

Re-membering my Charrúa roots on unceded land: weaving new narratives

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This thesis contains material published in conferences and various Non-Traditional Research Outputs (NTRO's) distributed through the thesis including:

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Charrúa Nation, ancestral remembrance, spiritual activism, universe-referent citizenship, sentipensar, plantcestors, weaving, body-land-spirit

Abstract

The framework for this thesis arises from my experiences cultivating relationship with Beada-o-Lajau an ancestral Ombú tree (*Phytolacca dioica*), native to Uruguay where I was born. My relationship with Lajau facilitates a journey of re-membering the knowledges held at the intersections of my ancestral lineages. Regular encounters with this particular plantcestor, who grows on Gadigal Country close to where I live, not only aided in my ancestral Charrúa re-membering but prompted a sentipensante/feel-thinking relationship with the land I inhabit. Taking an autoethnographic approach informed by a feel-thinking-doing methodology, a personal relational map emerges that spans multiple places and times, with Lajau at its center.

Working predominantly in tejido /weaving using crochet, tapestry, coiling and beading, I dance between being practice-led and led by place to express and integrate my experiences. In the process of relating aspects of my story, the practice of re-membering becomes a way to counteract colonial narratives of erasure and reckon with my position as a settler-migrant inextricably implicated in the ongoing colonial project that is so-called Australia. Weaving becomes a language and a space for feeling and thinking through reclaiming ancestral practice and embodied ways of knowing whilst living away from my ancestral lands. The resultant artworks generate their own symbolic visual language in the form of woven cartographies, a series of physically impassable gateways that speak to connections across waterways.

Although anchored in the personal, the themes in this research echo those who share in collective human concerns to be in right-relationship with ourselves, the communities we are part of and our environment. The lands and waterways affirm their role as living knowledge systems, facilitating re-membering and potential new perspectives on south-south global relationships and the intersections of Charrúa and Afro-descendant identities in Uruguay.

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Glossary

Abya Yala	A Guna/Kuna word from Panama, an alternative to reference South America.
beada-o	A Chaná term meaning “grandmother.”
Charrúa	I have used <i>Charrúa</i> in this thesis as an umbrella term to refer to various language and clan groups Indigenous to Uruguay including Chaná, Güenoa, Arachan, Bohan and Minuan.
conocimiento	Spanish, “knowledge/s.”
cuerpo-territorio-espiritu	Spanish, “body-land-spirit,” denoting the inseparability of the three.
desconocido/a	Unknown to denote gaps and silences in the archive/historical record especially birth records.
el pozo	Spanish, “the well.” A term used by the author in the thesis to describe a process of falling/going into the hole/well, as a metaphor for an inner journey of inquiry and the process of coming out of that journey and examining what has been surfaced.
First Nations	A term used to denote any of the Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander groups. However, where possible the author has included the specific language group and traditional place name. This term also refers to Indigenous groups of people from other parts of the world.
inchalá	A Charrúa word meaning “sibling,” used within communities as a greeting, term of connection between community group members.
Indigenous	Referring to peoples who are Indigenous to a place, sometimes used alongside First Nations. However, preference is given to using the group or language group name.
kimpasi	A West African term used to denote healing societies formed during the time of the Atlantic Slave Trade.
migrant settler	The process of migrating to a new country and becoming a settler there, often enjoying the benefits of the new country that can include citizenship, land ownership, access to services and other benefits.
nepantla	A Nahuatl word meaning “in the middle” made popular by Chicano and Latino writers to refer to the ‘in-between-ness’ often experienced as a result of intersecting identities and cultures.
onkaiujmar	A reconstructed Charrúa word meaning “great Earth mother” or more accurately “the heart of the earth.”
oyendau	A Charrúa word meaning “memory.”
plantcestor	A term coined by Layla K. Feghali of River Rose Re-membrance, it describes ancestral plants and trees connected to one’s ancestral lineages.

Quaraí	The river that defines the border between the north of Uruguay and the South of Brazil. Also known as Cuareim. This is the author's ancestral river connected to her paternal lineage.
quillapi	A Charrúa word for the animal skin cloak worn by Charrúa peoples and other Indigenous tribes in neighbouring Argentina.
quilombo	A word of African Kimbundu origin referring to organised camps and settlements set up by enslaved peoples who sought to escape capture and often used the collective strength of the Quilombo community as a form of resistance against colonial administrators.
re-membering	In response to dismemberment, to seek, gather and reattach disconnected parts of myself, my ancestry and relationships with place.
right relationship	A concept related to various Indigenous cultures emphasis on interconnectedness of all life including the more-than-human. In this thesis the author refers to the concept of right relationship with ourselves, others and the environment we inhabit.
river skipping	Translates as <i>saltando rios</i> (Spanish) and <i>húe sepé</i> (Charrúa), a relational map in the form of a visual journal devised by the author to illustrate her re-membering journey and its connection to waterways.
sentipensar	Translates from Spanish as "feel-thinking." The term was coined by sociologist Orlando Fals Borda and originates from his exchanges with riverine Indigenous people in Columbia, San Jorge River. It means "to use both mind and heart."
sucuri	From the Tupi-Guarani, <i>sucuriu</i> , meaning "anaconda," also a river in Bonito, Mato Grosso do Sul, Brazil, a tributary to the Paraná River that stretches from Paraguay to Uruguay.
territorio que llevo dentro	Translates from Spanish as "the territory within," referring to a person's inner sense of belonging to place/s.
territorio del otro	Translates from Spanish as "someone else's land," referring to being a foreigner, visitor or migrant on someone else's custodial/ancestral lands.
tolderia	A Spanish word referring to an Indigenous encampment, in Charrúa the word most closely related to housing is <i>pirí</i> .
truth-telling	In the Australian context, truth-telling refers to a process of challenging and engaging with the historical record, achieving justice for First Nations people and moving toward reconciliation and healing.
tejedora	Spanish, "weaver" (feminine).
Uluru Statement from the Heart	Developed in 2017 during the National Constitutional Convention, the largest consensus of First Nations peoples on a proposal for substantive recognition in Australian history. The statement from the heart can be viewed here: https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement .

Universe-referent citizenship	A concept developed by Dr Kerry Arabena to shift away from hierarchical and exploitative forms of relating to the Universe. By seeing ourselves as citizens of the larger context of the universe we can better appreciate our interdependence.
weaving	The author refers to weaving within this thesis as broadly encompassing a range of techniques and practices, including knitting, crochet, binding, hand knitting, tapestry and loom weaving, amongst others.
wyrd	An old Norse word, commonly taken to mean “destiny” or “fate.” The author aligns it with historian Max Dashu’s analysis that locates <i>wyrd</i> within <i>weorðung</i> , “honouring and showing reverence,” also from <i>wert</i> , “turning, being, becoming.”

Preface

This research is situated in opposition to erasure and narratives of extinction. It is written by and for the insider/outsider, the diasporic subject who creates within and without the academy to produce work to address the historical silences and archival omissions in a way that gives back to the communities they are part of.¹

My ancestral lineages coalesce on the lands of the Charrúa nation, that is present-day Uruguay, parts of Argentina and Southern Brazil. The term *Charrúa* collectively represents the Charrúa peoples and other Indigenous peoples and language groups of the region, including the Arachán, Minuan, Chaná, Güenoa, Yaro and Bohán. Porous borders together with historical and ongoing trade relationships with other peoples and territories of Abya Yala have resulted in multilingual and intercultural connections with various other Indigenous peoples, including the Tupi and Mbya Guarani, Andean, Quechua and Amazonian people.² I was born in Uruguay's capital city, Montevideo. My blood lineage is representative of over five-hundred years of settler colonisation in Abya Yala. Portuguese

¹ According to Carolina Latorre, "The diasporic subject can be defined as an individual that journeys through diverse levels of cultural and social domain in order to create a newfound identity" in Carolina Latorre, "The diasporic subject: The role of travel narrative in the construction of a Latin American and Latina subject" (ProQuest Dissertations Publishing, 2004). "The Diasporic Subject: The Role of Travel Narrative in the Construction of a Latin American and Latina Subject" (PhD dissertation, Perdue University, 2004), <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/dissertations/AAI3252936/>. Yoalli Rodriguez provides an insightful testimony of her own journey and process. Meztli Yoalli Rodriguez Aguilera, "Senti-pensando la antropología: mi experiencia y contradicciones en el pensar-hacer," in Lina Rosa Berrio, *Antropologías Feministas en México: Epistemologías, éticas, Prácticas y Miradas Diversas* (MX, MEXICO: Bonilla Artigas Editores, 2020). <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/usyd/detail.action?docID=6992091>, accessed September 9, 2024

² *Abya Yala* is a term originating with the Kuna people of Panama to refer to the Americas. Carlos Renato Carola outlines that Abya Yala has been "used by the indigenous movement in the Americas to refer to the American continent from the native people's stance. Within the scope of critical thought, *Abya Yala* is an ethical attitude acknowledging the various original people's right to live, to exist, and keep their history." Carlos Renato Carola, "Precursors of Decolonial Pedagogical Thinking in Latin America and Abya Yala," in *New Pedagogical Challenges in the 21st Century: Contributions of Research in Education*, ed. Olga Bernad Caverro and Núria Llevot-Calvet (London: IntechOpen, 2018), <https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/58012>.

and Spanish imperial forces are recorded in Uruguay from 1512 onwards, and the transatlantic slave trade turns Montevideo into a major slave port from 1587 to the last recorded ship 250 years later in 1835. I am descendant of West and South African Bantu peoples, with Iberian (Spain, Portugal and the Canary Islands) and Charrúa ancestors.

The information I have learned about these lineages comes from my own independent genealogy and historical research, oral family history and divinatory practices. Despite the increase in availability and mainstream awareness of DNA analysis via companies such as Ancestry.com, 23andMe and MyHeritage, the scientific reality is that there is no DNA test to prove indigeneity and that DNA on its own has little to do with Indigenous identity and sense of belonging.³ Researching genealogical records, surfacing family stories and situating those stories in the larger socio-historical context is challenging, emotionally draining and time consuming. Looking for my family and ancestors in the archive has exposed the racial bias that exists in the way records were made and are still kept, in regard to what information was recorded, for whose benefit, and who now owns and controls access to those archives. It is a privilege to have a paper trail. Many of my ancestors were only recorded up to a certain point, in births, deaths and marriage records kept by local churches. But beyond that, many of my ancestors appear in the archives as numbers, currency, cargo and property, and rest in unmarked communal graves. In Uruguay and across all Abya Yala, Portuguese and Spanish colonial expansion operated in conjunction

³ As recently as 2019 in Australia, the One Nation Party attempted to present legislation that would require those claiming to be of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent to undertake a DNA test to prove their identity. This was vehemently rejected by the Australian Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander community with many leading First Nations people publicly denouncing the proposal as racist, discriminatory and just plain false. The academic and scientific community also denounced any such proposal, given that there can be no DNA test for Indigeneity. See, for example, Brooke Fryer, "No DNA Test Exists for Aboriginality: Scientists," NITV, 16 March 2019, <https://www.sbs.com.au/nitv/article/no-dna-test-exists-for-aboriginality-scientists/cu9bksqqw>. For scholarship on DNA and Indigeneity, see Kim TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).

with and was facilitated by the Catholic and Jesuit missions, which were established to forcibly convert the Indigenous and enslaved African populations as well as pacify the subsequent waves of European migrants and the new intermixed *criollo*⁴ populations.⁵

It is because of these complicated, multilayered and entangled histories and their ongoing colonial impact on Abya Yala that I have made intentional choices regarding the language and terminology used in this thesis (see glossary) with the inclusion of Charrúa language throughout the writing to refer to particular concepts. Words and forms can contain entire universes. My encounters with the limitations of the archive and attempts to *desenterrar* (unearth) family silences have led me to what may be considered unscholarly and unconventional forms of research and coming to know. It is through engaging with the ancestral and the spiritual in connection to my creative practice that I have been able to shift into expanded ways of thinking, being and relating. When I refer to ancestors and spirit, I include the more-than-human; this encompasses plants, animals, sites of memory and elemental forces amongst others that elude definition or description through word or image. Within the thesis I invoke the names and stories of ancestral plants and trees, bodies of water, celestial bodies and symbolic or archetypal animals connected to the narrative of these places and spaces.

As a diasporic person in an ongoing journey to remember the Indigenous ancestors I descend from and claim both the wounds and the gifts, it is important for me to acknowledge the role of place and its impact on my research, my thinking and my creative practice. I have lived and worked on Gadigal Bidjigal Country (eastern suburbs of Sydney)

⁴ Criollo is a Spanish term referring to first and subsequent generations of European descendants as well as descendants of enslaved people of the African continent born in Abya Yala.

⁵ For a comprehensive account of the history of Portuguese and Spanish conquest of Abya Yala see Eduardo Galeano, *Open Veins of Latin America: Five Centuries of the Pillage of a Continent*, trans. Cedric Belfrage (New York: NYU Press, 1997).

since migrating to Australia in 1986. The majority of my time is spent thinking and communing with the above and below ground wetlands and swamps of Gadigal Country, within Centennial Park and surrounding areas, and along the eastern coast more broadly. Whilst undertaking this research, I have continued to work as an independent professional artist and have had the opportunity to travel, exhibit, facilitate workshops, undertake residencies and have conversations that have helped me refine my work and ideas. As a result, I have had the opportunity to spend significant amounts of time making, thinking and listening with Dharug Country (particularly Bankstown and Parramatta, NSW), Gameygal/Kameygal Country (in the area between the Cooks River and Georges River, NSW), Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung and Bunurong Boon Wurrung (South Melbourne, VIC), Mparntwe and other parts of Arrernte Country (Alice Springs, NT), Kariyarra Country (Port Hedland, WA), Boorloo, Whadjuk Noongar Country (Perth, WA) and Gomeroi/Kamilaroi Country (Tamworth, NSW). Land is teacher and spirit lives in the land. During the course of this research project, I have come to a deeper understanding of the importance and the impact of place on how I move towards being in right relationship, that is, how I relate to myself, others and the world around me.

From an academic perspective, this PhD thesis is a continuation of the practice-led research I commenced when I undertook an Honours year in 2008 as part of a Bachelor of Fine Arts degree. I have remained faithful to the themes and concerns expressed in that first research paper, my honours thesis, titled “Where Yah From?” This was followed by a Master of Fine Arts by Research thesis, “Mellorado: Identity, Heritage and Transmission,” in 2012. Both my Bachelors and Masters degrees in Fine Arts were undertaken at the University of New South Wales and represented a major life shift into a professional art and research practice having previously completed degrees in psychology and criminology, in addition to

spending eight years working in the corporate professional services sector as a registered migration agent. The intersections between the personal, family, migration, human behaviour, socio-cultural histories and place have consistently surfaced in my art practice and have been the catalyst for ongoing investigation. From a personal perspective, this research has been an opportunity to articulate my art practice as indivisible from my ancestral connections, my spiritual and cultural practices, and my navigating this world as a Black woman responsible to multiple lineages and geographical locations. Weaving with both word and thread, I view the doctoral research outcomes—an exhibition and a written component—as intermingled and complimentary. The written thesis interweaves multiple frameworks through academic writing, autoethnography, poetry, storytelling, anecdotes, mind maps, artwork images, and creative and self-reflective writing. Similarly, the fibre weavings comprise multiple techniques, including crochet, coiling, wrapping/binding, tapestry, weaving and beadwork. Until I began to put the words to the page or make the first stitches, I didn't know what the words would be or what form the stitches would take.

Urú-gu-aí

*la lengua se acuerda
de sonidos grabados
en los huesos*

the tongue remembers
sounds etched
in bone

*las manos tejen
colaboración con los ancianos
conversaciones con un río
de caracoles*

the hands weave
a collaboration with the ancestors
a dialogue with a river
of snails

*los cerritos aun vibran
sabiduría viva
que la puma cuida*

the earth mounds still vibrate
alive with wisdom
that the puma keeps safe

Paula do Prado, 2022¹

¹ There is some debate about the origin and meaning of the name Uruguay/Urú-gu-aí. Most scholars attribute it to being of Guaraní language origin, meaning “river of birds or snails.” See “Presentan tesis del nombre Uruguay,” *El País*, 10 October 2010, <https://web.archive.org/web/20120314100414/http://www.elpais.com.uy/101008/pciuda-520474/informe/presentan-tesis-del-nombre-uruguay/>.

Introduction

Timbó: ear to the ground

Of all the things packed into suitcases in preparation for our migration to Australia, I had packed amongst my books, dolls, clothes and shoes one singular Timbó tree seed pod. The Timbó tree (*Enterolobium contortisiliquum*) has a unique ear-shaped seed pod. It has a hard, smooth and glossy black exterior, and if you shake the pod you can hear the seeds rattle loosely within. In Uruguay and Argentina, it is commonly referred to as *oreja de negro* in Spanish, which in English roughly translates as “a black’s ear.” The tree itself is known by various names mostly of Tupi-Guarani language origin, including pacará, camba nambi, timbó colorado, timbó-puitá and guanacaste. The wood of the Timbó is valued for its lightness, and as the resin it contains makes it water resistant, it is used by Indigenous people to make canoes. The seed pods are rich in saponins (used to make soap) and tannins useful for curing animal hides.

There are different versions of the Timbó origin story, the most common being that of a tribal chief and his estranged daughter. The chief is saddened by the departure of his precious daughter when she falls in love with a man from another tribe of which the chief disapproves. In his grief the chief decides to track his daughter’s whereabouts, sometimes believing that he can hear her voice. He follows her through the jungle over many days and nights, not stopping to rest, eat or drink. He only stops occasionally to put his ear to the ground hoping to hear her footsteps. Eventually he is away so long that his concerned village send out a search party, who find him lying dead in the jungle with his ear to the

ground. They attempt to move his body to take him back to his village but find he is firmly attached to the soil where his ear has sprouted roots. Where his body lay, a Timbó tree grew, with its fruit resembling the ear of the chief listening for his daughter's footsteps. Nearly forty years later, I still have that singular seed pod. It is a reminder of the power of seeds, the genetic codes they carry, their various adaptive strategies for dispersal and their ability to remain dormant awaiting the necessary catalyst for new life.

Writing from el pozo (the pit)

If you long to speak the tongues of your ancestral mothers, you must be willing to jump into the pit, where the limbs of your sisters and the limbs of your brothers, were thrown, the ritual of dismemberment, is laboratory grown²

As a person of African, Charrúa and Iberian descent, the ritual of dismemberment is both literally and metaphorically imprinted in my genetic ancestral memory, operating both consciously and unconsciously in my daily life.³ The concept of the pit or well is an oft-used metaphor, symbolic of rites of passage that become catalysts for emotional and spiritual journeys via a voluntary leap or push into the unfamiliar and unknown. El pozo, "the pit," is a space marked by confusion and disorientation, followed by a process of *tanteo* to recover

² Personal transcript of message delivered by the Kontomblé in a group ceremony/divination as part of Vessels of Earth & Star led by Aislinn Kerchart of Sings with Trees, 22 October 2023. The Kontomblé are the "little people" of the Dagara Tribe in Burkina Faso. For more information see <https://singswithtrees.com/kontomble-divination>.

³ The literal dismemberment of brown, black and Indigenous bodies has been a well documented strategy of the colonial imperial project worldwide since its inception, see for example the images found here (warning: disturbing content): "Colonial Belgian Congo: A Slave Father Gazing at His Daughter's Severed Hand and Foot, 1904," Rare Historical Photos, 15 August 2023, <https://rarehistoricalphotos.com/father-hand-belgian-congo-1904/>.

and rebuild from the fragments.⁴ As part of this doctoral research process, I have repeatedly leapt and fallen into el pozo to interrogate familial and socio-historical silences and to reckon with my position as a racialised migrant settler living on stolen land. As I weave and write my way back from and out from el pozo, I resurface with partial fragments: a river pebble, a feather, the image of a quillapi held in an imperial museum, or a criollo story that might hold some truth and the memory of a place I have never physically visited.⁵

The outcome of the creative studio process is three large-scale mixed media fibre weavings in the form of archways. They each represent woven relational cartographies corresponding to my ongoing ancestral reclamation journey whilst building respectful relationships with the spirits of the lands that I inhabit. This written thesis is a collection of writings that explores land and its spirit(s) as facilitators of my ancestral *re-membering* through my own experiences of migration, diaspora and the violence of assimilation and erasure via the nation state/the colony. Within this context, re-membering represents an intentional process of seeking, gathering and re-attaching the disconnected or dismembered parts of myself, my ancestral connections and ways of relating to place. I weave and write from my personal experience not to centre myself or claim privileged access as a show of discovery but to be transparent and accountable about the ways I have come to these ideas and concepts. The woven cartographies and the theoretical research methodology outlined herein aims to illustrate an ongoing process of reckoning and

⁴ The Spanish word *tantear* translates as “probe” or “investigate.” In her book *Pilgrimages/Peregrinajes: Theorizing Coalition Against Multiple Oppressions*, Maria Lugones refers to *tantear* as a practice in moving through different levels of cultivating relationships within liberatory movements, “both in the sense of exploring someone’s inclinations about a particular issue and in the sense of ‘tantear en la oscuridad,’ putting one’s hands in front of oneself as one is walking in the dark, tacitly feeling one’s way.” Maria Lugones, *Pilgrimages = Peregrinajes : theorizing coalition against multiple oppressions*, Feminist constructions, (Lanham, Maryland: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2003). 1.

⁵ A *quillapi* is a Charrúa cloak usually made of animal hide. An intact surviving example is part of the collection of the British Museum.

recovering that does not seek to (re)produce solutions or answers. Nor do I aim to draw comparison between my birth/ancestral place (Uruguay) and the place I call home (Australia) but rather draw relation through a history that is personal and at times parallel.

My creative and writing encounters with el pozo resonate deeply with Gloria Anzaldúa's autotheoretical concept of *Nepantla*.⁶ Anzaldúa, a Chicana feminist scholar, writes from the intersection of her multiple identities, identifying as queer and having Spanish, German and Indigenous ancestry (although she does not refer to herself as Native American), growing up on the Mexico–United States border. Anzaldúa is perhaps best known for her work *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (1987), in which she develops, amongst other related concepts, the theory of *nepantla* as an in-between “liminal transitional space,” a place of transformation “where the outer boundaries of the mind’s inner life meet the outer world of reality, a zone of possibility.”⁷ *Nepantla* is also an important stage in her seven stages of *conocimiento* (knowing), which is at the core of *Borderlands* and further developed in subsequent writings, culminating in her book *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, published posthumously in 2015 and edited by her long-term writing collaborator, AnaLouise Keating. Throughout this doctoral research project, I have felt myself increasingly identified with and enacting *nepantla*. Through my encounters with el pozo, I have become a *nepantlera*, the word Anzaldúa coined to describe “threshold people, those who move within and among multiple worlds and use their movement in the service of transformation.”⁸

⁶ *Nepantla* is a Nahuatl word of Uto-Aztec origin meaning “in the middle” or “land between worlds.”

⁷ Gloria Anzaldúa, “Now Let Us Shift...The Path of *Conocimiento*...Inner Work, Public Acts,” in *This Bridge We Call Home: Radical Visions for Transformation*, ed. Gloria Anzaldúa and AnaLouise Keating (London: Routledge, 2002), 544.

⁸ AnaLouise Keating, editor’s introduction to Gloria Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro: Rewriting Identity, Spirituality, Reality*, ed. AnaLouise Keating (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2015), xxxv.

How then to write my nepantlera journeying to re-member, to re-transcribe what already finds expression in woven form, within the context of a practice-led doctoral thesis? How to contextualise a way of writing that, like the making, emerges and develops in the moment, in the doing? It is within the autotheoretical methods and frameworks of autotheory, ego-histoire and autoethnography that seek to integrate the scholar's personal history within the research that I situate my writing.⁹ The legitimacy of this autobiographical turn and its perceived slippages into memoir and storytelling, which have not traditionally been regarded as academic forms of writing (and therefore the difficulty in evaluating and critiquing such work), continues to be debated within academic research. Writer and anthropologist Kate Rossmanith argues that it is no longer a question of whether or not the self should be integrated within research, but how well personal stories are integrated within a work of research so that "the work of reflexive thought [is] co-extensive with the research all the way through."¹⁰ According to Rossmanith, the risk of the personal story within research is that "an account of the writer's experience becomes a sort of sanctifying ritual; because it is 'lived' in a way that excludes or transcends what is merely 'thought,' the personal story is seen as somehow non-cognitive (what typically allows us to draw a circle around 'an' experience is a pervasive and unifying affect), immune to critique, and therefore able to bestow upon the entirety of the book's research an existential validation."¹¹

In her book *Autotheory as Feminist Practice in Art, Writing, and Criticism* (2021), writer, artist and curator Lauren Fournier also acknowledges the issue of critical legitimacy.

⁹ The term *ego-histoire* is attributed to French historian Pierre Nora. See *Essais d'Ego Histoire (Essays in ego-histoire)*, ed. Pierre Nora (Paris: Gallimard, 1987).

¹⁰ Kate Rossmanith, "On Not Asking 'Should I Insert Myself in the Text?'" Sydney Review of Books, 11 September 2023, <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/essay/rossmanith-should-i-insert-myself-in-the-text/>.

¹¹ Rossmanith, "On Not Asking 'Should I Insert Myself in the Text?'"

Fournier views the concept of autotheory as a way to legitimise lived experience as a valid source of evidence, research and knowledge production, particularly in the case of “work by women and artists of colour [that are] particularly vulnerable to charges of narcissism [because] women and racialized people have been historically overdetermined by their bodies—in contrast, always, to the supposedly neutral standard of the white, cisgender man.”¹² For Fournier, autotheory is “the combination of autobiography and memoir with theory and philosophy (as practices of *theorizing*, of *philosophizing*),” which is a part of academic writing practice that relies on citations, footnotes, research and bibliographies while not strictly adhering to those conventions.¹³ Autotheory as an approach and practice “seems to best describe the practices of artists, writers and other art and culture workers who move between the worlds of contemporary art, literature, and academia, in spaces where practice and research, writing and studio art, self-reflection and philosophical study meet.”¹⁴ The reference to moving between worlds and working at the intersection of multiple spaces resonates strongly with the multidimensional nature and character of the nepantlera. In terms of criticality, what is being suggested within autotheory isn’t that simply adding the term *theory* to describe a piece of writing or creative process will add instant legitimacy, but to recognise that many creative works (and practice-led research projects like this one) are already doing the work of theorising and philosophising with citations in an academic framework alongside developing ever-evolving forms of self-writing.

¹² Lauren Fournier, *Autotheory as feminist practice in art, writing, and criticism* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press, 2021). 43.

¹³ Rayna Berggren, “Writing the Self, Communally: An Interview with Lauren Fournier,” *Columbia Journal of Literary Criticism*, 6 August 2021 (emphasis in original), <https://c-j-l-c.org/portfolio/writing-the-self-communally/>.

¹⁴ Fournier, *Autotheory as feminist practice in art, writing, and criticism*. in *Art*, 8.

In contrast, the approach of ego-histoire, a concept developed by Pierre Nora in the late 1980s, aims to make explicit the relationship between context and content so that “personal history is not separate from political or intellectual history.”¹⁵ For example, writer and researcher Anna Cole narrates her research from the position of being both a British migrant and an Australian citizen via naturalisation who returned to the United Kingdom as an adult. Cole is co-editor, with Vanessa Castejon, Oliver Haag and Karen Hughes, of *Ngapartji, Ngapartji: In Turn, In Turn: Ego-Histoire, Europe and Indigenous Australia* (2014), a collection of writings that bring together professional and personal accounts of studies by scholars from Australia and Europe thinking through culture, identity and ethnicity in Australian Indigenous studies.¹⁶ Reflecting on her own ego-histoire, Cole states

Thinking through my autobiography alerts me to the dual identities my family inhabits in postcolonial history as both persecutors, as white Australian migrants who have benefited from the dispossession of Indigenous communities from their lands, and as privileged victims of an outmoded and repressive English class system and the institutions that perpetuate it.¹⁷

Similar to Cole, my autobiography makes visible my multiple identities as a racialised migrant settler in Australia whose family has been a part of and benefits from the dispossession of the Indigenous peoples of this land. As Wiradjuri poet, author and academic Jeanine Leanne points out, “In settler colonies, Indigenous peoples are always

¹⁵ Anna Cole, “The History That Has Made You’. Ego-Histoire, Autobiography and Postcolonial History,” *Life writing* 16, no. 4 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.1080/14484528.2019.1633249>.

¹⁶ Anna Cole, Vanessa Castejon, Oliver Haag and Karen Hughes, eds, *Ngapartji, Ngapartji: In Turn, In Turn: Ego-Histoire, Europe and Indigenous Australia* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2014).

¹⁷ Cole, “The History That Has Made You’. Ego-Histoire, Autobiography and Postcolonial History.” 531.

minorities, because not only does the invasion never end and the invaders never leave—but the invasion is repeated and the invaders remain and increase.”¹⁸

Although there are benefits in aligning with elements of both autotheory and ego-histoire in writing from el pozo/nepantla, it still leaves the question of how to evaluate an autobiographical approach in the context of a practice-led doctoral thesis. The term *autoethnography* carries its own sense of legitimacy as it takes its framework from the established academic discipline of anthropology. Framed as a qualitative research method, autoethnography situates self-writing as stories about the self in connection to culture. These self-stories are “artistic and analytic demonstrations of how we come to know, name, and interpret personal and cultural experience.”¹⁹ Of particular interest within the literature on autoethnography as research method are the direct discussions (and examples) on ways to approach evaluating autoethnographies that could be extended to other forms of reflexive research and self-writing. The chapter “Evaluating Autoethnography” in *Autoethnography* (2015) by Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones and Carolyn Ellis, offers the following goals (rather than set criteria) as a guide to evaluating autoethnography:

- Making contributions to knowledge.
- Valuing the personal and experiential.
- Demonstrating the power, craft, and responsibilities of stories and storytelling.
- Taking a relationally responsible approach to research practice and representation.²⁰

¹⁸ Jeanine Leanne, “*Living on Stolen Land*: Deconstructing the Settler Mythscape,” *Sydney Review of Books*, 6 November 2020, <https://sydneyreviewofbooks.com/review/kwaymullina-living-on-stolen-land/>.

¹⁹ Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis, *Autoethnography* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 1.

²⁰ Adams, Holman Jones, and Ellis, 102.

Although this research represents the development of my own autotheoretical approach, throughout the research process I have kept these evaluative autoethnographic prompts in mind, and within the writing (culminating in a conclusion that borrows these goals as headings) I have reflected on each of these in a process of ongoing self-questioning and self-evaluation of my own work.

The trees are my elders, my guides

From the very moment I made a commitment to making this research project a reality and submit a proposal, I understood that it would be informed by and developed in connection with ancestors and with the places that have shaped my lived experience so far. Land is central to this research, both my ancestral lands, the lands of the Charrúa Nation, and the sovereign unceded Aboriginal lands that I call home. A key concept within how I navigate, cultivate relationship and attend to land is embodied in the term *plantcestors*, coined by Leila Kristy Feghali to acknowledge and assist reconnection with those ancient living organisms, plants-as-ancestors who came before animals and humans.²¹ Throughout the thesis, several plantcestors (such as Timbó at the beginning of this introduction) provide bridging story interludes, and in the case of three plantcestor trees, lend their branches and roots to hold the structure of the whole. The three ancestral trees, Ceiba (*Ceiba speciosa*), Ombú/Lajau²² (*Phytolacca dioica*) and Jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*), are all native to

²¹ Leila Kristy Feghali is the founder of River Rose Re-membrance, see her post “What does ‘Plantcestor’ mean?” <https://www.riverroseremembrance.com/ancestralhub-posts/1467>.

²² Ombú is the common name for *phytolacca dioica* and is of Guaraní language origin. Lajau is the Charrúa language name. Both Ombú and Lajau are used throughout the thesis to refer to the same type of tree,

Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay, as well as other locations throughout South America. Each of these trees is also present in various locations throughout Australia, and in the case of the Jacaranda are very much part of many major city urban landscapes. There are two, particular individual Ceiba trees that I cultivate relationship with located at the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney. On the same site there is an Lajau (male flowering) tree located in the succulent garden, but they are in an inaccessible location on an elevated section behind several large cacti. The individual Lajau tree with whom I have the deepest relationship I refer to as Beada-o-Lajau, a (female flowering) tree located within Centennial Park.²³ Ceiba and Ombú trees are relatively rare in Australia.²⁴ In contrast, the Jacaranda has had a distinct visual presence in Australia for over 150 years thanks to their purple blooms, so much so that many people believe them to be native to Australia. As a popular ornamental tree, many urban councils have planted entire rows of Jacaranda trees along both sides of residential streets creating a visually stunning sight when they bloom in unison during October through to December every year.

The trees are my elders and guides that anchor me (and the writing) through my nepantlera journeying, weaving across multiple geographical locations, timelines, storylines, and histories, along with the emotions held within those voyages. I anchor in the plantcestors as a way to venerate the Earth and develop respectful relationship with all the lands that I inhabit, physically and spiritually. Although I do not identify with a specific religion, nor am I initiated into any specific organised religious practice, I do practice ancestral veneration and work with both ancestors known and unknown who represent the

however preference is given to the use of Lajau, particularly when I speak about the particular individual tree I work with on Gadigal Country.

²³ Beada-o-Lajau, “grandmother Lajau,” combines the Chaná word *beada-o* and the Charrúa word *Lajau*.

²⁴ See for example, the National Trusts of Australia’s Register of Significant Trees lists only two Ombú trees in NSW and less than ten in the whole of Australia. See <https://trusttrees.org.au/>.

lineages I belong to. As is common in many Indigenous spiritual traditions, I also cultivate relationships with the elements, waterways and celestial bodies (sun, moon, stars, sky), all the sentient life above and below ground, as well the spirits of the lands who take on forms both seen and unseen. As a direct consequence of colonisation and the rituals of disconnection that have pervaded my familial history, combined with my experience of migration at a young age, my ancestral re-membering has been constantly challenged by both familial and historical denials, silences, temporal and geographic distance, and narratives of extinction and erasure. The autobiographical passages and related contextual information shared in this research is included not just as an abridged record of the personal education I have undertaken into my culture and heritage but as a relational practice to build networks of accountability.

Que significa identificar desde el sentir? What are the implications of attempting to recover and rebuild from a psychic space of feeling? Because the (trap)door to el pozo *is* feeling: fear, anger, grief, confusion, curiosity, awe and wonder. A consequence of writing from el pozo to re-member what has been dismembered has meant confronting all that I do not know and may never come to know. In order to address working from the fragmentary, African American writer and academic Saidiya Hartman developed a method she calls *critical fabulation*. Critical fabulation combines historical archive, fictional narrative and critical theory to bridge the gaps and silences in the historical record, particularly trans-Atlantic slavery records from which the voices of enslaved women are absent. Hartman's critical fabulations seek to challenge existing archives and problematic historical narratives with alternative (re)tellings. Although fiction is seen as a less legitimate form, particularly within the academic sphere, Hartman's work argues that it can still prove a useful tool or strategy, especially for Black and Indigenous people who are absent, *desconocida/o* in the

historical archives.²⁵ In conversation with academic Patricia J. Saunders, who specialises in Caribbean Studies, Hartman argues that in response to the absences within the archive, “Women often attempt to embody an archive or to be it. They are willing to make the body a vehicle; courage and recklessness are required to be a host of history.”²⁶ Hartman sees self-writing not as self-centring but as a strategy to stand in for the archive: “it’s not about navel gazing, it’s really about trying to look at historical and social process and one’s own formation as a window onto social and historical processes, as an example of them.”²⁷

For the purposes of this practice-led research, the narratives held at the intersections of my bloodlines stand in for the archive, while personal and familial anecdotes of encounters with places and spaces act as narrative bridges. In her book *Anecdotal Theory* (2002), American professor and writer Jane Gallop describes her process of experimenting with writing, whereby she would “recount an anecdote and then attempt to ‘read’ that account for the theoretical insights it afforded.”²⁸ Reading into my personal and familial anecdotal narratives that are rooted in real events and people allows me to theorise and philosophise connections that might otherwise have remained hidden in the absence of archival evidence. My re-membering is grounded in real relationships between people, plants and places. Working directly with plantcestors as related living archives means cultivating relationship beyond the transactional and the legacies of romanticism and colonial natural history.

²⁵ The word *desconocida/o*, “unknown,” often appears in genealogical records from Uruguay, not just in cases where the name of a parent might be unknown but where details are incomplete.

²⁶ Patricia J Saunders, “Fugitive Dreams of Diaspora: Conversations with Saidiya Hartman,” *Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal* Volume 6, no. Issue 1 (2008), Article 7, <http://scholarlyrepository.miami.edu/anthurium>.

²⁷ Saunders, “Fugitive Dreams of Diaspora: Conversations with Saidiya Hartman.” 5.

²⁸ Jane Gallop, *Anecdotal Theory* (Durham, NC, USA: Duke University Press, 2002). 2.

When we say that our river is sacred, the response is always the same: “That’s just their folklore.” When we say that the mountain is telling us it is going to rain and that today will be a prosperous day, they say: “Mountains are just mountains. They don’t tell us anything.”

—Ailton Krenak, *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World*³⁰

Brazilian Indigenous writer and activist Ailton Krenak argues that colonialism’s flawed legacy of human superiority is at the centre of the incessant violence that is being waged on the Earth, because by depersonalising the river and the mountain we reduce these places to mere resources for capitalist extraction.³¹ In her essay “The Mother Tree,” Suzanne Simard, a Professor of Forest Ecology at the University of British Columbia, suggests four ways to counteract the violent practices of clearcutting forests and planting commercial monocrops. She suggests (as Krenak does) that modern consumer societies need to recognise their relationship with nature and shift away from the image of nature as resource, maintain connections to nature by taking part in hands on conservation projects, protect elder trees so that their genes and wisdom can be passed on, and honour diversity in all its forms.³² How do we, individually and collectively, shift away from our current culture of extraction? Can we collectively conceive of a plausible alternative, and do enough of us believe that it is

²⁹ In her introduction to Ailton Krenak’s *Life is not Useful*, Natalia Brizuela uses the title “the cosmic sense of life” as a term that encompasses many of Ailton Krenak’s ideas and concepts. Natalia Brizuela, introduction to Ailton Krenak, *Life is not Useful*, trans. Alex Brostoff and Jamille Pinheiro Dias (Cambridge: Polity, 2023).

³⁰ Ailton Krenak, *Ideas to Postpone the End of the World*, trans. Anthony Doyle (Toronto: House of Anansi Press, 2020), 50.

³¹ Krenak, 50.

³² Suzanne Simard, “The Mother Tree,” in *Tree Story*, ed. Melissa Charlotte and Ratliff Day (Caufield East, Victoria: Monash University Publishing, 2021), 60.

possible? It is not within the scope of this thesis to do any of these questions justice; however, land as teacher and facilitator has emerged as central to re-membering my Charrúa roots on unceded land. To re-member my Charrúan ancestral connections is to remember the cosmic sense of life, what Ailton Krenak refers to when he states that “life is transcendence,” because in this understanding “life goes from the oceans to solid ground; it crosses from north to south like a breeze in all directions.”³³ As a result, all of life and nature “cannot be made ‘useful’ within the utilitarian logic of the colonial habitation of the planet.”³⁴ To re-member my Charrúan heritage is to remember a way of being with the Earth.

Navigating my way through this research and this topic in particular, I have felt energised by the work of Kerry Arabena and her book *Becoming Indigenous to the Universe: Reflections on Living Systems, Indigeneity and Citizenship* (2015). Arabena writes as a Meriam and Torres Strait Islander, harnessing her professional, academic and cultural background to promote a “new space created through and by diversity [that] allows for multiple stories, choices and alternatives to major problems of our time, including ecological devastation.”³⁵ Not wanting to replicate forms of power that separate knowledges and erase diversity, Arabena chooses “to approach all knowledges indigenously. Acknowledging that we all—Indigenous peoples and others—are indigenous to this Earth and this Universe,” and are therefore “deeply and profoundly connected.”³⁶

Similar concerns are discussed in the work of Robin Wall Kimmerer, a plant ecologist and writer of European and Anishinaabe ancestry, and an enrolled member of the Citizen

³³ Ailton Krenak, *Life is not Useful*, trans. Alex Brostoff and Jamille Pinheiro Dias (Cambridge: Polity, 2023), 14.

³⁴ Brizuela, introduction, xii.

³⁵ Kerry Arabena, *Becoming Indigenous to the Universe: Reflections on Living Systems, Indigeneity and Citizenship* (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2015), xv.

³⁶ Kerry Arabena, xv, xiv.

Potawatomi Nation. In her book *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (2013), Kimmerer, like Arabena, reflects on the idea that we are all indigenous to the universe, but notes that “an invitation to settler society to become indigenous to place feels like a free ticket to a housebreaking party. It could be read as an open invitation to take what little is left.”³⁷ Motivated by a desire to resituate settler migrant society’s relationship to place, Kimmerer reflects that “immigrants cannot by definition be indigenous. Indigenous is a birthright word. No amount of time or caring changes history or substitutes for soul-deep fusion with the land,” yet what are the alternatives: “if people do not feel ‘indigenous,’ can they nevertheless enter into the deep reciprocity that renews the world? Is this something that can be learned? Where are the teachers?”³⁸ Writing from *el pozo/nepantla* and the *nepantlera* journeying of re-membering is a process of recovery that also necessitates a letting go in an attempt to “throw off the mind-set of the immigrant.”³⁹ The *nepantlera* journey has meant navigating an intentional and destabilising process of extrication from the overculture towards right relationship while simultaneously putting my ear to the ground to send roots into the soil.⁴⁰

This thesis is structured in three parts numbered in Charrúa language, with titles representing the plantcestors that have been foundational in my thinking through and organising the content. Each of the three parts begins with an illustration, a black and white rendering of one of the three woven gateways corresponding to their chronological order of

³⁷ Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants* (Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Editions, 2013), 211.

³⁸ Kimmerer, 213.

³⁹ Kimmerer, 214.

⁴⁰ The *overculture* is a term attributed to Dr Clarissa Pinkola Estés. See “Dear Brave Souls. On the word I’ve coined called--The Overculture,” Facebook, 4 March 2015, <https://www.facebook.com/29996683634/photos/dear-brave-souls-on-the-word-ive-coined-called-the-overculture-q-a-soul-asks-i-a/10152805542223635/>.

making (rather than being thematically paired a given part). This is followed by guiding plantcestor narratives and a short introductory passage based on selected tarot cards. The inclusion of the tarot is an extension of my own personal tarot practice but also the cartographic practices aligned with the major themes of this thesis of re-membering and feel-thinking. The tarot cards act as disruptors, as signals and reminders that this text is an invitation to an exploratory space moving within and without academic conventions⁴¹, a space for alternate ways of knowing and visual symbolic languages. The purpose of this structure is to frame and situate each section within multiple interrelated viewpoints: multiple place relationships, multiple lineages, multiple timelines and languages. As the reader will note, this introduction began with Timbó, representing both the seed of my re-membering and the wood for the canoe that takes me on a journey along winding rivers hoping to catch a fish, an apt metaphor for this research. It follows then that the structure of this thesis can be represented in the visual form of a *cola de bagre* (catfish tail) (see fig. 1, p.18).

⁴¹ There are number of recent academic papers that reference or utilize the tarot as a tool for exploring alternative ways of knowing and/or not-knowing. The work of academic Anastasia Murney for example looks at tarot within the intersections of social art practice and climate change for ecological resistance and adaptation. See for example Murney, Anastasia. "Tarot as Affective Cartography in the Uneven Anthropocene." *Journal of Visual Culture* 22, no. 2 (2023): 243–63. <https://doi.org/10.1177/14704129231196365>.

ANOTHER WAY TO VISUALISE MY THESIS STRUCTURE:
LA COLA DEL BAGRE / THE TAIL OF THE CATFISH

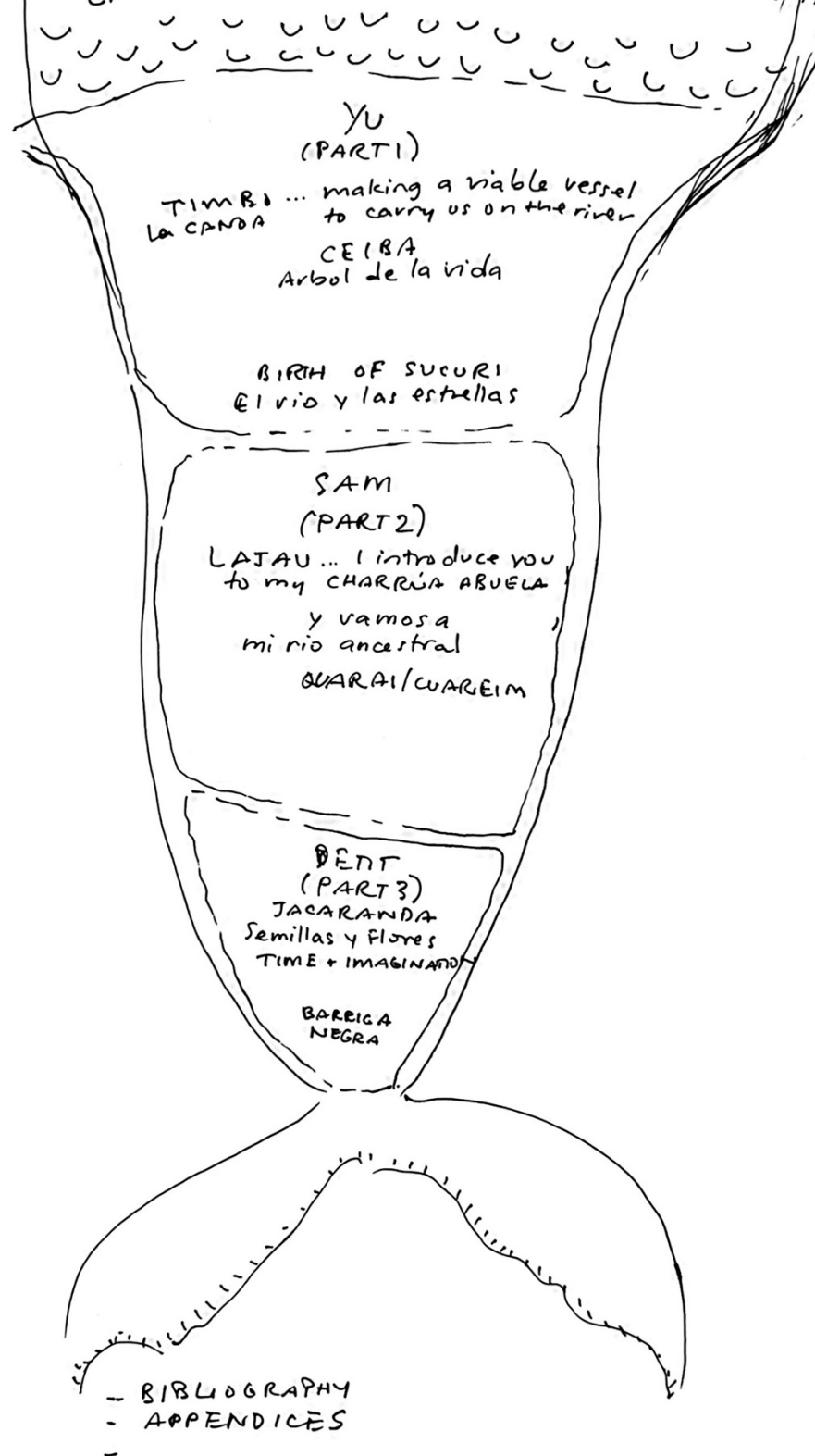


Figure 1. Paula do Prado, visualising my thesis structure as a cola de bagre (catfish tail)

Yú (part 1) is guided by Ceiba (*Ceiba speciosa*) to provide a deeper analysis of the socio-historical context, core events and experiences (the roots) that ground this research. In chapter 1, “Reckoning,” I develop the concept of a double reckoning in relation to my position as a migrant settler in Australia. I begin by providing an overview of the context at the time of writing, followed by an exploration of my personal experience of migration as a form of false belonging and how I might reframe solidarity. Chapter 2, “Oyendau,” discusses Charrúa heritage and self-identification in the Uruguayan context amidst a backdrop of erasure and denial. In particular, I focus on the lack of discussion, scholarly or otherwise, about the intersections of African, Charrúa and European heritage and the challenges inherent in visual representations of Charrúa identity. Chapter 3, “Sentipensar,” shifts into a discussion of feel-thinking as a methodology, illustrated via the *senti-pensa-hacer* diagram developed specifically to organise these ideas. This chapter is designed to be read together with appendix 1, *River skipping*, a visual journal that expands on my personal *sentipensante* process and place-based thinking on right relationship. Yú ends with an exploration of mind mapping and my reflections on creating the first woven gateway, *Birth of Sucuri*.

Sam (part 2) is anchored in my relationship with Lajau (*Phytolacca dioica*) at the centre of my sentipensante process and river skipping mind map. This is designed to be read together with appendix 2, *Lajau is my universe*, a separate visual journal documenting my encounters with Lajau. Chapter 4, “Mar mar onkaiujmar,” expands on the topics discussed as part of an Urban Theatre Projects online residency with Charrúa scholar and activist Mónica Michelena and the concept of *cuerpo-territorio-espiritu* (body-spirit-land). I discuss countering a sense of false belonging through alternative approaches to citizenship in Kerry Arabena’s concept of Universe-referent citizenship, and land as teacher in Leanne Betasamosake Simpson’s retelling of the Nishnaabeg story of Binoojiinh. Chapter 5,

“Quillapi,” extends the process of mind mapping into my weaving practice informed by the importance of the quillapi in individual and collective Charrúa cultural reconstruction practices. The final chapter in Sam is entirely devoted to the second woven gateway, *Quarái*, which brings together various personal and cultural narratives and connections between the human and more-than-human.

Detít (part 3) is guided by Jacarandá (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*) and the knowledge that Jacaranda holds about the cyclical. Chapter 6, “Kimpasi,” begins with analysis of re-membering as a form of return or self-initiation, and explores the symbolism within the cosmogram as a common form to many ancient cultures to organise and explain ideas about the nature of the cosmos and the human life cycle within it. The final section, “Barriga Negra-Coral Negro,” is devoted to the third and final woven gateway created as part of this practice-led research. The conclusion includes a final divination prompt and is structured as an autoethnographic evaluation. Mindful of what philosopher and writer Bayo Akomolafe refers to as the danger of narratives of arrival, my process has been one of gradual *atando cabos, relacionando una cosa con la otra*—tying loose threads, relating one thing with another.⁴²

⁴² Bayo Akomolafe is a writer, philosopher and international speaker who draws upon his West Nigerian Yoruba ancestral connections in his work exploring concepts such as postactivism, transraciality and ontofugitivity. In many of his essays, talks and podcast conversations he refers to the danger or risk associated with narratives of arrival. See, for example, Bayo Akomolafe, “The Burden of the New Story,” bayoakomolafe.net, 23 October 2016, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/post/the-burden-of-the-new-story>.

Yú (Part 1)

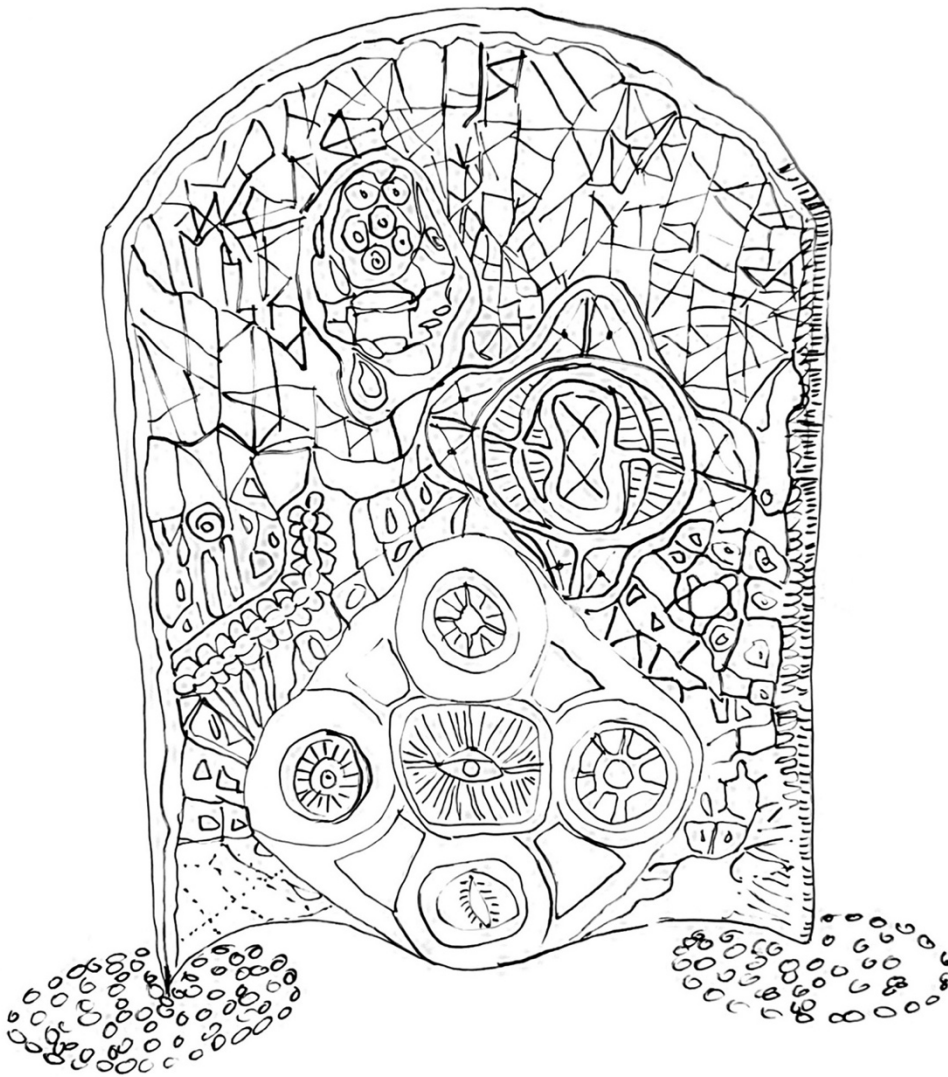


Figure 2. Paula do Prado, Birth of Sucuri, 2022, digital tracing from photograph

Ceiba

There are two *Ceiba speciosa* or floss silk trees in the Royal Botanic Gardens in Sydney that are believed to be about fifty years old. These are far from the only examples of Ceiba in the region as it has been twenty years since *Ceiba speciosa* was noted as naturalising in the Bellingen area, on the north coast of New South Wales.¹ Native to Abya Yala, including Argentina, Paraguay and Brazil, there are many types of Ceiba, with their range extending to other parts of Central and South America and Mexico. In Argentina and Uruguay they are commonly called *palo borracho*, which literally translates as “drunken stick.” Taxonomically, they are part of the family Malvaceae (previously Bombaceae) and are related to the baobab, Australian boab and other types of silk floss or kapok trees. Ceiba are visually striking trees. They can grow to twenty metres in height, have thick silvery grey trunks with protruding thorn-like spikes and produce a distinct tropical pink orchid-like flower. The Ceiba, similar to the kapok, also produces a fruit that bursts open to release a cottony fluff or floss. The floss of the Ceiba or kapok is a very light fibre, not strong enough on its own to be spun like cotton but it has traditionally been used as a stuffing for pillows and other textiles, especially because of its resistance to moisture, which attracts mould and mites. When I began working with soft fabric and fibre sculptures during my Master in Fine Arts by Research degree, I used kapok as a stuffing material. I became well acquainted with its texture and hard to control wispy fibres that would stick to my hands, nose and eyelashes.

¹ A naturalising plant is a non-native plant that is growing on its own in nature, reproducing and dispersing in its new environment. John Hosking et al., “Plant Species First Recognised as Naturalised in NSW 2002 and 2003,” *Cunninghamia* 10, no. 1 (2007), <https://www.botanicgardens.org.au/sites/default/files/2023-06/Cun101139Hos.pdf>.

In Mesoamerican “forms of remembering,” sacred trees of life hold up the four quadrants of the universe and are the means by which communication transpires between what is above and what is below. They unite the vertical skyward energy with the horizontal earthward dimension.

—Patrisia Gonzales, *Red Medicine*²

The symbolic significance of Ceiba is often discussed in terms of its importance to Mesoamerican cultures. The Maya in particular understood the Ceiba as a “world-centering tree” or *axis mundi*, the connection between earth and the underworld.³ In Inca cosmology this was related to the different thresholds between worlds: *Uku Pacha*, represented by the serpent, is below ground; *Kay Pacha*, represented by the puma, is the terrestrial plain; and *Hanan Pacha*, represented by the condor, is the sky and all above ground. This symbolism is embedded in the concept of the tree of life or of sacred trees is common to many cultures around the world. For example, the axis mundi in Celtic mythology is an oak tree.

The tree of life and sacred trees are more than just mythopoetic concepts; these trees are sites of enduring ancestral and cultural practice and connection. In diasporic communities in particular, plants and trees take on added symbolic significance as bridges between distant homelands and having to make home in new unfamiliar locations. For example, Ceiba trees became sacred to enslaved African Bantu and Yoruba peoples forced to work sugar plantations in sixteenth-century Cuba: “Far away from their homeland, the

² Patrisia Gonzales, *Red medicine traditional Indigenous rites of birthing and healing*, 1st ed., First peoples : new directions in indigenous studies, (Tucson: University of Arizona Press, 2012). 128–29.

³ Gonzales, *Red medicine traditional Indigenous rites of birthing and healing*.131.

Bantu found solace in the ceiba because it resembled the baobab, the holy tree they venerated back home in the Congo.”⁴

Sacred trees have connected people and place for time immemorial, and nowhere is this more evident than in the practices associated with birth trees, common to many First Nations cultures. Birth trees are associated not just as places to give birth; the placenta or umbilical stub are ceremonially buried in or near a sacred tree to connect the new born child with their ancestral land, affirming a relationship and responsibility toward that place. In Māori culture the word *whenua* refers to “both the placenta and land,” and the ritual of burying the afterbirth is connected to the proverb “He taonga no te whenua, me hoki ano ki te whenua,” which means “what is given by the land should return to the land.”⁵ In Australia, Djab Wurrung traditional owners are leading an ongoing battle with the Victorian Government and the proposed expansion of a major highway that would result in the destruction of over 3000 sacred trees, including birthing trees.⁶ In many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, “the placenta is considered the baby’s soul map, which must be buried for them to receive Ancestor guidance when they’re older. In some cultures, the placenta is buried and covered with fire, while in others it is to be buried inside or near a

⁴ Sarah Elton Sarah, “Spirits that inhabit ceiba trees feared and respected in Cuba: Ontario Edition,” *Toronto star* (2001). 2.

⁵ The meaning of the Māori proverb is discussed in Boulton, Amohia, Tanya Allport, Hector Kaiwai, Gill Potaka Osborne, and Rewa Harker. “E Hoki Mai Nei Ki Te Ūkaipō—Return to Your Place of Spiritual and Physical Nourishment.” *Genealogy (Basel)* 5, no. 2 (2021): 45-. <https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5020045>. The text credited to Sotheby’s is taken from information provided for a Māori wooden placenta bowl, New Zealand, 1890-1925. The bowl is a carved hemispherical wooden bowl, with curving side gully, elaborately decorated with interwoven animals and ancestral figures called Tiki, held in the Science Museum Group Collection <https://collection.sciencemuseumgroup.org.uk/objects/co103093/wooden-placenta-bowl-maori-new-zealand-1890-1925-placenta-bowl>

⁶ See the Djab Wurrung Embassy website: <https://dwembassy.com>. As recently as August 2023, a birthing tree was deliberately poisoned and the words “Build the road” spray-painted on its trunk. Rochelle Kirkham, “Djab Wurrung Birthing Tree near Western Highway Upgrade site Confirmed Poisoned,” ABC News, 22 August 2023, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2023-08-22/sacred-buangor-birthing-tree-poisoned-arborist-confirms/102758914>.

boab tree.”⁷ The name *boab* is thought to be a corruption of baobab, with the Australian boab (*Adansonia gregorii*) one of eight baobab species (genus *Adansonia*), the others being native to Madagascar and mainland Africa.⁸ There is ongoing scientific debate about how the baobab connection between Australia and Africa occurred but there is no doubt about the ecological and cultural significance of these trees to their respective locations.⁹

Origin x Tree

In the Akamara Tarot deck, the card “Origin” references the common card of the Fool, indicating new beginnings, naivety, spontaneity or leaps of faith. The imagery of this card depicts a woman with a golden arm falling from a tree (the tree of life) under a waning crescent moon. The meaning is intended to reference the ongoing destruction of sacred land globally, and specifically in so-called Australia, where the land was never ceded and no treaty has been signed.¹⁰ It is a reminder that it is in the land that spirit resides, and the ongoing cycle of destruction and extraction disrupts the importance of land as a place of ancestral connection and veneration.¹¹ The tree of life is a symbol of survival and resilience, that when one cycle ends another begins, even when that new beginning isn’t clear or guaranteed.

⁷ Gemma Pol, “Pregnancy and Birthing,” Common Ground, 21 October 2022, <https://www.commonground.org.au/article/pregnancy-and-birthing>.

⁸ Sue O'Connor et al., “Art in the bark: Indigenous carved boab trees (*Adansonia gregorii*) in north-west Australia,” *Antiquity* 96, no. 390 (2022), <https://doi.org/10.15184/aqy.2022.129>.

⁹ For a discussion on the various theories on the connection between the Australian boab and African Baobab see Megan Clement, “UWA Student wins International ‘Dance your PhD’ Competition,” *The Conversation*, 21 October 2011, <https://theconversation.com/iconic-boab-trees-trace-journeys-of-ancient-aboriginal-people-3956>. For a discussion of the significance of boabs in Australia and baobabs in Africa and Madagascar see G. E. Wickens and Pat Lowe, *The Baobabs: Pachycauls of Africa, Madagascar and Australia*, 1st 2008. ed. (Dordrecht: Springer Netherlands, 2008).

¹⁰ Lolu the Messenger, *Akamara Tarot*, 8. See <https://akamaratarot.com>

¹¹ Lolu the Messenger, 8.

The second card, “Tree,” is from Grandma Baby’s Black Gold Lenormand deck.¹² The imagery of this card is a sepia-toned archival photograph from the US Library of Congress. It shows a small black child holding what might be a bucket in his hand standing in front of a large tree with buildings that are slave quarters in the background. The meaning of the card, while open to interpretation, invites us to consider the following: “Tree is harmony with the land and all her spirits. This harmony with the earth also requires harmony with Indigenous people, paying our respects to land guardians.”¹³



Figure 3. Origin, Akarama tarot and Tree, Grandma Babys Lenormand

¹² Grandma Baby’s Black Gold Lenormand was created by Tea Angles and although rooted in African American and specifically Hoodoo traditions, Tea spent over a year living in Melbourne/Naarm during the time they were developing and working on this deck. See <https://littleredtarot.com/product/black-gold-lenormand/>.

¹³ Tea Angles, Grandma Baby’s Black Gold Lenormand guidebook, First edition, Tree card.

1. Reckoning

A double reckoning

The catalyst for this practice-led art research has been my ongoing journey to reconnect and re-member my ancestral lineages. In this research I focus on my Charrúan ancestry and where it intersects with my West African and Iberian heritage whilst I am geographically located on unceded Gadigal, Bidjigal, Gameygal, Dharug and Dharawal Country on the east coast of Australia. As someone born into one settler colonial context in Uruguay and who has migrated to a different settler colonial framework in Australia, I have come to recognise both similarities and differences in the ways colonisation has impacted and continues to pervade socio-historical and cultural narratives in both nation states. Yásnaya Elena Aguilar Gil, an Ajuujk (Mixe) linguist, writer and language rights activist from Ayutla, Oaxaca, points out that the conquest of Abya Yala did not just change that part of the southern hemisphere but the whole world through the implementation of a three-pronged system—colonisation, patriarchy and capitalism— encapsulated in the creation of the nation state.¹ Many of the ongoing colonial strategies that at their core seek to dispossess, erase and otherwise sever Indigenous people from their lands were enacted and developed in the Americas before being deployed and adapted in other parts of the world, including Australia. Although this doctoral research is informed by my personal experience of diaspora and migration, this is not a comparative study between Uruguay and Australia. It is, rather, an exploration of the

¹ Yásnaya Elena Aguilar Gil, “Writing in the face of Catastrophe,” originally published as “Escribir ante la catástrofe,” *El País*, 23 February 2020, https://elpais.com/elpais/2020/02/23/opinion/1582473048_542500.html. Translated by *Toward Freedom* with the author’s permission, 26 February 2020, <https://towardfreedom.org/story/writing-in-the-face-of-catastrophe/>.

tension between the desire to connect with my ancestral lands and lineages combined with doing so from a temporal and geographic distance whilst also being called to learn the history and acknowledge the lands that I have inhabited for nearly forty years—what I call a double reckoning.

The term *reckoning* in its broadest conception can be taken to mean an accounting, to take things into account and put them in order. I think here of the *quipucamayoc*, the accountants responsible for maintaining and reading the *quipu*, a length of rope with various knotted strings attached in different colours, one of the earliest known recording systems from the Inca empire.² The knotted and dyed strings of the quipu were made of wool or camelid hair and were thought to account for everything from food stocks, land distribution, births, deaths and marriages, as well as astrological information important for the cycles of planting and harvesting. A more mainstream notion of reckoning is the concept of “the day of reckoning”; having biblical origins and popularised by the disaster film genre (think *Armageddon*), it is defined as “a time when the consequences of a course of mistakes or misdeeds are felt.”³ In contrast to this fire-and-brimstone type of reckoning, North American author and culture activist Stephen Jenkinson, who has worked extensively and written on his work with dying people and their families, frames reckoning as a “willingness to see things as they are, a kind of fit of lucidity in a strange time.”⁴

² The quipu is a knotted mnemonic device of the Inca, a way of recording various forms of information made from lengths of knotted string.

³ Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. “day of reckoning,” accessed 23 November 2023, <https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/day%20of%20reckoning>.

⁴ “Stephen Jenkinson on a Lucid Reckoning,” For the Wild podcast, Episode 349, 20 September 2023, 6:02 <https://forthewild.world/listen/stephen-jenkinson-on-a-lucid-reckoning-349>. Jenkinson has recently co-authored a book titled *Reckoning* with Kimberley Ann Johnson, a women’s health and trauma recovery practitioner and author. Kimberley Ann Johnson is the author of what is considered a classic text in early mothering, *The Fourth Trimester: Healing Your Body, Balancing Your Emotions and Restoring Your Vitality*.

In settler colonial contexts like Australia, Canada, the United States and South Africa, there have been varying attempts at public, government-led processes of truth telling, as well as efforts to both reckon with and reconcile Indigenous and non-Indigenous settler colonial relations.⁵ Speaking of reconciliation with specific reference to the residential school system in North America, Jenkinson says that what is needed is conciliation, otherwise any idea of reconciliation is premature because “we continue to live off the veils of a system that, internal to itself, was illegal.”⁶ Although reconciliation broadly refers to the act of reconciling, to restore harmony and/or to settle or resolve differences, in both the global and the Australian context it has proven difficult to define in terms of a political concept or within public policy.⁷

Reckoning is perhaps best framed as conciliation that hasn’t yet happened. I first encountered the term *reckoning* in this context through the work of Wiradjuri and Wailwan woman Teela Reid. A lawyer, public speaker and writer, Reid has variously argued that it is time for Australia to have a reckoning not reconciliation.⁸ As a campaigner for the Uluru Statement from the Heart, Reid was one of the leading activists in the push for the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Voice, also known as the Voice to Parliament, which forms one of the three key pillars outlined in the Uluru Statement: voice, treaty, truth.⁹ The

⁵ There have been various truth and reconciliation commissions and processes set up internationally, for example in Canada and the legacy of the Indian Residential Schools system, and in South Africa after the end of apartheid.

⁶ “Stephen Jenkinson on a Lucid Reckoning.” 34:40. For more information, see “An Overview of the Indian Residential School System,” written by the Union of Ontario Indians based on research compiled by Karen Restoule, <https://www.anishinabek.ca/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/An-Overview-of-the-IRS-System-Booklet.pdf>.

⁷ Tom Clark, Ravi de Costa, Sarah Maddison, “Non-Indigenous People and the Limits of Settler Colonial Reconciliation,” in *The Limits of Settler Colonial Reconciliation*, ed. Sarah Maddison, Tom Clark, and Ravi de Costa (Singapore: Springer, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-10-2654-6_1.

⁸ Teela Reid, “2020: The Year of Reckoning, Not Reconciliation: It’s Time to Show Up,” Griffith Review 67, 4 February 2020, <https://www.griffithreview.com/articles/2020-year-of-reckoning/>.

⁹ “The Statement,” The Uluru Statement, accessed 9 September 2024, <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/view-the-statement/>.

Voice to Parliament aimed to give constitutional recognition to the First Peoples of Australia by establishing a representative body that would give expert advice to Parliament about laws and policies that affect Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Voice to Parliament Referendum was held on 14 October 2023 and did not pass.¹⁰ There were many prominent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander elders, senators, academics, activists, artists and journalists on both sides of the Voice Referendum campaign and public debates. These debates surfaced hope in the goodwill of the Australian people but also legitimately raised concerns and critique about the limitations of the Voice to Parliament itself. Dr Chelsea Watego, who is Professor of Indigenous Health and the Executive Director of the Carumba Institute at Queensland University of Technology in Brisbane, as well as the author of the book *Another Day in the Colony* (2021), pointed out that “While the nation muses over whether to vote yes or no to an Indigenous voice to parliament with no actual power, we are witnessing how power actually operates on the lives and livelihoods of Blackfullas in this place right now.”¹¹

The spirit of reckoning is embedded in the rallying statement *Always was, always will be Aboriginal Land*,” a statement of resilience, survival, deep connection and celebration,”¹² which came out of the 1980s Aboriginal land rights movement. The *Always was* rally cry can be heard in the collective chants of Survival Day rallies by both First Nations people and

¹⁰ Discussions surrounding the Yes or No vote campaigns in the lead up to the referendum were also affected by misinformation and disinformation predominantly spread online and through social media, see for example “Sorting Fact from Fiction in the Voice to Parliament Referendum,” Amnesty International, 13 September 2023, <https://www.amnesty.org.au/sorting-fact-from-fiction-in-the-voice-to-parliament-referendum/> and “Open Letter: A Statement for our First Nations People and our Country,” The Uluru Statement, 24 October 2023, <https://ulurustatement.org/statement-for-our-people-and-country/>.

¹¹ Dr Chelsea Watego, “Voice to Parliament: Why Mob are Staying Silent,” IndigenousX, 19 July 2023, <https://indigenoux.com.au/voice-to-parliament-why-mob-are-staying-silent/>.

¹² Laura McBride, “Always Was, Always Will Be, Aboriginal Land,” Australian Museum, 9 July 2021, <https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/always-will-be-aboriginal-land/>.

allies. The emergence of the Black Lives Matter movement following the murder of George Floyd in the US in 2020 brought into sharp focus the fact that the wider Australian population is well attuned to events happening overseas but is less responsive to the ongoing impact of colonisation here in Australia¹³. Despite the apparent complacency of the wider Australian population, First Nations peoples of Australia continue to demonstrate their resilience in dealing with the carceral and justice systems.¹⁴ Following the referendum, there have been several surveys about the referendum and its aftermath.¹⁵ One such example is the Australian National University's detailed survey of 4,000 Australian adults immediately following the referendum, which found that the negative result "did not signal a lack of support for reconciliation, for the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders having a voice/say in matters that affect them, truth-telling processes, or for a lack of pride in First Nations cultures."¹⁶ Unfortunately, many of the post-referendum surveys (and mainstream opinion pieces) such as these serve to reinforce notions that the No result had nothing to do with racism or Australian's poor understanding of the constitution. As Professor Megan Davis writes, "That so many do not know race resides in the Constitution, or that Indigenous exclusion and disadvantage stems from constitutional racism, means we

¹³ See for example Isabella Higgins and Kirstie Wellauer, *George Floyd's murder and conviction made Australia 'pay attention' — now Indigenous leaders say it's time for change*, ABC News 22 April 2021 <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-04-22/george-floyd-to-signal-action-for-australian-indigenous-deaths/100086004>

¹⁴ See, for example, *Incarceration Nation*, a 90-minute feature film directed by Dean Gibson and produced by Helen Morrison that premiered on NITV in 2021. The documentary presents the strength, resilience and advocacy of First Nations people in the face of racism in the Australian justice system. <https://incarcerationnation.com.au/the-film/>.

¹⁵ See for example "Polling – Misinformation and the Referendum," the Australia Institute, <https://australiainstitute.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Polling-Misinformation-and-the-referendum-Web.pdf> and articles such as Shane Wright, "The Demographics that Felled the Yes Campaign," *Sydney Morning Herald*, 15 October 2023, <https://www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/the-demographics-that-felled-the-yes-campaign-20231015-p5ecc5.html>.

¹⁶ Nicholas Biddle et al., "Detailed analysis of the 2023 Voice to Parliament Referendum and Related Social and Political Attitudes," Australian National University, 28 November 2023, https://csrc.cass.anu.edu.au/sites/default/files/docs/2023/11/Detailed_analysis_of_the_2023_Voice_to_Parliament_Referendum_and_related_social_and_political_attitudes.pdf.

are a country that does not know itself. I am sceptical that truth-telling would help at this point. We are a country with no memory.”¹⁷

Navigating false belonging¹⁸

*All Settlers are privileged
in relation to Indigenous peoples
because all Settlers
benefit from Indigenous dispossession*
—Ambelin Kwaymullina, “Bias”¹⁹

My parents and I migrated to Australia from Montevideo, Uruguay in September 1986, when I was seven years old. My dad Jorge, a *canto popular* singer/songwriter, had made a short visit to Australia two years earlier in 1984.²⁰ In an interview in 2020, my father spoke of the events that precipitated our move to Australia. In 1984, my father had come to perform at a Solidarity with Nicaragua concert held at the Sydney Town Hall to replace (at short notice) the Uruguayan musician who was originally meant to perform but had broken

¹⁷ Megan Davis, “Truth after the Voice,” *The Monthly*, December 2023–January 2024, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2023/december/megan-davis/truth-after-voice#mtr>.

¹⁸ Author Toko-Pa Turner credits John O’Donohue, an Irish poet, author, priest, and Hegelian philosopher with the phrase and concept of false belonging, as mentioned in O’Donohue’s 1997 book about Celtic spiritual wisdom, *Anam Cara*. See Turner, Toko-pa. *Belonging, Remembering Ourselves Home*, 2017, Her Own Room Press, British Columbia, 47.

¹⁹ Ambelin Kwaymullina, “Bias,” in *Living on Stolen Land* (Broome: Magabala Books, 2020), 37.

²⁰ *Canto popular*, which literally translates as “popular song,” is a folkloric genre attributed to the 1970s and ‘80s in Uruguay and Argentina. Often the lyrics of the time were coded, highly poetic and metaphorical, in order to speak out about the political climate and dictatorship of the time without raising suspicion.

his thumb and couldn't play his guitar. The trip was organised thanks in part to my mother's brother who had migrated to Australia in the early seventies.

Having accepted the invitation to travel to Australia to perform, my father lost his teaching position as a PE teacher in Uruguay. It wasn't until 1985 that the first democratic Uruguayan government was installed following the end of a violent military dictatorship that had lasted for over ten years. Both my parents and my uncle had first-hand experience of the questioning, intimidation, harassment, unlawful detention and torture that was a daily reality during the dictatorship years. We migrated under the family reunion scheme, with my uncle sponsoring the three of us. The year after we migrated the family reunion scheme was scrapped. By the late 1980s, the Australian government was undergoing another round of immigration policy reforms to reframe its multicultural policy and improve the assimilation of new migrants under a singular Australian identity.²¹ We became Australian citizens in 1989.

In 2009, to mark twenty years as an 'Australian' I created *A Big Adventure* (fig. 4, p.35). The text is written in Spanglish from the perspective of my younger self reflecting on the period just before leaving Uruguay, the flight itself (which was my first time on an aeroplane), and the time just after arrival experiencing an immediate feeling of awe and love for a place I did not yet know. Our move here was of course a defining 'before and after' moment that would change our lives forever.

The first few years were a difficult adjustment for many reasons. I became, and never stopped being a translator child, picking up the English language (and cultural lingo)

²¹ Elsa Koleth, "Multiculturalism: A Review of Australian Policy Statements and Recent Debates in Australia and Overseas," Research Paper no. 6 2010–11, *Parliamentary Library* (2010), https://www.academia.edu/15916741/E_Koleth_Multiculturalism_a_review_of_Australian_policy_statements_and_recent_debates_in_Australia_and_overseas_Research_paper_no_6_2010_2011_Australian_Parliamentary_Library_Canberra_2010.

much more quickly than my parents.²² For a time dad worked as a cleaner at the Westpac Museum at The Rocks in Sydney and he would take me with him. I remember reading the printed signs about the bank's Australian history alongside the diorama exhibits. I also collected Australian souvenir pins, three of my favourites, wombat, kangaroo and "I love Sydney" are pinned on *A Big Adventure*. Two years later in 2011, I created *200 years* (fig. 5, p.36), in response to the 200-year anniversary of Uruguay's independence from the Spanish, and to the Australian Bicentenary of 1988. The large text in Spanish at the top of the work translates to "What independence?" I write in detail about this particular work in my Master's thesis, "Mellorado: Identity, Heritage and Transmission," specifically in relation to the inverted maps and feeling conflicted about belonging to either a Uruguayan or Australian identity.²³ In the transition from leaving an uncertain, politically, socially and economically unstable yet familiar 'home' in Uruguay, for an unfamiliar place that promised a better future, my family had swapped being complicit in one settler colonial system for another.

²² As a newly arrived migrant I was placed in English language classes as soon as I commenced school. My parents also had the opportunity to attend English language classes. My father was able to attend but my mother often missed her class because she would stay home to look after me. Initially my father would assist me with homework, and we would look to our small English-Spanish dictionary for the phonetic spelling of words to work out how to pronounce them. It didn't take long for my English language ability to surpass my parents, and I was often relied on to check wording, meaning and pronunciation. This situation is common for many children of refugees and migrants who become translators within their families when adult caregivers do not yet have local language skills. See more on language brokering: "Child Language Brokers are doing a Massive Job but we don't Credit Them," RMCC webpage, accessed 9 September 2024, <https://rmccaustralia.org.au/kids-as-translators-the-burden-of-being-helpful/>.

²³ The upside-down map of South America is a reference to Uruguayan artist Joaquin Torres-Garcia's *Americia Invertida* drawing from 1943, which became a popular symbol in Uruguayan art culture. The map of Australia is given the same treatment as a way to acknowledge shared south-south global positioning, see Paula do Prado, "Mellorado: Identity, Heritage and Transmission" (Masters thesis, University of New South Wales, 2012), 56–59, <https://doi.org/10.26190/unsworks/16527>.



Figure 4. Paula do Prado, *A Big Adventure*, 2009, acrylic on Bemsilk lining, Australian souvenir pins. Photo: Andy Stevens



Figure 5. Paula do Prado, 200 years, 2011, acrylic, fabric appliqué and beading on linen remnant. Photo: Andy Stevens

Our longing for community and purpose is so powerful that it can drive us into joining established groups, systems of belief, or even employments and relationships, that, to our diminished or divided self, give the impression of belonging to something greater. But these places often have their own motives and hidden contracts

—Toko-pa Turner, *Belonging*²⁴

²⁴ Toko-pa Turner, *Belonging: Remembering Ourselves Home* (British Columbia, Canada: Her Own Room Press, 2017), 47.

In *Belonging* (2017), Toko-Pa Turner articulates the difference between belonging and fitting in, noting that “fitting in, by its very definition, is to parcel off our wholeness in exchange for acceptance.”²⁵ At some point, or perhaps at many different points, I traded my wholeness for an Australianness wrapped in multiculturalism as part of a citizenship package deal, and I have been navigating that false belonging ever since. The lure of that false belonging was not just acceptance but a safeguarding, a form of false protection, because “settler futurity exists in a perpetual present, with no plans other than to cling nervously to its privileges.”²⁶

This chapter began with a quoted excerpt from law academic, writer and illustrator Ambelin Kwaymullina’s poem “Bias” from her book *Living on Stolen Land* (2020). In her review of Kwaymullina’s book, author Jeanine Leanne points out that Kwaymullina’s poem “implicates *all* settlers in the layered bias of settler colonialism because it is impossible if you are a settler not to benefit from structural bias and not to hold unconscious bias.”²⁷ Reckoning with inescapable settler complicity, both conscious and unconscious is to confront “the threshold at which we can no longer compromise ourselves.”²⁸ In *Decolonising Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggle* (2015), academic and activist Clare Land outlines three key areas for reckoning with complicity, including critical self-reflection, public political action and personal sacrifice (as well as an awareness of the common strategies used to avoid discomfort and actual personal sacrifice).²⁹ For Land, the work of reckoning with complicity arises when non-Indigenous people recognise and acknowledge that Australia is Aboriginal land and how that then informs public political

²⁵ Turner, 48.

²⁶ Tom Clark, Ravi de Costa, and Sarah Maddison, “Non-Indigenous People and the Limits of Settler Colonial Reconciliation,” (Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2016).10.

²⁷ Leanne, “*Living on Stolen Land*.”

²⁸ Turner, *Belonging*, 48.

²⁹ Clare Land, *Decolonizing solidarity : dilemmas and directions for supporters of indigenous struggles* (London: Zed Books Ltd, 2015). 233.

action and how we live more broadly. This then sets in motion a process of “interrogating and reconstructing the shape of one’s life,” and reckoning with knowing that being on someone else’s land is “enabled by their dispossession and displacement—or even extermination—and is enabled still by everything that keeps things that way.”³⁰

Re-membering as solidarity³¹

African-diaspora Australians are settlers, albeit black-bodied, on black land—Aboriginal land—of which sovereignty has never been ceded. For all the othering and discrimination faced by Africa-diaspora Australians in the current climate, there is no escaping the perhaps uncomfortable reality that we, the colonised, are sometimes also we, the colonisers.

—Maxine Beneba Clarke, introduction to *Growing up African in Australia*³²

Relationships within settler colonial states tend to be framed between white settlers and Indigenous peoples, and even when this is broadened to include other groups there is a tendency to impose singular homogenous identities on Indigenous groups, white and non-white settlers, migrants and refugees. Under these terms, I identify as a racialised migrant settler, a settler regardless of my brown skin, my ancestral lineages or how long I have been living in so-called Australia. I’ve often noticed in different social spaces that there can be an assumption of solidarity with specific groups, based on how I look and once people know

³⁰ Land, *Decolonizing solidarity : dilemmas and directions for supporters of indigenous struggles.*, 230.

³¹ The title of this section references the phrase “Re-membering can be an act of solidarity,” spoken by artist, educator/facilitator and curator Nicole Barakat at the *Re-member* exhibition artists talks, 13 August 2022, 2 pm–3:30 pm, Fairfield City Museum and Gallery.

³² Maxine Beneba Clarke, introduction to *Growing up African in Australia*, ed. Maxine Beneba Clarke (Carlton, Vic.: Black Inc, 2019), 8.

where I am from. As someone who looks phenotypically brown/black but ethnically ambiguous, I find that navigating new social spaces or encountering new people can be fraught because my ambiguity at best raises what can be healthy suspicion and at worst can incite intrusive forms of curiosity.

Just as there is no escaping complicity, I am not immune to holding onto bias despite whatever oppressions, racism, discrimination or trauma I may have experienced in my life. Being aware of my own position also does not provide any immunity for the problematic ways that decolonisation operates and is often co-opted by settler colonialism as a way to mitigate or otherwise negate settler accountability. As writers and educators Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang outline in “Decolonization is not a Metaphor”(2012), settlers are diverse: “there are white settlers and brown settlers, and peoples in both groups make moves to innocence that attempt to deny and deflect their own complicity in settler colonialism.”³³ Discussing his book *Right Story, Wrong Story: Adventures in Indigenous Thinking* (2023), academic and researcher Tyson Yunkaporta, who belongs to the Apalech clan, asserts that “It's a tricky old storyscape that we're living in. And...we need these good yarns. We need good cautionary tales emerging, you know, good story that grounds us in, you know, just some basic care for each other and care for our place.”³⁴

In his foreword to Land's *Decolonising Solidarity*, Gumbaynggirr activist, actor, historian, curator and academic Gary Foley writes, “many of the most difficult conversations I have had have been with people who insisted that they were supporters of the Aboriginal struggle rather than with those who were opposed to our cause...this contradiction whereby

³³ Eve Tuck and K.Wayne Yang, “Decolonization is not a metaphor,” *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education & Society* Volume 1, Number 1 (2012). 10.

³⁴ “Tyson Yunkaporta on Inviolable Lore,” For the Wild podcast, episode 362, 17 January 2024, <https://forthewild.world/listen/tyson-yunkaporta-on-inviolable-lore-362>.

historically, it seems to me, sometimes our best friends are our worst enemies.”³⁵ Thinking through my own double reckoning and where and how I might anchor myself as I navigate re-membering through complicity and bias has led me to (re)consider how I might enact solidarity. How might I reorient myself to the good stories that ground us in care that Yunkaporta refers to and also address the hunger and blind enthusiasm for connection that often results in the historical contradictions that Foley identifies. One thing for me is clear: as writer Joey Mauro observes from his own position as a descendant of Italian migrants living as a settler on Turtle Island/Canada, “solidarity should not be assumed—especially solidarity based on shared oppression—because this assumption veils the tensions between Indigenous and diasporic modes of liberation.”³⁶

Research by sociologist Kaiya Aboagye, who is of Ghanaian, Aboriginal, South Sea and Torres Strait Islander heritage, seeks to address transcultural connections between Indigenous Australia and the global African Diaspora.³⁷ One of the many historical realities that isn’t widely discussed is that trade between Africa and Australia goes back to the twelfth century, and in fact there were eleven African-descendant convicts on the First Fleet in 1788. Aboagye has sought to engage with the historical archive to surface these connections with the aim of “restoring the terms of black or Afro/Indigenous history and connectedness in culturally relevant ways [and] seeking to develop and further advance new

³⁵ Gary Foley, foreword to Clare Land, *Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles* (London: Zed Books, 2015), xii.

³⁶ Joey Mauro, “Mapping the Conversation: Tracing Incommensurability and Solidarity in Theories of Indigenous and Diasporic Liberation,” *The Ascendant Historian* 2 (2022): 51, <https://journals.uvic.ca/index.php/corvette/article/view/20808>.

³⁷ Kaiya Aboagye, “Restoring Black/Indigenous Relations in Australia: An Indigenist Sociological Theory for Bla(c)k Indigeneity in the Global South,” *Journal of Global Indigeneity* 6. no. 1 (2022), <https://www.journalofglobalindigeneity.com/article/36058-restoring-black-indigenous-relations-in-australia-an-indigenist-sociological-theory-for-bla-c-k-indigeneity-in-the-global-south>.

mediums that transcend the rhetoric of black international solidarity.”³⁸ Finding ways to challenge established narratives as well as explore new ground for solidarity is no easy task. For example, the 2021 documentary *Our African Roots*, written, produced and presented by Santilla Chingape, uses phrases like “our forgotten African roots” and refers to the African descendant convicts of the First Fleet as the “African forefathers.”³⁹ The documentary, which attempts to address silences and omissions in the telling of Australian colonial history, centres interviews with a select group of descendants from First Fleet Africans who over 230 years later can only acknowledge connection through a colonial archive paper trail.

In response to Chingape’s documentary, writer and academic Dr Jared M. Field, a Gamilaraay mari who grew up on Dharug Country, observes that in attempting to surface one story, the documentary fell into the trap of reinscribing the danger of the single narrative by omitting another story, the equally important and deeply interconnected narratives of the encounters and relationships between the African descendant convicts/settlers and the traditional custodians of the lands.⁴⁰ Similarly to the narratives surfaced by Kaiya Abogaiye’s research, Field recounts his own personal story, that of his maternal grandparents. His African American grandfather arrived in Australia in the 1800s, and seeking to escape the colonial administration fled to the frontier of Gamilaraay country, where he met his grandmother. For Field, part of the harm in omitting such stories erases alternative pathways outside of the colonial system, just as his African American ancestor

³⁸ Kaiya Aboagye, “Australian Blackness, the African Diaspora and Afro/Indigenous Connections in the Global South,” *Transition*, no. 126 (2018): 83–84, <https://doi.org/10.2979/transition.126.1.11>.

³⁹ Santilla Chingape, *Our African Roots*, dir. Tony Jackson (Brunswick, Vic.: Chemical Media, 2021). The documentary is available to stream on SBS Australia <https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/tv-program/our-african-roots/1952984643554>.

⁴⁰ In a now widely referenced and quoted TED talk, “The Danger of the Single Story,” Nigerian novelist Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie argues that incomplete and inaccurate understandings can occur when defining others in terms of narrow or singular narrative about people, places and cultures. “Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie: The danger of a single story | TED,” YouTube, 8 October 2009, 19:16, <https://youtu.be/D9lhs241zeg?si=FoeCoe7AuMWii18w>.

“saw their future with First Nations people rather than the colonial powers—it was a choice.”⁴¹

At the time of writing, the first Invasion/Survival Day rallies since the referendum result have just been held. Increasingly, as a result of committed First Nations organising and activism, calls for changing the date of Australia Day have shifted into abolishing the national holiday all together.⁴² In 2024 in particular, what is possible through grassroots action has been demonstrated through solidarity in practices of joint resistance in the face of co-struggles. For example, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organisers such as Warriors of Aboriginal Resistance Victoria and Uprising of the People Northern Territory invited and marched alongside Palestinian organisations protesting the invasion of Gaza, extending their existing rally cry to “From the river to the sea, always was always will be.” Doctoral candidate, activist and community organiser Tasnim Mahmoud Sammak articulates her and her family’s positioning as Palestinians in Australia as “Indigenous there, settlers here.”⁴³ Her work reflects on her own experiences growing up in Australia with Palestinian immigrant parents (her grandparents were exiled as a result of the Nakba of 1948, followed by ongoing displacement) and the shifts she has observed in the Palestinian movement in Australia as an activist and community member. She describes “a loss of hope in Australian politics,” and a growing awareness of the ways both multiculturalism and assimilationist

⁴¹ Jared Field, “On ‘Our African Roots’: A First Nations Response,” IndigenousX, 19 October 2021, <https://indigenoux.com.au/on-our-african-roots-a-first-nations-response/>.

⁴² See for example Nayuka Gorrie and Crystal McKinnon, “Reconciliation is Dead, and so is Recognition. What’s Next?,” Crikey, 26 January 2024, <https://www.crikey.com.au/2024/01/26/january-26-australia-day-invasion-nayuka-gorrie-crystal-mckinnon/>.

⁴³ Tasnim Mahmoud Sammak, “Indigenous There, Settlers Here: Palestinians in Australia,” *Overland* “70 Years of the Nakba,” 2018, <https://overland.org.au/previous-issues/nakba70/essay-tasnim-sammak/>.

politics have served to uphold the oppression of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty.⁴⁴

In an article co-written with fellow activist and organiser Carol Que, Sammak further develops the idea that this shift in awareness within community and activist organising has served to reframe the fight for collective liberation:

Our shared commitment to solidarity and co-struggle lies in our desire to know ourselves and each other, rather than through any desire for “positive” representational politics curated by colonial institutions that birthed the patronising exceptional, good migrant-bad migrant dichotomy. We want to come together in all our difference and also refuse nullifying allyship solidarity constructs that impose one homogenous “ally” identity upon us, effectively cutting us off from any rootedness.⁴⁵

It is within this context that I recall the words “re-membering can be an act of solidarity,” spoken by artist, educator and curator Nicole Barakat at the commencement of the artists talks for the exhibition *Re-member*, held at Fairfield City Museum and Gallery.⁴⁶ *Re-member* brought together artists with ancestral links to the South West Asia North Africa (SWANA) region who are living and working in Australia, and extends on the ongoing re-membrance work of the SWANA Ancestral Hub and the (re)Gathering our Ancestors project led by Layla K. Feghali. The exhibition, curated by Barakat, included the work of Annukina Warda, DJ Gemma, Joanna Kambourian, Maissa Alameddine, Nazanin Marashian, Olivia

⁴⁴ Sammak, “Indigenous There, Settlers Here.”

⁴⁵ Tasnim Mahmoud Sammak and Carol Que, “Solidarities and Co-Struggles,” *The Funambulist*, 4 May 2021, <https://thefunambulist.net/editorials/the-funambulist-correspondents-08-naarm-melbourne-solidarities-and-co-struggles>.

⁴⁶ Barakat, *Re-member* exhibition artists talks, 13 August 2022.

Nigro, Zeina laali and Marian Abboud. Framed within the concept of *re-membrance*, “a practice that moves us back into the collective and reminds us that our relationships with each other and the earth are vital,” the exhibition was an invitation to re-member alongside the artists in order to “re-gather your own ancestral ways of knowing.”⁴⁷ This for me echoes Sammak’s situating solidarity and co-struggle in a “desire to know ourselves and each other.”

It is worth here reproducing a quote included in the catalogue essay by Olivia Nigro, one of the *Re-member* artists, which so aptly articulates the tensions in re-membering in exile and diaspora:

Our own healing and restoration from the impacts of our own displacement and experiences of colonisation and assimilation, deepens the possibilities for how we build connections, reciprocities and solidarity with the sovereign First Nations peoples of this continent and First Nations people globally, including our own communities in our homelands and diaspora, who lead a relentless movement towards decolonisation, land back and justice for themselves and the earth.⁴⁸

Re-membering becomes a practice through which to engage with the historical and acknowledge and confront the present. As outlined in the thesis introduction, I situate my own ancestral remembrance practice as weaving and writing my way through and out of el pozo, to reconstruct from the fragments or what Layla Feghali describes as a practice

⁴⁷ *Re-member* exhibition catalogue (Smithfield, NSW: Fairfield City Museum & Gallery, 2022), 6, <https://www.fcmg.nsw.gov.au/files/assets/fcmg/v/3/documents/re-member-exhibition-catalogue.pdf>.

⁴⁸ Olivia Nigro quoted in Nicole Barakat, introduction to *Re-member* exhibition catalogue (Smithfield, NSW: Fairfield City Museum & Gallery, 2022), 7.

towards wholeness: “not wholeness in the sense that everything gets back in order, but wholeness in the sense that we restore integrity to our essence.”⁴⁹

I now wish to focus on specific examples of artworks that have informed my own approach and illustrate the potential for re-membering as solidarity in art practices that acknowledge the histories of place as well as the artist’s position and own stories in relation to place. The first work is *Salt Water Deluge (Tucoerah River)* (2021), by Linda Sok (fig.6, p.46). Originally commissioned by Casula Powerhouse Art Centre, Sok, who was born in Cecil Hills, Australia, and is of Cambodian heritage, created *Salt Water Deluge* in collaboration with her sister Solina Sok. This textile work, which resembles hanging strips of yellow and crimson bandages or a deconstructed garment, incorporates salt, water (collected from the Tucoerah River/Georges River with permission from Dharug Elders) and silk fabrics sourced from Cambodian artisans. Working against the erasure of cultural practices, such as the art of silk weaving disrupted by war and the brutal regime of the Khmer Rouge, Sok’s work centres on healing and the preservation of matrilineal traditions and art forms. The processes for creating the work borrow from techniques used for preserving food. As Sok notes, “the method of boiling, marinating, and curing once applied to vegetables grown in the backyard are bestowed onto precious silk fabrics brought over from Cambodia.”⁵⁰ The work acknowledges how trauma seeps and embeds itself within people, objects and place. Rivers become sites that hold memories of cultural and artistic practice as well as trauma that when confronted and acknowledged also potentially become spaces for transformation and healing. As Sok writes, “for me, my practice is the way through which I began to

⁴⁹ “Tending the Life in Front of You: A Conversation between Layla Feghali and Nicole Barakat,” *Re-member* exhibition catalogue (Smithfield, NSW: Fairfield City Museum & Gallery, 2022), 14.

⁵⁰ Linda Sok, “Questions for my Sister, my Mother, my Grandmother,” *LOSS* exhibition catalogue (Casula, NSW: Casula Powerhouse Arts Centre, 2021), 17, https://www.casulapowerhouse.com/data/assets/pdf_file/0007/198610/LOSS_Catalogue_web.pdf.

rediscover my Cambodian culture. Inevitably, looking back at the culture also necessitates looking at the events that broke that culture. It ends up being a never-ending unearthing of things that feel simultaneously like too much and also not enough.”⁵¹



Figure 6. Linda Sok, *Salt Water Deluge (Tucoerah River)*, 2021

⁵¹ Sok, “Questions for my Sister, my Mother, my Grandmother.”

Ancestral remembrance is also evident in the work of TextaQueen, who is well known for their detailed, large-scale and satirical portraits produced entirely with felt-tip markers. A multi-genre artist who also works with printmaking, murals, music and writing, TextaQueen, who identifies as a person of Goan descent living on unceded Wurundjeri land, also often collaborates with other displaced and diasporic people to complicate assumptions about intersectional identities and engage with cultural and colonial legacies. Created whilst an artist in residence, firstly at Police Point Shire Park in association with the Mornington Peninsular Regional Gallery and later at Bundanon Trust in 2016, TextaQueen's two volume series of photographic works titled *Eve of Incarnation* and *Eve of Reconstruction* are "a science-fictional contemplation on desiring connection to a land as uninvited visitor whose ancestry belongs elsewhere."⁵²

The series of self-portraits have their own distinct visual texture, a departure from TextaQueen's felt-tip drawings that are highly colourful and laden with text and visual references; these photographs feel challenging and intimate in a different way. Both series, *Incarnation* and *Reconstruction* engage with the biblical story of Eve eating the fruit of the tree of knowledge in the Garden of Eden, which is reimagined as "an allegory of emigrant experience."⁵³ The photographs (fig.7, p.49 and fig.8, p.50) show TextaQueen in various poses; a singular human form in the landscape, often partially submerged in water, a nearby river or standing at the shoreline, they appear to be nude apart from strategically draped

⁵² TextaQueen, "We invited TextaQueen to share their lasting impressions as an artist in residence at Bundanon," Facebook, 18 October 2020, <https://www.facebook.com/photo/?fbid=10158093193497600&set=a.214912392599>.

⁵³ TextaQueen, "Eve of Incarnation," TextaQueen artist website, accessed 10 September 2024, <http://textaqueen.com/series/eve-of-incarnation/>.

“fabric of the landscape,” including kelp, seaweed, tree branches, bark and other plant material sourced from each site.⁵⁴ Challenging the genre of the nature nude, the colonial and ethnographic gaze, TextaQueen looks directly at the camera, deliberately making eye contact, reminding the viewer who is in control of the narrative and what is revealed and/or concealed, despite there being, for me at least, a palpable vulnerability in each image.

When asked to reflect on their residency at Bundanon after the making of the second series, TextaQueen writes, “I feel a complicated desire to connect to the Wodi Wodi country as I grieve for my degrees of disconnection from my land, culture, and heritage. Yet my body remembers our connection to a time before our land was a colony, where my safe ancestors dream the future and I am their science-fiction creation.”⁵⁵ This suggests a multilayered multi-place narrative whereby the entry point to these artworks might be the biblical story of Eve, which in its reimagining is the self-story of TextaQueen and the story of other displaced and diasporic peoples like myself who experience a felt sense of place, of being on someone’s else’s ancestral lands and whilst simultaneously remembering ancestral connection to elsewhere. TextaQueen’s body stands in for one archive while the land itself is an archive in its own right, each archive holding multilayered histories and intersecting identities. I read the *Eve* series as a careful co-authoring or co-creating with ancestry and place, whereby place becomes a site for processing connection and disconnection. As TextaQueen reflects, “I remember the visceral experiences of making photographic self-portraiture as alien visitor seeking connection—sitting emotionally and otherwise bare amongst bark, fronds, bugs, river reeds and shadows. I feel heaping gratitude to that Wodi Wodi country for witnessing the cathartic processes of myself, and so many other people

⁵⁴ TextaQueen, “Eve of Incarnation.”

⁵⁵ TextaQueen, “Opinion: Eve of Reconstruction,” Disability Arts Online, 1 December 2020, <https://disabilityarts.online/magazine/opinion/eve-of-reconstruction/>.

not of that land.”⁵⁶ Both Linda Sok’s *Salt Water Deluge* and TextaQueen’s *Eve of Incarnation* and *Eve of Reconstruction* series highlight the role of place, specifically waterways as sites that can hold multiple memories and facilitate ways to navigate the complexity of feeling that comes from disconnection from ancestral lands, cultures and practices whilst simultaneously seeking connection with the lands they inhabit as migrants. Re-membering as solidarity entails engaging with, confronting and processing the stories and histories of ancestral homelands as well as reckoning with the histories of the lands that become adoptive homelands.



Figure 7. TextaQueen, *Summoner*, from the *Eve of Incarnation* series, 2016

⁵⁶ TextaQueen, “We invited TextaQueen to share their lasting impressions.”



Figure 8. TextaQueen, Tripod, 2016

It is not just migrants and those living in diaspora that often use their art practices to work through disconnection and displacement in relation to place. In a conversation documented for the publication *Dale Harding: Body of Objects* (2017), artist and researcher Dale Harding, also known as D Harding, relates an anecdote that his Uncle Milton shares with Aboriginal school groups about the importance of having access to sites of cultural significance such as rock art, because engaging with these places has the potential to unlock inherited or inner knowledge through a process of remembering.⁵⁷ Harding is a Brisbane based artist and a descendant of the Bidjara, Garingbal and Ghungalu peoples. His work references his ancestral, familial and cultural connections to the sites in and around Carnarvon Gorge in Central Queensland. On the passing of his maternal grandfather, Harding took over the responsibility of documenting his family's oral histories and so situates his work as an artist and researcher as "only one extension of this cultural continuum, and my family and I view my/our work as contributing to the canon of our cultural production."⁵⁸ Although I engage with two of Harding's works on an almost daily basis, walking past his 2018 commissions *Spine 2* and *Spine 3*, located on Eastern Avenue on the University of Sydney campus, here I would like to discuss an earlier work, *Bright eyed little dormitory girls* (2013) (fig.9, p.53), which was created during Harding's Honours research and exhibited as part of the 2013 exhibition, *String Theory* at the Museum of Contemporary Art (MCA).⁵⁹

⁵⁷ Dale Harding and Hendrik Folkerts "The Present Continuum: A Conversation on Carnarvon Gorge, Ambivalent Artefacts, and Reproduction as an Artistic Method in the Work" in Dale Harding et al., *Dale Harding : body of objects*, Body of objects, (Nathan, Queensland: Griffith Artworks, Griffith University, 2017). 10.

⁵⁸ "The Present Continuum: A Conversation on Carnarvon Gorge, Ambivalent Artefacts, and Reproduction as an Artistic Method in the Work" in Harding et al., *Dale Harding : body of objects*.9

⁵⁹ *String Theory* was exhibited at the MCA between August and October 2013. I took my class of BA Textiles students on a student excursion during that time, and we were fortunate to hear Dale Harding speak to his work in the gallery.

I was fortunate to hear Harding speak to this work, which directly engages with the impact of European invasion and colonisation of the continent, and the forced displacement and dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from their traditional lands. Harding's research for his exegesis surfaced his matrilineal family members' lived experiences and oral histories of indentured domestic servitude as a result of their being forced to live under government control on Woorabinda Aboriginal Mission in Central Queensland. The material language of the work resonated deeply for me (perhaps because of my familiarity with textiles and my own matrilineal history); there was something simple yet very powerful in the juxtaposition of the rough and scratchy hessian with the delicate, soft and fluffy handstitched detail around the collars. In a few simple materials, Harding simultaneously acknowledges the horrible injustices and experiences within the mission and also his desire to hold those matrilineal memories entrusted to him in a gentle and respectful way, to both surface the stories and make way for healing. Harding's work along with the work of many other Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander artists such as Fiona Foley, Richard Bell, Megan Cope and Tony Albert highlights that cultural disconnection and displacement as a result of colonisation has been an ongoing source of harm for First Nations people all over this continent. What I find particularly interesting in looking at Sok and TextaQueen's work alongside Harding's is their considered, visually and materially layered handling of traumatic themes that seeks to both acknowledge the trauma and provide potential pathways for healing and repair.



Figure 9. D Harding, *Bright eyed little dormitory girls*, 2013, hessian, mohair wool, 190 x 25 x 3 cm. Collection, Museum of Contemporary Art Australia (MCA), Sydney. Purchased with funds provided by the MCA Foundation, 2013.

Photo: Dale Harding

Bright Eyed little dormitory girls signalled a shift in Harding's artistic practice to engage with what he terms a "poetic sensibility," allowing him to respectfully engage and respond to "residues of raw emotions that result from lived experiences and inherited memories."⁶⁰ While acknowledging that there are multiple ways to address painful and difficult histories, Harding has continued to develop the poetic sensibilities of material language because a "poetic strategy resists literal depiction and didactic signification and is able to communicate social and political content with subtlety and potency."⁶¹ In the next

⁶⁰ Dale Harding, *Bright Eyed Little Dormitory Girls*, Queensland College of Art, Griffith University, Exegesis, October 2023, p.1

⁶¹ Dale Harding, *Bright Eyed Little Dormitory Girls*, p.21.

chapter I explore my own familial history in relation to intergenerational experiences and memories of displacement, silencing and erasure.

2. Oyendau

Oyendau/ancestral memory

The concept of memory has been imbued with very specific connotations in Uruguay as a result of the military dictatorship that occurred between 1973 and 1985 (between the 1960s and 1980s, neighbouring Brazil, Argentina and Chile also suffered violent military coups).

The events within and surrounding the military dictatorship in Uruguay are well documented, and in 2023 to commemorate fifty years since the coup, initiatives such as the establishment of a Museum of Memory and the yearly March of Silence highlight how it continues to have ramifications for many Uruguayans.¹ It is in the context of the aftermath of the dictatorship and in the transition to a democratic government that several social and political justice issues have regained momentum.² These include the ongoing calls for justice for the disappeared and their families, to recognition of the role of Afro-Uruguayans and their contributions to the nation state despite racial discrimination that has resulted in intergenerational social and economic disadvantage. It is in this transitional period, just before democratic elections take place in 1986, that my parents and I leave Uruguay and

¹ There are ongoing legal battles to bring to justice those who committed crimes during the dictatorship as well as campaigns to recover the whereabouts and determine what happened to the hundreds of *desaparecidos* (disappeared). See for example Grace Livingstone *Uruguay bill stirs debate about dictatorship-era crimes*, BBC News, 4 January 2024 <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-latin-america-67785302>

² I used the word *regain* because these political justice issues were not new and did not start from the dictatorship but predate it to the colonial violence that made possible the founding of the Uruguayan nation state. See, for example, Pedro Cameselle-Pesce and Debbie Sharnak, eds., *Uruguay in Transnational Perspective* (New York: Routledge, 2023) and Gabriela Fried Amilivia, ed. *State Terrorism and the Politics of Memory in Latin America: Transmissions Across The Generations of Post-Dictatorship Uruguay, 1984–2004* (Amherst, NY: Cambria, 2016).

migrate to Australia. It is also the beginnings of the Charrúa movement as we know it today or what became popularly reported and written about as the Charrúa resurgence.

The fight for Indigenous rights in Uruguay has been unfolding concurrent to the multiple battles for Indigenous rights active across all of Abya Yala, including the neighbouring Mapuche, Guarani, Brazilian and Amazonian peoples. What the mainstream media refer to as the resurgence of the Charrúa people in Uruguay has been receiving increased media, academic and scientific attention, particularly in the lead-up to the recent 2023 census.³ In Uruguay's last national census in 2011, 4.9% of the population self-declared Indigenous ancestry but contemporary genealogical studies indicate that somewhere between 31% and 37% of Uruguayans are of Indigenous descent. The 2023 Uruguayan census specifically asked respondents if they know of at least one grandparent who was Indigenous. A grassroots campaign led by various Charrúa groups such as Derecho Indígena Uruguay (Indigenous Rights Uruguay) are using the census to encourage Uruguayans to ask questions and to interrogate their oral histories, familial and genealogical archives.⁴ For many the census results will represent another tool in securing the future of Indigenous rights in Uruguay, which is one of only two countries in South America who have not ratified ILO Convention 169⁵.

³ See Florencia Pagola, Organizaciones desarrollan campañas de autorreconocimiento indígena de cara al censo 2023 (Organizations develop indigenous self-recognition campaigns ahead of the 2023 census), La diaria política, 25 March 2023, <https://ladiaria.com.uy/politica/articulo/2023/3/organizaciones-desarrollan-campanas-de-autorreconocimiento-indigena-de-cara-al-censo-2023/>

⁴ Derecho Indígena Uruguay (Indigenous Rights Uruguay) is a social media campaign created in response to the 2023 Uruguayan Census to encourage the Uruguayan population to research their family history and self-identify if they have Indigenous heritage. See Instagram account @derechoindigena.uy

⁵ The International Labour Organization (ILO) is an agency of the United Nations, ILO Convention 169 (1989) is a law that if ratified serves to recognize Indigenous peoples' right to self-determination within a nation-state, while setting standards for national governments regarding Indigenous peoples' economic, socio-cultural and political rights, including the right to a land base. ILO 169 can be accessed via the ILO website https://normlex.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:12100:0::NO::P12100_ILO_CODE:C169

In recent years, through the influence of the Black Lives Matter movement, anti-racism, human rights and social justice protests and gatherings in Uruguay are increasingly organised and mutually supported by Charrúa Nation clans and cultural groups alongside long-standing Afro-Uruguayan activist organisations and other allies. A growing awareness of the interconnectedness of Indigenous sovereignty and Black liberation poses a significant threat to the Uruguayan settler-colonial state, which is founded on and continues to depend on the erasure of its Indigenous peoples. Although Uruguay is seen as one of the more liberal and progressive countries in South America, it is characterised by a “strong secularizing, anticlerical bias, privatized beliefs, and a homogeneously White European image.”⁶ The Uruguayan nation state’s liberal racist politics have resulted in the rhetoric that Uruguay does not have an Indigenous problem because it is a country “without Indians.”⁷ Successive governments have also sought to distance from Uruguay’s role in the Atlantic slave trade and minimise the presence and role of people of African descent in its national identity.⁸

The 2019 documentary *El Pais sin Indios (The Country without Indians)*, directed by Nicolás Soto and Leonardo Rodríguez, follows Charrúa descendants Mónica Michelena, a Charrúa activist and mathematics teacher, and Roberto Rivero, a highly regarded horse

⁶ Juan Scuro, “Interpellations and Challenges in the Neoshamanic and Ayahuasca Fields in Uruguay,” in *The Expanding World Ayahuasca Diaspora: Appropriation, Integration and Legislation*, ed. Beatriz Caiuby Labate and Clancy Cavnar (London: Routledge, 2018), 25.

⁷ The phrase “without Indians” was popularised by Uruguayan academics Renzo Pi Hugarte and Daniel Vidart who co-authored a two volume book “El legado de los inmigrantes” published by Nuestra Tierra in 1969. The Uruguayan state with support from scholars like Hugarte who is often considered the father of anthropology, adhere to the concept that Uruguay’s First Nations people, namely the Charrúa, are extinct and that at best there may be some present-day descendants of mostly Guaraní peoples.

⁸ See for example . George Reid Andrews, *Blackness in a White Nation: A History of Afro-Uruguay* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2010) and Alex Boruki, *From Shipmates to Soldiers: Emerging Black Identities in the Río de la Plata* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2015).

handler.⁹ The film is the first of its kind in Uruguay, as we hear from Charrúa people themselves about their fight for recognition from the Uruguayan state and society at large, as well as giving visibility to Charrúa Nation efforts to revive and preserve ancestral knowledge, practices and language. Central to the film is a discussion of the genocide committed on 11 April 1831 at Salsipuedes (a contraction of the Spanish phrase *sal si puedes*, “get out if you can”) by then president Fructuoso Rivera in an attempt to annihilate the Charrúa people. The massacre at Salsipuedes and its genocidal intent is a matter of public record.¹⁰ Its aftermath resulted in the surviving Charrúa, mostly women and children, being made to walk from Salsipuedes to the capital Montevideo, with many forced into domestic servitude on settler farms along the way or on arrival in the city. Continued resistance and activism against erasure and historical silences by Charrúa clans and groups, including the Association of Descendants of the Charrúa Nation (ADENCH) and the Council of the Charrúa Nation (Co.na.cha), has resulted in some steps toward recognition, with the repatriation of the remains of Charrúa chief Vaimaca Peru from France in 2002, and the site of Salsipuedes officially being recognised as a *Sitio de Memoria* in 2022. The 11th of April is now observed as the Day of the Charrúa Nation and Indigenous Identity in Uruguay.

Oyendau is a Charrúa word that is often translated as *memoria* or “memory,” but it specifically refers to the much broader concept of ancestral memory. Within the Charrúa community, *oyendau* represents *memoria viva* (living memory), an active, ongoing form of memory work and practice of ancestral re-membrance that works to reclaim, repair, deepen and sustain what it means to self-identify as Charrúa today. As a process of identity

⁹ The film can be watched in full in Spanish with English subtitles on YouTube: <https://youtu.be/LAamG88aWIY?si=MqYg7t1yKC9IRuj2>.

¹⁰ Archival state documents include letters written by Fructuoso Rivera outlining how he planned the events at Salsipuedes.

reconstruction, oyendau is concerned with the relationship between the human and non-human, place and ancestry. It locates Salsipuedes within a broad network of what are sacred sites for the Charrúa, including the *cerritos* or burial mounds,¹¹ the confluences of waterways, rock art at the Chamangas site and rock cairns atop Cerro Pan de Azúcar plus many more sites where pictographs and other evidence remain—all places that hold oyendau.¹² The official recognition of Salsipuedes as a Sitio de Memoria in 2022 came at a time when I was nearly two years into this research project and had already connected with various members of the Charrúa community online via group chats and online video gatherings. Having been on the periphery of some of the numerous talks and meetings held in the lead up to the momentous recognition of Salsipuedes, I felt more motivated than ever to continue to develop my practice-led research from the perspective of my own intersecting lineages – to make a contribution back to the Charrúa community from the oyendau I was re-membering on Gadigal Country.

The official recognition of Salsipuedes as a Sitio de Memoria and the ongoing battle to have ILO Convention 169 ratified has served to highlight the ways that academia and the mainstream media are both a hindrance and a help to the Charrúa movement. To date, academic scholarship has been focussed on the areas of anthropology, archaeology, scientific and DNA analysis, and historical, political and geographical studies. Most notably, anthropology, which (in conjunction with literary romanticism) has historically been seen to

¹¹ *Cerrito* is the general name used to refer to Indigenous burial mounds that are found all over Uruguay (in Brazil these are referred to as *sambaqui*). Writer Gustavo Verdesio for example notes that *cerritos* are monumental structures indicative of a pre-hispanic civilization but their existence has been largely ignored and minimised because they are made of earth and clay. Gustavo Verdesio, “Erasure to the Rewriting of Indigenous Past: The Troubled Life of Archaeology in Uruguay,” in *The Handbook of South American Archaeology*, ed. Helaine Silverman and William H. Isbell (New York: Springer Archaeology, 2008), 1116.

¹² See for example Afredo María Villegas Oromí, *Pictografías del Cerro Pan de Azúcar: Herencia Aborigen en el Departamento de Maldonado* (Montevideo: Linardi y Risso, 2022).

have done the most harm in disseminating narratives of extinction and tropes of the savage/primitive, is more recently helping to revise, collate and reanalyse existing archival and other written records to provide a much broader picture of Uruguay's Indigenous peoples both pre- and post-European invasion. The doctoral thesis of Ana Francesca Repetto, "Indigenous in Uruguay: A Debate Between the Denial of the State and the Narratives of the Descendants of Current Charrúas" (2015), directly confronts the formation of the national myth of being a country "without Indians," and includes extracts from interviews with Charrúa peoples based in the region of Tacuarembó to the north of Uruguay.¹³ This thesis was one of the key documents submitted in support of the successful application to have Salsipuedes to be declared a Sitio de Memoria. Similarly, Andrea Olivera's PhD thesis, "Decolonial Ethnography with Charrúa Collectives: Reflecting on Interknowledge," completed at the University of Lausanne 2014, is anchored in field work conducted with Charrúa associations between 2008 and 2011. Her work was inspired by the decolonial research methodology of Māori anthropologist Linda Tuhiwai Smith to take seriously Charrúa claims for recognition at a time when the academic and political elite, as well as mainstream Uruguayan society, mocked and dismissed any notion of Uruguayan Indigeneity.¹⁴ My encounters with these decolonial approaches provided an essential foundation not just for understanding the nuances within which the Charrúa movement had developed into its present form but the reasons why as someone who identifies as both Afro-descendant and Charrúa I would be initially welcomed with trepidation and suspicion on entering Charrúa community spaces.

¹³ Ana Francesca Repetto Iribarne, "Indigenous in Uruguay: A Debate Between the Denial of the State and the Narratives of the Descendants of Current Charrúas" (PhD thesis, Universidade federal da Integração Latino-americana, 2015).

¹⁴ Olivera's thesis was subsequently turned into a book, see Andrea Olivera, *Devenir charrúa en Uruguay: una etnografía junto con colectivos urbanos* (Montevideo: Lucida Ediciones, 2016).

An increase in the field of DNA research, primarily through the work of Dr Monica Sans, has been pivotal in bringing greater visibility and awareness of Indigenous ancestry in the Uruguayan general public and beyond. This in turn has fed back into anthropological studies such as the work of archaeologist and anthropologist Jóse López Mazz. His “Indigenous Blood in Uruguay: Memory and Post-National Citizenship” (2018) deals with both state silence on Indigenous Uruguay and the disappeared of the dictatorship.¹⁵ López Mazz has also been one of the more vocal and visible academics, appearing in various current affairs and news programs and speaking openly about Salsipuedes, including the archaeological evidence for its location and that it was in fact a state-sanctioned massacre.¹⁶

Despite the increased availability of contemporary books and articles on both Afro-descendants and Indigenous Uruguayans, there is little scholarship or other writing on the intersections of the two. Charrúa and African histories of violence and oppression in Uruguay *comparten espacio, pero no se mezclan*, “they can share space but do not mix.”¹⁷ To date, the most interesting research comes from studies of the Quilombo and the Tolderia as seen in the foundational book *El Pueblo Jaguar* (1998) written by historian and gemmologist Danilo Antón. *Quilombo*, or sometimes Palenque, was the name given for groupings of runaway slaves, whereas the word *Tolderia* was associated with semi-nomadic Indigenous groups who would set up temporary camps. What Quilombos and Tolderias had

¹⁵ José María López Mazz, “Sangre indígena en Uruguay. Ciudadanías post étnicas y Derechos Sociales,” *Athenea Digital. Revista De Pensamiento E investigación Social* 18, no. 1 (2018):181–201, <https://doi.org/10.5565/rev/athenea.2235>.

¹⁶ See for example Jose Lopez Mazz interview with Arriba Gente, a morning show from Canal 10 Uruguay. “Entrevista – Investigación sobre la Matanza de Salsipuedes / José López Mazz – Antropólogo,” YouTube, 6 May 2022, <https://youtu.be/s7IVjQZXmnE?si=52j7S9fQNPnLam-C>.

¹⁷ See for example “Afro and Indigenous Memories: Narratives, Resistances and Identity Productions of Cultural Singularities in Latin American National-States,” a Research Conference for Graduates and Postgraduate Students at the Faculty of Humanities and Educational Sciences, Universidad de la Republica (UdelaR), Montevideo, held October 11, 12 and 13, 2017, coordinated by L. Nicolás Guigou, Eliana Lotti and Martin Iguin, <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLWBI3SDrtEY4iszDt6CR0zMulNYS2rB98>.

in common was that they were spaces deliberately created outside of and in direct opposition to the state, a place for runaway slaves and gauchos where Indigenous peoples could exist away from colonial administration. One of the only literary spaces in which Indigenous Uruguayans, Afro-descendants and criollos/Europeans undeniably intersect is in the stories surrounding the life and military history of José Gervasio Artigas, who to this day is seen by a wide cross-section of Uruguayans as the founding father of Uruguayan Independence and a uniting force amongst the populace.¹⁸

It is interesting to note that many major authors who previously investigated and researched Afro-Uruguayan history are now turning to exclusively or concurrently investigate Indigenous Uruguayan history. Some authors, such as Fernando Klein, have written separate books, with one titled *Nuestro pasado Afro* (Our African past) (2016) and another titled *Nuestro pasado Indígena* (Our Indigenous past) (2012). Anthropologist, historian and documentary film maker Dario Arce Asenjo has dedicated the majority of his academic career to the topic of the history and origins of candombe and Afro-Uruguayans. In 2017, however, after having written an earlier paper laying out archival research on the same topic, Arce published a more complete article titled “El Espejo Charrúa: la alteridad como reflejo” (The Charrúa Mirror: Otherness as a Reflection), which centred on the events surrounding the exhibition of four Charrúa individuals in Paris in the early 1830s. Known as “the last Charrúas,” a phrase coined by Paul Rivet, Tacuabé, María Micaela Guyunusa, Senaqué and Vaimaca-Piru were taken to Paris by François Curel for scientific study, and to

¹⁸ See for example Nelson Caula’s trilogy, *Artigas Ñemoñaré*, which provides in depth research on the private life of Artigas including his multiple relationships with Indigenous women as well as his offspring. Importantly it provides information on his close bond with his right-hand man, Afro-Uruguayan Ansina and Ledesma, and his close working relationship with several Indigenous clan chiefs.

be displayed as objects of curiosity to the Parisian public.¹⁹ Piru, sometimes written as Perú, had been one of the generals that had fought alongside Jose Artigas. The four Charrúas and their stories have been the subject of intense interest and debate over many years and continue to hold a special role in the Uruguayan imaginary as well as for the present-day Charrúa movement. A monument was erected in their memory at the Parque el Prado in Montevideo (see fig. 10).²⁰



Figure 10. *Los últimos charrú*, Monument, Parque el Prado, Montevideo

¹⁹ Paul Rivet was a French physical anthropologist and ethnologist who founded the Musée de l'Homme in France in 1937. Rivet carried out much of his research in South America, predominantly in Ecuador and is known for his migration theory that the indigenous people of South America originated from Australia and Melanesia.

²⁰ *Los Últimos Charrúa* (The Last Charrúas) was created by Edmundo Prati, Gervasio Furest and Enrique Lussich at El Prado Montevideo in 1938.

Having had a similar shift in research focus to Dario Arce, Uruguayan anthropologist, social worker and writer Teresa Porzecanski, who has published over ten books and numerous articles with a specific focus on Afro-descendants in Uruguay, has more recently turned to Indigenous Uruguay as her main focus. Porzecanski began her early career documenting the experiences of Jewish immigrants in Uruguay before moving on to research Afro-descendants, with a particular focus on women. In 2006 she co-authored a book with Beatriz Santos, *Historia de exclusion: Afrodescendientes en el Uruguay* (A history of exclusion: Afro-descendants in Uruguay), a compilation of eleven short autobiographies by Afro-descendants who reflect on the painful experiences of racism, social exclusion and lack of economic opportunity in Uruguay, as well as discussing the various ways they resisted and transformed their own lives through individual and collective action.²¹ It was for me an important reference, where I could see myself and my family stories reflected in those autobiographies, affirming the importance and value of anecdotal and testimonial accounts. Porzecanski's later book, *Advinos y profetas: Estudios sobre Guaraníes, Indígenas Uruguayos, mestizaje cultural, rituales y creencias* (2023), picks up some of her early anthropological interests in Afro-Uruguayan religion and ritual, but this time with a focus on Indigenous Uruguayans, and takes the available archival records as a starting point for her specific interest in rituals and cultural practices.²²

As interest has increased in Indigenous Uruguayan topics, there are also publications that can be seen to somewhat disturb what are already muddy waters in relation to research on Indigenous Uruguay. The work of historian Diego Bracco fits this category,

²¹ Teresa Porzecanski and Beatriz Santos, *Historia de exclusion: Afrodescendientes en el Uruguay* (Montevideo: Linardi y Risso, 2006).

²² Teresa Porzecanski, *Advinos y profetas: Estudios sobre Guaraníes, Indígenas Uruguayos, mestizaje cultural, rituales y creencias* (Montevideo: Linardi y Risso, 2023).

which often questions the varying influence, roles and interactions between Charrúa and other Indigenous Uruguayan groups. There are nearly twenty years between his books, *Charrúas, guenoas y guaraníes: interacción y destrucción* (2004) and the more recent *Charrúas: genocidio or integración?* (2022). Bracco is motivated by a desire to correct historiographical errors, which he attributes to the lack of primary sources before 1830 and the subsequent surge in sources once Europeans became established in Uruguay following the introduction of cattle and the reintroduction of horses. He also argues that part of the problem in the research is that various distinct Indigenous clans and groups, such as the Guarani, Güenoa, Minuan and the Charrúa, were forced to band together under the Charrúa name in order to fight against increased colonial expansion. The collective decision to band together under the Charrúa name continues to be a point of contention to this day, with some suggesting, like Bracco, that it has diluted and clouded Indigenous Uruguayan identity, while others view it as a show of unity, solidarity and strength. In this regard my research is not neutral and my autotheoretical approach seeks to surface and insert the knowledge held within the intersections of my lineages within the current discourse.

Whether the absence of broader discussions of the intersections within Afro-Indigenous identity in Uruguay could be classified as a deliberate omission is uncertain, but it is a topic that tugs at more than one open wound. Firstly, historically these groups have been treated as separate: there are the Uruguayans of African descent, European/Iberian descent and those that identify as Indigenous. Secondly, Afro-Uruguayans have achieved an increased visibility and concessions in the eyes of the nation state and the broader Uruguayan public thanks to consistent and sustained collective action from what can appear to be a more unified Afro-Uruguayan population. This could be because research is focussed on archival sources, and the overwhelming research on Afro-descendants is focused on

slavery and its enduring impacts. As Patrick Wolfe notes of neighbouring Brazil, “Scholarly concern with Brazilian slavery has tended to obscure the role of territorial dispossession in the making of Brazilian settler society, as if the two were separate topics.”²³ This, of course, can be seen to come at the expense of Indigenous recognition, mainly because the recognition of Afro-descendants does not pose as much of a threat to the nation state as legally recognising its Indigenous population does. Afro-descendants claims centre around racial, economic and social justice, and while the Charrúa movement is also championing for the same, Indigenous recognition could lead towards Indigenous land claims should Uruguay ratify ILO Convention 169. Rights to land would include having to consult Indigenous groups on projects such as the booming green-washed hydroelectric dams and other predominantly foreign industry projects that already face strong Indigenous-led opposition. There is a lot of trauma and pain around these topics, specifically within the intersections of two historically marginalised groups, the Charrúa and Afro-descendants. The wording of ILO Convention 169 itself is also cause for tension because a fundamental criterion is self-identification as either Indigenous or tribal, not both.²⁴ Interestingly within Uruguay there is little recognition and research into the ways that Afro-descendants and the Indigenous population intersect. Even within many Charrúa community spaces, Afro-Indigeneity is seen as a separate category, evidence perhaps of the essentialism that has crept into segments of the Charrúa movement as a result of discriminatory, fickle and often contradictory government and mainstream social limitations placed on what Uruguayan Indigenous identity (if it even exists) should look like. My own personal and familiar narrative is situated

²³ Patrick Wolfe, *Traces of History: Elementary Structures of Race* (New York: Verso, 2016), 111.

²⁴ See “C169 - Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169),” International Labour Organization, accessed 10 September 2024, https://www.ilo.org/dyn/normlex/en/f?p=NORMLEXPUB:55:0::NO::P55_TYPE,P55_LANG,P55_DOCUMENT,P55_NODE:REV,en,C169,/Document.

within this very context: not quite African enough, not Charrúa enough and too brown to fit within a white European identity construct – a narrative that complicates definitions, categories and the work of historians like Bracco trawling the archives.

Hidden in plain sight²⁵

Do you know of any inter-generational stories within your family's history that have been silenced? What words or memories remain unspoken or unshared? Be sure to support yourself emotionally while you consider this provocation. You may wish to take a walk, listen to music, draw or write while you consider these questions.²⁶

The above provocation is from the learning resource produced for Haley Millar Baker's early-career survey exhibition *There we were all in one place*, comprised of works produced between 2016 and 2019. Millar Baker is a Gunditjmarra/Djabwurrung woman with mixed Anglo-Indian and Portuguese-Brazilian heritage working predominantly in storytelling through photography. One of the works included in her survey show, *Untitled (Flight)* from the series *The trees have no tongues* (2019) (fig.11, p.69), felt particularly resonant for me. The series deals with the trauma and unspeakable experiences of First Nations women as a result of colonisation and the introduction of Christianity, which violently separated them

²⁵ The title of this section is a reference to the quote "The Indigenous were hidden in plain sight," in Paul Edward Montgomery Ramirez, "Distant, Invisible, Hidden Raices. Indigenous Heritages of Central America: Renegotiation and Reconciliation," in Shawn Wilson, Breen, V. Andrea and DuPré, Lindsay, ed., *Research & Reconciliation: Unsettling ways of knowing through Indigenous relationships* (Toronto, Vancouver: Canadian Scholars, 2019).

²⁶ Provocation from learning resource no.5, from Hayley Millar Baker's exhibition *The trees have no tongues*. <https://www.therewewereallinoneplace.com/5-the-trees-have-no-tongues.html>.

from their cultural practices and identity. I know and feel the weight of this trauma carried in my own family's history, particularly within the maternal lines on both my mother and father's lineages. Millar Baker's *Untitled (Flight)* has both poetic and symbolic elements such as the string of pearls, the crucifix on the table, the mug and glass of wine, the floral cushion and what could be an ashtray, that stir awake my own memories because I've been in this exact same room. In my case it's my aunt's house that she shares with her daughter, my older cousin who moved back in with her mother after her marriage ended due to domestic violence. The shadowy figure in the image could be me, could be my mother, my aunt or my cousin – an entire matrilineal lineage is implicated for me in one singular figure. In *Untitled (Flight)* there is a sense that this image is of a time but it could encompass multiple generations and many timelines. For me the interior takes me to my aunt's apartment in Montevideo, Uruguay but it could be anywhere in the world. The view out of the window however although still ambiguous, situates the scene in a particular location, and for me personally it holds the familiarity of the apartments and houses I grew up in and around in suburban Sydney. I have found it deeply emotionally moving to engage with and reflect on Millar Baker's work from the perspective of reading her own rationale for the work but more so from the generous invitation her work offers to gently enter and even linger in a space for remembering and confronting familial narratives. As I've continued to develop my autotheoretical approach to this research, works like these remind me of the importance of being a good custodian of these stories.



Figure 11. Haley Millar Baker, *Untitled (Flight) (The trees have no tongues)*, 2019, 90 × 68 cm, inkjet on cotton rag

Although I am already familiar with harnessing my artistic practice as a way to speak to the unspeakable, it is not something that can be dealt with in the one go—it is a theme I return to over and over again. On each revisit I find myself experimenting and refining strategies, and where I may have initially been quite literal or explicit in expressing myself, that has been modified over time, taking on a more poetic sensibility, as evidenced in D Harding’s work or in the combination of poetics and symbolism in Millar Baker’s art practice. Looking back on my practice, I realise that I had compartmentalised my multiple cultural identities, keeping them separate, turning up the volume on one and dialling it right down on the other. I think back in particular to my Master’s exhibition work, *Mellorado* from 2012, in which I drew from Yoruba culture in the form of the orishas, which are much more ‘legible’²⁷ than Bantu-Kongo aligned cosmologies (see fig. 12, p.71). In hindsight, this series of works highlighted my masking in order to be legible and unambiguous, to more readily fit a version of ‘blackness’ or ‘African-ness’ that aligned with my phenotypes and excluded any kind of Indigenous Uruguayan identity, for which I felt I had no proof. I wonder how many generations before me carried the same shame of what survival had cost us?

²⁷ Although there are multiple African diasporic cultures and practices that are prevalent across Abya Yala, the orisha that emerge from Yoruba cosmology tend to be the most readily recognised African figures outside of South America. In particular the figure of Yemanjá, the orisha associated with the ocean, is widely popularised in Western culture through her association with mermaids.



Figure 12. Paula do Prado, *Mellorado*, 2012, installation view, Gallerysmith, Melbourne

I was born in Montevideo, the capital city of Uruguay, the lands of the Charrúa nation. I spent the first seven years of my life in Uruguay before migrating to Australia.²⁸ I can recall being aware from a very young age that I walked the world as someone mixed, the child of a black father and a white-presenting mother. Growing up in the early eighties in Montevideo, there were still taboos associated with mixed marriages and their resulting racially ambiguous offspring. There were also other differences. In Montevideo I spent most of my time with my paternal grandparents who lived in Cordon, a lower socio-economic and predominantly black neighbourhood, and with my mother's sisters who lived in the working-

²⁸ In developmental psychology, the first seven years of a child's life are marked by critical periods of rapid growth and skills development. In particular the age of seven can mark a transition between the end of one critical period and the beginning of another in particular for second language acquisition. In my case, it meant that by age seven I had developed core early developmental skills, memories and a grasp of the Spanish language. On arrival to Australia, I was thrust straight into learning a new language, English. Being told "but you have no accent!" still often comes up in conversation with new acquaintances when they learn of my South American origins.

to middle-class barrio of La Blanqueada. Most of Montevideo was and still is a very noisy, grungy and concrete-heavy urban environment. Green spaces were to be found in visits to Parque Rodo and seen from the window of the coach on the way to visit family in Minas or Porto Alegre. Uruguay is divided into nineteen *departamentos* or regions, and there is a significant distinction between the capital Montevideo, the coastal regions and *el interior*, the interior regions, which tend to have smaller city centres surrounded by large rural areas. My family narrative on both sides is marked by the shift from rural barrio to living in the middle of the capital city due to economic pressures and lack of opportunities.

My paternal lineage is embedded in the north of Uruguay in the city of Artigas on the border with Brazil, and the cities of Quaraí and Santana do Livramento in Brazil. Our ancestral river, known as Rio Quaraí in Brazil and Rio Cuareim in Uruguay, is a natural border between the countries, but in reality it is a living connector rather than separator. The river is on a flood plain; it regularly bursts its banks and recedes. I rely on my father Jorge's stories and memories of this place, fishing for bagre and crossing the river on foot, with water up to his waist holding hands with his brothers and cousins. My father's father, Fermin was born in the nearby hill top town of Pintadito, he attended school until the equivalent of third grade and was then sent to an *estancia* from the age of 6 or 7 where he suffered terrible cruelty working for a meal and a place to sleep.²⁹ Fermin's father, my great-grandfather Juan Antonio Canabarro and his *bagual* (horse) would regularly criss-cross the Rio Quaraí, often on the run, being chased by the authorities, until one day he didn't return.³⁰ We may never know if they caught up with him or if he was forced into exile in Brazil or elsewhere.

²⁹ *Estancias* are settler farms.

³⁰ *Bagual* is a mix of *ba* and *jual/gual*, which is "horse" in Charrúa.

Artigas is a *frontera*, a frontier place, a borderland where Portugu  l is spoken.³¹ My grandfather Fermin and his siblings have different surnames despite having the same parents because some were registered in the Brazilian way with their mother’s surname and some in the Uruguayan convention with the paternal surname. This is how I have come to carry my maternal great-grandmother’s surname, do Prado, that literally translates as “of the meadow” or more broadly “of the land.” My father’s maternal lineage is also in northern Uruguay, including Artigas and Durazno. My *tatara-abuelos* (great-great-grandparents) are registered as residing in Guaviyu de Catalan, which oral history identifies as a place where a *reduccion de indios* was run by Jesuit missionaries that included individuals from various Indigenous groups.³² My maternal lineage is situated in the area of Lavalleja and Canelones in Uruguay. After three generations of Orientales³³, my mother’s maternal line can be traced to *Espa  oles* with thick Basque accents and displaced Spaniards that found themselves in Lanzarote in the Canary Islands.

It has been challenging to trace my mother’s paternal line as her father rarely spoke of his family. We do know that my maternal grandfather Celestino was born in Las Canteras to a single mother who in turn was raised by a single mother in the area known as Los Tapes in Lavalleja.³⁴ After Celestino’s death, my mother, the youngest of twelve siblings, was sent to do domestic work at the house of a couple in the well-to-do barrio of Pocitos at the age of ten. All of her older siblings had already suffered the same fate, forced into agricultural or

³¹ Portugu  l is a mix of Portuguese and Spanish but also includes remnant words or slang of African Bantu, Guaran   and Charr  a origin.

³² *Reduccion de indios* is the equivalent of a mission, often run by Jesuit priests.

³³ Orientales is a term commonly used in Uruguay with nationalistic overtones, and that specifically in genealogical records is utilised to denote those who were born on Uruguayan soil in contrast to those born overseas.

³⁴ Los Tapes is both a location and a reference to an Indigenous Uruguayan group. *Tapes* is a Guaran   word meaning “the path to water.”

domestic work from a young age because their parents were unable to support the large family. All of my *tias* became proficient lace makers, seamstresses, hairdressers, cooks and experts in producing impeccably clean starched tablecloths and school uniforms.

Indigeneity in Latin America has peculiarities when compared to English speaking settler states. Genocide took shapes that were both the same and dissimilar to the experiences of Indigenous Peoples who met English-speaking settlers. And this is where this difference most counted is in a myth of the mestizos, of mestizaje

—Paul Edward Montgomery Ramirez³⁵

Mestizo/a is a Spanish term meaning “mixed,” which, along with the system of *castas* (castes), was used to classify mixing between Europeans, Indigenous Peoples in the Americas and those of African and Asian descent.³⁶ Although we may talk and write differently today about notions of ethnicity, the power dynamics inherent in concepts like *mestizaje* have carried over and continue to have influence today in racial and ethnic identity labels that are still in use, as well as the power structures that produced them—this is what Paul Ramirez calls “the trap of mestizaje.”³⁷ A common thread in the hierarchical mestizaje system was that the purer of blood (noble/European/white) the better your social

³⁵ Ramirez, “Distant, Invisible, Hidden Raices,” 65.

³⁶ The castas are a socio-racial classification system imposed by Spanish colonists that essentially positioned black and Indigenous people as the low class and those with white European features as the high class. The castas were used in colonial Mexico, the Caribbean and South America and were also depicted in the genre of castas paintings, illustrating the different categories and relevant social standing. The social and racial ideas behind the castas continues to inform various social, educational and economic policies that adversely impact Black and Indigenous peoples across Abya Yala.

³⁷ Ramirez, “Distant, Invisible, Hidden Raices,” 65.

position and access (to healthcare, education, etc). As noted by authors Patricia Reid-Merritt and Michael Rodriguez,

It is an undeniable fact that the racial and social stratification that existed in these countries placed members of the white community at the top of the social hierarchy. To be a member of the Amerindian, African, mixed-race, or other communities carried social consequences and obstacles that were, at times, difficult to overcome.³⁸

The terms *mulatto/a* and *negro/a*, *indio/a* and *salvaje* (savage) are still widely used in Uruguay, not only pejoratively but also within Indigenous and Afro-descendant communities as a way to reclaim their identity and have a choice in what they want to be called. The trap of mestizaje has also meant that all across Abya Yala “the Indigenous were hidden in plain sight,” separated from their culture, language and identities, often forced violently or by choice to take on one identity over another as a form of survival.³⁹ In Uruguay, like in many other parts of Abya Yala and beyond, “Indigenous people hadn’t vanished. They had been rebranded, and the goalposts of who is and who is not Indigenous were moved.”⁴⁰ In my personal experience, my family’s Indigeneity was hidden in plain sight, as one side was white-passing identifying with their presumed entirely Spanish origins, and the other found a sense of acceptance and identity in their visible blackness.⁴¹

³⁸ Patricia Reid-Merritt and Michael S. Rodriguez, *Race and Identity in Hispanic America: The White, the Black, and the Brown* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2020), 172.

³⁹ Ramirez, “Distant, Invisible, Hidden Raices,” 66.

⁴⁰ Ramirez, 66.

⁴¹ Within my paternal family there was never a strong sense of having African roots as such, possibly because familial oral history never went beyond Uruguay and Brazil. There was, however, at least from my father’s generation, a strong connection to black culture through candombe, drumming and music.

Academic, researcher and storyteller Ann Marie Biels, who is a Two-Spirit Indigenous-Black L'nuwey—a mixed-blood African Nova Scotian and First Nation Mi'kmaq who hails from Mi'kma'ki territory—is a team member and contributor to the Proclaiming Our Roots project, a digital archive of written, visual and narrative materials documenting the historical and contemporary experiences of Black-Indigenous Peoples on Turtle Island.⁴² In an article co-written by Biels and Ciann L. Wilson, also a team member of the Roots project, they write about the impact of a lack of recognition of Indigenous-Black identity:

such erasure affects Indigenous-Black people in a myriad of ways, including how we think about ourselves, and how events in our histories and current realities shape, break, and re-shape our identities. We live and suffer the legacy of colonization with marginalized dual-identities, yet we are not recognized as bona fide members of our identity groups.⁴³

Returning to the initial provocation, there are multiple intergenerational stories within my own family that have been silenced, and it is those unspoken memories and emotions that have been a catalyst for my nepantlera journeying to re-member.

⁴² See <https://www.proclaimingourroots.com>.

⁴³ Ann Marie Beals and Ciann L Wilson, "Mixed-blood: Indigenous-Black identity in colonial Canada," *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* 16, no. 1 (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177/1177180119890141>, <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/1177180119890141>.

The journeying to re-member can be fraught, because the “desire to reclaim what has been taken, hidden, is strong. But it’s also bound up in many difficulties.”⁴⁴ Those difficulties arise not only from internalised beliefs and ways of being and doing but the unavoidable external social and political context. As stated in the introduction, I resonate with Gloria Anzaldúa’s concept of *nepantla*, a liminal, transitional and transformative in-between space that for me is represented in the metaphor of entering or falling into *el pozo*/the pit. The *Nepantla* stage for Anzaldúa became part of a larger process that she termed the seven stages of *conocimiento* (knowing), which can be outlined as follows:

1. *El arrebató* (the rapture): an event or series of events that shock the individual and render their previous sense of reality and feeling of security now unfamiliar and strange.
2. *Nepantla*: a Nahuatl word of Uto-Aztec origin meaning “in the middle,” referring to this next transitional and in-between space of transformation after the initial shock of rapture.
3. The *Coatlicue*: this next stage is marked by a period of paralysing despair, self-hatred and depression. *Coatlicue*, “snake skirt,” is also a word of Nahuatl origin, referring to an Aztec Earth earth-mother goddess who like many earth-mother deities across different cultures is associated with both creation and destruction.

⁴⁴ Ramirez, “Distant, Invisible, Hidden Raices,” 71.

4. The call: a call to action that pulls the individual out of their depression and helps break down old patterns of behaviour, reconnect with spirit and enter a new stage of transformation.
5. Putting *Coyolxauhqui* together: Coyolxauhqui is the Aztec goddess of the Moon who was beheaded and dismembered in war by her own brother, she is the daughter of Coatlicue. Putting Coyolxauhqui together after her dismemberment is the next transformation which requires a reorganisation of beliefs and behaviour patterns to fit the individuals emerging new reality, akin to gathering scattered fragments to create a new narrative.
6. The blow-up: the individual takes this newly formed narrative to the world to see if it resonates with others and to get feedback.
7. Spiritual activism: this is the critical turning point of the final transformation, that through a developing sense of compassion you respect yourself as well as others.⁴⁵

I see my own practice-led research process and the structure of this thesis mirrored within Anzaldúa's seven stages of *conocimiento* (knowledge). Rather than representing a linear and ordered process, Anzaldúa's seven stages acknowledge the interrelatedness and messiness of colliding internal states and external events, linking what is partially an individual journey with the realities of a relational world. Throughout my research journey I have experienced feeling stuck on loop with the first three stages that include the sense as I've previously described of *nepantla* and falling into *el pozo*/the pit. In this autotheoretical research process I have found myself navigating a double reckoning, engaging with my

⁴⁵ Anzaldúa "Now Let Us Shift...The Path of *Conocimiento*...Inner Work, Public Acts," 150.

Charrúa Roots as well as my position as a migrant settler, what could also be described as a decolonial process. Human Rights Advocate, Lawyer and writer, Pōkā Laenui (also known as Hayden F. Burgess) outlined five distinct phases or steps towards decolonisation.⁴⁶ It was developed in direct response to the process of colonisation as written by Virgilio Enríquez and written from Laenui's own individual Hawai'ian, experience.⁴⁷ As with Anzaldúa's seven stages, Laenui makes no linear demarcations between one stage of decolonisation and the other so that phases may overlap or occur concurrently. I have summarised Laenui's steps toward decolonisation below, together with my suggestions on where these might align with Anzaldúa's seven stages:

1. Rediscovery and recovery: an individual enters a process of rediscovering their history, culture, language and identity, opening up a space for defining the reality of their experience in their own words through "interrogating the captive mind." (*El arretrato* and *Nepantla*)
2. Mourning: a period of reflection marked by sadness due to the individual's historical oppression, lived experiences and current realities that, although painful, is necessary for healing. (*The Coatlicue*)
3. Dreaming: a period marked by exploring culture and reclaiming personal and collective histories and ancestral/indigenous connections so as to imagine other possible realities. (*The Call* and *Putting Coyolxauhqui together*)

⁴⁶ Pōkā Laenui in Chilisa, Bagele. *Indigenous Research Methodologies*. Thousand Oaks, Calif: SAGE Publications, 2012, 15.

⁴⁷ Pōkā Laenui (Hayden F. Burgess), "Processes of Decolonization," in *Reclaiming Indigenous Voice and Vision*, ed. Marie Battiste (Vancouver: UBC Press, 2000), 150.

4. Commitment: accountability to community in the way research is developed and collected and conducted. (*The blow-up*)
5. Action: researcher as activist, actively developing strategies for social transformation, empowerment and inclusivity working in a relational system of accountability and respect for all involved. (*Spiritual activism*)⁴⁸

Overlaying Anzaldua's seven stages with Laenui's steps to decolonisation serves to affirm that both frameworks emphasize a personal journey that leads to a collectively beneficial goal, that both authors refer to as a form of activism. This is not the first time that Anzaldua's seven stages of *conocimiento* are recognised as a decolonial framework. Inspired by Anzaldua's writing, Sarah Ohmer's 2010 essay for example contextualises *conocimiento* as a ritual of decolonisation requiring constant transformation—that in order to enact change the path and elements within it must be repeated.⁴⁹ A more recent example is the 2020 doctoral thesis of Leslie C. Sotomayor, who situated *conocimiento* within the education setting for teaching decolonial Latina Feminisms.⁵⁰ Other studies use the *conocimiento* stages as a personal roadmap to enact social change as in the case of Edmundo Martin Aguilar's 2017 doctoral research utilising documentary film,⁵¹ whereas others make a case for Anzaldúa's use of the term *dismemberment* to stand in for the

⁴⁸ Pōkā Laenui (Hayden F. Burgess), "Processes of Decolonization"

⁴⁹ Sarah Ohmer, "Gloria E. Anzaldúa's Decolonising Ritual de Conocimiento," *Confluencia* 26, no. 1 (2010), https://academicworks.cuny.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1171&context=le_pubs.

⁵⁰ Leslie C. Sotomayor, "Curating Educational Spaces with Auto-Historia-Teoria and Conocimiento: A Decolonial Feminist Teacher Inquiry" (doctoral thesis, Pennsylvania State University, 2020) https://etda.libraries.psu.edu/files/final_submissions/21402.

⁵¹ Edmundo Martin Aguilar, "Between Worlds: A Personal Journey of Self-Reflection while on the Path of Conocimiento" (doctoral thesis, Washington State University, 2017), https://research.libraries.wsu.edu/xmlui/bitstream/handle/2376/12998/Aguilar_wsu_0251E_12089.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

various forms of cultural disconnection and oppression as a result of the impact of colonialism.⁵²

Laenui originally outlined his steps toward decolonisation, in response to social psychologist Virgilio Enriquez's steps of colonisation that include (1) denial and withdrawal, (2) destruction/eradication (3) denigration/belittlement/insult (4) surface accommodation/tokenism and lastly (5) transformation/exploitation⁵³. Pointedly, Laenui highlights that "The difference, therefore, between the final stage of colonization — *exploitation*—and the initial stage of decolonization—*rediscovery and recovery* —must be carefully distinguished (emphasis in original)".⁵⁴ Here Laenui is referring to the harmful and often contradictory nature of mainstream culture that will co-opt what are perceived as the trendy or economically valuable aspects of First Nations cultures (for example the tourism and fashion industries), simultaneously appearing to support Indigenous causes but remaining silent on the ongoing impacts of colonial harms. Essentially Laenui issues a warning against actions that appear to be making moves towards decolonization but are still firmly rooted in exploitation and the preservation of colonial structures rather than any genuine desire for systemic structural change⁵⁵. As part of this research process and developing autotheoretical approach, it becomes important to consider the timing and context within which this research occurs and the studio work emerges. In the following sections I look at selection of visual representations and artworks that reference Indigenous Uruguayan identity or aspects of Charrúa history. As I re-member my Charrúa roots and

⁵² See Mirella Vallone, "The Wound as a Bridge: The Path of *Conocimiento* in Gloria Anzaldúa's Work," *e-REA* 12, no. 1 (2014), <https://journals.openedition.org/erea/4135>.

⁵³ Laenui, "Processes of Decolonization," 150

⁵⁴ Laenui, 154.

⁵⁵ Laenui, 151-152

situate my journey within a decolonial process, as Laneui warns, I too must carefully distinguish between exploitation and recovery.

The greater visibility of the Charrúa movement over recent years has fuelled what the mainstream Uruguayan public seem to perceive as a sudden resurgence of a people's thought long lost. This perceived Charrúa resurgence is occurring during what some commentators refer to as the (re)colonisation of the Third World⁵⁶, a time of heightened extractivism and exploitation. At a time when both Indigenous and non-indigenous Uruguayans are asking questions about their familial histories and the possibility of Indigenous ancestry, there is a hunger to know and locate Uruguayan Indigenous identity. For many Uruguayans this has been a time of *rediscovery and recovery*, many are seeking and some have been successful in finding physical traces of the Charrúa in the form of *lai* exposed by dry river beds,⁵⁷ in remnants of Charrúa language or stories found stuck in the throats of their elderly family members or neighbours with *rasgos de indio* (Indian facial features) who live scattered in rural towns, or to awaken self-recognition in the shape of a fingerprint or the presence of a birthmark.⁵⁸

This hunger exists in the context of ongoing lack of state recognition, where both the state and Uruguayan society at large exert pressure on Indigenous Uruguayans to show themselves, to make themselves visible and identifiable as proof of their existence, but only

⁵⁶ Some authors have argued that countries like Uruguay that are classified as a Third World country are at risk of (re)colonisation through government policies that permit and encourage significant foreign capital investment that adversely impacts local development. See for example the controversial presence and political influence of Finnish paper pulp company UPM in Uruguay, Bernat Marré, Marta Saiz and G.Jaramillo Rojas, *El mundo es de papel y con papel se compra* (The world is made of paper and you can buy with paper), Brecha, 16 August 2024, <https://brecha.com.uy/el-mundo-es-de-papel-y-con-papel-se-compra/>

⁵⁷ Lai (*bolas* in Spanish) are hand-carved stone Charrúa artefacts that together make a suite of stone tools. The most well known are the *laideti* or *laiu sam*, which are *boleadoras*, a weapon for hunting ñandu (related to the ostrich) comprised of three or two of these stones connected to string.

⁵⁸ It is common in Uruguay for both Indigenous and non-indigenous people to place a lot of emphasis on phenotype, especially facial characteristics that are associated with what are considered *rasgos de Indio* or physical Indigenous traits such as facial features or particular birthmarks or fingerprint patterns.

in the ways that colonial myths and narratives define how a Charrúa should look.⁵⁹ Many Indigenous and non-indigenous Uruguayans would be familiar with two particular images accepted as being that of Charrúas: *Chef de Charruas Sauvages* (Chief of the Savage Charrúas) (1848) by Jean-Baptiste Debret (fig. 13, below), and *The Last of the Charruas*, an oft replicated image that appears on a Uruguayan postal stamp (fig. 14, p.84) reproduced from the original 1948 engraving of the same name by James Cowles Prichard (fig. 15, p.84). These images continue to exert a powerful influence on the collective imaginary about what a Charrúa did and should now look like.



Figure 13. Jean Baptiste Debret, *Chef de Charruas Sauvages*, 1848

⁵⁹ See for example Leo Lagos, “Por qué tanto miedo al indio en Uruguay?” (“Why does Uruguay fear the Indian?”), La Diaria Ciencia, 31 October 2020, <https://ladiaria.com.uy/ciencia/articulo/2020/10/por-que-tanto-miedo-al-indio-en-uruguay/>.



Figure 14. Uruguayan Postal Stamp, “Los Utlimos Charrúa” (The last Charrúa), issued 22 July 1999

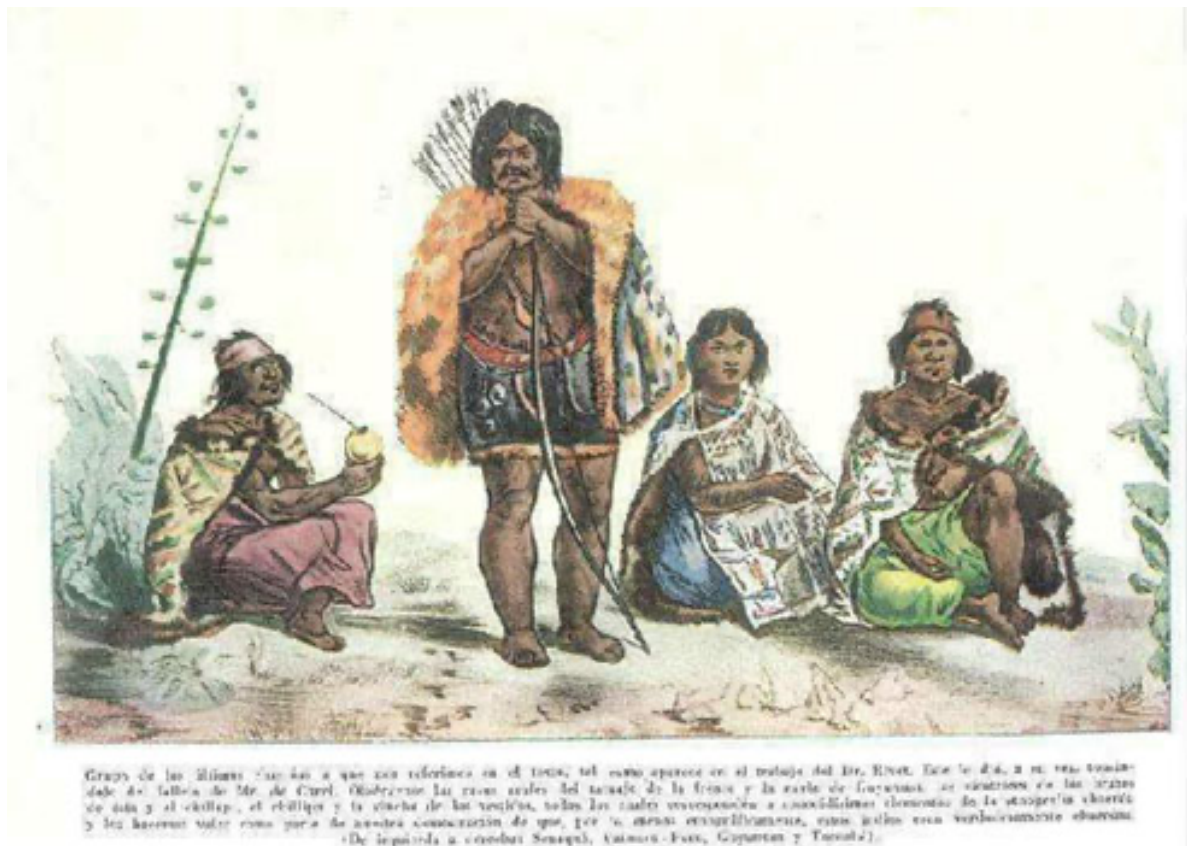


Figure 15. This image is attributed to Delaunoy, but the original image title is The Last of the Charrúas, 1848, an engraving by James Cowles Prichard, The Natural History of Man.

Following the end of the military dictatorship in Uruguay in the early 1980s, visual artists, writers and creatives re-emerged with works that confronted both the violently disappeared of the dictatorship but also in response to the Charrúa genocide. These works tended to focus on the role of the state in perpetrating violence and the subsequent attempts to silence and erase these events from public memory. I focus next on a number of artworks produced post-dictatorship that show a connection between the *desaparecidos* (the disappeared) of the dictatorship and the resurgence or reappearance of the Charrúa.

I begin with the work of Nelbia Romero, a Uruguayan artist born in Durazno, who between October and November 1983 mounted an ambitious audiovisual installation titled *Sal-si-puedes* (Get out if you can) (fig.16, p.86) at the Galeria del Notario in Montevideo. The installation was set up as a walk-through so that visitors were made to navigate various staged scenes, including the aftermath of a bloody massacre with mannequin pieces representing bodies lying strewn on the ground splattered in red paint. There was also a large cage representing the capture of the four Charrúa sent to France to be put on display. A series of photographs of Romero document a choreographed performance attempting to reimagine the reactions and emotions on the day of the massacre. These were shown alongside a small folder containing related archival documents and historical quotes for visitors to view. In her 2016 essay “Archives, Performance, and Resistance in Uruguayan Art Under Dictatorship,” Latin American Art historian and curator Andrea Giunta writes, “*Sal-si-puedes* took up a violent episode that was constitutive of the state’s formation, actualized under the conditions of censorship and violence imposed by the dictatorship.”⁶⁰ Romero

⁶⁰ Andrea Giunta, “Archives, Performance, and Resistance in Uruguayan Art Under Dictatorship,” *Representations* 136 (2016): 36, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/26420577>.

continued to produce works critical of the lack of recognition of Uruguay's Indigenous people. Her work is now part of several digital archives on feminist and Latin American Art.⁶¹



Figure 16. Nelbia Romero, *Sal-si-puedes (Get out if you can)*, 1983, installation views. © Courtesy of Teresita

Romero Cabrera

⁶¹ See for example Hammer Museum Digital Archive, <https://hammer.ucla.edu/radical-women/art?artist=Nelbia+Romero>, and AWARE Women Artists Archive, <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/nelbia-romero/>.



Figure 17. Gustavo Tabares, *Genocidio*, 2015, video, 4 min 45 sec

The events of both Salsipuedes and the dictatorship both relate to concerns to do with the silenced and the hidden, because following Salsipuedes, just as during and after the dictatorship, we are left wondering what happened to the descendants of those Charrúa that did survive? What happened to all those desaparecidos? There has been no resolution and no closure to these events and the ongoing intergenerational trauma of not knowing. As part of the Venice Biennale in 2015, Uruguayan artist Gustavo Tabares presented *Genocidio* (fig. 17, above), a four-minute video showing people washing their hands, much like the Uruguayan Government washed their hands of the Charrúa problem. The soap was moulded in the shape of a Charrúa flint or arrowhead.

Whilst these works by Romero and Tabare are critical of both a government and society that easily forget, the psychological impact of not knowing what happened to survivors and running out of clues in the historical archive is explored in the work *Micaela se fue a París* (Micaela has gone to Paris) (2000) by Teresa Puppo. Puppo, a Uruguayan experimental film-maker and writer, made the work in memory of Micaela Guyunusa, the only woman in the group of four Charrúa sent to France, and who was documented as giving birth to a daughter before dying of tuberculosis in Lyon. In the film, Puppo takes on the role of Guyunusa and wears a custom-made costume (what appears to be a *quillapi*) as she walks through sand dunes on the Uruguay coast, but that might equally be any place.⁶² Puppo's Guyunusa seems to wake up on the sand dunes as if from slumber. The viewer watches a somewhat disoriented Guyunusa slowly get her bearings before finally deciding on a direction to walk off further into the sand dunes. As the viewer, we too are left disoriented and confused. How did she find herself there? Where is she going? What happened afterwards?

The tensions between absence and presence, and (re)appearance and disappearance is also evident in the work of Carlos Martiel, a Cuban performance artist whose work addresses questions about the way different societies have treated ethnic minorities and outsiders throughout history and includes themes of indigeneity and immigration. I was fascinated by the powerful simplicity of Martiel's artistic response to notions of Charrúa resurgence in his work *Ascendencia Charrúa* (Charrúa ancestry), exhibited in 2018 at the Espacio de Arte Contemporáneo in Montevideo. Martiel worked with highly regarded Charrúa elder Mary Correa (also known by her Charrúa name Marithúe, meaning much fire,

⁶² Teresa Puppo, "Micaela se fue a París," video performance, 2000, YouTube, 4 min, <https://youtu.be/-1ThxV0J07A?si=icm0Doo3Xz3TwbOg>.

much water) to create this performance and installation work. Martiel traced an outline of Correa's body onto the wall of the gallery, before using a pick axe to remove the surface of the wall, leaving behind Marithue's silhouette. Martiel was then buried beneath the leftover rubble and shards (figs.18 & 19, below). Despite the apparent simplicity of this artistic intervention, Martiel, who identifies as Afro-Latinx, manages to convey multiple narrative layers in the work whereby he himself is implicated through the use of his own body.



Figure 18. Carlos Martiel, Ascendencia Charrúa, 2018, with Mary Correa (Marithué), Espacio de Arte Contemporáneo, Montevideo, Uruguay. Photo: Elena Téliz



Figure 19. Carlos Martiel, Ascendencia Charrúa, 2018, with Mary Correa (Marithué), Espacio de Arte Contemporáneo, Montevideo, Uruguay. Photo: Elena Téliz

Shifting focus back to questions of identity and *rasgos*, the recent artwork of Rosana Grebiet approaches artistic practice as a space for individual and collective healing and repair. In an ongoing project titled *Visibles*, which started in 2020, Grebiet created installations with photographic, textile and video elements. The *Visibles* installation has been travelling and showing at various galleries and museums within Uruguay with various workshops, talks and other public programs occurring alongside. Interestingly, as the installation travels it is adapted for each site, often incorporating new elements or areas of focus. The installation is centred on black and white photographic portraits or *rostros* (faces) of various Uruguayans who have *rasgos indígena*. Initially, these were faces that to Grebiet looked Indigenous, including the faces of family, friends and people she found on the bus or street. The *Visibles* then also broadened to include well known Charrúa activists (for example Grebiet sought out Mónica Michelena on Facebook).

The portraits are exhibited as large prints on suspended translucent lengths of fabric that resemble large banners or curtains, or as smaller prints on fabric arranged on string (fig. 20, p.91). The installation includes mounds of calico fabric strips together with other muslin-like fabrics used to create nest-like circular structures, or forms resembling placentas and umbilical cords (fig. 21, p.91). In April 2024, the installation was activated through a performance in which Grebiet along with a group of other women physically inhabited the installation, and the black and white photographs that are normally printed on fabric were instead projected onto their slow-moving bodies.⁶³

⁶³ See Rosana Grebiet, “Poner el Cuerpo: Habitar la trama indígena” Performance. Tribu Montevideo, 6/4/2024 <https://youtu.be/Ho8Y1rwRfoA?si=AsF4ozuPJiDx3Gdj>.



Figure 20. Rosana Grebiet, *Visibles*, 2020–ongoing, installation view, Museo Casa de Rivera, November–December

2022, Durazno Uruguay



Figure 21. Rosana Grebiet, *Visibles*, 2020–ongoing, installation view, Quinta Capurro, Dec 2020–Feb 2021, Canelones Uruguay

Through her work, Greciet's aim is to create space for and give visibility to Indigenous Uruguayans as well as her own Indigenous heritage via her great-grandmother, daughter of a Guaraní woman and a Frenchman—what she calls the *trama indígena* or Indigenous connective thread.⁶⁴ Although elements of the work resonate with me, particularly in its use of textiles aligned with themes of rebirth and repair, Greciet's *Visibles*, in the act of trying to make la trama indígena visible, may simultaneously reaffirm the very historical exclusions it would seek to repair. Her approach to choosing the faces for the portraits Greciet comes from the concept that gave rise to the whole project: "I always saw the presence of the indigenous peoples in the faces I saw on the street, but as a child my mother told me that Uruguay was the only country in Latin America that had no indigenous people. Paradoxically, her grandmother, who was still alive, was clearly the daughter of a Guaraní Indian."⁶⁵ As the project has continued to evolve, Greciet acknowledges that "in the process of searching and finding we also didn't realize that it wasn't important to have similarities since in reality the 'trama indígena' is often not so visible."⁶⁶

In pondering alternative ways for thinking through and visualising Uruguayan Indigenous identity, it is also important to consider work made on the borderlands and outside Uruguay. The exhibition *Entre Rios: Southern Indigenous Land* at the Museu de Arte Contemporânea do Rio Grande do Sul in Porto Alegre, Brazil, an initiative of the State Institute of Visual Arts, part of the State Secretariat for Culture (Sedac). It was held as part of a three-part program in 2023 to rethink April 19th (Indigenous Peoples Day) and reflect on the culture, history, struggles and achievements of Indigenous peoples. The exhibition featured the works of five contemporary Indigenous artists: Vera Lúcia Kanishka (Kaigang),

⁶⁴ See the *Visibles* website: <https://www.visibles.uy>.

⁶⁵ Rosana Greciet, email correspondence, 24 April 2024.

⁶⁶ Greciet, email, 24 April 2024.

Oderiê Chayúa (Charrúa), Vherá Xunú (Mbya Guarani), Woie Xokleng (Xokleng) and Bruna Lopes Silva (Charrúa). *Tarú* (2023) (fig.22, below), the installation created by artist Bruna Lopes Silva, includes pebbles collected in both city and rural locations, engravings, frottage using graphite and typographic ink and recycled waste from urban construction.



Figure 22. Bruna Lopes Silva, *Tarú*, 2023, Installation view, Museu de Arte Contemporânea do Rio Grande do Sul

Tarú is a Charrúa word for what are commonly known as cerritos or burial mounds, often overlooked as an Indigenous architectural feature and evidence of purposeful and deliberate construction by Indigenous peoples who are often dismissed as nomadic and therefore not tied to place. Bruna's work aims to highlight the ongoing presence and resistance of Indigenous people in large cities as well as their ability to adapt and simultaneously maintain and innovate ancestral knowledges and connections. Bruna writes that *Tarú* embodies "ancestral architectures belonging to Pampean Indigenous epistemology, whose functions in the landscape are quite specific and linked to a way of

living, especially Charrúa, still in contemporary times, and this, despite the urban space and all other current problems.⁶⁷ This work resonates and uplifts me in a direct way because I am re-membering my Charrúa roots not through *rasgos* but in a continuity of practice, a way of being and relating to the Earth despite geographic movement.

⁶⁷ Bruna Lopes Silva, Instagram post, 24 April 2023, @brunajeguakai. Translated from Portuguese by the author.

3. Sentipensar

Sentipensar/feel thinking as methodology

Esta es una investigacion sentipensante—This is sentipensante research. The term *sentipensar* translates from the Spanish as “feel-think,” a term coined by Colombian sociologist Orlando Fals Borda through his work with Colombian riverine communities along the San Jorge River and further north in San Martin de Loba. In conversation with these fishing communities Fals Borda learned of the ancestral practice of thinking with one’s heart and feeling with one’s head. This idea was also related to what Fals Borda would write about as the *hombre hicotea* or turtle man, whose ability to exist and thrive on both land and in aquatic environments, subject to sometimes extreme climatic and food resource changes, embodies a sentipensante way of living. The terms *sentipensar* and *sentipensante* were subsequently picked up by other Abya Yala writers, including Uruguayan novelist and journalist Eduardo Galeano, and has since become popularised by a number of contemporary writers and researchers.

One such writer, Arturo Escobar, an American-Colombian activist-researcher and anthropologist, has continued to extend the concept of sentipensar as part of his work critiquing development and on the challenges of transitioning away from extractivism and capitalism. In his book *Pluriversal Politics: The Real and the Possible* (2020), Escobar expands on the idea that there are other alternatives, other possibilities outside of the overculture: “the world is made up of multiple worlds, multiple ontologies or reals that are far from

being exhausted by the Eurocentric experience or reducible to its terms.”¹ In a talk given at Duke University in 2023, Escobar provides the foundation for his most recent hypothesis, which he has been developing in collaboration with Michal Osterweil and Kriti Sharma as part of his new book *Relationality: Remaking and Restor(y)ing Life* (in press).² His hypothesis is based on understanding our current situation as being in a state of emergence/y; as we transition away from terracide there is a need for new narratives of the human and of humanity.³ Rather than a singular response, what are needed are “many new narratives and multiple beginnings” to create relational ontologies.⁴ Escobar underlines the importance of preferencing knowledges emerging from territorial struggles in Abya Yala within Afro-descendant and Indigenous communities as opposed to those emerging from the academy, as community knowledges and responses are much better equipped to help us think through the multiple and interrelated crisis brought about by terracide and because these knowledges are produced by sentipensando with the Earth, attuned through reciprocity.⁵

There are important Abya Yala-specific, social, historical and cultural nuances that inform the concept of sentipensar. However, that is not to say it is not possible to adopt a sentipensante approach elsewhere, or that it does not already have sibling terms and ways of doing and being in other places and cultures that are in simpatico. As a diasporic person, a migrant settler living on stolen land, sentipensar is part of a methodology that offers me, as an artist-researcher, “a way to relate to this place that is not through the intermediate of

¹ Arturo Escobar, *Pluriversal politics : the real and the possible*, Latin America in translation, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020). 69.

² Arturo Escobar, “Against Terricide: Envisioning Paths Towards Pluriversal Transitions,” talk given by Arturo Escobar at the John Hope Franklin Humanities Institute at Duke University, 22 June 2023, YouTube, https://youtu.be/8UKXg_Agw3c?si=y4igECv78te4EXld.

³ Arturo Escobar, “Against Terricide” 23:36. Here Escobar credits the writings of Caribbean writer Sylvia Wynter and the work of Ailton Krenak. *Terracide* is a term coined by Mapuche activist Moira Millán to define the killing of the earth as well as the spiritual and knowledge systems.

⁴ Escobar, “Against Terricide,” 25:43.

⁵ Escobar, *Pluriversal politics : the real and the possible*, 69.

the settler state.”⁶ For the purposes of this research I have termed my methodology *senti-pensa-haciendo*, that is, “feel-thinking-doing” (see fig. 23, p.98).⁷ The addition of the doing or action goes towards representing the practice-led component of this research, in that the primary research outcome is in fact the artwork, which contains and gives visual and tactile expression to the feeling-thinking. The senti-pensa-haciendo elements are represented in a circular or loop format that can be read in a clockwise or anticlockwise direction. The accompanying diagram, based on multiples of three, seeks to illustrate the structure that underpins both this thesis and the artworks produced as part of this research. I return to this diagram and its structure later in part 3 of the thesis when I discuss cosmograms. However, for the purposes of this chapter, the diagram illustrates a methodology of moving through three interconnected worlds or overlapping relational ontologies, including but not limited to

- sentir (feel), pensar (think), hacer (do)
- past, present and future
- issue, advice and resolution (divination)
- world above, this world, world below

⁶ Jared Field, “On ‘Our African Roots.’”

⁷ This is not a new or original term. The elements of *sentir* (feel), *pensar* (think) and *hacer* (do/act) also referred to as the “Think Feel Do” tool or model have been used by various writers, academics and practitioners within the social sciences, psychology, marketing and discussions on pedagogy, amongst others.



The preceding sections of this thesis have been an invitation to an unfolding through the practice of weaving with words (writing), a slow process of understanding ‘the problem’. Sometimes the path out or through is a better understanding of the problem, beginning with an understanding of what we are decolonising from and moving toward thinking and doing otherwise.⁸ At this point, it is important for me to note the context in which I am invoking, practicing and writing about sentipensar as a methodology. I am not on the frontlines, here or there. The lives and homes of my immediate family are not under direct threat. I live geographically distant from my multiple ancestral lands, so that my on-the-ground understanding and knowledge of those places and the threats they currently face are limited. I live on the unceded lands of the Gadigal people in an area that very much operates as a cosmopolitan city, a neighbourhood that despite the jarring increased levels of development and gentrification can make one easily adopt the thinking that the conflicts, troubles and environmental threats have little bearing or impact on daily life because they are occurring far away, somewhere else, to someone else unrelated. However, I am never not in place, and as such, the multiple happenings both local and global make their presence felt whether I am actively (expending energy) paying attention or avoiding the news.

Along with these external factors, there are multiple internal scripts that mediate my relationship to place. Experiences of displacement, migration, assimilation and living in diaspora can be internalised as being or belonging to no place. This, coupled with the harms of notions such as *mestizaje*, can lead to a sense of exclusion, of not fully belonging to any peoples, a sense of being a *nadie, un invisible*.⁹ These tricky internalised narratives can

⁸ See, for example, Jesica Franco, “Thinking and Doing Otherwise in the Academy: Drawing Lessons from the Global South,” *Journal of Multicultural Discourses* 18, no. 2 (2023): 167–73, [doi:10.1080/17447143.2023.2242330](https://doi.org/10.1080/17447143.2023.2242330).

⁹ A *nadie, un invisible*, “a nobody, someone who is invisible.” The term “nadies” was used by current Vice President of Colombia, Francia Marquez, the first Afro-descendant woman to take up such a role in the

result in a persistent and troubling sense of untetheredness from place and community, which resembles what Simone Weil refers to as the “disease of uprootedness.”¹⁰ In her 1952 book, *The Need for Roots*, Weil states, “uprootedness is by far the most dangerous malady to which human societies are exposed, for it is a self-propagating one,” because “whoever is uprooted himself uproots others. Whoever is rooted himself doesn’t uproot others.”¹¹

The importance of rootedness is also found within Aztec philosophy in the concept of the “slippery earth.” Latin American philosophy researcher Sebastian Purcell, drawing from the sixth volume of the Florentine Codex, writes that “at its core, Aztec virtue ethics has three main elements. One is a conception of the good life as the ‘rooted’ or worthwhile life. Second is the idea of right action as the mean or middle way. Third and final is the belief that virtue is a quality that’s fostered socially.”¹² Purcell, who is also familiar with Greek philosophy, argues that although it might be seen as being at odds with Western notions of virtue, Aztec philosophy has much to offer for thinking and doing otherwise in terms of what it means to live a good life. The Aztecs conceived of the earth as slippery, that it wasn’t possible or realistic no matter how virtuous for a person not to at some point slip up and make an error. Rather than attempting (and likely failing) at trying to be good or happy, Aztec philosophy encouraged one “to try to lead a rooted life, which they called *neltiliztli*: literally, rootedness. In this kind of life, one is able to manage the mistakes and slip-ups well, rather than avoid them altogether. The reward is not happiness necessarily, but the promise

Colombian government. As part of her political campaign, she seeks to represent the nadies/nobodies encompassing Afro-Colombians, Indigenous groups, youth, gender diverse peoples and low socio-economic classes that have been traditionally left out of decision making in Colombia. See for example <https://www.elciudadano.com/en/colombia-mayoras-and-los-nadies-the-expressions-for-which-they-attack-francia-marquez-on-social-networks/03/29/>

¹⁰ Simone Weil, *The Need for Roots* [1952] (London: Penguin, 2023), 45.

¹¹ Weil, 48.

¹² Sebastian Purcell, “Life on the Slippery Earth,” Aeon, 3 July 2018, <https://aeon.co/essays/aztec-moral-philosophy-didnt-expect-anyone-to-be-a-saint>.

of a worthwhile life.”¹³ Significantly, how to live a rooted and worthwhile life was learned (and practiced) over one’s lifetime and was socially connected, so that when slip-ups did occur, with the help of others it was possible to get back up.¹⁴

The problem or question underlying “Re-membering my Charrúa Roots on Unceded Land” is how to navigate reconnection with my Indigenous roots on the slippery earth while maintaining respect for both the origins of those roots and for the lands (peoples and places) I inhabit. It is unfathomable to me to attempt to cultivate a *sentipensante* relationship with place or do any kind of Indigenous reconnection work without acknowledging and centring place/land. It is for this reason that *tierra* (land) is depicted at the centre of the *senti-pensa-haciendo* diagram (fig. 23, p.98). In her *Welcome to Country* on the lands of the Boon Wurrung Peoples of the Kulin Nation, N’arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM clarifies that a Welcome to Country is “a conditional invitation to Country. And the condition is that you come with purpose. So, identify what your purpose is. What is the reason for you coming?”¹⁵ Secondly, it is a way of informing you of what “the laws and customs you have to abide by are while you’re trying to achieve your purpose on our Country.”¹⁶ Dr Briggs outlines that visitors to Country must promise to do no harm, and to honour and respect the laws of place, which themselves are anchored in three foundational pillars: intergenerational community knowledge, valuing diversity, and fostering connection to place through developing an understanding of its history.¹⁷

¹³ Purcell, “Life on the Slippery Earth.”

¹⁴ Purcell, “Life on the Slippery Earth.”

¹⁵ N’arweet Dr Carolyn Briggs AM, Boon Wurrung senior elder, *Welcome to Country* in *Tree Story*, (Clayton, Victoria: Monash University Museum of Art and Monash University Publishing, 2021). 3. There is an important distinction between a Welcome to Country that can only be given by a First Nations person connected to that country and an Acknowledgement of Country that anybody can do. There is also an important distinction between *Country* and *country*. See <https://www.reconciliation.org.au/reconciliation/acknowledgement-of-country-and-welcome-to-country/>.

¹⁶ Briggs, 3.

¹⁷ Briggs, 4–5.

To be in relationship with the earth is to share in the responsibility of caring for place and all the human and non-human life it supports. At the beginning of my doctoral research journey in 2021, when I spoke about the wound of my separation, I was reminded in a conversation with Professor Lynette Riley that it is possible to learn from other Indigenous peoples and cultures as part of the process of reconnection. In cultivating a sentipensante relationship with the lands I live and work on and as part of this research, I rely and reflect on multiple First Nations' concepts, including to "walk in a good way" from Turtle Island,¹⁸ and the notion of *kuleana* from Hawai'i, both of which deal with personal and collective responsibility in connection to place and space.¹⁹ My sentipensar, though culturally tied to Abya Yala, is however, being developed in practice within the Australian context.

Australian poet and essayist Mark Tredinnick, who works in the genre of landscape memoir, asks, "how does a non-Indigenous writer go to land, nearly always land taken in violence, and learn from it and from Indigenous inhabitants of that country, and then write what they have encountered without perpetuating the dispossession?"²⁰ Tredinnick refers to this as a moral dilemma, which he encounters and explores within his own work as well as that of his mentors and colleagues, such as writer Barry Lopez and essayist and novelist Gregory Day. Whilst Tredinnick readily acknowledges the fact that his writing of place will never match up to the ways in which First Nations people are deeply connected with and can speak to their lands, it is not an exercise in comparison but one of acknowledging land and our unique relationship to it such that "to see land as one sees it, to respond in letters

¹⁸ The expression "to walk in a good way" originates in Turtle Island amongst various First Nations communities including the Anishinaabe People and means to walk lightly on the earth in a considered and respectful way, see for example Hank Hailey, *Walking in a Good Way*, Nature Change, 12 April 2017 <https://naturechange.org/2017/04/12/walking-in-a-good-way/>

¹⁹ See the Mauna Kea Syllabus Project: <https://www.maunakeasyllabus.com>.

²⁰ Mark Tredinnick, "To sing, to say: A lyric ethics for coming into country" *Griffith REVIEW*, no. 80 (2023), 176.

to how you met it and how it met and changed you, is not to speak for the experience of others, nor in itself to silence them.”²¹ However, he writes that “any telling you make must include some consideration of those who sacralised and shaped the landscape, and it must acknowledge their violent dispossession, all of which must surely be part of the incorrigible plurality of the place.”²² In seeking to better understand the connections between my time spent *sentipensando* with place, this writing and the weavings emerging in my creative practice, I found myself engaging in various forms of cartographic imaginings²³.

River skipping/Saltando rios/Húe sepé: relational mapping

River skipping seeks to acknowledge and illustrate, in the form of a visual journal or extended mind/story map, the *sentipensante* relationships with place and memories that inform my being in and moving through this place as well as connecting to me to my ancestral lands. (This in turn has a direct impact and correlation with my writing and weaving.) River skipping includes locations with which I have a physical, emotional and spiritual connection (see fig. 24, p.104). For the full document, see appendix 1). There are places I have a regular practice of visiting and intentionally spending time with, and others that have emerged as important sites for re-memembering myself and my rootedness to the earth, no matter where I may be. Some of the locations are attached to familial and ancestral events, stories and places inhabited or travelled through.

²¹ Tredinnick, “To sing, to say”, 178.

²² Tredinnick, 178.

²³ The concept of ‘cartographic imagination’ is explored in Moro, Simonetta. “Mapping Practices and the Cartographic Imagination.” *Critical Psychology* (Lawrence & Wishart) 13, no. 4 (2020): 298–314. <https://doi.org/10.1057/s41286-020-00111-y>

It is important for me to point out that, because I am writing this thesis and predominantly communicating in English, I am using the English title river skipping but translation to the Spanish *Saltando Rios*, offers “leaping over rivers,” and the Charrúa translation *Húe Sepé* literally means “wise water,” or alternatively “to be led by the wisdom of water.” River skipping is necessarily always going to be a work-in-progress and incapable of fully documenting what are shifting and expanding relationships to places that are themselves dynamic and shifting.

My intent is not to imitate, replace or seek proximity to existing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander concepts and ways of mapping Country. River skipping has provided a way for me to think and feel through my personal position in relation to this place so that even though I am not on my ancestral lands I can develop a sense of connection and rootedness. One clear message to emerge from this process has been that this place wants me to know myself. By *this place* I mean places on this continent, so-called Australia, that I have been fortunate to visit and that facilitate my remembering and reconnecting. The more that I have committed to learning, being in reciprocity and grounding myself in this place, the more I have been able to connect with my own ancestral lands and, by extension, lineages. “Re-membering my Charrúa Roots on Unceded Land” has opened a door to re-membering and reawakening a way of being, a way of relating to the earth, a rootedness or, as I referred to in the introduction, a “cosmic sense of life,” as articulated in the writing of Ailton Krenak.

River skipping aims not to draw comparison but to draw relation, not as a show of discovery or special access but in trying to show my working as I dance between being practice-led and led-by-place. In his article “Is there an Ethics of Place?” Australian philosopher Jeff Malpas notes that “we must recognise, and come to some developed understanding, of just what attachment to place involves, and the different forms in which it may be articulated,” while recognising that “place also has the potential to be ethically and politically destructive.”²⁴ At the time of writing there are multiple ongoing territorial struggles both in Australia and overseas. The centrality of place is undeniable. Whilst it is not within the scope of this research project to attempt to develop a model of an ethics of place, I seek to engage with place-based thinking rather than avoid it and the biases and problematic attachments it may surface, especially those unbeknownst to me until the moment thoughts are committed to thread and word.

As I progressed with this research project, river skipping emerged as a form of place-based thinking that grew out of the process of drawing multiple mind maps. I was initially keen to resist using the term *map* or *cartography* and instead find an alternative term, as maps are readily aligned with power dynamics; as Irish historian Benedict Anderson has pointed out, “maps facilitated and justified exploration, control, and colonial expansion.”²⁵ There are, however, multiple studies both in the areas of historical and contemporary mapping that portray maps not just as colonial tools but as sites where colonial and Indigenous map-making met. First Nations people hold and maintain deep navigational knowledge, with some Indigenous activists now using contemporary mapping technologies for the benefit of their tribes and defending ancestral lands, as well as continuing to exercise

²⁴ Jeff Malpas, “Is there an Ethics of Place?” *Localities 2* (2012): 15, 10, DOI: 10.15299/local.2012.11.2.7.

²⁵ Jason Xidias, *An Analysis of Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities* (London: Macat Press, 2017), 61.

agency over what and how information made it into colonial sources.²⁶ In the Uruguayan context (including Argentina and Brazil) for example, author and academic Jeffrey Erbig writes that it was common to see historical maps that represented Native peoples as “free-floating ethnic labels, superimposed upon the landscape yet absent of any symbolic anchor.”²⁷ Erbig’s research, which focuses on southeastern South America, combines archival and historical maps with a qualitative approach to the use of geographic information systems to create digital maps. His work on the Rio de la Plata region, which includes Uruguay, north-eastern Argentina and southern Brazil, involved mapping scholarly claims about the locations of autonomous Indigenous Uruguayan communities based on ethnic and/or language labels during the eighteenth century. His work has identified just how contradictory those academic claims were, revealing “common patterns of ethnonym placement and networks of knowledge production that were simultaneously inaccurate and foundational in the construction of historical memory.”²⁸

Creating a mind map of my sentipensante relationships and learnings with place offered a way to consolidate complex personal and relational narratives about place/s and time/s. As Mujahid Towarli and Jakelin Troy state, “maps are not only geospatial images with names, labels and coordinates; rather, they are mind maps and heart maps that position people in the landscape.”²⁹ Educator, academic and writer Dr Nerida Blair has

²⁶ See for example counter-mapping projects that assist in Indigenous land reclamation and defence projects, Emily Jacobi, *Indigenous Cartography & Decolonizing Mapmaking*, Medium, 22 June 2020.

²⁷ Jeffrey. A Erbig, Jr, “Between Ethnonyms and Toponyms: Cartography and Native Pasts in the Eastern Rio de La Plata,” in *The Rio de La Plata from Colony to Nations*, ed. Fabrício Prado, Viviana L. Grieco, and Alex Borucki (Switzerland: Springer, 2021), 10, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-60323-6_2.

²⁸ Erbig, 11.

²⁹ Mujahid Torwali and Jakelin Troy, “Places of the Heart: Issues in Indigenous Place Naming in Torwali of Northern Pakistan and Aboriginal Languages of South Eastern Australia,” *Endangered Languages and the Land: Mapping Landscapes of Multilingualism*, Proceedings of FEL XXII/2018 in Reykjavík, 121–127 (London: FEL & EL Publishing), 125, <http://www.elpublishing.org/PID/4019>.

utilised the process of mind mapping to bring together different ways of knowing within what she calls the “Brick Wall” of Western academia and the related imperial, colonial and Eurocentric paradigms, which emphasise linear ways of thinking and doing. Blair sees potential for mind maps to “become a bridge back to ‘validation’ and experience of Indigenous Knowings.”³⁰ In her book *Privileging Australian Indigenous Knowledge: Sweet Potatoes, Spiders, Waterlilys and Brick Walls* (2015), Blair outlines the concept of *lilyology* that draws on mind maps as a way of visualising and communicating ways of connecting and relating through web-like rhizomes. The rhizomes mirror the way waterlilys are grounded in Country through water, representing the “Spirit Knowings” embedded in different Countries via the different waterways waterlilys exist in.³¹ I think here also of the incredible gift that is the foundational concept of *songlines* as shared by Margo Neale and Lynne Kelly in *Songlines: The Power and the Promise* (2020). They describe songlines as “our knowledge system, our library, our archive from which all subjects are derived.”³² A once universal human endeavour, the book proving examples of songlines from other Indigenous cultures around the world.

Although it is still a very new way for me to visualise my emerging place-based thinking within the Brick Wall, river skipping has evolved from a number of different iterations. Initially it looked more like a scroll that could be read from right to left or left to right, but now it has become circular in its design. Along the way, particular choices were made about what should and could be mapped, and what shouldn’t be included. For local sites and places, I made the decision to include dual naming in some instances and only

³⁰ Nerida Blair, *Privileging Australian indigenous knowledge : sweet potatoes, spiders, waterlilys & brick walls* (Champaign, Illinois, USA: Common Ground Publishing, 2015). 37.

³¹ Blair, *Privileging Australian indigenous knowledge : sweet potatoes, spiders, waterlilys & brick walls*. 38.

³² Lynne Kelly Margo Neale, *Songlines: The Power and Promise* (Thames & Hudson Australia Pty Ltd, 2020). 10.

Indigenous place names in others, consulting *Sydney Language* (2019) by Dr Jakelin Troy along with a number of other sources for Dharug and D'harawal Indigenous place names.³³ In doing my own research about place and seeking out stories and histories, preferencing material written by First Nations authors has been essential to cultivating a sentipensante relationship with place. I am reminded that I need to walk with respect into what Dr Shane Ingrey and Dr Paul Irish describe as a dynamic active space of continuous ongoing relationships—the continuous connection Aboriginal people have to places like the Georges River.³⁴ A sentipensante practice with place has demanded shifts in how I seek to engage through a process of repeated and careful observation of place, to take note, as Jeff Malpas writes, that “places do not possess single, determinate identities, but are instead constituted out of multiple sets of relations between the entities within those places, between those entities and their environmental circumstances, between events, and between places.”³⁵

There are exciting research approaches that also attempt to expand ways of being and knowing within the Brick Wall, including the growing use of walking methodologies, as informed by Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman's (2018) methodology of walking-thinking-writing.³⁶ In a 2021 paper by Linda Henderson et al., “Becoming-Unhinged: Walking with Vulnerability as a Methodology of Co-Creating and Reconnecting New Forms of Knowledge and Possibilities,” walking methodologies are seen as a way to disrupt the status

³³ Jakelin Troy, *The Sydney Language* (Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2019). Other sources consulted include the work of Frances Bodkin in documenting D'harawal stories, which also includes a D'harawal Dictionary compiled by Gavin Andrews, Frances Bodkin and Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews: <https://dharawalstories.com/dharawal-dictionary/>.

³⁴ See for example an essay by Dr.Shane Ingrey and Dr.Paul Irish, *Guraban* in “Guraban: Where the Saltwater meets the Freshwater” exhibition catalogue, Hurstville Museum and Gallery, 29 October 2022-29 January 2023. https://issuu.com/georgesriver/docs/guraban_catalog_issuu/50.

³⁵ Malpas, “Is there an Ethics of Place?,” 16.

³⁶ See Stephanie Springgay and Sarah E. Truman, *Walking methodologies in a more-than-human world : Walkinglab*, First edition. ed., Routledge Advances in Research Methods, (London: Taylor and Francis, 2018).

quo in academia by taking the thinking outside of the institution so that “walking heightens sensitivity and awareness of breath: our smallness, our vulnerabilities in this space of stolen land.”³⁷ The authors state that “We walk as a methodology of becoming unhinged” to generate “a kind of permission to let go of our well-trained methods to take up walking as a methodical practice that can break our frames and open us up to shadows and vulnerability in our research, but more importantly in our lives: ethical lives.”³⁸ Similarly, Maya Ward’s *The Comfort of Water: A River Pilgrimage* (2011) recounts her journey with four friends along the Yarra River, tracing a Wurundjeri songline.³⁹ Through the process of discussing why Ward begun the journey and her experiences during the twenty-one day walk, she relates not only her story as a settler but the important histories and stories of the river and how the two are entangled.

Walking methodologies can help surface the ways we make relationships to place, especially the more quotidian forms of relating to place that are easily overlooked but that can nonetheless reveal deep emotional connections to place even when we are not of that place. Writing about the George’s River and Salt Pan Creek, Australian historian Heather Goodall refers to the process of *making locality*, or the ways in which we make place meaningful that can help to explain how, for example, “people who originally came from another locality, as so many people living on the Georges River have, can still ‘make a place’ in an area to which they have only recently arrived.”⁴⁰ Goodall describes making locality as

³⁷ Linda Henderson, Geraldine Burke, Sharryn Clarke, Helen Grimmett, Gloria Quinones, Ann Slater, and Claudine Lam, “Becoming-Unhinged: Walking with Vulnerability as a Methodology of Co-Creating and Reconnecting New Forms of Knowledge and Possibilities,” *International Journal of Education through Art* 17, no. 1 (2021): 64, https://doi.org/10.1386/eta_00051_1.

³⁸ Henderson et al., 56, 75.

³⁹ Maya Ward, *The Comfort of Water: A River Pilgrimage* (Melbourne: Transit Lounge, 2011).

⁴⁰ Heather Goodall, *Rivers and Resilience: Aboriginal People on Sydney’s Georges River* (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2008), 16.

an active process, whereby people have to keep making locality and can continue to make locality long after they have left a place.⁴¹ At the core of these emerging methodologies that include physically engaging with the terrain through walking is land itself as a central character. I envision continuing to develop my sentipensante methodology and in future expand on the connections between feeling/sensing and physical interactions/experiences with place similar to the walking methodology examples discussed above. In sentipensante methodology, the notion of land at the centre is connected to the concept of land as teacher, which I expand on in part 2.

⁴¹ Goodall, 17.



Figure 25. Paula do Prado, *Birth of Sucuri*, 2022, installation view, Bankstown Biennale SubTerrains, Bankstown Arts Centre.
Photo: Jason Nicol

Birth of Sucuri (2022) is the first archway I created as part of this practice-led research. It is also the first free-standing woven work I've made, and of this scale (fig. 25, p.112). It was a work I'd commenced as part of my research independent of any exhibition plans but it was subsequently commissioned as part of SubTerrains Bankstown Biennale at Bankstown Arts Centre, 8 October–26 November 2022, curated by then centre director Vandana Ram together with artist Nicole Monks. SubTerrains was designed as "a First Nations artists' led response to local narratives of land, water and historical truths buried within Bankstown's landscape."⁴² I had already commenced work on the weaving when invited to be part SubTerrains and it was fortunate that the themes I was exploring of above and below, visible and invisible aligned with the curatorial concept for the biennale. The inclusion of the work in the biennale necessitated it to be fast-tracked to meet the exhibition opening deadline and I worked almost exclusively on *Birth of Sucuri* for a period of two to three months.

Once part of the SubTerrains project, my work was heavily influenced by the site where the work would be shown and by being in exchange with the curators and some of the other artists: Abdul Abdullah, Aroha Groves, Carmen Glynn-Braun, Cigdem Aydemir, Dean Kelly, Jamie Eastwood, Jason Wing, Juxta, Kerrie Kenton, Lucy Simpson, Maddison Gibbs, Nardi Simpson, and Theatre Kantanka. At the start of the project, the curators organised a beautiful gathering on the lawns of Bankstown Arts Centre and a selection of the artists including myself gathered around a small bonfire on an evening with a full moon and had an opportunity to share experiences and make offerings in the form of stories and

⁴² See the Bankstown Arts Centre's webpage on the Bankstown Biennale 2022: <https://www.bankstownartscentre.com.au/archive/past-exhibitions/bankstown-biennale-subterrains>.

readings. My offering was in the form of handmade *sahumeiro* (powder incense) that was passed around so each person could offer a pinch of it to the fire. I had made the *sahumeiro* using some of the plants that I had been cultivating relationship with including Lajau, *Banksia serrata* and eucalypt.

The Bankstown Arts Centre is located on the lands of Dharug People and sits directly above a flood plain, a network of subterranean waterways. The site is also closely connected to the nearby Salt Pan Creek and Georges River. The Biennale highlighted the lesser known First Nations histories of the place and the ongoing concerns for the health and wellbeing not just of Salt Pan Creek or the Georges River but the First Nations communities still in those areas today.⁴³ One of the central stories that resurfaced was that of Joe Anderson and other Aboriginal people from the Salt Pan Creek community who were fighting for land rights, recognition and representation in the 1930s, which continues to echo in the Uluru Statement from the Heart, the Voice Referendum and subsequent Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander campaigns for recognition and justice.

I had cultivated a relationship with the Bankstown Arts Centre site over a number of years, having staged a solo exhibition, *Kuñã*, there in 2021. On every visit I would spend time with the twin Jacaranda trees on the lawns and the row of majestic figs that line the back of the site along the train track. There are also dynamic communities of birds on site including ibis families and their nests, ravens and magpies. *Birth of Sucuri* incorporates two pieces that I exhibited as part of *Kuñã*, which were made between 2019 and 2021. The first is *Telar* (2019) (fig. 26, p.115) meaning “to weave,” which at its centre has a piece of reclaimed lace collected in 2009/2010 while on a field trip to Uruguay and Argentina for my Masters of Fine

⁴³ See Goodall, *Rivers and Resilience*.

Arts research degree. Secondly, *Mother's Eyes* (2021) (fig. 27, below), which pays homage to the dominant ravens that patrol the site, is a work that itself incorporates artworks made for other exhibitions, namely *Kalunga* (2020), a joint exhibition with my young son at Firstdraft, Sydney. The process of incorporating newer and older work is very typical of my practice. As timelines collapse, works and their stories fold and layer into each other—there is no beginning and no end, just the present moment.



Figure 26. Paula do Prado, *Telar*, 2019



Figure 27. Paula do Prado, *Mother's Eyes*, 2020

The Biennale opened on 8 October 2022, and during my artist talk I shared the story that when we were newly arrived migrants to Australia, my father would pass through Bankstown on his bike route to work. I remember my dad would work at night, and in the mornings my mum would get me ready and walk me to school as my dad would only just be getting to bed. He worked as a cleaner, having been unable to have his Uruguayan qualifications recognised through what was then a complicated and lengthy process. It's funny the things you remember as a child, but it always struck me how he would wear plastic bags over his shoes when he rode his bike sometimes, because of course he was exposed to all sorts of weather on his bike ride from the eastern suburbs into the western suburbs through Bankstown on the way to Canterbury. After that difficult period of adjustment after having migrated we were slowly able to improve our situation and got a car. My dad remained in the cleaning business and has only just recently retired. I have since thought often about those initial struggles being new migrants, and I wonder if Country was looking out for us even back then, when we didn't know the history of this place.

Sucuri is a name in Portuguese given to the anaconda, and it is also the name of a river in Mato Grosso do Sul in southwestern Brazil, a tributary to the Parana River that travels through Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, eventually through to the Rio de la Plata and the Atlantic Ocean. Within the work *sucuri* is represented in the form of a multicoloured snake, referencing the symbolism of the serpent prevalent in many First Nations cultures globally. The serpent and their path bends and curves, potentially referencing a bike route, a river above or below ground, or a continuous path through time and space. In many *Abya*

Yala cultures, the anaconda represents both the underground or subterranean world and also a star path, namely the Milky Way.⁴⁴

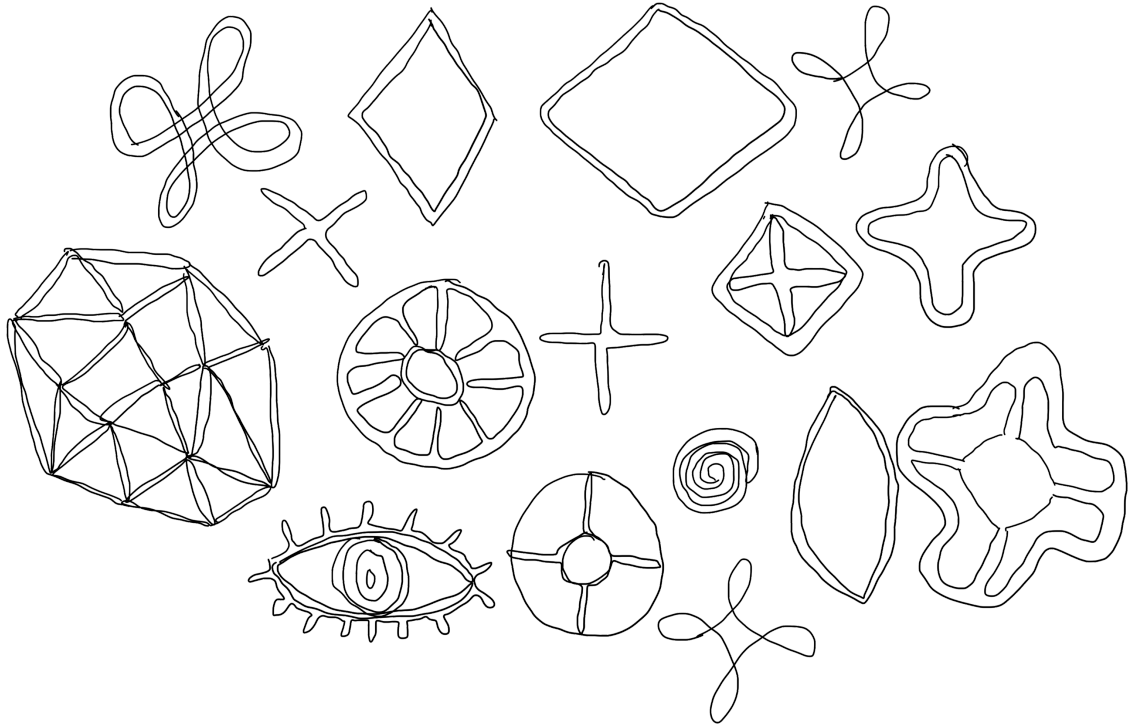


Figure 28. Paula do Prado, *Symbolic visual markers and recurring motifs*, digital drawing

Birth of Sucuri contains symbolic visual markers that become recurring motifs across all three of the woven archways created as part of this research. These recurring motifs have developed over the last fifteen years of my art practice and continue to evolve in form, scale and intricacy (fig. 28, above). Two of the most common recurring motifs are references to spiderwebs or spiderweb lace, more commonly known as *ñanduti*, the Guarani word for spider and the term used for a particular type of fine delicate lace made predominantly in

⁴⁴ See for example Neil L. Whitehead, "Indigenous Cartography in Lowland South America and the Caribbean," in J. B. Harley and David Woodward, *The History of cartography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1987). 301–26.

Paraguay.⁴⁵ The second is that of the *dikenga*, also known as the Yowa or Dikenga Cross, the Kongo cosmogram or Bantu cross, which can be presented in a number of forms, sometimes as a quartered circular or diamond shape or as a cross with four points (both *Telar* and *Mother's Eyes* are both in the form of a dikenga). The dikenga is a key visual marker that I discuss in more detail in Chapter 6). *Birth of Sucuri* is also the first work I've produced that includes a new hybrid technique combining crochet and tapestry that I had the opportunity to develop as part of the Australian Tapestry Workshop Artist in Residence program, undertaken in January 2022 (fig.29, below). Just as I have expanded my vocabulary to articulate my research in the form of this thesis, so has my visual and material language expanded to hold more complex and layered visual information.



Figure 29. Paula do Prado at the Australian Tapestry Workshop (ATW) Residency, 2022. Photo courtesy ATW.

⁴⁵ For examples of ñanduti lace, see specimens held by the Powerhouse Museum Collection: <https://collection.powerhouse.com.au/object/367046>.

Sam (Part 2)

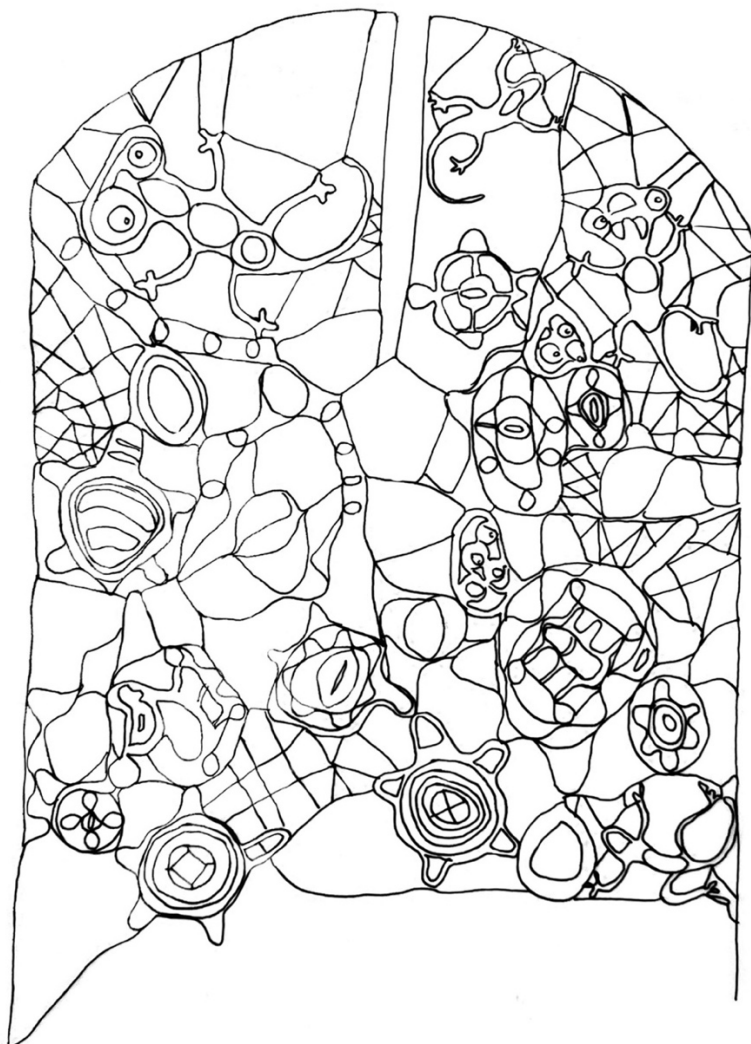


Figure 30. Paula do Prado, digital tracing of Quarai from photo documentation

Lajau

Since October 2019 I have been cultivating relationship with Lajau (*Phytolacca dioica*), a tree native to the pampas (grasslands) of Argentina and Uruguay. *Ombú*, as it commonly known, is the Tupi-Guarani name for the tree. Of the seventy-odd remaining Charrúa words recorded, *Lajau*, the Charrúa word for Ombú, is one of the only documented words for a tree or plant.⁴⁶ The tree is also known by other names, including *bella sombra*, meaning “beautiful shade/shadow.”⁴⁷ It is rarely found in Australia. There are only two singular trees in Sydney: one at Centennial Park and the other in the Succulent Garden at the Royal Botanic Gardens.⁴⁸ In Uruguay, as well as singular trees spread throughout the country, there are two Ombú forests, one in the Department of Lavalleja (where my mother was born) at the base of Cerro Arequita and the other in Rocha in the Laguna de Castillos. Ombú trees are dioecious, with male and female flowers on separate trees.

Lajau, whom I visit frequently, is located in Centennial Park. Although I was not aware initially, this tree is female, as its flowers do not have the bushy appearance given by the stamens of the male flower.⁴⁹ I have documented my visits with my phone camera,

⁴⁶ The word *lajau* is recorded in what is known as the *Códice Vilardebó* (1840), compiled by Dr. Teodoro Miguel Vilardebó (1803–1856), a Uruguayan doctor, amateur historian and ethnographer who took a special interest in Charrúa language and customs. It is said that the main sources for his Charrúa language word list came from a military sergeant who had lived with a group of Charrúas and a female captive who was made to work as a domestic servant at the estate of a military man. See “Lengua Charrúa,” Pueblos Originarios, <https://pueblosoriginarios.com/lenguas/charrua.html>.

⁴⁷ The World Agroforestry Website has a factsheet on *Phytolacca dioica* and includes a list of where the species is distributed as well as its other common names including umbu, packalacca, ombú, belombra and bella sombra: https://apps.worldagroforestry.org/treedb/AFTPDFS/Phytolacca_dioica.PDF.

⁴⁸ The National Trusts of Australia Register of Significant Trees records a number of Ombú Trees in South Australia, Victoria and Brisbane, but the NSW Ombú trees are not currently recorded on the site. <https://trusttrees.org.au/search?keywords=ombu&location=&type=0&criteria=0&level=0&fromDate=&toDate=&fromHeight=&toHeight=&measuredDate=&fromAge=&toAge=&condition=0>.

⁴⁹ Argentinian arborist, author and urban planter Fransisco Rebollo Paz has extensively documented and written about native trees of the River Plate region shared by Argentina and Uruguay. Having followed his work and undertaken his online course on native trees, which provides extensive photographic documentation of the native trees, I am now able to distinguish between the male and female Ombú flowers as well as understand the differences in growth pattern depending on the region they are found in (see appendix 2).

occasionally taking notes of particular words and phrases that come up at that time. The visits are also opportunities to collect small amounts of plant material that have fallen on the ground. Lajau's bark is hollow, spongy and light, breaking off easily with heavy rainfall and strong winds. I often collect branches and leaves, and during October over a few weeks when it is in flower, I also collect fallen blooms. The location of Lajau near a noisy road intersection and a busy pedestrian entry/exit to the park, combined with my anxiety and feeling exposed in the space, have at times made building connection a challenge.

Having compiled a visual diary (appendix 2) of my visits with Lajau, several patterns and connections began to surface. One of these was the presence of my shadow, separate and sometimes merged with Lajau's shadow in many of the photographs. In an effort to better make sense and meaning of my deepening connection to Lajau, I am grateful to *inchalás* who upon hearing of my experiences have shared stories or made suggestions for me to investigate further. One such helpful reference came in the form of the Pampas legend of the Talajau. The legend of the Talajau tells the story of Jau—the wife of Ta, a Querandi chief—who is tasked with looking after the plant crops when the men of the tribe go off to defend their territory. Jau looks after the corn plantings day and night until one day on a full moon a long, terrible drought begins. Jau continues to look after the corn day and night until she must use her own body to shield the plantings from the harsh sun and her tears to water them. Exhausted and desperate to protect the corn plantings, Jau herself takes root in the ground to give shade and protection. When her husband and the men of the tribe finally return, they find her transformed into a giant plant almost like a tree, for which the Charrúa word is *tala*. Overcome with grief her husband, the chief of the tribe

rushes to embrace her, entwining himself in her branches and leaves.⁵⁰ There are various versions of the legend with the names of the main characters changed. One refers to Talajau (very close to the Charrúa word *lajau*) and others to Ombú with the main character's name changed to Ombi, but the crux of the story remains the same.

Revelation x Disbelief/Accepting

Revelation in the Akamara Tarot represents the common card of Judgement. It is framed as the difference between answering the call to one's traditional spiritual practices or ignoring the call out of fear and self-doubt. Although a person goes through many transformations in a lifetime, Revelation refers to a particular form of radical transition, the choice between familiarity and perceived safety of stagnancy or making the conscious choice to live with intention and purpose even if that causes great upheaval.

The Aboriginal Ancestral Wisdom Oracle deck by Ngunnawal woman Mel Brown features wisdom from four different environments: Freshwater, Saltwater, Desert and Rainforest.⁵¹ The Disbelief/Accepting card emerges from Rainforest wisdom, with disbelief asking us to examine our doubts and feelings of mistrust by stepping outside of the issue to look at it from different angles. Conversely, in accepting we are encouraged to make space

⁵⁰ There are multiple versions of this story. I have based my summary above two versions, Graciela Repún and Enrique Melantoni's version in *Argentine Legends*, Buenos Aires, Norma, 2001 and a similar version published by one of the same authors titled "La leyenda del Ombú" in Graciela Repún, *Leyendas Argentinas* (Buenos Aires: Norma, 2001), 113–117.

⁵¹ The Aboriginal Ancestral Wisdom Oracle deck was created by Mel Brown and Ngunnawal woman who creates a range of different oracle decks that meld her Aboriginal culture with other cultures and spiritual beliefs towards an understanding that spiritual beliefs are individually unique. See <https://www.spiritdreaming.com.au>.

for difference as others' stories and unique paths are just as worthy of recognition and inclusion as our own, because "Your story matters."⁵²



Figure 31. Revelation, Akamara tarot x Disbelief/Accepting, Ancestral Wisdom Oracle

⁵² Mel Brown, Aboriginal Ancestral Wisdom Oracle Deck guidebook, Rockpool Publishing, 81. For more information on the use and intention behind this deck, see Mel Brown's website <https://www.spiritdreaming.com.au/project>

4. Mar mar onkaiujmar

Cuerpo-territorio-espíritu (body-land-spirit)

Onkaiujmar is a Charrúa word meaning “Tierra Madre” or “Mother Earth,” or more literally “Gran Madre” or “Big Mother.” It originates with Charrúa communities based in Argentina, such as the Comunidad Charrúa Paraná and is now used by many other Charrúa communities in Uruguay and beyond.¹ It is a new Charrúa word, conjugated out of collective oral memory and fragmentary records of Charrúa and sister languages. It is a word born out of community work to revive language and the difficult, challenging and joyous process of working towards collective consensus on the form, meaning and use of old and new terms. Whilst the concept of onkaiujmar has gradually become integrated within Charrúa contemporary use, great care needs to be taken in ensuring coherence between words, concepts and their meanings. For example, there are those who argue that onkaiujmar is not to be conflated with popularised Western interpretations of the Andean concept of *Pachamama*.² Charrúa often express the idea that *somos tierra* (we are earth), affirming a deep sense of connectedness in which relationship to land is also about our relationships to others and to ourselves. Onkaiujmar is also deeply connected to *oyendau* (memory) because the Earth is sentient, an active co-creator of our everyday with whom we feel-think and do.

In his recent thesis work, Charrúa activist, researcher and anthropologist Martín Delgado Cultelli explores the role of Indigenous memory in the context of various forms of

¹ The first of August each year has been designated as the *Día de la Onkaiujmar* (Day of Onkaiujmar, Mother Earth of the Charrúa Nation): <https://www.pressenza.com/es/2020/09/celebracion-dia-de-la-onkaiujmar-madre-tierra-nacion-charrua/>.

² Pachamama is the Andean concept of mother Earth.

violence (both historical and ongoing colonial violence) in Uruguay. In a recent online presentation on his research, Delgado makes reference to intergenerational Charrúa oral memory and “el territorio memoria” (the memory in the land) as an important actor that is often omitted in discussions of memory and violence.³ Not only has it been a challenge for Charrúa oral memory to be recognised as valid within academic research and socio-political spheres, the notion of the land itself as an actor in storing memory receives even less attention. Delgado frames el territorio memoria as the ability of the land to facilitate our remembering; however, he says it is not something he feels he can yet include in his research because this requires an acknowledgement of the spiritual dimension that marks the *magico religioso* experiences of those who engage with the territorio in this way.

Both “Lajau” in Sam (part 2) and “Jacaranda” in Detit (part 3) discuss how my Charrúa remembering has been facilitated by “el territorio del otro” (the lands of another) and “el territorio que llevo dentro” (the territory in me),⁴ which can be understood through the concept of *cuerpo-territorio-espirit*, “body-spirit-land.”⁵ Cuerpo-territorio-espiritu is an Indigenous paradigm that has helped me to articulate what I could see, hear and feel emerging in encoded ways as this research project has evolved.⁶ My journey of reconnection with my Charrúa ancestry whilst living on unceded Aboriginal land has been

³ Martin Delgado Cultelli, “Memorias Indígenas sobre violencia en el Uruguay” Friday 28 June, 7 pm, Zoom, hosted by Iglesia Metodista en el Uruguay, also streamed and recorded on Facebook. “Charla Memorias Indígenas,” Facebook, 28 June 2024, <https://www.facebook.com/share/v/SQJQvVZnLZPPdcqV/>.

⁴ “El territorio del otro” and “el territorio que llevo dentro” were phrases used by Charrúa artist and musician Arra Hué in conversation together with anthropologist and PhD candidate Victoria Bonilla-Báez and artist Rosana Greciet, titled “Un paso hacia el Rio: memoria ancestral, identidad plural y territorio,” held at La Sede in Piriápolis, Uruguay and online via Zoom, as part of the Ciclo de Conversa Circular Futuro Ancestral, 1 June 2024.

⁵ The phrase “Territorio: nuestro cuerpo, nuestro espíritu” (“Territory: our body, our spirit”) surfaced in 2019 as part of the first forum and march of Indigenous Women that brought together 2500 women from 130 Indigenous groups representing all the major Brazilian regions. <https://apiboficial.org/2019/08/16/primer-marcha-de-las-mujeres-indigenas-territorio-nuestro-cuerpo-nuestro-espiritu/?lang=es>

⁶ The idea that encoded knowledge emits messages so that those knowledges can be reclaimed is mentioned in Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 216. I return to this concept in Chapter 6.

led by place, specifically, the importance of acknowledging that I am remembering, feel-thinking-doing and grounding on the existing and continuing spiritually inhabited territory of the oldest living culture in the world.⁷ As my autotheoretical approach developed through the research process, it became increasingly clear that the reckoning required here was also a spiritual one. The reckoning for me has comprised an accounting of my relationship with the spirits of the land coupled with the initial steps needed to work towards an ancestral reconciliation to address historical and familial silences.

The work of Dr Anne Poelina and her daughter Marlikka Perdrisat, Nyikina Warrwa women from the Kimberley region of Western Australia, invites people of all ancestries and backgrounds to connect with their own identities by respectfully engaging with Indigenous people, research, stories, the land and waterways in order to “bridge the Indigenous/non-Indigenous binary that causes continued colonisation of people and places and may produce a felt sense of exclusion in people wishing to stand with Indigenous causes.”⁸ In Poelina and Perdrisat’s joint paper with Sandra Wooltorton and Edwin Lee Mullugan, “Feeling and Hearing Country as Research Method” (2023), I have found deep resonance and affirmation of my own senti-pensa-haciendo journey. Feeling and hearing Country as a research method is described as a co-operative inquiry within which researcher and participants are co-researchers and co-subjects; everyone participates. The four phases outlined as part of the research method constitute a cycle of inquiry that emphasises experience through meeting and encounter; embodied action through sensing and engaging; the use of creative methods such as art to express the experience; and finally a period of reflection and coming to terms

⁷ The importance of place or spiritually inhabited territories is discussed by Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 215.

⁸ Anne Poelina et al., “Feeling and Hearing Country as Research Method,” *Environmental education research* 29, no. 10 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1080/13504622.2023.2239531>.

with experience through questioning, critiquing and reframing.⁹ The cycles of enquiry echo my earlier articulation of el pozo in my own experience, and like el pozo, many journeys or “cycles of inquiry” are needed in what is a continual and life-long process. Feeling and hearing Country describes a decolonising process of re-indigenisation that the writers view as central in addressing issues such as the harms of settler colonialism and climate change through building “empathy and connection with Country,” and producing a “continuum of change towards greater respect for Indigenous people, places and knowledge.”¹⁰

Lajau is my Universe: Universe-referent citizenship

Borrowing from the terminology used by Poelina et al., I frame my own senti-pensa-haciendo process as a co-operative inquiry in which my co-inquirers in this research project are the waterways, landscapes, plants and animals featured in river skipping (appendix 1). An underlying line of inquiry explored in this section is the role of the beyond-human in facilitating and even mediating what I termed a *double reckoning*. How can beyond-human relationships assist in addressing the Indigenous/non-Indigenous binary, succinctly illustrated by Palestinian-Australian Tasnim Mahmoud Sammak as “Indigenous there, settlers here.”¹¹ A similar theme is explored through reflections on the impacts of non-native plants on the environment, whereby some plants exhibit what Robin Wall Kimmerer refers to as the “colonising habit” of becoming destructive weeds and out-competing native species, and others become so well integrated that they become naturalised.¹² In *Braiding*

⁹ Poelina et al., “Feeling and Hearing Country as Research Method.” 1492–1495.

¹⁰ Poelina et al., “Feeling and Hearing Country as Research Method.” 1488.

¹¹ Sammak, “Indigenous There, Settlers Here.”

¹² Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding sweetgrass : Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*, 1st ed. (Minneapolis, Minn: Milkweed Editions, 2013). 214.

Sweetgrass, Kimmerer uses this as a parallel to the human migrant experience, but seeks to take the concept of naturalisation beyond the transactional citizenship offered by the nation state in order to throw off what she calls “the mindset of the immigrant.”¹³ This relates to what scholars Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos define as the “perpetual foreigner-within,” formed in the image of either a submissive, compliant or subversive foreigner so that “the members of migrant and ethnic communities remain *white*-non-white and white-not-white enough.”¹⁴ Even so, Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos point out that non-Indigenous Australians, regardless of the power dynamics that play out between settler categories, are implicated in maintaining white race privilege that denies Indigenous sovereignty through processes of recognition (for example legal, social and economic including education and property-ownership) that preference those who are white-adjacent.¹⁵

Although writing within the context of Turtle Island, Kimmerer highlights that deepening relationships to place can bridge the Indigenous/settler binary to bring all people into right relationship to place through engaging in accountability, reciprocity, respect and care:

Being naturalized to place means to live as if this is the land that feeds you, as if these are the streams from which you drink, that build your body and fill your spirit. To become naturalized is to know that your ancestors lie in this ground. Here you will give your gifts and meet your responsibilities. To become naturalized is to live as if your

¹³ Kimmerer, *Braiding sweetgrass : Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants*.214.

¹⁴ Toula Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos, "Indigenous Sovereignty and the Being of the Occupier: Manifesto for a White Australian Philosophy of Origins," *Arena journal* 41-42, no. 41/42 (2014). 102.

¹⁵ Nicolacopoulos and Vassilacopoulos, "Indigenous Sovereignty and the Being of the Occupier: Manifesto for a White Australian Philosophy of Origins."93.

children's future matters, to take care of the land as if our lives and the lives of all our relatives depend on it. Because they do.¹⁶

My autotheoretical reading of personal and familial histories is informed by a senti-pensa-haciendo process that is predominantly enacted 'here' (Australia) and is integral to my Charrúa remembering 'there' (Uruguay). Working between being practice-led and being led by place, compiling my experiences in the form of river skipping made clear that my experiences of both 'here' and 'there' are anchored in Lajau. Lajau is my Charrúa ancestor, with roots in this ground, a living and extensively connected being that has brought me into conscious relationship with the particulars of this land base,¹⁷ what Towarli and Troy refer to as the "lanscape."¹⁸

Here I wish to extend the symbolism of the tree of life referenced in "Ceiba" in Yú (part 1) to embrace the Mayan concept that "all people had their own tree, therefore, their own tree of life, which centered their individual existence."¹⁹ Cultivating deep relationship with Lajau over multiple visits and completing many cycles of inquiry has gifted me a sense of rootedness, agency and a pathway to connect with other trees, plants and waterways, 'here,' 'there,' and everywhere. The legend of the Talajau marks Lajau as a sacred tree, a memory tree, a tree connected to the Charrúa and many other Indigenous groups of the Argentinian Pampas region, southern Brazil and Uruguay. Today, the Ombú remains an important national tree for both Argentina and Uruguay, present in both rural and urban

¹⁶ Kimmerer, *Braiding sweetgrass : Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge and the teachings of plants.*, 214–215.

¹⁷ Coming to know oneself through plants connects to culture. These are time-honoured traditions and relationships with the plant life and ecosystems of the various ecologies and particulars in a land base. Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 219.

¹⁸ Towarli and Troy, "Places of the Heart," 125.

¹⁹ Gonzales, *Red Medicine*, 131.

environments. Like many creation stories from these regions that survive (albeit in modified form and often rewritten through a colonial national imaginary or religious lens), there is a persistent narrative of reciprocal, cyclical and transformative encounters between the human and more-than/beyond-human.

Professor Kerry Arabena aptly points out that the invasion of this continent was not carried out just by people but by the plants and animals that were introduced into the ecosystem, so that “acts of citizenship in Australia structured to bring about positive human-Earth relationships should be concerned with both human and non-human entities.”²⁰ Within Arabena’s concept of *Universe-referent citizenship*, the Universe is defined as “a unity, an interacting and genetically related community of beings (community) bound together in an inseparable relationship in space and time,” which is both “a real as well as an imagined space, physically absent but metaphysically present at all times and in all ways.”²¹ In contrast to dominant Western traditions that place humans at the top of the food chain and conceive of nature as a resource, Universe-referent citizenship moves towards dissolving such hierarchies and binaries as well as making it possible to move beyond notions of citizenship produced by the nation state. Reporting on semi-structured interviews Arabena carried out with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people on the topic of Universe-referent citizenship, she writes:

To be a citizen of the Universe, the respondents identified a need to develop competencies which would enable them to traverse other countries and cultures,

²⁰ Kerry Arabena, *Becoming Indigenous to the Universe: reflections on living systems, indigeneity and citizenship* (North Melbourne, Victoria: Australian Scholarly Publishing Pty Ltd, 2015).123.

²¹ Arabena, *Becoming Indigenous to the Universe: reflections on living systems, indigeneity and citizenship*.xxv, 139.

recognise the connection and diversity of all things, place themselves in equal relationships with all other living and non-living entities, be positive and protect the environment in which we all live.²²

One particular response immediately stood out and resonated with my own experience. The respondent “R5” identified his Universe as being the big Karri tree on the country where he grew up and his sense of responsibility to that specific location.²³ This research project has intensified my own inner questions about it means to be responsible to place and to hold multiple place relationships at once that are both real, local and imaginal.

Lajau is my universe (see appendix 2) documents and reflects multiple visits and interactions with Lajau through selected photographs, words, phrases, anecdotes, notes and diary-like excerpts. In Lajau I find a mirror to the encounter between *el territorio del otro* and the *territorio que llevo dentro*—Lajau is a plural sentient being that exists both as a real physical presence grounded in the past, present and future, an organic and intuitive connective thread. Lajau is my universe extends my exploration and experimentation of a sentipensate methodology, this time working directly with a specific site, rather than multiple interconnected sites as is evident in River skipping. In her TEDx talk, “The Future Will Be Written in the Language of the Past,” Marlikka Perdrisat explains the concept of a *liyan*, a form of connective feeling, intuition and wellbeing that helps you understand who you are and what your place is in the world.²⁴ Perdrisat points out that anyone can develop a liyan, and encourages the audience to consider choosing a plant, animal or specific place

²² Arabena, *Becoming Indigenous to the Universe: reflections on living systems, indigeneity and citizenship*. 139.

²³ Arabena, *Becoming Indigenous to the Universe: reflections on living systems, indigeneity and citizenship*.140.

²⁴ “The Future Will Be Written with the Language of the Past | Marlikka Perdrisat,” TEDxSydney, 10:40, 5 August 2022, <https://tedxsydney.com/talk/the-future-will-be-written-with-the-language-of-the-past-marlikka-perdrisat/>.

to pair with, to take care of as pathway to developing a liyan. Perdrisat discusses the concept of *jadiny* through telling the story of how a newborn child received their totems. More broadly, *jadiny* is described as the process of pairing a non-human with a human, removing hierarchies and replacing them with a sense of identity and connection to place, and the resultant responsibility that comes from that partnership.²⁵ My pairing with Lajau has been instrumental in facilitating my connection with this place while simultaneously remembering my Charrúa roots. In the words of Joy Harjo, a celebrated performer and writer of the Muscogee (Creek) Nation, “Remember you are this universe and this universe is you.”²⁶ This is the purpose of remembering my Charrúa roots on unceded land.

Through engaging with First Nations scholarship and concepts such as Kerry Arabena’s universe-referent citizenship and liyan as shared by Marlikka Perdrisat, I have expanded my understanding of what it can mean and *feel* like to be in conscious relationship with the land I inhabit. My relationship with Lajau on Gadigal Country becomes a physical site for grounding my autotheoretical approach that prioritises local place engagement to form a respectful and reciprocal exchange that necessarily entails an ongoing commitment. My autotheory is represented through a combination image, text and citation. River skipping and Lajau is my universe are presented in visual essay and visual diary form to compliment the scholarship consulted as part of this thesis. A compilation of images taken on my visits to Lajau since 2018 (fig. 32, p.133) illustrates these emerging concepts. The images are self-portraits taken standing in front of Lajau. Neither Lajau or I are entirely visible, each image captures my shadow on the ground at the base of Lajau. Sometimes our shadows combine and we merge into a new hybrid being.

²⁵ “The Future Will Be Written with the Language of the Past | Marlikka Perdrisat.”

²⁶ Joy Harjo, “Remember,” in *She Had Some Horses* (New York: Thunder’s Mouth Press, 1983).



Figure 32. Paula do Prado, series of Shadow self portraits with Lajau, 2018–ongoing, in Lajau is my universe

(see appendix 2)

Sit, listen

The more I attend to (listen, observe and get to know) the local waterways and lands with Lajau as my Universe, the more I reconnect with (remember, anchor-in and understand) my oyendau ancestral. This intentional process of cultivating local place relationships and attending to what is experienced within place is central to my autotheoretical approach and how the research is documented and presented in a diverse range of forms, from essay style visual journals to woven artwork and this thesis. This section cites three key concepts that have assisted me in interpreting my encounters with Lajau and understanding that specific relationship within the broader context of the place where I live and the place where I come from. The first concept is *land as pedagogy*, the title of chapter 9 in *As We Have Always Done*: (2017) by Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, a Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg scholar, writer and artist. Simpson retells the Nishnaabeg story “Binoojiinh Makes a Lovely Discovery,” about a child who learns how to make maple sugar through mindful observation of a maple tree followed by their experiences of taking that knowledge back to their elders and community, despite a hiccup in being able to replicate the initial maple sugar process.²⁷ The deceptively simple narrative is, upon reflection, an intricate and multilayered story that takes us into a world where learning that comes through the land is not only readily practiced but supported and respected. The character of the child could be substituted for any person of any age being presented with the opportunity to direct their own learning in relationship to place outside of what Blair called the Brick Wall.

Simpson writes that one of the core messages of the story is that “to re-create the world that compelled Binoojiinh to learn how to make maple sugar, we should be concerned

²⁷ Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, *As we have always done : indigenous freedom through radical resistance*, Indigenous Americas, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2017). 146.

with re-creating the conditions within which this learning occurred, not just the content of the practice itself.”²⁸ This of course references the commercialisation of maple syrup production as well as the harmful impacts of colonisation on ways of being and knowing that result in both direct and indirect forms of disconnection from the land. More importantly, the story leaves me wondering what other learnings and remembering might be possible if the right conditions can be recreated.

I see myself reflected in Binoojiinh’s story. With every visit to *Abuela* Lajau (Grandmother Lajau) and the subsequent reflections and material expressions that resulted, my experiential learnings have been transcribed through this research project into learnings I have been able to share with my family and Charrúa communities. However, similarly to Binoojiinh’s experience, there are many challenges inherent in taking the findings back to community. Throughout this research project I have sought to share my experiences and findings with family and my communities in the moment, when the insight or ‘aha’ feeling has been fresh. Time differences, geographical/physical distance, language and communication barriers, as well as being met with suspicion or scepticism, and family members who are dismissive or simply do not wish to engage in remembering for various reasons, have all been part of my journey. These experiences represent an ongoing process of return, navigating reconnection with ancestral threads and Charrúa communities as part of my process of Charrúa self-identification, which I discuss in more detail in “Jacaranda” in *Detit* (part 3).

The second concept of *co-becoming* has helped me better articulate how it is that Lajau facilitates my remembering. Co-becoming originates in Bawaka Country and is a term

²⁸ Simpson, *As we have always done : indigenous freedom through radical resistance*.54.

used to describe a Bawaka Yolŋu ontology “within which everything exists in a state of emergence and relationality. Not only are all beings—human, animal, plant, process, thing or affect—vital and sapient with their own knowledge and law, but their very being is constituted through relationships that are constantly re-generated.”²⁹ In the collaboratively authored paper, “Co-becoming Bawaka Country: Towards a Relational Place/Space,” Bawaka Country is identified as lead author, along with Laklak Burarrwanga, an Indigenous Datiwuy elder and caretaker of Gumatj (including Bawaka) Country, and several members of her family, as well as a group of academic geographers and a research assistant. By naming Bawaka Country as lead and co-author, the contributors seek to respect and acknowledge both their co-becoming and “the active role that Country plays in shaping what we know, who we are and what we do. It is in doing that knowing and being emerge; it is by knowing and being that one does.”³⁰ The contents of the paper revolve around multiple visits to Country to dig for food and all the processes that entails, including all the co-authors—Indigenous/non-Indigenous, human and more-than-human—working together. Again, resonating with Binoojiinh’s story, co-becoming highlights the importance of facilitating the conditions for learning so that “more-than-humans and humans co-become *as* place/space, in deep relation to all the diverse co-becomings that also constitute it. Space/place *is* its doings, its beings, its knowings, its co-becomings.”³¹ In my own experience with Lajau, the most recent expression of our co-becoming is a process more akin to merging, an embodied anchoring in place mediated with and through Lajau’s connections both to this land and the lands of its origin.

²⁹ Bawaka Country et al., “Co-becoming Bawaka: Towards a relational understanding of place/space,” *Progress in human geography* 40, no. 4 (2016), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515589437>.

³⁰ Bawaka Country et al., “Co-becoming Bawaka: Towards a relational understanding of place/space.” 463.

³¹ Bawaka Country et al., 456.

The third concept comes from the work of Dr Jo Anne Rey, a Dharug community member and Research Fellow in the Department of Indigenous Studies at Macquarie University, who focuses her research on the revival of Dharug Aboriginal culture on and with Dharug Ngurra (Country). In “Changing Places: Weaving City Learnings into Country Futures” she builds on her doctoral research work that resulted in the concept of the *Dharug Web of Interrelatedness*. The Dharug Web of Interrelatedness developed through a process of gathering and exchange over several sessions that brought together seven Dharug women’s perspectives (including Rey), which surfaced the central role of place to frame “collective wellbeing as relational to the wellbeing of Country, where the reciprocity of caring is relationally what underpins communities, families and the individual self.”³² With Dharug Ngurra at its centre, the web preferences a Country-centric model, which Rey connects with Bawaka Country research through the centrality of being in reciprocity with Ngurra/Country and the experiential learning in context that gives rise to co-becoming.³³

In alignment with the ideas expressed in Poelina et al. and Bawaka Country, shifting towards embodied, contextual and reciprocal caring-for-place practices provides pathways to for repairing harmful colonial and Western binaries, which that only served to disconnect from people, place and self. Additionally, Rey’s paper sets these Country-centric processes not in some utopian off-grid faraway from distractions nature oasis, but in the very heart of the city in one of the country’s most populated locations, at the site that marks the beginnings of the colonial-settler invasion. In “Changing Places,” Rey mostly writes through the insights gained from working with Macquarie University students to give them opportunities to respectfully engage with a range of Dharug sites, histories of place and

³² Jo Anne Rey, “Changing places: Weaving city learnings into Country futures,” (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2021). 14–15.

³³ Anne Rey, “Changing places: Weaving city learnings into Country futures.”16.

ways of processing their experiences to implement what she calls *goanna walking*. Also developing out of her doctorate thesis, Rey describes goanna walking as a method for navigating between human-centric or dominant Western and colonial approaches and Country-centric ways of being, knowing and doing that attend to the other-than or more-than human. Rey's work seeks to demonstrate both the benefits and the ways it is possible to shift to Country-centric ways of being, knowing and doing in an urban environment as well as within the context of the academic space.

All three concepts—Leanne Simpson's land as pedagogy, Bawaka Country co-becoming and Dr Jo Anne Rey's Dharug web of Interrelatedness—articulate ways of being and relating that arise directly from engaging with and observing place, and that similarly require a return to place to process and integrate the learnings. These are not static concepts that can exist only as theory—they must be put in practice. Looking to the experiences of others like myself who find themselves navigating the complexities of diaspora, I turn to Olivia Nigro's work *Azemmur, let me write you a love letter*, completed between 2020 and 2022. The work includes digital photographs, hand-typed typewriter text and drawings on paper documenting Nigro's work with an ancestral olive tree located in the backyard of their new home in Mparntwe/Alice Springs (fig. 33, p.139).



Figure 33. Olivia Nigro, *Azemmur, let me write you a love letter*, 2020–2022, hand typed typewriter text on paper, drawing on paper and digital photography, dimensions variable. Image: Document Photography

Describing their process and encounters with the olive tree, Nigro writes:

Over the following months, with friends and in devotional solitude, I tended to the tree with love, care and ritual. I sang to the tree, prayed and vocalised, inviting the ancestral tree within to reveal its roots, trunk, branches, leaves, blossoms, fruits. I wrote to and with the tree, burnt leaves as offerings, distilled leaves for medicine, made olive leaf extract to share. I greeted the tree as an ancestor, peered into it as a mirror, listened to it for guidance.³⁴

³⁴ Olivia Nigro, artist statement, *Re-member* exhibition catalogue (Smithfield, NSW: Fairfield City Museum & Gallery, 2022), 43.

Nigro describes the space of their ancestral remembering as a private devotional space. In *Azemmur*, they refer specifically to their paternal lineage and the origins of their paternal surname Nigro, which comes from Cap Nigro in the Northern part of Tunisia on the border with Algeria. Nigro describes their artwork as a “mosaic” documenting the process of cultivating relationship with the olive tree.

5. Quillapí

Rearmando el gran quillapi

In 2011, Charrúa activist and community leader Mónica Michelena published her thesis “Mujeres Charrúas rearmando el gran quillapí de la memoria en Uruguay,” one of the first scholarly works of its kind written by and about Charrúa women in Uruguay.¹ *Rearmando el gran quillapí* could be translated to “re-piecing the cloak” as a *quillapí* in Charrúa language refers to a cloak pieced together from animal hides worn by both men and women, but predominantly crafted by women. The quillapi as an object is not confined to Charrúa culture but exists by other names and styles all across Abya Yala and beyond, including having its counterpart in the practice of Possum-skin and Kangaroo-skin cloaks made by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The process of crafting a quillapi is collaborative. It requires multiple steps and processes, from acquiring and preparing the hides to arranging and stitching them together, after which they are often decorated with intricate painted designs. As a practice, the quillapi becomes a powerful metaphor and symbol for the revival of Charrúa ancestral memory, a process of collective repair and reconstruction of Charrúa identity led by women. Although published over twelve years ago, Michelena’s thesis continues to be widely cited and referenced as it remains one of the few examples of Charrúa authored research documenting Charrúa ancestral practices like the quillapí, alongside Charrúa rituals such as

¹ Mónica Michelena Díaz, “Mujeres Charrúas rearmando el gran quillapí de la memoria en Uruguay” (PhD thesis, Centro de Investigaciones y Estudios Superiores en Antropología Social, 2011).

presenting newborn babies to the moon, retaining the newborn's umbilical stub and the role of *recorrer el monte* (walks along hills and waterways) as part of memory work.

In May–June 2023, as part of a digital artist residency hosted by Urban Theatre Projects (Utp) titled “For the Circular Movement of Knowledge,” I had the opportunity to be in conversation over a number of sessions with Mónica Michelena. The digital residency comprised several one-on-one conversations between Monica and me, conducted over video calls and messages were spread over a number of weeks, culminating in a final conversation recorded and published by Utp on 12 July 2023.² The digital residency project was preceded by a chance encounter between Mónica and my artwork on the occasion of showing my artwork in Uruguay for the first time as part of *Ellas Ancestras* in February 2023 at CAMPO, Garzon.³ Up until that point Mónica and I knew of each other through social media. The *Ellas* exhibition was a moment of synchronicity as I was not aware that Mónica had been invited by curator Mamu Camacho to open the exhibition, and Mónica knew I was an artist but had never seen my work in the flesh. One of the works on show was *Family Portrait* (fig. 32), an early appliqué textile work completed in the same year Mónica completed her thesis. *Family Portrait* takes the form of a patchwork family tree, making references to ancestors known and unknown. Although the work was hung on the wall for exhibition purposes, it also references a quillapí (see fig. 34 and 35, p.143).

² “For the circular movement of knowledge—Paula do Prado and Mónica Michelena,” Utp, 12–19 July 2023, <https://utp.org.au/event/paula-do-prado-monica-michelena>.

³ *Ellas Ancestras 4.0* was part of the yearly Campo Garzon Art Festival in Garzon, Jose Ignacio, Uruguay, an initiative led by Heidi Lender. The 2023 edition was curated by Mamu Camacho see <https://www.jbcdepiriapolis.com.uy/2023/02/municipio-de-garzon-apoya-ellas-40.html>



Figure 34. Paula do Prado, *Family Portrait*, 2012, fabric applique, patchwork, acrylic, Posca and beading on cotton fabric



Figure 35. Portrait of the artist wearing *Family Portrait* wrapped around her shoulders and body like a quillapi. Photo: Jamie James Photography 2020

Multiple topics and themes arose from the Utp digital residency with Mónica Michelena, however a common thread in our discussion was the connections between territorio (land), oyendau (memory) and *tejido* (weaving). As a result of our series of conversations, and the final recorded session, I felt acknowledged by a respected person in the Charrúa community and also importantly, I felt validated in undertaking practice-led research anchored in Lajau. It was a healing conversation that left me with a renewed a sense of commitment to continue this work of *rearmando el quillapí*, on an individual and collective level. The quillapí, which can also be *un tejido palabra* or *un tejido territorio*, remains an enduring symbol of Charrúa cultural revival because as a practice, to *rearmar el quillapí* makes possible a space of collective repair to surface and recover Charrúa oyendau.

It is thanks to the sustained collective hard work of Charrúa community organisations, leaders and activists over many years that I am in a position to take up this work and make what I hope will be a useful contribution to a growing body of literature by *ukai oyendau*: Charrúa women who care for Charrúa memory. I am also fortunate to be in a position to learn from and live on the lands of one of the oldest living cultures in the world. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander literature is literally written into the land and the rich variety of Indigenous literary, poetic, creative and scholarly sources readily accessible today is a testament to the activism, strength, vulnerability, resistance, care, generosity, deep-continuing knowledge and intellectual and spiritual rigour of the Aboriginal people of this land. The specific context for this research is important not just because of the role of territorio in facilitating remembering but the potential for divergent imaginings of *sur-sur*

(south–south) ways of relating and exchanging beyond narratives of economic development and resource extraction.⁴

Articulating the quillapí as both a practice and a space for recovery and repair assumes that there are latent memories and knowledges that are stored and retrievable. However, the act of re-membering for me is not an engagement so much with the past but a remembering-forwards. It is act of resistance against narratives of erasure and extinction. Resonant themes are embedded within the work of artist and designer Maree Clarke, who is well known for her work in reclaiming and reviving south-east Australian Aboriginal art and cultural practices such as possum-skin cloak making. Working with her family and community as well as undertaking depth research to study historical cloaks and objects held in various museum collections, many of the practices that Clarke works with were thought lost as a result of colonisation. Reflecting on Clarke’s extensive practice, author and curator Kimberley Moulton writes,

It is, however, a myth that cultural practice was “lost.” The colonial project caused a disruption in the multiverse of First People’s time, our old ways of making and being were waiting to be regenerated when it was safe and the right moment to do so. They were not asleep or forgotten, but holding still for when the descendants could come back to them and listen deeply.⁵

⁴ For an insightful volume that rethinks Australian and Latin American connections through a range of interdisciplinary scholarly works see Fernanda Peñaloza and Sarah Walsh, *Mapping South-South Connections Australia and Latin America*, 1st 2019. ed., Studies of the Americas, (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019). Seeking to address the generalised disinterest in Latin American studies within the Australian academy, the book explores contemporary cultural, historical and geopolitical south–south connections in an attempt to understand why Australia and Latin America are perceived as disconnected from each other despite sharing similar histories of settler colonialism, Indigenous dispossession and multiculturalism, amongst other parallels.

⁵ Kimberley Moulton, “Restoring the Spirit of the Possum-Skin Cloak,” pp.61-79 in *Maree Clarke: Ancestral Memory*, ed. Myles Russell-Cook (Melbourne: Council of Trustees of the National Gallery of Victoria, 2021), 64.

Inspired by author Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Moulton frames practices of reclamation and revival as practices whose purpose is a “restoration of spirit.”⁶ Charrúa cultural practice revival is at a comparatively early stage, however practices and concepts such as the quillapí and cloak making could be a rich common ground for future Charrúa and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander connections.⁷ However, one major issue affecting Charrúa cultural practice revival is access. Many Charrúa artifacts and objects including rare intact examples of quillapi are held in museums and private collections outside of Uruguay (figs.36 and 37, p.147). The importance of having access to these cultural significant objects and efforts to have these repatriated to their traditional owners cannot be overstated. As Moulton highlights, “Bearing witness to the belongings made by their Ancestors opened a space for contemporary cloak making that provided cultural continuity and connection for First Peoples.”⁸ I hope that my research goes some way to affirming the importance and timeliness in surfacing south–south First Nations connections in service of joint resistance, reclamation, liberation and justice.

⁶ Moulton, 64.

⁷ See for example the project *Wrapped in Culture*, which brought together ten Indigenous artists from Australia and Canada for a three-week art collaboration to create a buffalo robe and a possum skin cloak: <https://wrappedinculture.ca>.

⁸ Moulton, “Restoring the Spirit of the Possum-Skin Cloak,” 65.



Figure 36. Cloak made of horse's skin, with dark brown hair on one side, the smooth side carrying painted patterns in red, yellow, blue and black enclosed in ornamental border, Argentina, nineteenth century. © The Trustees of the British Museum



Figure 37. Cloak (detail) made of horse's skin, with dark brown hair on one side, the smooth side carrying painted patterns in red, yellow, blue and black enclosed in ornamental border, Argentina, nineteenth century. © The Trustees of the British Museum

Weaving is a broad term that can hold different meanings and bring up a range of visual associations in different contexts. Weaving can encompass the making of cloth via warp and weft on looms, or refer to various forms of tapestry weaving, knitting, crochet, nalbinding, basket weaving, and associated practices of making thread or cordage through string making, or the use of spindles and spinning wheels. There exists a myriad of traditional and contemporary examples of weaving practices globally. I identify as a *tejedora* (weaver) working predominantly with crochet and coiling, using a variety of yarns, both acrylic and natural fibres including my own hair. My crochet work is best described as free-form crochet, whereby I do not sketch, plan or follow a template to create my work but rather create organic forms in an intuitive way. I tend to create small- to medium-sized woven pieces that are then joined to create much larger woven compositions. The presence of multiple non-woven sections, what are often perceived of as holes or “negative spaces” within the work, are just as important as the ‘filled’ sections.¹⁰ Academic and anthropologist Grey Gundaker, who specialises in visual and material knowledge systems, notes that it is important not to apply Western visual conventions of negative space as empty space as the reverse can be true, where necessarily it is the space in between the lines where the “work” is.¹¹

⁹ *Wyrd*, from *weorðung*, “honouring and showing reverence,” also from *wert*, “turning, being, becoming.” See Max Dashu, *Witches and pagans: women in European folk religion, 700-1100*, First edition. ed., vol. VII, Secret history of the witches, (Richmond, CA: Velede Press, 2016). 24–27.

¹⁰ The concept of negative space or a void is very Western; for me it is not empty space but a space full of possibility. The open sections are just as important as the filled/woven sections. Life is everywhere; there is never nothing even if we can’t see it, and even the air we breathe is full of organisms, so the Western scientific concept of space as a void or vacuum is false as there is no “empty” space. See Teresa Washington, *The Architects of Existence: Àjé in Yoruba Cosmology, Ontology, and Orature* (Orifin, Ilé Àjé: Qya's Tornado, 2014), 3.

¹¹ Grey Gundaker, “The Kongo Cosmogram in Historical Archaeology and the Moral Compass of Dave the Potter,” *Historical Archaeology* 45, no. 2 (2011): 180.

The three main exhibition works, *Birth of Sucuri*, *Quarai* and *Barriga Negra* are woven on repurposed ready-made steel wedding arches. Although originally designed to create a threshold or passage to walk through, the weaving stretches all across the internal surface area making the passage physically impassable. The viewer is, however, encouraged to walk around the works, which can be observed from close proximity. At a height of nearly 2.5 metres, each gateway has a commanding presence on scale alone. Structurally and visually, they reference portals akin to the biblical saying from Matthew about the eye of the needle,¹² or the Mesopotamian story of Inanna/Ishtar's journey through to the underworld to meet her sister Ereshkigal.¹³ Each of these stories allude to having to give up personal and/or material effects to gain access or passage through a threshold. There are also symbolic references to structures such as Akapana and Pumapunku, the Andean "Gateway of the Sun," and associations with customs such as carrying the bride over the threshold that has evolved and continues to live in popular folklore since the time of the Roman Empire. Rich in symbolism, the threshold or gateway can represent multiple transformations, a point of no return or a journey into the unknown, whether taken willingly, by necessity or by force.

El tejido (weaving) in the context of the research project (and in my broader practice) is a space where I can engage with the intersections of all my lineages and express in form, colour, texture and thread the ancestral and spiritual connections facilitated by place. Each of the gateways are multilayered, representative of my own inner emotional

¹² Mathew 19:23–24: "Then Jesus said to His disciples, 'Assuredly, I say to you that it is hard for a rich man to enter the kingdom of heaven. And again, I say to you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God.'"

¹³ As one of the oldest goddesses in history, there are multiple ancient and historical sources and versions of the Inanna/Ishtar myths. For one of these versions that is readily accessible see Diane Wolkstein and Samuel Noah Kramer, *Inanna, queen of heaven and earth : her stories and hymns from Sumer*, 1st ed. (New York: Harper & Row, 1983).

and imaginal landscape where ancestral threads and accumulated knowledges intertwine to connect with broader shared histories, stories, sites and practices embedded in the lands and mediated by the waterways of my ancestors across Abya Yala, West Africa, Portugal, Spain, Canary Islands and parts of Europe. Despite being anchored in surfacing personal ancestral connections, the gateways can also open up a space for individual and collective reimagining, particularly for those who are also navigating diaspora or feeling untethered from the communal web. The gateways become relational drawings, webs or maps, symbolic inner/outer cartographies of alternate possibilities in a fluid visual timescape. In the spirit of *rearmando el quillapi*, the gateways are also an attempt at repair and recovery through the language of thread.

Mapuche poet, artist and author Daniela Catrileo writes in Mapudungun (a language spoken in south-central Chile and west-central Argentina by the Mapuche people, which literally translates to “the language of the land”), drawing connection between *witral* (weaving) and *wirin* (writing). Wirin, she says is like a thread in the weaving, like the lines left behind when the soil is ploughed to plant seeds.¹⁴ Catrileo writes in the intersections between the political and the creative to both recover and protect her language:

We carry traces of blood stamped
upon gold and brown skin

A painting that sketches
the map of the stars

¹⁴ Authors personal notes taken as part of SURCLA and AILASA Seminar: Witral Memory, Collectivism and Representation of the Mapuche, with renowned poet Daniela Catrileo, 3 December 2021.

—that is our language—

Not a word that imitates

but a figure that's traced.¹⁵

Tejido as texto (weaving as text) can also offer the possibility of a shared language. One contemporary art example is *The Soils Project*, shown at TarraWarra Museum in August–November 2023.¹⁶ *The Soils Project* brought together thirteen practitioners and collectives from Australia, the Netherlands and Indonesia to explore soil as both metaphor and material. The idea for the project developed and expanded through conversations with the Director of TarraWarra Museum, Victoria Lynn, together with a group of advisors as well as participating artists and practitioners. One particular conversation took the form of a workshop in which artists-thinkers engaged with the practice of weaving from each of their respective contexts, which included Latin America via Aldo Ramos, Wurundjeri via Brooke Wandin and Adat/Indigenous Indonesian via Yurni Sadariah. In the workshop space, weaving became not only a common language but a way to bypass Western aesthetic language, because, according to Ronaldo Vázquez, “weaving disobeys the system of separation and recovers relationality,” a way to respond to modern notions of experience “based on separation from earth, community, ancestrality, the cosmological and time.”¹⁷

¹⁵ Excerpt of a poem by Daniela Catrileo from her poetry collection *Guerrilla Florida* (War Blooms) 2018, translated from the Spanish by Edith Adams and republished in *New England Review*, Vol.43, No.4 (2022) <https://www.nereview.com/vol-43-no-4-2022/from-guerilla-blooms/>

¹⁶ Exhibited at the TarraWarra Museum of Art in Victoria, 5 August–12 November 2023, <https://www.twma.com.au/exhibitions/the-soils-project/>.

¹⁷ Rolando Vazquez, Charles Esche and Teresa Cos Rebollo, “Decolonial Aesthetics: Weaving each other” in *The Soils Project Essays*, Victoria Lynn (ed), TarraWarra Museum of Art, August 2023, 43

My autotheoretical approach as informed by a sentipensante methodology is situated within a broader continuity of practice in which weaving, is a both a practice and space for expression and reflection. In this sense, weaving has the capacity to create new as well as repair connections through the tactile and the haptic, to challenge and disrupt dominant ways of thinking and doing. In Abya Yala, this approach is currently being led by female African-Latin American artists who, although highly productive and active, have only within the last few years gained notice by the mainstream contemporary art world and were almost invisible until very recently.¹⁸ These artists include Sonia Gomes, born in Caetanópolis in 1948, who currently shows with PACE Gallery (fig.38, p.153) and recently had a major new work included in the 60th Venice Biennale.¹⁹ Another is Afro-Brazilian artist Rosana Paulino, born in São Paulo in 1967, whose work was included in the Biennale of Sydney 'NIRIN' edition curated by Brook Garru Andrew (fig.39, p.154). Paulino is currently represented by Mendes Wood DM.²⁰ Yet another example is Lídia Lisboa, born in 1970 in Guaíra, Brazil, who works predominantly with textiles and crochet to create installations, sculptures and performances. Lisboa's artist biography reveals she became a mother at the age of thirteen and comes from a large family of mostly women. She utilises crochet and fabric remnants to create the warp and weft structures that can be seen in her work *Casulos* (Cocoons). Her work also incorporates performance whereby the artist puts on the cocoon, which covers almost her entire body, and appears to interact with nature mimicking the movements of a caterpillar (figs.40 and 41, p.155).²¹ Gomes, Paulino and Lisboa, amongst

¹⁸ Andrea Giunta, "Afro-Brazilian Artists in the Transition between Two Centuries," *Aware: Archives of Women Artists Research & Exhibitions*, 2021, 1–7, <http://hdl.handle.net/11336/196820>.

¹⁹ See Sonia Gomes's gallery profile: <https://www.pacegallery.com/artists/sonia-gomes/>.

²⁰ See Rosana Paulino's gallery profile: <https://mendeswooddm.com/pt/artists/35-rosana-paulino/>.

²¹ Lídia Lisboa, *Casulo*, exhibition catalogue, curated by Marco Antonio Teobaldo, Galeria Pretos Novos, Rio de Janeiro, 19 August–17 October 2015, https://issuu.com/quimera6/docs/casulo_folder.

others, are considered as being at the forefront of contemporary art, challenging definitions and assumptions about Afro-Brazilian and Afro-diasporic art.²²



Figure 38. Sonia Gomes, *Memória*, 2004, stitching, knots, different fabrics, laces and fragments, 140 x 270 cm, photography by Bruno Leão © Sonia Gomes, courtesy Mendes Wood DM and the artist

²² Igor Simões, a biography of Lídia Lisboa produced as part of “The Origin of Others” research programme, in partnership with the Clark Art Institute and Archives of Women Artists, Research and Exhibitions, 2022, <https://awarewomenartists.com/en/artiste/lidia-lisboa/>.



Figure 39. *Rosana Paulino, from the Jatobá series, 2019, watercolour and graphite on paper, 65 x 50 cm*



Figure 40. Lídia Lisboa, from the series *Casulos*, 2015, crocheted remnants, 220 x 80 cm



Figure 41. Lídia Lisboa, from the series *Casulos*, 2015, crocheted remnants, 220 x 80 cm

Quaraí

Quaraí (fig. 42, p.158) is titled after the *rio* (river) of the same name, one of the various rivers that form part of a vast network of waterways connecting Uruguay, Argentina and Brazil. Rio Quaraí is located to north of the Brazil–Uruguay border, it is also the name of a town in Brazil established along the rivers’ edge. In Uruguay the river is known as Rio Cuareim. My paternal ancestry is embedded within and both sides of the river, where relatives and extended family continue to reside, predominantly in Artigas. In October 2023, I was able to travel to Artigas and spent several days by the river. Up until that point I had relied on my father’s living memories of the river including tales of fishing, his aunt and uncle’s *quinta* (small plot) nearby and that in times of drought the water level was low enough to cross the river on foot. There are also fragments of a story my paternal grandmother told me of a cousin who was cursed and drowned in the same river he had known his whole life. These fragments and stories often resurface in my work. For example, *The Flood* (2019) reflects on the river’s edge as boundary and the power of the river to contract or expand (major flooding events are common in Artigas).

In contrast to *Birth of Sucuri*, which incorporated a number of artworks made in prior years, *Quaraí* features predominantly new work. These include various recognisable forms including turtles, lizards, snakes and chameleons, that all seemingly float, suspended in a swirling waterscape. In contrast to the majority of my work, the colours are mostly muted natural tones as a result of combining plant-dyed wool and cotton, together with my own eco-dyed yarn using yerba maté and eucalyptus leaves.²³ The woven elements—both animal

²³ Yerba mate (*Ilex paraguariensis*) is a plant native to Paraguay and surrounding regions and is used to make a green tea like infusion. The practice of drinking maté originates with the Tupi-Guarani people, however it is common within multiple Indigenous groups and communities. Since colonial times although initially banned by Jesuit Priests, yerba maté is a valuable crop as it is widely consumed across many countries in Abya Yala.

and organic—represent multilayered narratives informed by the *hicotea* riverine thinking explored earlier in chapter 3, as well as my ongoing conversations with the African Bantu Kongo ancestors that found themselves reliant on the river and the Charrúa, Arachán and Guaraní ancestors who had always been there. *Quaraí* has been exhibited in two group shows. The first, in October 2022, was at Backspace Gallery, run by the Sydney College of the Arts Student Society, together with three other student peers with whom I shared my on-campus studio space. The second showing was in January 2023 for *Reading into things* at Pari, an artist-run gallery space in Parramatta, Dharug Country. It was through the experience of showing the work in Parramatta that I began to cultivate relationship with Parramatta Park and the River as referenced in appendix 1.

In the process of working on *Quaraí*, a storyline between the animal characters (e.g., the chameleon and the lizard) began to emerge, linking the imagery to a Bantu Kongo story from West Africa, with slightly different versions told in Malawi, Mozambique and Tanzania. The different versions have roughly the same plot sequence, but the animal protagonists change depending on where it is told. Oftentimes referred to as the story of the origin of death, it is said that the Creator wanted to send people an important message, and called upon chameleon to go and tell them that after death they will return to life. Unbeknownst to chameleon, lizard lay hidden and had overheard. Unfortunately, lizard had misunderstood the Creator's message. Lizard was much quicker than chameleon (who had gotten distracted along the way) and reached the people first to tell them that the Creator said that after death there is no return. The people thought the message lizard had delivered was nothing surprising and just a matter of fact. When at last the chameleon arrived and delivered the Creator's message that after death they will return to life, the people laughed and made fun

of chameleon saying that they already knew they were all going to die eventually, and that death is the end of everything.²⁴



Figure 42. Paula do Prado, *Quarai*, 2022, mixed media fibre on steel frame, 240 x 180 x 50 cm, freestanding, installation view, Pari ARI. Photo: Document Photography

It is a story reminiscent of what we might expect from Aesop's Fables, an entertaining and thought-provoking tale with an ethical or moral undertone. Many of these myths and fables have their origin in oral histories, in stories that are told and retold, changing over time in the retelling to suit the social and cultural context. This is a layered topic all on its own as we consider whether we can know the true origins of any such story, who has subsequently put it to paper or amended it and for what purpose. I think of *Quarai*

²⁴ Adapted from Alice Werner, "Where Man Came From, and How Death Came," in *Myths and Legends of the Bantu* (London: George C. Harrap and Co., 1933), 28–39, <https://sacred-texts.com/afr/mlb/mlb04.htm>. There are multiple versions of the same story including children's book adaptations.

in terms of a woven storyboard version of the Bantu myth except with two chameleons and two lizards, doubling the number of messengers and therefore the potential for mixed messages. I have come to associate the chameleon and the lizard with my African ancestry and the *karumbé* (turtles) with my South American heritage. The turtles are very much representative of another fable archetype, the slow, wise tortoise, a resilient figure of the river, existing between water and land with the ability to adapt to extremes in conditions. The lizard is a trickster archetype, a character common in many stories all over the world and represented by various animals and divine or mythical figures. The weaving itself is also a character playing a role. Anansi or spider, also a trickster, appears in many African and African diaspora stories.²⁵ Anansi in my imagining is represented by web alone, whereby the web itself takes on a trickster personality and agency within the narrative. Gloria Anzaldúa wrote of the imaginal animal as a psychic inner figure within the realm of the unconscious “This real/imaginal animal initiates me into these worlds via its perspective and language.”²⁶

The multiple overlapping and intersecting narratives within *Quarai*—not all of which are defined and immediately legible, although they might be at future date—open up a space of possibility where both the ‘correct’ and ‘incorrect’ messages along with their incongruent meanings are meant to be delivered. The process of creating *Quarai* in 2022 culminated in my ability a year later to travel to and connect with the river Quarai in 2023. This would be a monumental shift from an autotheoretical perspective – my sentipensante relationships with the waterways on Gadigal and Dharug Country together with cementing a connection with Burramatta river had facilitated re-connection with my ancestral river.

²⁵ See for example Emily Zobel Marshall, *The myth of Anansi, the trickster spider*, TED-Ed, January 2022 https://www.ted.com/talks/emily_zobel_marshall_the_myth_of_anansi_the_trickster_spider?utm_campaign=tedspread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare

²⁶ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 27.

Detít (Part 3)



Figure 43. Paula do Prado, *Barriga Negra-Coral Negro* 2024 pen drawing of work in progress

Jacaranda

Jacaranda goes by many names: yacaranda (Tupi), vete n'dae (Chana), ka'aro, ka'i, karoba and jepopete (Guaraní). In his Chana dictionary, Jaime Blas, not only wrote the Chana word for Jacaranda as *vete n'dae* but included information on its use.¹ Indigenous people of Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay would make tea from the green leaves of the Jacaranda, an antibacterial wash for wounds against infection or a paste from the bark and used the leaves as a contraceptive that both man and woman needed to take. Jacaranda wood is used to make fine furniture and musical flutes. Jacarandas are self-seeding as the seeds are well protected by its seed pods, which start off green in colour and later darken and split open to fall on the ground dispersing seeds.

Although many mistake the Jacaranda (*Jacaranda mimosifolia*) as a native Australian tree, it is an introduced species native to Brazil as well as parts of Uruguay and Argentina. It is believed to have been introduced to Australia in the late 1800s at a popular time for British and European “plant hunters,” and despite the Jacaranda’s obvious beauty when in collective full bloom announcing warmer weather, it is nonetheless a reminder of the continued workings of the colonial project and its imagination.² Over the last 150 years or so Jacarandas have been planted in great numbers all around Australia, particularly in cities, including Sydney and Brisbane, with many councils planning to plant additional Jacaranda trees. Such is the status of the Jacaranda in Australia that you can even attend the Grafton Jacaranda Festival that will celebrate its 90th year in October 2024. Conversely, in South Africa, the Jacaranda has been listed as an invasive weed and restrictions placed on further

¹ Jaime Omar W Blas and J. Pedro Viegas Barros, *La Lengua Chaná: Patrimonio de Entre Ríos* (Paraná: Direccion Editorial de Entre Ríos, 2013). See page 100 for vete n'dae/jacaranda translation and description.

² See, for example, John Godfrey, “A Brief History of British Plant Hunters,” Australian Rhododendron Society, March 2017, <https://rhododendron.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/A-Brief-History-of-the-British-Plant-Hunters-v2-sml.pdf>.

plantings. Meanwhile in Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay, there are urban cities with Jacaranda-lined avenues but nothing like what we see in Australia. In fact, in its native habitat Jacarandas are classified “at high risk of unnatural (human-caused) extinction,”³ and along with other native tree species are being cleared to make way for eucalyptus plantations.⁴

The very campus on which I am completing this research project is famous for its Jacaranda that lives in the quadrangle. I completed my first degree in the company of the original Jacaranda visiting it almost daily as I’d go up the quad steps to philosophy class, and now as I complete this latest degree, I occasionally pass by the original Jacaranda’s clone, a young tree, still to grow into the presence that was its predecessor. I grew up with Jacarandas in Uruguay, when I go to visit my *tia* (aunt) in Montevideo, I can still see the Jacarandas across the road in front of the nice houses on the ‘good’ side of Centenario Avenue from her apartment window. When my grandparents visited Australia for the first time, we took photos of Tata Fermin and Abuela Elsa underneath the Jacaranda tree overlooking the back laneway to the first place we lived in after we migrated. Jacarandas signpost many personal life memories but were also instrumental in my commencing this research project.

In 2020 I was reacquainted with the Jacarandas at Meroogal in Nowra. I had been to this site about ten years prior as part of a university class excursion to Meroogal, a historic house, often referred to as the Women’s House. Meroogal was built in 1880 and is part of the Museums of History NSW, and houses the collected belongings of four generations of

³ *Jacaranda mimosifolia* is listed as vulnerable on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as of 2019: <https://www.iucnredlist.org/species/32027/68135641>.

⁴ See for example “Uruguay: The Impact of Industrial Tree Plantations on the Water Crisis,” World Rainforest Movement, 25 October 2023, <https://www.wrm.org.uy/bulletin-articles/uruguay-the-impact-of-industrial-tree-plantations-on-the-water-crisis>.

colonial women. On both my first and second visit ten years later, I did not like to be in the house and much preferred being outside in the garden with the Jacarandas. It seemed to me that Meroogal, like many other regional museums, was upholding and celebrating a singular colonial narrative even though this is slowly and visibly changing. The first Jacaranda at Meroogal was planted in 1910 and is thought to come from seeds of the very first Jacarandas brought to Australia.⁵ I had been commissioned by the Historic House Trust (who at that time managed the property) to develop a self-led activity for visitors to Meroogal, which I named “Reconnections and offerings.”⁶ It comprised a small fibre materials kit and a leaflet that encouraged engagement with the Jacarandas through use of natural materials onsite and simple non-tool weaving techniques. As part of my artist statement, I wrote:

As the focal point, the [Jacaranda] trees encourage an ongoing reflection on what is above (what is visible, what we think we know) and what is below (what is hidden, what has been forgotten or silenced) and how we can come to be in right-relationship with each other, those who came before us and the land we live on.⁷

⁵ See <https://mhns.wa.gov.au/stories/general/dream-tree-jacaranda-sydney-icon/>.

⁶ See Paula do Prado, “Re-connections & Offerings/Meroogal Artist Statement,” <http://www.pauladoprado.net/meroogal-2020.html#/>.

⁷ Do Prado, “Re-connections & Offerings/Meroogal Artist Statement.”

Three of Cutlass x Initiation

The Three of Cutlass (The Three of Swords) from the Akamara Tarot speaks of emotional pain and upheaval that can come from endings, conflict or loss. The artwork for the card shows a slender body in a balletic mid-leap with their back arched backwards, with three swords protruding from their exposed chest. It advises not to try and avoid pain but to delve deeper into feelings that are coming up, as having a better understanding of the source of the pain (which can be internal or external) and what it has to teach you is essential to working through it. The Rune for Initiation, Perth, is associated with change in connection with the Unknowable, the hidden and unexpected. Initiation is concerned with cycles and disciplined inner work to release all expectations of outcomes or how things might unfold. This rune signals an opportunity for a complete renewal of the spirit through focussing on the present moment where self-transformation is possible, yet “what is achieved is not easily or readily shared. After all, becoming whole—the means of it—is a profound secret.”⁸



Figure 44. Three of Cutlass, Akamara tarot x Initiation Rune

⁸ Ralph H. Blum, *The Book of Runes* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2008), 103.

6. Kimpasi

Return as self-initiation

Renowned West African scholar Malidoma Patrice Somé contextualised initiation within a process of negotiating return to his ancestral community. In his autobiography, *Of Water and the Spirit: Ritual, Magic and Initiation in the Life of an African Shaman* (1994), Somé shares his personal story of return to his West African Dagara community after a long absence as a result of having been taken away and raised from a young age by Jesuit priests. Having escaped the Jesuit school, Somé makes his way back to his Dagara community and petitions the Dagara elders to undergo a traditional initiation process as part of his return.¹ In Somé's case, he is able to return to his ancestral community and village, where despite colonisation by the French, there remained elders in the village with the authority and knowledge that made it possible for Somé to undertake the initiation ritual and reinstate his place and role within the community.

Somé subsequently became a respected academic, author, diviner and healer, who towards the later years of his life travelled extensively within the United States to lead and facilitate rituals and initiations based on Dagara teachings. The practice of ritual and the process of initiation for Somé was also closely linked to understandings of life cycles, particularly death and grief, so that "the loss of initiation also inspires the loss of one's ability to grieve regularly in a community context and creates a condition that traps the

¹ Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Of water and the spirit : ritual, magic, and initiation in the life of an African shaman* (New York: Putnam, 1994).

person in a meaningless and wayward life pattern.”² In this chapter, I elaborate on the connection between re-membering and return, situating this practice-led PhD process as a form of self-initiation.

In contrast with traditional and some contemporary concepts of the myth of diasporic return, my practice-led research has situated return as a practice of re-membering, a return to self and a reorienting of the ways I relate to place whether I am positioned as Indigenous, settler or both.³ Without negating the importance of physically returning to place to “revitalize those connections,” the reality is that return or undergoing the ritual of initiation in a traditional sense is, for multiple reasons, not currently available to me.⁴ Re-membering my Charrúa roots on unceded land, at this point in time, has resulted in weaving new narratives with and through place, in relationship to my own cuerpo-territorio-espiritu. The three gateways created during this practice-led research alongside river skipping and Lajau is my universe, seek to document and surface new interconnected and woven narratives that make space for alternative possibilities and ways thinking about belonging and return. In chapter 2 of this thesis, I discussed Gloria Anzaldúa’s seven stages of *conocimiento* alongside Pōkā Laenui’s five phases of decolonisation. The resultant outcome for these two processes are expressed in terms of transformation and activism. In Anzaldúa’s case, she termed this *spiritual activism*, a combination of both the inner spiritual

² Malidoma Patrice Somé, *Ritual : power, healing, and community*, Echoes of the ancestors, (Portland, Or: Swan/Raven & Co., 1993). 112.

³ *The Myth of Return* was written by Muhammad Anwar in 1979 and there has been extensive scholarly literature on the subject of the myth of return for diasporic peoples in particular. More recent scholarship has expanded to acknowledge that forms of return are highly variable, unpredictable and not unidirectional, so that return may comprise a regular practice of coming and going or a series of returns. See, for example, the recent 2024 volume that looks at global migration through the concept of return:, ed. A. Boehm Deborah and H. Rogozen-Soltar Mikaela, *States of Return*, (New York, USA: New York University Press, 2024). <https://doi.org/10.18574/nyu/9781479823376.001.0001>.

⁴ Dr Lynette Riley, Deep Listening podcast launch, panel talk, Chau Chak Wing Museum, University of Sydney, 28 March 2023.

work as well as external action or activism—speaking and showing up. In examining Anzaldúa's concept of spiritual activism, author and academic Christopher Tirres notes that the important points regarding Anzaldúa's understanding of spirituality and the journey through the seven stages is that they should lead to positive changes in a person's life, that what is experienced during the journey connects the person's struggles to the challenges facing all life on earth, so that the path to *conocimiento* is reached and expressed by a broad spectrum of creative acts.⁵

To be acknowledged by the world, and to find ourselves in continuing communicative exchange with it, lifts our lives to a new level of meaning, one undreamt of by those oblivious of this possibility.

—Poelina et al, *Feeling and Hearing Country*⁶

The complexities of cultural reclamation as a diasporic person, Charrúa self-identification and the ongoing impacts of colonial violence that maintain cultures of silence and denial within families, amongst many other reasons, has led me to working with the more-than human and the memory in the land. Timbó, Ceiba, Lajau and Jacaranda have been and continue to be my placestors and guides in this winding and looping canoe ride. Through river skipping I've attempted to outline that the historical cultural and social contexts of these sites, including the human and the more-than-human stories of these places, are what have held significance in my re-membling. At the core of this process has been the realisation *que tenia que hacerme cargo* (I had to take responsibility) for the

⁵ Christopher D. Tirres, "Spiritual Activism and Praxis: Gloria Anzaldúa's Mature Spirituality," *Pluralist (Champaign, Ill.)* 14, no. 1 (2019), <https://doi.org/10.5406/pluralist.14.1.0119>.

⁶ Poelina et al., "Feeling and Hearing Country as Research Method." 1490.

territorio que llevo dentro, the DNA memory in my blood and bones, that houses the unhealed wound of my ancestral lineages being violently and forcibly uprooted from my/our ancestral lands, an experience of a wounding that didn't occur just once but that became a repeat ancestral pattern. Taking responsibility for that wounding is inextricably linked to reckoning with my position as a migrant coloniser. It represents the inner work of self-transformation as part of engaging in decoloniality and re-indigenisation: a process not just of outward action but an ongoing practice of untangling white guilt from my brown body to reveal the possibilities that exist beyond a cycle of projecting exclusion and shame, of not enough-ness and un-rootedness.

But due to the complexities of colonization and displacement, I am learning and unlearning as I go, sometimes publicly, and perhaps even with great humiliation and naïveté.

—Shannon Webb-Campbell, *I Am a Body of Land*⁷

This practice-led research and the PhD process for me represents a form of self-initiation, a ritual process that I have named from the beginning as *el pozo*. The practical reality and one of the most significant personal insights as a result of this journey has been that I cannot hope to do this work quietly, hidden away so that others may not see my mistakes and failings to instead emerge at some future time fully healed and decolonised. Throughout my journey, Bayo Akomolafe's pertinent question, "What if the way we respond to our problems is part of the problem?" keeps me in check.⁸ My fear of exposure, rejection and

⁷ Shannon Webb-Campbell, *I Am a Body of Land* (Toronto: Book*hug Press, 2019), 1.

⁸ Bayo Akomolafe, "Offerings & Journeys," Bayo Akomolafe website, accessed 10 September 2024, <https://www.bayoakomolafe.net/offerings#chapter-1-1>.

even ridicule has at times kept me stuck, oscillating between self-censorship and performative displays to deflect and distract. To counter this, the medicine of Jacaranda has led me to the importance of building networks of accountability. Reclamation as collective work requires accountability so that communal remembering and dreaming does not simply contort itself to fit within existing colonial structures and thus only serve to replicate colonial systems. Elaborating on her concept of *border art* in relation to Chicana/Latin artists, Gloria Anzaldúa acknowledges that “though Chicanas are aware that we aren’t Indian” ‘and don’t live in a Native American culture, and though our roots are indigenous, we often do misappropriate and collude with the Anglos’ forms of misappropriation.”⁹ My concern has also been to avoid transplanting or *sobreponer* (imposing) my ancestral worldview onto a sovereign land that is already spiritually inscribed and under the continuous care and custodianship of the First Nations people of this place.

*Acacia wonders how much Charrúa and African blood has been spilt on their land.
Blood forced by death, its gore from war. Blood whipped by worth, its chore from law.
Blood pushed by birth, its lore from awe. Its history running through their veins. Its
story tainting across their plains, she thinks and takes pride in her lyricism.*

—Natalia Figueroa, “Back to the Red Earth”¹⁰

I am fortunate to include within my network of accountability writer Natalia Figueroa Barroso, a fellow Uruguayan with African, Charrúa and Iberian roots, based on Dharug Country. Figueroa Barroso is a writer with the Sweatshop Literary Movement, who has also

⁹ Anzaldúa, *Light in the Dark/Luz en lo Oscuro*, 53.

¹⁰ Barroso Natalia Figueroa, “Back to the red earth,” *Griffith REVIEW*, no. 80 (2023). 128.

written numerous articles, poetry and short stories published in the likes of the *Griffith Review*, *Overland* and *Puentes Review*. Her work is anchored in familial memories, anecdotes and experiences, which serve as rich starting points for her creative writing work to further explore the intersections of her lineages and address historical and social omissions. The extract of writing above comes from her short story “Back to the Red Earth” (2023), loosely based on her great-grandmother’s real-life story, which serves to disrupt single narratives about Uruguayan national identity.

Fellow current PhD Candidate at the University of Sydney, Victoria Bonilla-Báez, also confronts shared themes and concerns, but from the discipline of anthropology. In 2022 she published her honours thesis, “Stepping into Self Recognition: Dismembering the Self to Heal and Reclaim My Family’s Silenced Indigenous Identity,” and turned as I have, to Gloria Anzaldúa’s concepts of dismemberment and rememberment, specifically the Coyolxauhqui imperative to frame her process.¹¹ Co-creating a network of accountability with fellow *inchalás nomadé*¹² has been a welcome by-product of this doctoral research process.

Academic, Indigenous feminist, author and activist Aileen Moreton-Robinson, a Goenpul woman of the Quandamooka people from Minjerribah in Queensland, asserts that there are distinct differences in how Indigenous women perceive events, objects and themselves, because “Indigenous women perceive the world as organic and populated by spirits, which connect places and people.”¹³ This practice-led research has been an integral part of a process of self-initiation through a return to self, a return to ritual, and a return to land that has radically and irrevocably changed my life for the better. It is important for me

¹¹ Victoria Bonilla-Báez, “Stepping into Self Recognition: Dismembering the Self to Heal and Reclaim My Family’s Silenced Indigenous Identity” (Honours thesis, University of Sydney, 2022).

¹² *Inchalás nomadé*, “diasporic siblings.”

¹³ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' up to the white woman : Aboriginal women and feminism*, Talkin' up to the white woman : indigenous women and feminism, (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2000). 18.

to note that the way this research has developed, the way it has been written and expressed, symbolises an anchoring in a feminine spiritual journey, what Maureen Murdock theorised as the heroine's journey,¹⁴ or what Zulu shaman Credo Mutwa termed engaging with "mother mind."¹⁵ Both concepts encourage balance and integration of the rational, linear and outward (the masculine) and the non-linear, intuitive and inward (feminine).

The title of this section, "Kimpasi," borrows its name from a historical West African healing society widely documented as part of the resistance and response to Portuguese colonisation of the Congo region. Kimpasi were an organised group of healer-diviners (often working in secret to avoid persecution by Christian missionaries), who sought to help and support communities at a time of monumental upheaval and suffering due to violent colonisation and slavery.¹⁶ There are multiple meanings attributed to the word *kimpasi* and, not, surprisingly the root of the word *mpasi* means "suffering" or "place of suffering."¹⁷ In other sources kimpasi is associated with the spiral, with some scholars arguing that the form of the spiral provides the symbolic basis for Bukongo or Kongo religion, which is most commonly recognised as the dikenga or Kongo cosmogram.¹⁸ The structure of the dikenga is seen mirrored in many other cultures in the form of the four-directions cosmogram, the

¹⁴ Maureen Murdock, *The Heroine's Journey: Woman's Quest for Wholeness* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 1990).

¹⁵ *Awakening the Mother Mind* is a short film featuring Credo Mutwa, produced in 2008 by the Global Oneness Project, an initiative of the Kalliopeia Foundation. The short film is available to watch on the Films for Action website: <https://www.filmsforaction.org/watch/awaken-the-mother-mind-powerful-message-from-zulu-healer-credo-mutwa/>.

¹⁶ *Healing Knowledge in Atlantic Africa: Medical Encounters 1500–1850* provides multiple insights into the encounters between African and European healing traditions during the Atlantic Slave Trade. See specifically chapter 3, "Healing (and Harming) Specialists: Plural Medicine in Angola and Kongo," in *Healing Knowledge in Atlantic Africa: Medical Encounters, 1500–1850*, ed. Kalle Kananoja, Global Health Histories (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2021). 43.

¹⁷ J. van Wing, *Études Bakongo*, 2, Religion et magie: 426; and *Le Plus Ancien Dictionnaire Bantu*, (eds) J. van Wing and C. Penders, S. J. Louvain, 1928, 199. Referenced in Ras Michael Brown, *African-Atlantic Cultures and the South Carolina Lowcountry*, 1 ed., Cambridge Studies on the American South, (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2012). 127.

¹⁸ See Kiatezua Lubanzadio Luyaluka, "The Spiral as the Basic Semiotic of the Kongo Religion, the Bukongo," *Journal of black studies* 48, no. 1 (2017), <https://doi.org/10.1177/0021934716678984>.

Gaelic Cross, the Anishinaabe medicine wheel and the Mayan calendar, amongst others.¹⁹ In the next section, I discuss connections between weaving and the cosmogram, including recurring and related symbolic forms in my work that have emerged to represent the intersections of my ancestral lineages.

Spirals and Vees

the first knot, beginning of the spiral:

Life and death, birth and rebirth

—Cecilia Vicuña, "The Origin of Weaving"²⁰

Land is at the centre and the weaving comes first. Throughout this research I have referred to weaving as a space within which to explore and express the intersections of all my lineages as well as relationships with plantcestors, lands and waterways. Although the focus of my research is to call in my Charrúa heritage, what has emerged is a more nuanced understanding of the historical, political, social and cultural reasons for the challenges inherent in making and presenting work from that very position. The ongoing process of reclaiming and re-membering my Charrúa heritage has not necessitated that I put on hold, compartmentalise or even amputate my West African or Iberian lineages. Rather, the process has initiated a significant shift in the ways I orient myself and my work in relation to

¹⁹ For an in-depth discussion on the conceptual framework of the cosmogram and the connections between its formulation and use across various Indigenous knowledge systems, see Rudolph Carl Ryser, Dina Gilio-Whitaker, and Heidi G. Bruce, "Fourth World Theory and Methods of Inquiry," in *Handbook of Research on Theoretical Perspectives on Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Developing Countries*, ed. Patrick Ngulube (Hershey, PA, USA: IGI Global, 2017).

²⁰ Cecilia Vicuña, "The Origin of Weaving," in *Unravelling Words & the Weaving of Water*, trans. Eliot Weinberger and Suzanne Jill Levine (Minnesota: Graywolf Press, 1992), 9–10.

place. With Lajau as my anchor, my work has expanded to hold all my lineages and multiple place relationships in a *kincentric ecology*.

Anthropologist, ethnobotanist and academic Enrique Salmón proposed the concept of kincentric ecology as the closest approximation to the Rarámuri understanding of *iwígara*, a layered concept encompassing the physical and the spiritual, ritual, ceremony, and understandings of the life-death-rebirth cycles and connections between all forms of life as they arise from the traditional lands of the Rarámuri in the eastern Sierra Madres of Chihuahua, Mexico. Following *iwígara*, Salmón defines kincentric ecology as “the manner in which indigenous people view themselves as part of an extended ecological family that shares ancestry and origins. It is an awareness that life in any environment is viable only when humans view the life surrounding them as kin.”²¹ I have come to view my weaving practice as an expression of an emerging kincentric ecological understanding.

Layering different weaving techniques, beadwork, soft sculpture and combining a range of materials, including acrylic, hand-spun and plant-dyed yarns, together with making without templates or without counting stitches, has facilitated a way for me to materially express some of the complex living relationships that guide my practice-led research. My weaving workspace is an inherently *espace metissé* or hybrid space, a metaphor used by Congolese philosopher Valentin-Yves Mudimbe, and subsequently taken up by scholar Donato Fhunsu, who defines it as a “complex, contested, and thus dynamic space existing in constant political, philosophical, historical, geographical, psychological, and sociocultural tension as it constantly seeks to integrate, in the same ‘space-ness,’ the past, the present,

²¹ E. Salmon, "Kincentric Ecology: Indigenous Perceptions of the Human-Nature Relationship," *Ecological applications* 10, no. 5 (2000), [https://doi.org/10.1890/1051-0761\(2000\)010\[1327:KEIPOT\]2.0.CO;2](https://doi.org/10.1890/1051-0761(2000)010[1327:KEIPOT]2.0.CO;2).

and the future of various constituent geographies and cosmologies.”²² The connections between espace metissé and knotting/weaving are exemplified in the work of artists such as Sonia Gomes and Lídia Lisboa, as well as in the work of poet and artist Cecilia Vicuña. Vicuña, who has a long a prolific career, has found wider mainstream recognition later in life. Working extensively at the intersections of weaving, assemblage, poetry and installation, Vicuña often references the quipu, “knot” in Quechua language, what she describes as “a metaphor spun.”²³

The knot, where various strands cross, overlap and otherwise entangle, is a powerful visual representation of the hybrid space. Fhunsu goes on to relate hybrid space to the form of a knot or *zita* in Kikongo, and because it acts “as a dynamic gate or bridge of powers, energies, or forces, a zita can be purposefully and consciously locked, tied (*kukanga*) or unlocked, untied (*kukutula*).”²⁴ The process of working to weave thread, colour and form can therefore also be considered a form of encoding and translating knowledge. In weaving with thread and weaving with word throughout this research project I have layered multiple concepts and created a tangle of metaphors. In the spirit of coming full circle, circling back or endings as beginnings, I return in this and the following sections to discuss symbolic visual markers and recurring motifs shared across the three archways produced as part of this research project. I briefly introduced the dikenga motif whilst discussing *Birth of Sucuri* in Part 1. Here I return to a more in-depth discussion of the dikenga as motif in preparation for ending the thesis with an analysis of the symbolic elements of the third and final archway.

²² Donato Fhunsu, “The Kongo Rule: The Palo Monte Mayombe Wisdom Society (*Reglas de Congo: Palo Monte Mayombe*) A Book by Lydia Cabrera, An English Translation from the Spanish” (PhD diss., University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, 2016), 2, file:///Users/ppttrr/Desktop/Fhunsu_accessible.pdf.

²³ See Billie Jean Isbell and Regina Harrison, “Metaphor Spun: A Conversation with Cecilia Vicuña,” in *The Precarious: The Art and Poetry of Cecilia Vicuña*, ed. M. Catherine de Zegher (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press, 1997), 47–58.

²⁴ Fhunsu, “The Kongo Rule,” 2.

The dikenga or Kongo cosmogram (fig. 45, p.175, top) illustrates the cycle of life—conception, birth, maturity and death (whereupon the process begins again)—with the corresponding four elements and the four positions of the sun. The kalunga line refers to the primordial ocean that divides the physical and spiritual worlds. The dikenga represents a continual process of transformation applicable to both individual and collective cycles, of *vida-muerte-vida* (life-death-life). Emphasis is often placed on its circular form, however Bantu Kongo scholar Dr Kimbwandènde Kia Busenki Fu-Kiau takes great pains to elucidate the importance and sacredness of the V form found within the central axis of the dikenga. Although the symbol of the cross has come to be regarded almost exclusively as a symbol of Christianity, there is evidence that the dikenga and its central cross (which is not always represented with visible intersecting lines) actually pre-dates European contact in the 1400s.²⁵ Fu-Kiau writes that the V form comprises a fundamental form within our natural environment within the structures of trees, flowers, mountains and even our own bodies. A kind of living energy, Fu-Kiau states that “everything is a ‘V’ because the beginning itself, or the big bang, exploded in the form of the ‘V.’ Because it is the bridging ‘wire’ between thinking-matter the human (*mûntu*), and the world of unthinking-matter (the work and source of ‘ungrasped’ ideas and images).”²⁶

The dikenga is a powerful motif whose form can be seen echoed in the very structure of this thesis, the outline of the senti-pensa-haciendo diagram and within my woven work (fig.46, p.175), often multiple times within one work, symbolising cycles within cycles and the confluence of time and storylines. The interconnected ideas and ways of

²⁵ See Robert Farris Thompson, *Flash of the spirit : African and Afro-American art and philosophy*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1983).

²⁶ Kimbwandènde Kia Busenki Fu-Kiau, *African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kongo, Tying the Spiritual Knot, Principles of Life and Living* (Brooklyn, NY: Athelia Henrietta Press, 2001), 130.

thinking embedded within the structures and concepts of the cosmogram with its central axis corresponds closely to the espace metissé in which I find myself working. The space that weaving opens up—the space of el pozo—is also the espace metissé. This hybrid space represents an infinite spiral, a source of creativity and alternative possibilities, as well as the risks and burdens of over-imagination, uncertainty and the unknown. Ultimately, the integrity of work produced in such a space has to be evaluated not just through contextualisation within theory and a broad continuum of practice but in community, in presenting it to a broad audience and facilitating ongoing dialogue and exchange. Although I have had the opportunity to present and discuss elements of this research in the context of gallery exhibitions, workshops, research symposiums and conferences (see appendix 3), there has been limited engagement outside of the art and academic research community. The outcome of this practice-led research is but one of many iterations in what is for me a lifelong project to weave new narratives. By *new* narratives I am referring to the type of cycles and transformations on which the dikenga is based, that is, an understanding that nothing is fixed, that is all transitions and transformations. As Gundaker asserts, “Change, mixture and innovation are givens, not aberrations, however much ‘people without history’ are supposedly locked in a timeless seasonal round, or historians’ accounts fixed in writing create illusions to the contrary.”²⁷

In the sky reflected in the waterways I imagine my ancestors might point out the constellations and exchange stories about the Pleiades star cluster and the Milky Way. Star and cosmos stories are always coming back now, resurfacing as First Nations knowledge and technologies are expanded upon through science. At the time of writing,

²⁷ Grey Gundaker, "The Kongo Cosmogram in Historical Archaeology and the Moral Compass of Dave the Potter," *Historical archaeology* 45, no. 2 (2011), <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF03376840>. 176.

ethnoastronomical, anthropological and archaeological research into the cerritos in Uruguay has shown that their orientation is aligned with the Pleiades to coincide with the winter solstice, affirming pre-Columbian sky knowledge amongst the Charrúa and neighbouring Indigenous groups.²⁸ Furthermore, the Ombú was found to be one of three trees, alongside the Tala (*Celtis tala*) and La Coronilla (*Scutia buxifolia*), to dominate the unique *bosque indigena* (Indigenous forests) of a number of cerrito clusters in the Rocha region.²⁹

Supplementing these fieldwork studies in Uruguay are emerging units of studies and courses, particularly at university level, which specifically address Uruguay's Indigenous heritage, such as Contemporary Indigenous Collective Worldviews, Spiritualities and Ways of Life in Uruguay, a newly formed course convened by the University of the Republic, Uruguay's public university.³⁰ These studies together with future investigations will assist to build a more complete picture of Indigenous Uruguay prior to and after European contact, supporting the Charrúa movement in its ongoing efforts for recognition and, mostly importantly, guiding current and future thinking about biodiversity protections and action on climate change. The woven gateways are a material expression of these real, imagined and potential sites for gathering, feel-thinking and re-memembering. As Fu-Kiau asserts, it is within an understanding of the intersections within our cosmologies that important past, present and future knowledge is held, because "under the Vee's light we dig up into our

²⁸ See for example, Camila, A. Gianotti, César González-García, Nicolás Gazzán, Cristina Cancela-Cereijo, and Moira Sotelo, "Knowledge of the Sky among Indigenous Peoples of the South American Lowlands—First Archaeoastronomical Analyses of Orientations at Mounds in Uruguay," *Land* 12, no. 4, 805 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.3390/land12040805>.

²⁹ See Laura del Puerto et al., "Pre-Columbian Mounds Harbor Distinctive Forest Communities in the Southern Campos of American Pampas," *Human ecology : an interdisciplinary journal* 51, no. 1 (2023), <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10745-023-00389-x>.

³⁰ *Cosmovisiones, espiritualidades y modos de vida colectivos indigenas contemporaneos de Uruguay*, a virtual unit of study, is being offered by the University of the Republic and comprises an interdisciplinary team including Charrúa community members: <https://www.ei.udelar.edu.uy/grupos-financiados/sigla-acronimo/cosmovisiones-indigenas-uruguay>.

past memories. Under the beam of the Vee emerging from the dark matter (*piu*) that makes the creative vision possible, we re-discover lost details in our memory.”³¹

Barriga Negra-Coral Negro

The name of the third woven gateway, Barriga Negra-Coral Negro (Black Belly-Black Coral) (fig.47, p.180) takes its name from a Uruguayan town and my paternal grandmother’s favourite perfume. Barriga Negra is both the name of a town and a creek, arroyo Barriga Negra, in Llavalleja, in south-eastern Uruguay. There are multiple myths surrounding the naming of Barriga Negra. Some say it was because of the high number of Basque migrants that inhabited the area who were known for their work as shepherds of the Barriga Negra goat. Some say Barriga Negra refers to folklore relating the story of a black woman who lived in the area who gave birth to many children, or to a black man that was found on the road, face up, having died of a stomach injury.³² The area is known for its unique mineral and stone formations, with many nearby slate *canteras* (quarries) that are still in operation. Not far from Barriga Negra are the Salamanca caves, famous for the native bats that inhabit them. The waterways and mineral cave networks form a link between the lands of my maternal ancestors and my paternal ancestors. Arroyo Barriga Negra is part of a network of creeks and rivers that lead out to Merin/Mirim Lagoon in Brazil.

³¹ Fu-Kiau, *African Cosmology of the Bantu-Kongo*, 144.

³² Although most of this information lives in oral stories, there are various documented family narratives from Barriga Negra in Lavalleja, including that of Pocha Arbelo, who had a corner store in the area for over 35 years: <https://www.efectodialogo.uy/historias/un-peaje-de-afecto>. There is also an essay by Luis F. Pacheco Fernández that tells his own family story of Basque descendants who migrated and settled in Barriga Negra. His testimony also includes his own archival research on the name of the locality and its history: <http://ifdminas.cfe.edu.uy/attachments/article/18/BARRIGA%20NEGRA.pdf>.



Figure 47. Paula do Prado, *Barriga Negra/Coral Negro* 2024, installation view SCA Project Space

This artwork references both above ground caves and quarries of Lavalleja and the below ground mineral-rich deposits and mines of Artigas. The Brazilian legend “A Salamanka do Jarau” was published in *Lendas do Sul* (Legends of the South), a collection of stories

written by João Simões Lopes Neto in 1913³³. “A Salamanca do Jarau” tells the story of Teiniaguá, an enchanted/cursed Moorish woman whose story melds the cultures of the emerging crioulo/orientales of Uruguay and Brazil, European migrants, and the various Indigenous groups of Northern Uruguay and Southern Brazil. It is a layered story combining common elements of mythological romances, including the forbidden love between Teiniagua and a Christian priest, as well as the magical ability she has to grant wishes. In the artwork I make various references to Teiniaguá who as a result of her enchantment shapeshifts between the form of a woman and a mythological carbuncle,³⁴ a sort of slithery lizard-salamander form with the head of a deep red gemstone. Along with the salamander form with a red aura around its head, the central fabric soft sculpture head (which has been repurposed from a 2012 work) is a reference to Teiniaguá as spirit of the cave and a guardian of the minerals and metals held within the stone.

The poetic and symbolic overlap in the figure of Teiniaguá as guardian of the minerals and metals. I am here reminded of yet another instance of the dikenga in the form of the Dagara Medicine Wheel (fig.48 and fig.49, p.182). As opposed to the dikenga that represents life cycles, the Dagara Medicine Wheel illustrates the five element rituals of the West African Dagara tradition. The five elements together with their corresponding colours, directions and numbers include Fire (red, south, 2-7), Water (blue, north, 1-6), Earth (yellow, centre, 0-5), Mineral (white, west, 4-9) and Nature (green, east, 3-8). The numbers represent the last digits of the year, so that 2024 for example is a fire mineral year. Individuals can also identify their corresponding element by consulting the last digit of their

³³ João Simões Lopes Neto, *Contos gauchescos e lendas do sul*. 3 ed. Porto Alegre: Globo, 1965.
<http://www.dominiopublico.gov.br/download/texto/bv000122.pdf>

³⁴ The *carbunclo* or carbuncle is said to derive from a Chilote (Southern Chilean) myth, although the legend of the carbuncle appears in other stories from South America, including “A Salamanca do Jarau.”

birth year. Each element has its particular themes and characteristics. I myself fall under the mineral category that also includes metals and denotes those people whose role is that of storyteller³⁵. Incorporating the additional information offered by the Dagara Medicine Wheel, an expanded autotheoretical reading of the work emerges where the figure of Teiniaguá potentially becomes a self-portrait or the representation of an ancestor. Implicated within this extended reading is also the concept of being a custodian of familial stories.

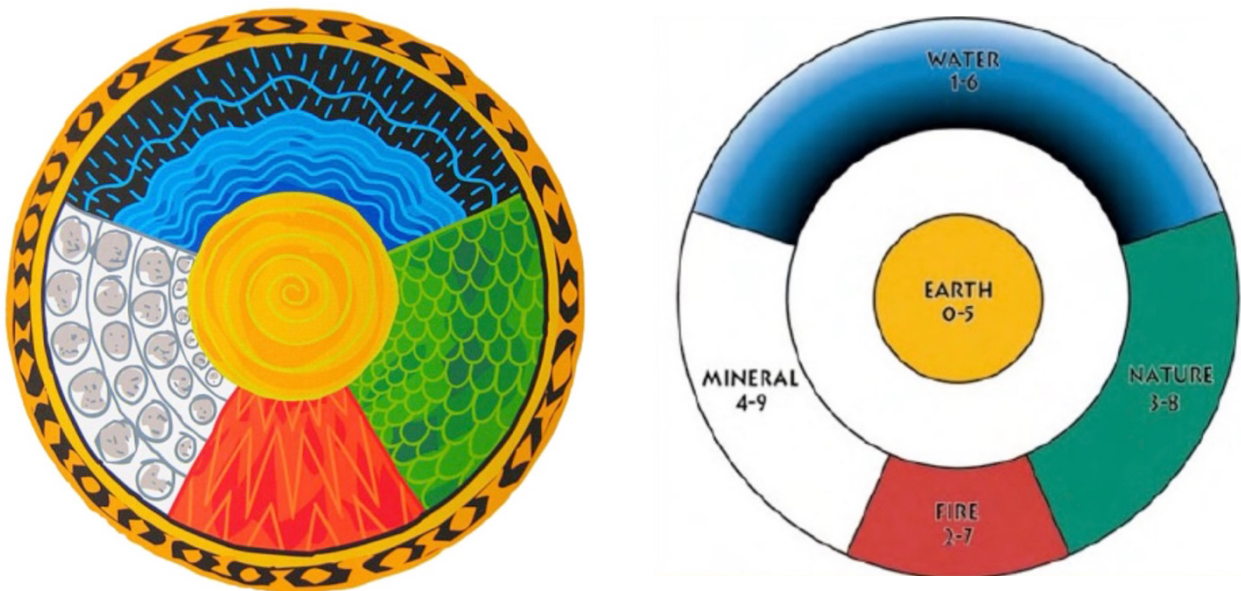


Figure 48 (left) The Dagara Medicine Wheel showing the elements and their positions as shared by Malidoma Somé <https://malidoma.com>. Figure 49 (right) The Dagara Medicine Wheel, showing the elements, positions and corresponding numerical references by Ancestral Wisdom Bridge Foundation www.eastcoastvillage.org

Barriga Negra-Coral Negro represents inner cave like structures, both fluid spaces reminiscent of cenotes as well as the jewel encrusted surfaces of a mineral rich soil and

³⁵ Author and Dagara elder, Malidoma Somé based much of his writing and associated teachings on the Dagara Medicine wheel, see for example an outline of the *Elemental Rituals* <https://malidoma.com/elemental-rituals/>

rock. The composition of the woven gateway creates a clear distinction between the sections above and below the central head figure. The section above encases coral and jewel-like shapes in black netting whereas the section directly below resembles a large U-shaped tongue woven entirely in shades of purple yarn, a reference to the famous agate and purple amethyst crystals of Artigas. The purple tongue seems to unfurl from the black depths above, alluding to the mouth of the cave or the dark deep ocean in which corals can be found.

My paternal grandmother Elsa was fond of a perfume named Black Coral. It was a gift she had received from my aunt who had purchased it on a trip to Cuba. It came in a glossy black glass bottle, the shape of which resembled a female form with a pleated shawl draped around its shoulders. But the term has multiple references within the work. Black coral, from order Antipatherians (a Greek word meaning against disease), is a type of deep-water coral with a black or dark brown soft, flexible skeleton. The Queensland Museum in Brisbane has one of the largest collections of black coral from the Coral Sea and the Great Barrier Reef. In February 2024, high resolution images and video from a scientific exploration of the seamounts along the Nazca and Salas y Gómez Ridge both within and just outside Chilean waters, revealed many previously unknown corals, sponges and deep-sea animal life, reaffirming the importance of coral and marine environment conservation efforts.³⁶ However, in April 2024, a fourth global coral bleaching event was confirmed, with the plight of many coral reefs and marine ecosystems bringing increased awareness of climate change and the escalating severity of rising sea water temperatures.³⁷

³⁶ Footage showing some of the highlights can be viewed here:

<https://youtu.be/rh8RtuuFhsY?si=tVRLdSuR9JQ1t3-g>

³⁷ "NOAA Confirms 4th Global Coral Bleaching Event," National Oceanic and Atmosphere Administration (US), 15 April 2024, <https://www.noaa.gov/news-release/noaa-confirms-4th-global-coral-bleaching-event>.

Along with particular minerals, crystals and metals, black coral holds cultural and spiritual significance for many First Nations people around the world. Amethyst and black coral have traditionally been used in jewellery making as wearable talismans. In Arabic, black coral is called *yusr*, meaning “ease” or “relief,” and used to make prayer beads.³⁸ Although named black coral, when alive, it can present in an array of bright colours; it is only once that it is dead that it turns jet black. Like trees, cross sections of the coral reveal growth rings, and Australia is thought to be home to one of the most ancient types of black coral, the *Leiopathidae*, which can live up to 4,000 years.³⁹ The climate impacts on coral mirror the impacts we are seeing above ground; as the saying goes, “as above, so below.”

³⁸ Yusr, its method of collection and spiritual connections are discussed in H. Nawata, “Indigenous Beliefs and Divine Conceptions of Red Sea Black Coral: A Case Study for the Traditional Fishery, Sinai Peninsula, Egypt,” Proceedings of the 13th International Coral Reef Symposium, Honolulu: 389–407, https://coralreefs.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/Session-66-Nawata-single_final_Text-Indigenous-beliefs-and-divine-conceptions-of-Red-Sea-black-coral.pdf.

³⁹ Jeremy Horowitz, “Australian Museum’s 130-Year-Old Black Coral Collection Reveals Hidden Australian Biodiversity,” Australian Museum, 27 July 2021, <https://australian.museum/blog/amri-news/australian-museums-130-year-old-black-coral-collection/>.

Conclusion

*You are my eyes for what I cannot see. You are my ears for what I cannot hear. You sense all the possibilities ahead of what I am yet to perceive. What do I need to know at this time?*¹

Throughout this research project I have consulted, read and attempted to interpret a wide range of sources, from traditional primary and secondary sources to co-inquiring with the more-than-human, as well as using divinatory tools and structures. The quote above is taken from one of the journals I've kept during this research project, documenting my own personal divinatory practice. It is a statement I often use, either at the beginning or before closing a divination session. All that to say, this conclusion is a point of transition, not a complete ending nor a complete beginning. It is written as a self-evaluation, continuing the autoethnographic style in order to address the tensions between what I thought I had set out to do and the reality of what I managed to achieve. I recognise that I as the author/maker and you as the reader/viewer may not have the necessary capacity to fully process all the references, associations and possible implications of this research project within the confines of the submission and examination process. Within this framing my opening quote becomes more of a joint appeal on your and my behalf, so that whatever insights are of most importance at this moment can be surfaced for our mutual benefit.

¹ From a personal journal/prayer used in divination sessions with my ancestors and guides.

Book x Mosaic

It is human nature to be at times over eager to know, to understand, to have clarity on an issue or the next steps, but the reality is that the outcome, path or answer does not solely rely on our actions (or lack of action) but on multidimensional, overlapping and entangled interactions and variables. The “Book” card from Grandma Baby’s Black Gold Lenormand deck is about knowledge. It is trusting ancestors to have your best interests at heart—your very survival—because “knowing the right thing in the wrong time is dangerous.”²



Figure 50. Book, Grandma Baby's Lenormand x MOSAIC, Sacred Medicine Oracle

Acknowledging timing and things in and beyond our control are also important in reflecting on our journey to this point in time. The “Mosaic” card from Asha Frost’s Sacred

² Grandma Baby Lenormand Guidebook, oracle card Book, XVI (26).

Medicine Oracle encourages us to gather all the fragments or pieces collected along the journey so far, both failures and achievements, and to pay special attention to the lessons learned from those fragments that carry pain and trauma. The healing affirmation for this card states, “I retrieve all the pieces of the past that are calling for acceptance and love. I return to me.”³

Original contribution to knowledge

The opening story of the Timbó seed has imparted two essential wisdoms that have guided this research project. The first is the importance of listening to the soil beneath my feet. The second is that seeds carry within them all the information they need so that as soon as they sense the necessary conditions for life, to awaken and transform, they know exactly what to do. This research has been led by my art practice, the analysis of which necessitated an inward journey to connect with the Timbó seed and the knowledge held therein. This research project is an original contribution to knowledge precisely because it is woven from the personal, not as a way to centre myself but to centre the insights held at the intersection of the lineages I am responsible to, and the relations to place that hold me to account. Navigating what I call a double reckoning comprised a journey of reconnection with my Charrúa heritage whilst simultaneously working to acknowledge the context/place from where I am undertaking that process. In both instances it has been important to adopt a reflective approach to address my positionality within each context.

³ Asha Frost, *The Sacred Medicine Oracle Guidebook*, Card 47: MOSAIC (Pieces), 113.

My aim has been to extend existing knowledge as well as the ways of organising and presenting that knowledge. This is illustrated through the structure of the thesis, represented by the tail of a fish, and the work of river skipping and Lajau is my universe referred to within the thesis and included as appendices. The concept of weaving as cartography is expressed in a unique way, with each of the gateways produced for this research project included within the thesis as visual starting points for each section as well as forming the subject of the final chapter with which each part ends. The multiple, overlapping patterns of threes within the structure of the written thesis also affirms an emphasis on the circular and the cyclical throughout the thesis, culminating in a discussion of the spiral and the cosmogram in the final section. The deliberate and considered layout of the thesis was also essential in helping me to communicate complex interrelated topics as an alternative to existing and more accepted linear structures. Adopting a more fluid structure where not all is necessarily explained leaves space for the reader to make certain connections themselves. There is for example no specific literature review chapter (although chapter 2, "Oyendau," could be conceived as such); instead, there are what I view as multiple short literature review passages within each of the three parts.

In developing my own scholarly voice, I have benefited (like many others) from the writing of Gloria Anzaldúa, which made it possible to put a name to a particular type of inward spiritual journey in *nepantla* and to *trenzar* (braid) with English, Spanish and Indigenous languages in a Western academic context. Through weaving the work of First Nations thinkers, artists and writers from Abya Yala and from Australia, I have sought to better understand ways of cultivating relationships with place as a migrant settler outside of colonial imaginings and false narratives of belonging. This research represents a significant milestone in my journey of self-identification as Charrúa by contributing to a growing body

of Charrúa scholarship written by and for Charrúa. Something I feel is equally significant is having narrated this journey as a Charrúa living away from her ancestral lands and community, encountering *el territorio que llevo dentro* while in dialogue and intimate relationship with *el territorio del otro*.

Valuing the personal and experiential

Taking an autoethnographic approach, I seek to embody the archive. My journey of re-membering relies on my weaving practice, in the first instance, to surface, transcribe and make visible *el territorio que llevo dentro*. Unable to separate my re-membering journey from the relational context in which it takes place, the personal and experiential is, in my case, anchored in encounters with place and the more-than-human. In other words, my weaving practice has led the inquiry, the 'data' collected is in the form of recollections and documentation of encounters with place, and the analysis serves to connect the two.

What makes this personal narrative justifiable as research is the surfacing and interweaving of new narratives that might not have been revealed otherwise. There are core aspects of the thesis that I feel particularly vulnerable in sharing for example my relationship with Beada-o-Lajau, who emerges as a central guide in my personal journey but also as a sacred being within Charrúa cosmology that is currently being collectively reconstructed. This research project supports the idea that there are multiple pathways toward remembering, reclaiming and repairing a sense of meaning and connection with place.

The responsibilities of storytelling

This practice-led research could have taken the form of a major solo exhibition, a book, a podcast series or many other creative forms, so why a doctoral thesis project? My academic research path has been motivated by the desire to insert marginalised voices like mine into the scholarly archive and also to develop my own unique scholarly voice so that I might present my research in a way that meets the standards of my discipline as well as honour the ancestral, spiritual and more-than-human relations that inform it. My focus in the research has been to share and present my story of Charrúa self-identification whilst living as a migrant settler on the unceded lands of the Gadigal, Bidjigal, Dharug and Dharawal Peoples. Through practicing reflexivity, vulnerability and honesty in my work and writing, my aim has been to engage in responsible and respectful storytelling. I have attempted to stay within the confines of my personal experiences and encounters with place so as to reduce the likelihood of straying into speaking for others or telling other people's stories as my own.

In my encounters with place, I have attempted to practice various forms of reciprocity so that my interactions with place are not just about making myself feel better, relieving feeling of anxiety, shame and guilt, or extracting inspiration and gathering observational wisdoms. My reciprocal relationships with various places are characterised by a regular ongoing practice of spending time in these sites to sit and listen, and to continue to research and learn about the histories of place while preferencing the voices of the First Nations people of that place. Developing and practicing forms of reciprocity attuned to place is integral to deepening relationships and understanding of what tending to these sites might entail, both presently and into the future. Acknowledging the significant role that place has and continues to have in my personal journey I hope goes towards repairing the

silencing and erasure by omission that can result from internalised narratives of migrant and diasporic disconnection. I recognise, however, that decolonising my thinking, ways of interacting and communicating connections with place is a work in progress. This thesis engages in several different forms of storytelling, including creation stories, myth, anecdotal encounters with place, personal and familial anecdotes, reflective writing, poetry, dreams/daydreams and divination. Responsible storytelling also requires me to be reflective of my privilege as someone who is sufficiently resourced (with time, money, access and support, amongst other factors, despite whatever personal challenges and limitations I might face) to undertake and complete a doctoral research project. Because of this privilege and the academic and social value attached to a doctoral degree, it can look to others as though I am presenting myself as more knowledgeable, connected or spiritual.

A relationally responsible approach

Throughout the research process, opportunities to present aspects of the work in development, engage in dialogue and receive feedback have all directly and indirectly assisted the development of the project. At some point in the process of writing this thesis it became clear that I could write a whole other thesis just on the concurrent exhibitions, artist residencies, workshops and collaborations that nourished and made the research process interesting and exciting. Whilst some of these concurrent projects are not mentioned or analysed in the main body of the thesis, many are included in the river skipping appendix as they relate to engaging with specific locations to present or develop work. A full list of projects undertaken during my doctoral candidature is included in a separate appendix. Many of these projects have involved working predominantly with

women from vulnerable communities, and in service of adopting a relationally responsible approach only catalogue-related material is shared on these projects. In alignment with a senti-pensa-haciendo methodology, I chose to focus the main body of writing on the intersecting ideas and concepts triggered by the themes emerging in the weaving and my encounters with place. Writing from the personal and experiential, the resultant self-writing is not just about the self but about the self in relationship to others and place. There were multiple challenges in writing with and in relationship to place. My aim was to minimise reinscribing the very erasures, silencing and colonial legacies that I wanted to speak out against as well as develop respectful co-creating relationship with ancestors and spirits of the land. Evaluating the ways I've been able to navigate this successfully and responding to the ways I could have approached things differently is an ongoing process that will extend beyond the parameters of this project.

Given that many of the ideas, practices, themes and re-memberings that surfaced throughout the thesis arose from sentipensando (feel-thinking) with Gadigal, Bidjigal, Dharug and Dharawal Country, further development of these ideas and practices will benefit from direct engagement and consultation with First Nations elders and community members from these areas. Despite making the decision to predominantly cite and engage with the work of Australian First Nations writers, thinkers and artists, this cannot ever replace seeking out and developing person to person exchanges and conversations. As part of my research, I did not use any interviews, and as a result there was no requirement to undertake human research ethics approval. I made an intentional decision not to undertake interviews as at the beginning of my research COVID-19 travel restrictions were still in place and the possibility of undertaking field trips to Uruguay for research and interview community members was unlikely. I also understood that regardless of whether or not I

would be able to travel to Uruguay during the PhD process, the basis for my research was that I was engaging in this remembering work while geographically located in Australia and it would be written from this perspective.

As part of a relationally responsible approach, there are protocols of consent that I adhered to in an effort to safeguard the privacy of community members, friends, family members and other individuals in proximity to the research. In many instances, I was able to include details from interviews and conversations with individuals that were already in the public sphere, such as my father who is a well-known musician in Uruguay, or for example that formed part of a public outcome, as was the case with my recorded conversation with Charrúa activist Mónica Michelena for Utp. Having based the research on my personal stories and experiences, my family is inevitably referenced, but I do not believe this research places them in any more of a vulnerable position than they are in currently as I have been a practicing professional artist addressing similar themes in my art practice within the public realm for over fifteen years.

Future directions

There is great potential for future research that explores the intersections of Charrúa and Afro-descendant identities in Uruguay rather than continuing to treat them as separate identities existing in parallel. The expansion of research beyond the accepted scientific disciplines would also open up further opportunities for transdisciplinary research, including the creative fields opening up other forms of knowledge production. Efforts towards Charrúa recognition are not just of concern for those living within Uruguay, Brazil and Argentina. As a result of a history of displacement, with many having living memory of the

military dictatorship, recognition is also of importance to Uruguayans living in other parts of the globe who might also carry Indigenous Uruguayan identities and memories. Creating spaces for Charrúa collective re-membering, including within the academy, forms part of a greater Universe-referent citizenship towards right relationship with ourselves, others and our environment.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: River Skipping

Appendix 2: Lajau is my Universe

Appendix 3: Exhibitions, residencies and conferences during candidature