

Next in Colour: An alternative setting navigating race and power in the pursuit of self-determination

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Thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

May (2022)

Abstract

In Australia people of African heritage are subjected to racialised structural exclusion grounded in ideologies of white supremacy. However, resistance can be enacted through the creation of alternative settings that through self-determination foster greater control over symbolic and material resources and to imagine more just ways of knowing, being and doing.

Next in Colour (NiC) is a self-determined initiative in Naarm (Melbourne) led by Colour Between the Lines, a collective of creative artists of African heritage. The initiative developed networks of support, opportunities and vocational pathways to the creative industries for people of African heritage; and engaged community arts approaches to foster critical conversations about identity, belonging and community and surface counter-narratives about the African diaspora in Australia. This study documented how self-determination came to be understood and enacted through the alternative setting of the NiC initiative and how self-determined outcomes were constrained and facilitated through the organisations CBTL sought support from. Informed by decolonial and critical race frameworks data from semi-structured interviews, participant observation and archival research was collected drawing on community-engaged approaches and analysed through a frame of critical narrative analysis. The findings show that NiC served as a homeplace for healing and deconstruction, and a site to reimagine relationships and ways of working that supported decolonial actions of counter-storytelling, authentic visibility and building of solidarities. However, whilst CBTL looked to key organisations to support the initiative and build capacity, forms of racialised structural exclusion NiC was responding to were reproduced in these organisational relationships, constraining self-determination and contributing to hidden labour as CBTL navigated and resisted these dynamics of control and exclusion. The findings of this study show the importance of self-determination and community arts practice within the creation of alternative settings towards liberation and

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structural inclusion for racialised communities. Further, it highlights the necessity of a contextualised analysis of power and ideology to understand how such settings can best be supported.

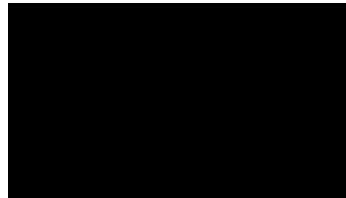
Student Declaration

I, **Rama Putu Agung-Igusti**, declare that the PhD thesis entitled "**Next in Colour: An alternative setting navigating race and power in the pursuit of self-determination**" is no more than 80,000 words in length including quotes and exclusive of tables, figures, appendices, bibliography, references and footnotes. This thesis contains no material that has been submitted previously, in whole or in part, for the award of any other academic degree or diploma. Except where otherwise indicated, this thesis is my own work.

I have conducted my research in alignment with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research and Victoria University's Higher Degree by Research Policy and Procedures.

All research procedures reported in the thesis were approved by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee HRE18-241.

Signature:



Date: 28th of April 2022

Publications

The following publications have been published based on, or including aspects of, this research:

Agung-Igusti, R. P., C. C. Sonn, & Colour Between the Lines. (2021). [Colour Between the Lines: Self-determination and the creation of home-places as resistance to symbolic and structural violence](#). *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 12(2), 1-19.

Agung-Igusti, R. P. (2019). [Tensions at the “edge”: Reflecting on edge effects and institutional power](#). *The Community Psychologist*, 52(4), 7-10.

Agung-Igusti, R. P., C. C. Sonn, & Du Ve, E. (2021). *Next in Colour: Creating spaces, practices and processes towards self-determined futures*. Melbourne, VIC: CIDRN, Victoria University.

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Dedication

To the
other
To the countless
hours you have toiled.

The silences
you have endured. Both yours
and others.

To the words
you have shared. In lovingly
pained generosity.

To the slights
and the stares. The borders
you have crossed, literal and
metaphorical. The margins
you traverse. Boundaries and hyphens.

To the way you take their barbs
and weave them into silk.
Slung back to
the centre
from the periphery.

To your endless labour. Your endless labour. Your endless labour.

Just your being is an act of resistance.

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to acknowledge that throughout completing this thesis that I have worked and lived on Whadjuk Noongar Boodjar, and on the lands of the Woi Wurrung and Boonwurrung people of the Kulin Nation. I recognise the privilege afforded to me as a settler on these lands at the expense of its Traditional Owners, a privilege that has allowed me to undertake this research. These are stolen lands and sovereignty was never ceded.

I want to thank all who participated in this project, for their graciousness in giving up time to sit down and talk with me. I am forever thankful to all the members of Colour Between the Lines, past and present, for their generosity, openness, commitment, support, and above all, friendship. This project has been a journey of shared learning, reflection and growth, and I hope I have shown the same care in documenting your stories as you have shown to others.

I would like to acknowledge the support and guidance of my supervisors Christopher Sonn and Amy Quayle who many years ago set me on the path I have found myself now traversing. Your friendship is deeply cherished. I would also like to acknowledge my PhD “siblings” Sam Keast and Roshani Jayawardana – I could not have chosen better people to have “grown up” alongside.

I would like to acknowledge my family for all the encouragement and belief you have shown me over the years: my Oma, Louisa, Elmar, Luna, my mum Anita; and Ajung and Ibu, Mahendra, Ratna, Mirah, Dede, Luna and Levi. I would like to acknowledge Alex and Kerry whose support I drew on countless times for so many years, and who were there all through my undergraduate degree and Honours year. And I would like to acknowledge Jane, Lindsay, Matt and the Bears for your support through the final sprint of this thesis.

Finally, to my love, Emily, I would like to thank you for all the cups of tea, for listening to my excited rants, and my anguished ruts, for your endless belief that I would get this done,

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thank you for reading drafts and listening to my presentations – and bringing over Elliot whenever things felt tough.

P.S. and thanks Elliot for being the best dog in the world!

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Chapter 1: Introduction and Overview

Background

This thesis is about stories. Stories of triumph and resistance. Stories that have been concealed and ignored. Stories of self-determination in the face of calcified and hegemonic racial and neoliberal systems that infuse our institutions and organisations. It is itself a story about a collective of creatives from the African diaspora, racialised migrants and children of migrants, living and working in Naarm¹ (Melbourne) a city within the settler colonial nation of Australia. It is a story about their fight to take control of their own stories, to delimit their subjectivities, and to self-determine over both the terms and means of their structural and social inclusion within their vision of an equitable and just society. And it is a story about the persistence of dynamics of power that create racialised inequities and injustices. A story has a time and place. It also reflects the time and place in which the story was created. This story is no different, itself grounded in the present and local, yet it also joins in dialogue with multiple histories, all of which have contributed to our present moment and the global system of modernity and coloniality which defines it. To wholly understand the story that will be shared across these pages, it is important to begin with a prologue of sorts, an acknowledgement of the lineages and legacies of the colonial dispossession that began with the arrival of British ships in 1788 on Gadigal country on the East Coast of Australia and ends with a multicultural Australia that holds white supremacy implicitly and explicitly at the heart of its imagined community. It is through this genealogy that we can arrive at the beginning of *this* story and begin to understand the contexts of racialisation and the ongoing structural and social exclusion of the African diaspora in Australia. But also, the forms of

¹ This is a traditional Aboriginal name for the area known as Melbourne on the lands of the Kulin nation, which consists of the Wurundjeri, Boonwurrung, Wathaurung, Daungwurrung and DjaDjaWrung people.

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collective resistance and healing that this community fosters through the creation of self-determined settings and the various structural struggles this work entails.

From Colonisation to Multiculturalism

The British colonial invasion of the lands that formed Australia started with the lie of *terra nullius*. A lie that proclaimed that these lands which over 400 different Aboriginal nations served as custodian to, belonged to no *man*. Through this lie the British embarked on a project of violent expansion and genocide which robbed Aboriginal peoples of their lands and lives by gun and disease (Aboriginal Heritage Office, n.d.; Tatz, 2017). By the mid-1800s Australia adopted a policy of “protection” towards the decimated Aboriginal population, which made them wards of the state to be moved to reserves and missions with every aspect of their lives controlled, robbing them of their culture, language and identities (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC], 1997). In the mid-Twentieth century Australia shifted to a policy of assimilation shaped by eugenicist beliefs and the desire for a wholly white Australia. These policies led to the Stolen *Generations* which saw thousands of Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their homes and families and placed into institutions or adopted into white families (Haebich, 2000). “Mixed-race” children were targeted with the intention that they would be assimilated and their Aboriginality bred out, while “full-blooded” Aboriginal peoples would naturally “die-out” (HREOC, 1997) – all predicated on the white supremacist ideologies that supposed black inferiority.

These policies occurred in conjunction with a range of other white supremacist policies collectively known as the “White Australia Policy”. These policies restricted non-white and non-European migration to the nation, and by 1947 only 2.7% of the population were born outside of Australia, Ireland or the United Kingdom (National Museum of Australia, n.d.). The White Australia policy would continue up until the 1970s where, recognising the need for population growth and skilled labour to grow the nation, it would

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finally be dismantled with bipartisan political support and a policy of multiculturalism. Yet despite shifts in migration policy, the recognition of racial discrimination, or public attitudes, many argue that Australia remains a white nation with white supremacist ideologies continuing to shape national identity, discourses and institutions (Hage, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 2015).

White supremacy renders a racialised non-white other as inferior, and indeed, today one does not need to look far for signs of how this ideology structures the experiences of non-white people and communities in Australia, contributing to significant forms of interpersonal racism and structural exclusion. The Scanlon Foundation's Mapping Social Cohesion report found experiences of discrimination based on skin colour, ethnic or religious background have risen from 9% in 2007 to 19% in 2019, with discrimination highest for those aged between 18-24 (Markus, 2019). The Multicultural Youth Census produced by the Centre for Multicultural Youth found 48.7% of multicultural young people had experienced discrimination recently, with two third identifying that it was because of their race and one quarter because of religion (Wyn et al., 2018). The Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission (2018) also found an 88% increase in the number of complaints about race across 2017-2018. A 2018 report by the Australian Human Rights Commission found, that despite 24% of Australians having non-European or Indigenous backgrounds, 96% of CEOs, 99% of governmental heads, 97.4% of university Vice Chancellors and 97.6% of Federal Ministry have Anglo-Celtic backgrounds; and our present government cabinet consists of one Aboriginal man, whilst the remaining 21 ministers all hail from European backgrounds. Reflecting places of power, the media we consume overwhelmingly centres white identities, voices, and stories whilst denigrating and racialising non-white identities. One report found that 57% of media pieces were negative when discussing race. This is

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particularly the case for Aboriginal people, racialised Muslims, and people of African heritage (All Together Now, 2021).

For members of the African diaspora in Australia, those who have migrated and subsequent generations, complex histories of race and racialisation have structured their experiences in particular ways and marked them as a visible *other* positioned against whiteness. Reports have found that 60-77% of African migrants and 38.5% of students from African backgrounds reported experiences of discrimination (Markus, 2016; Priest et al., 2013), a finding further reflected in reports by service providers and community stakeholders that discrimination is widespread (AHRC, 2010). One representative survey of the Australian population found that 21% of people agree that African refugees increase crime (Blair et al., 2017), a perception exacerbated by the present news media landscape. One report found that 57% of media pieces that discuss racialised groups such as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, Africans and Muslims are negative in their reporting (All Together Now, 2019). In particular, stories that criminalise young people from African backgrounds have served to both inform and reproduce racist views and attitudes in the broader public (Han & Budarick, 2018; Windle, 2008). One example is in the state of Victoria, where there have been widespread constructions of African youth belonging to violent gangs (Majavu, 2020). For young people from South Sudanese backgrounds this has led to increased hate crimes, racial profiling by police and contributed to intergenerational tensions within their own communities (Benier et al., 2018). These reports document the pervasiveness of racialised discrimination within the Australian context, and for people of African heritage particularly. And these reports only represent the present documentation of these ongoing experiences, as this is not new phenomena. Whilst the discursive flavour may have changed, the roots of racism in this country run long and deep.

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Many scholars have focussed their attention more closely to the dynamics of racism and racialisation faced by the African diaspora in Australia, including the more pernicious and subtle forms of racism experienced. Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama (2018) for example draw on a framework of *everyday racism* (Essed, 1988) to understand the mundane, familiar but pernicious, forms of racism that African heritage people experience in their day to day lives. They argue that this form of racism has troubling consequences, arising particularly in their working lives, as they are constructed as incompetent and capable, made guilty, and have their subjectivities constrained as they must view their self through the white gaze. Majavu (2018) draws on previous work on infrahumanisation (Haslam & Loughnan, 2014) to explain the subtle and indirect forms of dehumanisation directed at African men in Australia. Like Kwansah-Aidoo and Mapedzahama (2018), this speaks to the everydayness and insidious forms of racialisation and racism. In Majavu's (2018) interviews with African men, it was found that African men were constructed as dysfunctional and dirty Others, as outsiders and perpetual refugees who are not culturally compatible with a "mainstream" (white) Australia. This echoes Udah's (2018) work with people of African heritage in the South-eastern area of the state of Queensland to explore experiences of Othering and being Othered – positioned outside of a dominant normative group. Similarly, in Majavu (2018) the participants felt that they were constructed as incompetent outsiders and different from the white Anglo-celtic Australian "standard". For Udah, the basis for inclusion and exclusion was skin colour, a visible marker against white Australia which always marks people of African heritage as not belonging irrespective of time spent in Australia, citizenship, or cultural knowledge and understanding. The scholarly work above depicts the explicit and implicit ways people of African heritage in Australia are racialised and subject to forms of racism. In schools. In workplaces. In public spaces. In the media. And within national discourse. This

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has significant impact on individual health and wellbeing as well as materially as structural exclusion limits access to resources and opportunities (Ben et al., 2022).

The Present Study

In this thesis I present a case-study of the Next in Colour (NiC) initiative produced by Colour Between the Lines (CBTL) a collective of creative artists of African heritage. NiC is an alternative setting located in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia; It is a self-determined initiative that mobilises community arts to create symbolic, material and social resources and opportunities for members of the African diaspora, challenging and resisting racialisation and the damaging forms of structural and social exclusion that constrain belonging and agency. This setting serves as a space where marginalised groups construct and reimagine individual and collective identities beyond dominant negative representations, engage in forms of cultural expression and production that are often devalued in other contexts, and form supportive relationships that contribute to a sense of community (Case & Hunter, 2012; hooks, 1990; Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

This thesis, in telling part of the story of NiC and CBTL, will examine how self-determination is enacted through NiC by CBTL, through their meaning-making activities, their practices, and their forms of self-representation. This thesis will document the various obstacles and challenges that arose as the CBTL collective navigated their relationships with support organisations, caught in a dialectic between what they imagined to create and institutionalised manifestations of race and racialisation. This thesis will also contribute knowledge to support organisations and community-based workers to develop important literacies and praxes for supporting and collaborating with self-determined initiatives in ways that are attentive to the racialised power dynamics within the Australian context. Within community psychology there are many studies of alternative settings (Kagan et al., 2011; Kloos et al., 2012; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Rappaport & Seidman, 2000), however, it is

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essential to develop local understandings grounded in local contexts reflecting unique histories and discourses, and thus the unique systems of power and oppression – and how within these contexts different communities develop resources to respond. Furthermore, collectives that mobilise creative and cultural practices through community arts present a unique alternative setting that sits at the intersection of multiple sectors that seek to address inequity and develop communities. Thus, through this thesis I aim to provide insights shared by creatives from the African diaspora in Naarm (Melbourne), Australia, who draw on transnational and local narratives to shape their own understandings of self and community. This is a uniquely positioned group who experience a racialisation and racism grounded in Australia's colonial history, and equally, who must construct belonging within this particular context of Australia as a settler colonial nation.

Through this thesis I seek to heed calls from critical community psychologists to support community-led mobilisation to address issues of social justice, and to situate these responses amongst wider structures of power and historical and political contexts (Burton & Kagan, 2009; Coimbra et al., 2012; Evans et al., 2017; Montero, 2010). This draws important linkages between micro and macro perspectives that will further theorise the processes, barriers, and benefits of enacting social change through alternative settings. Furthermore, by drawing on conceptual tools and frameworks from beyond the disciplinary borders of community psychology, engaging approaches from critical community psychology, critical race theories and decolonial theory, this case-study offers a nuanced understanding of how coloniality as a global system of power shapes particular manifestations of race and raced thinking and practices that permeates the Australian context (Evans et al., 2017; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Stark, 2019).

Colour Between the Lines and the Next in Colour initiative presents an intrinsic case, a specific instance of important self-determining work that is being developed in Naarm's

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(Melbourne's) Western suburbs. Thus, through documenting this initiative, I seek to address the following questions:

1. What meanings do people share within NiC and how do these shape understandings of self, community, and self-determination?
2. How is self-determination evident in the community arts practices and processes mobilised within NiC?
3. How do other settings support or inhibit the creation of self-determined settings?

Power, Politics and Language

Politics infuses language. The categories and labels that are circulated, that we apply to others, or that are applied to us are bound up in dynamic processes of contestation, negotiation and resistance (Parker, 1992). They are used in strategic and intentional ways, representing the political in our local and everyday social worlds, in concert with macro narratives and discourses. Such processes are complex, and never static – we may one day claim an identity that we come to reject the next day. How we describe ourselves is contingent on the situated nature of our social lives, the *who*, the *when* and the *where* (Tappan, 2005). Even to speak from the perspective of a *we*, *our* or *us*, or from a position of *here* or *there*, may construct an essentialised group or evoke hegemonic narratives grounded in whiteness and coloniality (Yuval-Davis, 2010). As noted in the next section, I locate myself and am hailed into multiple positions, positioned multiply, thus at different times constituting the *we* or constructing the *them*. This thesis draws on language that reflects a range of contexts and is produced through various histories. It examines how people have been positioned and constructed in particular ways, how they've been raced, how they've been centred, or how they've been marginalised. In the literature I have engaged with I have kept the language that is used within these texts to describe different groups and individuals. In describing individuals and groups that I have engaged with as part of this research I have

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attempted to the best of my ability to use the language and frames through which they themselves have described their own identities or the communities they may belong to or refer to. For example, whilst Africa is a continent with a diversity of countries, ethnicities, languages, tribes and communities, an essentialised “African” identity is both applied by dominant groups and used by individuals who claim membership to the African diaspora. Within the Australian context various identity labels such as African-Australian are also used to mark belonging (Gebrekidan, 2018). These labels can be used in different ways and mean different things for different people and within different contexts (Agung-Igusti, 2017). The choice to hyphenate itself invokes particular meanings and reflects a politics of identity and belonging (Ali & Sonn, 2010; Fine & Sirin, 2008). Some who have participated in this project have at times described themselves as Africans in Australia, foregrounding the importance of diaspora, and recognising Indigenous sovereignty in any claim to belonging. Further, while many of the conceptual frameworks I have drawn on have used black and white to describe certain subject positions constructed through coloniality and racialisation, reflecting processes and relations of power, literature I have drawn on (particularly from North America) have used these labels in more essentialised ways as demographic dividers that have been ascribed, whilst in yet other literature these labels have been taken up by individuals themselves. Again, individuals may at times reject a black identity as a racialised and homogenising identity, but at other times adopt it to engage in practices of strategic essentialism (Agung-Igusti, 2017; Spivak, 1990). White identity within Australia is often ascribed to Australians of Anglo-Celtic descent, however, as is examined more closely later, whiteness represents a position of dominance and privilege rooted in coloniality and encompasses a range of white subjectivities and complexities arising across contexts and histories (Green et al., 2007).

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Different contexts also construct difference, and the “other” in specific ways. The United States national census asks for individual’s race (United States Census Bureau, 2012); alternatively, the United Kingdom asks for individual’s ethnicity (Office for National Statistics, 2012); whereas the Australian census asks for parent’s countries of birth and ancestry (ABS, 2017). These formalised labels shape the many discourses present within a national context, the language of policy, of research, the everyday language we use to discuss ourselves and other. Often these labels may not translate across contexts (Sonn et al., 2017), often they may serve to hide or deny things such as the role of race within the shaping of a nation (Stratton, 2011), but often they may migrate across contexts and be taken up in informal ways. Within Australia particular labels such as Culturally and Linguistically Diverse or “migrants and migrant communities” have become shorthand ways to describe groups and individuals that have been racialised or made “other”. Increasingly, borrowing from popular discourse from United States, many people also draw on the identity label of people of colour (POC), or for some others, black, Indigenous, people of colour (BIPOC) – foregrounding important difference in the lived experiences of black and Indigenous peoples to other racialised groups. These are useful labels and can be enactments of solidarity and strategic essentialism, however, they also show the complexities that language faces as it travels across contexts and encounters local politics, negotiations and contestations.

Other language denotes the location of different communities in terms of their status within society. Communities can be minorities to a dominant majority, or they can be marginalised reflecting the outcomes of oppression and inequity. Some scholars have contested the way these labels construct different communities as deficit, wounded or as helpless victims (Tuck, 2009). At times I have drawn on this language, as it reflects how these communities have been positioned in Australia and elsewhere, as well as particular ways different communities have been positioned. However, I have chosen to use “racialised

communities” to refocus on the processes that construct and position communities in these ways. Racialisation may result in marginalisation or minoritisation, but it doesn’t freeze a community at these junctures.

To conclude, the language present in this thesis seeks to reflect the contexts, histories, relationships and politics from which it has been drawn from, whilst recognising the contested nature of these labels. It is not my intention to homogenise or essentialise, yet at times it is analytically useful to draw on broader labels and categories. However, a focus on processes and practices which serve to construct these labels and categories, hopefully, averts their re-inscription.

Researcher Positioning

I was born in Australia but can trace both migrant and settler backgrounds. My father is a first-generation Balinese migrant, and my mother was born in Australia to a white Austrian migrant mother and a white Anglo-Celtic father with colonial settler histories. I am privileged across multiple social locations, as a cis-gender male, as possessing light skin that affords me an ambiguity to racialising gazes, and through class as the beneficiary of the multitude privileges of land-owning family; these cumulative intergenerational privileges predicated and dependent on Indigenous colonisation, dispossession and intergenerational traumas. I locate myself as inhabiting both centre and margin. At times Other, at times proximal to whiteness, but always complicit in, and subject to coloniality. This signifies a crossing of borders, a traversal of in-between spaces reflecting the situatedness of identities: how I am read by others and how I read myself, and the varied possibilities of being that are shaped by each context I move across (Tappan, 2005).

Through my undergraduate degree I began to explore how identity is shaped through migrancy and migrant backgrounds. These interests in migrancy and the experiences of

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belonging and identity of first and second generations, spurred from my own familial stories and my own experiences growing up in Australia. Inevitably, these topics were difficult to broach without encountering the impacts of whiteness and race, ensconced in Australia's ongoing histories of colonialism and coloniality. In many ways, I had also grappled throughout my life with topics of whiteness and race but did not yet have the language or conceptual tools with which to name and wholly understand each. Throughout my own life I had always crossed cultural borders: between my upper class white European family on one side, and my working-class migrant family on the other; between my first years spent at a culturally and socio-economically diverse high-school and a relatively monocultural top tier private school for my later years. In that first high school, my friends and I learnt to codeswitch, to lose accents which would identify us as inhabiting particular social locations. We would refer to "skippies"² and "aussies" as something we were decidedly not. At my private school I learnt how to weaponise my class and privilege, affecting ways of talking and acting which enabled me to navigate encounters with various institutions and their representatives. Ultimately, I was left confused when I was "read" by others, in ways that I did not "read" myself – which much later I came to realise was the experience of being racialised when my self-perception was well buffered from racialising gazes by class and other forms of privilege. Perhaps these were some of the experiences that drew me towards topics of identity, and eventually drew me towards race and whiteness.

My first connection with CBTL started through my minor thesis project, and the evaluation of a theatre piece entitled "AMKA: Narratives from the African Diaspora" (Sonn et al., 2018). It was through my minor thesis supervisor (also my PhD supervisor) that I was introduced to cohealth Arts Generator and a group of young creatives artists from the African

² Skippy/Skippies is colloquial slang to describe Australians of Anglo-Celtic backgrounds. It is derived from the 1960s Australian television show "Skippy the Bush Kangaroo". Here Skippy, the titular Kangaroo, represents Anglo-Celtic constructions of Australianness.

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diaspora who were drawing on decolonial approaches and creative practices to surface and create narratives of identity and belonging. I was presented with the opportunity to engage with the self-representing and self-determining work that was being curated by those I had encountered through the Arts Generator. This body of work showed me the importance of supporting and engaging in critically oriented and decolonial work and engaging in loving “world travelling” (Lugones, 1987). By entering another’s world, we move across difference and enter a new construction of the world. For Lugones “travelling to someone’s ‘world’ is a way of identifying with them...because by travelling to their ‘world’ we can understand *what it is to be them and what it is to be ourselves in their eyes*” (1987, p. 17). This present thesis is an extension of this work and thinking.

Thesis Structure

In Chapter Two I will review theories of racism and racialisation, defining key conceptual terms and processes. I will present an understanding of racism that moves past frameworks that shift focus to the individual, recontextualising and rehistoricising racism as a global system grounded in coloniality and manifesting through dynamics of power. In the chapter I will also present an overview of whiteness and white supremacy, as a position of dominance and privilege within these systems. These theories will form an important conceptual framework that will be used to understand the (re)production of ideologies of race and white supremacy across contexts. In the chapter I will argue the need for drawing together critical race, decolonial and community psychology theories and approaches to best document and contextualise dynamics of racialisation across settings.

Within Chapter Three I will examine organisations as social settings in which power relations embedded within powerful ideologies and discourses are reproduced. I will then engage in a specific examination of organisations as raced, mapping approaches to understanding how race is (re)produced within organisational contexts, and the centrality of

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ideologies of white supremacy and its concomitant obfuscation through organisational cultures that enshrine white normativity. It is not only organisational practices, discourses, values and behaviours that sustain whiteness as an implicit norm, but also many of the approaches that seek to speak to issues of diversity, discrimination and bias within organisations. I will discuss the implications for organisations engaged in community-based work, with particular attention to not for profit and government human services organisations, and organisations that can be characterised as progressive or attentive to structural dynamics of power. Much of the literature examines the experiences of workers within organisations, with less focus on how these dynamics of power, predicated on race and whiteness, manifest at the interface between organisations and communities. Lastly, in this chapter I will describe the creation of alternative settings as a response to organisations that reproduce relations of racialised oppression.

In Chapter Four I will contextualise CBTL and NiC by presenting an overview of the histories and contexts from which the collective and the initiative emerged, drawing on organisational documents and oral histories from key figures involved within these contexts. This is important to not only understand how CBTL was formed, but also how the work the collective engages in builds on projects and bodies of work that have come before, drawing on shared learnings and experiences to inform CBTL's own development of practices and processes, and orientations towards the work they do. Furthermore, it is also important to understand the organisational and policy contexts that shape the relationships CBTL holds with support organisations within the broader terrain of socially conscious and community-engaged work embedded in the human services sector. Specifically, in this chapter I will present an overview of cohealth and the Arts Generator as key support organisations to the NiC initiative.

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In Chapter Five I will present key theoretical frameworks which have shaped the research methodology, specifically that of critical community psychology, critical race theory and decolonial theory. It will illustrate how these frameworks contributed to a collaborative and community-engaged research praxis predicated on dialogical and relational ethics. This approach is underpinned by a desire for epistemic justice (Fricker, 2013), an unsettling of what knowledges we hold as valued, and relationships within the research context that are sensitive to the democratisation of knowledge and knowledge production.

In Chapter Six I will present the methods undertaken across the research detailing data collection methods of participant observation, semi-structured interviewing, and archival analysis. I will then describe my approach to data analysis through a Critical Narrative Analysis (Souto-Manning, 2012) framework.

Chapters Seven, Eight and Nine I will present the findings of this research. The first chapter will show how through *naming the cultural and structural violence* experienced by the African diaspora in Australia, the collective began to imagine NiC as functioning inwardly to create *homeplaces and healing spaces*, and outwardly as a space for *counter-storytelling, community mobilisation and building solidarities*. The next chapter shows how this vision was then embodied by describing how the collective were *enacting relational processes and counter-practices* within NiC, and how they were *creating cultural resources* through the setting, creating new shared meanings and frames for understanding the world. In the final findings chapter, I describe the ways the CBTL collective negotiated institutional power as they engaged with dominant organisational settings that constrained their efforts towards self-determination. In the chapter I identify *non-profit discourses and the hidden dynamics of race*, which contributed to “colourblind” practices of control and exclusion, and the ways the collective responded to these dynamics through acts of *refusal, resistance and building power*.

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In Chapter Ten I will present a summary and discussion of the findings before sharing theoretical and methodological contributions. I will conclude with some limitations to the study and recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Critical Perspectives on Racism and Whiteness

In this chapter I will present a review of critical perspectives on racism and whiteness, providing an overview of the dynamics and processes which construct race as a category. Firstly, I will provide a brief history of the relationship between psychology and race and present a critique of dominant paradigms in the field. I will next examine alternative perspectives within psychology that draw on socio-cultural understandings of racism, and are attentive to the roles of power, ideology, and discourse. I will argue that these perspectives integrate analyses at the structural level with the micro-level through everyday experiences of how race structures our social worlds. Then, heeding the calls from within critical community psychology (Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2015), I will draw on decolonial and critical frameworks which deepen our understanding of racism as a historically and culturally situated system that manifests in structural and cultural violence at the local and global levels. These perspectives will also be important towards responding to the first research question: *What meanings do people share within NiC and how do these shape understandings of self, community, and self-determination?* In understanding hegemonic and racialising meanings that circulate within our society, we are better placed to analyse the ways people and communities resist through the creation of alternative understandings. Lastly in this chapter, I conclude by presenting a short review of critical whiteness studies, which seeks to point the lens to whiteness as an analytical subject. The review will demonstrate the contextual and situated nature of whiteness and examine how it is constituted discursively, contributing to an understanding of the dynamics race, power and privilege within the context of settler colonial Australia.

Race, Racism and Psychology

Psychology as a discipline has long shared a history with both race as a construct and racism as social phenomena. It has contributed to the construction and reification of race at various times as biological category or social category (Ahmed & Howarth, 2014). It has and

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continues to perpetrate forms of scientific racism (Teo, 2011). It has also located racism as an important topic for psychological investigation. Race was initially conceived as biologically grounded differences in the physiology and psychology (through understandings of intelligence) of geographically located groups – an assertion shared by many of psychology's founding thinkers (Teo, 2011). Race science presented an “empirical” body of research that argued the existence of natural hierarchies of “races”, presenting a rationalist, scientific extension of the colonial understandings of superiority and inferiority that begot the genocide, dispossession, exploitation, and enslavement of many Indigenous populations by white Europeans (Mills, 1997; Quijano, 2000). These biologically grounded understandings have been long disproven, though race science has continued and seen a resurgence, psychology notwithstanding, with a focus on genetic difference between “races” (see Saini, 2019). Contemporary understandings instead view race as a socially constructed phenomena that shapes lived experience in material and psychological ways (Ahmed & Howarth, 2014). Further, race is still seen as the purview of psychology with a strong focus on the social psychological process of racism.

While nuanced understandings of racism define it as a system in which racial hierarchies are drawn on as social categories, creating individual beliefs and institutional structures that view one racial category as more superior than another, manifesting in a dynamic of domination and oppression (Howarth & Hook, 2005; Salter et al., 2017); psychological research has largely been concerned with the biases, prejudices, and discriminatory practices of individuals, seeing race as one dimension alongside many other forms of social categories (e.g., gender, ability, and ethnicity; Tuffin, 2017). For example, prejudice, whilst having shifting definitions over time, can be defined as “a negative attitude toward a group or towards members of the group” (Strangor, 2009, p. 2). Early influential scholars whose work shaped psychological understandings of prejudice include the work of

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Allport (1954) and Dovidio and Gaertner (1986). Much contemporary prejudice research within psychology has been concerned with cognitive and affective processes and engaged experimental methodologies through which to investigate these phenomena (Duckitt, 1992; Strangor, 2009), this has been to the exclusion of social understandings and how prejudice manifests in our everyday lived contexts (Dixon & Levine, 2012). Work from Tajfel and Turner (1986) has also been influential, examining group levels discrimination through processes of social categorisation and social comparison. Here individuals place themselves and others within social groupings, which then become the basis of identification for responding to people as individuals. Bias has been another specific focus within psychology that takes an individual level focus, in particular the investigation of implicit or unconscious bias. Implicit bias refers to the stereotypes and negative attitudes we implicitly hold about other groups (Dovidio et al., 2002). It has commonly been measured within psychological research using the Implicit Association Test which measures reaction times in pairing, for example, pictures of black individuals and white individuals with pleasant and unpleasant words (Greenwald et al., 1998).

These have been some dominant paradigms within mainstream (predominantly North American) iterations of psychology, which eschews a more systemic focus for a view of racism as a series of cognitions grounded in either “natural” evolutionary responses to intergroup contact or formed through early experiences which “hardwire” our brains in particular ways (Adams et al., 2008). Within Australia, there have been similar assertions made. It has been argued that white psychologists have employed ways of talking about race that render Australian psychology as speaking from an invisible and normative subject position of whiteness (Riggs & Selby, 2003). Some of these modes of talking include: the positioning of racism as a product of individual racists, pathological behaviours bound up in psychological processes, and the focus on discrimination between groups due to social

identity as a product of how humans naturally come to stereotype and categorise others (Augustinos, 2013). These modes ignore the dominant contexts, histories and practices that have led to groups and individuals inhabiting racialised subject positions; and the assertion of a binary of traditional and modern forms of racism, which places some expressions of racism as a historical artefact, erasing racism's continuities and suggesting a "softening" of racism's impacts (Leach, 2005; Riggs & Selby, 2003).

Alternate Perspectives within Psychology and Beyond

Within psychology there are also alternative understandings that bring into sharper focus the systemic nature of racism, and attend to racism's contexts, histories, and the role of culture. These alternative understandings emphasise a sociocultural lens to examine people within their social worlds and are interested in the ways racism is embedded within these worlds; manifesting symbolically and materially, through cultural tools that shape people and in turn are shaped by people. For example, the work of Vygotsky (1978) can be drawn on to understand how individuals engage with and appropriate symbolic meaning across settings. Vygotsky's theory of mediation poses that our interactions with the social worlds we are situated in are, rather than being direct, are mediated by signs and symbols. This framework allows us to reconcile individual agents with their social, cultural, historical, and institutional contexts. Individuals enact their agency on their social worlds through engaging with mediational tools. These tools are physical, psychological, and importantly cultural and symbolic. Individuals are actively engaged in the process of appropriating these mediational tools, accomplishing mastery and taking ownership of them (Wertsch, 2017).

This framework has been extremely useful in theorising how cultural scripts, discursive practices, spatial and material dimensions act as mediational tools that can be appropriated by individuals to uphold understandings of the self and others shaped by a system of racialised oppression and white supremacy. These cultural tools can further create

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ignorance through representations of history that minimise or decontextualise the role of race and the inequities in outcome and experience that spring from the existence of race within society (Salter et al., 2018). Furthermore, cultural tools also take the form of ideologies that provide a frame for understanding and being in the world and shape identities, which can help us also understand impacts of racist systems. For example, the internalisation of oppression or domination through this lens can be understood as an appropriation of discourse which shapes identities positioned within sets of power relations rather than as a psychological phenomenon (Tappan, 2005). Thus, through this lens, important sources of understanding lie within the analysis of collective cultural representations that construct shared understandings in the form of stereotypes. Importantly these approaches seek to understand racist oppression from the perspectives of those who experience it (Adams et al., 2008).

Within a community psychology framework, race as a construct is considered an important dimension of human diversity through which social issues are defined and addressed. Community psychology also urges us to look beyond individual levels of analysis, and thus racism is understood as one type of oppressive system made up of privileged and subordinate groups with differential access to power and resources (Kloos et al., 2012). Within community psychology, sites of intervention thus encompass groups, communities, organisations and more macro levels as ways of working towards transformative change of racist systems (O'Neill, 2000). Community psychology is a diverse discipline spanning geographies, histories and intellectual and epistemological traditions, as such some iterations still tend to view racism as sets of intergroup processes, or a singular dimension of oppression (alongside gender, religion, ability, class for example), however, other iterations more clearly contextualise racism within histories of colonisation, specifically as both a rationality and mechanism of coloniality (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010; Seedat, 2000).

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Central to these perspectives is the notion of power. Power is a complex concept but can be understood as the ability to exercise agency or self-determination or have the structural opportunities to enact change on events and circumstances (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). Power is exercised by individuals and groups within society, and whilst forms of power can be more direct and easily identifiable, this can often work in conjunction with more amorphous informal forms of power that are much harder to name (Foucault, 1980).

According to Fisher, Sonn and Evans (2007) power is

produced in and through cultural practices and symbolic means, through ideologies and discourses that mediate between people and social systems. Ideologies such as race, sexuality, gender can be taken for granted and experienced as given. When something is naturalised and taken for granted it is assumed to be normative, and this normativity affords ideologies its power. (p. 260)

Thus, ideologies of race, and the regimes of knowledge they produce, are shared discursively and form relations of power that create contexts of oppression and resistance whereby individuals and communities are racialised - a process of attributing race as a salient social marker of difference, power and privilege (Stevens, 2014). Discourses can be defined as constituting forms of collective knowledge, assumptions, beliefs, values, ideas, and ways of being in the world (Souto-Manning, 2012). We are all positioned as subjects across different discourses creating different social, political, and cultural relations to one-another and to our social worlds. Discourses that reproduce, and are produced by ideologies of race, form racialised subjects, and sustain a social order predicated on racialised hierarchies (Mama, 2002). In taking this view of power we are able interpret broader ideologies, how they are mediated through societal structures and layers of symbolic meaning, and how this then manifests at the social-psychological level.

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It is important to bring together the macro cultural and ideological manifestations of racism, which shape racist structures, and the micro enactments which play out interactionally between social actors. Here both engage in a dialectical and co-constitutive relationship, as individuals and their practices create and shape social structure, which in turn mediates individual thought and action. Thus, it is essential to map racism across these levels (Essed, 1991). van Dijk (1992) in a seminal paper examined discourse and the denial of racism. Such discourses show us how enactments of symbolic violence and misrecognition occur at various levels. Examples of denials are the denial of the racist act, denial of racist intention, claims of the act being accidental, and denial of the stated goal of the racist act. Other literature has identified other denial discourses, for example, locating racism in the past rather than the present; locating racism as belonging elsewhere, in other countries or places; locating racism within a select few, rather than as perpetrated by the majority or structurally; or denying its existence completely (Nelson, 2013; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Denials of racism have functions for both the individual and at the level of the social and political. Interpersonally, denial of racism can serve to maintain positive self-image of both the individual and society, but also serves as a means of controlling and managing racial “others” (Hage, 1998). The denial of racism negates the existence of relations of dominance and thus, in the eyes of the dominant, trivialises calls for justice, and acts of resistance and negates solidarities towards anti-racism practice (Augustinos & Every, 2007; van Dijk, 1992; Nelson, 2013).

Racism denials can be seen as a protective and legitimating mechanisms that manifest at institutional levels but also in everyday talk. However, we can also examine other racist interactions that are enacted interpersonally but shaped by broader cultural and ideological forces. Microaggressions are ways of talking and acting, and structuring space and place, that either through interpersonal interaction intentionally or unintentionally, produce forms of

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oppression based on individuals marginalised group membership (Sue, 2010). Often these microaggressions occur without the microaggressor's awareness, as dynamics of superiority/inferiority are reproduced unthinkingly. These can be thought of as everyday forms of racism, which according to Essed (1991) are interrelated instantiations of racism and can be defined as:

A process in which (a) socialised racist notions are integrated into meanings that make practices immediately definable and manageable, (b) practices with racist implications become in themselves familiar and repetitive, and (c) underlying racial and ethnic relations are actualised and reinforced through these routine or familiar practices in everyday situations. (p. 23)

Thus, by integrating multiple levels of analysis we can better see how ideology and power are constituted in the realm of the everyday, shaping the experiences of the racialised “other” and in turn reproducing forms of misrecognition that also sustains systems of racism.

However, critical approaches to psychology and community psychology, have further argued the need to draw in understandings from outside the discipline to enhance our ability to analyse or engage in transformative work and better understand dynamics of race and racism (Evans et al., 2017; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011; Stark, 2019).

Critical Race Perspectives

Critical Race Theory (CRT) is an analytic frame which places race at the centre of understanding our social worlds and the structures which contribute to vast inequalities. Ladson-Billings (1998) wrote that it emerged from the sub-discipline of critical legal studies, which drew on Gramsci's (1991) ideas of hegemony to employ a class critique of the formation of oppressive structures. Scholars who situated their work within this paradigm saw the clear intersections between these oppressive structures and race, and indeed, the

centrality of race to how these structures were formed, maintained and operated within US society (Crenshaw, 1991). Thus, first CRT proposes that race and racism is normal within US society, it is not abnormal or unexpected, but part of the social and historical fabric.

Secondly, that racism provides important material and psychic benefits to whites, and that any civil rights “wins” for BIPOC people have been the product of *interest convergence*, the idea that for any significant change to racist structures to occur it must also benefit or be of greater benefit to whites. A further tenet of CRT emphasises the lived experience of those who are racialised and experience racism as an essential analytical standpoint towards deconstructing oppressive structures. Thus, CRT proposes storytelling as a powerful tool to produce counternarratives. Furthermore, CRT levels a critique towards liberalism and its concomitant ideas and discourses of meritocracy, individualism, choice, and freedom which creates a supposed colourblind and postracial context which obscures the perpetration of racialised inequality (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While this framework emerged within the United States as a response to the entrenched systemic racism produced through the Atlantic slave trade and re-shaped across historical civil rights struggles, the systemic nature of racism, and the processes that obscure and sustain it are not unique to the United States. Thus, CRT has been a useful frame applied in the Australian context to historically situate dynamics of racialised power relations in relation to migrants, people from migrant backgrounds, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, and to document how race is reproduced and reinscribed within institutions (Bargallie & Lentini, 2021; Sonn & Quayle, 2013; Watego, 2021).

Decolonial Perspectives

Decolonial perspectives, provide an understanding of race as birthed through European colonial expansion, and the epistemological projects of modernity that erupted from that historical moment. Quijano (2000) writes of the colonial matrix of power which,

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through hegemonic institutions, governs dimensions of social existence: labour, sexuality, authority, and subjectivity. Race and racial hierarchies are the central governing principle of coloniality, and racism is therefore constitutive rather than derivative of the present global system. Here coloniality, the enduring and pervasive patterns of power that have erupted from colonialism, a distinct event consisting of political and economic relationships forced upon sovereign nations by European Empires (Maldonado-Torres, 2007), is manifest across systems that hierarchise through racial division under white supremacy. Coloniality further privileges forms of Western and Eurocentric knowledge production to the exclusion of all other forms, and reinforces both through powerful societal institutions (Quijano, 2000). From this standpoint, we can turn to Grosfoguel's (2016) definition of racism as:

a global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority...that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the 'capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world system.

(p. 10)

Within this world system, Grosfoguel (2016) proposes Fanon's "line of the human" to understand how race cleaves into two, creating: the zone of being or the human, those people above the line as "recognised socially in their humanity as human beings and, thus, [enjoying] access to rights (human rights, civil rights, women's rights, and/or labour rights), material resources, and social recognition to their subjectivities, identities, epistemologies and spiritualities" (p. 10); and the zone of non-being, those below the line whom are seen as non-human, and thus undeserving of the same rights, resources and recognition. Within each zone we can further apply a lens of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Davis, 1981) as further social categorisations positioned within relations and structures of power, such as class, sexuality, gender and ability, producing forms of oppression and privilege. However, these various forms of oppression and privilege are ultimately mediated through race as it is race

which structures the zones of being and non-being. It is important to note, that under this conceptualisation, the process through which race is attributed to another as a social marker that locates them within this system, is not limited to skin colour or even appearance (Grosfoguel, 2016). Race changes across time and place, morphing and shifting, but always present under the present world system (Stevens, 2018).

Cultural and Structural Violence

It is necessary, in seeking to understand the dynamics of race, to also understand how forms of violence are perpetrated in the service of sustaining these hierarchical systems. In his seminal work developing Frantz Fanon's writing on coloniality and psychology, Bulhan (1985) defines violence as “any relation, process, or condition by which an individual or a group violates the physical, social, and/or psychological integrity of another person or group” (p. 135). Such a definition expands analyses of violence across personal (both inter- and intra-), institutional and structural levels, and across physical, social, and psychological domains. Importantly these different levels and domains are interrelated, as complex forms of structural and institutional violence shapes social realities and enables violence at individual levels, for example, interpersonal physical violence or intrapersonal psychological violence.

Others drawing on peace studies have also written on structural violence and cultural violence to conceptualise how power perpetuates forms of oppression and domination (e.g., Dutta et al., 2016). Structural violence is constituted by material structures, and immaterial social systems that manifest in tangible ways, both (re)producing and maintaining oppression and asymmetrical relations of power across social categories such as race, class and gender (Galtung, 1990). The products and impacts of oppression through these structures and systems are rendered normal, so too are the social categories through which they are filtered (Dutta et al., 2016; Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016). Here cultural and symbolic violence engages in this normative work, through the symbolic meanings that become circulated via

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language, ideology, and the production and control of knowledge. This violence shapes our understandings of the world, and our ways of being and engaging with others, legitimising, and obfuscating, as those subject to this violence and its concomitant structures and systems are misrecognised (Bourdieu, 1989; Rylko-Bauer & Farmer, 2016), their subjectivities, capability, and agency constrained (Dutta, et al., 2016). This psychologically impacts both coloniser and colonised alike, as myths of inferiority and superiority are internalised and bound up in the creation of social institutions that make these mythologies material through subjugation and violence (Memmi, 2021).

These systems of power, and manifestations of violence are both contested and reproduced through racial projects. Omi and Winant (2015) describe *racial projects* as the linkages between forms of signification and meaning-making of race and racial identity and social structure. They write, “a racial project is simultaneously an interpretation, representation or explanation of racial identities and meanings, and an effort to organize and distribute resources (economic, political, cultural) along particular racial lines” (p. 125). Racial projects can occur at both macro- and micro- levels, within broad ranging government policies such as restrictions on immigration, or the individual practices and enactments of race in people’s day to day lives, such as discriminatory policing or the choice to wear one’s hair “naturally”. Racial projects can be liberatory, for example through the celebration and self-representation of racial identities that contest denigrative representations, but also hegemonic and racist, such as the evolving white supremacist racist project which continues to endure (Omi & Winant, 2015).

Many scholars have also spoken about how contemporary manifestations of race and racism has been made invisible across different white supremacist racial projects. Bonilla-Silva (2015) proposed a new racial ideology of “colour blind racism” which contrasts with historical expressions of racism in the United States. This ideology superficially draws on

principles of liberalism through key frames which works to obscure and remove the language of race and racism when explaining racialised organisation of society and structure and the inequities which this produces. These frames minimise racism as a historical artefact, replace race with a language of cultural difference, and the naturalisation of racial phenomena such as explaining racism through evolutionary responses (Neuberg & Schaller, 2016). One key frame identified by Bonilla-Silva (2015) is that of abstract liberalism which produces discourses constituted by ideas of political liberalism, such as equality and liberty, and economic liberalism, such as freedom of choice and individualism. Through these abstracted ideas race and racism becomes obscured, with inequity being merely an outcome of individual agents responsible for their own outcomes, and privilege being the well-earned and deserved outcomes of hard work and logical reasoning - inequity becomes depoliticised and dehistoricised (Quayle & Sonn, 2012).

Reviewing Whiteness

These frameworks not only show how oppression and domination shapes the experience of those racialised as non-human, but also those who preside within the zone of being, those who are racialised as white. Whilst, racism has long been a subject of analysis, and those who experience racism made subjects of research, there have been critiques of this focus that have argued for a shifting of the lens instead towards whiteness and how privilege is accumulated over time (Howarth & Hook, 2005). Indeed, within community psychology there have been calls for the need to integrate understandings of whiteness into our understandings of complex systems and develop a critical awareness of whiteness when implementing multi-levelled interventions (Coleman et al., 2020; Sonn, 2012).

The field of whiteness studies represents a distinct contemporary theoretical approach to examining whiteness, drawing on writing from such diverse areas as literature, psychology, philosophy and media studies (see Engles, 2006). Twine and Gallagher (2008)

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presented an overview of this scholarship across three distinct waves. They located the intellectual origins of the field in the work of W.E.B. DuBois (1920, 1935), his writing constituting a “first wave” rooted in three key observations; that whiteness affords “public and psychological wages” providing social and material privileges that aligns marginal white workers (working class Americans and southern and Eastern European migrants) with dominant classes, is both a normative and invisible identity, and spreads globally yet transmutes as it enters local contexts. The second wave constitutes writings from critical race theorists, black theorists, critical legal scholars and feminist theorists (e.g., Delgado & Stefancic, 1997; Harris, 1993; Morrison, 1992). Writing within this wave, sought to reorient the focus back to the structural nature of racism and white supremacy, and away from the individualised focus on pathological racist behaviours that had come to dominate scholarship. Here the scholarship sets out to detail the discursive practices through which whiteness cloaks itself in invisibility, the institutional reproduction of white supremacy through material processes, and the forms of epistemic violence that supports this. A third wave perspective of whiteness shares some of this focus but with some departures:

A third wave perspective sees whiteness as a multiplicity of identities that are historically grounded, class specific, politically manipulated and gendered social locations that inhabit local custom and national sentiments within the context of the new ‘global village’. (Twine & Gallagher, 2008, p. 6)

This body of scholarship emphasises the relational, situational, and contextual nature of whiteness, captured through a range of innovative and renovative methodological approaches. Third wave whiteness studies also seek to examine the ways people construct white identities and maintain white supremacy in contemporary contexts that have moved beyond historical periods of colonialism, apartheid, and struggles of civil rights, and that exist outside the

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United States. Ultimately this perspective seeks to map these new terrains of race and white supremacy.

Nayak (2007) also offers a taxonomy of whiteness studies, presenting three distinct approaches that draw on materialist, deconstructionist and psychoanalytic frameworks that seek to abolish, reconstruct, and rethink white identities respectively. Nayak asserts that materialist writers seek to abolish whiteness and thus dismantle the structures which create racialised inequities to resources, opportunities, and rights. Through understanding histories of labour relations theorists can provide understandings of how whiteness came to be afforded social and material value at particular historical moments (Roediger, 1991), and the ways different groups at times have been drawn into whiteness within complex histories of labour politics (Allen, 1992; Ignatiev, 1995). Social constructionist approaches have sought to deconstruct whiteness within other spheres. Key work within this approach has emerged from feminist writers who have explored the intersection of whiteness and gender. Ruth Frankenberg (1993) produced her seminal text *White Women, Race Matters: The Social Construction of Whiteness*, taking the position of a white academic turning the lens back to whiteness, unsettling assumptions towards the “absence” of race in the lives of white people, through an examination of the ways Southern Californian women construct and deploy whiteness and the ways it shapes their lives. Goenpul woman³ and academic Aileen Moreton Robinson (2000) writes from the Australian context, her seminal text *Talkin’ Up to the White Woman: Indigenous Women and Feminism*, interrogating whiteness and western feminism. In this work she dissects the way power coalesced around white women and was used to construct Indigenous women in subordinate and racialising ways. These approaches unsettle a uniform whiteness through taking an intersectional lens which opens a diversity and

³ Goenpul are Aboriginal people from the Quandamooka peoples whose lands are located in what is now also known as Moreton Island.

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complexity of white subjectivities, often taking discourse as its entry point for understanding. The third approach detailed by Nayak (2007) asserts that whiteness mustn't only be examined as an artefact of the social, but as co-constituted with our interior worlds. Here we can turn again to the work of Fanon (1967), amongst other writers (e.g., Ellison, 1965; Cohen, 1993; Seshdari-Crooks, 2000), who takes a psychoanalytic approach to understand the unconscious and internal workings of race and racialisation and its concomitant psychological phenomena.

It is important to also note, that whiteness studies, and the construct of whiteness itself have faced various critiques (see Chen, 2017 for a review). One critique argues that whiteness as a construct serves to homogenise through positioning white people as always being the oppressors and erasing the cultural and historical heterogeneity of different backgrounds that have been raced as white (Bonnet, 1996). Ahmed (2004) also offers a series of critiques of the field, pointing to the non-performativity of declarations of whiteness within the self-reflexive turn of whiteness studies. Here by declaring oneself as white, by recognising unearned privilege and naming it, there is a supposed commitment or action of anti-racism. However, such declarations do not commit one to anti-racist action, and can instead serve to recentre whiteness, absolve white guilt, and positions privilege as something which can simply be ‘unlearned’. Fine et al. (1997) also identify a key tension that plagues whiteness studies, and the use of race as an analytical construct more broadly. They write

we worry that in our desire to create spaces to speak, intellectually or empirically, about whiteness, we may have reified whiteness as a fixed category of experience; that we have allowed it to be treated as a monolith, in the singular, as an “essential something” (p. xi).

Whilst these are important critiques and concerns, whiteness remains an important frame for understanding power and privilege. Thus, rather than constructing homogenous

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identity categories, we can seek to employ whiteness as a concept whilst better understanding the complexities of white subjectivities across time and place. Furthermore, we can continue to foreground how whiteness is theorised from outside by non-whites and orient ourselves towards anti-racist praxis over non-performative reflexivity.

Whiteness has been examined at different times, and by differently placed scholars - in relation to both discipline and subjectivity, however, I will take Ruth Frankenberg's (1993) definition as a point of departure:

First, whiteness is a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a "standpoint", a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, "whiteness" refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed. (p. 1)

It is the "production and reproduction of dominance rather than subordination, normativity rather than marginality, and privilege rather than disadvantage" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 236). Whiteness, as a racial category finds its origins in biology and phenotype, yet like race as a construct more wholly, it can be understood best as a social construction and social organising principle linked to notions of white supremacy predicated on the idea of a "superior" race from which "inferior" races are to be measured against. The assumed supremacy of whiteness underpins the accrual, transmission and protection of unearned material and social advantages (McIntosh, 1995). It represents a set of power relations which simultaneously enables this set of inequities, casts them as the natural order of things, and obscures the very raced practices and structures that are responsible. Thus, whiteness becomes normative and rendered invisible to many of those who are raced as white, and who have engaged in a racial contract of which the purpose is:

The differential privileging of the whites as a group with respect to the non-whites as a group, the exploitation of their bodies, land and resources, and the denial of equal socioeconomic opportunities to them. All whites are *beneficiaries* of the Contract, though some whites are not *signatories* to it. (Mills, 1997, p. 11)

Part of this contract is an *agreement to misinterpret the world* as white people engage in an epistemology of ignorance, a wilful misunderstanding of the relations and conditions of a world that has been created by them to bestow privilege and power, whilst being blind to how these same relations and conditions oppress and disempower (Mills, 1997). This profoundly shapes the psychology of white people, effecting behaviours grounded in motivations to protect white innocence and maintain invisibility (Phillips & Lowery, 2018).

Situating Whiteness

Whiteness, as a racial category is grounded in global systems of coloniality and modernity discussed earlier, and whilst it holds stable features that locates it within familiar sets of power relations, whiteness manifests differently across time and place – as well as across intersecting social categories such as gender, class, ability and sexuality (Green et al., 2007; Twine & Gallagher, 2008). White subjectivities, white supremacist structures, practices and discourses are expressed differently across contexts. Perhaps, the best example is the remaking of the Irish from racialised other into whites (Ignatiev, 1995). More recent research has also set out to examine how other groups more recently may have been drawn into whiteness, or within its proximity. These socially constructed boundaries taking different shape as national boundaries are crossed (Nayak, 2007). This is not to say that whiteness has not historically been defined by pigmentation, but rather that what has been identified as “white” has always been in flux, produced socially and oft enforced structurally through policies such as Apartheid in South Africa or the “White Australia” immigration policies (Markus, 2003; Posel, 2001).

Discursive Constructions of Whiteness

An important analytic approach to examining whiteness, its myriad expressions, and the subjectivities which it produces, is the examination of discourses taken up by different white subjects across different contexts. Analysis of these discourses unveils the ways whiteness is constructed, and how it works to maintain centrality and normativity. Nakayam and Krizek (1995) identify six strategies that constitute a discourse of whiteness within the United States. The first they identify is an explicit tying of whiteness to power, whether through reference to the majority position of whites or to the inferred status of being white. The second strategy is through definitions of whiteness marked by the absence of racialised markers attributed to other groups which are given “race” and “ethnicity”. This positions whiteness as a form of purity, unsullied by colour, and the default through which others can be measured against. A third strategy draws on scientific definitions of whiteness and race, constructing white as a natural state, and decontextualises it from its social and historical underpinnings, or the power relations within which whiteness is situated. The fourth strategy defines whiteness through nationality and places whiteness at the centre of national belonging relegating non-white others to the margins, a familiar discourse within the Australian context (Hage, 1998; Moreton-Robinson, 2015). A fifth strategy disavows a language of race or ethnicity, assuming a colour blindness (Bonilla-Silva, 2014), again rendering whiteness and the power it holds invisible. The last strategy deploys “symbolic ethnicity” (Gans, 1979), through the relation of whiteness to European ancestry. This discourse references some of the historicity of whiteness but refuses reflexive consideration of power within how whiteness is constructed (Nakayam & Krizek, 1995).

Whilst these discourses are drawn from a specific context, they also unveil broader ways of talking which reflect the global flows of knowledge and shared understandings of race and whiteness that take hold in other contexts. However, localised histories and

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conditions can shape these discourses in particular ways. For example, Melissa Steyn's (2008) examination of "white talk" of white South Africans who inhabit a unique positionality of intersecting whiteness and diaspora, shaping discursive reproductions of race and whiteness. Writing from the Australian context shows how gender and class intersect with whiteness, across different histories of coloniality and migration (McDonald, 2016; Moreton-Robinson, 2000). Other writers have documented the ways specific discourses related to reconciliation shape different white subjectivities and differently position both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people (Green & Sonn, 2005; 2006; Riggs & Selby, 2003). Reconciliation is a symbolic process that seeks justice and equity through recognition of Aboriginal dispossession and disadvantage and raising awareness of non-Indigenous Australians to these histories and how they have manifested in the present (Reconciliation Australia, 2016). Green and Sonn (2005; 2006) interviewed white Australians to examine discourses pertaining to their involvement in the Reconciliation process. Through these discursive negotiations they illustrated one of the ways dominance and privilege of whiteness works within the Australian context. The reasons given for involvement positioned white Australians and Aboriginal people in different ways, for example a discourse of *cultural connection* spoke of a valuing and desire of Aboriginal knowledges and ways of doing. This discourse moves away from a language of justice and equity, instead it recentres whiteness and places an onus on Aboriginal people to engage in sharing knowledge and education with white Australians. A discourse of *expert analysis* positioned white Australians as holding expert knowledge around issues faced by Aboriginal people, whilst Aboriginal people were positioned as subjects to be known, a problem to be ultimately controlled. Both discourses recentre the white-self and shift focus to the Aboriginal "other", reproducing white dominance (Green & Sonn, 2005).

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Other discourses were examined about how racism might be tackled; these discourses also showed how specific subject positions were adopted to avoid interrogation of whiteness and its role in racism. For example, in one discourse Aboriginal people were positioned as needing to change themselves to ultimately enjoy what is constructed as a normative and superior white way of life in Australia. However, even discourses which acknowledge racism, and how it can be located structurally and institutionally, act to buffer interrogation of individuals own whiteness and complicity. Locating racism within “racist others” achieved similar outcomes. Lastly, discourses that related to bringing non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal people together for a peaceful and harmonious Australia served to depoliticise difference, and again locates difference within the Aboriginal “other” placing the onus on them to fix the “problem” of reconciliation (Green & Sonn, 2006).

Knowledge construction also works to form what histories and understandings are available to us, often working through academic institutions that have been shaped by and reproduces the broader power relations grounded in white supremacy (Green et al., 2007). Secondly, national identity and belonging is mediated by whiteness. For example, the Australian nation state has been re-imagined as a white possession (Moreton-Robinson, 2015), this has shaped who gets to be seen as Australian, as white Australia become the arbiters of national identity and belonging (Hage, 1998). Thirdly, anti-racism practices and discourses can be identified as producing and maintaining whiteness. This can be seen through the discursive delinking of white positionalities to responsibilities regarding issues of race and privilege, or the redefining of these concepts to locate them within specified domains such as class or relegating them to individual “racists”. Conversely, a focus only on structure may also exclude capacity for individual reflection and action (Green et al., 2007).

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have presented an overview of critical perspectives on racism and whiteness, drawing on theoretical frameworks from within psychology and beyond. These perspectives provide a deeper understanding of processes of racialisation and dynamics of oppression, grounded in an analysis of power. I have also endeavoured to present whiteness as an important site of analysis through which to better understand these dynamics, following calls to shift the lens towards this normative and often obscured system of domination.

Chapter 3: Organisational Settings and the Reproduction of Dynamics of Race, Power and Oppression

Whilst organisations have been recognised as sitting within contexts of inequitable systems of power that create racialised, gendered and classed divisions within society, they have often been seen as themselves neutral structures (Cox & Nkomo, 1990). Within this view that supposes neutrality, organisations may contain individuals who hold prejudices or engage in discriminatory behaviours, but the organisation itself is seen as ideologically neutral and not implicated in the reproduction of racialising patterns and dynamics of oppression. Within this chapter I show how social settings such as organisations are sites for the reproduction of race and white supremacy ideology by drawing on key frameworks and theories across disciplines concerned with theorising organisational life. This review of literature will draw together important perspectives and frameworks through which to understand my third research question: *How do other settings support or inhibit the creation of self-determined settings?* I will first briefly examine some seminal frameworks for understanding how power and ideology shape organisational life. Then I will present key symptoms specific to an ideology of race, by way of the racialised inequities that are present across organisational life. I will then endeavour to examine the dominant race discourses that have shaped how race and whiteness has been considered in both the theorisation and the practice of managing organisations. Following this, I will turn to literature that specifically examines settings with an orientation to social justice and that works closely with marginalised communities. I will argue that these contexts offer a unique set of discourses and dynamics in contrast to other organisational settings. I then briefly look at dominant interventions into issues of race within organisational settings, such as diversity training and inclusive structural change, before presenting the creation of alternative settings as an intervention that has the potential for important impacts across levels. Lastly, I will argue that

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alternative settings that mobilise community arts are an effective intervention towards racial inequity that contributes to symbolic and material transformation across levels, and constitute an alternative setting across creative industries, and community development and human services sectors. This literature will provide an important foundation to respond to my second research question: *How is self-determination evident in the community arts practices and processes mobilised within NiC?*

Social Settings as Sites for the Reproduction of Relations of Power

Organisations are important social settings that act as mediating structures that stand “between the individual and [their] private life and the large institutions of public life” (Berger & Neuhaus, 1980). Social settings are “relationships over a sustained period of time to achieve certain goals” (Sarason, 1972, p. 1), not necessarily bounded by a physical space but encompassing any kind of social organising from formal organisations to family units. As a setting, organisations are constituted by important social processes as individual actors engage with each other and within groups; and they contain human, economic, physical, and temporal resources which are organised and allocated in ways that structure the experiences and opportunities for those within the setting. Whilst resources and the way they are organised represent material constraints and levers for how individuals act within a setting, social processes are *how* individuals experience a setting, manifest through norms and social scripts, interactional patterns and practices and participation (Seidman & Tseng, 2011).

Organisations as social settings are also sites that reproduce relations of power predicated on ideological systems of oppression that permeate their social, political, and cultural contexts. Much of the research that has mapped disparities along socially constructed divisions within organisations has entailed an examination of gender ideology within organisational settings (Powell, 1999). This body of work has shown how social hierarchies are reproduced discursively within organisational settings, creating structures that support the

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accumulation of privilege for some and subjection to oppression for others. This shapes identities and structures and has profound impacts on all aspects of organisational life, from labour and the structuring of physical space, to forms of symbolic meaning and identity construction (Acker, 1990; 2006; Gherardi & Poggio, 2001).

Scholarship within community psychology has also endeavoured to apply a gender analysis within social settings frameworks (Bond & Allen, 2016; Bond & Wasco, 2017). Settings contain gendered qualities which, through practices, reify discrete categories of sex and gender such as male and female, reinforcing gender binaries and excluding other possibilities for gender identifications. Practices within a setting also delimit what opportunities are available to individuals, according to gender. These practices are shaped by narratives that are circulated within a setting and are constructed from societal narratives. Whether individuals conform or not is also managed through social sanctioning, at the risk of marginalisation. Further, through these practices and narratives another quality is produced, the norming of masculine ways of being and doing, which also become privileged. The last quality is the legitimation of inequality, whereby the practices which sustain these inequities and forms of privilege are rendered unproblematic and “natural” as notions of meritocracy or equality over equity are utilised. The practices that constitute these qualities consist of structural aspects, how resources are allocated to uphold the gendered relations of power; the transactional patterns, interpersonal interactions, made up of regular and recurrent ways of relating, norms of communication and how social ties are made; and the embedded values of the settings as both espoused and enacted through forms of symbolic meanings, rituals and formal policies (Bond & Allen, 2016). The dynamics and processes through which race ideology is produced and reproduced are not dissimilar. However, it is useful to first map how race is conceptualised by those who theorise organisational settings and their management.

The Racialised Dimensions of Organisations

Whilst many countries have robustly documented gender disparities within organisations and institutions, for some countries there has not been the same level of data collection pertaining to racial inequity. For example, the United Kingdom has only recently begun to consider reporting on pay disparities between ethnicities, similar to the “gender pay gap”, based on clear disparities between ethnic minorities and white people shown in census data (Equality and Human Rights Commission, 2017). In contrast, within Australia there has been little widespread data collected to document this. However, a recent report found that senior leaders, chief executives and executive management across Australian organisations are all predominantly Anglo Celtic or European in background and their presence is disproportionate to their representation in the broader population (AHRC, 2018). Another report found that women from culturally diverse backgrounds faced a “double jeopardy” where both gender and cultural background combined to increase difficulty towards progressing into leadership roles (Diversity Council Australia, 2017); household incomes, employment status and housing conditions have also been found to be lower for migrants from Lebanese, North African and Vietnamese backgrounds than for white migrants, including those with European backgrounds (Borooah & Mangan, 2007); and those with refugee backgrounds also tend to hold low-level jobs, regardless of previous experience (Colic-Peisker & Tilbury, 2005). Research has also shown that migrant workers, who work in racialised roles in hospitality and agriculture industries, experience significant wage theft (Berg & Farbenblum, 2017). Furthermore, many racialised communities have also reported significant experiences of discrimination within the workplace (Blair et al., 2017). Thus, despite the lack of initiative by Australian governments in tracking these disparities, there is still many markers that show the prevalence of racialised inequity within organisational and institutional life.

A focus on race has also been lacking within dominant perspectives that theorise organisations and their management. Disciplinary knowledge constructs frameworks of thinking and doing; they are often hegemonic and value particular knowledges, ideological positionings, and understandings of their contextual domains (Foucault, 1980). Thus, the predominant approaches within organisational and management theory shape processes, structures, and the decisions made by power holders which have material and symbolic impacts on organisations and those who experience them. This has implications for how race and racial equity comes to be understood in the study of organisational settings. Much early scholarship neglected to address race as a significant feature of organisational life. A review of the literature in the 1990s showed not only a dearth of literature that addressed race and ethnicity, but an underdevelopment of theory which led to simplistic understandings of the complexities of racialised dynamics (Cox & Nkomo, 1990). This was indicative of an understanding of organisations as race neutral structures and spaces and prompted a call for alternative frameworks better suited to the analysis of race, amongst other social categories. However, while some contemporary perspectives more readily recognise race, it is often in ways that obscure the systemic entanglements of power and privilege. For example, Ashcraft and Allen (2003) offer an analysis of discursive constructions of race within undergraduate organisational communication texts. They identified a series of messages within these texts that construct race in particular ways:

1. Race is a separate, singular concept that is relevant only under certain circumstances.
2. Race is relevant so far as it involves cultural differences, which can be identified, valued, and managed, to improve organisational performance.
3. All cultural differences are synonymous with international variations.

4. Racial discrimination is a function of personal bias, interpersonal misunderstanding, organisational failure to manage cultural differences, and disproportionate demographics.
5. White (collar) workplaces and workers constitute “universal” settings, identities and practices.

They argue that through the “disciplinary socialisation of students”, these core messages sustain organisations as raced, and both centre and obscure whiteness, and its associated norms and practices. Furthermore, these messages “flatten” difference, and only recognise it in service of neoliberal goals of productivity and efficiency.

Building on earlier reviews Proudfoot and Nkomo (2006) have also revisited the contemporary state of organisational scholarship and its relationship with race, including sociological and psychological literature pertaining to the study of organisations. They found significant improvements in relation to earlier reviews (Cox & Nkomo, 1990). New research has been more attentive to the complexities of race, examining the experiences of different groups such as Asian Americans and Hispanics, multiracial identities, and including whiteness as a racialised category. Further, contemporary scholarship has also further embraced the importance of recognising the intersections of gender and race. Despite these improvements, many stark disparities still exist, and there is little advancement in understanding the mechanisms that perpetuate them, nor what approaches can be taken to work towards eradicating them. They attribute this to a lack of theoretical focus, an over reliance on individualised theories of social cognition, and the predominance of North American scholarship to cite some examples. Importantly, they also identify a shift of focus away from dynamics of race and racialisations towards a discourse of diversity, which will be further explored below (Proudfoot & Nkomo, 2006).

Within scholarship from the Australian context there are some important departures from the North American literature. Largely the conceptual language of “race”, or blackness and whiteness is eschewed for categories of ethnicity, culture, nationality or language (Stevens et al., 2015). Furthermore, whilst much of the North American literature draws on racialised identities as an analytic lens, the Australian literature largely focusses more on the experiences of migrant workers or workers from non-English speaking backgrounds (NESB; e.g., Daly et al., 2018; Kosny, Santos & Reid, 2017; Rajendran et al., 2017). There is, however, literature that examines the experiences of Indigenous Australians within a variety of organisations and institutions (e.g., Ewing et al., 2017; Chirgwin et al., 2017; Lai et al., 2018); and literature that has looked at the experiences of Muslims within organisations (e.g., Sav et al., 2010; Syed & Pio, 2010); and research examining the experiences of people of African heritage within organisations (e.g., Gatwiri, 2021; Mapedzahama et al., 2012). This scholarship largely draws on ideas of diversity and Australian multiculturalism, or cultural competency as a concept stemming from the health fields (Trenerry & Paradies, 2012).

Diversity Approaches

Organisational and management literature has seen a shift towards discourses of diversity from the 1990s onwards. Some critiques of diversity discourses have argued that common understandings of diversity reduce differences to simplistic identity categories to be treated identically and without attention to the histories of power, privilege, and oppression in which they are situated (Proudford & Nkomo, 2006). Syed and Kramar (2010) provide a detailed assessment of diversity management within the Australian context by drawing on a relational and multi-level analytic framework. Mapping the management of diversity across macro-national, meso-organisational and micro-individual perspectives, they demonstrate how diversity management policies and practices across these levels have contributed to negative outcomes for NESB workers. They assert that at the level of national policy, a

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distancing from values of multiculturalism towards assimilationist policies and rhetoric, coupled with inadequate reactive equal opportunities legislation, and the decentralisation of workplace agreements creates precarious work conditions that contribute to ongoing disparities for NESB workers. This is also exacerbated by an overall focus on gender within diversity legislation, and thus organisational policies within a compliance approach, which does little to recognise or address both structural exclusion and individual experiences of discrimination for workers from diverse ethnic, cultural or linguistic backgrounds (Syed & Özbilgin, 2009). It is important to note that such broad categorisations of difference are insufficient to capture the dynamics of race and racialisation within organisations, even when attentive to structural factors and ideology.

In a review of diversity management literature, Linnehan and Konrad (1999) identified significant problems with the concept of diversity that still hold with contemporary critiques. They argue that diversity discourses shift away from examining inequalities and instead focus on individual differences between people; they often avoid discussions of prejudice, discrimination and stereotyping or contexts of historical and institutional disadvantage; they often intentionally distance diversity from mechanisms for structural inclusion such as affirmative action; and that interventions grounded in diversity approaches often are designed to not affect change in ways that may unsettle the status quo. Importantly, recent systematic reviews of such interventions have found them to be largely ineffective (Chang et al., 2019). Sara Ahmed (2009) in interviews with diversity practitioners within universities poses that,

the term ‘diversity’ is appealing as it does not necessarily challenge organisational culture, even if it allows a change in appearance. Hence, to add ‘diversity’ to a mission statement does not necessarily add anything...and yet, the word still has baggage, and still gets associated with people who ‘look different’. (p. 45)

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For Ahmed, discourses of diversity take reified difference and imbue organisations and institutions with the quality of being diverse. She continues, focusing on university settings:

...diversity becomes a brand, and a form of organisational pride. Not only does this re-branding of the university as being diverse work to conceal racism, but it also works to re-imagine the university as being anti-racist and even beyond race: as if the colours of different races have ‘integrated’ to create a new hybrid or even bronzed face. (p. 44)

Others have instead argued for more critical approaches to diversity, for example, Steyn (2010) advocates a critical diversity literacy which counters the performative and “carnivalesque” normative conceptualisations of diversity, bringing in an understanding of power relations through critical thought. Critical diversity literacy can be regarded as

An informed analytical orientation that enables a person to ‘read’ prevailing social relations as one would a text, recognising the ways in which possibilities are being opened up or closed down for those differently positioned within the unfolding dynamics of specific social contexts. (Steyn, 2015, p. 381)

Such an approach not only attends to power, but situates power relations historically, and recognises the social construction of identity and the role of affect. This “literacy” is congruent with moves to understand raced and racialising organisations, and important conditions from which racialising practices can be interrogated. Further, such literacy is important alongside ecological approaches to understanding diversity which call for the need for multiple levels of analysis, which recognise the interdependence of organisational systems, and understanding the experiences of individuals within these systems (Bond & Haynes, 2014).

Organisations and the Reproduction of Whiteness

Other critical approaches have focused their analysis on the role of whiteness and white normativity within organisations. They argue for an understanding of “whiteness as a cultural and ideological formation embedded in institutional life” (Ward, 2008, p. 583). Grimes (2002) identified three perspectives within the diversity management literature that demonstrate the coexistence of whiteness and power within organisations. The first perspective, *interrogating whiteness*, aims to de-centre and reveal how whiteness works through normative assumptions. The second perspective, *re-centring whiteness*, adopts a superficial progressiveness found in many diversity discourses. This perspective celebrates difference yet maintains whiteness as the “normal” and ideal position. It evokes themes of equality over equity, and belief in meritocracy and colour blindness that recentres white, masculine subjectivities and concerns, and sustains power whilst cursorily acknowledging the skills of those that sit outside the “norm”. The third perspective, *masking whiteness*, actively works towards obscuring whiteness and devaluing difference, sustaining and reproducing white privilege. McAlpine and Marsh (2005) also demonstrate how organisations employ discursive strategies of silence that work to conceal whiteness. These discursive strategies police talk of race or ethnicity through embarrassment and fear, marking it as transgressive. This further normalises whiteness and prevents white people from recognising their own power and privilege.

Drawing on the work of Green et al. (2007), Al Ariss et al. (2014) emphasise the importance of identifying how the construction of knowledge and history is integral towards analysing how whiteness, and the inherent forms of power and privilege, are (re)produced. They offer a framework for examining whiteness within organisations, which not only examines the interdependence of contextual settings, but is attentive to grounding analysis within important social histories. They highlight the need to examine whiteness at an individual level, in respect to individual experience and agency; at an organisational level,

through the practices and processes, as well as implicit norms, which sustain white privilege and supremacy; and at a macro level, including structural and institutional conditions such as policy frameworks. An analysis of whiteness must also additionally occur at a spatial level, with respect to context; and at a historical level, mapping the histories of ideological reproduction that manifest in contemporary material conditions (Al Ariss et al., 2014).

Nkomo and Al Ariss (2014) demonstrates how colonial and racial histories within the United States are central to the (raced) organisation of labour, and inextricably linked to how we need to understand contemporary organisations. They claim that it is precisely these histories that have created the organisational conditions that constructs both organisations and whites as raceless, whilst ensuring inequitable access to power and resources that becomes legitimised through discursive mechanisms and the centring of whiteness as normative, valued, and ideal.

Theorising Race in Organisations and Organisations as Raced

Despite the absences and diversions noted above, there have been others who have developed more critical frameworks to theorise race in organisations. Drawing on the understanding that there are symbolic and material practices and processes which sustain organisations as raced, Wingfield and Alston (2014), within the context of predominantly white organisations, proposed a theory of racial tasks. This theory examines the tasks that are performed by racialised groups at ideological, interactional, and physical levels across an organisation's structure and that serves to maintain racialised hierarchies. They propose that different roles within an organisational hierarchy perform types of maintenance work, exemplified in racial tasks. Those situated within positions of upper leadership, such as executives or senior management, engage largely in ideological work (and some interactional work). These tasks are related to setting the wider organisational culture, the values and assumptions that underpin the attitudes and behaviours of people within the organisation.

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Within the raced organisation, this work involves the reproduction of white normativity and supremacy, and as racialised disparities exist in relation to who holds power, it is often white people that inhabit these positions. At the mid-level of the hierarchy, for example middle management, it is largely interactional work (and some ideological). This work entails tasks which involve conforming to implicit and explicit norms directed by the organisational culture; it often entails self-presentation and emotional labour to enact these conformities. The ideological work engaged here, is less about setting and shaping, and more about enforcing already established norms. At the lower level of the organisational hierarchy, such as frontline staff, the work is often physical. Here individuals must perform racial tasks in their physical form. This can also include engaging with the physical organisational space to maintain symbolic spatialised dimensions of whiteness, embodied by art, layout, physical access, or organisational visual communication (Wingfield & Alston, 2014).

Ray (2019), however, offers an alternative framework. They argue that the racial tasks approach focuses too heavily on the work performed by racialised groups within white settings; by obscuring the kinds of racial tasks that white people perform supposes organisations as neutral settings, with race being brought in by the racialised other. Firstly, they define racialised organisations as:

...meso-level social structures that limit the personal agency and collective efficacy of subordinate racial groups while magnifying the agency of the dominant racial group.

The ability to act upon the world, to create, to learn, to express emotion—indeed, one's full humanity—is constrained (or enabled) by racialized organizations. All organizations are racialized and “inhabited” by racialized bodies; yet the specific distribution of resources, the degree to which organizational dynamics rely on explicit racial criteria, the deployment of racialized schemas, and patterns of racial incorporation are variable. (p. 36)

They argue that when racial schemas, templates for social action, exercise control over resources, racial structures are formed. In turn, racial ideologies then explain and legitimise this set of relations and the unequal distribution of power and resources, and further sustain racial schemas. Racial structures then also become institutionalised as they are reproduced across myriad organisational forms. Racialised organisations contain four key features. They constrain or enhance agency, for example through the control of time and how much is used; this is closely mapped to positions of power within the organisation. This can constrain capacity to act within an organisation, and access to various forms of power. Racialised organisations also work to legitimate unequal distribution of resources, for example discourses of meritocracy serve to explain away racialised inequity and legitimate who holds power and the flow of resources and opportunity. Within this dynamic whiteness is deployed as a credential that becomes linked to formal forms of credentialing, and thus whiteness as a possessed quality enables forms of access and cumulative advantage that culminates in “merit”. Lastly, racialised organisations engage in racialised decoupling, similar to Ahmed’s (2007) and other critiques of organisational approaches to diversity, this entails a distancing of diversity and inclusion commitments to tangible policies and practices that serve to alter the status quo.

A Focus on Community Based and Progressive Contexts

Much of the research and theorising of race and organisations that has been discussed has centred on mainstream for-profit organisations. However, different organisational contexts can also show particular nuances and complexities. For example, some organisations considered to be progressive, if not alternative, may hold sets of values that commit them to social justice or an attention to power. Some organisations may also construct alternative organisational structures that seek to address structural inequities. However, these contexts can still produce raced organisations that enshrine white normativity and perpetuate

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disparities, whilst employing discourses specific to such contexts that serve to obscure these processes. Ostrander (1999) examines relations of gender, race, and class in a mixed-gender and mixed-race, progressive, pro-feminist organisation. Despite a commitment to feminist principles, and values of social justice, the organisation still manifested oppressive gender and race dynamics. These dynamics are expressed in who dominates discussions and claims authority to speak or assume power or the emotional labour required by women of colour who take on mediating roles and relational work between men of colour and white women. However, despite the patterns of subordination that arose, opportunities to respond and contest these dynamics were also evident, allowing for the potential of solidarity grounded in ongoing struggles and commitment to transformation. Scott (2005) examined the processes of two feminist organisations in becoming racially diverse organisations. Scott discusses the creation of alternative decision-making structures developed in many feminist organisations that aimed to subvert the patriarchal and oppressive hierarchical systems common in many organisational structures. This decision making was collectivist and consensus based, however, despite such enactments of prefigurative politics they also acted to obscure patterns of power and privilege attached to whiteness. Informal hierarchies can emerge, often predicated on the resources and opportunities afforded to whiteness more broadly, providing forms of power within the organisation through an increased ability to participate or networks that arrange along classed (and racialised lines). These power inequities can then be obscured, as minority members may not feel able to challenge in consensus decision making, and even when they do, once consensus passed, dissent is soon forgotten.

Progressive social justice-oriented spaces can also circulate discourses that centre and secure whiteness. Todd (2011) posits that,

...community development creates the discursive and performative space for white bodies to know, evaluate, and intervene in the collective lives of racialized bodies. It

also creates the possibility for white subjects to imagine themselves as being heroic in the struggle against racism. (p. 118)

They identify discursive strategies employed in this project. For example, that racism can be resolved through self-reflection and declaration of one's privilege. This commitment to reflection then becomes an anti-racist "end" rather than a commitment to ongoing work and the larger project of challenging broader systems. Discursive strategies also locate racism as something that exists "outside", a problem perpetuated by individual "others", thus obscuring how white privilege is maintained in progressive spaces. Further, the "consumption" of creative, cultural, or culinary otherness becomes an indication of exceptionality, and aides in the construction of a "good white subject" that shrugs off complicities in systems of racism. It is also important to note, that people of colour are also engaged in racial projects, not only for racial justice, but also racial projects that sustain and perpetuate white privilege and forms of dominance. To be non-white does not remove the possibility of complicity, nor the necessity of reflexive anti-racist practice.

Racial ideology does not exist independently within these settings, but also interacts and is shaped by other powerful discourses. Bonilla-Silva's (2015) writing on colour-blind racism is useful here. Frames such as *abstract liberalism*, which draws on abstracted aspects of political and economic liberalism to explain racial matters, can be deployed in organisational contexts, to devalue raced others, legitimise inequality and white supremacy, whilst avoiding the "language of race". Chen (2014) presents a case-study of a pan-Asian non-profit organisation. In analysing volunteer, staff, and client discourses, they found the prevalence of a dominant organisational ideology grounded in neoliberalism and the non-profit industrial complex. This ideology emphasised, individualism, professionalism, and efficiencies, which depoliticised the organisation and approaches that attended to the structural issues their clients faced, recreated inequitable relations of power within the

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organisation, and risks contributing to the marginalisation of Asian subjects. According to Ward (2008),

Organizations do not operate in an institutional or cultural vacuum; therefore, an analysis of white normativity in organizations must account for the ways that external norms produce rewards for organizations that have white normative cultures and, conversely, produce constraints for those organizations that attempt to operate outside of a cultural framework that is familiar to whites. (p. 565)

In Ward's (2008) examination of a racially diverse LGBT organisation, they posed that even when organisational participants and leaders are racially diverse and share anti-racist values, the hegemony of whiteness that permeates within the broader cultural context, still infuses organisations, and enforces the use of neoliberal language and tools which in turn support and reproduce white normativity.

It is also important to note, that many of these organisations engage in community-based work. Again, most of the literature considers the experience of raced organisations from the standpoint of those who work within those spaces, yet the organisational (re)production of race and whiteness has significant impacts on many of the racialised communities such organisations engage with. Ideological frames shape policies and many of the practices and programs with which communities engage with (Collins & Barnes, 2014). For instance, the enactment of “colour blindness” in forms of community work, ignores the lived realities of racialised communities and risks perpetuating culturally unsafe practice. Further, in the non-performative orientation of organisations being non-racist (rather than anti-racist), many of the structural and systemic concerns that are perpetuated by whiteness and faced by these communities are not addressed. Instead, a commitment to anti-racism is needed (Mapedzahama, 2019). Quayle and Sonn (2013) also examined the way that non-

Indigenous local government workers discursively reproduce neoliberal ideologies which constituted symbolic barriers to partnerships with the local Noongar Aboriginal community in Western Australia. Drawing on Bonilla-Silva's (2014) framework of colour-blind racism, they identified frames of abstract liberalism, culture blame and a silencing and non-acknowledgement of the past. These discursive strategies showed an active severing of history and politics to the consideration of Aboriginal and non-Indigenous relationships, instead engendering an epistemology of ignorance (Mills, 2007) and reinforcing white privilege and dominance.

Addressing Race within Organisational Settings

Considering the understandings of race and the reproduction of systems of power within organisational contexts discussed above, it is important to look at the way organisations “address” or “intervene” on matters of race. Many organisations and institutions have recognised the need for diversity and inclusion, but often framed within a business case for improving productivity, innovation, and customer and staff satisfaction and retention (O’ Leary & D’ Almada-Remedios, 2019). Some specific interventions include diversity awareness workshops and/or training concerning implicit bias. In a survey of Diversity Managers and Human Resource leaders across Australia and New Zealand, it was found that the majority of organisations included, had committed to a focus on better managing diversity and inclusion, and a focus on leadership capability in managing diversity and inclusion (Korn/Ferry Institute, 2013). The implementation of “whole-of-organisation” interventions into reducing race-based discrimination have also reportedly increased representation of diverse employees, including within senior roles and boards, and built greater awareness, knowledge, and skills in regard to understanding racial discrimination (Trenerry et al., 2012). Whilst a conceptual critique of diversity was offered previously, the

following offers an examination of how this concept is deployed as an intervention at the level of the individual.

Diversity training can take various forms but can largely be defined as “a distinct set of instructional programs aimed at facilitating positive intergroup interactions, reducing prejudice and discrimination, and enhancing the skills, knowledge and motivation of participants to interact with diverse others” (Bezrukova et al., 2016, p. 6). However, despite the flourishing of this approach many question its effectiveness. Bezrukova et al. (2016) conducted a meta-analysis of over 40 years of diversity training evaluation, and whilst they found some effectiveness in the short term, their analysis of long-term effects indicated little evidence that changes in attitude or affective responses were sustained. These findings were echoed by further research by Chang et al. (2019). A key concept used in diversity training initiatives is that of implicit, or unconscious, bias. Implicit bias refers to the stereotypes and negative attitudes we implicitly hold about other groups (Dovidio et al., 2002). We often do not recognise these biases within ourselves, and how they shape our decision-making and interactions with others. This concept has formed a large part of how we think about racialised disparities within organisational spaces and more broadly, and training is often designed to give individuals the tools to recognise their own implicit biases. However, there have been some critiques, and one study has shown that individuals who receive messages that indicate that most people hold stereotypes, in fact engaged in more stereotyping than those who received messages indicating stereotyping to be infrequent (Duguid & Thomas-Hunt, 2015).

Tate and Page (2018) argue that implicit bias is (un)conscious and interlinked with epistemologies of ignorance. Systems of power grounded in whiteness are maintained, because such conceptual approaches refuse to acknowledge the existence of white supremacy

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and racism or distort understandings of racism in such a way that it becomes decoupled from white supremacy. They write,

The institutionalisation of unconscious bias as alibi for white supremacy is part of white fragility and, thereby, unconscious bias reinstates white equilibrium. The inevitability of (un)conscious bias, the very notion providing palatability to discussions of racial discrimination within organisations, facilitates this ignorance.

(p. 146)

It is through understandings such as unconscious bias that attention is shifted away from ideologies and structures that maintain inequity towards the individual, whilst simultaneously absolving white guilt and legitimating the status quo (Tate & Page, 2018). Thus, organisational interventions are too products of disciplines, and are underpinned by ideological and discursive positioning. They evoke explanatory frameworks that are complicit in the wider project of maintaining systems of power and privilege, and work through organisational contexts and spaces, which are rendered neutral and un-raced.

Many argue that organisations must actively engage in forms of structural inclusion to begin to address racialised dynamics and respond to currents of power and privilege within organisational spaces. Scott (2005) argues that it is necessary to combine attentiveness to how these systems manifest, with material mechanisms that enable inequities to be addressed and enable people of colour to engage in culture setting. Bezáhler (2014) also offers a case study that demonstrates the impact structural inclusion and emphasis on self-determination can have in transforming organisations. They describe the necessary conditions of working towards structural inclusion as lying in the adoption of organisational frameworks that recognise the root causes of inequity as systemic and structural. They further advocate an attentiveness to internal dynamics of power and how power shapes relationships with communities the organisation served. Then through the adoption of internal practices and

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policies, and structural change, tangible and meaningful change can occur. One example, is through the funding organisation which constituted the case, requiring that the boards of organisations they funded reflect the communities they sought to serve. In turn, the funding organisation sought to populate its own board with leaders from the organisations it chose to fund. This served to unsettle the way power pools within spaces of organisational leadership and allows resources and opportunities to flow through well-worn grooves (Bezahler, 2014).

Seidman and Tseng (2011) also describe intervention strategies that can be engaged to reduce inequity. These strategies encompass approaches such as a desire to reduce inequity through building collective power and consciousness raising, professional development and training, policy and regulation and the generation of data to inform change. Whilst, across approaches changing social processes such as practices, routines, interactions, and norms is key for change to occur, this is not always the main target of change. Reorganising resources is an important lever, and can be a focus of strategies, but must also coincide with a shift in social processes.

Alternative Settings as a Mechanism for Structural Inclusion and Self-Determination

For some it is better to create new settings rather than transforming existing organisational and institutional settings. Approaches within critical community inquiry have advocated for community based and led mobilisation and organising that focuses on creating settings that increase cultural safety, promote resilience, support processes of empowerment and tackle the misrecognition and dynamics of privilege and racialisation that operate at structural and systemic levels (Christens, 2012; Dutta et al., 2016; Maton, 2008; Sonn & Baker, 2016; Speer et al., 2014). Many marginalised and racialised communities have mobilised through forming their own settings for participation (Bailey, 2012; Ejorh, 2011). These organisations and projects are developed from and through communities and reflect knowledge and experiences that are better able to cater to the needs and desires of these

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communities - and they can be alternative settings that work outside of the bounds of mainstream systems and institutions. Alternative settings are a rejection of existing institutions, and support different ways of organising, different goals, different ideologies, or different approaches and ways of working; they are “radically different ways of perceiving, enacting, and experiencing...basic relationships and life activities...it is a protest, a reaction, an attempt to find a better way, a rejection” (Cherniss & Deegan, 2000, p. 360).

Cherniss and Deegan (2000) offer a nuanced consideration of what constitutes an alternative setting. They propose that alternative settings can be thought of as located along a continuum of alternative-traditional across dimensions of *organizational structure, goals, ideology or technology*. Along the continuum alternative settings may fall to alternative on some dimensions and traditional on others. Alternative settings also may not always work within broader orientations of social justice. Indeed there are many alternative settings that are grounded in hateful ideologies or that perpetrate harm. However, community psychology seeks to support alternative settings that are created by people to address shared experiences of oppression or inequity, and tend towards the creation of settings that emphasises:

creating a supportive community, non-hierarchical structures, holistic approaches to health, consensual decision-making, horizontal organizational structures that promote participation and power-sharing, building on the strengths of diverse people who do not ‘fit’ into existing programs and advocacy for social change. (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010, p. 164-165)

Such alternative settings can be important sites for the transformation of harmful dominant narratives, building capacities to resist and navigate oppressive social networks. They can represent prefigurative spaces that engage in alternate ways of being and doing that challenge the practices and ways of organising dictated by oppressive systems and structures and for racialised communities to contribute to efforts of self-determination and agency over selves

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and their communities (Sonn & Fisher, 1998). Whilst the concept of alternative settings casts a broad net that captures the multitude of ways marginalised people and communities organise together to engage in new and different ways of engaging in social change, within the literature there are many frameworks that more specifically capture the goals and processes of alternative settings that seek to challenge oppression. Frameworks such as *empowering settings* (Maton, 2008; Maton & Brodksy, 2010), can also be useful in understanding the effects alternative settings have on its members, however, while alternative settings can certainly be empowering not all empowering settings are necessarily alternative (Cherniss & Deegan, 2000). What follows are conceptual frameworks that more specifically describe alternative settings that challenge marginalisation and oppression. Importantly, many of these concepts overlap in what they describe, and some concepts fall into others, however, collectively they demonstrate the many ways alternative settings have been conceptualised by academics, activists and others engaged in social change praxis.

One concept that has moved from activist and academic spaces and into mainstream discourse is that of safe spaces. The Roestone Collective (2014) provide a detailed account of the critical feminist contexts from which the concept of safe spaces emerged and further map the contemporary shifts it has undergone. They identify two key ways that safe spaces have been conceptualised: *separatist sites of resistance*, exemplified by settings where those with marginalised identities can come together to form shared understandings and organise resistance from a safe base; and as *inclusive safe spaces in the classroom* that describes pedagogical settings that maintain feelings of safety, inclusivity and comfort for students. However, the Roestone Collective (2014) instead offer a conceptualisation of safe spaces as *paradoxical spaces* that entails embracing and negotiating binaries of inclusivity/exclusivity, safety/danger, and public/private rather than simply offering settings that produce a sense of equality through the erasure of difference or separating the self from contexts of violence and

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oppression. Drawing on the work of black feminist scholar bell hooks, homeplaces constitute another important alternative setting that challenges oppression. Considered by the Roestone Collective (2014) as a separatist site of resistance, hooks described homeplaces as radically political sites where:

Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world. (p. 42)

Others have extended on this work posing public-homeplaces as spaces for communal resistance and liberation through cultural action; these are spaces that foreground connection, care, humanisation, meaning making, radical imagination and collective remembering (Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

Counter-spaces provide a process focussed framework through which to understand setting-level responses to oppression. Within this framework counter-spaces are concerned with challenging negative representations of marginalised identities, through *challenging processes* (Case & Hunter, 2012). Settings which can be thought of as counter-spaces, contain three sets of processes which in turn engage different mechanisms that elicit positive effects within contexts of oppression at individual, collective and community levels. The first process, *narrative identity work*, describes a process of narrative meaning making where individual and collective identities, and shared meanings are rearticulated in ways that resist negative representations and hegemonic views of the world. The second process, *acts of resistance*, refers to engaging in cultural practices, and behaviours that are otherwise

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marginalised within broader society. Within counter-spaces these practices and behaviours are re-valued, re-affirmed, and constitute a form of social critique. The third process, *direct relational transactions*, refers to interpersonal processes between setting members that builds a sense of community that further fosters empathy and security, and creates a pedagogical space where members can share with one-another cognitive and behavioural strategies to resist oppression.

The three frameworks shared above, each provide insight into types and functions of alternative settings formed by marginalised and oppressed communities, with the intention of challenging the conditions of marginalisation and oppression. They are not interchangeable but offer instead different perspectives to this type of alternative setting, providing theoretical complexity and anchoring into histories of activist intellectual traditions. Another feature of the type of alternative setting articulated here, is that such settings are created, led, and controlled by the people and communities subjected to the forms of oppression and marginalisation that the settings challenge. They describe grassroots sites of community mobilisation, participation, and autonomy that hold important functions for setting and community members, and for broader structural change (Campbell, 2014; Campbell & Jovchelovitch, 2000). They are sites of intervention into oppressive systems that facilitates the emergence of critical consciousness, fostering solidarities and development of counter-systems (Burton & Kagan, 2009) – and in these ways they serve as powerful sites of liberation.

Montero and Sonn (2009) describe liberation as:

a process entailing a social rupture in the sense of transforming both the conditions of inequality and oppression and institutions and practices producing them. It has a collective nature, but its effects also transform the individuals participating, who, while

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carrying out material changes, are empowered and develop new forms of social identity. It is also a political process in the sense that its point of departure is the conscientization of the participants, who become aware of their rights and duties within their society, developing their citizenship and critical capacities, while strengthening democracy and civil society. (p. 1)

For Moane (2003) psychological processes of liberation occur at the personal level by building strengths through practices that support the development of positive identities and representations, a sense of socio-historical context, assertiveness, exploratory sexuality, creativity and spirituality; at the interpersonal level by making connections through practices of support, solidarity, conflict handling, and the valuing of diversity and cultivation of community; and lastly, at the political level by taking action through developing analysis, exploring new and different options, developing broader understandings of change and new strategies, and envisioning. Through his articulation of Fanon, Bulhan (1985) also calls for a psychology of liberation that moves from individualism to collective wellbeing, which seeks to fulfil human needs through self-determination, and empowerment for oppressed people over adjustment to the prevailing social order. The various frameworks described above are in alignment with the goals, processes, and practices of liberation; and liberatory settings are fundamentally alternative settings, as they seek to challenge hegemonic systems which contribute to ongoing oppression which constitutes the status quo.

However, alternative settings do not exist in a vacuum, but rather within complex ecologies situated within socio-political and discursive contexts that shape meanings and power relations. Thus, alternative settings also are sites of negotiation and resistance, as well as potential sites for the reproduction of oppressive practices and discourses. For example, access to resources can be difficult for many of these settings due to scarcity and gatekeeping from larger organisations (Hiruy & Eversole, 2015), thus many of these settings engage with

a range of intermediary support organisations (Cherniss & Deegan, 2000) to develop resources and build capacities. These relationships have material and symbolic impacts on these alternative settings and their activities and products (Seidman & Tseng, 2011). Institutions within the context of community-based work also reflect colonial and neoliberal systems and can act to reproduce dynamics of power and oppression that sustain hegemonic whiteness (Beals et al., 2021; Mingo et al., 2021). Thus, while alternative settings can form to challenge structural exclusion and pervasive forms of racism, at times they may still need to work with, in, and alongside structures shaped and infused by racist systems that contribute to white normativity and supremacy.

Community Arts as an Alternative Setting

Community arts brings together artists, creatives and community members to engage in collaborative creative practices through which shared resources for meaning-making emerge, shaping identities and addressing meaningful issue for a community (Adams & Goldbard, 2002; Quayle et al., 2016). Much has been written on the possibilities of community arts towards empowering both individuals and communities, constructing belonging, and creating powerful counter-stories (Baker, 2019; Madyaningrum & Sonn, 2011; Quayle & Sonn, 2019; Sonn et al., 2021; Wernick et al., 2014). Sonn and Baker (2016) describe community arts as public pedagogy that brings together cultural practice and knowledge production in the service of social transformation. It is also an important avenue for community organising that integrates art and cultural practice (Adams & Goldbard, 2002; Kuttner, 2016). It contributes to healing from those who have experienced injustice and oppression. It enables forms of epistemic justice through counter-storytelling (Dutta et al., 2021; Quayle & Sonn, 2019; Segalo, 2014). By implementing creative and participatory methodologies, and centring a relational and reflexive praxis, community arts challenges oppressive systems and the inequities they produce.

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The racialised structural inequities and paucity in diversity that are evident in broader institutional and organisational spaces within Australia also extend to the creative industries. For example, less than 50% of leaders in cultural bodies, less than 10% of artistic directors, 14% of leaders in literary and publishing organisations and 5% of leaders in theatre, dance and stage organisations come from culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) backgrounds (Diversity Arts Australia, BYP Group & Western Sydney University, 2019). Further, representation is not only lacking within spaces of power within the creative industries, but also across and within the types of stories that are told within the Australian film and television landscape. A report by Screen Australia (2016) found that Asian, African, and Middle Eastern communities were largely under-represented within TV dramas when compared to representation within the population. Within the reviewed TV dramas, culturally diverse characters were also not only often presented in conflict with white characters, but also represented in negative ways. Thus, by engaging participatory methods and creating non-traditional pathways Community Arts can also serve as an important avenue, for many creatives and artists who may be otherwise excluded from traditional pathways, to work within the creative industries. These qualities position community arts settings as potentially powerful alternatives to dominant settings within the creative industries, but also community development and human services sectors through which much community engagement and capacity building occurs. Thus, community arts oriented alternative settings are important sites that can respond to the impacts of racialised exclusion at multiple levels and across multiple sectors with positive impacts for individuals and communities. In spanning multiple areas of practice and knowledge such as art-making, community development, activism and community organising, community arts activities and products can contribute to transformative change within both symbolic and material spheres.

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However, alternative settings that engage community arts practices can take many forms, for example, they may consist of programs and projects delivered through larger organisations and institutions including arts organisations, not-for-profit community-based organisations, academic institutions, and local government (Goldbard, 2006; Mulligan & Smith, 2010). They may engage approaches that are *instrumental*, encompassing arts activities that raise broader awareness to issues in the community, builds capacities, or serves a tool for community engagement. They may also engage in approaches that are *transformational*, contributing to structural changes and shifts in policy and the shared understandings of decision-makers (Mills & Brown, 2004). In these examples, creatives and arts workers may be drawn from members of the community but organisational leadership or even program or project leadership roles might still be held by community outsiders. Many of these projects and spaces may still be considered community-led or peer-led, however, organisations and projects led by community members or people who share significant sets of experiences embody an important shift that challenges existing dominant relations of power and facilitates a bottoms-up approach to transformative change (Bamrick, 2020; White, 2018). Creative collectives represent one example of alternative settings that sit at the intersections of art making and community building and draw on alternative ways of organising that resist hierarchical structures steeped in oppressive systems. Many creative collectives have formed through creatives and artists from racialised and marginalised communities to create culturally safe spaces for connection and creativity (e.g., This Mob, New Wayfinders, Still Nomads, Soul Alphabet, Proppa Now), however, they must still navigate various challenges and constraints posed by institutions of hegemonic white Australia.

Alternative settings that mobilise community arts practice can be an intervention into the forms of structural exclusion experienced within the creative industries, which reflect the

racialised inequities present in other spheres of work and life in Australia, and the ways dominant arts institutions alongside community development and human services sectors reproduce dynamics of race that compound privilege and perpetrate oppression. They can do this through participatory and community-led structures that offer an alternative to these dominant institutions and practices. Furthermore, community arts as a modality can contribute to broader projects of liberation and transformative change within society, through community participation and mobilisation, public pedagogy, and participatory knowledge production that realises epistemic justice.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have shown how race is conceptualised and discursively constructed within dominant epistemic frameworks concerned with the theorisation and management of organisational settings. These conceptualisations work to erase or minimise raced dynamics within these settings and contribute to the view that organisations are objective and race-neutral. I have presented a review of key frameworks that have, provided in-depth analyses of the symbolic and material manifestations of race across a range of setting contexts, positing otherwise. Collectively this literature establishes the presence of race as a key organising framework in organisational life that establishes white supremacy and normativity and is actively obscured. While there are several interventions, with differing capacities for transformative change, many people who are subject to the oppressive dynamics of racial systems, opt instead to create their own new and alternative settings. Such settings have profound capacity to transform symbolic and material conditions for racialised and marginalised people and communities.

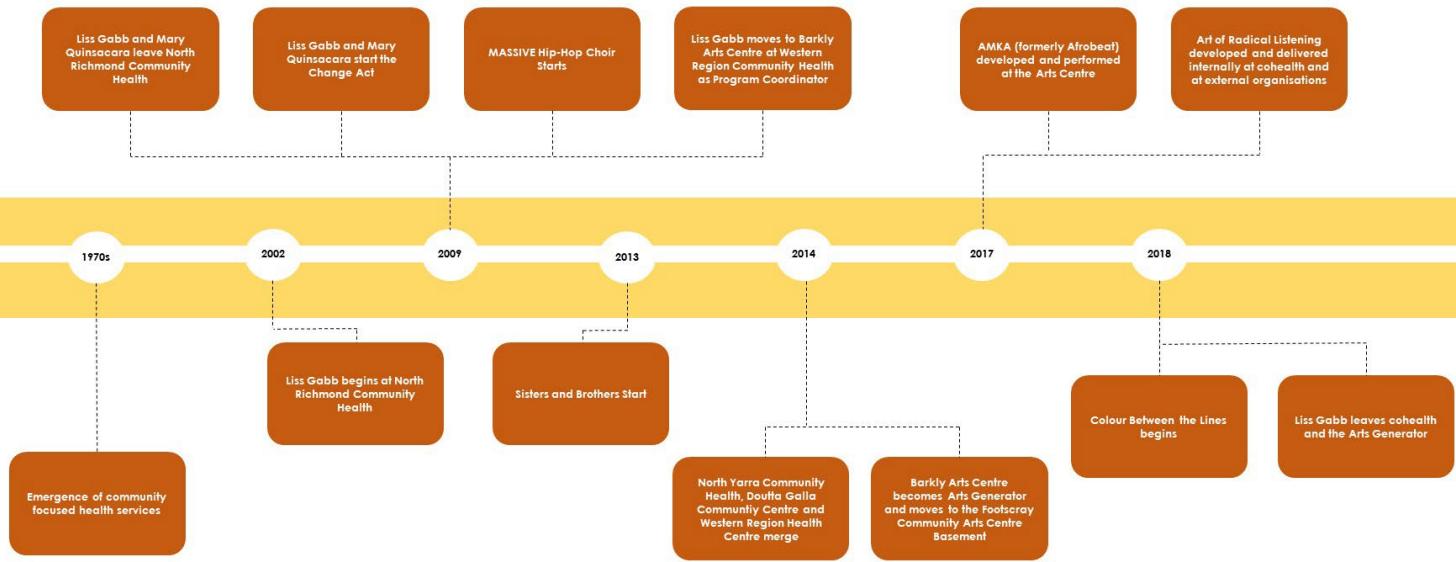
Chapter 4: A History of Colour Between the Lines

In this chapter, I contextualise the Colour Between the Lines (CBTL) initiative by presenting an overview of the histories and contexts from which it emerged. I will do so through compiling different perspectives and forms of data, including oral histories, organisational policies, organisational communications, and other documents. This is important to not only understand how CBTL was formed, but also how the work it engages in continues to build on projects and bodies of work that have come before, drawing on shared learnings and experiences to inform the development of practices and processes, and orientations towards the work they do. Furthermore, it is also important to understand the organisational and policy contexts that shape the relationships CBTL holds, and the broader terrain of socially conscious and community-engaged work embedded in the public health sector. Specifically, this chapter will present a brief overview of the neoliberal reforms across Australian federal and state governments which shaped the structure and approaches of community health services formed in the 1970s, providing the setting for the eventual amalgamation of three community health services into cohealth. This is followed by a profile of cohealth, discussing its structure and approaches to addressing social determinants of health. Drawing on oral histories shared by key figures involved in the creation of the space, the chapter will present a history of the Arts Generator, a participatory arts space situated within cohealth and in which the idea of CBTL found genesis. These oral histories are the product of informal conversations that reflect the ongoing relationships and collaborative work to theorise the transformational processes of participatory arts practice that has preceded this research (see Chapter 6). Lastly, I will introduce the CBTL Initiative, and a brief history of how the initiative emerged, again drawing on oral histories of those who took part in the initiative's inception. In figure 1 below is a timeline which briefly maps key events across these histories:

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Figure 1

Key Events Leading to the Creation of Colour Between the Lines



cohealth

Community Health Services and Australian Neoliberalism

Community health services in Australia emerged in the 1970s amidst the activism and advocacy of the transformative social justice movements of the era (Townsend, 2012). These community-based organisations were oriented towards a social model of health that saw a focus on addressing social, political and economic contexts that impacted the health of individuals and communities. Catering to marginalised and disadvantaged communities, community health organisations engaged in holistic approaches, often engaging in activism and political action as important tools alongside individually focussed medical interventions (Townsend, 2012). These organisations reflected the needs of the communities they were situated in, and further sought to include the voices of service users and develop a sense of community ownership.

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However, according to Western et al. (2007) from the 1980s Australia begun its foray into a range of neoliberal reforms, which would change the way community health services were structured and the approaches that they took. Neoliberalism refers to the resurgence of liberal political philosophies during this era that shaped and continue to shape western societies and governments. Key to neoliberalism is the centrality of the market as an organising mechanism, and the belief that individuals are rational actors that should not be constrained or coerced by government interventions, but rather should be left to pursue their own self-interest. These principles play out in policies such as deregulation, privatisation, defunding of social welfare and the outsourcing of social services (Western et al., 2007). Whilst neoliberal policies emerged through respective Republican and Conservative governments in the US and UK, in Australia it was ushered in under the Hawke and Keating Labour governments, with further reforms undertaken by the Howard Liberal government (Horton, 2007; Western et al., 2007). A key area of reform has been in the area of social policy, which has seen the Australian state shift from a service provider to a service purchaser model. An outcome of this shift is the creation of a market for public and private agencies to compete for government contracts for the provision of services. This further saw government and public agencies adopting the rationalities of private sector agencies: service users become clients and consumers, organisational efficiencies and the bottom line become key guiding forces (Horton, 2007; van Gramberg & Bassett, 2005). Whilst these changes occurring at a Federal level are important to understand the broader contexts of neoliberal reforms through which many of our institutions and organisations are structured and operate, state level reforms also significantly impacted the health sector and how community health services and organisations operated.

In Victoria 1992, Jeff Kennett's Liberal state government took power in a landslide election victory, largely due to significant debt accrued by the incumbent Labour

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government. Kennet's tenure as Victorian premier saw a dogged implementation of neoliberal reform, often unfettered and without regard for checks and balances. This included for example, the privatisation of public transport, and electricity and gas utilities, amalgamation of local councils, school closures, significant cuts to the public sector and services and mass budget cuts (Strangio, 2012). Community health services, as the domain of state governments, were not immune to sweeping reforms and cuts. Hamish Townsend (2012), in a history of the North Yarra Community Health Service writes of this time,

The Health Department announced a set of principles that would guide the state's health services platform, as well as direct "productivity gains". In language excruciatingly familiar to many, government would focus on "people and not institutions. It will fund services, not agencies" based on performance; services would reflect value for money; resources would be distributed "equitably", and a better health status and outcome would be achieved for all Victorians. In practice, a "units of service" definition of funding cemented the market-instruments approach to health that had been developing since the 1980s. (p. 130)

By 1993, despite concerted efforts of community rallies, occupations and activism in opposition, Victorian community health services experienced massive funding cuts overseen by the then Health Minister Marie Tehan, with many losing up to half of their operating budgets. Townsend (2012), writes of the eventual amalgamation, amidst drastic job cuts and structural reorganising of Carlton, Collingwood, and Fitzroy's community health services into first the Carlton Collingwood Fitzroy District Health Service and later North Yarra Community Health. Importantly, the concomitant organisational restructure signalled a move away from the flat structures of the originating health services which enabled more collectivist approaches and flexibility in the ways wider issues could be tackled to a more

hierarchical structure. Specifically, the creation of a Program Manager role acted to separate the delivery of services and management of services (Townsend, 2012).

Amalgamation of North Yarra Community Health, Doutta Galla and Western Region Community Health

In 2014, three community health services, including North Yarra Community Health (NYCH), merged to become cohealth. NYCH emerged from the amalgamation of Carlton, Collingwood and Fitzroy community centres during the Kennett era, and subsequently faced “an enforced emphasis from the government on clinical services over community participation” (cohealth, n.d., para. 7). Doutta Galla Community Health Centre, likewise, emerged from amalgamations during this time and underwent government pressure to “operate as businesses with fees consequently introduced on a means tested basis for some services” coupled with a “shift towards health promotion...which was at odds with the belief that community health starts with addressing social determinants of health” (cohealth, n.d., para. 3). Western Region Health Centre (WRHC) comprised the third centre, it was active in Naarm’s (Melbourne’s) Western region particularly in engaging low socio-economic communities and the growing ethnic diversity in the area due to waves of immigration (cohealth, n.d.). These three centres would then merge, encompassing ten municipalities and 30 sites across Melbourne’s “most disadvantaged and high growth metropolitan communities” (cohealth, 2014). As former cohealth CEO Lyn Morgain tells, speaking of the merger, “we believe this merger gives us an opportunity to secure the funding and resources we need to remain a trusted, well-resourced service for local communities” (2014, p. 1). In coming together and forming cohealth, there was more opportunity to attract funding within a competitive “market”, and to engage in advocacy from a stronger position.

Organisational Profile

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cohealth would be a not-for-profit community health service based in the northern and western suburbs of Naarm (Melbourne). It would focus on reducing health inequities for those who experience marginalisation and stigma, and is premised on working in partnership with communities, underpinned by a model that envisions the interlinkages between caring for individuals, communities and society more broadly. As part of this approach, the organisation provides a range of health and support services in areas of physical, mental and child and family health; but also, community health and connection and diversity and inclusion programs, which aim to strengthen communities and prevent root causes or the social determinants of health inequities (cohealth, n.d.). The World Health Organisation defines social determinants of health as “the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. The conditions in which people live and die are in turn, shaped by political, social, and economic forces” (WHO, 2008, p. i). Key social determinants of health include socio-economic position, early life and development, social exclusion, social capital, employment and work, housing, and residential environment (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016), thus developing programs and services that support individuals and communities across these domains takes a more preventative approach than simply addressing health issues once developed.

As a product of the shifting policy and funding terrain that shaped the community health services that preceded it, the organisation has a more hierarchical and departmentalised organisational structure. It consists of a board of directors, an executive team comprised of the Chief Executive, Executive Lead Services, Executive Lead Experience and Executive Lead Capability roles. The organisation is further stratified into management roles across departments, and delivery and frontline roles. cohealth, however, also emphasises the importance of co-design and community embeddedness through parallel structures of a

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community advisory committee informing the cohealth management team and regional and specialist advisory groups informing service delivery teams (cohealth, 2015).

As an organisation they continue to contend with competitive funding models and a shifting policy landscape that continues to exacerbate the pressures from the sector reforms of earlier decades. As stated in a preface to the 2019-2023 strategic plan,

Growth in competition, contraction of government funding, and policy shifts that see funding directed to consumers rather than providers, compel organisations to more carefully allocate resources and to develop alternative revenue streams. High quality customer experiences across all services are essential. Meanwhile, developments in automation and digital technologies, along with changes to the workforce and to ways of working also require organisations to adapt in order to remain competitive.

(cohealth, 2018, p. 4)

Thus, the present strategy of cohealth is responsive to these structural conditions aiming to balance the needs of community, effective service delivery and the financial sustainability and competitiveness of the organisation. This is evidenced by its current strategic framework which sets the following aims of the organisation: to be impactful, with a focus on populations experiencing the largest health inequities, whose needs can be practically met and adequately resourced. This would also be supported by the collection and analysis of evidence to inform their approaches and ensure quality and safety. Further, the approaches should be adaptive to individual, and community needs and financially sustainable.

According to cohealth's (2018) strategic plan these aims are to be realised across key focus areas which seek to:

- define, document and disseminate impact from the work cohealth engages in.

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- develop co-designed services and documenting these successes; developing key partnerships and continuing to build cohealth's credibility within the sector.
- focus on cohealth's workforce and engage in better ways of working grounded in the organisation's values and underpinned by the measurement of outcomes and assessment of performance as part of ongoing review and improvement.
- provide the resources needed to enable coworkers and community to develop evidence informed approaches, and to improve systems and processes.
- develop effective data utilisation to map productivity, inform strategic and operational decision making, whilst making access to data transparent and further ensuring protection of data is aligned with organisational values.
- and adopt a financial model that engages in advocacy for more equitable resource allocation, resource allocation aligned with measurable health gains, and the diversification of the financial base by developing new products and services that open up new funding and revenue streams.

cohealth's Prevention Team

Essential to developing and delivering programs within a prevention framework is cohealth's Prevention Team which aims to improve health, well-being and social inclusion through various organisational and community collaborations and partnerships, and a focus on community development and mobilisation (cohealth, 2018). This entails awareness and capacity building projects to support community members in civic participation and advocacy efforts, as well as supporting efforts to influence policy change at the level of government and various service design and delivery organisations. The team's integrated health promotion strategy builds on cohealth's broader social determinants of health approach to focus on key principles of:

- Redressing economic and social power imbalances

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- Equity through self-determination
- Harnessing community strengths and assets, together
- Sustaining connections through authentic relationships and communication
- Inspiring creativity and innovation (cohealth, 2017, p.3)

The Prevention Team's 2017-2021 Integrated Health Promotion Strategic Plan seeks to address two health priority areas of the Victorian Government's 2015-2019 Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, mental health and the prevention of violence and injury (prevention of violence against women), by addressing social determinants of gender equity, race-based discrimination and vocation; also recognising the interrelated nature of these determinants and their outcomes. Their approach includes collaboration and partnering with traditional and non-traditional stakeholders; systems thinking informed work that entails working at individual, organisational, community and sometimes policy levels to contribute to systems change; place-based projects; and generating sustainable change through increasing a sense of self-control and self-determination for individuals and communities through co-design approaches. Outlined within this strategic plan is a theory of change for each social determinant, mapping the short-, medium- and long-term goals as they linearly connect to an overarching goal. For example, change pathways to address race-based discrimination include raising awareness of rights and building skills and capacities to self-represent for culturally and linguistically diverse and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, engendering greater empowerment to give voice to issues, and finally a greater valuing of multiculturalism and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples within communities. Or developing knowledge of non-discriminatory practice and individual awareness of unconscious bias leading to more diverse workforces and the practice of more respectful and equitable behaviours, thus increasing feelings of being valued by society. Or lastly, reducing media bias to support cultural safety for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and culturally

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and linguistically diverse peoples within the wider community. Each of these short-, medium- and long-term goals work towards communities reducing experiences of stigma and discrimination. Similarly, gender equity change approaches focus on attitude, belief and behaviour change combined with addressing structural impediments that impede equity within organisations, whilst vocational participation is largely predicated on building awareness and knowledge of rights, expectations and opportunities. As one person affiliated with the cohealth Prevention Team explained,

health promotion and prevention work is fairly broad, and I think it's evolving. It typically has included things like community education and leaflets and behaviour change programs and things. The evolution of that has recognised that a lot of the things that actually impact on people's health and wellbeing are far further upstream than that kind of stuff and not necessarily about individuals or their behaviours. [The work] took different forms. For example, some of the gender equity work also involved working with people with lived experience with an arts practice. I did some work, for example, with a woman...who was a survivor of family violence and also an artist who, basically, had been involved in a bunch of cohealth programs over the years that had supported her through some really tough times. But she was interested in doing much more advocacy-oriented work to draw on her experience to effect wider change. Some of the work was... a community mobilisation role. At least the way I saw it was, it was about directly supporting people with lived experience to identify and then act on the issues that they identified as impacting on their health.

(Person affiliated with cohealth - 1)

Importantly the Prevention Team understood that change work was not just located outside of the organisation; cohealth also recognised the need to examine its own internal structure, systems and processes:

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The team also did, I suppose, work that was about the organisation itself as a setting. Looking at what policies we have around gender equality, looking at what we can do within our spheres of influence. Looking at what the makeup of the board is, for example, what recruitment processes you're taking, and how are they helping to address these barriers? The team's work is a little bit tricky to characterise because sometimes it wouldn't be all that visible, but in terms of reducing race-based discrimination, a few of the examples were around recruitment. Putting a bit of a spotlight on how we go about it. Whether there's ways that reinforces biases, drawing on research and initiatives from elsewhere to look at how we might address that.

(Person affiliated with cohealth - 1)

However, community mobilisation and organisation that seeks to work within community contexts to empower through collective action, community leadership and advocacy (cohealth, n.d.) remained important ways of thinking about how to address systemic issues and social determinants of health inequities. This also became an important focus area for the team,

Part of it was to come up with a position on how we would do what they described as community mobilisation, which is very often thrown around in health context but very rarely defined. That was one of the things that was key...documenting approaches that are taken to that type of work, which have been either effective or promising in the context of trying to address things like race-based discrimination and gender inequality. Partly, it was setting out a framework and partly it was piloting a couple of initiatives or trying to identify existing practice that was already happening either within cohealth or kind of local partners or other organisations that have had similar values to make the case for an approach that was much more about peer-led so-called interventions....some of the literature about community organising in particular firstly

aligned with the approaches that are already happening down at Arts Generator, for example, but also seemed to be the most promising models to follow if we actually wanted to try to effect more structural change. (Person affiliated with cohealth - 1)

The arts have long been intertwined with social change and arts and creative practices have been important avenues for building social inclusion and cohesion, as well as reducing the social determinants of inequitable health outcomes (Putland, 2012; Sonn et al., 2002). The Arts Generator (formerly Barkly Arts Centre) was one such program that builds connections within and across communities, supporting the development of positive social identities and increasing wellbeing and agency through participatory arts practice.

The Arts Generator

Working with young people and emerging artists from a range of culturally diverse communities, people experiencing mental illness and homelessness, refugees, Indigenous Australians, and people living in public housing, Arts Generator has been able to provide opportunities for participation, material outcomes in terms of employment and skill development for young artists and facilitators, and the creation of important symbolic resources through creative practice (Sonn et al., 2018). In particular, Arts Generator aims to train, mentor and employ young artists and arts workers from many of these communities, meaning often individuals who have become involved through one project, will go on to facilitate or develop other projects. At the heart of Arts Generator's approach is a focus on relationality and community building that brings diverse young people together through creative practices and a desire for equity and social justice.

The Colour Between the Lines collective and Next in Colour initiative, how they came to be, and many of their core values and ways of working must be understood within the context of Arts Generator – a space in which many of the collective members had

worked, and the space from which NiC had been conceptualised. In turn, the Arts Generator must also be contextualised within versions of its history, its conception, formation and development. The following is a brief history of the Arts Generator, as told in interviews with long time collaborators and key figures within the space, Mary Quinsacara and Liss Gabb, documents connected to the space and the programs that emerged, and other interviews with individuals who have worked within and alongside the space. History is a remembering. It is a retelling, an evocation of what is important and meaningful to the teller. To record a history and (re)present it is to again slice away those tantalising segments that, to the recorder, may be most mouth-watering for the narrative they are preparing. And so, the history I (re)present here is a retelling of a retelling. It is those choice parts that add depth, texture and flavour to the narrative of Colour Between the Lines. It omits many voices, and many stories, as histories are wont to do. These voices and stories are also important but cannot be fully captured here.

From Richmond Flats to Barkly Arts

This story of cohealth Arts Generator starts with Mary Quinsacara (Mary Q, MC Que, Querator), a Chilean born hip-hop artist, creative producer, mentor and activist; and Liss Gabb, a white creative producer, director and curator. Both would spend time working at the intersections of participatory arts and community health services, collaborating across a range of projects that would eventually shape the Arts Generator. Both Liss and Mary had worked together at the Richmond Housing Commission flats (high-rise public housing built in the 1960s with many tenants belonging to racialised communities) in the Arts and Culture program of North Richmond Community Health⁴ (NRCH), coordinating and developing participatory arts projects. Liss and Mary, over five years of working in this space,

⁴ During this time Mary Q had left North Richmond Community Health, but was still working on projects within the flats

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experiencing burnout from working within organisational spaces such as NRCH, embarked on an independent partnership called the Change Act. This partnership would allow them to apply for grants and develop projects not constrained by organisational relationships.

That was at that time a bit of an in-between space... I think we were applying for grants as independents... We created our own little, collective which was called the Change Act.... I think that's where it started...we already had a working relationship. She had been my mentor and had become my friend. Then me coming up with the idea and Liss' expertise and know-how to get shit off the ground running. It was quite fortuitous. It was probably burnout from being at Richmond and just imagining too, other ways of doing the work that we wanted to do, that didn't necessarily have the constraints that came along with being attached to an organisation. We did then flip that around. I think Liss was pretty convinced from the get-go with Barkly Arts, which was part of western region community health. It seemed like a good fit. It was, she was right. (Mary Quinsacara)

However, in 2009, an opportunity also arose for Liss to take on the role of Program Coordinator with what was then called the Barkly Arts Centre, which was a participatory arts space within WRHC. The Barkly Arts Centre was part of a shift by WRCH to adopt participatory arts and culture approaches towards supporting community health. The physical location of the space was within the old Barkly Hotel on Barkly St Footscray, co-located alongside community housing, where Colour Between the Lines would be housed many years later. Liss Gabb shares,

It was a space that was pretty much four blank white walls when I got it. It was my job to bring that into being, and find out what it was that the community using

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Western Region Health Center wanted from an arts and culture space. Then, develop and run and fund, and coordinate that program. (Liss Gabb)

During this time, Liss and Mary through the Change Act, had begun developing a project called MASSIVE Hip-Hop Choir,

we were in the midst of creating a whole new project that was going to be like not necessarily attached to any organisation. That was the MASSIVE hip-hop choir. We decided that it was going to be a good idea to actually bring that to Barkly Arts as like a... I guess maybe it was one of the first things that we ended up bringing to that space as well as a whole range of other things (Mary Quinsacara)

MASSIVE was an ensemble of young performers from culturally diverse backgrounds. The “choir” drew on “hip-hop, gospel, traditional cultural tunes and protest music”; they performed, recorded and collaborated as a collective, and ran workshops in a range of spaces including schools, community spaces, and youth justice centres across the Western suburbs. Whilst the development of this project was outside of any particular organisation, it was brought into the Barkly Arts Centre. MASSIVE would in many ways infuse the space with a particular set of values and approaches to working – both premised on relationality and creating access and opportunity for often marginalised young people,

I think, for example, hip hop is often used as an engagement tool to get people in the door. And yes, you might develop skills and you might have access to resources and you might make a few songs, you might record, make beats, whatever. But I guess from what I could see... that way of connecting with other people was not the only way to build relationships. Because I guess the people that came along into MASSIVE - who were the originating group - they were, I guess people who had a real sense of... strong family relationships, strong social relationships and the sense of

togetherness. Whether they either were used to... having those kinds of collaborative bigger group relationships or those that actually just didn't and were also wanting that, and needing that.

For Mary, these kinds of spaces are more than the resources and opportunities they provide, but become a place for important connections with other people, strengthening existing ties for come, and creating desired opportunities for connectedness for others. Mary continues,

And understanding that music was one avenue, creativity was one avenue to come with that. I think that skill wise, they were... not like they'd done or they could do but it maybe it was that they'd been in a program for years, but maybe not necessarily progressing. Maybe they were... I don't know if they had opportunities to become facilitators of those programs or not or whatever was happening. I'm not exactly sure. But certainly, we knew that particularly for women of colour in some of those programs they were not getting access to power and to progress as much as they would have liked. (Mary Quinsacara)

Additionally, it was necessary to address broader inequities of power, whereby people may have their capacities developed but are still structurally excluded. This meant creating tangible opportunities for employment and developing experience through paid roles, leading to important material outcomes, alongside connectedness and community-making Mary described.

The Genesis of Arts Generator

Then in 2014, North Yarra Community Health, Doutta Galla Community Centre and the WRHC, within which Barkly Arts was situated, merged to become cohealth. Through this change, Barkly Arts would also then become the Arts Generator and move to the basement

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studio of the Footscray Community Arts Centre. Whilst the organisational context had changed, many of those involved in Barkly Arts, and its ways of working had not,

Barkly Arts was that space for, I guess the genesis of Arts Gen. The real, I don't know it's kind of magical space I would say for building relationships through the music, through art, through workshops, through performance and a strong culture, I think, of trying new things, through the creative process was super bonding, it certainly wasn't perfect but it did give birth to, what Arts Gen is today... (Mary Quinsacara)

[It] was almost like the testing ground...we had that experience and we knew what the conditions could be to generate particular experiences. I feel like having that visceral lived experience of that was something for me that Arts Gen was trying to allow for other people to have in a way. (Mary Quinsacara)

Early programs developed by the Arts Generator were focussed on engaging clients who had used the WRHC, but this later shifted to a focus on creating arts and culture projects for young people to be a part of. However, funding that was available to engage particular groups around health issues within the Western Region, continued to shape many initial projects. Again, the Arts Generator engaged in particular ways of working that sought to break down many of the walls which organisations put up between themselves and the community,

[there] was a park that was a very significant meeting ground for ex-cons, but also for young African men who would meet there to drink. It was a last legal drinking public space in Footscray. I remember meeting with my then boss, Ian Simmons, who said, "We want you to engage with the crew in the park. Both the Anglo ex-con community, and the young African men meeting there". I remember saying to him, "But they're intoxicated," and he was like, "Yes". I was like, I come from another community health center, it was very much- the approach was, if somebody knocked

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on the door and they're intoxicated you said, "Go away and come back when you're not". This was like, "No, we want you to engage with them as they are in that public space. Do something creative that is going to support them to both access services, tell their story, engage with other services on offer through Western Region, and generally find out what it is that they want and need". There was a certain outreach approach to it as well. Once we'd established those relationships in the park, then those young men started coming to the arts center and working on a really regular basis there. (Liss Gabb)

Liss, goes on to describe the space,

the space had a very open door policy and feel. It was never a service that was somewhere deep in a building behind a reception area, and you needed swipes to get in. It was very much always a space that people felt that they could walk straight into. It always had a focus on ensuring that the space was safe for people to come and engage with programs there, but also initiate stuff that they wanted to do. Use it as a safe space to write, or think, or talk, or just engage with their peers. (Liss Gabb)

"It was all those elements coming together in a very strategic way". Many of the participants of the Massive Hip-Hop choir had also become the staff and artist facilitators of the Arts Generator, supported through mentoring to develop into these roles. This was a key goal of many of these projects, to develop skills and provide access for young people, importantly because lived experience was seen as important attribute in engaging with communities.

It was that project that got Mary and I thinking about the fact that the program actually was a pathway, both into working as an artist facilitator as a contractor, and also as a pathway into employment. That the space needed to employ those young

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people with the lived experience because that was what work best with the communities that we were serving. (Liss Gabb)

Just prior to the shift from Barkly Arts to the Arts Generator, another project, Sisters and Brothers, had started to be conceptualised which became a catalyst for how projects would come to be developed. Sisters and Brothers was a program that worked with children aged 8-12 years that addressed racism through dialogues around diversity and discrimination, building empathy through collaborative storytelling, songwriting, role-play and music making, drawing on diverse cultural traditions. (Davey, 2019). Developed as part of Arts Generator it was situated within the prevention focus of cohealth,

Liss put in the application, we got the money and then we started. That was basically, I guess the drawing on everyone's, positionalities, however, they wanted to put that forward and express it with the Arts space skills. With support from an organisation in terms of the prevention framework that they were, Western Region Health Center I was working on, which flowed on into Arts gen, into co health. It was all those elements coming together in a very strategic way. Because before that I think it was still strategic, but it was more strategic around, building sense of belonging, connecting through music, celebrating culture, all of those things, that art can do. But when we started Sisters and Brothers it was a real connection... it was a connection between, the arts-based practice, community health prevention models and education, was that kind of intersection. It was a real kind of leap up for everyone. (Mary Quinsacara)

Part of this shift also meant working within organisational frameworks, for Mary this did not necessarily constrain the work they were doing and the space they were creating: “the trust

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was built that we could navigate or - not shift the framework - but maybe make it suit to what we needed it to be”.

Arts Generator would continue to develop a range of projects, some big, some small, largely within the prevention framework focus on gender equity and racial discrimination (cohealth, 2017). These programs included other participatory arts programs such as Benchmark, programs such as the Art of Radical Listening described as “Sisters and Brothers for adults”, or creative projects like AMKA: Narratives from the African Diaspora. The Amka project was an initiative comprised of a performance over two nights at the Arts Centre, and the ongoing collection and archival of narratives from the African diaspora in Australia. The project itself was collaboratively directed and conceptualised through a group of young Africans in Australia who sought to speak back to dominant representations of young Africans through counter narratives, provide positive visibility, engage in decolonising practices, and create spaces of belonging. It was through this project that I first became involved with cohealth, the Arts Generator, and some of the members of Colour Between the Lines who were also involved in the project. At the core of these projects were the way relationships were formed. Here Mary reflects on her experiences within Arts Generator,

I think the greater awareness of how people are feeling and what they are walking in with at any moment, I guess. And how systemic issues affect that interaction for different people at different times. I think underlying all that is the relationships to be able to... have empathy, to have compassion and to have patience, and it's so imperfect and it should be, I think and that's essential.

For Mary, underlying these relationships were practices of care, but also imperfection. For these relationships to evolve in this way there needs to be an openness to complexity and uncertainty, as roles and needs change. Mary continues:

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I don't know if it's a learning, but just the amount of, and the diverse wealth that is in the communities I'm part of that, I think it's just a fraction at least of what I've kind of been involved with, I think is, there's so much untapped, or unseen, or undervalued ways of being and thinking and doing. How essential it is to have spaces where people have the opportunity to be fully seen... The forging of making spaces like that...has been a way to explore different types of relationships and I guess sometimes unwittingly, I know I've become a mother, or a sister, or a friend, or a combination of those things over time. I guess by the way that people relate to you, is also based on how we're relating to people... You never, not just making art you're doing so many things at the same time and when you're making space for people to have more of a self-determined way to express themselves, their ideas, their crafts, their faults, that it's very potent. It's a very potent space and it's quite exciting. Maybe the learning is that there's not enough of those spaces and enough of those opportunities. (Mary Quinsacara)

In forging such relationships, a recognition of different and undervalued ways of being, knowing and doing can be recognised. This has immense value for those who are marginalised and creates opportunities to self-determine in important ways.

Colour Between the Lines Presents Next in Colour

The formation of NiC and the CBTL collective was the culmination of the events described in the oral histories of the previous section. The CBTL collective was originally comprised of six creative practitioners (see Table 1) – later five - from the African diaspora in Naarm (Melbourne). CBTL was funded through the Future Makers for Change grant and auspiced by cohealth. It is important to note here that initially, both the collective and the initiative that was planned to be produced with the grant funding were titled CBTL. As the initiative progressed, the name CBTL was kept to refer to the collective of creatives who

were producing the work, and Next in Colour would refer to the specific initiative. Within participant narratives, at times CBTL and NiC are treated as interchangeable. I have otherwise been intentional in the text to refer to CBTL as the *collective* and NiC as the *initiative*.

Table 1

CBTL Collective Members

Anyuop Dau	An artist facilitator and multidisciplinary creative practitioner ranging in film, handcrafting and creative directing in styling. Anyuop is also a lead facilitator in the cohealth Arts Generator program Sisters & Brothers which is a program that works with young primary school students to deliver workshops on race-based discrimination using art forms of Dance, Acting and songwriting. Anyuop believes in the power of words to transform people and also gains pleasure from working with intergenerational communities.
Ez Eldin Deng	A South Sudanese film and music video director, producer, and writer. He has directed and produced numerous music videos, which have reached millions of views in total on YouTube. Deng first arrived in Melbourne, Australia in 2004 with his family and to this day, Melbourne is still his home as he continues to break new grounds within the Australian film and television industry. He currently also works as an assessment trainer at Pulse Studio in Geelong.
Ruth Nyaruot Ruach	A South-Sudanese multidisciplinary artist, who uses art to heal, explore her surroundings and create comfort within her blackness.

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Ruth's art explores the experiences of being an African of the diaspora although she is strongly influenced by, decolonising language, tone and the cultivation of shared perspectives in place of assimilation.

Geskeva	A creative humanitarian of Comorian and Tanzanian heritage. Raised in the Western suburbs of Melbourne she has experience combined in community development, theatre, spoken word as well as music. Geskeva continues to work in spaces that combine critical thinking, art and community.
Nyakeer	An artist who loves to support broader community members to participate
Akuol	and take action on social justice issues. Nyakeer facilitates multidisciplinary artistic workshops which support platforms for marginalised voices and takes action around Mental health, race-based discrimination, family violence and more.
Tiyami	A creative practitioner working in the community development sector
Amum ^a	working at an organization that focuses on empowering young people to take action for the things that they're passionate about. She is mostly writing poems and short stories and exploring themes of faith, themes of personal identity and dual identity, and the relationships that makes us whole and that really form us into who we are. She is South Sudanese Shilluk and also identifies with the communities of South Eastern Suburbs of Melbourne.

^a Tiyami was a founding member of the CBTL collective and NiC initiative but would leave in January 2020 due to other commitments. This reflects the collective members at the time of this research. Some members would later leave the collective due to other commitments.

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The collective members were brought together and supported through Liss Gabb, the former program coordinator of the Arts Generator and many of the collective members have had existing relationships with both cohealth and various projects that had emerged through the Arts Generator. As Liss Gabb recounts,

When I saw that opportunity for the [Future Makers grant], I gathered some of the crew together and said, "Do you want to do something? This is a great opportunity. It's a great opportunity because it does actually identify the African community as a priority, and it is about young people or emerging artists and creative producers, and arts workers having a go at something different that uses the creative arts and the creative sector to create some real social change". That's when the crew came up with the idea of CBTL, and of, again, the creation of a space that was self-determined. Which we hadn't been able to do at cohealth and probably never could do while it was still attached to cohealth. There was always going to be that organisational influence and parameters to it. That's immediately what they decided to do, was to create a space that was run by young Africans for young Africans. A space that supported critical conversation, art-making, skills developments, intergenerational conversation, and a whole range of other things. (Liss Gabb)

As one of the collective members recounts, this was an important step towards accessing resources to develop not only a community-oriented space, but a space that was both a part of community, and constituted by the community,

If we have all of this money, all of these resources and all this support, how do we envision, how do we create a space where we can support our communities? That's how we came together as us all agreeing that there is organisations here, but most of them are very political in a sense, but having us run an arts based organisation, run by creative practitioners that are creating political change, but not in that political language. We all

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agreed that to move forward and to develop community, we have to use a practice that is so healing and is so connected to ourselves, and connected to our souls. I think that change is not changing the exterior, but also changing the internal. Those were the conversations that were accumulated in the meetings that we had. I think four months later, we didn't think about it. I didn't think about it until we got the call that we got the grant. Then it was like, "I've never really been a part of this type of process. What happens now?"

Through lengthy planning, the collective proposed to develop various platforms which aimed to “offer a network of support, vocational pathways and a collaborative working environment”, and to “make space that reflects the communities we come from, and we are able to call our own, as well as ensuring that we continue to create a map for the next generations to come” (CBTL, n.d.). The various platforms include the development of digital spaces, a three-edition zine titled *The Colouring Book* that deconstructs bla(c)k and brown existence, exhibitions, screenings, performances, workshops and talks, and importantly it included the creation and activation of space within Footscray (on the lands of the Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung of the Kulin Nation and within the previous home of the Barkly Arts Centre). As one of the collective members recounts,

We felt that a lot of collectives and individuals and for ourselves as well, that having a physical space for people to create and build a sense of belonging and connections to other people within the community was missing. We wanted to find a physical space where we could create that. [Having that space] was an important thing because it was about our representation, but also visibility, authentic visibility. Also, it's about having autonomy and self-determination over the work that we do and how we deliver it and providing a reflection of ourselves within the community and letting the broader

community know that we are doing these things and we want to do these things for us ourselves as much as everybody else.

Through this space, and the other platforms and projects the collective were creating, young people and emerging artists from the African diaspora would be able to develop their skills to enter the creative industries, facilitate intergenerational dialogues, develop solidarities across communities and have critical conversations that explore issues of social cohesion and gender equity from African perspectives.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have drawn on archival data and oral histories to present an overview of the origins of CBTL, as well as contextualise its relationships and partnerships. This has entailed a profile of cohealth and the community health sector, outlining its goals and approaches, the asupicing body for CBTL. This was followed by a retelling of oral histories that capture the conception of Arts Generator, an important community arts space from which CBTL evolved from, and which itself exists within the organisational context of cohealth.

Chapter 5: Methodology

In this chapter I will outline the methodological approaches which inform the design of this research, from the methods used to collect and analyse data, to intention of the research, and the way relationships took shape. I situate this research within the field of critical community psychology, and draw linkages to liberatory, critical race and decolonial frameworks which share a commitment to epistemic justice and goals of transformative social change. I also detail narrative inquiry as a powerful approach through which to examine individual's experiences within settings as they engage in generative social action and navigate racialising and oppressive dynamics.

Theoretical Frameworks

Critical Community Psychology

Dominant forms of community psychology (CP) emerged from the Swampscott conference in the United States in 1965 as a response to the individualised treatment-focussed mental health interventions that characterised psychology (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). At its centre were principles towards prevention through addressing social problems at multiple ecological levels, engaging change through action-oriented, strength-focussed and participatory approaches, valuing human diversity and an orientation towards social justice and the promotion of empowerment (Tebes, 2016). Whilst this iteration of CP emerged as a progressive response and critique to the limits of mainstream psychological approaches, some have argued that it is in fact a homogenous, conservative and noncritical discipline and ultimately an ameliorative approach that does little to shake powerful political and economic systems that are the root cause of many social problems (Evans et al., 2017).

It is important to note that while US CP is a dominant iteration of the discipline, CP has emerged across global contexts, taking shape to reflect the social, cultural and political conditions which shape the problems faced by individuals and communities within those

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contexts. Some of these iterations are more explicitly political, for example CP in South Africa which has been fundamentally shaped by histories of colonisation and apartheid, or Latin America where the discipline was influenced by liberation philosophy and the writings of Paulo Freire (1970) and Ignacio Martín-Baró (1994; Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). The conceptual tools that have emerged from these contexts have also shaped and contributed to broader understandings of CP. Montero (2012), for example, presents some key formative ideas through which CP strives towards social transformation. For example, CP has drawn on the concepts of transformative praxis, engagement and participation, and the development, as well as engaging approaches to building power and empowerment developed through joint relationships between community psychologists and community stakeholders, potentially leading to outcomes conscientisation and liberation (Freire, 1970). However, some of these conceptual tools and frames, whilst also being adopted into dominant forms of CP, are also particular to a critical orientation of CP.

Critical community psychology (CCP), according to Evans et al. (2017) is an umbrella term that encompasses a range of more critical orientations toward CP, including CP from global contexts outside of the US. It seeks transformative, second-order change, through more political and radical approaches. It is concerned with how power works to create and maintain oppressive structures and dynamics, and to deideologise dominant understandings which uphold the status quo. It recognises that we must look to broader systems such as capitalist neoliberal globalisation, colonialism and patriarchy as the origin of oppression and injustice and a key point of intervention (Coimbra et al., 2012). A critical CP is also concerned with applying the same analysis of power and ideology to the broader discipline of CP and the methods and approaches it engages (Evans et al., 2017). Indeed, some have argued that the discipline of CP reproduces norms and structures that are grounded in the colonial and white supremacist foundations of Euro-American psychology (Beals et al.,

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2021; Mingoet al., 2021; Sonn et al., 2017; Wilson et al., 2021), thus a critical CP seeks to draw on alternate praxes grounded in both transdisciplinary forms of knowledge (Stark, 2019), but also marginalised and subjugated epistemologies (Coimbra et al., 2012; Sonn et al., 2017). A critical CP seeks diversity and complexity over reductionism and homogeneity. This extends to the conceptual tools and frameworks it applies and necessitates a willingness to cross boundaries into other disciplines and ways of knowing that can sharpen the efforts of CP in its critical orientations towards transformation and prefigurative action (Burton & Kagan, 2009). This active prefiguration is concerned with imagining, creating, and sustaining alternative social arrangements and innovations towards visions of social justice, through participatory praxis and analysis alongside less powerful people (Kagan & Burton, 2000).

The intellectual roots of critical CP encompass critical theory, poststructuralism, postcolonialism, queer theory and feminist theory, alongside iterations of CP emerging across different global contexts, each offering different ways to understand and intervene within oppressive systems, each highlighting the importance of power, ideology, and the role of language in constructing our social worlds and relationships (Evans et al., 2017). Many aspects of these different paradigms are implicit in the critical CP approach taken through this project. However, the project will further draw on specific frameworks, which provide a powerful lens towards understanding how creatives from the African diaspora in Australia are navigating dynamics of racism grounded in coloniality and white supremacy, and responding through the creation of spaces for self-determination. The specific frameworks I will share – critical race theory, decolonial theory and narrative inquiry - are also not homogenous and represent different bodies of scholarship and intellectual thought from a range of contexts and histories, thus what is presented here is by no means exhaustive or definitive.

Critical Race Theory. Whilst CRT emerged from the field of critical legal studies, and was initially applied to legal frameworks and institutions, it has since found much utility

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across a range of disciplines. Of note is the adaption of CRT as an analytic lens to the fields such as education (Bell, 2010; Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Solórzano & Yosso, 2002) and public health (Ford & Airhihenbuwa, 2010) amongst others. Similarly, some have argued the need to integrate CRT frameworks within psychology and the development of a Critical Race Psychology (Salter & Adams, 2013; Salter & Haugen, 2017). For Salter and Adams (2013) there are many synergies between sub-disciplines of psychology which take a critical orientation, in particular they argue, that much in the same way as CRT refocused the lens of critical legal studies towards the centrality of race in power relations and structures, a CRT lens can extend the efforts of critical psychology in deideologising psychological phenomena and the role of the psychological sciences in reproducing inequality and privilege. A psychology that adopts a CRT lens, or a critical race psychology (CRP) draws on the themes and tenets of the latter and applies them to understanding psychosocial dynamics and the praxis of psychological research itself. In taking a systemic understanding of racism, CRP shifts the locus of racism from theories of individual bias and instead requires intervention and analysis at multiple ecological levels, from its structural embeddedness to the ways it manifests in our everyday social worlds. It privileges marginalised perspectives and engages methodological tools that reflects this epistemological standpoint as important and valid forms of knowing alongside dominant positivistic approaches. A CRP seeks to deideologise the impulse towards neoliberal conceptions of individuality in understanding the human subject and its relation to the world; it seeks to construct theory that does not erase difference and/or engage in colourblind practices and understandings that obscure racialised power in society and within research praxis; it seeks to interrogate whiteness and white subjectivities; and importantly, it supports and engages counter-storytelling towards dismantling racist structures (Salter & Adams, 2013).

A CRP is also fundamentally action oriented (Salter & Adams, 2013), aligning with community-engaged approaches. There are important synergies between CRT and liberation psychology, and its goals of collective consciousness raising and developing transformative action (Salter & Adams, 2013; Sonn & Lewis, 2006). Torre (2009) writes of the alignment between Participatory Action Research (PAR) for Social Justice – which poses PAR as epistemological rather than depoliticised methodology – and CRT. Each sharing a commitment to expanding notions of expert knowledges, recognising the complexities and intersections of identities and relationships which people hold, a desire to complicate identity categories, and a commitment to a critical reflexivity towards how knowledge is produced. Thus, a CRT lens is both useful, in its understanding of the centrality of race, and synergistic with critical community psychology approaches. Furthermore, it aligns with calls for a deeper examination of the reproduction of white supremacist and Eurocentric ideals and practices within the broader field of CP (Beals et al., 2021; Mingo et al., 2021; Wilson et al., 2021).

However, CRT emerged from a specific context, the US context, and much CRT scholarship reflects US history, culture and politics. Yet, important parallels can be found with racialised systems of domination that exist across other global contexts, particularly in other settler-colonial states like the US, and the ways contemporary manifestations of racism have taken shape in those contexts (Salter & Haugen, 2017). In the context of settler colonial Australia, others have deployed CRT in ways that reflect local dynamics and histories (Bargallie & Lentin, 2021; Watego, 2021). For example, Sonn and Quayle (2013) adopted a CRT lens to examine the dynamics of race that emerge within the relationships between white institutions and Aboriginal community within the context of community cultural development. The expression of these racialised and power laden dynamics take a unique shape that reflects this particular context; however, these dynamics share a genealogical history that was birthed with coloniarity and modernity (Grosfoguel, 2016).

Decolonial Theory. It is important to first distinguish some definitional boundaries. Decolonisation in its most literal sense refers to a set of political and material outcomes which sees the end of colonial control, return of land to Indigenous peoples and the removal of colonial administration (Decolonial Psychology Editorial Collective, 2021; Tuck & Yang, 2012). However, the term has entered into broader discourses where its usage has taken different shapes and its meaning and intention is contested. Of particular concern is that decolonisation has become little more than a metaphor and removed from its more material orientations to change (Tuck & Yang, 2012). However, whilst the language of decolonisation can often be co-opted or misunderstood, there are also important aspects of decolonisation that occur within the symbolic realm. Decoloniality makes this distinction clearer, it refers to “a process of dismantling and disrupting the broader manifestations of coloniality” (Decolonial Psychology Editorial Collective, 2021, p. 7), whereby coloniality refers to the “habits of mind, ways of being, strategic relations of power, and systems of knowledge that have roots in the colonial period but persist long after the end of colonial rule” (p. 4). Thus, according to Sonn and Stevens (2021) decoloniality is fundamentally concerned with epistemic justice (Fricker, 2007), seeking to address the many absences in our collective understanding of the world, and to recentre the many denigrated and subjugated ways of being, doing and knowing of the majority world.

As decoloniality is a project of epistemic justice, a key site of action has been places of hegemonic knowledge production, such as the academy. Whilst the decolonial intellectual tradition emerged at the advent of coloniality/modernity and key texts from seminal writers engaged in decolonial thinking and action (e.g., Cesaire, Memmi, Fanon, Biko), a contemporary decolonial turn can be traced within the social sciences from the 1990s (Sonn & Stevens, 2021; e.g., Mignolo, Grosfoguel, Wynter, Dussel, Maldonado-Torres, LT Smith). Whilst the work of Fanon represents early decolonial thought within the discipline of

psychology ([Maldonado-Torres, 2017](#)), the discipline largely was produced by, and reproduces, colonial systems and sustains coloniality (Beals et al., 2021; Bulhan, 1985; Mingo et al., 2021; Teo, 2005). However, a decolonial turn can also be located within psychology, emerging alongside particular synergistic sub-disciplines with critical and identity-conscious orientations (e.g., critical psychology, black psychology, feminist psychology), with some writers pointing to cultural and liberation psychologies (Adams et al., 2018), Indigenous psychologies (Dudgeon et al., 2020), and Africa(n)-centred psychologies (Ratele et al., 2021) as underpinning decolonial approaches within psychology.

Within psychology, a decolonial approach not only offers a sociohistorical framework for understanding psychological and social phenomena but applies the epistemic project of decoloniality to the discipline itself, the praxis of researchers and practitioners, and the kinds of knowledge that is produced or centred. Thus, many have applied a decolonial lens to the concepts which we draw on within psychology (e.g., Dudgeon et al., 2017; Dutta, 2018; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2015), the kinds of projects we do, the ways of working we engage in (e.g., Sonn et al., 2021; Sonn et al., 2019), and our pedagogical strategies and approaches (see Carolissen & Duckett, 2018; Canham et al., 2021). Across this body of work, there have been many recent articulations of approaches towards enacting decoloniality within and through psychology that have distilled key themes across decolonial writing and projects within psychology and community psychology (Adams et al., 2018; Decolonial Psychological Editorial Collective, 2021; Fernández et al., 2021; Sonn & Stevens, 2021).

These various approaches were concerned with what kinds of knowledge is produced through the discipline of psychology. For Sonn and Stevens (2021) knowledge must come from below with the voices of those who are marginalised being centred, alongside the reclamation of archival knowledge that has been subjugated and obscured. It is generating knowledge with communities and within the boundaries of where knowledge is possible

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(Fernández et al., 2021). For Adams and colleagues (2018) and the Decolonial Psychology Editorial Collective (2021), this represents a strategy of indigenisation. Indigenisation (small *i*), which can include understandings and knowledge systems of Indigenous people (capital *I* Indigenisation), emphasises localised and place-based knowledges that is essential in understanding the immediate contexts of people and communities. It is a counter to decontextualised and universalised forms of knowledge that perpetuate hegemonic ideas grounded in coloniality that reduce and flatten peoples lived experiences. A decolonial approach within psychology, also means unsettling existing understandings and hegemonic systems of knowledge. Through elevating different forms of indigenous knowledge grounded in lived experience, a knowledge otherwise, we engage new epistemic tools through which we can understand our social worlds (Decolonial Psychology Editorial Collective, 2021). These are important resources to embark on a process of denaturalisation, uncovering the ways the coloniality of knowledge and being has contributed to a hegemonic psychology and the knowledge which it has produced (Adams et al., 2018; Canham et al., 2021). For Fernández and colleagues (2021), it means developing a *sociohistorical intersectional consciousness*, which resists the urges of hegemonic psychology to be ahistorical and decontextualised and offers a frame of understanding that tracks the genealogies and legacies of coloniality.

Decolonial approaches within psychology also relate to the kinds of relationships that are fostered within research and practice. One important concept is that of accompaniment, which calls for those who are engaging in psychological research and practice to accompany, work alongside and with, marginalised people and communities in their struggles for social justice (Adams et al., 2018; Martín-Baró, 1994; Sonn & Stevens, 2021; Watkins, 2015). Importantly, accompaniment must occur in ways that do not reinscribe researchers and practitioners as outside experts in ways that reproduce extractivist dynamics or contribute to

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white saviourism (Adams et al., 2018). For Fernández and colleagues (2021) accompaniment looks like relationships of mutual accountability reached through a “process of building meaningful, sustainable relationships and coalitions of co-intentional solidarity” (p. 9). This is an accountability that speaks to a commitment and intention to connect with people and communities in ways that are marked by humility, integrity reciprocity and authenticity, rather than a transactional responsibility to one-another. For Huygens (2011), settler colonisers must undertake in collective cultural action, in mutually agreed relationships that are attentive to the ideological contexts that have historically shaped relations.

Pivotal to all these approaches is engaging in critical reflexivity and a *decolonial attitude*. Foremost a decolonial attitude entails researchers and practitioners within psychology to think about how, from their positions of relative power and privilege within the academy, they are complicit with sustaining and reproducing coloniality and social injustice (Decolonial Psychology Collective, 2021). It emphasises rehumanisation and is an attitude of love and understanding that involves the reclamation of sub-others in the effort to counter epistemic and ontological colonization, along with the coloniality of knowledge, being, and power. Without this attitude, both tradition and methods, to the extent that they are relevant, along with the sciences and approaches based on them, become vehicles of coloniality. (Maldonado-Torres, 2017, p. 440).

It is efforts towards “decolonizing oneself”, an unsettling of subjectivities of power/privilege (Fernández et al., 2021), and for Sonn and Stevens (2021) it means drawing on an intersectional lens and engaging a dialogical ethics. Locating oneself within systems of power, is essential if we are to unpick taken for granted understandings, engage in actions alongside, and produce powerful forms of knowledge. Without critical reflexivity and a decolonial attitude, we risk, at best, sabotaging both our efforts and the people and

communities we engage, and at worst perpetrating forms of violence, epistemic and otherwise. These approaches, as they appear across different forms of scholarship, are interrelated and interdependent: a decolonial attitude is needed for real accompaniment; relationships of mutual accountability are essential to developing indigenous knowledge from the ground up. A decolonial approach entails a praxis which earnestly seeks to embody these approaches wholly and collectively, and which understands that decoloniality is an ongoing process rather than a static end-state.

Methodological Approaches

Critical Narrative Inquiry

Narrative Inquiry as a methodological approach emerged from the narrative turn in social sciences in the 1990s influenced by the work of a number of seminal writers across disciplines (e.g., Bruner, 1991; Josselson & Lieblich, 1993; Polkinghorne, 1988). This encompassed a turn to narrative as a unit of analysis and phenomena of interest that captures key aspects of people's lives, and an approach through which individual stories can be analysed (Creswell & Poth, 2018). Through the stories people tell, people make sense of themselves and their social worlds (Bruner, 1990), and circulate collective cultural resources that shape important processes of meaning-making (Rappaport, 1995). Thus, narrative is fundamentally transformative, with the capacity to transform both individuals and their contexts and represent sites of social action where individuals also create and shape narratives, exercising agency (Sonn et al., 2013; Sparkes & Smith, 2007). Thus, the analysis of narrative has the potential to provide insights into dynamics of power and resistance as individuals reproduce, shape, contest and create narratives within and across various social institutions (Ladson-Billings, 2003; Rappaport, 1995). Scholarship on changing, creating and analysing settings has shown the ways narratives are transmitted through cultural production contributing to both individual and social change, as well as the maintenance of oppressive

systems (Bond & Wasco, 2017; Bond & Allen, 2016; Case & Hunter, 2012). Thus, narrative inquiry is a valuable tool through which to examine individual experiences within setting, whilst situating those experiences within broader macro social processes.

The narrative turn represents a multitude of approaches and theoretical frameworks through which to understand narrative and to engage in the analysis of narrative phenomena, rather than a single methodological framework. However, there are some key defining elements that occur across approaches to narrative research. Significantly, narrative research entails the collection of stories of lived experiences from individuals, from groups, communities, and documents. In fact, whilst a narrative interview is a common qualitative method for collecting stories, narratives can be analysed across a range of data including images and observations (Creswell & Poth, 2018). These stories constitute a retelling of significant events that have been organised and represented to convey salient meanings to an audience (Riessman, 2005). They represent how individuals and groups see themselves and the world, but also how they represent themselves and their interactions with the world and are thus co-constructed and performative (Creswell & Poth, 2018).

The capacity for narrative inquiry to capture these different functions and interactions, has seen the development of varied analytic approaches that focus on different aspects of narratives: thematic, concerned with *what* is said within a narrative; structural, concerned with *how* the narrative is told; interactional, concerned with the *dialogic* interaction between a teller and listener to co-construct meaning; and performative, extending the interactional co-construction of meaning beyond words to encompass how narrative and the self is performed (Riessman, 2005). Smith and Sparkes (2008) further locate narrative approaches on a continuum of “thick individual” and “thin social relational”. At one end lies approaches more concerned with individual constructions of self and identity. Here the psychosocial nature of storytelling and the formation of narratives is secondary to the individual

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psychological process of understanding and narrating oneself. At the other end of the continuum the social takes primacy, encompassing the performative aspects of narrative as selves and identities are constructed through interactions with individual's social worlds. The points of this continuum can be also understood as different levels of analysis across the personal lived experiences of narrators, the interpersonal interactions that co-construct narratives, the positional differences between narrators and listeners, and the societal and ideological level that seeks to understand the ways stories are shared socially and shape collective representations and understandings (Murray, 2000).

The different levels of analysis of narrative inquiry make it an important approach within community psychology and its ecological framework (Rappaport, 1995, 2000; Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000). Furthermore, narrative not only provides a bridge to understand the complex and interdependent relationships between individual, interpersonal, and collective processes of meaning-making and identity construction, but also is an important frame for understanding the connection between narratives and power. The narratives that are produced at these different levels constitute cultural resources that circulate within society and are drawn on and negotiated by individuals and communities (Esin et al., 2014; Smith and Sparkes, 2008). Rappaport (1995) asserts that:

If narratives are understood as resources, we are able to see that who controls that resource, that is who gives stories social value, is at the heart of a tension between freedom and social control, oppression and liberation, and empowerment versus disenfranchisement. If we view the power to create, select, and tell stories (that are positively valued) about one's self and one's community as a resource, we quickly see that like most resources it is distributed unevenly, in about the same proportion as other resources, such as money and social prestige. Those most in need are least likely to have control over the valued resources. Everyone has stories, but some stories actively devalue

people and other stories are not recognised as valuable at all. Some stories empower people and other stories disempower people. (p. 805)

Rappaport (1995) explicitly defined different narratives that occur at different levels; he identified *stories* as the narrative retellings of individuals. Stories are the temporal and thematic representations of events and experiences, which follow a narrative structure but are idiosyncratic and personal. In contrast, *community narratives*, are stories common to a collective grouping of people, they provide meaning for the group, establish norms, and shape collective identities. *Dominant cultural narratives*, on the other hand are the regularly reproduced and circulated stories that are disseminated widely through social institutions, through schools, through media, through political discourse. They communicate powerful meanings and representations that are commonly held within a society and have the capacity to shape both community narratives and individual stories.

Whilst tensions can exist between the macro perspective of critical theories, and narrative inquiry's focus on individual experience, navigating these tensions and theorising from the epistemological borderlands offers a rich analysis that can connect personal experience with broader power structures and issues of ideology (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007). For Parker (2005) narrative inquiry has the capacity to engage with issues of power, situate and contextualise socio-cultural phenomena and action, and examine more closely broader ideologies and discourses. Narrative Inquiry's engagement across multiple levels, provides a lens through which individual troubles are connected to broader structures and social issues and thus makes it an apt tool for deconstruction of meaning and challenging hegemonic systems of power (Goodley, 2012).

A core tenet of Critical Race Theory (CRT) is the importance of counter-storytelling as a tool to both reveal and resist racist structures in society (Delgado, 1989). Bell (2010)

proposes different types of stories important to counter-storytelling. *Stock stories*, the collective stories reproduced through individuals and in everyday contexts that obscure and sustain racist structures. *Concealed stories*, which represent the many absences, the stories hidden by stock stories, which represent subjugated memories and knowledge and accounting of racialised experiences. These too are collective stories that also manifest through individuals. *Resistance stories* can emerge from concealed stories and actively challenge stock stories, expanding opportunities for action and transforming how individuals and communities see themselves, understand their histories and the racialised contexts they presently exist within. Lastly, *emerging/transforming stories* are the new stories that both extend and amplify on concealed and resistance stories, they offer alternate ways of being and subvert the norms and assumptions of the status quo (Bell, 2010). Storytelling in CRT privileges the lived experiences of those who have been racialised and marginalised and seeks to legitimate the intimate knowledge they hold of the systems which racialise and marginalise, a further synergy with a Narrative Inquiry which centres individual's agency, humanity and values lived experience (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007; Goodley, 2012; Parker, 2005).

Narrative Inquiry also holds important synergies with decolonial approaches more broadly and within psychology (Boonzaier, 2019; Mavuso et al. 2019). Samuel and Ortiz (2021) identify storytelling as an important methodology and decolonial praxis within psychology. They argue that storytelling contributes to a decolonising praxis through centring indigenous ways of knowing, and like CRT approaches, the lived experiences of those marginalised and oppressed through coloniality and colonisation. Similarly, storytelling supports the creations of powerful counter-stories which speak back to Western colonial epistemologies and forms of knowledge production grounded in conceptions of white supremacy and universality predicated on the white subject. Further, storytelling provides

opportunities for the construction of individual and collective identities untethered from the constraints imposed by dominant cultural narratives configured by coloniality, and instead grounded in indigenous cultural and community contexts.

For Stevens et al. (2013) narrative contributes to a liberatory praxis in its capacity for meaning-making, and as a means to integrate and reappropriate challenging experiences in psychologically and socially transformative ways. For them, to tell one's own stories in one's own words is a powerful agentic act, and it allows an insertion of familiar and everyday experiences into broader histories and collective memories. In this sense stories are part of a project of *critical psychosocial mnemonics*, that includes the retrieval of historical and cultural memory and their rearticulation in the service of socially transformative praxis and understanding the oppressive dynamics and conditions imposed on marginalised and racialised people through coloniality across multiple spheres of power - and the ways they survive and resist (Sonn et al., 2013; Quayle & Sonn, 2019). Thus, critical narrative inquiry can support this transformative work as it situates stories within hierarchies of power and contribute important symbolic resources for marginalised people and communities.

Community Engaged-Research

I situate this research within a body of methodological approaches that fall under community-engaged research (CEnR). This is a broad term which captures ways of engaging in research with and within a range of communities and describes or shares goals with multiple approaches (e.g., participatory action research, community based participatory research). Key elements of this approach are an action orientation, relationships with communities founded on trust, concern with building community power, and a centering of culture (Wallerstein, 2021). However, a key critique of CEnR is that it lacks specificity and nuance. Haapanen and Christens (2021) present an argument for the need of conceptual clarification and expansion of CEnR across three key areas of processes and partnerships,

knowledge and epistemology, and power and structure. For example, how *community* is defined, becomes a central question through which processes and partnerships are shaped. In the CEnR literature, often community is represented by participants who are human services professionals, rather than community residents or members, or situated within human service organisations rather than community-controlled organisations. Importantly, being a human services professional does not exclude community belonging (Kivel, 2000), but however, transforms the power dynamics within a research context and the interests that may be represented. Democratic modes of knowledge production and an orientation to researching alongside non-democratic partners is also central to conceptualisations of CEnG. This is often achieved through high levels of participation and an attentiveness to power, with PAR as an example. However, low partner participation does not always equate to power inequity and epistemic violence. Different levels of partner participation may reflect different interests in different parts of the research process. It may reflect a partner's non-research role in the envisioned change action, or an existing capacity for research that does not need to be developed. Thus, Haapanen and Christens (2021) argue that rather than a sole focus on level of participation, more nuance is needed to consider how partners may control and inform the research process without direct involvement in the research process. Lastly, they argue for a stronger consideration of processes of changing power structures, and the role CEnR and research outputs plays in this. This requires an expansion beyond a focus on intrapersonal power dynamics towards how CEnR contributes, sustains, challenges or changes broader power structures.

Community-engaged research can also be mobilised through approaches that draw on critical frameworks to enact change towards issues of racial justice and coloniality (da Cruz, 2017; Sonn, 2018). These approaches bring an explicit orientation to liberation and broader structural changes. For example, da Cruz (2017) integrates CRT into CEnR through posing a

set of critical questions that guide CEnR towards developing knowledge that seeks to name and deconstruct oppressive structures; to authentically locating expertise regarding experiences of marginalisation and oppression with those who experience it; a commitment to race-conscious over colour-blind forms of research; and a grounded in asset-based over deficit focussed understandings of community. Sonn (2018) also draws on critical race and whiteness theories, alongside decolonial and Indigenous approaches and methodologies. For Sonn, this presents an approach that is concerned with contesting epistemological ignorance and promoting cognitive justice (Santos, 2007) through an unsettling of white supremacy grounded in coloniality. Within the work he describes, this entails a deep questioning of whose knowledge counts, and imagining new roles and methods that can support decolonising goals.

Ethical and Value Orientations

As one iteration of a critical CEnR, the present research embodies many of the principles described above. It holds a commitment to attending to how power is enacted within research with community, and a desire for epistemic justice. Foremost, it begins with a set of ethical orientations that have guided research processes, partnerships and ways of collaborating. King et al. (2021) argues that whilst epistemology is oft seen as the philosophical basis of psychology, that perhaps ethical, cosmological and existential concerns must share primacy in how we approach and construct psychological research and practice. From here, they continue, we are better placed within encounters with alterity as an ethical foundation and orientation necessitates care and responsibility for one-another. Relational and dialogical ethics also offer us important frameworks through which to approach research, focusing on the interdependence and interconnections between people. Relational ethics take a similar holistic understanding to ethical action, posing a range of commitments to not only each-other, but our world more widely, and locating it within relationship (Montero, 2011;

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Watkins & Shulman, 2008). Within relational ethics independence cannot be separated from interdependence, and calls for mutual respect and engagement, embodied knowledge and an openness to uncertainty and vulnerability (Montero, 2011; Tuck & Guishard, 2013). Hopner and Liu (2021) also call for ethics as a primary principle within psychology, and a shift from procedural ethics to an ethics that is situational, aspirational and relational. Such an ethics moves our focus beyond merely thinking about epistemology and what kinds of knowledges are produced but urges us to consider the way knowledge is produced. Such an ethics foregrounds principles of respect, reciprocity, dignity, and interconnectedness.

An ethical orientation that holds relatedness at its centre, some have argued, is foundational for community psychology (Montero, 2011). If community is the point of analysis and intervention, and if we can understand community as constituted by the relations that are generated between people, then we must adopt an epistemological and ontological position that our knowledges and selves exist within and are constructed through these very same relations. Similarly dialogical ethics focuses on relations and human interdependence. At the centre is the notion that research is constantly evolving and emerging from, through and within dialogues with community and self. Importantly these dialogues should be sustained by communicative structures and critical questions that foreground questions of power and privilege, but also be sustaining and last beyond the research process as shared commitment to transformation (Watkins & Shulman, 2008).

In taking these ethical positionings as a guide and point of departure for research, our role as researcher is transformed to that of an accompanier. The concept of psychosocial accompaniment captures how these sets of ethics might be constituted in our research (Watkins, 2015), it speaks to “an invited dialogical relationship that becomes close and continuous, involving listening, witnessing, and the offering of specific, flexible and strategic support” (Edge et al. in Watkins, 2015, p. 327). This values-based and ethical positioning

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invites collaboration and care as central aspects of the research process, embodied in the relationships formed and the troubling of researcher/researched dynamics. It calls on our engagement with the struggles of those we accompany, it calls on us to listen, to imagine together new possibilities and to bear witness. However, importantly, it calls on us also to engage in critical reflection and to understand of what it means to accompany, and the impacts of our accompaniment (Watkins, 2015).

Furthermore, an approach to research grounded in relational ethics, aligns with decolonial thinking. Fernández et al. (2021) articulate a decolonising praxis within community psychology across four orientations. These orientations are towards generating knowledge with and from within, which entails the acknowledgement of multiple ways of knowing and producing knowledge that is both embodied and rooted in place; developing a sociohistorical intersectional consciousness, and fostering relationships of mutual accountability, through “the process of building meaningful, sustainable relationships and coalitions of co-intentional solidarity” (p. 9); and unsettling subjectivities of power/privilege. These orientations are intimately connected to the relations we have with one-another, the knowledges produced from these relations, and a fundamental regard for the Other. Tuck and Guishard (2013) also articulate a vision of a Decolonial Participatory Action Research that, through its ethical framework, counters the academy’s contributions to the colonial project. For Tuck and Guishard (2013),

decolonial research necessitates a posture of ethics that frames discussions of ethics away from an emphasis on checklists that attempt to safeguard individual rights and autonomy, toward conversations about relational, dialogical ethics in which partnership, commitment, accountability and social justice are central tenets. (p. 8)

The ethical framework they propose includes: a commitment to reflexivity about the purpose of the research, what and how it sets out to do, and the role of the researcher within this; a consideration of what is legitimated as expertise, bringing in to concert lived experience with other forms of knowledge; humility as an extension of reflexivity, this is marked by openness to mutual vulnerability and a relinquishing of superiority; preservation of dignity of those whom we work alongside with, rejecting compulsions to appropriate and commodify; taking action as a core goal, what is the change that is being elicited and how is this change sustainable; and a relationality predicated on trust, representation and reciprocity as fundamental to the research process. Similarly, Dudgeon et al. (2020) describe Aboriginal Participatory Action Research as an approach that is both transformative and grounded in critically self-reflexive Indigenous research methodologies. This approach also centres an ethical orientation grounded in reflexivity, reciprocity, mutual relationships, respect, recognition and participation and collaboration. For Dudgeon et al., decolonial approach must draw on Aboriginal ontologies, epistemologies, to inform methodologies and methods. To centre relationality is to adopt an approach to research is necessarily political, in its desire for transformation in solidarity with those who are marginalised and oppressed. It mobilises research towards liberation by engaging liberatory processes and ideals (Montero, 2007).

Engaging in an Iterative-Generative Reflective Praxis

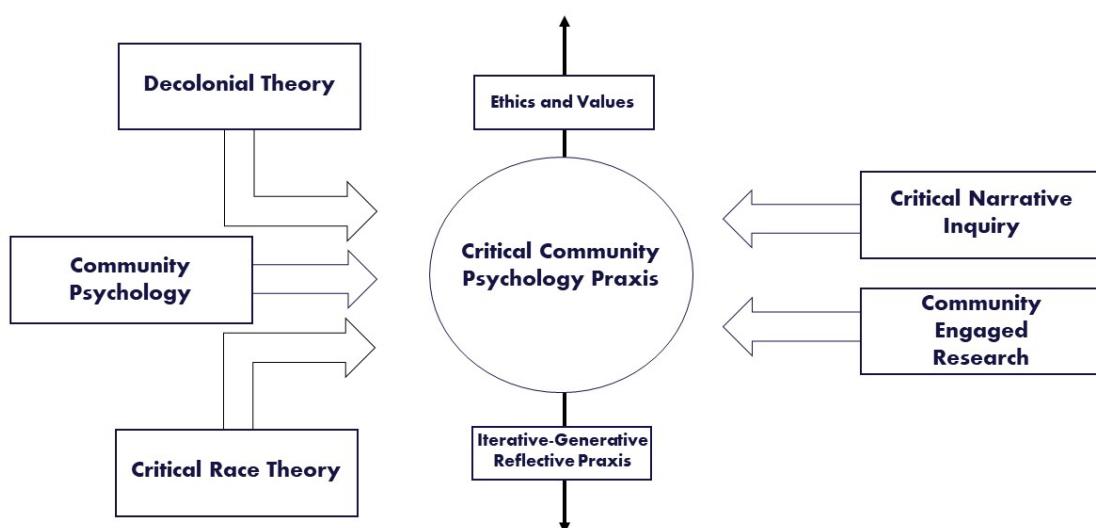
It is these ways of understanding our relationships and responsibilities to one another, mediated through power and privilege, which begin to give form to the approach to collaboration and community engagement within the present project. Research should be an ongoing process of reflexive ethical decision making, where praxis emerges from engagement and dialogue, and is collectively shaped with attention to power and the politics of knowledge (Furness et al., 2016). From these ethical positionings the research engaged in a form of substantive theorising (Wicker, 1989) that adopted a model of iterative-generative

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reflective praxis (Bishop et al., 2002). This model describes an iterative process of moving back and forth between conceptual and substantive domains, with each informing reflection of the other. Through this model of inquiry concepts and epistemology are incrementally developed. Reflection is essential, as the tacit knowledge, the values and worldviews, held by the researcher fundamentally shape the collection and analysis of data and mediates the researcher's immersion in the substantive domain. This praxis crafted my approach to producing knowledge, but also shaped key methodological decisions and methods. Figure 2 shows how the critical community psychology praxis I engaged took shape drawing on key theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches, whilst guided by ethics, values and an iterative-generative reflective praxis.

Figure 2

Developing my critical community psychology praxis



Chapter Summary

Liberatory, critical race and decolonial frameworks provide an important lens through which to sharpen our tools as community psychologists. By drawing on these frameworks a power-sensitive, contextualised, and justice-oriented analysis can take shape. As shown, there is a synergy between these frameworks and methodological approach of narrative inquiry, enabling linkages to be made between the lived experiences of racialised and marginalised people to the broader symbolic and material systems that pervade their lives. Collectively, this informs a community-engaged approach that grapples with issues of process and partnerships, knowledge and epistemology, power and structure; through methods that are grounded in an ethically informed, iterative-generative reflective praxis.

Chapter 6: Methods

In this chapter I describe the methods engaged within this research. I begin with a description of the data collection process, beginning with the development of relationships with the CBTL collective in line with the methodological stances detailed in the previous chapter. Next, I outline the interview, participant observation, and archival material data collection process, including a description of the data sources and participants. Lastly, I will describe the data analysis framework of Critical Narrative analysis, and the data analysis process I undertook.

Data Collection

Growing Relationships

This project emerged from a history of previous relationships and collaborative work undertaken by myself and my primary supervisor Professor Christopher Sonn as part of the Community Identity and Displacement Research Network at Victoria University, alongside members of the CBTL collective, and key staff of the cohealth Arts Generator. It is important to include an account of the beginning of these relationships, as it represents not only the values that underpin this work, but the ongoing relations of trust and reciprocity that must begin much before an ethics application is even conceived and must continue far beyond the ink drying on the last piece of writing connected to a project. These relationships had begun with Professor Sonn who had taken the role as a mentor and critical friend to support Arts Generator staff, both coordinators and artist-facilitators, through critical conversations about race and whiteness, as well as the development of anti-racist projects such as “The Art of Radical Listening” (Sonn, 2018). I had first met Professor Sonn in 2016 in the final year of my undergraduate psychology course where I had undertaken a work experience unit, in which I opted to gain further experience about community-based research. At the end of this

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year Professor Sonn approached me to see if I was interested in becoming involved in a project he was about to begin, that could also be the basis of my minor thesis requirement during my psychology (Honours) course that would begin in 2017, the following year. The project was an evaluation of the AMKA initiative, developed through the cohealth Arts Generator and led by a group of creatives from the African diaspora. The AMKA initiative aimed to represent narratives from the African diaspora in Australia through a theatre performance held at the Arts Centre in Naarm (Melbourne). The intention of AMKA was to speak back to dominant representations of young Africans in Australia through counter narratives, provide positive visibility, engage in decolonising practices, and create spaces for belonging (Agung-Igusti, 2017). Through this project I produced a minor thesis, but also an evaluation report with Professor Sonn and Geskeva Komba who was a key creative involved in AMKA, an employee of Arts Generator and would later become a member of CBTL. The report we produced was a collaborative project, as we worked together with the AMKA creatives to design an evaluation that was aligned with their goals and approaches. We opted not to focus our report solely on metrics of attendance and audience enjoyment, but rather to make connections between creative arts practice and transformative social change (Sonn et al., 2018).

My relationship with cohealth Arts Generator, and many of the creatives involved with AMKA continued as I contributed my research skills towards evaluation work for other projects such as the Art of Radical Listening, and I continued to support and attend the creative work and events that emerged from this space. I was successful in an application to undertake a PhD in 2018. My intention was to explore coalition-building between grassroots community-based groups and non-profit organisations, particularly with relation to race and whiteness within the Australian context. In July 2018, Professor Sonn and myself spoke with Liss Gabb, the coordinator of cohealth Arts Generator at the time, and members of the CBTL

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collective, some of whom we already knew through our previous collaborative work. The CBTL collective had just been successful in their application for the Creative Victoria Future Makers for Change grant to develop the NiC initiative, and both Creative Victoria and cohealth wanted to undertake an evaluation of the project. The evaluation report we had produced for the AMKA initiative reflected the depth and nuance that the CBTL collective and cohealth Arts Generator desired, the collaborative approaches that we took aligned with the participatory orientation of the Arts Generator and the underpinning desire for self-determination within the NiC initiative, and we already had existing relationships built on trust and shared values. Importantly, through the AMKA report, we had demonstrated care in how we represented narratives of the African diaspora and were attentive to the politics of representation grounded in colonising practices of universities and other institutions (Smith, 1999; Watego, 2021).

Professor Sonn and myself agreed to undertake the evaluation project, and for me to deepen this work through my PhD thesis. Across July I would meet numerous times with the CBTL collective to learn more about the initiative, and to shape our collective thinking about what the evaluation and my thesis might focus on. I would also attend a meeting at Creative Victoria that was held for all the funding recipients where I was included as the key individual who would be documenting the initiative. In August of 2018 myself and Professor Sonn would meet with members of cohealth's prevention team, as well as some members of the CBTL collective, who were overseeing the relationship between cohealth and NiC, and the collaboration between Victoria University and cohealth for the evaluation of the initiative. These meetings primarily were for the negotiation of the evaluation and research contract, but also for the cohealth representatives to have input into topics to be included in the evaluation, which included the relationship between cohealth and CBTL. Meetings also continued between me and CBTL as they continued to conceptualise NiC and plan their outputs; these

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were further opportunities to develop relationships with the collective members and engage in collaborative discussions about what they envisaged for the research and evaluation. At the end of August 2018, I accompanied a member of CBTL and a member of cohealth's prevention team to a Theory of Change workshop organised by a consultancy that had been contracted by Creative Victoria to evaluate the Future Makers for Change grant and the recipient projects as a whole. Again, I participated in this space as the key individual documenting the initiative which afforded an in-betweenness as being both inside and outside of the collective. In October of 2018 I would attend my confirmation of candidature (attended by members of the CBTL collective) presenting a research proposal that had developed out of ongoing conversations with the CBTL collective and cohealth staff. At the same time Professor Sonn and I finalised a proposal to cohealth for the evaluation work we would be undertaking that was shaped through the same processes. On the 17th of January 2019 ethics was approved for both the evaluation and my PhD research (see Appendix A), supported by a Letter of Support from cohealth (see Appendix B).

Across 2019 to 2021 I would share workspace with the CBTL collective, working on aspects of my thesis first at the Arts Generator studio space in the basement of the Footscray Community Arts Centre, and then from the NiC space on Barkly St (this occurred until the beginning of 2020 when the world fundamentally changed due to COVID-19). I participated in NiC planning meetings between the CBTL collective members, as well as with the Arts Generator coordinators, in which I would often be tasked with taking minutes. I attended events organised by CBTL and provided support in organising and setup in whatever ways I could or in developing feedback surveys for audiences and workshop participants. Also, across this period I would have regular collaborative discussions between myself and the collective, at times including Professor Sonn, to discuss the progress of the research and evaluation. I further conducted interviews with the CBTL members at the beginning, middle

and end of the funding period of the initiative, and conducted interviews with key members of cohealth and the Arts Generator who were connected to the NiC initiative. In 2020 I co-supervised a Psychology (Honours) student who was undertaking a minor thesis which sought to examine The Colour Book (TCB) Zine produced through NiC; I also engaged with meetings between the student, and the creatives involved in the Zine and helped guide the development of that project. Lastly, at the end of 2021 I began a project with CBTL to produce a third edition of TCB Zine adapted from the findings of the completed evaluation.

Interviews

In-depth interviewing is characteristic of much qualitative work, allowing for an examination of human experience that is contextualised within people's lives. Semi-structured interviewing is one of the most prevalent methods allowing for an analysis of data that privileges the epistemological and ontological standpoints that inform qualitative approaches and enables participants to exercise agency to engage in topics salient to their individual experience within a guided framework that addresses the research questions outlined within the project (Gubrium & Holstein, 2012; Minichiello et al., 1995).

Interview Participants. As the project sought to present a case-study of the Next in Colour (NIL) initiative, interview participants constituted the members of the CBTL collective who were responsible for developing NiC (see Chapter 4, p. 76 for descriptions of the collective members), and key stakeholders from cohealth who were key contacts for the collective or involved in supporting the initiative's development. Additionally, as presented in Chapter 4, an informal interview was held with two key individuals involved in the formation of the Arts Generator to provide further context for this research. Lastly, an interview with one of the collective members and a creative collaborator involved in producing the 2nd Edition of the Colouring Book zine that was conducted as part of a minor thesis project was included as data.

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All the collective members and the creative collaborator opted not to be de-identified as it was important for them that their words and experiences were not to be disconnected from their identities (Case et al., 2014). All the collective members were creative practitioners, identified themselves as belonging to the African diaspora, and were engaged in ongoing community development work. Geskeva was employed with cohealth Arts Generator as a Community Cultural Development Officer as well as in the capacity of an Artist-Facilitator and held a dual role as being the main point of contact from cohealth for the NiC initiative until she left the organisation in December 2019. The other members of CBTL had variously been employed by cohealth Arts Generator as Artists-Facilitators or to assist on small projects. The creative collaborator, Aïsha Trambas:

is 24 years old and describes herself as a Black queer woman. She describes her cultural background as Central African by one parent, and Greek and Anglo-Celtic by the other. Aisha is an independent artist and arts worker, whose creative practices includes poetry, spoken word performance, group facilitation and visual arts. Aisha's role in TCB project has been curating and designing the second edition of the zine.

(Du Ve, 2020 p. 25)

To protect confidentiality, I have chosen to minimise the participant details shared for the key stakeholders affiliated with cohealth. This was communicated to these participants prior to their participation. These individuals were employed by cohealth at key times during the course of this project, and in these roles all held official relationships with the NiC initiative, and thus possess valuable insight into both NiC but also the broader context of cohealth and the Arts Generator. There were five individuals in total who participated in interviews. Four held management roles within cohealth and Arts Generator at similar levels to one-another. One individual had worked closely within the Arts Generator and had intimate knowledge of that specific context. Some are no longer employed with cohealth,

while some still hold roles within the organisation. Whilst some individuals may be comfortable for more information to be shared, or even to be identified, minimising detail across all these participants minimises risks to confidentiality for those who wish not to. I believe that the most salient information relevant to contextualising the insights shared by these individuals, is their employment with cohealth and the Arts Generator, and their knowledge of both the organisation and the initiative. Whilst gender could also provide further insight, the risk to confidentiality outweighs the relative further context it might offer. These participants also included both white and non-white individuals – further information relating to specific cultural background will also not be shared. Data attributed to these participants will be labelled as “person affiliated with cohealth” with a numerical signifier to distinguish each.

Interview Process. Initial interviews with the CBTL collective occurred in April 2019 and ranged from 40-80 minutes. In the preceding period the collective had been engaged in further conceptualising of the NiC initiative and their planned creative outputs and events, met capacity building requirements attached to the Creative Victoria funding, begun negotiating their relationship with cohealth (and significant organisational changes that included staff that held key relationships with the initiative), engaged in negotiations around a Memorandum of Understanding towards securing a space to house the initiative, and held their first event (Drop the Mic). The interview schedule for these initial interviews sought to elicit how the collective members described themselves and the communities they belong to, how they came to form the CBTL collective, what they imagined the NiC initiative to be, and what their experiences had been so far developing the initiative (see Appendix C). These initial interviews were held individually with Tiyami, Geskeva, Ruth and Anyuop, while Ez Eldin and Nyakeer opted to be interviewed together.

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A second round of interviews with the CBTL collective occurred across May and June 2020 and were approximately 60-70 minutes. Since the initial interviews, the collective continued to produce creative outputs and events, navigated organisational change and their relationship with cohealth, re-negotiated a space for which to house the project, and had undergone significant reconceptualisation of the project given the setbacks they had experienced including the constraints posed by the COVID-19 pandemic and lockdowns in Naarm (Melbourne). The interview schedule (see Appendix D) for these interviews sought to elicit an account of some of the changes the initiative had undergone, an overview of the work that NiC had produced over the last year, reflections on how some of the relationships that the initiative had, had been progressing and how the collective had been navigating both new constraints and tensions that had been named in the initial interviews. These interviews were held individually with Anyuop, Geskeva and Ez Eldin. At this point Tiyami had left the collective and Nyakeer had taken a break from involvement. Ruth was not specifically interviewed with this interview schedule, but was interviewed about her key project within NiC, The Colouring Book zine, by Ella Du Ve a minor thesis student who I co-supervised with Professor Christopher Sonn. Ella's interview (see Appendix E) captured pertinent reflections related to my project, and ongoing conversations I had with Ruth during this time enabled me to capture further insights that may not have been explicitly captured through the interview. I had decided not to interview Ruth again as I recognised the time and labour involved in participating as an interviewee, especially during the unfolding COVID-19 pandemic. This was compounded by the time that Ruth had already contributed to processes of building a relationship with Ella who had entered the project as an unfamiliar person. The second round of interviews were all held remotely as restrictions in place due to the COVID-19 pandemic prevented us from meeting in person. The interviews were conducted over zoom or via telephone at a time convenient to each participant. However, as the relationships that

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had been formed with the collective had long preceded the restrictions (with some members the relationships had been formed years earlier), the need to conduct interviews via Zoom or telephone didn't significantly shape the interview process.

A final round of interviews to be held at the end of the initiative's funding life span was initially planned. However, due to setbacks from the COVID-19 pandemic the grant acquittal date had been lengthened for funding recipients. During this extended period, I engaged in ongoing collaborative discussions with the CBTL collective, which at times also included Professor Christopher Sonn, my primary supervisor and the principal investigator on the project. These conversations encompassed ongoing tensions that the collective had been navigating across their relationship with cohealth and planning for future projects and what the initiative would look like beyond the lifespan of the Creative Victoria funding. The interview schedule developed for this final round of interviews was framed to elicit retrospective reflection from an assumed endpoint, and whilst there was an end to a period of time connected to the funding and the relationship with cohealth, the initiative had in fact not ended. Further, the reflections on the funding process and the relationships the collective had been negotiating had already been captured in informal interviews, some of which I recorded, and all of which I took extensive notes of.

Interviews with the individuals affiliated with cohealth occurred in April, August and September 2019, and in March 2020. These individuals were only interviewed once, and the interviews were approximately 60 minutes. Two of these individuals opted to be interviewed together at the same time, and interviews were all in person at a location of choosing, except for the interview in 2020 which occurred over Zoom. The interview schedule (see Appendix F) sought to elicit information about their role with cohealth and their understandings of the organisation, their understanding of the NiC initiative and its goals, reflections on their relationship and cohealth's relationship with the initiative including some of the key events

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across these relationships that had been identified by CBTL members. Each of these individuals held a different relationship with NiC at different points of the funding timeline, across which they were involved in certain key events. The timing of these interviews was in relation to each individual's proximity to these events and their reflections on them and the organisational context at the time.

Prior to all interviews the interview schedule along with information to participants (see Appendix G) and informed consent (see Appendix H) were shared via email. For the collective members, the initial interview schedule was shared during a collaborative discussion where they were invited to give feedback on the questions that were to be asked. Individuals affiliated with cohealth were given the opportunity to ask any questions beforehand related to the interview schedule or the research process. Before the actual interviews started the content of the documents were explained and both verbal and written consent was obtained. The interviews were recorded and later transcribed. After transcription, a copy of the transcript was provided to each of the interviewees for their records, to correct any errors in understanding in the transcription, and to ensure they were comfortable with what had been shared.

Participant Observation

Participant observation is a naturalistic approach to data collection that seeks immersion in a particular social and cultural context. Evolving from ethnography, it involves researchers participating in the day-to-day experiences of individuals, groups, communities, and organisations (McKechnie, 2014). Researchers collect data through their direct observations of the dynamics, processes and interactions in these contexts, taking extensive fieldnotes that capture detailed descriptions but also interpretive reflections, as well as informal interviewing that entails conversations that may not be planned or structured

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according to an interview guide, but instead responding to the events or happenings within a context at a particular time (Kloos et al., 2012).

According to Case et al. (2014) ethnographic methods such as participant observation share important synergies with the principles and values of community psychology, particularly towards capturing cultural complexity and diversity, fostering collaborative and participatory forms of research, and enabling forms of inquiry that support the self-determination of communities and attends to the issues that they find important. They further argue that such methods are essential towards documenting important meaning-making work such as the construction of narratives across settings and communities, and how they inform social processes.

Across my time documenting NiC I would record reflections and descriptions of the events that I attended and notable occurrences that I observed whilst sharing workspace with the collective. However, a key source of observational data came from my attendance and participation in a number of planning meetings between the CBTL collective members, as well as meetings between CBTL and cohealth and Arts Generator staff. Initially I took on the role of taking minutes, typing up a detailed set of notes as part of my observational data, and then distilling and sharing with meeting attendees a descriptive summary of key points. I stopped assuming the role of minute taker within meetings but continued to be present to observe and take notes as part of the work documenting the NiC initiative. A secondary key source were informal interviews between me and CBTL members, and often including Professor Christopher Sonn. Similarly, these would include a detail descriptive set of notes with reflections, however, as I was also participating in dialogue, I wasn't able to provide similar detail as to when I was purely in the role of note-taker/documenter. In total across all meetings and informal interviews I made 28 entries.

There are many tensions that can arise through participant observation, reflecting the dynamic and engaged orientation of community-engaged approaches, the complex relationships that emerge, the multiplicity of roles the researcher undertakes, and the many negotiations with stakeholders, gatekeepers, community or group members, and others within the research setting (Case et al., 2014). This project was no different, and many of these tensions were navigated. For example, Case et al. (2014) point to the importance of clear boundaries for the research context across time and space where data is collected through observation. In contrast to broader reflections when attending events, I chose to take detailed fieldnotes when attending meetings and participating in informal interviews, as within this context my role as a researcher and my intention to document was made clear. However, this was challenged as the relationship between cohealth and CBTL underwent strain – I was invited to continue to attend and document meetings at the request of the collective, but my presence was contested by members of cohealth. The collective felt that cohealth wanted to protect their reputation and didn't want me to document the negotiations that were occurring. One member of cohealth had expressed a concern to me about sensitive information being shared in these meetings, and at another time a member of cohealth expressed to a collective member that cohealth did not want to be studied and that the “cultural safety of staff” needed to be protected. This meant my role and access had to be renegotiated to reflect the changing context and relationships. Alternatively, some events facilitated through NiC were not appropriate for me to attend. For example, Medida and Chill was a set of conversations for young South Sudanese people to share experiences, connect and build meaningful relationships. My presence in this setting as a researcher and non-South-Sudanese person would have implications for maintaining the intention of the culturally safe space that was created. Another key tension to navigate was the level of my engagement within the research setting, and the role I would take. Here I would move between insider and outsider status

(Trickett, 2009) as I would inhabit various roles as researcher and evaluator, a contributor to outputs and even attending meetings with other organisations as “part of the team”, and being invited as “witness” (Watkins, 2015) to particularly tense and difficult meetings and negotiations which the collective had to engage in. This took an understanding of my relationships with different stakeholders and gatekeepers, and a clear articulation of who this project should benefit – the CBTL collective. Importantly, it required ongoing reflexivity as I drew on different identities, and distanced myself from others, each positioning myself in relation to different histories and relations of power that shaped how the research unfolded (Breen, 2007; Langhout, 2006)

Archival Materials

Archival material constituted another important data source. Archival documents were shared with me through the CBTL collective, individuals employed by cohealth, or were publicly available on websites and social media platforms. Table 2 below outlines the various archival material I engaged with.

Table 2

Archival Material

Creative Outputs	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• The Colouring Book Edition 1• The Colouring Book Edition 2• Digital Spotlight Series
Debrief Statements	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• COLOUR/CUT/PIC Debrief Statement• Media and Chill Debrief Statement• The Colouring Book Edition 1 Debrief Statement
NiC social media	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• African Kings Promo (Video)

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-
- Road Dogs Q+A (Video)

 - Aïsha Trambas Q+A (Video)

 - Mariam Koslay Q+A (Video)

- Media Appearances
- Ruth Nyaruot Ruach RRR “The Wrap” Interview promoting Drop the Mic (Audio)
 - Ez Eldin Deng RRR “Diaspora Blues” Interview promoting 40 Days, 40 Nights Exhibition (Audio)
-
- NiC Project
- NiC Description, Values and Output Overviews
-
- Documents
- NiC Project Timeline

 - NiC Project Proposal

 - NiC Group Agreement

 - Planned Output Descriptions (Multiple Documents)

 - Terms of Reference Draft
-
- UNISON Tenancy
- Email correspondence relating to the UNISON tenancy
-
- Documents
- cohealth Arts Generator Proposal Letter to UNISON

 - Memorandum of Understanding
-
- Documents Related to Creative Victoria
- Progress Report to Creative Victoria (30/6/2019-15/11/2019)
 - NiC Theory of Change
-
- cohealth and Arts Generator Documents
- Annual Review (multiple documents covering 2015-2019)

 - cohealth website

 - Integrated Health Promotion Strategic and Action Plan 2017-2021

 - Community Organising Internal Prevention Team Paper
-

-
- Theory of Change to Reduce Stigma and Discrimination for Communities which Experience It
-

- Black Lives Matter Statement from cohealth
-

- Posts relating to racism on the Chief Executive Blog
-

- Chief Executive press release about racism and COVID-19
-

- cohealth submission to draft amendments of the Racial Discrimination Act 1975
-

- Be a Brother project Evaluation Report and Follow-Up Evaluation Report
-

- cohealth Strategic Plan (2015-2018, 2019-2023)
-

- Integrated Health Promotion Strategic Plan (2017-2021)
-

- Arts Generator Theory of Change Model
-

Documents Related to
the Multicultural Arts
Victoria Review

- A written response to the MAV review survey provided by an employee of cohealth that worked with the NiC initiative
 - NiC Project Review Report produced by MAV
-

The various documents and media that constitute these archival materials contributed to analysis in two ways. Creative Outputs, Debrief Statements, NiC Social Media videos, Media Appearances and documents related to the Multicultural Arts Victoria Review were subject to the data analysis process outlined below. The other documents were used to further contextualise the data collected from the interviews, observations and discussions and further my understanding of the organisational contexts and settings. Whilst these documents were not subject to the same analytic process, they were still read with a lens informed by the

theoretical frameworks that shape this project and were used as a point of triangulation for findings that began to emerge from my analysis.

Data Analysis

Data Analysis Framework

The analysis of narrative can take many different approaches, informed by the iteration of narrative inquiry a researcher embarks on, and in turn the theoretical frameworks, research questions and assumptions that underpin the study (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000). In the pantheon of narrative approaches there are many prescriptive models of data analysis that delineate a step-by-step process, however, Smith (2016) points to the value of holding analytic methods as a heuristic guideline that opens one's interpretation to dynamism and the unexpected. Within this present study, the approach to analysis has opted to hold analytic method loosely, as a guideline, and while perhaps not rigid this approach remains rigorous and is situated within a guiding framework, and alongside key questions to inform analysis and interpretation of narrative data.

Of interest in this study is the thematic content of narrative, the meanings that each narrative holds, and the significance to the individuals and communities who construct these narratives (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000). It draws on community psychology's understandings of narrative as powerful individual and collective resources (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000; Rappaport, 1995, 2000), the utility of narrative to better understand the social processes that emerge within settings and organisations (Bond & Wasco, 2017), and the counter-storying imperatives of CRT and Decolonial approaches. However, also of concern in this study is an understanding of how powerful societal discourses are drawn into organisational contexts, reproduced through shared narratives, shaping organisational practices and behaviours. Thus, it is necessary to draw on conceptual tools that are attuned to illustrating the interconnections that occur at these different levels of our complex social

worlds. Critical Narrative Analysis (CNA) offers a frame that accounts for how individuals come to understand and make meaning of their everyday lived contexts, drawing on cultural resources, and as situated within powerful societal discourses, by drawing on narrative and critical discourse approaches. Drawing in a discursive lens to narrative analysis better attends to the presence of ideology and power within individual's narrative sense-making and uncovers the obfuscated impacts of inequitable relations of power ensconced in hegemonic systems (Boonzaier, 2019; Souto-Manning, 2012).

Data Analysis Process

Whilst I will proceed to outline some steps and analytical methods in a way that seems sequential, relatively straightforward and neatly temporally bounded within an analytic phase, the analysis was an iterative and cyclical process that began when the first interviews were conducted at the beginning of the project and continued right into the writing up of my findings. I used different tools such as Nvivo and Excel, I made tables in Word and countless mind-maps, I covered my walls in post-it notes and blu-tac (See Appendix I). I often revisited my early analyses, re-examining and revising as more understandings of the setting and contexts grew and I had more discussions with the collective. During this period, I also wrote multiple papers that required me to focus my analysis on specific aspects, such as risk as a discourse evident in the reproduction of racialised structural exclusion (Agung-Igusti, 2021). This required me to ask different questions of the data but ultimately contributed to the present analysis. With that being said, I can begin to outline the shape of my analytic approach, in a way that offers some clarity, but perhaps not the actuality of the messiness of the analysis process.

Firstly, it was important to “[get] to grips with stories” (Smith, 2016) to familiarise myself with the data, which entailed a close reading and re-reading of interview transcripts and select archival data (audio and video archival data were also transcribed). Throughout

this first step initial thoughts and reflections were recorded, tentative connections made to the literature I had reviewed, and observations remembered from the interview itself. Through this initial familiarisation it was important to begin to consider what in fact would constitute a narrative unit. Mankowski and Rappaport (2000) suggest that narratives and stories are not always precisely and cleanly defined. They can be big or small, such as a retelling of important events within a recognisable narrative form and elicited in a structured interview or incidental and more fragmented, emerging in casual conversations (Smith, 2016). My own immersion in the setting of the NiC initiative, and role as interviewer and participant observer, had already given me a familiarity with many of the key events that would serve as an initial organising structure to identify stories. For example, stories of how the collective and the initiative came to be, stories about what the initiative would become, stories about leasing a space for the initiative, and various stories about the relationship between the collective and cohealth. There were other stories that would also emerge such as about experiences of being of African heritage in Australia, community-making or of being a migrant on Aboriginal land, whilst these were emergent stories, they were all considered in relation to the relevance to the research questions. The different stories across different forms of data were then compiled into sub-texts, holistic excerpts drawn from different perspectives and sources (Lieblich et al., 2011).

Next the sub-texts containing each collection of stories were examined for preliminary narrative themes and patterns. This entailed a close reading of words, sentences, and paragraphs to identify salient meanings, both descriptive and interpretive (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Whilst this analytic reading also occurred at the level of small utterances, it was important to maintain a holistic understanding of narrative content, rather than fracturing and fragmenting the stories from their contexts (Smith, 2016). During this phase of analysis, commonalities and contrasts were examined across the different retellings of these

key events. Smith (2016) drawing on the work of Frank (2010a) proposes sets of guiding questions to further the analysis. These questions urge us to consider how stories are informed by different cultural resources, and themselves serve as a resource, and who might control or have access to these resources (Rappaport, 1995). They urge us to consider who the stories are intended for, where they are circulated, in what ways are they constructed differently for different audiences? They urge us to think about how stories connect the storytellers to people and to groups, how they construct boundaries of inclusion and exclusion. They urge us to think about how stories shape individual identities and sense of self, and what function they hold for the storytellers as a form of action. These were useful guiding questions that helped narrative themes take shape and mirrored many of the questions the collective grappled with as they crafted stories through their crafted work.

Each narrative theme was then reviewed multiple times and refined into broader overarching themes. These broader themes were then examined more closely, some being collapsed, omitted, or made clearer. Whilst power and ideology informed my initial readings of the narrative data, at this stage I would focus more intentionally on the relationships between the emergent narratives and broader societal discourses relating to race and concomitant dynamics of power (Boonzaier, 2019). For example, a shared narrative of “not being taken seriously” had emerged from the stories the collective had told to describe how in their encounters with white organisations and people they were devalued or positioned as incompetent. This narrative spoke to racialising discourses of people of African heritage as being in deficit or dangerous, discourses that circulate freely within the Australian settler colonial state and are readily ascribed to the racialised “other”. Across this process I would engage in member-checking, sharing preliminary analyses and interpretations with the collective, and finding resonances and divergences from their experiences. I would also share parts of my preliminary findings with colleagues in a research group that I would meet

regularly with alongside my supervisors, to seek their critical feedback as part of a process of analyst triangulation. In the process of supervision I would also refine, question and review the narratives that would begin to be shaped. Finally, once these various narrative threads took shape, and deeper connections were made back to power and ideology through a discursive frame, I would begin to shape my own narrative by identifying the broader patterns, the dynamic processes and interactions that would occur across levels, such as the reproduction of discourse in individual acts of storytelling and how they shape social processes within settings.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have described the embodied praxis guided by the theoretical frameworks and methodological approaches outlined in the previous chapter. Of key importance was the relationship building the preceded and continued through the methods of data collection and analysis. In this chapter I also described the systematic way multiple forms of data were collected to provide an in-depth and contextualised exploration of the setting being examined. Furthermore, I described how I used an analytic approach informed by Critical Narrative Analysis to bring closer into focus how discourse manifests across analytic levels permeating from the ideological level and shaping individual, interpersonal, and collective experiences. The following three chapters will report on the findings from the data analysis, addressing the research questions outlined in the introductory chapter.

Chapter 7: Radical Reimagining of Relationships and Ways of Working

In this chapter I present three narratives constructed from the interviews with the CBTL collective at the beginning of the NiC initiative. The narratives reflect the collective's work of *naming cultural and structural violence* as permeating their lives as racialised people of African heritage. This naming is a product of efforts to deconstruct their experience as a collective, within their communities and through their creative and cultural practice. It is these contexts of violence which the collective sought to respond to through the NiC initiative and which engenders a radical imagining of what could be otherwise. Watkins and Shulman (2008) write that

Imagination is a psychological phenomenon that occurs at the level of the local in individuals and communities. It gives those in isolating, asphyxiating, and exhausted social structures new possibilities. To create cultural alternatives, people have to break with taken for granted ways of thinking that prevent them psychologically from interrupting the status quo. They need to do work that “renews the past, refiguring it as a contingent in-between space, that innovates and interrupts the performance of the present” (Bhabha, 1994, p. 7). Learning to create conditions for social and personal regeneration, for an awakening of hope and imagination, is one of the central psychological tasks of our era. (p. 3)

To dream, to radically imagine, is borne from political and collective engagement. It is not a solitary act but occurs with others and within fields of meaning where conceptual tools are reshaped to be more just and more inclusive (Kelley, 2002). The following narratives describe how, at this early point of the initiative, the collective had begun to imagine NiC as functioning inwardly to create *homeplaces and healing spaces*, and outwardly as a space for *counter-storytelling, community mobilisation and building solidarities*. Across these narratives the CBTL collective articulate a vision of self-determination grounded in a radical

reimagination of their relationships: between themselves, their communities, and those beyond their communities; and their approaches to creating spaces for transformative social and cultural action and building a sense of safety.

Naming Cultural and Structural Violence: “... They feel like they're going to be judged”

Through collective processes of problematisation, the collective named cultural and structural violence, and the centrality of race to their experiences of inequity and structural exclusion. This articulation of the violences encountered, reveals the ways possibilities of collective self-determination are limited by violent systems, and becomes a beginning point through which to imagine otherwise. Cultural violence works within the symbolic sphere to legitimise and sustain structural violence and relies on the circulation of powerful ideological and discursive constructions. Structural violence “includes the production, maintenance, and reproduction of social inequalities and oppressions” through social systems and oppressive mechanisms (Dutta et al., 2016, p. 1).

For CBTL, a key form of cultural violence lay in the deficit discourses that construct people of African descent in Australia in particular ways. For example, as dangerous and criminal:

...cause a lot of the times, what I see is the youth, they feel uncomfortable to reach out to white spaces because they don't feel like they're wanted or they feel like they're going to be judged before they approach. It's like there's all this talent in the community but they don't know what to do with it because, they've been already looked at like, "You're criminal. You do this and you do that". (Anyuop Dau)

These harmful constructions create a white fear of a black dangerous “other” and are deeply embedded in dehumanising colonial imaginings of blackness that have been transported and persist across contexts (Hasford, 2016). Whilst the shape of such colonial images remains relatively unchanged, their modern representations reflect the present

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context. For the African diaspora in Australia, images of “African Gangs” are conjured (Majavu, 2020), joining the dehumanising chorus of colonial images of the “dangerous savage or slave” (Collins, 2000; Fanon, 1991). These images combine with other harmful discourses that similarly attribute violence and fear to other racialised identities of “refugee” or “immigrant”:

most people of colour and the African diaspora have migrated and have been refugees within Australia... the Australian society puts that as something negative, as if us migrating, or coming here as refugees, is like we're here to attack them, that's what it sounds like, that's what they make it seem as. We want to be able to work together and show them that, this is not our land, this is the Indigenous land. We're not here to attack it, we're not here to do anything bad. We're just here to educate ourselves, find the opportunities we can find, work, study, all that lifestyle jazz... (Nyakeer Akuol)

To be African, and to be a migrant or refugee, is to be a threat to Australia. A threat to white sovereignty and hegemony.

Additionally, for those who might shake free constructions of danger and criminality, there remains a devaluation of cultural identities, intellectual abilities, and overall capacities. Ways of being in the world are inferiorised and constructed as lesser than or signalling deficit:

...when it comes to being around people who aren't from your community, you have to change yourself... you've got to speak a certain way. If you speak and people don't understand you, you're automatically seen as unknowledgeable. Having to ensure that you are educated and you know what you're doing around the people you're with so that you're not categorised as something you're not. (Nyakeer Akuol)

This devaluing works to both render racialised people of African descent as incapable and unknowing, but also reflects a shift from racism’s biological frame to a cultural frame that

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emphasises incompatibility with a presumed superior western and white cultural system (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018; Majavu, 2018; Udah, 2018). It also encompasses a devaluation of cultural products and practices; this manifests in the creative industries in a devaluing of creative products as a lesser than:

I think that a lot of the times, we would request to use certain spaces and we'd just be shut down because, well, I don't know. I guess the validity of what we were doing was not recognised. For me, that really fuelled the desire to then have that space. (Tiyami Amum)

This reflects discourses that positions community arts or particular cultural practices as less serious forms of creative work, then those produced through hegemonic institutions or within specific schools of knowledge grounded in Eurocentric frameworks (Balla, 2020; Idriss, 2016). The different devaluations place a burden of labour on racialised individuals and communities as they navigate and challenge these representations and push to have their identities, capacities, practices and products recognised and legitimised (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018).

However, value is also *bestowed* on people of African descent – but in objectifying and limiting ways:

In a space, if a person of colour or an Indigenous [person] is in a space where it's all white people, they feel uncomfortable. Most of the time, you are questioned about your culture, not about why you're here in this [space]. It's more of...your skin is brown, what culture are you? Are you from this community? I've heard a lot about you on the news. I like your hair, can I touch it? It's those questions. It's never about your reason of being where you are at this point, "Are you studying this course? Why are you in this conference?...What did you find interesting about it?" It's more of questions of who you are. We want to be able to create a space where we're not

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questioning who you are.... we're not questioning anything at all. We just want you to be here, feel comfortable. (Nyakeer Akuol)

People of African descent are also often reduced to an exoticized other, where culture and even physical attributes become exotic objects which set boundaries on personhood. For Nyakeer in the excerpt above, the value of her presence is reduced to her racialised identity, which subsumes her other interests, knowledge, experience, and identities. The scope of her epistemic authority does not extend beyond the boundaries of race and culture set by whiteness.

“Blackness” can also become commodified when individuals of African descent are rendered objects, here their “blackness” is consumed by members of the dominant white cultural community. In doing so white norms are upheld through “the othering of constructed Black culture and identities” and applications of white ideals to black bodies” (Nguyen & Anthony, 2014, p. 771). Through the lens of whiteness, black cultural products and identity are defined and assigned value. In the context of the creative industries, this can manifest in how creative works are made niche, or constrained to particular content that serves to construct “blackness” in particular ways:

There's a lot of space that exists for people of colour to just be. However, those spaces are so poisoned nowadays because you go to an art gallery or you go to an event where people can overly consume you as an artist or overly consume me as a person because they have their own connotations of who you are or they have their own ideologies of who you are. Sometimes that imagery does not fit you. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

This serves to perpetuate a “single story” (Adichie, 2009), whether as the “exotic other” to be consumed through the consumption of cultural products that are given value through a designation of authenticity also arbitrated by dominant white culture (Nguyen & Anthony,

2014), or through the perpetuation of deficit narratives that reinforce constructions of people from the African diaspora through limiting and dehumanising representations grounded in stories of trauma (Majavu, 2018; Marlowe, 2010):

Spending time in the poetry scene, there was a period of time where I just really got over it because I felt like people respond only to these stories of our suffering...Then, subconsciously...that becomes just what you keep producing, and that then becomes your identity. I think that we are so much more as human beings than just the stories of our suffering or the stories of all the experiences of being outcast or othered.

(Tiyami Amum)

This commodification can often occur in a context of “white” organisations that seek to maintain control of spaces and filter diverse ethnic and cultural identities and experiences through the lens of whiteness:

There's not a lot of places that cater to black bodies and black people. It's always, we're under the ice grip of whiteness, and to be able to have a space where [people in our community] feel comfortable and that no one's looking down on them or they're being controlled by an organisation or an individual in order for them to do what they need. For us, it was really important type of space where you feel safe when you go there and you don't feel like you're restricted in what you're doing because somebody is looking through like a lens of you, but it's not even in a positive way and they want control over that. We didn't want a space that people felt like that. We wanted to give everybody the equal opportunity and be like, "When you come to this space, you're in a safe environment and you can speak up and you can put your opportunities forward and you don't have to feel like you're not wanted". (Anyuop Dau)

This form of cultural violence, whilst different to the vilifying discourses of criminality and deficit, depicts the experience of being black under a controlling gaze, “looking through ... a

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lens of you". The controlling gaze works towards limiting the ways individuals can identify or represent themselves. Often such forms of cultural violence can be seen as celebratory or employed within discourses of diversity and multiculturalism. These discourses reduce "blackness" or "Africanness" to overdetermined categories that still maintain "otherness" and constrain people within dominant group narratives (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018).

Cultural violence is the epistemic fuel that enables structural violence that works to exclude racialised people from equitable access to important resources and opportunities through acts of interpersonal and institutional racism, both overt and covert. For the collective, the discursive constructions and dominant narratives named above, manifest in their micro encounters and everyday racism, that the collective contributes to structural exclusion:

I think a lot of the times when we wanted to go use a space, they would kind of agree and it would be great over the phone, it would be great over email, and it's a totally different story in person. That's just kind of like, "Well, the only thing that's different now is that you've got a chance to see me", and you're just like, "It's a bunch of black kids. I don't know if we can really count on having you." "Granted you already had this conversation with us over the phone, we already spoke about this via email, we already agreed to things, we know your conditions, the conditions of using this space," but then now, it's just kind of like, "Well, things have kind of changed. Actually, we double-booked that space." Little things like that but just actually, then meaning like, "Well, you're undervaluing me because I'm black?" (Tiyami Amum)

These representations of racialised people of African descent, of "black kids", inform interpersonal interactions such as described in the excerpt above. These interactions have profound impacts, that compound in significant ways, and collectively have ramifications for communities of the African diaspora. Instances of structural racism cannot be viewed as

isolated or seen as exceptional, rather they are part of a collective symptomatology from which effects reverberate.

Additional to the structural impacts, and collective impacts on communities there are also individual costs for people from racialised communities who must navigate these forms of cultural and structural violence. This cost is the emotional labour involved in resisting misrecognition and misrepresentation and asserting complex identities and telling complex stories (Evans & Moore, 2015). This is an everyday form of labour that is produced by an everyday form of racism. Emotional labour, like “burn out” as an example, takes a deep psychosocial toll as individuals navigate racism:

There's also a lot of stolen time in having to explain my blackness and having to explain why that's the thing that I have to explain, and then having to explain why that's the thing that you should stop doing to me. That's a lot of stolen time, a lot of stolen energy when I could be expressing something so much more. (Tiyami Amum)

This product of cultural and structural violence frames interactions and relationships and is often unseen and unaccounted for. Thus, it is important that it is recognised and understood when examining how racialised individuals and communities both respond to structural violence, but also form relationships and interact with individuals and organisations across contexts.

Homeplaces, Healing Spaces: “Our own Space is Like you can Just Declutter There”

Through the problematisation of their experiences, and the naming of these violences which constrained the self-determination of individuals and communities of the African diaspora in Australia, the collective was able to imagine what form an antidote and response might take – ways of rehumanising that created new possibilities of being and being with one-another. For the collective, this was fundamentally connected to space in its material sense. At the heart of the NiC initiative was the desire for a physical space from which the

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collective could be based, but that would also constitute a resource for African diaspora communities whom would also take part in shaping it. While many of the projects the collective planned to create and support through NiC would inhabit digital space or collaboratively used spaces controlled by other groups and organisations, establishing a physical space of their own was seen as integral to their vision of self-determination. Physical space plays an important role building and connecting community and liberatory processes (Moane, 2003). The collective members evoked metaphors of having a home, to signify both this importance and the function it would serve:

If you don't have a home, you're considered homeless. We need a space to call a home for us to be free. Get up, have breakfast, and also we have family without a judgement. You could do what you needed to do, as long as you've got respect and you've got a vision. Then in that home, you can go anywhere, but you're going to come back and share your stories with the family. You're not generating any negative impact. You're just building a relation. (Ez Eldin Deng)

For the CBTL collective such a place would function to create for people of African descent opportunities for criticality, healing, the fostering of relationships and cultural safety. Such a space would support the creation of important symbolic and material resources. Importantly, it would connect people and communities. This sense of home that the CBTL collective drew on, is a space of respite (Balla, 2020), and is reminiscent of bell hook's (1990) homeplace. hooks writes:

Historically, African-American people believed that the construction of a homeplace, however fragile and tenuous (the slave hut, the wooden shack), had a radical political dimension. Despite the brutal reality of racial apartheid, of domination, one's homeplace was the one site where one could freely confront the issue of humanization, where one could resist. Black women resisted by making homes where

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all black people could strive to be subjects, not objects, where we could be affirmed in our minds and hearts despite poverty, hardship, and deprivation, where we could restore to ourselves the dignity denied us on the outside in the public world. (p. 42)

The CBTL collective was also predominantly comprised of women, reflecting the significant role of women in racialised and marginalised communities in shaping spaces of healing and resistance to intersecting systems of oppression (Balla, 2020). Watkins and Shulman (2008) speak of building communities of resistance and extending on the writing of bell hooks (1990), fostering public homeplaces through cultural work. Such spaces are counterspaces that engender humane relationships and networks that seek to enact collective care and healing, form a sense of community, as well as engage in positive meaning-making relating to self, community, and imagined futures beyond the frames of dominant systems. It allows for processes of collective remembering, across communities, and across generations (Case & Hunter, 2012; Sonn & Fisher, 1998). Within such spaces important meaning making-occurs, and people are given the freedom to remember and imagine together. This activity creates opportunities for the revaluing of cultural practices and the development of counter-practices and ways of relating to one-another that challenge oppressive systems and ideologies (Case & Hunter, 2012; Segalo, 2016).

Importantly, the space CBTL envisaged would be autonomous, free from the overdetermining and racialising gaze of whiteness, manifest through individuals and organisations. Such a gaze constrains agency and seeks to shape representation within the parameters of dominant narratives, thus enacting specific forms of epistemic violence that creates unsafe spaces. On the one hand, for many creative artists from racialised communities, systemic inequities have constrained their ability to find spaces at all within which they can create and produce. On the other hand, when there are spaces made available

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it is often on the terms of others which can discourage collective and community forms of working and wrests away control over the creative and subjective representations of artists:

It's usually a white space giving us an opportunity. In this case, it's going to be a black space giving other black people and other black spaces their own opportunities. It's like bridging that gap and being like, "You're my people we'll come together, we feel comfortable," and to be able to create more spaces and not just this one. (Anyuop Dau)

Such a space would also serve an important role beyond moves towards structural inclusion within the creative industries, or simply gaining autonomy over representation. As noted by one of the participants, such spaces make it possible to create the conditions to be vulnerable, to be reflective and to decolonise one's own "psychic space", a space within individual's minds that enables "creativity, play, symbolisation and meaning-making, as well as the on the growth processes that rely on these functions to take place" (Rapoport, 2014, p. 1533). This psychic space can be subject to colonisation as racialised bodies and minds absorb the meanings and products of a society shaped by racism (Oliver, 2004):

Creating a space or allowing a space to be created collectively by community is so important because it's not only is operated and run by a collective of people that understand the language of being marginalised and the importance of having a space to just be, it's like we're creating a sense of home. We're creating a space where you can be vulnerable and where you can deconstruct stuff for yourself. You're understanding your own biases and stuff like that, understanding your own internalised racism or internalised disconnect to others and stuff like that based on what colonialism or white supremacy...has told you to feel about this particular group of people or this community. I think the importance of space is just like you have to have your own room in a house. You can't just live in the living room all the time

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because everybody's always there and everybody's always putting their own thing there. Having your own space is like you can just declutter there. At the same time, understanding that in the process of decluttering, it's not going to be a trash bag or something like that. Taking accountability of what you're putting in that space and re-imagining how does a safe space look like? (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

It is essential to have a sense of safety when allowing oneself to be vulnerable, whether as healing process, or in the service of deideologisation – “the process of constructing and reconstructing the world one lives in and its circumstances as a totality” (Montero, 2007, p. 525).

Through NiC, CBTL sought to deconstruct taken for granted ways of being and doing and create a framework through which future generations could self-determine and access important resources and opportunities. The values and ethics that drive the NiC initiative would also shape relationships and processes, driving the collective to conceptualise ways of relating and how the organisational practices and processes they developed defined their relationships with both other settings and each-other, reflect their values and forming a basis for their broader goals. This would entail radical imagination from which the collective was working and imagining from a different set of ethics and principles to the settings they were responding to, creating new possibilities for being and doing.

From these values, and ways of relating, and from drawing on lived experience and cultural memory, practices that were collective, healing, and reflexive could begin to take shape. This included the collective’s non-hierarchical ways of organising, and how they would construct their roles; their internal practices and processes, how they make decisions, how they would communicate, take and hold accountability, learn and grow, and share successes and failures. This would be a praxis that emerges from radical decolonial reimaginings, asserting humanity and recentring relationality:

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We all agreed that to move forward and to develop community, we have to use a practice that is so healing and is so connected to ourselves, and connected to our souls. I think that change is not changing the exterior, but also changing the internal... I feel like CBTL we have our intentions, we have our values, we have the structure, how we want it to look like but it's always changing because we're individually growing. We'll bring in different things and different perspectives. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

Whilst there were many opportunities for the CBTL collective to access and utilise existing physical spaces to develop projects, these spaces are both temporary and dependent on other organisations and institutions. It is not to say that important meaning making does not occur in such spaces, or that it prevents collective forms of healing, or the flourishing of networks or rehumanising praxis. For the collective, not having a space of their own is an impermanence that is linked to wider patterns of structural inequity and devaluing of social identities. It is an impermanence that solidifies the power of white institutions as arbiters of control and access and upholds this arrangement through ongoing processes of misrecognition. Thus, the possibility of self-determined space, shows the cracks in this logic and reasserts a control over self and communities.

To be able to have this space and then allow people to really thrive and create how they feel like they should be creating ... for us to be able to support that, foster that, empower and encourage that, and then see what comes out of that. It would then speak for itself. (Tiyami Amum)

Counter-storytelling, Community Mobilisation and Building Solidarities: “We're not These Kind of People that you see on the News all the Time”

While a key component for the NiC initiative was the establishment of material space as a homeplace and counter-space that had important inward functions for themselves and those participating in this space, the initiative would also function outwardly across many other platforms through the creation of counter-stories that resist damaging harmful narratives that denigrate and racialise people of African descent. Counter-stories are the obscured stories that emerge from those people and communities who experience oppression and marginalisation, they are challenges and responses to damaging dominant modes of understanding circulated within a society (Delgado, 1989). Counter-stories as a form of self-representation are an important way for racialised communities to resist cultural and structural violence. They can be thought of as resistance stories that fight the negative representations of the dominant society and the inequitable systems they uphold (Bell, 2010). It also creates resources for people within those communities to construct identities and understandings of the world, drawing on their own experience and knowledge grounded in community and cultural histories (Sonn & Fisher, 1998):

For me, they can be able to learn what we do and not just see us from a lens of negativity or what the media shows them and being like, "These people are actually like grinding out here." They want spaces, they want to do better and we're just, we're not these kind of people that you see on the news all the time, but we're trying to create change for our community and trying to better ourselves for the next generation... (Anyuop Dau)

The inwards work, driven by shared values, and shaped by counter-practices and the reclamation of cultural memory, creates the foundation from which counter-stories can emerge – engaging in a praxis through which “people reproduce themselves in the objective

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world, make explicit their personality, and validate themselves as well as their knowledge” (Bulhan, 1985, p. 265).

Counter-storytelling would enable self-representation and authentic visibility. For the collective, self-determination included having control over their own stories and images, how they are produced, and what is done with them:

It was an important thing because it was about our representation, but also visibility, authentic visibility. Also, it's about having autonomy and self-determination over the work that we do and how we deliver it and providing a reflection of ourselves within the community and letting the broader community know that we are doing these things and we want to do these things for us ourselves as much as everybody else.

(Geskeva Komba)

Counter-storytelling also entails the surfacing of counter-histories:

History may be written in this colonialised way, so us rewriting our own history, but like, "That's not how it's been said to us, so that's not how we've experienced it. That's not how our ancestors have experienced it. This is the truth of it" (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

Not only are the histories of the African diaspora often suppressed and obscured given coloniality but distorted and changed to reflect dominant understandings or legitimate inequities through the reproduction of dominant Eurocentric narratives (Adams et al., 2018; Bulhan, 1985). To wrest control back of one's own history is an important self-determining act, and remembering the past is fundamentally connected to imagining new futures (Malherbe, 2020; Martín-Baró, 1994; Segalo, 2014; Zavala, 2016).

However, whilst an initiative such as NiC may enable self-determined activity, it still exists within a broader context such as the creative industries and non-profit human services sector and holds necessary relationships with organisations within these spaces. The

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collective not only desired to create counter-stories that resisted dominant constructions of the African diaspora in the broader context of Australia, but also within the contexts of institutional spaces where these constructions shaped ways organisations and organisational actors worked with people and communities. This meant conceptualising how partnerships and collaborations can occur, and providing opportunities for organisations to reflect on and learn from their interactions with various communities:

Within organisations, the changes that would definitely be made is the way that the African diaspora, the Indigenous community and people of colour are being seen. There'll definitely be a conversation on the ways that we work together or the ways that we have delivered a project or ways that these organisations could work better in being aware, being culturally aware in their platforms or in their organisations... there would also be a change, a big change in...the kinds of programs, workshops, events et cetera that would be delivered. That would definitely involve...not only the communities but the organisations. When working with the wider communities they'll be able to see that the African diaspora we can work as the community all of the things on social media, the negative things isn't true. (Nyakeer Akuol)

Counter-stories are deployed within these important settings where structural violence is experienced, seeking to transform relationships and ways of working in these contexts. These counter-stories would draw on the values and ethics that the collective embedded in their praxis, showing desired ways of relating and collaborating:

For myself, I think that being true to the values of self-determination, transparency, intersectionality. Then communicating those values to people or an organisation that we would be collaborating with that they believe that they... share those values.
(Geskeva Komba)

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By ensuring that partnerships and collaborations are grounded in shared values, and centring this within relationship building, there are opportunities for organisations and individuals to reflect on their own practices and processes. This focus on values works towards creating culturally safe spaces and collaborations, but also raises broader questions and considerations about working alongside and within various communities. Within building these relationships with various organisations there are opportunities for more structured learning and change processes.

The project also sought to build solidarities with other racialised and marginalised communities. Structural exclusion for marginalised communities translates to a scarcity of resources and opportunities, creating an environment of competition. For many of these communities there are similar sets of racialised experiences perpetrated by the same structural mechanisms:

...all of us Indigenous community, Pasifika communities, we are all looked at from the same lens, from the white perspective. To be able to have that connection with them and being like, "Hey, you're doing this and we're doing that, let's collab." Cause if we don't help each other, no one else is going to help us. We have to work through these spaces so that we can give our own communities the same benefits. Being able to link up with Pasifika communities, Indigenous communities is important in the sense that all we have is each other most of the time and we have to work through that for other people. (Anyuop Dau)

In fostering these solidarities, engaging in cultural sharing and understanding, and connecting shared experiences within the Australian settler colonial context, exclusionary structures can be exposed, better challenged and shifted, and new narratives created. Explicit in the way many of the CBTL collective talked about creating solidarities, was an acknowledgement of sovereignty for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples:

For First Nation people, it's more so us acting as a support, but not navigating or driving anything because it's like we are just there to create the space and to just be like do whatever you want to do. We can't really navigate the conversations that happen there, or what is represented or what's presented in that space because we don't know. I think that's the way change also happens. When I say stepping down, like stepping down from that place of power of or whatever because it's like, if we are working in solidarity with these communities, they need to create the change that they need for their community. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

For the CBTL collective, their vision of solidarity recognises and supports self-determination for other racialised communities, but importantly recognises Indigenous sovereignty and the relationship of migrants and settlers to it.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, the contexts of structural and cultural violence which NiC is responding to are named by CBTL, and the collective's vision of self-determination is articulated. NiC can be understood as an alternative setting that further engenders important forms of resistance and community making, and that is shaped and constrained by social power relations. Cultural violence as a conceptual tool shows how racialisation is enacted in everyday language to maintain privilege while marginalising people with emotional and psychological cost. This violence is expressed and manifest through the vilification, inferiorisation and commodification of “blackness” and black people constraining self-determination over stories, histories and identities and legitimisation structural violence. A further product of these expressions of cultural violence is emotional labour, which continues to structure the experiences and relationships of individuals within racialised communities.

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Structural violence is also met with resistance and desire. The formation of CBTL is resistant and emancipatory action. Critical scholars have long shown the benefits and functions of homeplaces (hooks, 1990) and alternative settings in the lives of oppressed communities. It is in these settings that people are able to come together to imagine alternative ways, affirm community cultures and histories, provide mutual support, and craft alternative visions (Case & Hunter, 2012; Sonn & Fisher, 1998). These alternative settings can be conceived as relational healing spaces grounded in collectively held values of care, recognition, reciprocity. Importantly, both CBTL and the spaces they create continue to exist within contexts of race and coloniality, and so the products of re-imagining and pre-figuration reach back out through counter-stories and authentic forms of visibility, which seek to form solidarities and broader practices and ways of relating within the creative industries.

Chapter 8: Self-Determination Towards Re-Existence

The narratives described in the previous chapter illustrate the contexts of cultural and structural violence that, for the CBTL collective, necessitates the creation of alternative settings through NiC. Within these settings CBTL can foster opportunities for a collective engagement of radical imagination to transform relationships and ways of working. Their narrations of what they imagined and hoped for NiC as an alternative setting, is an articulation of their vision of self-determination, one that spans symbolic and material domains. In this chapter I present an embodiment of this vision, describing how the collective were *enacting relational processes and counter-practices*, constructed through analysis of interviews with the collective and creative collaborators, and participant observation and archival materials that documented the process of creating NiC and the creation of events and outputs. The creation of relational processes and counter-practices is a key function of counter-spaces and are implicated in both the creation of shared meanings and efforts towards revitalisation and healing (Case & Hunter, 2012). In the second part of this chapter I provide examples from my analysis of how through NiC the collective were *creating cultural resources*, in the creative artefacts that were produced and shared through the setting. These are important mediational tools through which the collective and their collaborators can act on their social worlds, and through which others can appropriate, shaping their own frames of understanding and action (Tappan, 2006). Together these practices, processes, and resources constitute a rearticulation of relationships and meaning, inter-subjective social action that facilitates an acting on one's world (Bulhan, 1985). This is self-determining activity towards re-existence, a decolonial goal that can be understood as “the mechanisms, strategies, and practices that human groups employ against racialisation, exclusion, and marginalisation, procuring the redefining and re-signifying of life in conditions of dignity and self-determination” (Walsh, 2021, p. 475).

Enacting Relational Processes and Counter-practices

Within NiC the collective enacted relational processes and counter-practices that reflected the value orientations of the setting and their collective understanding of self-determination. These processes and practices were drawn from multiple places, reflecting cultural knowledge, but also participatory and community arts spaces that counter the neoliberal capitalist ideologies of the creative industries that informs funding and practice. The processes are constituted through centering *individual, interpersonal and collective care*; fostering *communality and interdependence*; and drawing on *emergent processes*. For the collective, how they worked together and with others was *as important as what they produced*, and profoundly impacted what was created.

Individual, Interpersonal, and Collective Care

Care was practiced individually through self-care, interpersonally within the way the collective worked with each-other and collaborators and at a collective level in how they saw accountability to their communities and the stories shared with them that would contribute to community narratives. Care was essential to how the collective worked with and supported each-other – especially when encountering oppressive systems within organisational settings. Both self-care and collective care were recognised as necessary and interrelated, to the extent that it formed one of the espoused values of the collective, *wellbeing*:

We strive to centre self-care, in its various forms to build ongoing solidarity and awareness of how we can grow and reach our full potential. Allowing a willingness to learn but also looking after individual and collective wellbeing as a whole. (NiC, n.d.)

Here self-care is a precursor to solidarity and collective capacity building, and collective wellbeing. Below Geskeva reflects further on the relationship between self and collective care:

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Going into these places and understanding...self-care versus collective self-care and how to cater to that because obviously each person would be triggered in a different way, [or] might not be triggered, [or] all of us will be triggered so it's like, "How am I going to look after you if I can't look after myself?"...but also understanding that things happen differently for different individuals. (Geskeva Komba)

For Geskeva, practising self-care creates a foundation of support from which practices of collective care can be mobilised. Further, collective care must also be attendant to intersectional experiences that shape individual's responses to phenomena such as racialised oppression. Across the NiC initiative the collective navigated various setbacks: the COVID pandemic, racialised structural exclusion that impacted core aspects of their vision, significant organisational change within their auspice partner. But also, individually each of the collective members navigated their other responsibilities, across other projects, as creatives, as students and workers, as community members, as family members. They navigated broader structural and social exclusion across many other contexts, and symbolic and structural violence directed at their communities. And they mobilised against this exclusion and violence. Collectively this takes a toll, and supporting each other's individual mental health and wellbeing was an important step in enacting collective care.

Care practices were also evident in the collective's interpersonal relationships with creative contributors to NiC:

...your best work is done when you're present, as an artist. You know what I mean? Like when you put an artist under pressure, sometimes they will just create. But that wouldn't be for the purpose for them, you know, creating with joy or with peace. So, it's kind of being more human, and not really seeing how...figuring out how to really be professional but at the same time looking at art and creativity as such a very

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vulnerable, very sensitive, you know, practice. And how you can, accommodate, and also at the same time... accepting that people have mental health issues, you know what I mean? People get affected mentally, so their processing changes, cause each artist has a different processing. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

The creative process is as important as the creative product. Care is fundamental to the collective's vision of self-determination, as it is an orientation towards a respect for individual *and* collective needs and wellbeing; care supports spaces where people can be vulnerable and create on their own terms. It reflects a mutual implication, and a recognition of difference, firmly grounded in the relationality embedded in NiC (Montero, 2007). This became a point of tension for NiC when different stakeholders such as funders and partners required deadlines to be met or were concerned with output and products at the expense of process. For the collective it became essential that despite this, care had to be embedded in their relationships with collaborators, whilst meeting the requirements imposed on them. The giving of time became one important act of care – whether time to create on one's own terms, or time away to heal and recover.

Practices of care were central to how the collective engaged with the stories that were shared within and through NiC, and ultimately entrusted to them. The way these stories were handled entailed a care and respect for the artist, and a consideration of the implications of mishandling someone's story:

Is the work being justified the way it's being positioned and the way it's being placed; you know what I mean? Are we justifying the story, you know what I mean? Are we creating a space where the story can exist and be safe? Where the story can exist and be read from the perspective of the artist? So, a lot of the stories, we didn't want to change a lot of it, you know what I mean. We didn't want to, you know, do a lot of

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that extra stuff, because it's like, those are not our stories, these are other artist' stories and our responsibilities as people who asked for these submissions...it's kinda like when you're doing an exhibition and you're putting artwork up. You don't just grab a frame with your hands or grab, you know what I mean, the printings with your hand like, there's a delicacy of it where it's like you have to wear equipment and stuff like that. There's a process and there's equipment, you know what I mean. So, it's displayed the way the artist wants it to be displayed. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

Here Nyaruot reflects on the process of working with other creatives' stories within The Colouring Book. In a context where stories of racialised and marginalised communities are often commodified by dominant groups, extracted and consumed, separated from the storyteller and mined for value, and used to reduce and constrain individual and collective subjectivities (Tuck, 2009). In such a context it becomes imperative to care for both the story and the storyteller. In this excerpt Nyaruot recognises both the power and fragility of stories, and the responsibility taken to handle those stories, respecting and honouring the storyteller. She also recognises that mishandling stories has implications for the safety of the story, the storyteller, and the communities the storyteller belongs to. The power stories hold to heal, create, and transform can also be misused to do the inverse; to aggravate wounds and reify dominant understandings (Delgado, 1989; Rappaport, 1995). Furthermore, alienation from one's own story can have profound and damaging psychosocial effects – and thus continues to be an effective tool of coloniality and white supremacy (Bulhan, 1985). Stories are more than just stories, and for the CBTL collective, they must be treated with care. As a collaborator on the Colouring Book shared:

...we are representing ourselves and for other people who resonate with the representations of art that we create... but we're not doing so for the sake of representation. We're doing so because it is vitally life changing for people to

experience, being mirrored, being validated, being given access to spaces where they can just do whatever they would like to do with their time and energy and talent.
(Aïsha, creative collaborator)

Communality and Interdependence

The Next in Colour initiative was created through strong relationships. It exists through strong relationships. And its work is predicated on the strengthening of relationships, on people coming together, and on fostering a sense of community. Communality, writes Dutta et al. (2021) drawing on the writing of Lugones (2015) is:

ways of being, knowing, and relating that are predicated on resisting oppressions, of “communal wanting, imagining, visioning, intending, and acting together...when intending is communal, the self that intends is communal”. Communality is both that starting point and the method for crafting and reclaiming stories that restore...people’s humanity. (p. 4)

Communality creates mutual forms of support that foster respite and restoration (Case & Hunter, 2012) and is an important interpersonal process towards liberation (Moane, 2003). The practices grounded in communality employed by CBTL and within NiC, reflect an orientation towards an ethic of relatedness (Montero, 2011). In the excerpt below, Ruth discusses the process of developing an edition of The Colouring Book zine, a creative project produced through NiC:

I definitely feel like The Colouring Book is a community arts project, because like you’re co-designing with an artist that is basically creating and facilitating how the work is going to be put together, and then you’re creating a space where you’re allowing other artists to come and submit, you know, their understanding or any work

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that reflects on what has been asked. And I think that, that is creating a sense of community because you're bringing people together. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

The Colouring Book was an extension of existing community spaces and existing relationships across African diaspora and BIPOC creative communities, while also being a space through which new connections could form. In this sense NiC is distinct from other creative spaces in which the intention is solely the production of creative outputs because the opportunities for community making that the creation of the setting engenders are of equal importance. As one individual affiliated with cohealth shared:

working as a collaborative group to create, to produce incredible work and to have a space to unpack... I saw [Next in Colour] as a space to come together as much as it was to do what we see in the public realm...it's zine making, it's creating the different ways of public programming, but it was really around the core of the conversation of collective making, thinking and creating. (Person affiliated with cohealth - 1)

Whilst the spaces the initiative created led to important and impactful outputs which the broader public were able to engage with, these works were necessitated and preceded by important acts of collective making and deconstructing of ideas. The emphasis on relationships and community-making is also captured below by Aïsha (creative collaborator):

what I've told you almost exemplifies the definition to me of true community arts. Not the way that the term is often used... like "we are an organisation that aims to serve this community...". But like, where people who are in relation with each other, who try to support each other, who are connected to each other and share, not only certain elements of our identities and our experiences, but we share place, we share resources. If I get low one time, sis I may need you for some money, and I may need you to come and look after [me] when I'm sick. Or we may need to work on this

conflict in our friendship circles together, I don't know, we're just in genuine community relationship with each other and we are arts workers. And those things combine, and [NiC] is the culmination of those things. And that's what defines it as community arts... Because if you took [NiC] out, we would still just be friends making zines and making art and coming to each other's exhibitions and contributing to our learning, contributing...to each other's discourse, each other's careers, just by virtue of being friends and in community. (Aïsha, creative collaborator)

Of note, the relationships – both existing and new - that existed within NiC, would precede and exist long after NiC. NiC fosters communalism, but the setting was also formed through existing community relationships and an existing orientation to communalism within these relationships. This also reflects the approaches fostered within the Arts Generator discussed in the oral histories shared in Chapter 4. As one creative collaborator described, NiC is part of a “collective effort of space-making that’s happening in a lot of different communities in different ways and different spaces...people mobilising with their peers and their friends” (Aïsha, creative collaborator). The members of CBTL and other creatives they collaborated with named similar spaces and collectives such as Still Nomads and Akoma Ntoso as community sites that supported their own relationships to one-another. Thus, NiC serves as an infrastructure that sits around existing relationships and facilitates new connections – a way of organising, building, and mobilising resources. As Aïsha notes: “I think it’s about us literally ageing and getting access and building the skills and capacity to take on and demand and seek out these resources to establish things”. NiC represents a means to create opportunities, build community power and contribute to structural inclusion within the creative industries. Yet, the essence of NiC is the relationships that constitute it. If the infrastructure were to be removed, these relationships would endure, and communities would seek to enact self-determination in different ways and through different spaces.

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Many CBTL members and their collaborators described community as an interdependent “ecosystem... a self-operating system...It’s made up of individuals that are... Adding in or taking in something... it’s an ongoing ecosystem that keeps building” (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach). This understanding of community reflected how they understood connection and a sense of belonging to their own communities, but also informed the practices of community making and collective working they employed. The NiC initiative itself was a setting that was “aiming to build or contribute to an ecosystem that already exists of African artists, of artists of colour in the area that we are in” (Aïsha, creative collaborator). In this way NiC was fundamentally connected to community. Neither the initiative, nor the collective members, were separate entities that act on or is acted upon by community but were instead bound in interdependent relationships oriented towards mutual support and building of resources (Trickett et al., 2000). This interdependence shaped how the CBTL collective organised themselves:

because if I look at my colleagues, and the rest of the collective that are in CBTL, I'm not who I am without them, and they're not who they are without me, especially if we're working together. We all need each other to be able to make this work and to be able to make it happen. That accountability that, you need to do this in order for this to actually work, because it's not a one-man job, and we've all understood that.

(Anyuop Dau)

As a collective, CBTL adopted a non-hierarchical participatory structure, with dynamic shared roles, and transparent communication processes. Various collective members described themselves as being interdependent, rather than individual creatives working together. They emphasised the mutual learning that occurred, as they shared skills and developed each-other's capacities.

Change as Emergent

For the CBTL collective, practices and processes were emergent. Emergence can be used to describe the way complex systems evolve and take shape from multiple, small and simple connections (Obolensky cited in Maree Brown, 2017). Some have taken this concept and applied it to think about how broader social change occurs through small actions, which are grounded in relationality and connection, and that are adaptive, interdependent and intentional (Maree Brown, 2017; Wheatley & Freize, 2006). What the collective produced and how they produced it was grounded in a reflexive and responsive praxis informed by changing contexts and salient encounters and events. One illustrative example lies in how the collective conceptualised their *theory of change*. Part of the requirements of the funding that NiC received was for the collective to attend a half-day workshop run by a “leading practitioner of theory of change” (Moss, n.d.) from the United States. One of the collective members attended, along with an individual working within cohealth at the time whose role was to support the initiative, and myself to document the process. Here the individual affiliated with cohealth describes:

we went to that theory of change workshop, that dude being flown in from the US, had zero context, didn't seem to be concerned by the fact that he had zero context...they kind of expected that this guy who was an expert would be able to just like, distil all this information into this theory of change that would hold for the initiative and might be tweaked a little bit by the creators involved, but it just seemed like the processes they envisioned to come up with a worthwhile evaluation framework just didn't match at all the reality of what Colour Between the Lines are trying to achieve. ...I guess they wanted this neat theory of change of how Colour Between the Lines was going to achieve outcomes around social cohesion and gender equity. That basically would also have limited their understanding of all the amazing

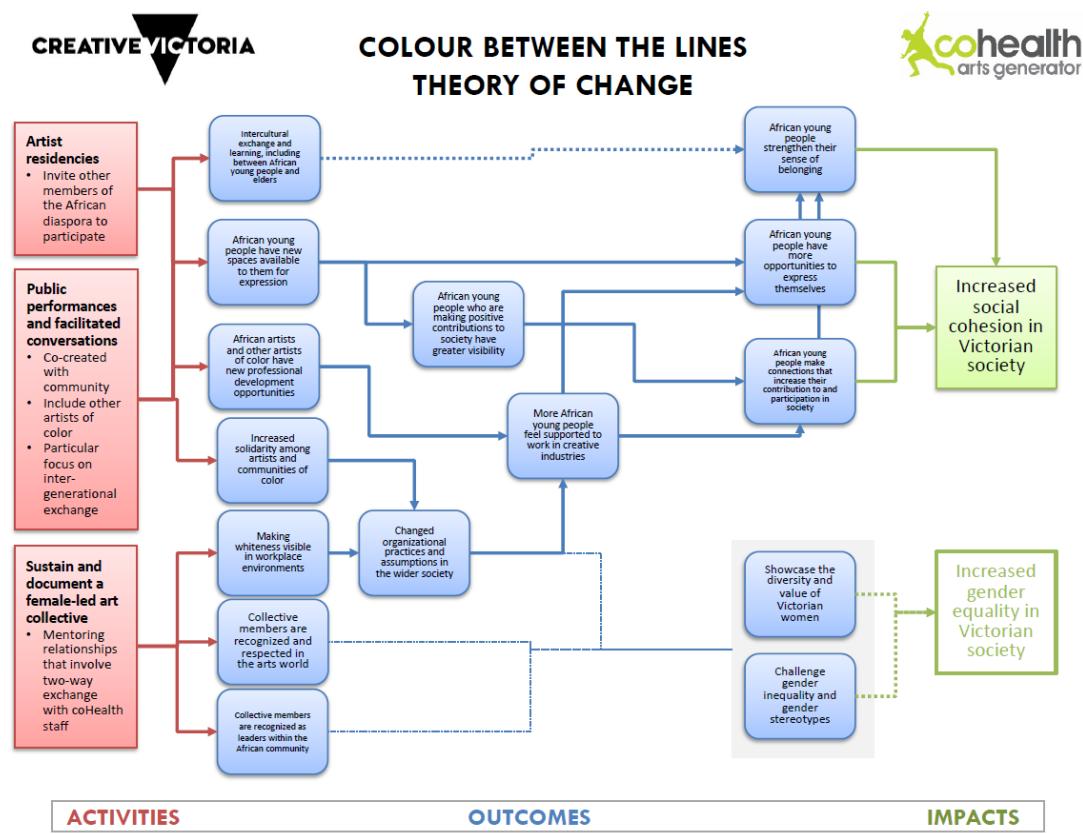
outcomes ...I remember...Nyaruot was talking about it and I was trying to explain as well to this TEDx American expert, the importance of just the space and having a space. And that just didn't seem to compute. They were...like, 'Okay, you got a space and then what?' It's like well... Then all of these things happen in that space for people who are often denied spaces where they can be an explorer and connect all these things. (Person affiliated with cohealth - 1)

The Creative Victoria grant was oriented to targeting key focus areas. The NiC initiative would need to address impact goals of increased social cohesion and increased gender equality in Victorian society. Through the Theory of Change workshop, the collective was directed by a consultant, with little contextual and historical understanding, to develop a logic model with a discrete and linear pathway through which the impact goals were to be attained. This was indicative of a recurring dynamic for the collective, in the ways that broader deficit narratives named in the previous chapter positioned their knowledge and ways of working as inferior. Despite their deep understanding, grounded in lived experience, of how to support and engage their communities, other knowledges are legitimated and positioned as superior. A dynamic that will be examined more closely in the following chapter.

Figure 3 shows the original draft that was formulated within the workshop.

Figure 3

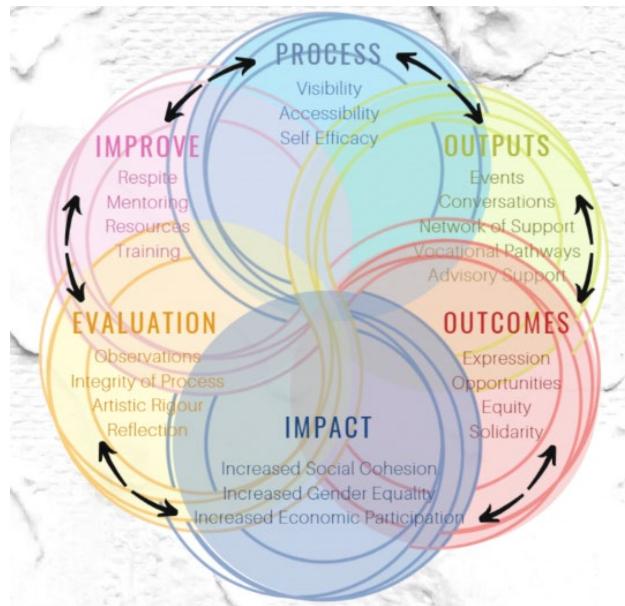
Theory of Change Developed in the Creative Victoria Workshop



However, for the collective this linear approach to developing a Theory of Change didn't reflect how they understood NiC – an understanding that saw the initiative as emergent, interdependent and cyclical. The collective spent time shaping an alternative way of thinking about the initiative and the work they had set out to do, which is represented in Figure 4.

Figure 4

Cyclical Theory of Change Proposed by CBTL



This model does not reflect the later evolutions of NiC but is important in that it captures a tension between a static and linear model of change that was imposed on the collective, and the emergent cyclical model that the collective articulated. Fixing the initiative to a Theory of Change logic model and sets of specific impact goals acted to firstly constrain the possibilities of the initiative, but also was incongruent with the responsive, reflexive and community-led ways of working that the CBTL collective engaged in. Importantly, fixing the initiative to a set of specific outcomes also fixes the initiative to a set of specific deliverables and measures for the evaluation of success. NiC would be shaped by many things: their network of relationships, the constraints they encountered, the COVID-19 pandemic, but ultimately, they responded to the needs of their communities:

...it's not just about us, it's about other people. When we sit down on a table, and we talk about our plans, and our projects, and what we really want out of CBTL in the future, it's not about just what we want too, it's about what the community wants, and how we can actually best do that for them in a procedure where everybody is happy with the outcome. (Anyuop Dau)

The Next in Colour initiative is fundamentally oriented to meeting the needs of the communities of the African diaspora. The collective holds a desire to give back the community; to provide a resource for future generations; to support the many spaces, groups and people that have supported them. This for CBTL was the priority that took precedence over government policy goals captured in the funding stipulations – and could not be captured in static conceptualisations of what they would do.

An example of emergence is also captured in how some projects came to be within NiC. This can be illustrated by Anyuop describing the Colour.Cut.Pic project which she developed and led:

I was visiting the lab every Wednesday last year, for a couple of months, and just participating in the workshop that was run by...the Arts Gen team. I was coming to that and helping them with it. I had a couple of girls, and...they used to come to the programs, but they didn't think that the program fit them. They thought the whole lab idea is really cool. They'd come there, they'd hang out, but they wanted programs that... they would get involved in. One of the girls asked me if she could do painting, do some fashion stuff. I was like, "Cool." So [the Arts Generator Artist Facilitator] came to me, and he said, "We should just implement some of that, get you on board, and you can facilitate that." That's really how it came about, and then we just connected that with CBTL because I was part of that at the time. From there, I spoke to [Geskeva]. [Geskeva] was like, "Yes, cool. We have enough budget for that, so let's kick it off." (Anyuop Dau)

Developing this project took a bottom-up and responsive approach. It did not presuppose a need by creating a program or a space, which then must be filled with participants. It supported spaces and ideas emerging through embeddedness within the community, listening

to what people needed and shifting resources to support that happening. This process itself becomes a key outcome: being listened to, being supported, and being valued have hugely important psychosocial benefit for individuals and plays an integral part in creating space (Prilleltensky, 2019).

Thus, the collective placed an emphasis on process, as a counter to the preoccupation with products and outputs and restrictive and individualistic ways of working that are emblematic of neoliberal capitalist creative industries (Watts, 2017). This emphasis recognises that how things are produced is *as* important as what is produced:

...one of the things that we want to change is how people look at process. It's not just the product, we want to change the processes. The structure that we want to build is about process because the process is what defines how things are accessible. How language and certain tools, and things like that, how they've been built, and in what way that certain things have been built because somewhere along the way, that process of things went left. (Geskeva Komba)

It was important to not only think about how they got to the products, how they could reimagine ways of working or deconstruct exclusionary systems and structures, but also it was important that this was recognised as how an initiative such as NiC ultimately works to create impact. Process as outcome is a prefiguration that maintains the integrity of what is envisioned through radical imagination.

Creating Cultural Resources

Creative mediums can create an aesthetic distance, a traversal between fiction and reality, which enables conditions for both resonance and critical reflection - and the surfacing of opportunities for solidarity (Agung-Igusti & Sonn, 2020). The insertion of counter-stories into public discursive space can work to unsettle the comfort dominant groups find in stock

stories (Bell, 2010; Maxwell & Sonn, 2020; Quayle, Sonn & Kasat, 2016). Such unsettling challenges the complacency and wilful ignorance of dominant groups that perpetuates and is perpetuated by deficient collective hermeneutical resources and “ethically bad affective investments in negatively stereotyping another group” (Dotson, 2012, p. 27). The broadening of repertoires of representation from which to construct our understandings of the world, create new possibilities for thought and action for differently positioned groups. For some this becomes the basis of solidarity and recognition, for others, such interventions into the public sphere are less welcome. However, the presences of these counter-stories and narratives grounded in lived experience serve to highlight the incongruences and absences that have been intimately felt by communities of the African diaspora in Australia - and become much harder to deny when surfaced in public space and preserved in archival work.

Through the relational processes and counter-practices that were mobilised within the NiC setting, powerful cultural resources and counter-stories were created and shared by the collective and creatives they collaborated with and supported. These cultural resources were created across a range of projects such as a digital zine titled *The Colouring Book*, online platforms where the collective and other creatives’ work and projects were shared and promoted, a short film entitled *BLVCK GOLD*, a photography exhibition entitled *40 Days, 40 Nights*, not to mention the spaces for skill development and critical conversations that were facilitated through NiC. What follows are some the counter-stories that ran through the body of creative work – the images, sounds, film and text - shared across the spaces NiC created, that challenged dominant cultural narratives and discourses that constrained subjectivity (Rappaport, 1995). Visual and other creative methods offer multiple vantage points to unravel the meanings that are shared through these various cultural resources (Segalo, 2018) and are a powerful mode of theorising from below (Watego, 2021). These were counter-stories that affirmed identities, and recovered histories, ancestral knowledge. Counter-stories of *self-love*

and the celebration of black bodies; recognition of diverse African identities; ancestral continuity, strength and survivance; and centreing Indigenous sovereignty. These counter-stories provide people with alternative resources for subjectivities and collective identities, creating opportunities to assert complex personhood and affirm one's being. These stories, across their varied platforms and mediums, also radiate beyond the communities of the African diaspora, as public pedagogy and sites of intercultural contact. Other research has shown the ways differently positioned audiences engage with such stories in acts of witnessing (Agung-igusti & Sonn, 2020; Maxwell & Sonn, 2020; Sonn et al., 2019).

Self-love and the Celebration of Black Bodies

Counter-stories of self-love and the celebration of black bodies rejects dominant conceptions of beauty derived from white norms. Figure 5 shows portraits that are a subversion of the classic oil painting by Dutch painter Johannes Vermeer, *Girl with a Pearl Earring* that depicts a young white European girl – often described as beautiful – staring past her shoulder to the viewer.

Figure 5

“Homegirl with Hoop Earrings” by Ruth Nyaruot Ruach



Note. Located in the first edition of The Colouring Book Zine: “And So the Story Goes...” presented and produced by Next in Colour and Sha-Gaze Whomanifestations. Accessible here: <https://www.nextincolour.com/and-so-the-story-goes>

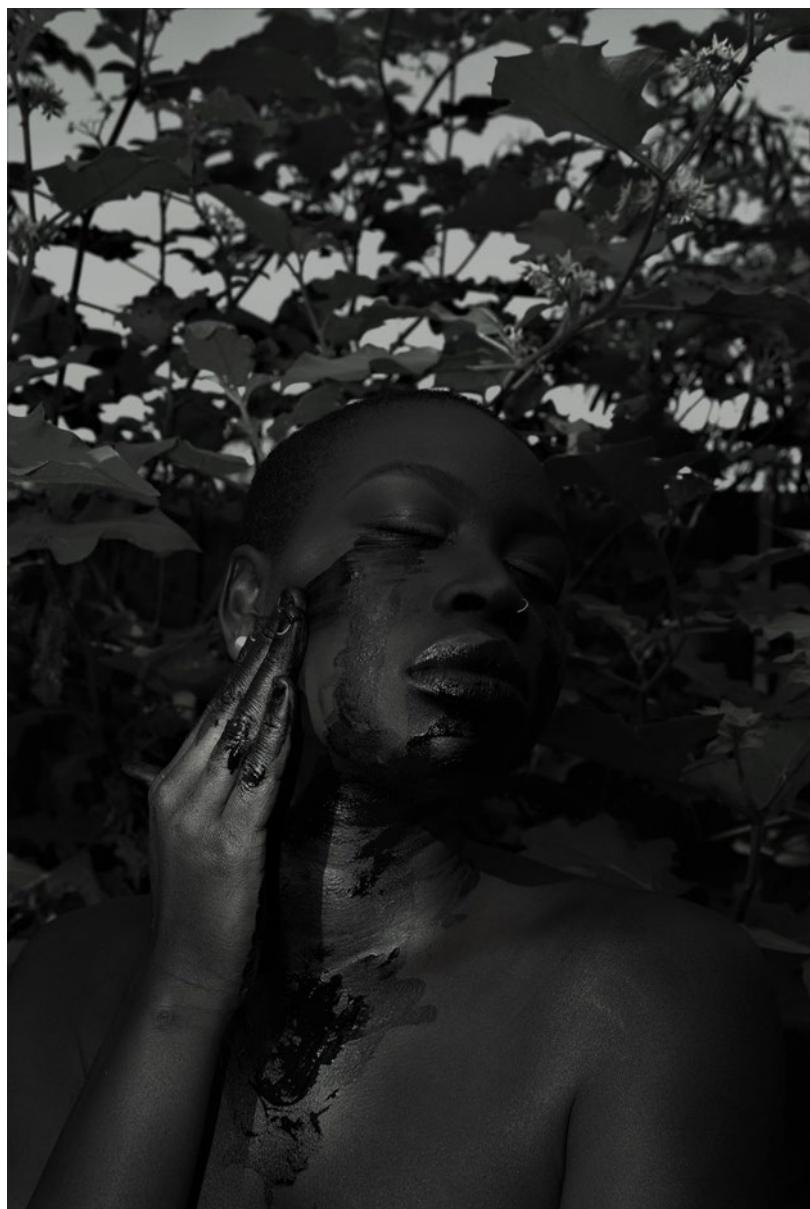
In Ruth Nyaruot Ruach’s photo portraits the model is instead a black woman. This piece is reminiscent of Awol Erizku’s photo *Girl with a Bamboo Earring* (2009), itself appropriating the original work to counter depictions of beauty and representations of blackness in art history and culture more broadly (Phillips, 2017). However, there is a striking difference in Ruach’s model who bares her blackness across the nakedness of her neck, shoulders and the top of her chest (which are covered in both the original painting and Erizku’s work). Additionally, in Ruth’s version, *Homegirl with the Hoop Earrings*, the pearl earring is replaced by a gold hoop – reflecting a contemporary aesthetic. Ruth’s work also speaks back to the way black women are represented in art (ARTS, n.d.), in dialogue with pieces such as Erizku, but connecting it with her present context. Bared skin is featured in other pieces of

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Ruach's work reflecting an exploration of the black female body (Audrey Journal, n.d.), this theme can also be seen in the photo in Figure 6:

Figure 6

Photo by Ruath Nyaruot Ruach



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Note. Located in the first edition of The Colouring Book Zine “And So the Story Goes...” presented and produced by Next in Colour and Sha-Gaze Whomanifestations. Accessible here: <https://www.nextincolour.com/and-so-the-story-goes>

Here the monochrome medium highlights the model’s black body and the viewer’s attention is focussed by the smearing of what seems to be black paint across her face, neck, and chest. In both pieces Ruth’s emphasis of the body as subject, entails a celebration of blackness.

Other work shared in *The Colouring Book* zine, counters colourism experienced from outside and within black and African diaspora communities. Colourism can be understood as “prejudicial or preferential treatment of same race people based solely on their colour” (Walker, 1983, p. #). It can take the form of a greater valuing of both lighter black skin or darker black skin, reflecting cultural and social contexts and histories – and like other forms of discrimination, has harmful psychosocial impacts and translates to structural inequities (Craddock et al., 2018) and constrained subjectivities (Mama, 2002). In the below excerpt (see Figure 7) taken from *Return What is Mine* by Akwal Magek, the poem addresses a romantic partner who has “stripped away [her] self-esteem, self-worth, and self-love” through their valuing of lighter skin over her darker skin:

Figure 7

Excerpt from “Return What is Mine” by Akwal Magek

I thought you said you loved my melanin? No, what you meant was.

You love the idea of my melanin, it is just a bit too much melanin for you.

You love that Milk Chocolate with a whole lot of milk type of melanin.

That honey glazed type of melanin.

That brown sugar type of melanin.

Because when you say melanin, you are not thinking about me.

Note. Located in the first edition of The Colouring Book Zine “And So the Story Goes...” presented and produced by Next in Colour and Sha-Gaze Whomanifestations. Accessible here: <https://www.nextincolour.com/and-so-the-story-goes>

In the poem Akwal Magek recognises the beauty of her dark skin and also recognises the boundaries of complicity that are traversed: “I’ve been angry at girls for bleaching. When I should have been furious at you”. The rebuke in this poem reflects not just her own experience but those imagined other women – and their imagined daughters - who have and will internalise these same beauty standards. The poem speaks of the author’s emerging consciousness, towards her own internalised oppression, the sources of oppression, and how cultural violence can be transferred intergenerationally. In connecting individual experience to a collective shared experience, the poem seeks to form solidarities, and to create a different experience for future generations.

In the poem excerpt (see Figure 8) by Fatma Hussein, the writer also begins a dialogue between generations. Here the writer speaks to a memory of her younger self, laying out her own personal journey of love and care for her self, her image, her body, and her hair – and in doing so offers an alternative for current and future generations:

Figure 8

Excerpt from a Poem by Fatma Hussein

I found myself into a reality that taught me about nourishment, how to care for my 4c, how my coiled curls run so deep my mother sings your hair is rich and beautiful, how each time my mahogany was stripped away from me I claimed it right back, each time, and every, other time even, when my voice was choked out of me upon stolen lands,

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Note. Located in the first edition of The Colouring Book Zine “And So the Story Goes...” presented and produced by Next in Colour and Sha-Gaze Whomanifestations. Accessible here: <https://www.nextincolour.com/and-so-the-story-goes>

Here 4c refers to a system of identifying natural curly hair types. The category of 4 represents the curliest hair and is representative of most black hair types (Day & Baba, 2018), and the sub-category of c refers to hair with the tightest curls, also known as *kinky* hair. In Fatma’s poem, self-love and her mother’s love are connected to love and care for her hair, and in turn, her hair is fundamentally connected to her blackness and her identity. In caring for her hair, she enacts self-love and a valuing of her identity and blackness. This self-love is an act of resistance, a reclamation, when her blackness and her voice are stripped away. Hair is an important site where racialised oppression is played out. Natural black hair, within the context of white settler colonial contexts, is often constructed as inappropriate, messy or unprofessional, symbolic of the discourses of deficit evoked by ideologies of race. Internalised oppression has birthed a politics of hair and shame that entails the management of natural black hair to better reflect white standards (MbiliShaka et al., 2020). However, at the same time natural black hair also becomes exoticised and appropriated. It becomes an object to be touched, or transformed into wigs for minstrel-esque costumes, or hairstyles with deep cultural roots become appropriated, decontextualised and assigned value when worn by non-black people (Dabiri, 2019). In Fatma Hussein’s poem, her hair evokes these battles, but also connects her deeply to her identity, her family, her ancestors, her cultural history, and her journey of becoming.

Images and narratives that constrain subjectivities and limit the identities available are not only imposed onto communities of the African diaspora through the ideals of hegemonic whiteness, but also can take shape from within those same communities (however, still in dialogue with dominant representations shaped by coloniality). Next in Colour, importantly,

sought to also create spaces for marginalised voices within the African diaspora. To contribute to the visibility of those who might otherwise be unheard or unseen. This is reflected in creative work that depicts a range of bodies, and is perhaps most evident in the images, an example is shown in Figure 9, created by Sha-Gaze Whoman-ifestations:

Figure 9

Image “Body is Beauty” by Sha-Gaze Whomanifestations



Note. Located in the first edition of The Colouring Book Zine “And So the Story Goes...” presented and produced by Next in Colour and Sha-Gaze Whomanifestations. Accessible here: <https://www.nextincolour.com/and-so-the-story-goes>

Sha-gaze’s work troubles binaried categories of masculine/feminine and normative beauty standards. Their work celebrates the diversity of shapes and sizes and locates beauty as the

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body itself. The text that accompanies the above image “BODY IS BEAUTY”, is perhaps a proclamation that all bodies are beautiful, that beauty cannot be divorced from the human form, that our bodies are inherently beautiful. Sha-Gaze’s work depicts myriad representations of black bodies and faces, each with different hair, different shapes, and different colours, and each in states of contentment or joy.

Whether responding to dominant representations of black bodies as ugly or lesser than imposed by standards of white supremacy, or lateral cultural violence and internalised oppression from within black and African diaspora communities, or patriarchal conceptions of femininity and the imposition of gender norms, Next in Colour contributed to powerful counter-stories that depicted enactments of self-love through the celebration of diverse black bodies. These counter-stories were formed through engaging with a range of feminist, queer and black radical discourses that offer new subjective ways of being (Mama, 2002). Collectively these counter-stories constitute a powerful resource for current and future generations to see their own bodies represented and valued in affirming ways, rather than stigmatised or objectified.

Recognition of Diverse Black and African Identities

Our physical bodies cannot be disconnected from the identities we hold, nor our subjective experience of the world. Particularly for those whose bodies are racialised. Next in Colour surfaced and created counter-stories that not only sought to transform people’s relationships with their own bodies, but also sought to challenge the dominant narratives that constrict what identities are available for people of African heritage in Australia. These are counter-stories that recognise the multitude and diversity of African identities, of different ways of being in the world, of different possibilities for the self – and also creating new ways of being. This represents both an unsettling of singular representations of Africanness, but also surfaces new identity positions and unsettles hegemonies of gender, sexuality and ability.

One important example lies in a project supported and promoted by Next in Colour entitled *African Kings*. The project is a mini-series directed by Mariam Koslay that:

illustrates the depth of young African men in Australia today. In an attempt to show positive and timely representations of young African men, the show will feature African men from across the world sharing their views. (Next in Colour Instagram Post)

In the excerpt below, Mariam is interviewed about the project by CBTL member Ruth Nyaruot Ruach in a Q+A that was shown live on the NiC Instagram space. Mariam describes how the project challenges constricting dominant narratives such as:

that if you're a black man, you're stigmatised as a drug dealer, as a ball player or a sports player or an athlete or a model or a musician. There's nothing wrong with that because these are all creative outlets, these are all ways that we express ourselves but there are so many other different types of black men here, in Victoria, and broadly in Australia. I was just like, why don't I create a series of profiles, short videos, of different black men from different stages of their life talking about what it means for them to be a brother or a son or a father or an uncle or a neighbour and his experiences and different age groups and different professions. I also want this series to challenge this idea of what it means to be black because when we talk about black people, we often start and stop at the continent when actually those of African descent still experience a lot of the challenges that black people experience. I want the series to open up the conversation about what does it mean to be a black man? It doesn't have to be from the continent. I want people ... As the series continues, we want people from the Caribbean, of African American descent, those of African descent that have been displaced. (Mariam Koslay – Creative Collaborator)

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The project seeks to challenge the limited depictions of blackness and expand the range of masculinities available to black men. Further, it seeks to explore conceptions of blackness and masculinity from various cultural contexts, the African continent, the United States, and the African diaspora more broadly. Showing the linkages between culture and identity making, and that black identity cannot be homogenised. This challenges hegemonic black identities across different cultural contexts, whether for example, African migrants within Australia, Caribbean migrants in the UK, or dominant notions of blackness predicated on the African American experience (Asante et al., 2016). This expansiveness creates opportunities to recognise similarities across experiences, but also to recognise difference, and affirm the complex personhood of people of African heritage (Gordon, 1997).

One key creative work that emerged from NiC, unsettling dominant narratives that circulate about the African diaspora in Australia, was the film *BLVCK GOLD*. Filmed and produced by CBTL collective members Ez Eldin Deng and Geskeva Komba, in collaboration with writer Ras-Samuel Welda'abzgi and Sami Obama studios, the film was created in the wake of the global Black Lives Matter protests and the lockdown in 2020 due to COVID-19 of high-rise public housing estates located in Flemington in Naarm's (Melbourne's) North, that was home to many families of African heritage. Ez Eldin Deng describes the film's story as "allowing us to present different faces of African Australians, young men, old, as well as women, and children" (MAV, n.d.). The film follows a young man, Tino, who encounters a childhood friend, Frederick, who tries to give him a mysterious and seemingly dangerous object that he has been trying to distribute (see Figure 10). The film itself is set in the Flemington high-rise public housing estate (see Figure 11), also colloquially known as the Flemington Flats. Dominant constructions of the Flemington Flats cast it as a dangerous place, filled with poverty and violence, and inhabited by dangerous *others*. Yet in *BLVCK GOLD*, the Flemington Flats are shown to be a place of family, community and home. In one

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scene the Flat's diverse inhabitants are gathered outside near the entrance to cook, eat and dance together. There are close-ups of tea and food from the African diaspora and the scene depicts shared joy and community as people laugh together and children run around playing. This not only resists the negative constructions of the Flemington Flats that are circulated, but it also humanises the people and families that inhabit it.

Figure 10.

Tino and Frederick – Still from BLVCK GOLD



The object that Frederick is trying to distribute is seemingly dangerous, as we see Tino's refusal to take it, and later we are confronted with Tino's assault by a white police officer who threatens that he knows "what your mates are dealing". By the film's conclusion we learn that this dangerous object, to be controlled and kept away from the film's protagonists and their community, is knowledge. The object, until now always concealed in

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parcels and boxes, is in fact books representing the knowledge through which people of African heritage can self-determine and find liberation from oppression. The film connects its vision of liberation and self-determination to many seminal sources. Earlier Frederick's partner tells their child:

Now there's some heroes I want you to know about that made our beloved continent beautiful. The first person is Patrice Lumumba...Then Wangari Maathai. Kwame Nkrumah. There's nothing that you can't be. There's nothing that can't be done. These people fought for what was right.

Each hero named: African activists, revolutionaries, independence leaders. The knowledge that takes the form of books, which Tino agrees to distribute with Frederick, one represented through a book by Frederick Douglass, an American man who escaped slavery and became a leader in the abolitionist movement; the other is a book adorned with the African proverb, that cautions against the path of least resistance: "a fool goes where the water diverts it".

Figure 11.

Tino at the Flats – Still from BLVCK GOLD



In the final scenes, Tino gives his sister a parcel of books, and says:

You did good today sis, I'm proud of you. These are the words of Frederick Douglas, you see he knew the only way to freedom was through knowledge, this is what our father was trying to give to us before they took him away and this was the first weapon dad equipped me with. He told me until the lion learns to write every story will glorify the hunter. (BLVCK GOLD)

The final scene, overlaid with a monologue by Frederick proclaiming “freedom as birthright”, depicts the main characters and their families, posed regally as if for a portrait. They are dignified, strong, and proud, as Frederick proclaims, “do thee know thou art black gold”. The film creates a powerful counter-story that draws on both African and African American histories of resistance and liberation and shows the African diaspora in Australia as the inheritors of this lineage and collective story. Knowledge is both weapon and key, from knowledge collective consciousness can emerge, solidarities form (a brief scene shows the

abusive police officers partner encountering the *knowledge* and being enlightened in the process), and subjectivities transformed.

These counter-stories work to centre lived experience and interrupt dominant narratives; they are important cultural resources from which new and complex subjectivities can emerge. The insertion of these counter-stories into the epistemic economies of our social worlds engage decolonial aesthetics and provide important meanings for how others come to “know” people of African heritage in Australia, and how they come to know themselves (Agung-Igusti & Sonn, 2020). To tell and to listen to stories are fundamentally healing processes and acts of psychic self-preservation whereby psychic space is expanded through the expansion of social and cultural space (Sonn et al., 2013). Storytelling precipitates the development of collective consciousness as the threads of individual stories are woven into a shared understanding that provides a framework for understanding the systemic antecedents of racialised oppression and structural exclusion (Delgado, 1989; Martín-Baró, 1994).

Ancestral Continuity, Strength and Survivance

Another powerful counter-story evident across the creative works that emerged through NiC related to ancestral continuity, strength and survivance. The film *BLVCK GOLD*, depicted above, draws heavily on the sense of lineage – both ancestral and in the liberatory actions that story the collective history of the African continent and diaspora. From the naming of African heroes; the use of African proverbs; the visual representation of African prints and clothing, food and drink, and the beads that are always in Frederick’s hands; these construct a shared pan-African cultural history. Further, the film draws linkages between Tino’s father, the ancestral past; Tino, the present; and Tino’s younger sister, the future generation. Each contributing to collective resistance and the passing on of knowledge, working to create a better future for the next generation and to remember culture and history despite contexts of displacement, migration and symbolic and structural violence.

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This sense of continuity was also captured in *40 Days – A Journey Back in Memory*, an exhibition of collective member Ez Eldin Deng's photography. In the excerpt below, taken from an interview on the radio show *Diaspora Blues* (www.3cr.org.au/diasporablues), Ez Eldin shares the inspiration for the exhibition, to capture his recent trip back to his ancestral lands of South Sudan:

I went back to South Sudan in Africa... for the first time and then when I went there first of all I had a culture shock, I'd never been there since I was a little kid and... I was intrigued seeing so many black people in one place, you know what I mean, and everybody is walking around with their heads up, everybody was wearing colourful clothes, music, cars all over the place. So for me it was unreal, so after one week I was like "I'm just gonna start taking photographs...it was healing for me, also it will be a way for me to connect with the young people who are living in Australia who have never been to Southern Sudan before who lost their cultural identity, who lost their sense of belonging, but through those photographs they get to see themselves and hopefully they will connect. (Chuol & Ayan, 2021)

Disconnection from historical and cultural memory has profound effects, especially when harmful dominant narratives constrain subject formation (Fanon, 1967). In the excerpt above, photography was an important healing practice for Ez Eldin to reengage with ancestral place and a vision of the world where he did not exist as a racialised other. But it also was an important medium, a mediational tool (Wertsch, 2017), to convey this same sense of belonging and identity to young South Sudanese people in Australia . His photography was not only a story of connection to ancestral place, but of migration and diaspora - connecting past and present. It acts as a *psychosocial mnemonic* where “storytelling facilitates memory recall and its articulation, comes to restructure and shape such memories and their articulation

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and indeed dialectically serves to reinforce and ‘create’ such memories” (Sonn et al., 2013, p. 296).

Figure 12.

Photograph by Ez Eldin Deng



Note. This photo was part of the “40 Days – A Journey Back in Memory” exhibition

The photos showed Ez Eldin’s village in Aweil, and depicted the land, the buildings, and the people. Scenes of a mother with her child, or as shown in Figure 12, one boy facing the camera while another looks on – a truck driving past behind them. These are representations, for some, of home, and for others, ancestral place. These are representations that evoke memories or serve as an affirmation of imagined places that some may have never seen or have been too young to remember.

Figure 13 is an excerpt from a spoken word piece by collective member Geskeva Komba that was showcased through Next in Colour:

Figure 13.

“Name the Word” by Geskeva Komba

Geskeva

Meaning:

Removing the suffrage of being alone

I am because you are
A reality that is stronger than any dream we could ever have
Because you are an affinity so strong it's in the world so deep
Because you are one of the foundations for the vision of us standing together for radical change

You are because I am
Able to find peace amongst others who have the same vision
Because I am the reflection you had dreamed of for you had faith
Because I am the child of a nation of beasts that aren't weak
Because I am the future you saw grow with hope for a better tomorrow
Because I am continuing that long walk to freedom side by side with kin
Because I am part of a generation who will always speak
Because I am one of the single bursts of liberation that you saw when you were alone
Because I am empowered by your grace and the courage of our people
Because I am one of thousands of beacons that'll bring all that havoc that you could not reap
I am because you are and you are because I am

Note. Full spoken word recording available at <https://www.nextincolour.com/virtual-spotlight>.

The piece’s premise is to show the meaning of the artists name, Geskeva. It evokes ancestral and cultural memory, speaking back to family and community, a sense of lineage. It evokes a strength, grace and courage that is carried on across time. It evokes an interconnectedness and communal, in which radical change and collective action is grounded in. The line “the child of a nation of beasts” is reminiscent of the words of Fela Kuti (1989) and connects into a rich history of African art and resistance. Embodied here is self-determination, history, excellence, self-love and complex personhood within a piece that is deeply personal and reflective of individual story, yet offers a mirror for others to see their own stories in.

The counter-stories described here are not apart from one-another. To root oneself in ancestral history, find strength from this rootedness and work to preserve cultural memory, contributes to the collective resources of identity-making available to communities of the African diaspora. It is in this recovery of collective memory an understanding of the present and vision of the future manifests (Segalo, 2018). What is reflected across these stories is survivance, a term used by Anishanaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor, to describe something that is for Indigenous people more than resistance, and “more than survival or mere response; an active repudiation of dominance, tragedy, and victimry” (1998, p. 15). Survivance is generative, an active survival, not just merely existing but a re-existence (Walsh, 2021). It speaks to the reclamation of cultural memory that is then reimagined through new forms of cultural production – and so too for the African diaspora in Australia the notion of survivance positions them as replete in their strength and achievement rather than as victims merely subsisting.

Centring Indigenous Sovereignty

A final counter-story to be shared here, is one that centres Indigenous sovereignty. The African diaspora are indigenous people that have been dislocated or migrated from their ancestral homelands, building homes and futures elsewhere. Dominant narratives within settler colonial Australia construct migrant belonging in relation to an imagined white polity and citizenry (Hage, 1998), ignoring Indigenous sovereignty over land and country. January 26, a day that marks the invasion of Australia, is instead known as Australia Day and is a celebration of this dispossession. It is also on this day that ceremonies are held in which migrants to Australia pledge their commitment to the nation and are bestowed with citizenship and the legal right that this entails. Across the creative work within NiC, there are counter-stories that recognises Indigenous sovereignty and what it means to migrate to stolen lands – unsettling a sense of belonging predicated on assimilation to whiteness.

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Counter-stories that centred Indigenous sovereignty were evident in the collectives' outward engagement across social media, for example, in the collective's communications and organising through NiC connected to the Black Lives Matters protests in Australia - a site of solidarity for people of African descent and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, both of which are subject to racialisation and violence within Australia. The following image, Figure 14, below shows a post to the NiC Instagram page, a collage with images of black resistance and a prominent sign displaying "YOU ARE LIVING ON STOLEN LAND". The accompanying text recognises the traditional name of the land they are based, the traditional owners of the land, the ongoing struggles of Indigenous activists, and their relationship and responsibility towards coloniality in Australia as non-Indigenous people.

Figure 14.

Next in Colour Instagram Post "You are Living on Stolen Land"



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This crafts a sense of belonging that holds Indigenous sovereignty at the centre and recognises that the work CBTL do to support self-determination within their own communities, must both support and respect the self-determination of First Nations communities.

Whilst NiC was primarily concerned with supporting self-determination, representation and structural inclusion for communities of the African diaspora in Australia, the initiative also sought to form solidarities by supporting and collaborating with Indigenous creatives. For example, The Colouring Book zine explicitly sought to include Indigenous voices in each of its edition – its stated goals to “deconstruct... bla(c)k⁵ and brown existence”. Figure 15, below is an excerpt that accompanied a song by Ngiyampaa singer/songwriter Pirritu (Brett Lee). The work speaks to the experiences of invasion, dispossession, and colonisation, and to the ongoing nature of this violence:

Figure 15.

Accompanying Text to “Ngurrampa” by Pirritu – Brett Lee

“Here is a song called Ngurrampa, which is the Ngiyampaa word for Country. So this is a response to the Family category. The direct translation to English is camp world, but we Ngiyampaa people use it to talk about our, land, our country: Our Home. It is a response to the colonial impacts on our Ngurrampa. A phrases that an old Ngiyampaa Aunty used to say was “Ngurrampa, where are you?”. She was one of the last few Ngiyampaa people who watched the deterioration of our lands as the invasion of colonisation slowly creped in further and further until Ngurrampa was unrecognisable to her cohort.”

— PIRRITU - BRETT LEE

⁵ The term blak, originally used by Aboriginal artist Destiny Deacon in 1994, has come to be used to differentiate between the racialised experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities of colour (Latimore, 2021).

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Note. Located in the first edition of The Colouring Book Zine “And So the Story Goes...” presented and produced by Next in Colour and Sha-Gaze Whomanifestations. Accessible here: <https://www.nextincolour.com/and-so-the-story-goes>

The second edition of The Colouring Book also opened with the following statement, shown in Figure 16, in the black, yellow and red of the Aboriginal flag:

Figure 16.

Acknowledgement of Country in the Second Edition of The Colouring Book Zine



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Note. Located in the second edition of The Colouring Book Zine “Support” presented and produced by NiC and Aïsha Trambas. Accessible here:

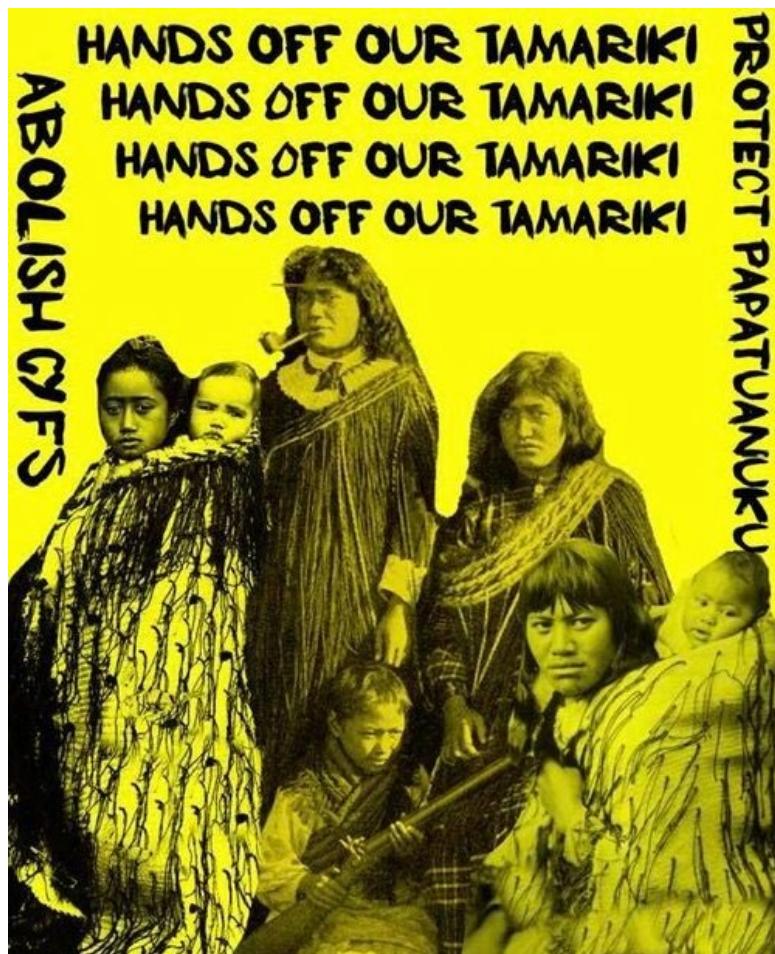
<https://www.nextincolour.com/support>

Importantly, the statement recognises the absence of Indigenous voices from this issue and a commitment to build further relationships and connections so that platforms and resources can be shared. This further represents a powerful counter-story to a narrative of “together but apart” multiculturalism (Keddie, 2014) that contributes to a sense of competition and divisiveness in resource deprived sectors such as the creative industries. Rather than fighting over and hoarding access, funding and opportunities, this counter-story depicts mutual support and recognition.

This recognition of Indigenous sovereignty also extends to other Indigenous peoples, contributing to a recognition of global struggles in the face of coloniality. The piece shown in Figure 17 below and the accompanying excerpt represents an example of this:

Figure 17.

Hands Off Our Tamariki by Saskia Sassen



THIS PORTRAIT IS A DIGITAL ART DEPICTION OF STRONG WAHINE PROTECTING THEIR PEPIS. THE WORDS "ABOLISH CYFYS" AND "HANDS OFF OUR TAMARIKI" REPRESENTS AN ONGOING MOVEMENT IN WHICH THE PEOPLE OF NEW ZEALAND ARE PROTESTING AGAINST A NEW ZEALAND MINISTRY UNDER THE NAME OF CYFYS, WHICH THEY HAVE NOW CHANGED THE NAME TO ORANGA TAMARIKI, WHO ARE TAKING MAORI BABIES AWAY FROM THEIR MOTHERS DUE TO THE FACT OF FAMILIES BEING UNFIT PARENTS AND PROVIDING AN UNSAFE ENVIRONMENT. THE OVERUSED NARRATIVE OF MAORI BEING UNFIT PARENTS NEEDS TO STOP, AS IT IS BEING USED TO TAKE THREE MAORI BABIES A WEEK IN THE NAME OF ORANGA TAMARIKI. I WANTED TO SHED LIGHT ON THIS ISSUE AND TO SHOW OUR MOTHERS IN A STRONG AND PROTECTIVE WAY. THIS IS DEDICATED TO ALL MY SISTERS, MOTHERS, AUNTIES, GRANDMOTHERS AND ANCESTORS. I WOULD LIKE TO THANK THEM FOR ALWAYS WATCHING OVER ME.

SASKIA SASSEN

Note. Located in the first edition of The Colouring Book Zine “And So the Story Goes...” presented and produced by Next in Colour and Sha-Gaze Whomanifestations. Accessible here: <https://www.nextincolour.com/and-so-the-story-goes>

The work by Saskia Sassen depicts the struggles of Maori people against the ongoing violence of coloniality in Aotearoa New Zealand. This story echoes the experiences of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples in Australia, who endured the historical violence of child removal policies leading to the “Stolen Generations”, and whom continue to have children removed disconnecting them from family networks and important cultural resources. Collectively these stories show the global impacts of coloniality across contexts, and the cultural violence that justifies structural violence and racialised oppression.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have shown the self-determined activity which emerged from the alternative setting of NiC, and constituted a struggle towards re-existence (Walsh, 2021). Through the relational processes and counter-practices enacted by the CBTL collective and those whom they collaborated with and supported, the collective sought to transform ways of working derived from oppressive histories that endure in the present and that sustain inequitable systems of power and racialised hierarchies. These are processes and practices that are fundamentally caring and foster communality and interdependence, and that are emergent and responsive to the mutual relationships and responsibilities that a relational orientation creates. From this foundation the collective were able to surface powerful cultural resources, counter-stories that re-narrated black bodies, black identities, and remembers the lost, hidden and obscured histories absent from dominant narratives. The development of relational processes and counter-practices are a key function of counter-spaces and are deeply implicated in the production of cultural resources. They are an enactments of resistance narratives, and newly narrated identities embodied in action, and in turn they inform the creation of new narratives that can only emerge from the collective practices and processes that are mobilised within such spaces (Case & Hunter, 2012).

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Chapter 9: Negotiating Institutional Power

The previous chapter shared examples of the relational processes and counter-practices that the CBTL collective mobilised, and which supported the creation of powerful cultural resources in the form of counter-stories. These enactments of self-determination supported through the creation of an alternative setting that sits outside institutional boundaries represents a rejection of oppressive structures and practices and the dominant narratives and discourses that constrain black and African subjectivities. The creation of new and alternative settings creates a safe and healing space for these communities and individuals, but also fosters radical approaches towards working toward racial justice and creates powerful counter-stories. Sarason (1972) noted two key insights for the success of a setting. First, what precedes the creation of a setting, the contexts from which it emerged from, those who supported and constrained it, and the sparks which gave the very idea of the setting life, play an immense role in the success of the setting. Second, setting success is further dependent on external relations with other settings it engages with (Cherniss, 2012). Whilst alternative settings offer some reprieve from oppressive structures, they must still engage with those same structures and exist within a broader oppressive social context.

In this chapter, I draw on interviews with the CBTL collective and individuals affiliated with cohealth, participant observations of meetings and planning events, and pertinent archival materials related to NiC and the organisational settings they negotiated, to illustrate the collective's negotiations of institutional power. Through critical narrative analysis of the counter-stories shared by the collective and key individuals affiliated with cohealth, describing from their perspectives encounters with organisational settings which sought to constrain the collective's efforts towards self-determination, I identify *non-profit discourses and the hidden dynamics of race*, that contributed to "colourblind" practices of control and exclusion. From their subaltern position the collective highlights the ways race

and racism, rather than exceptional presences within institutional and organisational contexts, are pervasive and enduring features. However, the counter-stories also show that rather than passive actors subjected to hegemonic systems of racialised power and oppression, the collective engaged in acts of *refusal, resistance and building power*, as they drew on powerful forms of capital that bolsters resilience and demands their humanity to be recognised.

Non-profit Discourses and the Hidden Dynamics of Race

Discourse is central to the maintenance of hegemonic power and racialised hierarchies and inequity. Non-profit human services organisations, like other organisations and institutions, are the product of their cultural and historical contexts; they are shaped and moulded, imbued with meaning though the integration of powerful societal discourses within structures and practices (Bond & Wasco, 2017; Roscigno, 2011). For CBTL there were several key events, related to their relationships with two non-profit human services organisations, which contributed to significant setbacks for the NiC initiative. The first relationship was with cohealth, the auspice organisation for NiC, a capacity building support, and the organisational context where Arts Generator was situated – the participatory arts space from which the collective and the initiative emerged. The second relationship was with a social housing organisation that managed the property from which NiC was to be located. Evident in the stories shared by CBTL about these relationships and the key events that defined them, is a deconstruction of their experiences of racialised control and exclusion, and an unpicking of the discursive threads that they were bound in. What will follow below is a description of three dominant discourses identified through my analysis of the narratives shared by the CBTL collective of their encounters with dominant organisational settings: *paternalism, abstract liberalism and managerialism*; and how these discourses work to disavow race in practices of control and exclusion. Stories from key individuals affiliated

with cohealth at the time of these events, who worked within the organisation and claimed white identities, are also included as reflections on their own implication within these discourses.

Paternalism

Power and control, sits at the heart of paternalism. Paternalism is about maintaining relations of dependence that restricts autonomy and agency, supposedly for the benefit of those who are being subordinated (Taylor et al., 2018). Paternalism often takes root in those institutions and organisations tasked with the welfare of those less powerful in society: government agencies, charities, non-profits, human services organisations. These settings are ideologically formed, and are concerned with the alleviation of social, physical and psychological harms. The discourse of paternalism functions to enable a form of oppressive othering, predication on a binary of superiority and inferiority (Taylor et al., 2018). It constructs a knowing, powerful and beneficent actor on the one hand, and the pitied, needy, and incapable actor on the other. For one person affiliated with cohealth, paternalism was most evident in the organisation through the way communities and community members were positioned as *beneficiaries*:

that terminology of beneficiaries as I understand it, it didn't come from a community health background so much but has been around for a very long time. You describe your programs as interventions and you describe those who you're intervening to benefit as beneficiaries. I guess it comes from that. Even public health is, not often, but by those who observe it, often seen as somewhat imperialist, in its own way. It's like the development sector or NGOs, in general. Community health is made up of a lot of people who really believe in what they do and their intentions are very good. In order to interrogate the language you use, also entails having to interrogate whether good intentions are enough. (Person affiliated with cohealth - 1)

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The marginalised people and communities that engaged with cohealth and its services were positioned as *beneficiaries*, receiving help and support through the interventions of the organisation and its employees. In intervening there is a presupposition that those communities are unable to intervene themselves and require the expertise of the organisation. As noted by the cohealth employee above, paternalist discourses are not particular to community health organisations such as cohealth but reflect an orientation across a range of settings that work with marginalised people and communities and subsist on creating and maintaining relations of dependence. A core component of paternalism is the intention to “do good”. This intention becomes the primary motivation for action, and ignores dynamics of power and worse, deflects critiques from paternalistic practices.

To maintain a relationship of dependence, paternalistic discourse amplifies the benevolence and expertise of the organisation and its actors, as well as the construction of marginalised people and communities as helpless and lacking in knowledge and capacity. In the excerpt below, Ruth deconstructs the ways institutional “talk” is positioned as superior to other modes of communication:

[In institutions] people act a certain way. Then when they're out of their suit, they're just people. There's almost a code switch that exists in those institutions and it's so competitive in a way, and that's why these languages exist. Basically, they're just saying the same thing that we would be saying, but in just this very complex English way. It doesn't make sense. It's just a loop that just goes around and around. Then when they use these words...It's like even their definition...for certain words, it does not talk about the community that they're reaching out to. There's a lot of falsehood in that. There's a lot of promises in the languages that exist. You see a lot of hierarchy.
... There's a lot of [superiority] and you can sense that in just how things are constructed because it's an institution...it's just all fictional. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

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Here the modes of communication that exist outside of institutional spaces and within community spaces are made inferior. This functions to create boundaries of inclusion and exclusion, privileges institutional forms of knowledge, and creates hierarchised subject positions within institutional settings which situates people from the community who enter these settings as “lesser than”.

Ruth also shares that “cohealth is always hiring, creating new jobs and creating spaces where we can navigate our communities. We don't need these people to navigate it for us because we understand that language”. Ruth, like the other members of CBTL, has spent much of her life navigating her community, she is a holder of invaluable knowledge, however, that knowledge, her knowledge, is hierarchised as lesser than, rendered unsophisticated and naïve as ignorance is ascribed to her racialised identity (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018; Mapedzahama et al., 2018; Udah, 2018). This represents a fundamental valuing of certain kinds of knowledge over others. And functions to legitimate white ways of knowing, being and doing; and a vision of the world which explains inequitable relations of power as naturally occurring due to the supposed mediocrity of a racialised Other. As Geskeva shares: “the level of respect from [cohealth] to community groups and collectives, and how they are treated when they work with a non-profit organisation or community services. It's almost being treated as something mediocre” Paternalism reinforces racialised narratives of deficit and engenders a lack of respect that underpins practices that maintain power inequity. This dynamic further translates to structural exclusion as non-profit organisations gate-keep power through controlling access to funding or decision-making actors such as the government, or much worse creates the contexts for more violent forms of structural exclusion wielded through institutional practices. Serrano-Garcia (2020) writes of the tensions faced by self-determined settings, or “sovereign acts” that often must leverage coalition building with dominant institutions to affect broader

transformational changes. However, building such coalitions can lead to “the debilitating force of dependence which generates hopelessness, and the impotence nurtured by coloniality and colonialism” (p. 8). This dynamic has also been evident in the work of Hiruy and Eversole (2015) documenting the experiences of grassroots African community organisations in Australia, and further shown in the work of Frantsman and Spector (2021) who interviewed racialised Israelis who were constructed as “at-risk” children, made into beneficiaries and subject to subordination and control by non-profit organisations through what they term *cruel benevolence*. However, whilst paternalism is still evident within many non-profit and community-based human services organisations, paternalistic discourses have been supplanted by contemporary discourses that are cast as blind to power and race.

Abstract Liberalism

Principles of equality, freedom, and individualism are evoked within the discursive frame of abstract liberalism. These principles when discursively applied to structural inequity, give the illusion of equality, whilst ignoring the impacts of privilege and power on the outcomes of different groups (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). One illustrative example within cohealth was the replacement of the white coordinator of Arts Generator - that had developed the space and its approach and had been a pivotal support in the formation of CBTL and the NiC initiative – and how the organisation responded to calls to restructure the role in ways that reshaped how power was held within the organisation:

...there seemed to be some genuine interest in supporting a more self-determined model of leadership and a distributed model of leadership, but that isn't how it played out. How it played out was that they did take the advice of the group, which was to split [the] role into two because it was an enormous role. It wasn't a role...that you were easily going to find people within the group who had all the skills. The other reason being that we thought it was unsafe to put one person in that position as the

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interface with the broader organisation and the white structures of the organisation, that it would be much safer to have two people... Then at the last minute... they made the decision to employ one person who was a person of colour, and one person who was a white creative producer. That was a decision I think that has had some very negative ramifications since. I do remember very clearly one of the managers who was involved in making that decision saying to a colleague of mine..."Well, this white creative producer who applied is easily head and shoulders above most of the others in terms of the application." [They] turned around to him and said, "Well, there's a fucking reason for that,"...those opportunities, of course, if you make it an open application process, a supposed meritocracy, the people who have had all the advantage will make the superior application. That's what we were trying to work against, but I think they got scared and they decided that they needed somebody who had a white lens that they would be able to relate to better or something. (Person affiliated with cohealth - 2)

Envisioned by those who had worked together in the Arts Generator space was a flatter decision-making structure drawing on the existing knowledge and expertise of the artist-facilitators that had been working in the space and were from the communities which the Arts Generator worked alongside. Some calls for change were heeded in the splitting of the role, which would support the effectiveness and productivity of the Arts Generator and thus cohealth. Yet the calls for change that shifted power towards members of racialised communities – individuals already engaged deeply in working with their communities – was only partially fulfilled, representing an inability to completely relinquish power. Abstract liberalism, through the idea of meritocracy, serves to reinforce white power and privilege and structurally disadvantage racialised people (Bonilla-Silva, 2014). Within this dynamic whiteness, competency, and trustworthiness become confused. White oversight and the

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maintenance of controlling structures is disguised through an “objective” selection criteria and the status quo reproduced and sustained.

Examples such as above, describe a reluctance by the organisation to change structures in ways that unsettle white power and privilege and recognises cumulative disadvantage – limiting the kind of change that is possible. cohealth reflects many important aspects of the radical community health services it developed from. Importantly, it adopts a prevention and promotion model that integrates individual, community and societal approaches towards health and social equity. This model is underpinned by principles of human rights, self-determination, intersectionality, cultural humility and cultural safety; and includes a focus on diversity and inclusion, accessibility, community collaboration and partnership, inclusive leadership and advocacy for broader change (cohealth, n.d.). Many of these principles, values and approaches are evident in the organisational change, structural and cultural, that the organisation has undergone over the years, including across the development of the NiC initiative. For example, the organisations board has changed over the years to be more inclusive and represent the communities the organisations work alongside; there has been important work to reflect and integrate the espoused organisational values through co-design processes; the organisation’s executive has been vocal on speaking about raced-based discrimination; a consultant was engaged to work with the organisation to develop a culturally safe working environment; funding has been directed to external projects that seek to engage change at a structural level; and participatory and collaborative projects and spaces have been funded and supported, such as the Arts Generator and its programs (cohealth, 2019).

However, whilst these are examples of meaningful change, there are limits placed on change that truly transform recalcitrant structures and culture shaped by hegemonic

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whiteness. In Geskeva's reflection on her experiences as a collective member, change within cohealth often occurred in an equality rather than equity framework:

...when you want such structures or resources to be accessible, they have to work for you, not the person who it's already benefiting. If they continue to benefit the other person, that hasn't really moved toward benefiting you the way that you needed it to. You're just being, "No, this is not going to work if you don't do this for me, at all." I know it's also the people are giving up their power, and it's like everybody has got to meet in the middle. We've got to meet in the middle, but we're not meeting in the middle because the lack of equity that's already at play for underrepresented communities, for African community, Indigenous communities, and things like that, are already at a deficit. Instead of being 50/50 halfway, they have to move 70, and we move 30. That's the lack of understanding that comes with negotiating or going through processes dealing with such big organisations. (Geskeva Komba)

For Geskeva, transformative change entails giving up power, but also a recognition of the cumulative disadvantage that underrepresented and racialised communities experience living in a settler colonial society shaped by interlocking systems of oppression. Transformative change for organisations requires deep structural change, accompanied by a transformation of philosophy, beliefs, strategies, patterns of decision making, accountability mechanisms, participation, and interactions with the external environment (Evans et al., 2007).

Ameliorative change on the other hand works within existing structures and does little to transform underlying power relationships, both material and symbolic (Watzlawick & Weakland, 1974). However, Prilleltensky (2014) poses a more nuanced perspective over this dichotomous approach of ameliorative-transformative, recognising that change can be situated on a continuum moving between these two approaches. This better reflects the complexities encountered when endeavouring to change systems. However, Prilleltensky,

locates the end of this continuum, past amelioration to what he calls co-optation. This constitutes activity that is aligned with oppressive structures and systems and can be manifest in minute forms of change that functions only to prevent further agitation, or change restricted to the realm of language with no material and structural impacts (Ahmed, 2004). While transformative change is the ideal, and forms of change that span amelioration and transformation often the reality, co-optation offers only cosmetic change whilst ultimately sustaining the status-quo.

Managerialism

Managerialist ideology sees organisations as fundamentally alike, and thus optimum performance, productivity and efficiency can be achieved through universalised structures and approaches. Central to this is the role and importance of the management class in overseeing these approaches through mechanisms of control and standardisation (Kilkauer, 2015). Whilst managerialist ideology is seemingly opposed to bureaucracy as a form of governance, managerialist organisations still reproduce bureaucratic practices reflecting hierarchical structures and complex rules and processes (I use bureaucratic here in this latter sense). Managerialism, also known as New Public Management, has become a pervasive ideology within non-profit organisations globally, and represent a micro-level manifestation of macro level neoliberal policies implemented by government (Connel et al., 2009). With its prevalence has come a distinct discourse that shapes organisational focus, decision making, actors within the organisation, relationships and ways of communicating (Maier & Meyer, 2011). For one person affiliated with cohealth, the culture and structure of the organisation reflected:

...a managerial kind of culture that was quite hierarchical. For one it meant that some things that really needed to change in terms of organisational processes was very

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difficult to actually get people to commit to that because you had to go through so many layers. (Person affiliated with cohealth - 1)

Within managerialist organisations power sits with a management class who employ practices and tools in the service of supporting the organisation to achieve its goals of effectiveness and efficiency. As another person affiliated with cohealth shared:

[cohealth] was very hierarchical and very heavy in management. That there were people who are very receptive to the successes of the program and to the way in which we were able to achieve a whole lot. But it didn't get past the senior management who really, for me, they were the blockers in terms of it having the level of influence that it could and should have had in shifting it. (Person affiliated with cohealth - 2)

This management class can mediate access to decision-making or resources, and thus organisational hierarchies and bureaucratic practices can become a tool to reproduce racialised inequities. However, managerial discourses and practices are seemingly objective and race neutral, and so the inequities that are created become rationalised through claims of increasing effectiveness and efficiency.

Gatekeeping by managers and the use of organisational hierarchy as a strategy to maintain control was experienced acutely by the CBTL collective whilst negotiating an auspice agreement between the collective and cohealth for the NiC initiative:

It's interesting to see that there's still no agreement even for now. Blame it all on time management and things like that, but if this is something that you've auspiced and has been signed off at the top level from executive directors. There should be a microscope on these projects to see that it gets looked after the way its needed...I think that an auspice agreement can't be delegated to someone who's working one day a week when it needs to be signed off by an executive director. (Geskeva Komba)

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Negotiations around the auspice agreement were a key constraint for the NiC initiative requiring significant resources of the collective. Despite the NiC funding agreement with Creative Victoria being approved and signed at higher levels, the negotiation of the auspice agreement, which had been resisted by the organisation, was kept at a lower level of the hierarchy with a person who was insufficiently resourced or supported to affect the implementation of the agreement. The resolution of the agreement, despite the impact it had on NiC, had been stalled and reduced in priority. Various collective members describe these negotiations as making them feel less respected, or not taken seriously. This discourse of managerialism therefore was a reproduction of racialising discourses that construct Africans as not competent and binds them within paternalistic relations of dependence. In this example, this devaluing was exercised and obscured through bureaucratic mechanisms that assert control. Geskeva continues:

I know if it's signed by an executive director, and things are not going the way it needs to go, I can go to them, to the director rather, and bypass middle management...and be like, "No, this is not being adhered to, please, look at this."

Where if it's signed by middle management, it can stop there. (Geskeva Komba)

By having the agreement signed at the executive level, some accountability – and some power – can be gained back by the collective.

Risk management constitutes another practice and explanatory frame for racialised control within managerialism. During negotiations to lease a space for NiC from a social housing organisation, the CCTL collective were subject to added clauses that served to surveil and police their access and use of the space. As Tiyami recalls:

...then there's this group of black people that want to rent out the space upstairs whose patrons are mostly going to be people of colour. Then there's just like that unconscious bias- or conscious that, "This is going to become a recipe for disaster.

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There's going to be people coming down to the bar, and then going upstairs, and then who knows what's going to happen next?" ... I saw that unfolding just in the conversations that we were having and the body language. Just even in their eyes and in their energy, you could feel that. (Tiyami Amum)

At this time the social housing organisation had agreed to lease the bottom of the building to a bar. For Tiyami, that risk was applied to the collective and the community members of the African diaspora who would be using the space, rather than other patrons of the bar, felt inequitable. Managerialist discourses of risk work to make “colour-blind” practices of control and exclusion that are grounded in racialising discourses that construct Africans as “dangerous” and “criminal” (Han & Budarick, 2018; Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018; Majavu, 2018, 2020; Nolan et al., 2011; Udah, 2018; Windle, 2008). Risk can be thought of as both a political and moral concept that functions to foster cohesiveness through the construction of an “Other” who is made risky and dangerous (Douglas & Wildavsky, 1982). In the application of risk to individuals and groups, they become subject to control and management. These dominant ideologies, in turn, rationalise and legitimise these controlling practices (Langhout, 2005). The assumed deficit, which often the racialised Other is made responsible for, becomes the logic for intervention (Follesø, 2015). Risk discourses create particular racialised subject positions, which are further infused with harmful dominant cultural narratives of danger and deficit. Risk comes to represent racialised (and classed) identities – white identities are seemingly free from risk, and even behaviours often associated with risk become normalised when attributed to dominant groups (Pica-Smith & Veloria, 2012). Risk can then be deployed within managerial practices to enact deracialised and legitimised forms of exclusion. One example is discretionary policing (Roscigno, 2007) which described the way individuals differentially deploy controlling bureaucratic practices, policing some people but not others.

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These powerful discourses become internalised as explanatory frames by actors within organisations, even when they possess a literacy regarding dynamics of race and racism. In the excerpts below a white person affiliated with cohealth recounts these events from their perspective, reflecting on their impulse to deny race and racism and support the construction of organisations as objective and race-neutral in their practices:

Suddenly, there's always extra barriers, and there's all these kind of...racial biases as well about young African people being in this space and the implications that might have. They started talking a lot more about security, swipe tags... and I kind of feel like, if it was me and a bunch of white kids working on a comedy show or something and using that space, it just never would have come up. The members of the group could see it for exactly what it was. Even I was having to resist my gas light tendencies, to go “maybe they're reading too much into this, or maybe it's something else... (person affiliated with cohealth)

The management of risk becomes a powerful discourse that justifies the increased security and surveillance, but despite this person's recognition of what they believed was a racialised inequity; despite the perspectives of the collective for whom such experiences the NiC initiative was supposed to mitigate; and despite their embodied knowledge of what it *feels* like to be subject to a racialising white gaze and what it *looks* like to be treated differently and excluded (Canham & Williams, 2017; Yancy, 2008); an objective, race-neutral, and colour-blind reason presented itself. They continue:

...there was probably times where I didn't push things as hard as I could have back to cohealth or to [the social housing organisation] or just even didn't understand where they were coming from or didn't reflect on those gas lighting tendencies that sometimes come through, where they're saying, no, this is about racism and my mind is almost hardwired to go “is it though?”....you get accustomed, particularly when

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you've worked within organisations to almost help justify their actions for reasons of risk management or governance...(person affiliated with cohealth)

The imperative for whiteness to defend itself and invoke wilful ignorance (Mills, 1997) works through colour-blind organisational discourses. Denials of racism are commonplace. Sarah Ahmed (2007) writes at length about the erasures of race, the protestations of racism and the non-performativity of diversity discourses. The work of Augustinos and Every (2007) in mapping discursive patterns employed across political rhetoric and everyday talk found people: engaged discourses of reason and rationality to justify views; engaged in the deracialisation of their negative views by downplaying race as an explanatory construct; and similarly to the assertions of Bonilla-Silva (2014), engaged explanations that drew on discourses of liberalism as explanatory devices for the effects of oppression and exclusion. These same strategies are evident in organisational denials, just entwined with managerial discourses.

Managerialism also places the performance goals of the organisation as paramount. In the excerpt below Anyuop recounts the lack of support from cohealth during the negotiations with the social housing organisation:

I felt that we didn't get the support that we needed to be able to get that space or the people that were supposed to... help us to gain this space didn't really fight for us in my opinion...it's already hard enough as black people or in this community and in this society to be able to be accepted into spaces because people are very sceptical of us already and we have so many eyes on us in negative ways as well. (Anyuop Dau)

cohealth and the social housing organisation shared existing sets of relationships, including a high-level leader within cohealth that sat on the social housing organisation's board. As a powerful organisation with strong connections, cohealth was well placed to engage in advocacy and strong support for CBTL, leveraging its existing relationship to address an

instance of racialised inequity. However, both the collective members and persons affiliated with cohealth reported a reluctance for the organisation to strongly intervene, instead privileging and protecting its relationship with the social housing organisation. Eventually, a key actor within cohealth was able to leverage relationships and advocate for the collective, facilitating leadership within the social housing organisation's recognition of the experiences of CBTL and engaging in practices of learning and acknowledgement to mend and progress the relationship. However, the initial lack of support had already taken a significant toll on the collective and the project. Willner (2019) draws on Gillborn (2013) to examine *interest divergence*, the benefits accrued by white organisations through upholding systems of racialised inequity. For Willner, social justice non-profit organisations preserve social inequity through the implementation of managerialism as a way to ensure organisational legitimacy. This became evident not just in the reluctance to alter internal decision-making structures for cohealth, but also in a reluctance to support the collective as they dealt with experiences of racialised exclusion across their negotiations to lease a space from the social housing organisation.

Refusal, Resistance and Building Power

The above discourses supported practices of control, exclusion, and dependence; constrained the NiC initiative in material ways; and obscured inequitable relations of power predicated on ideologies of race. For the collective, profound *psychosocial effects* were also produced, impacting the individual and collective resources available to negotiate these manifestations of institutional power. However, the CBTL collective were not passively acted upon. Rather, the collective were – as previously shown - engaged in naming oppressive discourses, and mobilised various capitals (Rosales & Langhout, 2020; Yosso, 2005) to actively challenge them through: *a refusal of oppressive systems*, engaging in acts of

resistance by *using the master's tools on their own terms* (Lorde, 1983), and building power by *drawing on supportive relationships* with other settings and actors.

The Psychosocial Effects

The collective's experiences with cohealth and UNISON, their negotiations with these settings, and the various outcomes of those negotiations that ultimately constrained the NiC initiative took an emotional and psychological toll. Difficulties that arose from trying to secure a physical space represented a serious setback for the NiC initiative. Collective members variously described this experience as having “their confidence broken” and their “hopes and dreams crushed”. This was exacerbated by their not feeling fully supported by cohealth and that their relationship was differently valued. There were many inequities felt by the collective in comparison to the large organisations with which they had key relationships . Inequitable access to various material resources such as money and space. Inequitable access to knowledge holders to support in key activities related to governance and the navigation of specific institutional settings. And inequitable stakes across various outcomes which were acutely felt by the collective members:

Then when [the opportunity to lease the space] was taken away, we all were just aloof, we were all just a mess. Basically, it allows an institution like that dragging things with you and giving you this sense of hope, but then later on being like, "We're not interested anymore." It's like, had we been a white institution, that wouldn't be the language. Just understanding these are going to be the blockage that are going to happen and going to keep reoccurring. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)

The loss of opportunity not only threatened to impact the viability of the whole initiative, but evoked broader recurring experiences of racialised structural exclusion. This strains the affective resources the collective had available to navigate the emotional labour involved in navigating these contexts and situations.

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Similarly, the ongoing negotiations with cohealth to clarify what their support looked like, through first an Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) and then an Auspice Agreement, proved to be an ongoing strain – it was “draining” -- emotionally and psychologically for the collective: “Then just working on our MOU with cohealth, which has been draining as well because we feel we're not meeting them halfway, and they're not trying to meet us halfway as well” (Tiyami Amum). Geskeva, who navigated those power relationships both as a member of the collective and as an employee of cohealth shared that she was “exhausted in meetings with cohealth” and had to step back in the last meeting she had. For Geskeva, these ongoing negotiations presented a drain on psychosocial resources, reducing her capacity to engage, and requiring her to step back in order to protect herself from both burning out or being further impacted emotionally (Evans & Moore, 2015). These negotiations were by themselves a difficult and intensive process, but situated within the context of ongoing racialised patterns of power, the responses of Geskeva and the rest of the collective can be understood as *racial battle fatigue* – the psychosocial response to the stressors of ongoing engagements with racist settings and systems manifest in various ways such as “frustration; anger; exhaustion; physical avoidance; psychological or emotional withdrawal; escapism; acceptance of racist attributions; resistance; verbally, nonverbally, or physically fighting back; and coping strategies” (Smith, Allen & Danley, 2007, p. 552).

These experiences were also fundamentally disempowering for the collective, as Nyaruot recounts:

A lot of the changes also that have happened within cohealth have been challenging for us because of the relationship that we have with Arts Gen and cohealth. There have been so many major changes, things that are completely out of our control that then obviously have such a massive effect on us. (Ruth Nyaruout Ruach)

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And Ezeldin shared in one of the regular planning meetings held by CBTL: “[conversations are] always off the record, nothing written and signed, no accountability – [we] don’t have strength or power to go to managers up high like we used to when [the previous Arts Generator coordinator] was there” (Observation of CBTL Meeting). At the individual level of analysis, outcomes of psychological empowerment constitute “beliefs about one’s competence, efforts to exert control, and an understanding of the socio-political environment” (Zimmerman, 2000, p. 46). Despite the collective - as an organisational structure - and NiC as empowering counter settings that work to foster increased access to decision making and opportunities to build power and self-determine, the relationship with cohealth at times led to the collective members feeling impacted on and not able to assert control within the relationship and over aspects of the initiative such as finances.

The emotional and psychological cost on the collective; as well, the temporal and financial resource costs bound up in the various negotiations the collective were engaged in, and the capacity building efforts needed to be effective in these negotiations, limited the creative and planning work that NiC was able to produce. At times there was a very real fear that the NiC initiative would not be able to achieve the outcomes outlined in the funding proposal, and acquit their responsibilities to the funder:

The money is going to come to an expiry date, and then Creative Victoria are gonna be like, "What have you guys done?" Then because we haven't written any agreement with cohealth and there's no evidence that we've been spending or creating projects, then we have to explain why. By explaining that, we'll create some problems that will be all about blaming. (Ez Eldin Deng)

For the collective, the stakes were higher than just meeting their responsibilities to Creative Victoria, as Ezeldin continues:

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It seems like we're going to be in deficit, and then there will be no evidence. Then we're going to be saying all the blaming. There's nothing positive going to come from this experience. In the review, I don't want to go through that blaming game. I've been professional. I think they're supposed to respect the paper and the contract. (Ez Eldin Deng)

Engaging in negotiations to secure arrangements that would support the collective in ways that shifted power in decision-making processes and legitimated the NiC initiative was essential towards self-determination. However, to not successfully deliver the initiative and achieve the planned outcomes, carried a risk of reinforcing the very deficit discourses that were being challenged. And so, a vicious cycle emerges, and a sense of being set-up to fail. Self-determination becomes a process to challenge racialised structural exclusion and hegemonic systems of power, these very same structures and systems constrain self-determination, and failure then becomes “evidence” of the need to maintain paternalistic relations of dependence. This dynamic is not unique in the Australian context, and is most evident in the relationships between self-determining Aboriginal led and controlled organisations that are situated within a system that structurally creates the conditions to be undermined, constructed as deficient, and to be blamed for poor progress (Bond et al., 2019) – leading to “controlled communities” rather than “community control” as Aboriginal forms of governance and ways of working grounded in Aboriginal culture and identity are devalued and cast as problematic in favour of the “objective” and “superior” governance practices of white colonial institutions.

Yet despite these emotional and psychological costs, despite the potential costs to legitimacy, the raised stakes and risk of repercussions, the collective demonstrated resilience fostered through processes of individual and collective care. Despite at moments feeling like they were less able to assert control, they maintained other important domains of

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empowerment fostered through critical consciousness and participatory practices. As Anyuop shares, reflecting on the lack of support from cohealth during the UNISON negotiations:

I think they were trying to save their relationship with that organisation and not jeopardise that. They were not willing to do that for us. They kind of were just like briefly fighting for us. Sometimes that's not enough. That made us feel like we have to even try harder now. We got to put our foot 10 times forward now and actually do this for ourselves cause we didn't get the help that we wanted or that we should've got.

(Anyuop Dau)

Geskeva, reflecting on the initial rescinding of the space for lease by UNISON as an opportunity to build their own spaces, states:

I see it as an opportunity because I'm the type of person that if something doesn't work out, but I really want it, then it'll give me more drive and determination to see it get to where it needs to be. For example, losing that partnership and the venue gave me more drive and determination rather than just being like, "Okay." I'm not sure what it does for the whole group because everybody responds to it differently. Then that's why I was talking about understanding collective care and the self-care of the group in terms of external factors. I see it as an opportunity because it just makes me want to attain that goal. (Geskeva Komba)

There is a need for racialised communities to work twice as hard, to succeed in the face of constraints, to always be surpassing the steep bar of excellence that is the condition of acceptance in settler colonial Australia (Gatwiri, 2021; Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018). For CBTL this resilience is grounded in multiple capitals which constitute a *community cultural wealth* (Yosso, 2005). Foremost, an *aspirational capital*, the “ability to

maintain hopes and dreams for the future, even in the face of real and perceived barriers" (p. 77). As Geskeva shares:

It's been a very long two years. [chuckles] It's gone much quicker than I thought though. Now, looking back, it's been like, "Oh my God, that was 2018." ... I always have to remind myself that we had succeeded in quite a few things. It's very hard to remind yourself of that when you're in the thick of things, and you're fighting a great big beast around structural racism, violence, and symbolic violence, and they have a lack or no understanding of what that looks like. Within those two years now, I look back, and I'm just like, "Oh, we got through that. How did we get through that, and we're still mentally intact?" [laughs] Just reminding myself of those achievements despite the headaches and despite the frustrations. (Geskeva Komba)

From this hope the collective were able to overcome the constraints experienced by mobilising: *social capital*, through their relationships, networks and community resources; their *navigational capital*, as they drew on their collective knowledge of navigating white organisations and institutions; and *resistant capital*, fostered through the knowledge and skills developed in ongoing everyday struggles and resistance within the settler colonial context of Australia (Yosso, 2005).

Using the Master's Tools on their Own Terms

One key negotiation that occurred within the collective's relationship with cohealth centred around establishing various formal documents which would formalise the relationship between cohealth as an auspice and support organisation, and the NiC initiative. First was a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), which would later become an Auspice Agreement. As part of the conceptualisation of the NiC initiative, prior to securing the funding, an MoU had been discussed with a member of cohealth's management which oversaw the Prevention

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Team, where the Arts Generator and responsibility for the NiC initiative sat under. The MoU was intended to outline the nature of the auspice relationship and the support to be provided to NiC and the collective. After the funding had been secured, cohealth underwent significant organisational change, also occurring during the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which saw many of the cohealth staff involved with the development of the MoU leave the organisation:

There was a changeover in management. Obviously, that impacted on [the MoU] being looked at again. That took a while and then we picked things up again when new management came in... then that got put on hold because...there was another changeover again. Really, the conversation picks back up towards the end of last year. That was a conversation around, "Do we really need the MOU? I don't think we need one," but it was we- the collective, that said, "No, we need one because we need to acknowledge accountability around certain paths and certain things that we've agreed to...that the organisation would provide. Also, what the collective has said that they would implement in terms of outputs. That needs to be documented and put in an agreement. Also, we wanted those kind of things like finances and things like that also addressed in terms of how we get access to money that is basically ours and which was not working out and hasn't been working out for us throughout the project.

(Geskeva Komba)

The negotiations around the details of the MoU had shifted to whether an MoU was needed. By this point the CBTL collective had experienced constraints in their ability to access their funds, the failure of key forms of support in the way of mentoring through cohealth to materialise, and an inadequate level of support and advocacy in their negotiations with the social housing organisation. The MoU was an important mechanism to hold all parties accountable to a clear set of responsibilities and outline the processes regarding how the

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relationship would be structured; it would include sections on communication, release of funds, cultural safety, pathways to self-determination and mentoring. The collective also believed that an MoU would mitigate the lack of clarity and tensions that arose from the change process that cohealth had undergone:

Tiyami: reason need MOU also about having accountability, intention of MOU to have set agreement that protects both, and shared language to be used to reduce friction and as a handover in case people leave – no room for miscommunication – and wouldn't then need meetings like this one – in light of continuing restructuring means potential of needing to do this process again. (Observation of NiC Meeting)

However, the collective had a greater desire than just the clarification of roles and responsibilities:

It's now at this point where I got advice at the beginning of the year that have a term of reference to see if they would respect what our... where we draw the line in terms of how we want to work and whatever values, which they were all happy to. Then, also having a proper auspice agreement. The reason was to have actual, proper auspice agreement over an MoU, is that an MoU doesn't necessarily respect the level of growth that we want to see within ourselves. (Geskeva Komba)

The collective would advocate instead for an Auspice Agreement with cohealth, and at the same time worked towards developing a Terms of Reference [ToR] to be shared with all individuals, groups, organisations and institutions that they would potentially work with. The Auspice Agreement represented not only a mechanism for accountability but a form of legitimacy that signified that they were both respected and to be taken seriously. It would be a binding agreement that would see the collective treated by cohealth in “exactly the same way...if they had to go in agreement with either another organisation or the bank, or the

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government when you're putting in a tender, or even when you had to get into an agreement with Creative Victoria for the funding" (Geskeva). This legitimacy, and desire for respect, emerged in the context of the deficit discourses of Africans in Australia, and the devaluing of community-based groups and initiatives within patterns of inequitable power relations that enables power hoarding and gatekeeping by non-profit organisations (Hiruy & Eversole, 2015).

The intention for the ToR was to be a document that ensured respect for the values of the collective and the NiC initiative, and their ways of working. It would provide a:

description of the role, function and composition of Next in Colour and sets out the guidelines under which the team agrees to operate. These Terms of Reference (ToR) is an overview for implementing and monitoring current project activities. It is intended to describe the purpose and operation of the collective including decision making, chair, communication lines as well as conduct of meetings for the advancement and sustainability of the initiative. (Terms of Reference Draft Document)

The ToR would not only outline what the goals and structure of NiC was, but also the non-negotiable elements of any collaboration or partnership: "Next in Colour is determined to build and maintain relationships with people and organisations that share an interest in our vision and values" (Terms of Reference Draft Document). Essential, was alignment of vision and values between the collective and any other individual, group or organisation. From the beginning this was important for the collective, but as the initiative progressed and they encountered organisations where they experienced a misalignment of vision and values, this became even more essential, necessitating clarification and legitimisation through a structured document.

These documents became important mechanisms for the collective to resist and assert themselves within a set of asymmetrical power relations. These mechanisms drew on CBTL's resistant and navigational capitals (Rosales & Langhout, 2020), their knowledge of institutional contexts and how to enact resistance within them, as bureaucratic structures and practices are not solely available to organisations and the powerful actors within them, but also those who are excluded within organisational settings and contexts. However, organisations and institutions have at hand more resources such as specialised knowledge, time and money that make it easier to create and implement these structures and practices and are further able to draw on culturally proscribed authority to legitimate their actions (Roscigno, 2011). Thus, it is not resistance without consequence. For CBTL there were high resource costs as the collective sought to educate themselves on areas of administration, governance, liability, and arts law to draft these documents. This drew from their capacity to engage in the important work of developing their own ways of working within the initiative, of creating, of engaging with community, of their own roles and responsibilities outside of NiC and as individual creatives and actors within their communities. It also opened them to the risk of further withdrawal of support and weaponised bureaucratic practices in the face of protracted negotiations.

Refusal of an Oppressive System

Many scholars have written on the power of refusal: Audra Simpson (2017) writes on "refusal" as an alternative to recognition politics that allows the generative action of "producing and maintaining alternative structures of thought, politics and traditions away from and in critical relationships to states" (p. 19). Tuck and Yang (2014) speak of refusal in the context of social science research as a way of surfacing counter-narratives and rehumanising those whose personhood is diminished through colonial modes of knowledge production. McGranahan (2016) writes that:

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To refuse is to say no. But, no, it is not just that. To refuse can be generative and strategic, a deliberate move toward one thing, belief, practice, or community and away from another. Refusals illuminate limits and possibilities, especially but not only of the state and other institutions. And yet, refusal cannot be cast merely as a response to authority, or an updated version of resistance, or a concept to subsume under already existing scholarly categories. Instead... refusal [is] about the social as much as the political...a concept in dialogue with exchange and equality. (p. 319)

Refusal they write, is to step away from the oppositional politics of resistance within asymmetrical relations of power, and instead disinvest from its structures, understandings, and practices. It recognises the limits of such a relationship, its boundaries and borders, and steps beyond it. While the collective had been engaged in important forms of resistance - whether speaking back and naming their experiences of racialised exclusion, or drawing on the bureaucratic tools and practices of oppressive systems to build power and legitimacy – there were times where they refused to participate in the dynamics of race that shaped their experience:

we were direct about what we really wanted. If they're not going to step up and do what they want to do, then we're just going to have to get another auspice because that was the alternative that we had. If we're not getting the support that we need, there's no point in cohealth being our auspice. We can really just go to someone else.

(Anyuop Dau)

Rather than continue the relationship with cohealth, brushing up against the limits placed by the organisation's structures and practices, the collective explored the possibility of finding a different auspice. Rather than seeing NiC dependent on large non-profit organisations, they recognised their agency and autonomy to direct their own future and control their own

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outcomes. The funding agreement did not stipulate that cohealth had to remain an auspice partner, and there was no auspice agreement in place binding them to the relationship. This enabled the collective to investigate other organisations, such as Auspicious Arts Projects, a not-for-profit creative community management organisation who assists artists and arts organisations, who were better suited to provide the support and guidance that CBTL wanted. Presenting this refusal transformed the relations of power between cohealth and the collective. It shifted the scope of control that cohealth had held, and for the collective opened new possibilities through which they could develop the initiative in the ways they had envisioned. Whilst the collective ultimately continued in the auspice relationship with cohealth, the surfacing of this possibility, alongside other key events (a Review of the initiative and relationship that was undertaken by a third party), contributed to a shift that would enable NiC to see out the remainder of the funding with increased autonomy.

However, there was another example of a refusal undertaken by Geskeva, both a member of the collective and employed as a Community Cultural Development Officer within the Arts Generator. In this dual role Geskeva had felt she had been made the conduit between CBTL and cohealth through which communications were funnelled. This had sat in opposition with the model of communicating desired by CBTL which reflected the interdependent and non-hierarchical structure of the collective:

Ruth: any conversations that have to do with CBTL, has to be – if via email – CBTL has to be cc'd, or if verbal need to be present – so that there are no private conversations it includes everyone - if conversation about structure, projects, budget, anything to do with CBTL, it has to be communicated with CBTL – need to separate roles and responsibilities clearly between cohealth and CBTL. [We] can learn from cohealth in terms of structure and roles, but not reproduce because it doesn't reflect CBTL's values (Observation of NiC Meeting)

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This increased pressure and stress for Geskeva who felt like she was being “isolated” from the group and that she was increasingly unsafe in her interactions as a cohealth employee. Rather than continue within this dynamic, Geskeva would refuse by resigning from her role with cohealth:

I was on the project as an employee for cohealth and member of the collective that changed and now I’m just a member of collective. I think the choice was to resign for a number of reasons. The main one was I was there for a long time, it felt like it wasn’t the direction that I wanted to go in anymore. My values didn’t align, so those are some of the changes and I think that changes the dynamic or I hope that it changes the dynamics of how the project and the collective are looked at or affected. I think my presence now in a different way is a good thing. It allows the organisation to take more responsibility rather than having a person of colour be a buffer to how they need to take responsibility to building more space in providing more resources to people of colour or communities of people from the African community as well. (Geskeva Komba)

This refusal opened possibilities for how cohealth would continue to engage with the collective but was also instrumental for her own feeling of safety and wellbeing – particularly as a person of colour. Geskeva continued, reflecting on a conversation with friends who had also been affiliated with cohealth at different times:

They were just like, "They're going to let you take the fall if shit goes wrong." I was like, "What?" I got it. That scared me. I was just like, "No, no. I'm going to leave before that happens." That adds to the constructive dismissal because people don't want to take the fall. It was just like, "I'm not going to be the scapegoat for whatever

mess was here in the first place that you couldn't fix but you asked me to fix,"
(Geskeva Komba)

To walk away, to refuse, is not to give up a fight but to refuse to be subject to another's power. To exist on one's own terms rather than another's (Watego, 2021). To quote Sarah Ahmed's (2017) on what it means to say *no*: "the experience of being subordinate – deemed lower or of a lower rank – could be understood as being deprived of no. To be deprived of no is to be determined by another's will" (para. 17), for Ahmed "a struggle against power is a struggle for a right to no, a right not to agree with what you are asked to do or to be" (para. 21).

Drawing on Supportive Relationships

The CBTL collective also leverage their social capital, mobilising networks, relationships, and community resources to help develop the NiC initiative but also as crucial supports across the collective's negotiations with organisations such as cohealth and the social housing organisation. On reflecting on what advice she would give a different collective embarking on a similar project as NiC, Geskeva shared:

Come with an army [laughter]. No, no, I'm serious. I swear to God, and really just being connected with those people who have a lens in different industries, and in different roles and positions. That's one of the things that cohealth was supposed to be responsible for in terms of providing us mentors, in terms of communication, governance, finance. That still hasn't been something that's done. If we added those things in place, we'd probably feel a bit more empowered to do the roles that we were doing. I would definitely look at it in a different way, and be like, "These are particular mentors that will ride with me the whole way through." (Geskeva Komba)

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Whilst CBTL were engaged in struggles to build the relationships they needed to make NiC a self-determined and sustainable initiative, there were key relationships that they had cultivated which were impactful. One such relationship was with Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV), a relationship that was pivotal in moving the relationship between the collective and cohealth forward towards a more constructive space and point of resolution. Multicultural Arts Victoria is a non-profit organisation whose goals are:

1. To champion the development of artists and artform practices that speak to who we are as Australians, embedding pluralism and diversity as a fount of artistic and cultural innovation.
2. To build the case for diversity as one of our greatest cultural assets, through the generation of critical and compelling new work; and
3. To lead transformation in our sector, contesting the marginality of diverse artistic practices through the application of contemporary lenses and frameworks. (MAV, n.d.)

A key member of MAV had facilitated a workshop attended by some members of the collective and had been approached by CBTL to see if they could support them in the difficulties NiC faced across their negotiations with cohealth. The organisation proposed that considering external challenges such as the COVID-19 pandemic, that were also exacerbated by internal changes within NiC and cohealth, a review could be conducted at the half-way mark of the funding timeline “to take stock of achievements to date, review progress and account for any changes that may need to be made to the project plan in order to achieve the project outcomes” (MAV, n.d.). The review entailed facilitated meetings with key stakeholders, such as key cohealth staff, as well as a survey that went more widely to a range of actors and organisations that had relationships with the NiC initiative. Where the collective had encountered difficulty obtaining legitimacy through an Auspice Agreement, MAV were

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able to build the collective's power through their own legitimacy as a respected organisation and the knowledge they possessed of navigating institutional contexts. The review process was a circuit-breaker that both clarified the key tension points and enabled a partial resetting of the cohealth relationship. Furthermore, MAV were able to facilitate dialogue between both parties, and draw on their expert knowledge to further guide CBTL towards an outcome that would best support them to realise their goals of self-determination and sustainability. Additionally, MAV were able to broaden the scope of accountability to include Creative Victoria as a funding body and the insufficient support provided across the initiative.

Other important forms of support were also mobilised through key actors within cohealth who advocated for the collective, both internally within the organisation or externally such as in the negotiations with UNISON. For example, some of these actors were instrumental in bringing the collective together and supporting them through the grant process; in pushing for managers within cohealth to act to support the collective in being heard and respectively responded to by UNISON; and as buffers from the broader organisation of cohealth. Various Arts Generator coordinators were particularly significant in acting as a buffer and advocate within cohealth, to the extent that a further weaponisation of bureaucracy saw responsibility of the NiC initiative moved structurally away from the Arts Generator and the coordinators instructed not to be involved in the same way as previous coordinators had been; alienating and further restricting access to decision makers within cohealth. However, whilst the kind of support these actors provided was important, they also questioned the boundaries of what that support should look like:

I think the thing that I grapple with and don't have an answer to it is like I don't know that allyship is the right term because it is this thing of everyone's liberation being bounded up together. There's got to be a role for white majority in somebody who struggles and in trying to address the structural issues. I don't necessarily know that I

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haven't made sense of that. Sometimes just about donating some money, like no strings attached and getting out of the way and sometimes it's like you've got a specific skill set. I've got some legal skills, I know how to navigate contracts, I know how to write in a certain way. There's probably times where my voice affirming things that people are saying will actually be heard as fucked up as that is. I don't know what the role is exactly or what it looks like, but it's like if there is one, it's never going to be a clear cut one. (Person affiliated with cohealth - 1)

Similarly, one of the collective members reflects on how the Arts Generator coordinator that supported the collective in forming, and what it meant when they left:

I think firstly, not having [them] around was a huge challenge in itself. Then it became liberating in the sense that we're not relying on somebody else to do some of the things that we should probably know how to do by ourselves. It wasn't so bad but it was a huge change and that [they were] the middle person, that point of contact between CBTL and cohealth, especially because of [their] experience with the organization and then [their] relationships with the people within CBTL. (Tiyami Amum)

These are important boundaries where either relations of dependence can be recreated, or solidarities emerge building capacities for self-determined futures. People who find themselves in such roles; people who inhabit particular social locations or hold privileged identities; people who work alongside marginalised individuals and communities; must engage in critical reflexivity to navigate these relationships. There is no singular *answer* to what support *should* look like, but rather a need to be attentive to context, history, and to deeply listen to those whom one chooses to walk alongside with.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have presented an analysis of the counter-stories shared by the collective and key individuals affiliated with cohealth, that re-inserts race into the seemingly objective practices and strategies mobilised within organisational settings that enact control and exclusion towards racialised people and groups. In this analysis I identified three distinct discourses that permeate non-profit human services settings and work to obscure and render these practices and strategies as “colour-blind”. These discourses transform individual subjectivities and intersubjective relations, and work to rationalise and legitimise the systems that continue to sustain white supremacy at multiple levels. However, in the face of asymmetrical relations of power, the subjects of oppression are not helpless agents that are simply acted upon, rather, they enact small and large resistances, refuse oppressive conditions, and work to build and leverage community power forcing a rearticulation of relationships, critical learning, or both.

Chapter 10: Discussion and Conclusion

In this research I set out to work alongside Colour Between the Lines (CBTL), a collective of creative artists from the African diaspora, and to document the creation of Next in Colour (NiC), a self-determined alternative setting. Specifically, I sought to examine how self-determination was enacted through NiC, through the meaning-making activities the setting supported, and the practices and processes that emerged. Furthermore, alternative settings are not apart from their external contexts, and must engage and negotiate with other settings – many of which they intentionally pose an alternative to. I also sought to understand the complex negotiations that CBTL engaged with across these relationships, that constrained self-determination through the exercise of oppressive power. Specifically, the research questions that guided this research were:

1. What meanings do people share within NiC and how do these shape understandings of self, community, and self-determination?
2. How is self-determination evident in the community arts practices and processes mobilised within NiC?
3. How do other settings support or inhibit the creation of self-determined settings?

Situating this research within the field of critical community psychology, and drawing on critical race and decolonial frameworks, enabled me to refine community psychology tools that support the theorisation and analysis of settings to better understand how racialised people of African heritage respond to contexts of oppression in self-determining and rehumanising ways; and to bring into sharper focus the ways race and processes of racialisation are experienced and play out in organisational settings. Narrative inquiry provided an important methodological approach that aligns with these frameworks. Narrative inquiry examines the ways individuals narrate their lives and engage with their social worlds, privileging the lived experiences of those subjects within oppressive systems. Furthermore,

these frameworks supported the development of a community-engaged praxis that fosters an approach to research as accompaniment (Watkins, 2015) and implicates researchers into a shared liberatory vision and commitment to transformative social action.

Critical narrative analysis (Souto-Manning, 2014) was employed as a useful analytic tool to better connect the lived experiences of settings and the ways ideology and power are produced through societal discourses that permeate multiple levels of analysis (Quayle, 2017). Through my analysis I was able to present findings that showed how the collective engaged in a *radical reimagining of relationships and ways of working* to shape a vision of self-determination that would emerge through the NiC initiative; how the collective would ultimately enact this vision through relational and cultural activity that embodied *self-determination towards re-existence*; and the ways the collective were *negotiating institutional power* which constrained their efforts towards self-determination by asserting control and perpetuating structural exclusion through dominant organisational settings. These findings will be discussed further below, followed by a discussion of theoretical and methodological contributions, limitations of the research, future directions, and a conclusion.

The Cyclical Praxis of Next in Colour: Radical Imagination and Radical Action

Next in Colour was an alternative setting that mobilised community arts to support re-existence through self-determination (Walsh, 2021). It was a site of cyclical praxis, where radical action sprung forth from radical imagination, which in turn shifted the limits of what was possible (Freire, 1970; Kelley, 2002; Watkins & Shulman, 2008). To engage in radical imagination, to break with the normative assumptions and reconfigure our relationships with oppressive structures (Watkins & Shulman, 2008), deideologisation must occur. For the CBTL collective, the naming of structural and cultural violences that were experienced by themselves and their communities, and constrained subjectivities and their capacity to act in the world, became a pivotal outcome of this process. This naming constituted a

deconstruction of the conditions of the social world and enabled an articulation of what was needed to create spaces that offered possibilities of a world otherwise — an articulation of what it meant to self-determine.

For CBTL, self-determination encompassed material and symbolic domains. They imagined NiC as a physical space, a home for themselves and the communities of the African diaspora. It would be a tangible resource, a means to structural inclusion through the creation of opportunities, and way of maximising the financial resources attained through the Creative Victoria grant, alongside other funding. These resources would foster a sense of control, build a sense of belonging, and instil a sense of autonomy: to how they relate and work with each-other and their communities, but also within their relationships with institutions. The mobilisation of community arts and creative practice further engendered a self-determining over the representations of the African diaspora in Australia, the stories that are told and the histories that are claimed – an active and agentic engagement with their social world (Sonn et al., 2021). For the collective, self-determination would also mean regaining control over psychic space (Oliver, 2004) through healing, deconstruction of selves, expansion of epistemic resources and the freedom to create new meanings and frames for understanding. It is from this place of individual and collective healing that new identities can be shaped, and new narratives circulated within our broader social contexts for racialised groups (Case & Hunter, 2012; Quayle, 2017; Sonn et al., 2018). Counter-storytelling reconstructs shared societal understandings of racialised and marginalised people. It connects present systems of racialised oppression to their historical antecedents, showing how they formed and become hidden over time; and it makes clear how these systems manifest in everyday lives (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). Dutta et al. (2021) has shown how counter-storytelling through creative practices contributes to epistemic justice, making clearer relations of power that work to oppress and the processes which underpin the enactment of violence. These experiences of

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violence are held in the psyches and bodies of those whom violence is inflicted on; creative practice enables that hurt and violence to be expressed, to be made sense of, and to collectively be healed (Segalo, 2014). Thus, in turn, counter-storytelling supports further healing and the creation of important symbolic resources for communities to “(re)connect, (re)claim, strengthen and renew” (Quayle & Sonn, 2019, p. 56).

Engaging radical imagination is both a seed for self-determination, and a self-determining act in and of itself. Preceding self-determination is the unclasping of shackles, the symbolic and cultural violence, that constrain psychic space (Oliver, 2004). From this, further radical action emerged for the collective, as NiC became a prefigurative space as relational processes and counter-practices were formed (Cornish et al., 2016). These processes and practices served as a counter to neoliberal capitalist ideologies within the creative industries and everyday contexts. These practices and processes were an enactment of self-determination and also further supported the conditions of pre-figuration that enabled further self-determined activity. The setting and the relationships within it were constituted by these practices and processes and mediated the kinds of meanings shared.

The cultural resources created and supported through NiC were mediational tools re-signified dominant representations and discourses that constrained the subjectivity of racialised people of African heritage (Sonn et al., 2021). Through re-signification, the collective resisted and imagined ways and worlds otherwise. As an individual and collective resource, they supported deideologising processes and made available new frames and identities. Importantly, they made visible a version of the world where individuals were able to shape their *own* frames and identities (Sonn et al., 2021). Rather than simply a replacement of one set of representations for another – the cultural resources created and supported through NiC served as a broader invitation to radical imagination and collective forms of self-determination that also recognises intersectionality within African diaspora communities. The

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vision of self-determination that was articulated by the collective was not one that elevates a singular black and African identity in the face of white supremacy, but one that recognises complexity and diversity and elevates myriad black and African identities in the face of interlocking oppressive systems under coloniality. The imagined future that connects these stories represents a dialectic between cultural and historical memory, and the conditions of the present, with the goal of broadening the collective repertoires of understanding self, community, and the world (Stevens et al., 2013).

This generativity could also be seen in how the collective and their collaborators engaged with existing emancipatory frames and representations to fashion new cultural resources pertinent for this context of settler colonial Australia. The creative work represents an engagement of concepts, ideas, traditions of resistance, that span location and history. The collective and their collaborators engaged with dominant anti-oppressive, liberationist, anti-racist discourses that emerged from North America, and pan-African discourses from the African continent, but rearticulated them in relation to what it means to be black and of African descent in settler colonial Australia, recognising both a shared struggle with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and the need to seek a sense of belonging contingent on recognising Indigenous sovereignty. It is of utmost importance to develop tools and frames that reflect the histories of this place and are attentive to the struggles and manifestations of coloniality that structure day to day lives (Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011). Even justice-oriented frames can veer towards cultural hegemony when they begin to flatten experience and elevate some stories over others, or at worst erase some stories all together. This further constitutes self-determining activity – not just bound in the resistance of oppressive discourses, but in the creation of indigenous and situated forms of knowledge.

Thus, relationships were the orienting aspect, from which practices, processes, cultural resources and the setting itself emerged (Dutta et al., 2021; Montero, 2009). The

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setting of NiC, the art making and creative practice, were a vessel to hold the intentions and desires generated through being in relations and in dialogue. This is a generative-iterative (Bishop et al., 2002) cycle of radical action and radical imagination, which exists within pre-existing relationships and acts of community making that each member of the collective was embroiled in. NiC served as a canvas for radical action, a mediating structure that facilitated the shaping of the social world. These relationships, and the knowledge created through them, will last beyond the setting and inform new modes of cultural action. In this sense, NiC was not a setting that was ever wholly discretely bounded, but rather one manifestation of a complex ecology of relationships and their efforts towards collective meaning-making and social action. These relationships extended across settings, and the intentions of NiC were fundamentally connected to a collective set of intentions circulating within communities of the African diaspora. According to Bulhan's articulation of Fanon's work (1985), self-determination refers to the "process and capacity to choose among alternatives, to determine one's behaviour, and to affect one's destiny. As such, self-determination assumes a consciousness of human possibilities, an awareness of necessary constraints, and a willed, self-motivated engagement with one's world" (p. 265). This captures the collective's vision of self-determination, a process of deconstruction, imagination and acting on the world in which they "re-produce themselves in the objective world, make explicit their personality, and validate themselves as well as their knowledge" (Bulhan, 1985, p. 265). Bulhan further highlights that it is not only the product of praxis that is of importance here, but an active engagement with others and one's context. A relational orientational and sense of situatedness figured strongly in the collective's conceptualisations of self-determination. This was a conceptualisation that was foregrounded in their understanding of community, and collective responsibility. A vision of self-determination anchored in shared histories and reaching towards shared futures, and a vision that extended to a broader decolonial goal that

imagined self-determination not just for communities of the African diaspora, but in solidarity to speak back to broader systems of coloniality and white supremacy.

Rethinking Support – “colourblind” or power-conscious?

Creating alternative settings is a powerful intervention that can address the cultural and structural violence faced by racialised communities. The creation of alternative practices, structures and processes represents an important articulation of self-determination that have profound material and psychosocial effects. Thus, it is essential that community-led projects and initiatives to create alternative settings are supported to build capacity and maximise resources. Furthermore, organisations engaged in community-based work must also resist the neoliberal and managerial imperative towards endless innovation and recognise the grassroots and self-determining work that already exists within the communities they work alongside. This means shifting resources towards existing initiatives rather than creating new projects that originate from institutional settings. Scholars who have theorised alternative settings have noted the importance of context and external relationships (Bond & Wasco, 2017; Cherniss & Deegan, 2000; Sarason, 1972), and with their desire to support, organisations must also commit to developing practices, processes and structures that foster critical literacies across all levels. In aide of this it is imperative that we continue to map the contemporary manifestations of race and racism across all dimensions of our social worlds. The dynamics of oppression, the mechanisms that obfuscate and misdirect, they must be named and denaturalised (Dutta et al., 2016). This research has shown, that like a magician fooled by their own sleight of hand, wilful ignorance (Mills, 1997) lends itself to protective institutional responses that ensures the continuity of race and racism, and the misrecognition of its impacts. Organisations are mediating structures between individuals and their social worlds and are microcosms through which broader systems can be examined (Berger & Neuhaus, 1980). Thus, critical literacies must be attentive to how privilege is reproduced, and

how the processes of reproduction become obscured through “colourblind” discursive frames (Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

A starting point, firstly, is to recognise and take seriously the shared experiences of those subjected to racialised cultural and structural violence (Decolonial Psychology Editorial Collective, 2021; Fernández et al., 2021; Martín-Baró 1994; Salter & Adams, 2013; Sonn & Stevens 2021). From this vantage point contemporary manifestations of race, and the psychosocial cost of living and working within unjust systems becomes clearer. These costs, the emotional labour and racial battle fatigue (Smith et al., 2007), often go unrecognised. This includes the costs of accommodation, which can give a reprieve from white fragilities, the ongoing work of educating and informing in the face of white wilful ignorance, the relational work in fostering community and solidarities, the everyday resistance, and the ongoing efforts to untether subjectivity from whiteness and coloniality. Secondly, is to place primacy on the processes of collaborating with and supporting alternative settings, rather than measuring success solely on the outputs that are produced. This calls for values alignment and an ethical orientation, beyond institutional risk management, that privileges relationality and dialogue over neoliberal values of productivity and efficiency (Agung-Igusti, 2022). It calls for the development of structures that support critical reflexivity, mutual learning and conscientisation (Agung-Igusti et al., 2021; Beals et al., 2021; Fernández et al., 2021). While dominant settings that have more resources at their disposal are well positioned to strengthen the capacities of alternative settings, these dominant settings stand to learn much about the limits of their own practices and processes across these encounters. Together these approaches can contribute to forms of support that are situated and power-conscious and can help navigate ways of leveraging institutional power and white privilege in ways that do not reproduce patterns of dependence.

However, alternative settings may very well encounter the kinds of oppressive structures that constrained CBTL's efforts towards self-determination. This research also showed the way racialised communities mobilised important capitals to engage in everyday resistances. For Rosales and Langhout (2019, p. 3):

Everyday resistance is “people [acting] in their everyday lives in ways that might undermine power” (Vinthagen & Johansson, 2012, p. 1). Everyday resistance is distinguishable from collective social movements, which tend to be organized and more public, such as in protests and strikes, where people directly make demands. Although it can inform organized political movements (Kelley, 1993), everyday resistance undermines power in ways that talk back to unjust power relations and says “no” to the logics of domination (e.g., neoliberalism, whiteness), rather than attempting to directly alter power structures (Cohen, 2004; Kelley, 1993).

The CBTL collective may not have been able to transform organisations like cohealth and the social housing organisation and were dependent on both organisational settings in significant ways – one as an auspice that controlled access to their grant funding, the other as the property manager of the space that housed NiC. However, the collective still enacted important forms of resistance using the tools and practices of a bureaucratic and managerialist system that they had often been wielded against them. These resistances further embodied the collective’s desire for self-determination, as in the face of asymmetric relations of power they continued to assert autonomy, legitimate the initiative and their approaches, and centre their values as a guiding orientation to their relationships and collaborative ways of working. They mobilised resistant, aspirational, and navigational capital (Rosales & Langhout, 2019; Yosso, 2005) to navigate institutional contexts and find ways to leverage institutional tools to renegotiate the boundaries of power within a relationship they were structurally bound to.

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The counter-storytelling the collective engaged in, formally in the interviews as part of this research, and with each other when they would come together to plan, constituted another form of resistance. For Scott (1990) this constitutes the hidden transcripts that occur in private spaces between those subjected to oppression, an infrapolitics that consist of small-scale, unobtrusive forms of resistance. For Scott engaging in these small resistances cannot be seen as separate from other forms of more direct resistance, they signal a renegotiation of power relations, and a testing of boundaries, which opens a dialectic between the direct and indirect. The counter-storytelling, a symbolic resource that creates the possibility of transformative declared action and declared action providing material from which to shape new narratives and counter-stories that inform identities and frames of meaning. They reject the moral authority of dominant institutions to make claims of their worth and humanity, and reaffirm resistant identities (O’Nell, 1994). Furthermore, to engage in this counter-storytelling provides counter-frames that are internalised by individuals and reject negative assumptions. This is an important mechanism to weather the psychosocial costs of encounters with oppressive systems when the capacity for more active forms of resistance, and the associated costs, become too risky (Evans & Moore, 2015).

Additionally, these forms of infrapolitics develop a consciousness that leads to a recognition that relations of dominance and subordination can at times be refused. There were instances where the CBTL collective encountered institutional power wielded against them, they refused to participate. A key deceit of dominant power holders is the myth of the inevitability and immovability of their power. This power is often invested in a rigged game where they dictate the rules and conditions of struggle. In refusing, who holds power is rearticulated, and the assumed binaries of dominant and subordinated become less clear. Of course, refusal comes with material costs, as organisations and individuals respond defensively to challenges to the status quo. However, in refusing, the collective was able to

draw on their other networks and build power to support them to renegotiate the terms of their relationships with organisations such as cohealth. Again, the collective nature of self-determination is evident. For initiatives like Next in Colour it cannot solely be reached through developing resources and building capacities but lies also in the relationships that are fostered across all levels. Thus, for CBTL, self-determination, whether in the spaces they create, the stories they share, or the institutional structures they navigate, is relational. To self-determine is to nourish our relationships with one-another, for it is in our relationships with others we can act on our worlds and assert our humanity (Bulhan, 1985; Montero, 2007).

Extending Community Psychology's Conceptual Tools

There have been calls from within community psychology to better focus our conceptual tools on the “micro-politics of culture, power and knowledge” (Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011, p. 27; Watts & Serrano- García, 2003). Others have argued that many of the foundational concepts of community psychology, such as empowerment, have been separated from similar theoretical concepts developed outside of the Americo-centric confines of the discipline, and co-opted in ways that reflect neoliberal values and beliefs and blunt their political utility (Beals et al., 2021), maintaining the status quo (Cattaneo et al., 2014). In engaging an articulation of critical community psychology grounded in decolonial, liberation and critical race and whiteness perspectives, this research brings power sharply into focus and provides an analysis of how power and race are (re)produced epistemically. The creation of settings (Cherniss, 2012; Maton & Brodksy, 2010; Sarason, 1972; Seidman, 2012; Tseng & Seidman, 2007) has long been a concern within community psychology. Like others who have examined more closely the gendered qualities of settings (Bond & Allen, 2016; Bond & Wasco, 2017), these frameworks resist the urge to treat race as simply a demographic variable in the theorisation of settings and their dynamics, and instead advance an analysis that places settings within broader histories and contexts of racialised relations of power.

Further, they centre culture, as pivotal in understanding power, privilege and oppression – and the ways racialised people and communities respond and seek to self-determine (Bulhan, 1985; Malherbe, 2020; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2011). Community psychology has also sought to describe how people draw on narrative resources to construct individual and collective identities, and negotiate dominant cultural narratives (Mankowski & Rappaport, 2000; Rappaport, 1995; Rappaport, 2000). Research from within psychology has also identified the role dominant cultural narratives play in shaping relational dynamics and structures within organisational settings (Bond & Wasco, 2017; Hasford, 2016). By engaging a critical narrative reading, the relationship between the way people construct themselves and make sense of their experiences through individual, collective and dominant narratives; and societal discourses that reflect hegemonic systems and relations of power become more evident (Boonzaier, 2019; Quayle, 2017; Souto-Manning, 2012).

Central to decoloniality is a striving for epistemic justice (Sonn & Stevens, 2021). Like other community-engaged research has demonstrated (e.g., Sonn et al., 2021; Quayle, 2017) the community arts practice mobilised by CBTL promotes epistemic justice through the recovery of cultural and historical memories and the surfacing of powerful counter-stories. However, this further constitutes an epistemic intervention into hegemonic forms of disciplinary knowledge, and who gets to be considered a “knower” and holder of legitimate knowledge. Critical race and decolonial approaches places primacy on the lived experiences of those who have borne the brunt of racist systems and colonial oppression. However, importantly, these experiences do not just constitute “data” to be extracted and made sense of for the benefit of expanding disciplinary knowledge. Rather, it constitutes a substantive theorising from below, from sub-altern positions, representing an intimate analysis of oppressive conditions (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984; Watego, 2021). The CBTL collective chose not to be anonymised, to not be separated from their knowledge making contributions.

The knowledge contributed through this research is co-constructed, shaped through the collective epistemic resources that both me and the collaborative have drawn on to make sense of the various settings and dynamics that were encountered in this project. Thus, community psychology, in particular Australian community psychology, is further enriched through the frames of understanding contributed through NiC. These are frames that are highly contextualised and situated within the context of settler colonial Australia, and the politics of race that permeate it. Thus, this research contributes to an Australian critical race psychology that follows decolonial imperative towards the creation of indigenous knowledge from marginalised communities and a recognition of Indigenous dispossession as central to the formation of racialising structures. This reveals not only contemporary manifestations of race and racism but shows how it manifests locally. With dominant discourses and narratives that originate from global systems of coloniality, morphing as they engage with the cultural resources, and racial politics that are firmly rooted in particular places and histories (Quayle & Sonn, 2013).

Towards a Critical and Community-Engaged Praxis

The conceptual frameworks discussed above also provide a set of coordinates from which to engage in a critical and community-engaged praxis. Like others have written on critical and decolonial forms of PAR (e.g., Dudgeon et al., 2020; Tuck & Guishard, 2013), this methodological approach moves beyond research design and requires the adoption of an epistemological position that is fundamentally relational, dialogical and reflexive. The approach outlined in this research begins with a set of ethical and value orientations, and a concern with epistemic justice and transforming systems of oppression (Montero, 2011; Reyes Cruz & Sonn, 2015). It is a methodological approach shaped through substantive theorising (Wicker, 1989) and engaging in a reflective iterative-generative praxis with those whom I have accompanied in my research (Bishop et al., 2002). Such an approach maintains

rigour while being more attentive to the interpersonal and institutional dynamics of power.

This form of substantive theorising is also better suited to addressing the social problems that we grapple with in our everyday worlds, social problems that we are often not distant from but instead implicated within (Sonn & Quayle, 2013). Indeed, as the NiC project unfolded and responded to changing situations and relationships, so did the design of this research, and as I engaged with the counter-stories and counter-practices shared by the collective, my own frames of understanding the research relationships and my own practices took new shapes. The social problems addressed in this research are situated within complex cultural, historical and political contexts, and so, require situated approaches that are nuanced and contextually sensitive (Haapanen & Christens, 2021).

The critical, liberatory and decolonial frameworks that I drew on in this research call for new approaches to knowledge production that necessitate reflexive processes. These processes entail a questioning of how power, privilege, and the social locations I inhabit worked to shape my relationships with the CBTL collective. Harrell and Bond (2006) describe the community psychology principle of *self-in-community*, which is concerned with the ways our values, cultural assumptions, and identities shape our research with diverse people and communities. They advocate a stance of empowered humility, which supports a shift from community psychologists as “expert knowers” to collaborators who recognise their limitations and deficits in knowledge. At various times I inhabited different roles. At times I was a researcher documenting meetings or conducting interviews; at times I was a participant in those same meetings and in workshops and events; and at times I was a collaborator, invited to contribute to the NiC initiative in useful and meaningful ways. The sense of a shared identity also shifted across the research. In some moments I shared a sense of identity and community belonging with the CBTL collective, as a POC, as having migrant histories, as living and working in the Inner Western Suburbs of Melbourne. But I was also an outsider,

as non-black, non-African, as a man, and as a university-based researcher. It was important to situate and locate myself reflexively, being wary to not let sameness erase difference, and in doing so obscure the workings of power (Langhout, 2006). Not all settings created by CBTL were appropriate for me to be a part of, with my presence (and identity as a researcher not from the African diaspora) potentially antithetical to the kind of safe space for people from South Sudanese backgrounds that the collective wished to create. However, at other times I was called on as a critical friend (Evans, 2015) and witness (Watkins, 2015) as the collective negotiated their relationship with cohealth. To rise to these roles means refusing to be simply a distant observer but implicated in the struggles of those you accompany. Ratele and Malherbe (2020) outline what an anti-racist psychology *does* and *does not* do. For them anti-racism is a “set of ongoing acts and practical commitments” (p. 298), it entails a recognition that we are bound in each-other’s struggles, and an active political engagement that extends beyond the walls of academia and into collective forms of intersectional anti-racist struggles led by those who bear the brunt of racist structures.

Contributing to Social Transformation

Hapaanen and Christens (2021) call for a greater consideration as to how community engaged projects contribute to social transformation. This includes in what ways power structures are altered. They note that epistemic justice and participatory methodologies are key areas that many projects address, however, there is less consideration for the ways local power structures are changed contributing to important material outcomes. Decolonial and anti-racist work must seek to effect change beyond the creation of scholarly work that contributes to disciplinary knowledge, and instead find ways to support the efforts of communities organising and building community power (Ratele & Malherbe, 2020; Segalo et al., 2015). This work contributes to the epistemic projects of the CBTL collective and many others who strive to right the deficits in collective epistemic resources that currently exist. In

documenting this work it grows an archive that captures the lived realities of Africans in Australia navigating the ongoing legacies of coloniality, but also the transcendent stories of joy and celebration grounded in cultural remembering, and that shape ways of being that seek to be untethered from dialectics of race. Such archives open possibilities for new subjectivities and shared understandings across differently positioned people who are brought together in inter-communal spaces (Stevens et al., 2013).

The knowledge produced within this project also contributes to the creation of practical resources that aide in ongoing efforts for people of African heritage to build community power and carve out spaces for self-determination. In documenting the processes that the CBTL collective developed and the constraints they faced, targeted resources and capacity building efforts can be mobilised to support similar collectives and groups in forming their own self-determined alternative settings and navigating institutional power. These resources and avenues for capacity building will be developed through community-led spaces, challenging structures that lead to gate-keeping and the maintenance of relations of dependence. Whilst there is risk of over-stating the power of academic research in transforming structures that are grounded in political realities (Hapaanen & Christens, 2021), academic authority holds a legitimating power. The products of this research will further seek to leverage that power in way of contributing to the evidence base that shows the capacity for self-determined community arts spaces as an effective intervention across symbolic and material domains into racialised structural exclusion. This highlights the need for further funding of projects such as NiC. Additionally, similar projects may require support from various organisations and institutions to access more resources, develop capacities, and build power – this equally includes funding bodies. Products of this research will also be shared with key stakeholders to advocate for policies that incorporate frameworks for collaborative

working that are process focussed, engage mechanisms of accountability, and commit to mutual learning and critical reflexivity.

Limitations

The unprecedented global phenomena of the COVID-19 pandemic also impacted upon the research. It had a significant impact on the operations of cohealth, a large community health organisation; it required NiC to cancel or significantly changed many in-person events and activities due to lengthy lockdowns that prevented people coming together; these same lockdowns prevented the collective from meeting in-person for periods across 2020, or for me to conduct in-person interviews or observations. However, the barriers presented by the pandemic showed both how the collective adapted and re-imagined their work in this context, and the dynamics within their relationships with other settings. Lastly, across the project my access to the setting of cohealth became more limited as the relationship between the organisation and the collective, and by extension myself, changed. The research was primarily concerned with documenting the collective's experiences, but further interviews and access to the setting of cohealth and key individuals connected to the initiative would have deepened my understanding of organisational discourses, practices, and processes.

Future Directions

Firstly, community-engaged research that desires to engage a decolonial and liberatory praxis, and to not reproduce the epistemic violence so engrained in the social sciences and psychology (Bulhan, 1985; Smith, 2012; Tuck, 2009), must take seriously a commitment to accompaniment that extends beyond the lifespan of a project. While this project may come to an end, it is essential to ensure a continuity to the relationships that took shape and the forms of reciprocity and mutual accountability that defined them. This is a counter to extractive forms of research, a recognition of mutual accountability that recognises that the struggles

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marginalised communities face is ongoing and do not end once a project's funding runs out (Fernández et al., 2021). This research focused on documenting the work of the CBTL collective in building an alternative setting; the practices, processes and creative resources they engaged; and the constraints they faced. It was one moment in time, and part of a broader body of collective community-building and resistance each of the collective members were part of. For the collective NiC is not just another project, but part of a more expansive desire for self-determination and reclamation of culture and memory. Ongoing efforts must be made to continue to move resources from institutions such as universities towards supporting this ongoing work. For example, supporting scholarship funded researchers to continue these relationships of accompaniment, and support the overarching projects of epistemic inclusion.

In shaping NiC, the collective had voiced an intention that the initiative would not focus on gender, but instead the way that the experiences of the African diaspora in Australia are over-determined by race. The tools and frames developed in this research reflected these acutely felt impacts of racialisation, and the desire of the collective to document the concomitant dynamics of resistance and oppression. The CBTL collective consisted of five women and one man. Gender permeated the relational dynamics between the collective, and within the settings they created reflecting the importance of matriarchy for creating spaces of resistance and healing (Balla, 2020; hooks, 1990). Gender was powerfully evident across the counter-stories present in the cultural resources that were surfaced and created – as the collaborating creatives not only theorised how their bodies were raced, but also gendered. Future research should seek to explore the role of women in creating and leading settings such as NiC, and the intersections of gender and race within dominant settings.

Future research could also document the ways different positioned people engaged with the settings and the creative resources that are created. The cultural resources created through

NiC re-shaped subjectivities and frames of understanding for people from the African diaspora. However, they also are important resources that invite people from outside the community to view them differently, with implications for solidarity and social action. It is important to further investigate how processes such as aesthetic distance and transformative witnessing that are mobilised through creative practices can facilitate social transformation (Agung-Igusti & Sonn, 2020; Maxwell & Sonn, 2021). Furthermore, a key finding was that the NiC setting did not exist as a discrete and disconnected alternative settings but was part of a wider ecology of relationships and community making where cultural resources and ideas were shared. Future research could expand the research to better document the broader ecologies of self-determined activity emerging from the formation of alternative settings that creatives from racialised communities are engaged in. The goal of such research would be to archive the epistemic resources, strategies of resistance, and forms of solidarity building that emerge from these networks and relationships and show how institutions can best support self-determination in this work.

Conclusion

Self-determination is both a process towards, and an outcome of, re-existence for those who are excluded, racialised, and marginalised (Walsh, 2021). To self-determine is to be free to imagine, to create, and to act on the world in ways that are affirming and humanising (Bulhan, 1985). In this sense self-determination is generative and future oriented, yet to imagine radically necessitates a recovery of cultural memory, a rootedness, from which revitalised subjectivities can flourish (Malherbe, 2020; Martín-Baró, 1994; Watkins, 2015; Zavala, 2016). These are not solitary actions, but endeavours we undertake in community, and through our relationships with others. Alternative settings, such as Next in Colour, are structures that can emerge when people come together and strive to self-determine; they are protective structures, and they are structures that radiates outwards a vision of transformative

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change. Malherbe (2020) writes that cultural remembering and production through the arts can both be a mode of inquiry and site of liberation, and community arts engages a relational praxis that fosters connectedness and a collective acting on the world (Madyaningrum & Sonn, 2011; Quayle & Sonn, 2019; Sonn et al., 2021). This research has shown how alternative settings that mobilise community arts, can create powerful relational practices and cultural resources towards self-determination. For the CBTL collective this constituted a naming of racialised violence and an imagining otherwise that they sought to embody both in their praxis and within their counter-storytelling.

However, the creation of new and alternative settings can serve as an affront to the dominant institutions they embody a critique to. For CBTL, the envisioned path to self-determination was fraught with tensions as institutions sought to limit what was possible, reassert control and reinscribe asymmetrical relations of power through dominant discourses that obscure the centrality of race. Yet, through various acts of resistance and refusal (Ahmed, 2017; Rosales & Langhout, 2020; Scott, 1990; Simpson, 2017; Watego, 2021) - a further articulation of self-determined activity - the collective was able to build their power and maintain agency and autonomy. Thus, for those who seek to work with racialised groups and communities to support self-determining work, it is imperative to develop critical literacies and reflexive practices that allow a deeper consideration of how race and power shape relations within settler colonial Australia. This starts with listening to sub-altern voices and validating the knowledges and lived experiences of those who are subject to racialised cultural and structural violence. It also entails a willingness to accompany, to enact solidarities, to bear witness and leverage the privileges and resources afforded by proximity to whiteness in the service of liberation.

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Appendix A: Ethics Approval

Dear ASPR CHRISTOPHER SONN,

Your amendment request for the following ethics application has been formally reviewed and finalised.

» Application ID: HRE18-241

» Chief Investigator: ASPR CHRISTOPHER SONN » Other Investigators: MR RAMA AGUNG-IGUSTI, MISS ELLA DU VE, DR AMY QUAYLE » Application Title: CBTL: Creating Solidarities Across Communities of Difference » Form Version: 13-07

The amendment request for this ethics application has been accepted and deemed to meet the requirements of the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)' by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee. Approval has been granted for two (2) years from the original approval date; 17/01/2019.

Continued approval of this research project by the Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee (VUHREC) is conditional upon the provision of a report within 12 months of the above approval date or upon the completion of the project (if earlier). A report proforma may be downloaded from the Office for Research website at: <http://research.vu.edu.au/hrec.php>.

Please note that the Human Research Ethics Committee must be informed of the following: any changes to the approved research protocol, project timelines, any serious events or adverse and/or unforeseen events that may affect continued ethical acceptability of the project. In these unlikely events, researchers must immediately cease all data collection until the Committee has approved the changes. Researchers are also reminded of the need to notify the approving HREC of changes to personnel in research projects via a request for a minor amendment. It should also be noted that it is

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the Chief Investigators' responsibility to ensure the research project is conducted in line with the recommendations outlined in the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) 'National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007).'

On behalf of the Committee, I wish you all the best for the conduct of the project.

Secretary, Human Research Ethics Committee

Phone: 9919 4781 or 9919 4461

Email: researchethics@vu.edu.au

Appendix B: cohealth Arts Generator Letter of Support



2/11/2018

To whom it may concern:

I am writing to confirm that cohealth Arts Generator is working in partnership with Victoria University to examine Colour Between the Lines (CBTL). CBTL is a ground breaking community arts initiative run by a collective of 6 experienced African artists (creative practitioners) in partnership with cohealth Arts Generator.

cohealth Arts Generator and CBTL creative practitioners will actively support the research that will be conducted by Christopher Sonn and his team. Geskeva Komba who has dual role as part of the initiative, being an employee of cohealth and as a creative practitioner of CBTL, will act as a collaborating researcher in the proposed collaborative participatory research approach to document CBTL as a social change initiative.

As the acting coordinator of cohealth Arts Generator, I have read through Christopher Sonn's research proposal and support the involvement of our organisation in this project, subject to receiving appropriate ethics approval, and participant consent.

Yours sincerely,


Julian Cleary
Acting cohealth Arts Generator Coordinator

45 Moreland Street, Footscray Vic 3011 Ph: 03 93628877
www.cohealthartsgenerator.com

Appendix C: Interview Schedule – First Round CBTL

1. 1. Tell me a bit about yourself? In what ways would you describe yourself?
2. What communities do you describe yourself as belonging to?
 - a. How would you describe these communities?
3. Tell me, how did CBTL come to be?
4. How did you become involved in CBTL?
5. What is your creative practice coming into CBTL?
6. What are the aims of CBTL?
7. How do you see CBTL as achieving these aims?
8. Describe your experience so far developing CBTL?
 - a. Have there been any challenges, and what difficulties might you have encountered?
 - b. What are some things you have learnt through this experience?
9. What communities/groups/organisations do you see the initiative as contributing to and in what ways?
 - a. What contributions do you think the initiative will have for:
 - i. Young artists
 - ii. African diaspora
 - iii. Other communities
 - iv. Arts communities
 - v. Cohealth/cAG

Appendix D: Interview Schedule – Second Round CBTL

1. Tell me a bit about where CBTL is at at the moment?
 - a. What projects
 - b. What collaborations and partnerships
2. Tell me a bit about the workshops/exhibitions/performances you've been involved in so far?
 - a. Highlights
 - b. Challenges
 - c. How did it come to be?
 - d. What was one of the most memorable moments for you working on this project?
3. In what ways has the initiative changed from when it was in its early stages?
 - a. Why have these things changed?
4. Can you recount some of your experiences working with cohealth and cAG?
5. Can you describe some of CBTL's encounters with other groups, settings or organisations?
 - a. UNISON
 - b. Councils (e.g. Brimbank, Bunjil Place)
 - c. Other orgs
6. What have been the biggest challenges faced as a collective?
7. What have been some of the biggest achievements?
8. If you could share with someone else doing a similar project, what are some things you have learnt so far through your experience that you would share with them?
9. How would you describe your experience so far developing CBTL?
 - a. What are some things that have surprised you about these experiences?

Appendix E: Interview Schedule – Contributors to The Colouring Book Zine

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE

1. Can you share with me a bit about yourself; how would you describe yourself and the communities you belong to?
2. Can you share with me how you came to be involved in the creative arts and zine-making?
3. How did you come to be involved in The Colouring Book/CBTL?
4. Can you share with me a bit about how and why The Colouring Book came to be?
5. As a contributor, can you share with me what The Colouring Book is aspiring to?
6. Why choose the medium of zines for this project?
7. Why choose to make the zine an online space/digitally distributed?
8. What do you see as some of the defining aspects of community arts projects?
9. What sets The Colouring Book apart from other community arts projects or creative spaces?
10. Can you share with me some of the practices/processes that define The Colouring Book?
11. How do you translate the processes that The Colouring Book has envisioned into action and tangible outcomes?
12. Can you tell me a bit about what is important to you, as an artist and as a collective, about how you do this work?
13. What are the challenges you have faced in working on this project?
14. As a contributor, what has the experience of working on The Colouring Book been like?
15. Would you like to see The Colouring Book grow as a project? How?

Appendix F: Interview Schedule – Persons Affiliated with cohealth

1. Can you tell me a bit about cohealth?
 - a. Role at cohealth
 - b. Prevention team
2. Tell me a bit about Arts Gen and role there?
3. Can you tell me a bit about CBTL?
 - a. How would you describe the project and how did it come about?
4. How would you describe the aims of CBTL more broadly?
5. Describe your relationship with the CBTL initiative?
6. Have there been some challenges for the initiative? What do you see those as being?
7. What are some things you might have learnt through working with CBTL?
8. What do you think makes the CBTL initiative successful in achieving its goals? And what are its constraints?
9. In what ways do you think the initiative can be improved?
10. How do you think the initiative could be better supported?
11. What communities/groups/organisations do you see the initiative as contributing to and in what ways?
 - a. What contributions do you think the initiative will have for:
 - i. Young artists
 - ii. African communities
 - iii. Other communities
 - iv. Arts communities
 - v. Cohealth/cAG

Appendix G: Information to Participants

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS INVOLVED IN RESEARCH

You are invited to participate

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled “Colour Between the Lines: Creating Solidarities Across Communities of Difference”.

This project is being conducted by a student researcher Rama Agung-Igusti as part of a PhD study and evaluation of the project at Victoria University under the supervision of Professor Christopher Sonn from the College of Health and Biomedicine and Dr. Amy Quayle from the First Year College, Psychology.

Project explanation

The project is a case study and evaluation of the Colour Between the Lines initiative, and seeks to examine how change is enacted through CBTL as a participatory arts organisation, and the spaces it creates, across individual, collective and organisational levels. The questions asked during the interview will relate to your involvement and participation with the initiative, what issues are important for you and the communities you belong to, and what impacts and contributions you think the initiative has made.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to participate in an interview that may be up to an hour in duration. The research will be conducted as a participatory case study, with Colour Between the Lines constituting the case. The case will be situated within a broader framework of narrative inquiry where narratives are the key means for constructing and conveying meanings about everyday life, and understandings about self and others. You will be interviewed about your experiences and relationships with and within CBTL and the meaning of participation in the initiative or its projects.

What will I gain from participating?

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Your participation will provide you with an opportunity to recount your experience, involvement and participation with the Colour Between the Lines initiative, as well as voice your opinion about issues relevant to yourself and the communities you belong to. It will also provide an opportunity to contribute insights that will inform activities aimed at supporting and strengthening African Australian communities.

How will the information I give be used?

The information you provide will be digitally recorded (with permission) and transcribed verbatim. These transcripts, which will inform the final report and academic papers, will be confidential and only seen by the researchers, your transcript will also be returned to you. All of your information will be coded and not attributed to yourself, unless you specify otherwise. The research will be produced into a written report, a student thesis, as well as academic journal articles and presentations.

What are the potential risks of participating in this project?

There is a low probability of risk during the interviews, however, it is possible that you may become distressed because of some of the questions asked in the interview, as they may evoke particular memories or draw on negative experiences.

How will this project be conducted?

This study will use interviews to gather information from people supporting or participating in the Colour between the Lines initiative. Those interested in participating can contact Rama directly. He will contact you separately to organise a time and place that is mutually convenient for the interview to be conducted. After the interview has been conducted they will make contact again to go over the transcription of the interview with you and to discuss the next steps in the research and your involvement.

Who is conducting the study?

Professor Christopher Sonn

College of Health and Biomedicine

Victoria University

Christopher.Sonn@vu.edu.au

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Direct contact number: 99195226

Dr. Amy Quayle

First year College, Psychology

Victoria University

Direct contact number: 99195892

Rama Agung-Igusti

College of Health and Biomedicine

Victoria University

Rama.agungigusti@live.vu.edu.au

Direct contact number: 0422 038 318

Support Services

Dr. Romana Morda

Psychologist

Romana.Morda@vu.edu.au

Phone: 99195223

Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the Chief Investigator listed above.

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

Appendix H: Informed Consent

**CONSENT FORM FOR PARTICIPANTS
INVOLVED IN RESEARCH**

INFORMATION TO PARTICIPANTS:

You are invited to participate in a research project entitled "Colour Between the Lines: Creating Solidarities Across Communities of Difference".

The project is a case study of the Colour Between the Lines initiative, and seeks to examine how change is enacted through CBTL as a participatory arts organisation, and the spaces it creates, across individual, collective and organisational levels. The questions asked during the interview will relate to your involvement and participation with the initiative, what issues are important for you and the communities you belong to, and what impacts and contributions you think the initiative has made.

There is a low probability of risk during the interviews, however, it is possible that you may become distressed because of some of the questions asked in the interview, as they may evoke particular memories or draw on negative experiences.

CERTIFICATION BY PARTICIPANT

I, _____

of _____

certify that I am at least 18 years old* and that I am voluntarily giving my consent to participate in the study:

"Colour Between the Lines: Creating Solidarities Across Communities of Difference" being conducted at Victoria University by: Professor Christopher Sonn.

I certify that the objectives of the study, together with any risks and safeguards associated with the procedures listed hereunder to be carried out in the research, have been fully explained to me by:

Rama Agung-Igusti

AN ALTERNATIVE SETTING TOWARDS SELF-DETERMINATION

and that I freely consent to participation involving the below mentioned procedures:

- Individual interview that will be digitally recorded (with permission) and transcribed

I certify that I have had the opportunity to have any questions answered and that I understand that I can withdraw from this study at any time and that this withdrawal will not jeopardise me in any way.

I have been informed that the information I provide will be kept confidential.

Signed:

Date:

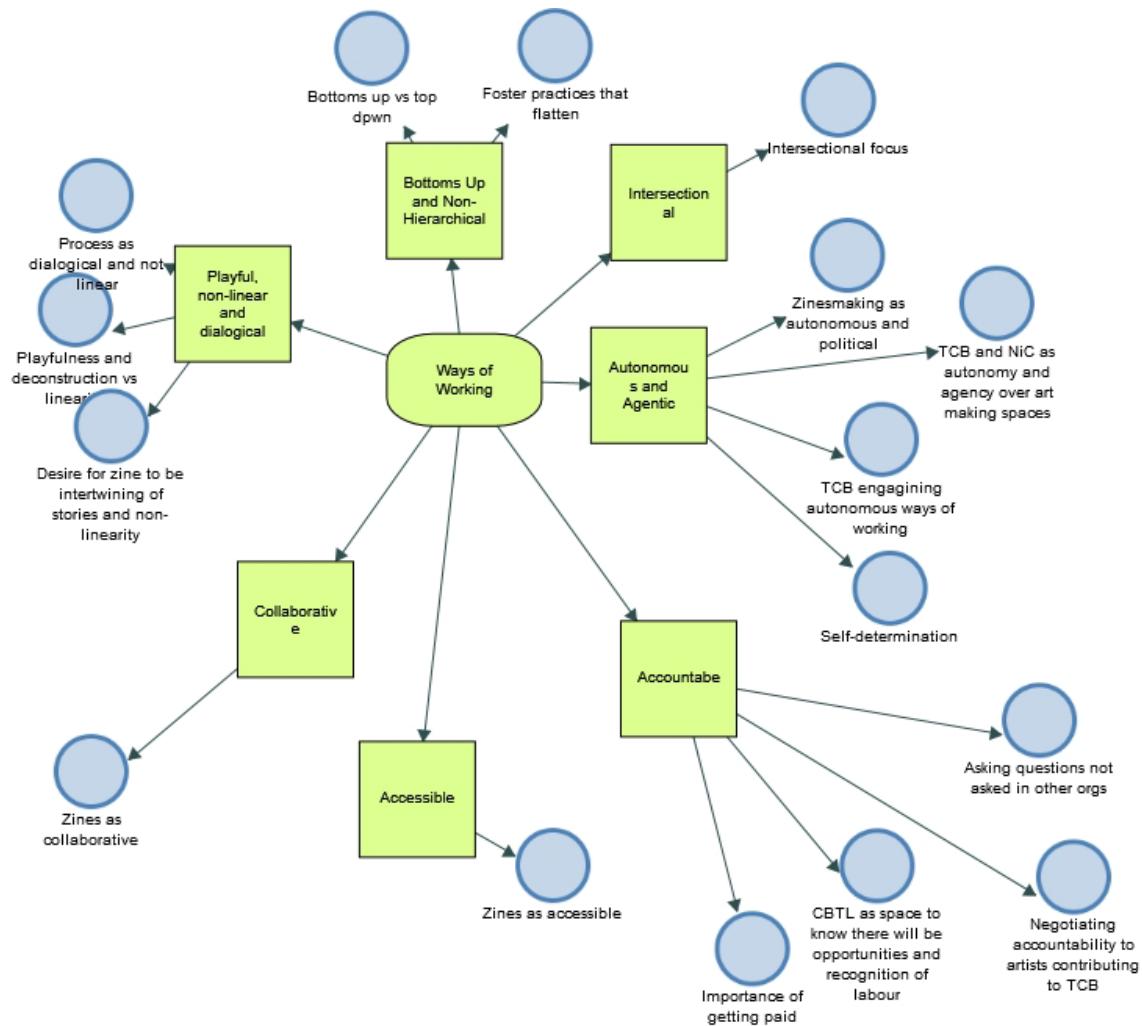
Any queries about your participation in this project may be directed to the researcher

Professor Christopher Sonn

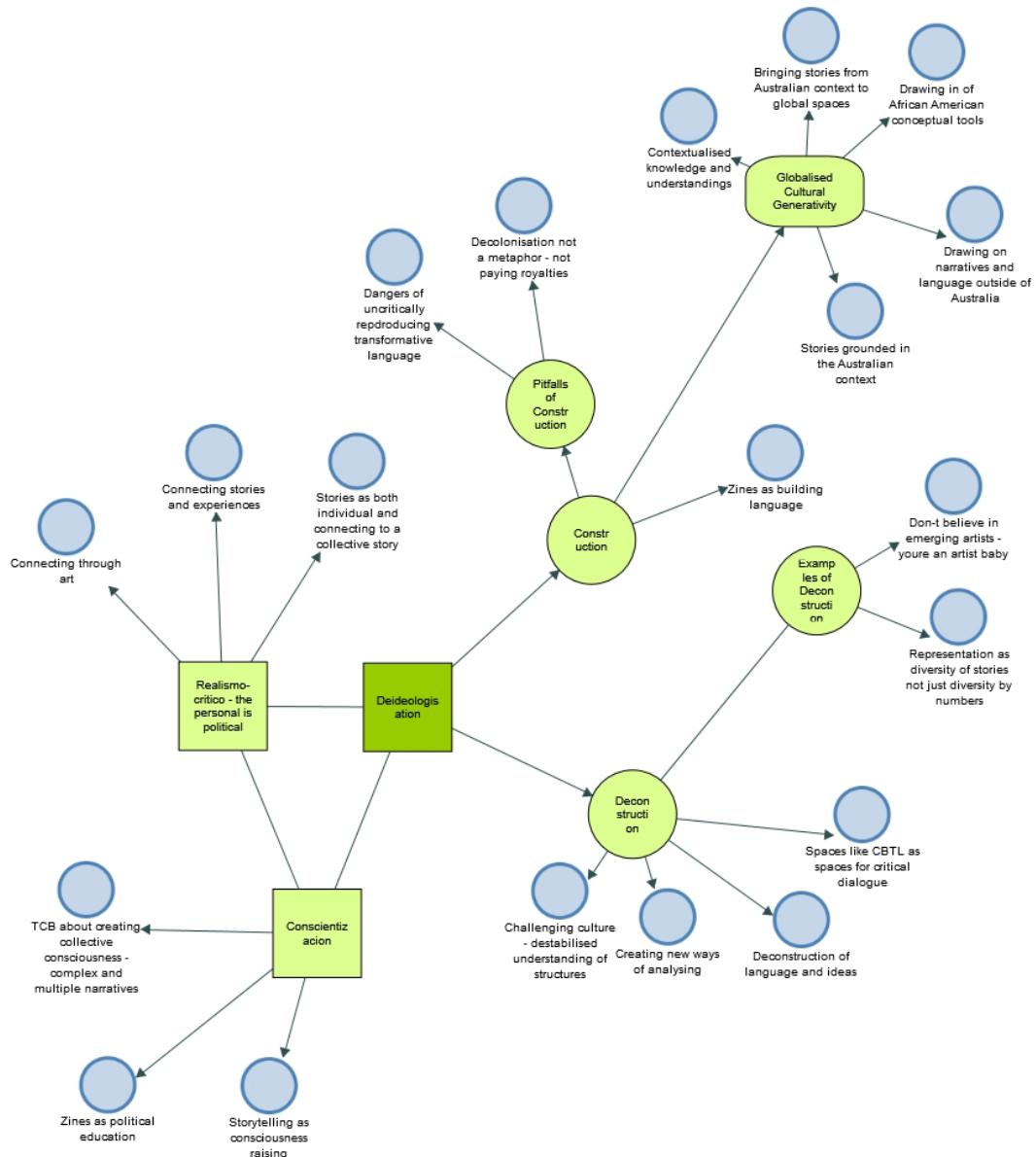
Direct contact number: 99195226

If you have any queries or complaints about the way you have been treated, you may contact the Ethics Secretary, Victoria University Human Research Ethics Committee, Office for Research, Victoria University, PO Box 14428, Melbourne, VIC, 8001, email Researchethics@vu.edu.au or phone (03) 9919 4781 or 4461.

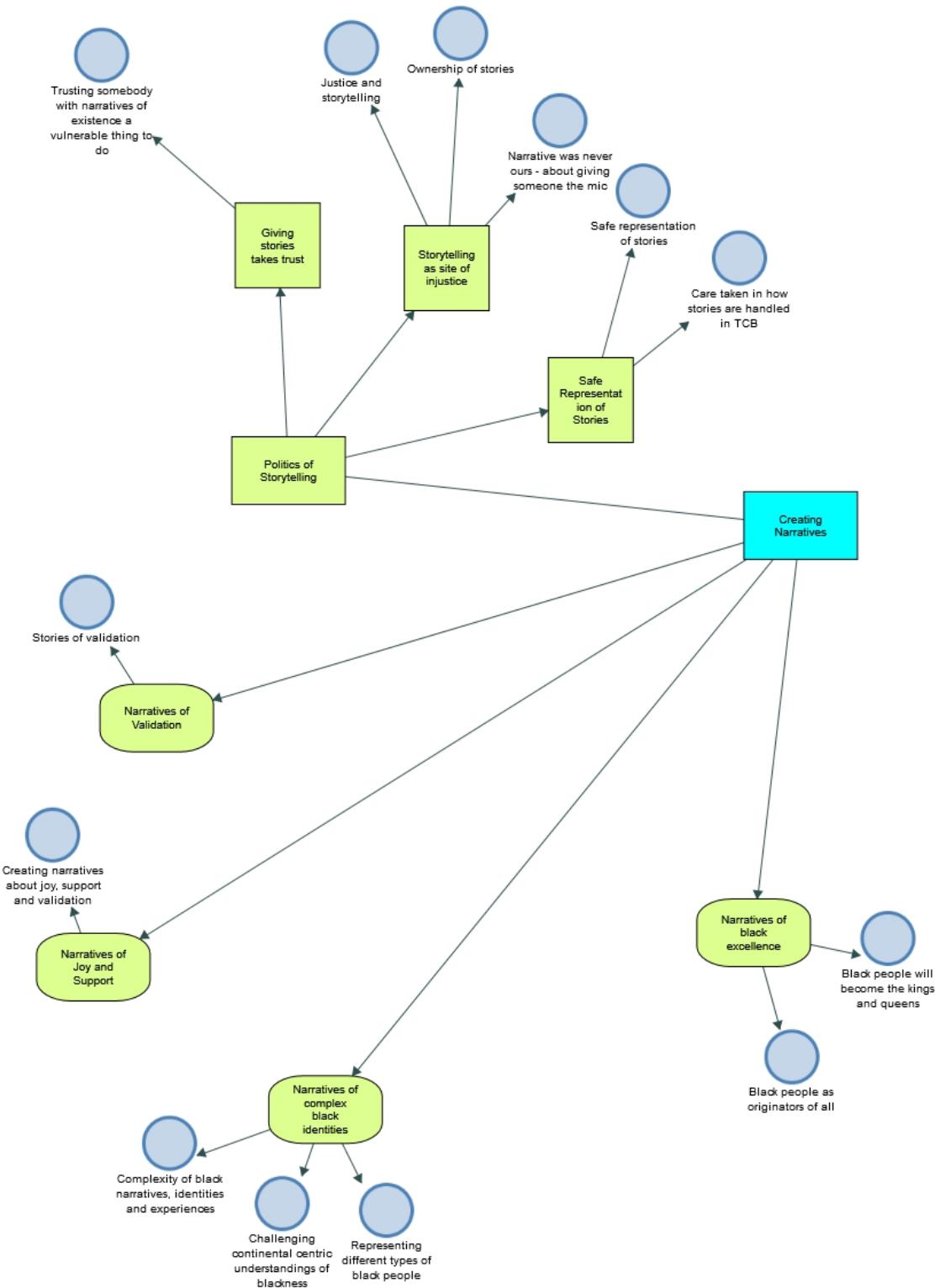
Appendix I: Preliminary Analytic Maps



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