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Indigenous Transnational Visibilities and Identities in Oceania
Establishing Alternative Geographies across Boundaries

Par

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Establishing Alternative Geographies across Boundaries

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Résumé

Pendant la deuxième moitié du vingtième siècle, les régions du Pacifique, et notamment l'Australie et la Nouvelle-Zélande, ont vu augmenter les mouvements de migrations. Ces derniers ont permis une diversification des concepts de nationalité, d'identité, de langage et d'espace. De ce fait, bon nombre d'auteurs ont donc décidé d'approcher leurs écrits à travers le spectre du transnationalisme et ont cherché à repousser les limites culturelles et les frontières géographiques -imposées par un état colonial.- Par conséquent, c'est avec une approche comparative que j'analyserai, en tenant ainsi compte de la constante évolution des nouveaux cadres géographiques et culturels, le recueil de poèmes *Star Waka* (1999) de l'auteur maori Robert Sullivan, le roman graphique *Night Fisher* (2005) de l'artiste hawaiien R. Kikuo Johnson et le roman *Carpentaria* de l'autrice waanyi Alexis Wright. En effet, j'examinerai la formation des identités autochtones en lien avec le lieu natal respectif de chaque auteur tout en tenant compte de l'évolution de la notion de frontière, qu'elle soit locale ou nationale. En se détournant de la perspective coloniale, je mettrai ainsi en lumière les différents outils que les auteurs utilisent dans leurs œuvres pour permettre de définir une ou plusieurs identité(s) autochtone(s) qui se lisent entre les lignes et au-delà des limites spatiales. La question de l'enracinement et du déplacement est au cœur de ce réseau d'alliances autochtones, et permet une approche et une lecture transnationales, ainsi qu'une vision d'un monde littéraire commun et partagé. Ce réseau va au-delà des frontières locales et nationales, créant ainsi des géographies alternatives.

Mots-clés : littératures autochtones, Océanie, transnationalisme, Australie, Aotearoa, Hawaï, décolonisation, langage, espace, identités.

Abstract

The second part of the twentieth century saw movements of migration increased, notably in Australia, New Zealand, and the Pacific regions, resulting in a diversification of the concepts of nationhood, identity, language, and space. As such, many authors have worked through the lens of transnationalism and have sought to think beyond the concept of borders, since locality is ultimately attached to a specific identity. Thus, to account for shifting geographical and cultural frameworks, I aim to paint a cross-cultural comparison within different genres of Indigenous literatures in Oceania. Through an analysis of Robert T. Sullivan's *Star Waka* (1999), R. Kikuo Johnson's *Night Fisher* (2005), and Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria (*2006), I examine the formation of Indigenous identities in relation to the authors' respective homelands while also interacting with the changing concepts of local and national boundaries. By decentering the Western definition of the border I highlight the way in which these authors can be read through the semantic lines of their works as well as across geographical borders, thereby challenging the dichotomy between the local and the global by disorientating and regenerating creative Indigenous identities on a larger scale. As the twenty-first century engages with new sorts of narratives, the issue of rootedness and displacement within a network of Indigenous alliances allows for a comparative and transnational approach, and a vision of a shared literary world that crosses over local and national boundaries, thereby enabling alternative geographies and accounting for contrasting perceptions of the world.

Keywords: Indigenous literatures, Oceania, transnationalism, Australia, Aotearoa, Hawai'i, decolonization, language, space, identities.

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1. Introduction: Indigenous Transnational Literatures, Altering Western Perceptions

1.1 Context

> All traveling, all over, all the time.
> *Trans*-, yes, in the sense of *across*, *beyond*, and *through*, but not limited to national borders, and certainly not limited to the national borders of contemporary (settler) nation-states.
>
> ——Chadwick Allen,
> "A Trans*national* Native American Studies?
> Why Not Studies That Are Trans-*Indigenous*?" (3)

Transnationalism can be seen through the spectrum of a continuous partnership between what is local and what is global (Allen 2012). In a world that is universally connected through different means such as social networks and mass communication or migration, it is a scene were several worlds meet, yet do not necessarily clash with each other. Transnationalism of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries must be understood in relation to corporate settlements, destructive and abusive tourism, and global destruction of the environment and of natural resources. Those particular aspects of transnationalism are indeed part of a social and cultural reality, yet so are migrations, collaboration, communication, new media, composite languages and identities, and worldwide interconnectedness. So, what can Indigenous literatures bring to the transnational conversation? Questioning the very term "transnational," Chadwick Allen acknowledges that Indigenous literatures have "[moved] through space and time" for a long time, "through landscapes and generations, cross borders, [infiltrating] languages, cultures, and communities—none the less so when intended by their first makers to distinguish an 'inside' from an 'outside' rather than to

facilitate connections" (2). Likewise, scholar Hsinya Huang claims that "the 'trans-Pacific' and 'trans-Indigenous' ecopoetics foregrounds an alter/native model of reckoning space, place, and time that both requires an active and participatory engagement with the Pacific seascapes and invokes the planetary consciousness" (Introduction, xvii). In essence, this change of perspective, connecting the local to the global, has made it possible to broaden readers' mindsets and readers' attitudes towards the inclusion of new frames of cultural reference.

As the world is shifting away from its former certainties, learning and understanding what is around us seems more and more essential. Indigenous authors are moving away from the dominant Eurocentric vision of the world ─ as borders and the construction of identities shift, the twenty-first century has also witnessed a shift or, an alteration in points of view. For instance, in 1976, Samoan writer Albert Wendt examined the effects of colonialism in New Zealand. The country, he noted, was subject to a quickly changing world; however, by the late 1990s, it was defined by both continuities and shifts reworking and redefining the identities of the Pacific communities, due partly to mass migrations and the advent of new media. Nowadays, new media allows for flows of ideas, opinions, and information to be available worldwide in a very short time thanks to digital technologies and online news applications, which, however, have further contributed to "the existing tensions between the local and the global" (Forte 17). Thus, migrations in this "New Oceania" (Wendt 53) have provided the region with generations of writers who embody to this day this blended aspect of their communities and who have, as a result, shaped new ideologies: cultural, social, and geographical identities challenge complex matters. They address, confront, and direct themselves towards the repercussions of colonialism. As such, the constant negotiation among territories, between time and space, and between literatures and politics allows for universal interrelations and associations that aim to create a beyond-nations-and-borders

philosophy. In this way, Indigenous transnational literatures depict reality, while also providing alternatives to understand and highlight the positive aspects of today's highly connected world.

The oral stories present in literatures provide knowledges. Literature, thus, becomes a way to educate Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous people on the importance of stories and, as such, it provides knowledge. In *Indigenous Methodologies: Characteristics, Conversations, and Contexts*, Plains Cree/ Saulteaux scholar Margaret Kovach states: "knowledge and story are inseparable" (98). She further argues that

> much of what dominant society perceives as legitimate knowledge is generated by a rather small, homogeneous group of people in formal institutions of higher learning. As Bud Hall indicates, universities have claimed a monopoly on what does and does not count as knowledge. To assert Indigenous research frameworks, there is a need to critically interrogate this monopolistic knowledge enterprise. Applying a decolonizing lens prompts this action, thus, becoming a quality of Indigenous research methodology. (79)

Kovach advocates for another truth, a different definition of knowledge – and this kind of knowledge can be found, for instance, in the migrations and migratory movements of what Samoan writer Albert Wendt coined "New Oceania." This is of particular importance because my work looks at the question of transnationalism through the lens of New Oceania, and changes, migrations, movements, and flows are all topics present in the works that I investigate and discuss in this thesis. As such, these shifts have provided this region with a new generation of writers who embody "blended" communities and who have shaped new genealogies where linguistic,

geographical, social, and spiritual identities challenge new complexities that address the repercussions of colonialism. The strict dichotomies between settler and Indigenous, between inside and outside, between Indigenous languages and English, between the local and the global, are thus transgressed, and frontiers are crossed and blurred. Moreover, as a way to resist Western perceptions or "assumptions" — to use the term of Cherokee author Thomas King (1990, 10) — such works reframe and thrive on reshaping cultural and social frameworks and knowledges. Of particular note, many authors challenge the very concept of "authenticity": in effect, the un-settlement of Western ideas highlights new ways of envisioning cultural frames of reference, thereby questioning what counts as "authentic" with regard to language, space, and identity. These, indeed, cannot be considered without acknowledging the different cross-cultural influences that are at play in the specific location of New Oceania.

In her 2007 Sydney PEN lecture "A Question of Fear," Alexis Wright stated: "When a common environment holds potential for new life, creativity and knowledge…can only occur when there is a balance that insures the integrity of each flow" (Wright, 00:20:16–34). The flows to which the Waanyi author refers are those of different belief systems, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, that, according to her, must be considered equal and as "flow[ing] together side by side" (Wright 00:19:22–24), like complementary processes in a changing world; that is, they must be considered as such if one hopes for change regarding our perceptions of what constitutes history, knowledge, truth, identit-y/-ies, borders, and the birth of new ideas coming from a variety of cultures and practices. Indeed, the multitudes of islands that shape Oceania and the Pacific region constitute transnational territories in which identities, place, and dis-placement—which are, in turn connected to locality, community, and globalization—are constantly evolving, moving together, floating, and flowing side by side, to use Wright's term. In the same way, Wright's speech echoes

the philosophy of the Two Row Wampum, a treaty that was originally made in 1616 between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and the Dutch, and which is based on a reciprocal relationship of peace, friendship, and respect, and which would last forever, "as long as the grass is green, the water flows downhill and the sun rises in the east and sets in the west" ("Two Row and the Covenant Chain of Treaties," n.p.). The philosophy behind the Two Row Wampum is that of a non-dominating relationship of balance and harmony within each and every relationship, between different peoples as well as among humans, "other-than-humans" (a term coined by Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice), and our environment, as a collective and shared experience. In this way, the flow between creativity and knowledge appears to be one of the main characteristics of this philosophy: and, whether related to language, time, or space, this understanding can be applied to shifting geographical and cultural frameworks, frameworks which, despite being particular to each community, appear to be shared. As Plains Cree/Saulteaux author Margaret Kovach writes,

> As Indigenous people, we understand each other because we share a worldview that holds common, enduring beliefs about the world. As Indigenous scholar Leroy Little Bear states, "there is enough similarity among North American Indian philosophies to apply concepts generally". Thus, when considering Indigenous epistemologies, Indigenous people contextualize their tribal affiliation. We do this because our knowledges are bound to place. (37)

Being aware that Kovach is based in Ontario, I find her work particularly useful as she argues that there are connections and communications among various Indigenous peoples. She acknowledges the transnational flows of ideas and shared experiences among Indigenous peoples without

claiming they are all identical and equivalent. As such, her writing applies, in my view, to what I want to demonstrate with regard to New Oceania. Similarly, in "Towards a New Oceania" (1976), Albert Wendt explains the evolution of the notion of nationhood in Australia, New Zealand, and in the Pacific Islands during the 1970s. Those territories saw increasing movements of migration from the second part of the twentieth century, something which caused significant changes in the cultural and social experiences of the Island communities and which consequently gave birth to generations of individuals with mixed ethnicities (Forte 17). These changes and shifts—both cultural and social—gave rise to many tensions that have since been translated in and through multicultural writings that seek to tackle the complex issues of citizenship, belonging, and authenticity. However, beyond simply addressing these changes, these literatures have also contributed to further connecting the political and cultural worlds of New Oceania. Indeed, given the constant movements within their respective homelands, the writers of this new generation started to think beyond the Western concept of borders while each also ultimately being attached to a specific identity.

1.2 Approach

The authors under study in this thesis are Maori poet Robert Sullivan, Waanyi novelist Alexis Wright, and Hawaiian author R. Kikuo Johnson. In choosing to focus on three literary genres — a collection of poems, a novel, and a graphic novel — I sought to highlight the possibilities in difference. Specifically, transnational literatures are not defined by a specific literary genre and, consequently, I did not want to restrict myself to a particular genre. Indeed, although very different in form, poetry and novels put the language, the written words, at the forefront, while graphic novels rely, in large part, on the visual language of illustrations.

Furthermore, the notion of space is tackled differently in the three texts. In addition to talking about space, Johnson and Sullivan physically represent it in their work: the panels and the way in which Johnson chooses to arrange them offer his own idea of space, whereas the way in which Sullivan chooses to spread the free verses on the page suggests a continuity and a certain connection from one poem to another. Wright, for her part, chooses to tackle the issue of space figuratively through the spiritual and geographical adventures of her characters. The specific interest, to me, of putting these three works into discussion here is that the source of the production of these works comes from collaborations among the writers, the illustrators, the editors, the publishers, and the readers. Each piece of work in its own way embodies the bi-/multi-cultural aspect of the authors' respective homelands, giving the reader a sense of their perspectives on the results of colonialism and globalization, and the impacts of these on Indigenous lives, beliefs, and lands. Moreover, their literary art evokes the moving, changing definition of the authors' cultures and their adaptation to it. In the works of Sullivan, Johnson, and Wright, both worlds and cultures, Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous, stand together side by side; they do not blend, but coexist with each other. They collaborate together and echo each other to create a relationship, a network that goes beyond the established borders of the nation-states. Thus, all three authors represent communal and collective interests which, in turn, allow us to piece together a better understanding as to how transnational Indigenous literatures resist Western definitions and European culture.

As such, even if the methods and the literary genres are consequently different from each other, they emphasize their shared conception of common transnational languages and spaces. In addition to crossing regional, national, and international frontiers, the diversity of voices and of genres breaks the literary barriers and allows for an approach that pushes boundaries—geographical and hierarchical boundaries, that which constitutes "real" literature or literary

canons—and recognizes an alliance of Indigenous literatures, as well as a circulation of ideas, cultures, and genres. Because of their location, these literatures can be perceived as isolated—and thus often unseen and unacknowledged—when in fact, they are not. Rather, it is quite the opposite: their insular position has allowed people to circulate, communicate, and move to and from the various places within Oceania for thousands of years, thus creating new communities, nations, and cities. Moreover, the multiple waves of migration have made these places multicultural and transnational spaces: spaces that acknowledge every culture. As such, migrations have shaped the authors' current approach to culture—that is, an encounter among various peoples and backgrounds.

In this way, this collaborative aspect, that I read as at the heart of transnational literatures, asks us to consider how to purposefully take part in the universal advancement of initiatives regarding Indigenous studies, and thereby to reflect on one's own positionality. As such, I would like to share my thoughts based on settler scholar Renate Eigenbrod, who, reflecting on her position as a(n) im/migrant in Canada, states that "[it] was not Western but Aboriginal thought that made [her] rethink notions of truth, objectivity, and scholarship, especially as the influence of Aboriginal conceptualization of knowledge on North America's intellectual climate has been hardly recognized" (4). In addition, American-Canadian writer Thomas King, of Cherokee, German, and Greek descent, specifically in his work *The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative* (2003), which illustrates the major and necessary importance of stories to our understanding and perception of the world, echoes, in my view, the words of Eigenbrod. My master's thesis seeks to contribute to the alteration of the false representations and depictions of Indigenous peoples. Stories create (a version of) history, perceptions, and ultimately relations between populations and cultures. My readings of Renate Eigenbrod's *Travelling Knowledges: Positioning the Im/Migrant*

Reader of Aboriginal Literatures in Canada (2005) and of Sam McKegney's article entitled "Strategies for Ethical Engagement: An Open Letter Concerning Non-Native Scholars of Native Literatures" (2008) have allowed me to ponder my position as a settler student. Considering my own posture as a French student paying attention to Indigenous literatures, I understand the importance of expanding my cultural knowledge and learning from the stories "to become a participatory listener/reader of literary texts rather than to remain a distant critic" (Eigenbrod, "Preface", xiii) —and to become an ally as well. Ignoring and disregarding the necessity of stories and being disengaged from Indigenous peoples' history have triggered a profound desire to participate in a necessary change to spread a different way of acquiring information, to learn for myself and for others, from another perspective. What inspired me to get involved in this particular area of research was the importance of exploring another truth, a different side of the story and version of it, of discovering new learning perspectives, and of paying significant attention to stories and to the circulation of different versions of official narratives and of our own vision of the world.

Ultimately, and globally, collective histories of forced exile, migration, containment, and elimination, but also of collaboration, communication, survival, resilience, and memory have led to multiple transgressions and rejections of the Western established rules amongst Indigenous populations of North America and Oceania. Specifically, I am interested in how the identities of New Oceania have put into question the meaning of imposed borders, for we are witnessing the birth of a new vocabulary, created by Indigenous artists, and for Indigenous and non-Indigenous people – one that encompasses and suits the burgeoning re-conception of identity as something that can be unravelled and rebuilt through literature and language. These new forms of expression require their producers to connect, interact, and work with each other, often far beyond their own local borders or nations. Thus, by decentering Western definitions of borders and re-centring

Indigenous knowledges on the matter, I approach the works studied here as counternarratives, and in which the respective local environments must be considered in a much larger context.

The strategies the authors use for expressing Pacific transnationalism can be found, for instance, in the elaboration of a new language. While there are numerous studies on the topic of language with regards to Indigenous peoples in North America, there is little that is specific to New Oceania. English is the language used by most to communicate: it is a tool devoted to translating one's experience. That said, whether it is a literary language, a spoken one, or a visual one, one that the readers can read as well as hear, it is a language that tells stories. Indeed, the authors work with that tool and play with it, so that the language one is faced with is a result of the many presences stemming from Oceania. Thus, this language transcends the barriers of the local to speak to people worldwide, while also being specifically connected to and located in a place. The authors chose to position their respective languages as equally flowing alongside the colonial one, which threatens to envelop them. However, they privilege neither language, and choose to benefit and to take advantage of each and every language that surrounds them. Like the "confluence of two streams of knowledge represented by salt water and fresh water" (Wright, "A Question of Fear" 00:19:40–45), their main argument lies in the sovereignty of a borderless, fluid linguistic space, moving between different systems of communication as equally valuable.

However, the language one reads in these texts is a language that works in favour of decolonization. In line with Kenyan writer Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o, academic David Jefferess states that literature and language are acts of decolonization that "[require] the colonized to seize back control of the means of communal self-definition" (14). In other words, it is by rewriting in their own terms that Indigenous authors reaffirm their sovereignty over the stories. They are responsible

for their own depictions with the creation of a language that has been remoulded for new usage and, as such, steps away from the site of colonial privilege. Creation thus appears as a major feature in Indigenous literatures as reacting to colonial oppression. According to Pueblo poet and writer Simon J. Ortiz, this creativity was a response to "European culture…cast upon Indian people" (8); "it can be observed that this was the primary element of a nationalistic impulse to make use of foreign ritual, ideas, and material in their own-Indian terms. Today's writing by Indian authors is a continuation of that elemental impulse" (8). The language used in these literatures reveals experiences with colonization and dominance, but also with survival, resilience, and the thriving of what Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor calls "[the] Postindian": "Postindians are the new stories of conversations and survivance […]. Native stories are cues of modernity" (viii). The use of English in Indigenous translational literatures does not prove an assimilation into the colonial culture; on the contrary, the fact that the authors use it and then revise it for their own purposes and in their own terms proves their creative resistance to Western culture. In Ortiz's words,

> it has been this resistance—political, armed, spiritual—which has been carried out by the oral tradition. The continued use of the oral tradition today is evidence that the resistance is ongoing. Its use, in fact, is what has given rise to the surge of literature created by contemporary Indian authors. And it is this literature, based upon continuing resistance, which has given a particularly nationalistic character to Native American voice (100).

Similarly, in *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou author Linda Tuhiwai Smith asserts the usefulness and necessity of counternarratives. The stories of "the Other" (2), she says, "are powerful forms of resistance which

are repeated and shared across diverse indigenous communities" (2). As Tuhiwai Smith argues, "deconstruction is part of a much larger intent" (3). What she qualifies as a "burgeoning international community" (4) allows for new forms of knowledges, alternatives and counterknowledges that disorientate Western definitions on the matter to emerge. The three authors under analysis in this thesis, then, seem committed to emphasizing difference, not uniformity. They insist on differences of knowledges, of identity, of references, and of understandings of how time and space work, and they thus allow for a contrasting vision and a questioning of our perception of the world, as well as a questioning of our knowledge. Diversity and difference appear as positive aspects present in the multiplicity of heritages that the authors under investigation have witnessed. Transnationalism is seen as a new way of building contemporary cultural relationships and, in this new space, connections are created among a local culture, a national culture, and an international one, which, in turn, reconnects with the local one; and, the main purpose of this is to engage, explore, and question what serves as cultural standards, collective as well as individual, for Indigenous peoples.

Thus, and taking into account the characteristics of the transnationalism of the twenty-first century, I analyze in detail *Star Waka* (1999) by Maori Robert Sullivan, *Night Fisher* (2005) by Hawaiian R. Kikuo Johnson, and *Carpentaria* (2006) by Waanyi Alexis Wright. The collection of poems from Aotearoa, the graphic novel from the Sandwich Islands (a term used by Queen Liliuokalani)[1], and the novel from Australia each offer their readers a glimpse into the rich history of Maori, Hawaiian, and Australian Aboriginal cultures, respectively. Specifically, then, I ask how these movements serve the Indigenous nations of Oceania. In my thesis, I argue that the communities from the Pacific have created space/s and identity/ies through their interventions in

[1] *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* [1898] 2010, 87.

language, and that the creation of new cross-cultural spaces profoundly affects current Indigenous transnational literatures and, thus, the way in which one comprehends the world. I further explore the issues of place, space, belonging, identity, and language by way of a new framework within the broader field of Indigenous literary studies: transnationalism. Moreover, as the twenty-first century engages in new sorts of narratives, the issue of rootedness and displacement within a network of Indigenous alliances allows for a comparative and transnational approach and vision of a shared literary world that crosses over local and national boundaries, thereby creating alternative geographies. While, the colonial systems in North America and in Australia have created strictly defined portions of land for Indigenous people (such as nation-states and reserves) or have forcibly removed entire nations from their land. In my research, I focus rather on deterritorialization and reterritorialization and the reinterpretation of the understanding that for Indigenous peoples, in journalist Lou Cornum's terms, being "land-based does not have to mean landlocked" (n.p.). She adds:

> There is a history of movement among many of our peoples …. The need to defend [Indigenous] rights to live on [Indigenous] lands without harassment has created the political necessity of claiming our land-based political and cultural identities …. This insistence on [Indigenous] people having to always be located on or closely connected to one particular area also erases those who are unable to return to their traditional territories…. There is also the simple fact that NDNS may want to move around. (n.p.)

To this end, I examine the formation of Indigenous identities in relation to the authors' respective homelands, while also interacting with the changing concepts of local and national boundaries. By decentering Western definitions of the border, I highlight the way in which these authors can be read through the semantic lines of their work and across geographical borders. In the wake of the twenty-first century, travelling and accessing a particular territory has become more common, yet borders appear increasingly strict. Thus, while accounting for shifting geographical and cultural frameworks, I aim to paint a cross-cultural comparison within different genres of Indigenous literatures in Oceania. The intention of my research is thus to focus on Indigenous literatures in a transnational context of glocalization[2]. For Chadwick Allen, glocalization happens when "the local launches into the regional, national, or global only to become local again and again" (2)—and to consider contrasting visions of our perceptions of the world. With this in mind, how do such concepts serve Indigenous communities? Taking into account the importance of local conditions, which must be considered in a context of globalization, the authors suggest an approach that challenges the dichotomy between the global and the local by disorientating and regenerating creative Indigenous identities on a large scale. Moreover, emphasizing worldwide movement and circulation further allows for a visibility that is both "rooted and routed" (Huang, "Towards Transnational Native American Literary Studies" 2) in a network of Indigenous alliances. As such, the readers witness a pan-continental movement with different way and scales of communication and collaboration. Originating from a fixed location, writer and artists attempt to un-settle geographical frameworks in order to rely on new cultural ones that further decenter the settler dynamic.

[2] The term "glocalization" was originally coined in 1995 by Roland Robertson, who explains that glocalization "has involved the reconstruction, in a sense, the production of 'home', 'community' and 'locality'" (qtd. in Riemenschneider, 140).

1.3 Chapter Division

In my research, I discuss the notions of language, space (in all its forms—geographical, spiritual, linguistic, and emotional) and identit-y/-ies according to each of the three authors, and in relation to their respective homelands through the lens of transnationalism, while also bearing the current context of a globalized world in mind. As such, my methodology chapter highlights the terms and scholars on whom I base my investigative analysis. Then, I focus on Waanyi activist and writer Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria* and discuss how Wright addresses Indigenous needs while also responding to Western expectations, thereby creating a piece of work that disorientates her readership. Published in 2006, *Carpentaria* takes us into the world of the fictional small town of Desperance in north-western Queensland, Australia, near the Gulf of Carpentaria. The story encapsulates many genres and tones, such as epic, mythic, comic, dramatic, and realist, to name only a few. Told from an Aboriginal point of view, the novel deals with complicated real-life current matters such as land titles and land rights, racism, the outcomes of colonialism, precarious life, and conflicts between the town's inhabitants. Wright depicts the various interactions taking place among the western family, the eastern mob, the Uptown white officials, and the mine factory. Wright herself is from the same region in Australia and has taken part in several struggles concerning the rights of Aboriginal Peoples on their lands (Wright in "The Garret: Writers on Writing"). The region and the communities that she writes about are depicted with a writing that highlights both her Aboriginal legacy and the effects of colonialism.

In my third chapter, I investigate *Star Waka* by Robert Sullivan and show how the global and the local interact through acts of travelling. Much like *Carpentaria*, *Star Waka* (1999), published just before the 2000 millennium, offers a glimpse into the new cultural frameworks present in Aotearoa-New Zealand. *Star Waka*, tackles issues of travelling, navigating, and moving

back and forth in a specific space, but in time as well. Focusing on political issues and identity, Sullivan boards his readers, like members of a crew, or a *waka*, a canoe used by Maori and a symbol of voyage and reminiscent of Maori ancestors voyaging on waka from Hawaiki to Aotearoa ("Stories: Waka – canoes" n.p.), to explore the world of *stars* and the *ocean*: these three elements return with each poem. It is important to remember that the term "waka" establishes links of multiplicity. According to the Maori dictionary website, and as stated in Sullivan's poems, it has a meaning that can range from canoe or vehicle to conveyance or spirit medium. Relying on these elements, the poet suggests a rethinking of society as a whole present on the islands and in relation to the world. More than that, the 110 poems in English suggest a reconsidering of those relationships. The three beacons —the star, the waka, and the ocean—further serve to explore what stands in as new cultural standards: with the underlying theme of voyages and travels, Sullivan raises questions of how to define contemporary cultural references on several levels—personal, collective, local, and national—all within an era of globalization. Colonization, decolonization, culture, identit-y/-ies, and politics are all universal concerns and questions present in the collection.

Finally, my fourth chapter discusses the issues highlighted by R. Kikuo Johnson in the graphic novel *Night Fisher*. In this final part, I pay specific attention to Johnson's work on both textual and visual language. *Night Fisher* encompasses movement from one place to another, raises questions about identity, and presents a vision of Hawai'i that defies the romanticized image of it. Specifically, the question of identit-y/-ies and belonging is one of the many recurrent themes in *Night Fisher*. The Hawaiian-born and New York City-based author and artist takes his readers into the everyday life of Loren Foster, his friend Shane, and his father. Refusing to submit to the clichés one might have about the Island of Hawai'i, the readers are told the story of Loren, who moved from Boston to Maui six years before. Loren, his friends, his father, his encounters, and the

island are all depicted as characters and the readers are witnesses to Loren's struggle to find a sense of belonging. It is through the changes that happen in the teenager's life—specifically when he starts to engage in petty crimes—that Johnson shows us his poetic and artistic moments: the drawings of the graphic novel evoke Hawai'i as it is and not as one might imagines it to be; it is precarious, uncertain, luxuriant, powerful, and strong, as well as dramatic. Moreover, *Night Fisher* also deals with colonial fallouts, including tourism.

Carpentaria, *Star Waka* and *Night Fisher* offer a reinterpretation of the understanding of land and space more generally. All three authors tackle colonization from their own point of view and expose the consequences on their respective homelands to create a literary space that goes beyond the boundaries of literatures. They reach people all over the world by engaging with language, spaces and identit-y/-ies to alter the current understanding of the world. The work of Wright, Sullivan and Johnson emphasizes difference, collaboration while giving another comprehension and perception of the world.

2. Methodology: Why Indigenous Transnational Literatures?

> We are not mere victims but active agents in history, innovators of new ways, of Indian ways, of thinking and being and speaking and authoring in this world created by colonial contact.
>
> ——Craig S. Womack,
> *Red on Red, Native American Literary Separatism*, 1999, 6.

In transnational studies, the circulation of ideas and of literatures allows for a communication and the establishment of links among them. This approach to literary studies makes it possible to decenter the nation-states' literary canons. Indigenous transnational literatures, I argue, take an active part in crossing any sort of border and push the limits of regional, local, and international spaces to introduce a shared, connected, and communicating Indigenous world, thus creating alternatives ways of comprehending and apprehending spaces, countries, and history. Instead of focusing on a binary system divided between the local and the global, between first and second languages, between "us" and "them or "the other," these literatures promote a circulation of ideas that highlight an alternative way of researching that "celebrates the networking and coalition of Indigenous peoples as well as the circulation of Indigenous ideas and cultures…; it offers inputs based on Indigenous specificities, experiences, and realities" (Huang, Deloria, Furlan et al. 3). This change of perspective in transnational literatures emphasizes worldwide connections between local and international spaces. As such, this relation questions the European model of nation and what makes a nation. To this effect, scholars Huang, Deloria, Furlan, and Gamber state:

> How, in these processes, do longstanding notions of homeland and nation interact with new modes of community formation and literary expression, drawn across spatial and temporal borderlines? Insofar as we recognize that Indigenous experiences may make much more sense if understood with less focus on national boundaries, the transnational turn describes the reality of what we often seek in reaching across borders and oceans for consonance or, more importantly, perspective. (3)

Within a transnational context, Indigenous literatures challenge these relations and concepts (borders, nation, nationhood, language, identity, geographies) that are, too often, taken for granted. I use this particular approach to analyze the work of Robert Sullivan, Alexis Wright, and R. Kikuo Johnson, because they themselves, unapologetically, seek to challenge these European perceptions and establish a connection with one another. In reshaping geographies, they complement their readers' ideas of what constitutes a nation. I argue that these three authors take advantage of this process to create a network of alliances and to produce a new literature, one that is unique and shared, and which engages with thoughts and actions: coming from multiple backgrounds, it is in this cross-cultural context that Indigenous voices must be heard and become central to create change. It is in this logic of cultural diversity that difference must be understood as equality and harmony. These changing forms of expressing and living Indigeneity thus disorientate and move away from place-centric points of view while also bearing in mind the importance and specificities of the local context, allowing for the envisioning of a common literary world that moves beyond and crosses over local and national boundaries.

2.1 Indigenous Transnational Literatures: Another Way of Envisioning Communication in the Twenty-First Century

Indigenous transnational literatures have existed long before the term "transnational" was coined in research and in the academic field. These literatures often tackle topics of interaction and of encounters and deal with language, as well as with cultural standards. Moreover, they tend to focus on transmission. Scholar Azade Seyhan argues that this kind of literature addresses what she calls the "paranational" (9-10); it "operates outside the national canon, [and] addresses issues facing deterritorialized cultures" (9-10). Her view of transnational literatures thereby joins Chadwick Allen's, but he goes a little further by bringing forward not only the idea of transnational studies, but also the idea of transindigenous studies. Such literatures, Allen states, are "not limited to national borders, and certainly not limited to the national borders of contemporary (settler) nation-states" (3). Moreover, Allen seeks to undo the dichotomy between the here and there, the "inside" and the "outside" (2); on the contrary, Indigenous literatures and communications travel, circulate, and, as suggested by Alexis Wright in her 2007 PEN speech, they "flow." Transnational Indigenous literatures are, thus, "appropriated, incorporated, manipulated, interpreted, reinterpreted, combined, recombined, recreated, and, once remade, relaunched into the semiotic traffic flows of worlds old and new to move and be moved again" (Allen 2). In this way, once released into the "semiotic traffic flows" of different worldviews, transnational literatures address the matters of place, space, mobilit-y/-ies, languages, cultures, identit-y/-ies, and politics. These are all issues that have surfaced in the context of globalization and that can be defined, as Keri E. Iyall Smith suggests, as "a set of processes that are moving around the globe, re-shaping economic systems, political bodies, and cultural identities" (70). The encounter between globalization—or rather, a globalized society—and transnational literatures, in which local perceptions, cultures, and

knowledges are facing new global “nested identities” (Tuhiwai Smith 126), thus leads to a glocal approach to the world. For Allen “[glocal] narratives and characters and symbols and forms and themes move and are moved and, in the course of their movements, simple and complex, more obvious and more subtle, stories and elements of stories develop and change” (3).
Consequently, transnational Indigenous literatures allow for the creation of dialogues beyond and across local and national borders.

This framework further favours a decentering of what has been considered the “national” (US-based) literary canon in Indigenous literary studies. Joseph Bauerkemper notes:

> Through critical reciprocity, the entrenched nationalist tendency in American Indian literary studies and the transnational turn enhance one another and engender “Indigenous trans/nationalism” as a productive theoretical construct. As the punctuational inclusion of the slash suggests, Indigenous trans/nationalism signals both the sovereign integrity of Indigenous nations and the relations that move between and across them. (396)

With these considerations in mind, how do authors communicate in and through their narratives to create a network of alliances that allows for resistance on a global scale? How do they use transnational works to re affirm their sovereignty while transcending frontiers?
Specifically, these literatures often decentralize the prevailing position of the English language and play with it, un-settling it in such a way that the authors

> ultimately privilege neither 'first' nor 'second' language, neither 'source' nor 'target', metropole nor colony, locating their argument for sovereignty in a kinetic space of translation, identifying the process of moving between heterogeneous languages which are irreducible to national literature … as equally valuable as the recourse to self-expression in an oppressed or minority language (Baxter and Smith 263).

As the binary approach to language is deconstructed, the use of Indigenous languages in these literatures enables a shifting away from identity-based politics and helps to shed light on the resilience of Indigenous peoples and their creativity on a global scale. By grounding literature within Indigenous perceptions and epistemologies, such works promote a circulation, a collaboration among several sources—Indigenous as well as non-Indigenous—that originates from and is articulated by Indigenous voices. The chosen language translates a current, contemporary reality—not a colonial discourse—which puts Indigenous perceptions, thus, their sovereignty, at the centre. This sovereignty is not only connected to language and land; Indigenous epistemologies in literature reflect a cultural and political sovereignty, as well as an intellectual one. "Indigenous research frameworks shift the power," argues Kovach, as it "means gathering knowledge that allows for voice and representational involvement" as well as "[allowing] the participants to share their experiences on their terms" (82). She adds that "such methods act to give power back to the participants and the participant's community" (82).

Beyond literary studies, Indigenous transnational literatures connect peoples on several levels. Creek-Cherokee scholar Craig Womack argues that "one viable approach is to examine…Native authors to understand Native textual production.… There *is* such a thing as Native perspective. I feel that native perspectives have to do with allowing Indian people to speak

for themselves, that is to say, with prioritizing Native voices" (4); "those voices," he adds, "rise out of a historical reality wherein Native people have been excluded from discourse concerning their own cultures, and Indian people must be, ultimately will be, heard" (5). In line with Womack, Pueblo poet Simon Ortiz states that it is the imagination and the creative response of Indigenous peoples to the effects of colonialism that helped them "to keep telling and creating stories…and it is this resistance against loss that has made life possible (11). In addition, Ortiz claims:

> Nevertheless, it is not the oral tradition as transmitted from ages past alone which is the inspiration and source for contemporary Indian literature. It is also because of the acknowledgement by Indian writers of a responsibility to advocate for their people's self-government, sovereignty, and control of land and natural resources; and to look also at racism, political and economic oppression, sexism, supremacism, and the needless and wasteful exploitation of land and people, especially in the U.S., that Indian literature is developing a character of nationalism which indeed it should have. (12)

With Womack and Ortiz, Indigenous voices in literature highlight their sovereignty, they emphasize collaboration and exchange, as well as aim at disrupting the power of the nation-state in which they reside. The language they chose to speak or in which they chose to write is a language that reflects history, a history of evolution, resurgence, change, adaptation, and most of all, a modern history. Indeed, an increasing number of authors who have migrated or who have witnessed migrations have chosen to write in a language that is inspired by a global network of influences and which in turn allows them to reach audiences throughout the world, enabling

constant interactions. Margaret Kovach argues that language has a role “in shaping thoughts and culture,” and thus, she adds,

> conflict between Indigenous and Western research approaches (and its involvement in knowledge construction) rests deeply within language and the matter of dualist thought patterns. In tribal epistemologies and Indigenous research frameworks, one must first assert the interrelationship between Indigenous language structure and worldview, and then, the manner in which colonialism has interfered with that dynamic. Given the history and interruption, it is no wonder that Indigenous thoughts tend to dance around the sharp edges of languages binaries that define Western methodologies. (59)

Similarly, I argue that Johnson, Wright, and Sullivan take advantage of the many languages around them and break away from the dualistic approach mentioned by Kovach. The linguistic scheme, then, thus appears as a global project, reading “across, beyond and through” (Allen 2014, 392). In this way, literary production seems to occur within and despite national contexts and borders. Literature thus appears as a means by which personal and collective memory transcends and is transmitted, beyond borders and official versions of history (Allen 392).

2.2 Defining a Transnational Space through Roots and Routes.

The transcendence of literary boundaries through language leads me to the second topic I discuss in my thesis: that is, the concept of Indigeneity as being both “rooted and routed through particular places” (Huang 2). Mass media, consumption, tourism and mass migrations—all factors

that have come with globalization—have an impact on imagination, according to scholar Arjun Appadurai. The message that new media convey, for example, are making people transnational, allowing them to reach one another in no time, to watch the same show, to eat the same food, and to wear the same clothes. Time and space collapse. However, as noted by Cree editor Gregory Younging, the concept of "the time-space continuum"—a term that LeAnne Howe coined—allows for mobility and place to be intertwined in a cultural framework that goes back to previous generations of Indigenous peoples and forward to future generations. He points out that, applied to Indigenous lives and literatures,

> the ultimate responsibility for Indigenous peoples lies in being the link between the ancestors and futures generations – a cultural precept that has been referred to by Indigenous writers, such as LeAnne Howe, as "the time-space continuum." … Indigenous peoples wish their cultures to be perceived as dynamic, in interaction with the modern world, and existing in a continuum between past and future generations of Indigenous peoples. They are not encapsulated in the past – static and resistant to change, or absent. (18)

Thus, it is by envisioning an expanding network of coalitions that alternative geographies can be constructed, and thus, borders upset. The time and space continuum builds a bridge between past, present, and future, which are perceived not as linear, but rather as circular, as a continuity. Moreover, interactions among homelands and the ongoing evolving conception of time and space allow for a collaboration between Indigenous peoples and non-Indigenous people across institutional lines and draw upon community production of knowledges, in which Indigeneity both

transcends national boundaries and is grounded in a specific place across the Pacific region. Indeed, the notion of borders—and of what makes home, home—is firmly tied to the concepts of time and space. As such, the Western ideas of time and space remain different from Indigenous conceptions. In an established society that perceives time as linear, the Indigenous perception of it as circular, stretching across generations (Younging 20), questions the very idea of time and, consequently, the idea of space as well. Indeed, post-contact society was defined according to a colonial system around concepts that did not apply to the Indigenous ways of living and that did not match Indigenous peoples' ways of thinking or perceiving time and space. Thomas King's short story "Borders" (part of the *One Good Story, That One* collection, 1993), for instance, is a perfect example of that difference of perspective. The story sets at the US/Canadian border, recounts a mother and her son (the narrator)'s attempt to cross into the US to visit another family member. When asked about her nationality and where she comes from, the "Canadian side" or "American side"—according to the border guards—the narrator's mother answers the "Blackfoot side" (50). She does not take into account the irritation of the guards and the threats of arrest; she does not and will not identify herself as Canadian nor American. Her refusal to identify herself with nationalities she does not acknowledge attracts the attention of the press and, eventually, both the narrator and his mother are able to cross the border. King's short story echoes his article "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial", in which he argues that avoiding the defined "chronological order" of the "nationalistic centre" is an act of defiance: in doing so, they – Indigenous peoples, but also the mother in "Borders" – show that "they do not depend on the arrival of Europeans for their *raison d'être*" (189); to follow such rules, for King, would be "an act of imperialism that demands that I imagine myself as something I did not choose to be, as something I would not choose to become" (190).

Ultimately, what King's story reveals is that the whole idea of one's identity and culture being "authentic" – or perceived as such – was, and has been, all too often defined by the very society that colonized the lands in the first place and, consequently, imposed its ideas and conceptions of time, space, and borders, unto its inhabitants as their "raison d'être".

Similarly, all too often, views of the Pacific have been dominated by Eurocentric visions. In his article "Our Sea of Islands," Epeli Hau'ofa states:

> The idea that the countries of Polynesia and Micronesia are too small, too poor, and too isolated to develop any meaningful degree of autonomy is an economistic and geographic deterministic view of a very narrow kind that overlooks culture history and the contemporary process of what may be called world enlargement that is carried out by tens of thousands of ordinary Pacific Islanders right across the ocean—from east to west and north to south… borders that have been defined only recently, crisscrossing an ocean that had been boundless for ages before Captain Cook's apotheosis. (151)

As Hau'ofa demonstrates in his essay, the way in which the dominant power perceives the islands of this region has had a tremendous effect on the people who live and inhabit it, and on the ways in which the islands have been defined and perceived by the rest of the people around the globe. With this "New Oceania" (Wendt), colonialism brought new encounters: as such, the Pacific region was perceived by Westerners as a divided and separate area, whereas Pasifika peoples saw the sea as a continuous space in which to reach one another, to connect, and to circulate, rather than as a separation. The colonial state is one that defines history and that shapes it in its own

interest. In this sense, viewing Oceania as broken, divided pieces of land is one of the methods used to assert colonial authority: the tiny islands that constitute Micronesia or Polynesia are isolated; they have no resources to rely on; they are separated from one another by the vastness of the ocean; the ocean is thus an obstacle in their development. However, as Hau'ofa illustrates in "Our Sea of Islands," it is all a matter of perception: where one person perceives the ocean as a way to divide, others will see it as a way to enhance connection and circulation. "Is this not what neocolonialism is all about? To make people believe that they have no choice but to depend?" asks Hau'ofa (151). As he argues, this belittling view of Oceania is entirely based on the size of the land one sees. Nevertheless, one needs to consider "the myths, legends, and oral traditions, and the cosmologies of the people of Oceania," says Hau'ofa, for "it becomes evident that they did not conceive of their world in such microscopic proportions…. Their world was anything but tiny. … There is a world of difference between viewing the Pacific as 'islands in a far sea' and as 'a sea of islands'" (6). Thus, as exposed by Hau'ofa, perceptions and assumptions play a crucial role in how one views space.

Land, sovereignty, and identity are tightly connected. Transnational literary studies have made it possible to widen the scope of the humanities. Whether the concern is gender, language, space, or identity, these literatures have given access to a new way of envisioning, understanding, and grasping key concepts on a global scale; they move away from previously too narrow concepts. Moreover, Indigenous transnational literatures alter these former views and shape another network that favours and promotes communication and reciprocal action. The "transnational turn" (Byrd 176) promotes a restructuration of "the global networks that produce identities, subjectivities, and vested positionalities across the permeability and rigidity of borders" (Byrd 176). Mobility, place, and politics are thus intertwined, and this interaction between homelands and the ongoing,

evolving conception of time and space allows for a transcendence of national boundaries. Pertinent to my analysis here, this act of going beyond is always grounded in a specific place, and is of great importance across the Pacific region.

2.3 New Cultural Formations and Standards: Identit-y/-ies in the Making

The third concept that I focus on is that of identity, which is closely connected to language and land. It is important to note that all three concepts under investigation in this thesis – language, space, and identit-y/-ies– are evolving and changing as the world evolves and changes: they are not static, but rather, dynamic. As such, the way in which one perceives them is subject to many global and local influences. Moreover, in my chapters, I decided to directly link identity to language and identity to land, since they are entangled with one other. As such, identity will not be examined in one specific part of the thesis, but rather in all its subsections.

In *Modernity at Large*, Arjun Appadurai argues in that with globalization, locality (or, at least, the feeling of locality) has an influence on the national identities created by the nation-states, which use national identities as a means to perpetuate colonial powers and relations, to keep control over the various populations, and, thus, to prevent transnational movements, and therefore communications, from happening (22). Therefore, Indigenous transnational literatures can decenter such settler dynamics and perspectives, and challenge conceptions of community and identity of these island nations. Consequently, Indigenous transnational literatures have a crucial role of decolonizing the so-called postcolonial world. To this end, Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou thinker and scholar Linda Tuhiwai Smith states:

> There is rather compelling evidence that in fact [decolonization] has not occurred. And, even when they have left formally, the institutions and legacy of colonialism have remained. Decolonization, once viewed as the formal process of handing over the instruments of government, is now recognized as a long-term process involving the bureaucratic, cultural, linguistic and psychological divesting of colonial power. (98)

In this reconception of national identity, the loss and regaining of languages, lands, and territories remain central. However, how do Indigenous cultures and identities address the concerns of the twenty-first century? What happens when being in one's "homeland" is no longer necessary? Does it mean that Indigeneity vanishes? Issues of rootedness and displacement have raised questions about Indigenous traditions being locally articulated, while also having transnational routes.

It is with this diversity in mind that I argue that Wright, Sullivan, and Johnson all build on their understanding of identity in relation to their homelands, while also crossing local, national, and international borders. The resettling—or unsettling—of cultural, geographical, and literary boundaries supports and enables them to think of new ways of navigating the current state of affairs. This approach, in turn, challenges generic Western knowledge, which has been established and firmly grounded for far too long, as the norm. This difference in perception brought by numerous encounters between two or more cultures over the years has led to global and local cultural influences that constantly feed and renew one another. One of the main consequences to note was a change to identity itself, and what it means to be Indigenous then and now. As scholar Keri E. Iyall Smith claims: "Indigenous is not a race, an ethnicity, or a religion. Indigenous is a

complex concept: as an identity, a relationship to the land and the State, and as a form of legitimation. Being indigenous is about "continuity of habitation, aboriginality, and often a 'natural' connection to the land (Clifford 1997 [1994]: 287)." (33)

In this way, Indigenous peoples have a history in common; but while they also often share cultural aspects, that does not mean that Indigenous peoples can be considered as one entity. On the contrary, as Gregory Younging and Margaret Kovach both argue, diversity and distinctness are central to defining Indigenous identit-y/-ies. Even the UNDRIP, the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, does not give a proper definition of the term "Indigenous," according to Steven Newcomb. Rather

> [in] the UN working definitions, peoples said to be 'indigenous' were existing freely in a particular place. Then, eventually, another people of a different 'race' or 'ethnic origin' arrived there, and the new arrivals gradually became dominant through conquest, settlement, and other means. In other words, the UN working definitions tell us that the original peoples were reduced down 'to non-dominant or colonial situation' (Newcomb qtd. in Cheyfitz 192).

On his part, Younging summarizes the concept of Indigeneity with five "key principles" around which "Indigenous Peoples view themselves" (20–21) and thus define themselves: first, he acknowledges that Indigenous Peoples are "diverse, distinct cultures," and that "they are part of an ongoing continuum" that goes back to several generations before. They also "have not been assimilated into Canadian society"; rather, Indigenous peoples are processing "cultural

reclamation," as well as culturally changing and adapting. He adds that this last one "[does] not mean that Indigenous peoples have acquiesced to mainstream Canadian society, nor that Indigenous cultures have been fundamentally altered or undermined" (20-21). Younging's thinking, in this way, meets Kovach's and Tuhiwai Smith's: Indigenous knowledges are important, not to say essential, when it comes to Indigenous research and methodologies – especially in relation to the land, knowing that some protocols insist that one introduces oneself by naming "the mountain, the river, the tribal ancestor, the tribe and the family," so as to "locate oneself in a set of identities which have been framed geographically, politically and genealogically" (126), writes Tuhiwai Smith. Consequently, umbrella terms that attempt to blend the differences and the different practices are usually not appreciated.

Moreover, it is crucial to conceive of Indigenous identity as strongly tied to land and place. For instance, Tuhiwai Smith and Margaret Kovach are from very different parts of the world. Yet, they both agree and give methodologies that originate from different contexts, that feed each other, and that respond to each other, while allowing the approach, which I have also chosen, to be grounded in a transnational context and to inform the boundless nature of Indigenous Peoples of connections far beyond nation-states borders.

Thus, land and one's connections to place and community play a central part in the building of one's identit-y/-ies and are deeply rooted in one's understandings of this very concept. Such understandings are relations—in other words, forms of kinship, which Cherokee scholar Daniel Heath Justice explains as the "many relations to whom we owe more than superficial respect" (90). For Justice, kinship is "an active network of connections, a process of continual acknowledgement and enactment" (42), which puts place-based identit-y/-ies at the centre without making such concepts as rigid as colonial policies do. Indigenous identities, therefore, are built around

flexibility, fluidity, changes, and adaptation—to use Younging's specific terms—of the many Indigenous communities. The evolution of these identities thus challenge the categories imposed by the colonial system. As a consequence, Indigenous peoples take advantage of what one could qualify as modern and traditional cultural tools, to create change. Moreover, the environment in which these changes happen is important: indeed, the environment, kinship, land, and communities, all are factors of self-determination and sovereignty, and thus will differ from one person to another, from one community to another. As scholar Hsinya Huang puts it:

> In the context of an increasingly transnational globe, the master narratives of time and place are shifting. Especially in (sovereign) Indigenous cultures (which have at all times placed great emphasis on transnational orientations), notions of homeland, territory, migration, diaspora, and time have emerged as central coordinates in the construction of identity, both individual and collective. ("Introduction" xi).

In an era where information spreads around the world in one split second, where one can go around the world in a few hours, where people who never meet connect and find common interests and share ideas, the rigid borders of space and time are shaking. Nevertheless, in spite of being located and having specific bonds to a particular place, Kovach mentions that, as Indigenous peoples, "we understand each other because we share a world view that holds common, enduring beliefs about the world" (37). That said, what happens when one's homeland is no longer necessary to define one's identit-y/-ies? How to define oneself and to build oneself? Due to colonization and its ongoing consequences, Indigenous peoples from around the world have experienced continuous, systemic, and systematic removal from their lands.

For this reason, I conceive of the concept of authenticity as tied to that of hybridity while also being acutely aware of how controversial and questionable the latter term is; it makes it difficult for me to use[3]. That said, according to Ngāti Awa and Ngāti Porou author Linda Tuhiwai Smith,

> The term [Indigenous peoples] has enabled the collective voices of colonized people to be expressed strategically in the international arena. It has also been an umbrella enabling communities and peoples to come together, transcending their own colonized contexts and experiences, in order to learn, share, plan, organize and struggle collectively for self-determination on the global and local stages. Thus, the world's [Indigenous] populations belong to a network of peoples. (7)

Consequently, Indigenous peoples around the world do share the experience of colonization of their lands, their languages, and their cultures, but also the very real experience of "denial of their sovereignty, by a colonizing society that has come to dominate and determine the shape and quality of their lives, even after it has formally pulled out" (Tuhiwai Smith 7). However, both Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Margaret Kovach seem to agree on the matter that Indigenous peoples also share stories, cultures, territories, beliefs, and much more (37). Identity then must be defined outside of the Western conception—and, more specifically, does not rely on blood only. Thus, being aware of the shortcomings of the term "hybrid," perhaps the expression "nested identities," as coined by Tuhiwai Smith (126), is better: these refer to the "multiple layers of belonging" and

[3] After reading Maria Campbell's *Halfbreed*, the term "hybrid" or "hybridity", in my view, denotes a sense of discrimination as it puts the person between cultures and emphasizes a division rather than a flow or a connection between two cultural worlds.

thus avoid a strict classification that might perpetuate a colonialist framework. Indeed, Tuhiwai Smith states:

> Some writers refer to these multiple layers of belonging as 'nested identities.' Gerald Alfred, for example, conceptualizes Kahnawake identity as including 'localised Kahnawake, national Mohawk, broader Iroquois, and pan-Native.' He says, 'Thus people of Mohawk descent who live in Kahnawake have a multi-layered identity which incorporates each one of the 'communities' he or she has inherited, and which also includes the broader Native –or the more common 'Indian'– identity flowing from their racial affiliation and identification as the [Indigenous] peoples of North America.'"(126)

Tuhiwai Smith, then, recalls the story of African American historian Bernice Reagon Johnson, who met a Maori community who relied on a song—rather than a specific territory—to define their identity. Tuhiwai Smith adds, "through this form of introduction you locate yourself in a set of identities which have been framed geographically, politically and genealogically" (126). Thus, these identities move away from solely land-based or blood-based conceptions. In this way, I argue that identities of these island nations challenge the conception of community and identity viewed from a Western perspective. As noted above, the distinct geography of Oceania, a territory of islands, was defined by the West and perceived as distant, isolated, and unconnected lands. Rather, it is as a multiplicity of "nested identities" that I want to address it in my thesis. With this in mind, I want to reiterate that I consider Indigenous transnational literatures to be optimal in this discussion, for they decentre and move away from the too-rigid and restrictive dichotomies often

found between modernity and tradition, the authentic and the hybrid. Land, territories, and languages are central to this reconception of identit-y/-ies.

3. *Carpentaria* and the Act of Writing: Disorientating the Reader

Published in 2006 and winner of the Miles Franklin Literary Award, Alexis Wright's novel *Carpentaria* is, in part, about cultural clashes and struggles among the local families and a mining company established on sacred grounds, and is told from the perspective of Australian Aboriginal people. Wright's long years of professional commitment to local and Aboriginal activism have shaped her deep knowledge of land rights in Queensland and in Australia (Wright, "The Garret Podcast," 2018). Her fictional work captures both cultures, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, and addresses Indigenous needs while also responding to Western expectations.

Wright's story exposes the ongoing and very present consequences of the colonization of Australia. This chapter looks at the different strategies that Wright uses to address and bring to light issues about Aboriginal land. One of the rhetorical devices she includes throughout the book is humour. For instance, Angel Day, one of the characters, spends most of her days conducting exhaustive searches in a giant "rubbish dump" (14) near her house, but she does not mind at all going through trash every day; in fact, she muses, "she could get anything her heart desired—*for free*" (14). This incisive use of humour immediately highlights the irony within tragic situations for the reader that, consequently, ask us to question official narratives. In this way, Wright's rhetorical strategies are in line with Unangax scholar Eve Tuck, who makes a distinction between "damage-centered research" and "desire-based research." She defines the first one as "being more socially and historically situated" (2009, 6). The intention of this research is to look to:

> [Historical] exploitation, domination, and colonization to explain contemporary brokenness, such as poverty, poor health, and low literacy. Common sense tells us this is a good thing, but the danger in damage-centered research is that it is a pathologizing approach in which the oppression singularly defines a community. (6)

On the other hand, what she calls "desire-based research" (9) is more "concerned with understanding complexity, contradiction, and the self-determination of lived lives" (9). The second theoretical framework helps to question preconceived ideas, "assumptions of responsibility, cohesiveness, ignorance, and paralysis within dispossessed and disenfranchised communities. Desire, yes, accounts for the loss and despair, but also the hope, the visions, the wisdom of lived lives and communities. Desire is involved with the *not yet* and, at times, the *not anymore*" (417). As such, desire-based research has two goals that can be seen in Wright's novel: the first one is to place Indigenous voices at the centre, thus, to have them assert their sovereignty. The second is to allow the author to insert hope and, thriving that is present, past, and also future.

In addition, the Waanyi author appears to want to disorientate her readers by forcing them to face and question what is called the postcolonial era in her country: in *Carpentaria*, the reader is faced with what, at first, appears to be an isolated, dry, divided land, spilt between Aboriginal Peoples, white town officials, and workers in the mine. The readers also bear witness to a multitude of Aboriginal stories and, although Wright's characters are the physical representation of the division and separation between well-entrenched Western assumptions and Indigenous culture and spirituality, she weaves a world of encounters and dialogues that navigates through the various experiences of peoples there. *Carpentaria*, in this way, questions what being Australian means and what authenticity is – or might be. In an interview with Nic Brash for "The Garret Podcast: Writers on Writing" in 2018, Wright states: "We say we're an oral storytelling culture, but what does that mean? How do we keep our story strong? And how do we attend to that practice? How do we understand that practice? Because we're going to be more and more dependent on that in the future, as well as a Western style education" (Wright in "The Garret: Writers on Writing", 00:26:18–49).

And, in “On Writing *Carpentaria*,” she adds: “How [does one] understand the idea of Indigenous people living with the stories of all the times of this country, and secondly, how [does one] write from this perspective [?]” (2). Here, her purpose is clear: How *does* one keep Aboriginal ways of storytelling strong?

To this end, Wright draws links between knowledge, language, and authority and revises what it means to be Australian Aboriginal today, specifically by finding inspiration in the Dreamtime narrative, which is connected to Aboriginal storytelling. Dreamtime, or Dreaming is “the Aboriginal understanding of the world, of its creation, and its great stories. The Dreamtime is the beginning of knowledge, from which came the laws of existence” (“Dreamtime Meaning”,n.p.). In addition, “all life as it is today—Human, Animal, Bird and Fish is part of one vast unchanging network of relationships which can be traced to the great spirit ancestors of the Dreamtime” (“Dreamtime Meaning”, n.p.). The following figure further illustrates the Dreamtime perception of the world:

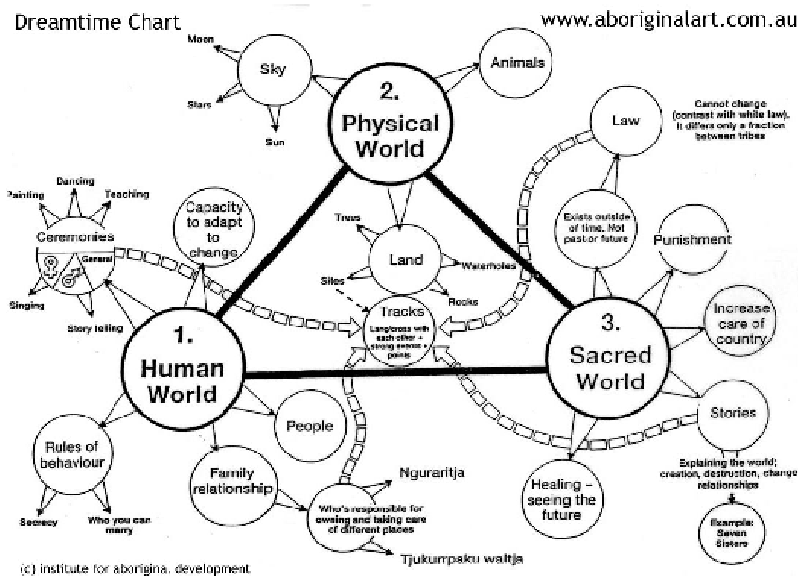

Figure 1: Dreamtime Chart

One of Australia's creation stories, "The Rainbow Serpent," tells the story of Goorialla, who woke up from his sleep and "crossed Australia from east to west and north to south, stopping to listen for his people" ("The Rainbow Serpent,"n.p.). His body, voyaging through Australia, modified the land, creating rivers and streams that brought life to earth. In her novel, Wright refers to this founding story in the first pages of her novel: "the ancestral serpent, a creature larger than storm clouds," she writes, is responsible for all the trees, rivers, mountains and canyons in Australia. She adds, "[the] inside knowledge about this river and coastal region is the Aboriginal Law handed down through the ages since time began" (*Carpentaria* 3). Dreamtime is thus understood to be the "foundation of Aboriginal … culture. It is the story of events that have happened, how the universe came to be… Aboriginal people understood the Dreamtime as a beginning that never ended. They held the belief that the Dreamtime is a period of continuum of past, present, and future" (Scott Linklater, "Aboriginal Dreamtime" n.p.). By integrating the creation story into her novel, thereby blending worldviews—Aboriginal and Western—Wright reveals an active Aboriginal community that dynamically engages in re-creating their reality and un-settling colonial assumptions, first of all, through the use of the Dreamtime. Moreover, the Dreamtime is applied to language as well, and becomes a tool to highlight the effects of colonization. *Carpentaria* can thus be interpreted as a counternarrative in constant movement between worldviews that puts Indigenous voices at the centre, and promotes the idea of time and space as nonlinear; thus, *Carpentaria* challenges Western accounts and knowledge.

3.1 Positioning the Narrative: Two Knowledges that Flow Side by Side

Knowledge is a central theme in *Carpentaria*, and Alexis Wright takes her readers and her characters on the same journey. Told from an Australian Aboriginal view point, the stories of the characters of the town of Desperance seem to move in and out of the Dreamtime narrative. By evoking Dreamtime storytelling as well as the damage brought by colonization to the community, the novel is rooted in Aboriginal culture, Waanyi culture, and Western culture, all at once. Within the context of the twenty-first century, taking into account mass migration—whether it be corporate or touristic—and a globally connected community of various people, Wright offers a novel with knowledges that come from different cultural origins, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal. Ultimately, knowledges play an important role in the formation of one's identity; both knowledge and identity grow, change, and evolve. Thus, identity cannot be considered without acknowledging the different cross-cultural influences at play. Indeed, as Jamaican-English scholar Stuart Hall so aptly notes, "[i]dentity is not as transparent or unproblematic as we think" (222). Hall believes that what constitutes one's identity is ever-changing and developing. He states: "Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished fact, which the new cultural practices then represent, we should think, instead, of identity as a 'production,' which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation" (222). Moreover, he suggests, "this view problematizes the very authority and authenticity to which the term 'cultural identity', lays claim.… We all write and speak from a particular place and time, from a history and a culture which is specific. What we say is always 'in context,' *positioned*" (222, emphasis in the original). The link I draw between Hall's theory and Alexis Wright's writing lies in the two ways in which Hall chooses to approach the cultural identity that can be found in *Carpentaria*. Firstly,

Hall argues that the first definition—identity as an "accomplished fact"—conceives of cultural identity in the following way:

> one shared culture, a sort of collective 'one true self,' hiding inside the many others…which people with a shared history and ancestry hold in common. Within the terms of this definition, our cultural identities reflect the common historical experiences and shared cultural codes which provide us, as 'one people,' with stable, unchanging and continuous frames of reference and meaning, beneath the shifting divisions and vicissitudes of our actual history. (223)

This "oneness" (Hall, 223) can be found in Wright's novel and lies in its Aboriginal beliefs, history, and stories in an Australia that is shared by many. However, Hall suggests a second understanding of cultural identity, which is "a matter of 'becoming' as well as of 'being'. It belongs to the future as much as to the past" (225). While the first interpretation of the concept relies on similitudes, this one is based on difference:

> [Cultural identity] constitutes 'what we really are'; or rather—since history has intervened—'what we have become'.… It is not something which already exists, transcending place, time, history and culture. Cultural identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything which is historical, they undergo constant transformation. Far from being eternally fixed in some essentialised past, they are subject to the continuous 'play' of history, culture and power. Far from being grounded in a mere 'recovery' of the past…, identities are the names we give to the

> different ways we are positioned by, and position ourselves within, the narratives of the past. (225)

In this way, even though *Carpentaria* can be understood from this second perspective—that is, as one that observes and accounts for the consequences of colonization—it is interesting to consider how the characters themselves experience these consequences and take advantage of them, as well as how these consequences affect their roles and positions in the town of Desperance. In this way, *Carpentaria* enacts both of Hall's definitions of cultural identity, while also allowing characters to bridge the gaps between two systems of knowledge—Western and Aboriginal. Moreover, the novel enables a diversity of people and characters to connect through their shared life stories. For instance, the opening of the book captures what Wright calls her "more organic"[4] style:

> NATION CHANTS, BUT *WE KNOW YOUR STORY ALREADY*. THE BELLS CALLING THE FAITHFUL TO THE TABERNACLE WHERE THE GATES OF HEAVEN WILL OPEN, BUT NOT FOR THE WICKED. CALLING INNOCENT LITTLE BLACK GIRLS FROM A DISTANT COMMUNITY WHERE THE WHITE DOVE BEARING AN OLIVE BRANCH NEVER LANDS. LITTLE GIRLS WHO COME BACK HOME AFTER CHURCH ON SUNDAY, WHO LOOK AROUND THEMSELVES AT THE HUMAN FALLOUT AND ANNOUNCE MATTER-OF-FACTLY, *ARMAGEDON BEGINS HERE*. The ancestral serpent, a creature large than storm clouds, came down from the stars, laden with its own creative enormity. It moved graciously—if you had been watching the

[4] Alexis Wright in "The Garret Podcast: Writers on Writing," 00:14:27.

> eyes of a bird hovering in the sky far above the ground. Looking down at the serpent's wet bod, glistering from the ancient sunlight, long before man was a creature who could contemplate the next moment in time. It came down those billions of years ago, to crawl on its heavy belly, all around the wet clay soils in the Gulf of Carpentaria. (1)

This passage embodies Wright's awareness of the need to create and invent a new way of writing that gives way to both Aboriginal and Western traditions, and which could allow for the depiction of what it means for her to be authentic. Indeed, in The Garett Podcast, she said: "I wanted it to be as authentic in every way as I possibly could make it for my traditional country. … And I wanted the book to have the tone of who we are" (00:14:34-57). Moreover, the opening lines of the excerpt above convey a sense of biblical creation, while Indigenous knowledge and origin myths clearly prevail, making it difficult to strictly categorize her writing. That diversity—or blending—of worldviews renders the act of writing of *Carpentaria* experimental or even lyrical; it is influenced by the author's imagination and perception, and evokes, at the same time, Dreamtime storytelling, while also suggesting the malfunctioning of a community. The language Wright uses is blunt, almost raw, yet it quickly turns into a poetic epic narrative that relies on powerful imagination. Her new form of writing, then, embodies both her Waanyi legacy and the ongoing legacy of colonization. These two ideas meet and interact with each other throughout the novel.

Moreover, the land she describes, known as Australia, and its inhabitants, appear to be desperate and in an endless state of struggle, loss, and grief. Yet Wright shakes the hierarchy given to certain events in order to connect them, to equally entangle them together. For instance, she starts her novel by depicting in detail the creating serpent and the magnificent grandeur of the landscapes of Northern Queensland. She then introduce her readers to Angel Day and her daily

trip to the dump in the same way. She describes in one chapter the Phantom family— while also alluding to the rape of the daughters by the mayor of the town — and then offers an epic and heroic journey in which Norm Phantom takes the body of his friend Elias to be buried at sea. We also learn the story of Will, Norm's son, who left the body of Elias in his father's workshop, as well as the story of Norm who is fed by his grandson Bala on an island after the hurricane, while Will ends up on a floating rubbish raft. What is noteworthy here is that none of these events holds a more important place in the novel, and none of them is a turning point in the story; most of all, there is no ending to these stories. Wright describes them as if the readers were following the various lives and actions of each character. Like a collage of a multitude of stories, cultures, legacies, and traditions, parallels are drawn between each and every event in the novel.

In this way, the novel takes on narrative aspects of Dreamtime narrative, provides its readers with information about land rights, and offers a glimpse of what Aboriginal life might be in the region; these last two are important, for, ultimately, they primarily serve Indigenous interests towards self-determination.

Additionally, her stories are not solely about mourning and loss, as the following example reveals. This attests to the celebration of Australian Aboriginal culture, stories, and histories, whether traditional or contemporary. More than that, it attests to the resilience Australian Indigenous people's resilience for many generations and their refusal to be culturally, historically, and socially defined by Western colonial structures, notions, and concepts of language and stories:

> ONE EVENING IN THE DRIEST GRASSES IN THE WORLD, A CHILD WHO WAS NO STRANGER TO HER PEOPLE ASKED IF ANYONE COULD FIND HOPE. THE PEOPLE OF PARABLE AND PROPHECY PONDERED WHAT

> WAS HOPELESS AND FINALLY DECLARED THEY NO LONGER KNEW WHAT HOPE WAS. … LUCKILY, THE GHOSTS IN THE MEMORIES OF THE OLD FOLK WERE LISTENING, AND SAID ANYONE CAN FIND HOPE IN THE STORIES: THE BIG STORIES AND THE LITTLE ONES IN BETWEEN. SO…. (*Carpentaria* 12)

This resistance to framing Indigenous peoples as passive in the face of a postcolonial system is at the heart of *Carpentaria* as it displays the endless importance of storytelling. As the passage above demonstrates, the act of writing appears as a tribute to past and present Indigenous customs. Likewise, later in the novel, one of the characters, Mozzie, says to his men, "Even if I don't get through, don't survive this, the story has to go on. Nothing must stop our stories, understand?" (426). This kind of agency is a prevalent aspect in *Carpentaria*.

With *Carpentaria*, Wright creates a new language, another way of communicating, one that resides in difference: by blending—rather than opposing—Australian Aboriginal and Western points of view on telling and writing stories, Wright disrupts established ways of thinking and creates a new space for cultural freedom, imagination, and harmony. Homogeneity and similarity are put aside to make way for a narrative that emphasizes difference and mocks the dominant cultural and political authority that has, to date, often pigeonholed Australian Indigenous peoples as marginalized. For instance, scholar Diane Molloy argues that the characters, both human and other-than-human,[5] "are responsible for passing on the essential stories of history and cultures to

[5] See Daniel Heath Justice, "How Do We Learn to Be Human," *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Wilfrid Laurier University Press, 2017, 38. Justice defines "other-than-human" in the following way: "We also have to keep firmly in mind that Indigenous traditions generally don't limit the category of *person* solely to the *human.* As humans, we're simply one of many peoples, and depending on the tradition, there are also animal people, bird people, rock people, fish people and so on, alongside human people."

their families as lived history, not the official history held in archives and managed institutions" (4). In many instances, Wright reminds us of the timelessness of Australian Aboriginal cultures, a timelessness that stands in opposition to the briefer, transitory Westernized concepts of time and culture. One of these examples can be found at the outset of the novel, in the first chapter: the city of Desperance used to be a port, but it "lost its harbour waters when the river simply decided to change course," yet "no living soul remembered what the port had looked like before. No picture could be put on display in a showcase at the museum of scarce memorabilia, because no one at the time of the heyday thought it was worthwhile to take photo" (7–8). Settler memory, here, is depicted as dependent on something less reliable that seems doomed to disappear: "Invisible things in nature made no sense to Uptown because of their savoir faire in being Australians" (78). Unlike Western history and legacy, which are dependent on written archives, this "*savoir faire*" relies on the physical, written evidence of the existence of a particular memory; however, this also implies that, without that specific physical evidence, memory fades away, as do history, culture, and traditions, and, thus, it must find a way of renewing its existence. In *Carpentaria*, this way of living is compared to a way of life in which, according to Wright, the collective memory of Aboriginal peoples from Australia "[gives] voice to a testimonial far beyond personal experience" (4) and in which oral stories are a matter of "everybody's business" (*Carpentaria* 4). It is only in this way that stories can be kept alive and transmitted through time and generations, as opposed to "the official history [that is] held in archives and managed by institutions" (Molloy 4).

It is clear, then, that the writing of *Carpentaria* seeks to disrupt, even break, boundaries. While its readers may be confused by the blending of voices—Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal—they are introduced to another version of history in which Aboriginal peoples are not portrayed as outsiders and victims of colonization; rather, they have agency.

3.2 Comedy and Seriousness at Work: Another Language to Promote a Different Side of History

A central feature in the novel is language, and Wright's specific use of it to confront an aggressive cultural and political colonial foundation is interesting. Language in the novel is often playful: it is punctuated with word plays, clichés, and sarcastic comments. For example, Angel Day finds a statue of the Virgin Mary and immediately wants to take it home with her so that she can "[own] the luck of the white people" (23) because, she thinks, once the statue is placed in her home, "nobody would be able to interfere with the power of the blessings it would bestow" (23). The same character, ironically, is used to voice the outcomes of colonialism, such as the stealing of the land that has now turned into an open-air dump, and the resulting division and war between the local Western and Eastern Pricklebush people:

> "What's wrong with you people? You people don't belong here. Who said you got any normal rights to be hanging around here? On other people's laaand for? Just taking what you want, hey? What about the traditional owner then? …" Well! Most people had heard that argument before. Angel Day was mouthing off again about the poor old traditional owner being bypassed—once again. …imagine that. Precarious modernity squashed by hostilities dormant for four hundred years, and Angel Day started it up again over an old clock and a statue. Probably all wars start off a bit of taunting like this. (24-25)

Here, Wright uses comical sarcasm to depict present colonial repercussions, as well as the Western cultural belief that past history can exist and be remembered only in written form. Indeed, Wright

underlines the competitiveness among the various communities in response to a colonizing system that seeks to exclude them so that others can benefit from certain social or financial advantages, thereby creating divisiveness among the communities themselves: "[T]he act of a community closing in on itself was not an isolated act particular to Desperance alone. Go anywhere, and it was the same, same, same" (88). Through her raw, sarcastic language, Wright reveals an ugly truth, and the result is a novel that can be qualified as experimental, allegorical, humorous, and almost lyrical: "You got to believe what was true in the homes of Desperanians. A folk tale of ancient times elsewhere was stored in treasure chests in the minds of these people. A sea people such as themselves, come from so far away to be lost, would forever have all seas in their sights. That was their story" (50). In this way, *Carpentaria* appears consistent with Inuk scholar Kristina (Fagan) Bidwell's analysis of humour in Indigenous writing:

> [H]umour and pleasure with which many Australian Aborigines regard their rampant code-switching, is part of their general enjoyment in "putting things to unintended uses." This sense of humour around code-switching is shared by Canadian Native people. The meeting of two or more languages can create a sense of incongruity, performance, and nonsense, and the potential for many forms of word play (140)

With regards to code-switching, it is noteworthy that *Carpentaria*'s language also reflects a regional language, floating alongside English and Waanyi:

> Traditional people gathered up for the event mumbled, *Ngabarn, Ngabarnm Mandagi,* and so did Normal is a very loud and sour-sounding voice over the loud-

> speaker in his extremely short thank-you address, although those who knew a fruit salad full of abuse in the local languages knew he was not saying *Thank you! Thank you!* and belly-laughed themselves silly because the river only had one name from the beginning of time. It was called *Wangala.* (10)

As such, it seems impossible to categorize the blend of voices and the multitude of influences driven by the author's creative imagination, which not only recalls Dreamtime storytelling, but also depicts a community with a sharp wit.

Furthermore, when it comes to identity politics, Wright uses sarcasm, comedy, and laughter with education and freedom in mind. Bidwell affirms that the confusion felt by many Indigenous characters about identity "is often depicted [in Indigenous writing] as comic rather than tragic" and that "making exaggerated attempts to 'act white' or to 'act Indian,' is ridiculously unsuccessful" (53). In *Carpentaria*, it is Angel Day who wishes to "act white" by filling her house with the many items she finds in the dump, so as to be blessed with "the luck of the white people" (23). Likewise, the Pricklebush people, whether they are from the Western or Eastern side after the war, all laugh at the Uptown people. Mockery is something that is shared in town, and the simple act of laughing allows the prevailing white institutions to be weakened: laughter and humour allow the people of Desperance to mock the very authority that seeks to erase them, allowing them to break free from the constraints imposed on them and, ultimately, to challenge the prevailing institutions in town. Thus, by upsetting the dominant narrative, counternarratives claim a space in which to voice the Australian Aboriginal community's perspective. Laughter is empowering, as it undermines what is deemed the official history. Sarcasm and comedy challenge the writing and dissemination of harmful, stereotypical Western

narratives, which all too often include a romantic Australian Aboriginal victim, marginalized and vanishing—an aspect that *Carpentaria* clearly disrupts.

The first step towards changing a historical narrative is to reach the audience. As mentioned earlier, Wright's fictional work captures both cultures, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, by addressing Indigenous needs while also responding to Western readers' expectations. As Molloy puts it, "while accepting that Aboriginal people must adopt Western forms to have a voice, [Wright's] novel demonstrates that these forms can be changed and redrawn to reflect Aboriginal concerns storytelling styles and language use" (4). This approach challenges Wright's readers' expectations because her characters take control of the globalized, colonial, English language and make it their own, as a way to free themselves from oppression:

> The delegation turned their attention away from Normal to Angel Day, who engaged them further in discussion about the water situation for the itinerants, as she called them. Norm could not help but be impressed with her ability to mislead people. The delegation looked at her talking down to them with awe written across its faces. Where did she get it from? He wondered. *Itinerants* was not the language of the Pricklebush. (39)

The reappropriation of English by the Aboriginal characters here first decentralizes the colonial language, then reveals a strategy implemented by the Waanyi author to reclaim one's voice. On the one hand, the literary representation of the Pricklebush people paints a people that resist a political and cultural order by making language their own. One the other hand, the newly created

language is also used to spread a counternarrative: "truth just needed to be interpreted by the believers who could find the answers themselves" (410). This allows Wright to tackle serious social issues, for instance:

> We were burning the white man's very important places and wasted all his money. We must have forgotten our heads. We were really stupid people to just plumb forget like—because the white man was very important person who was very precious about money. Well! He was the boss. We are not the boss. He says he likes to be boss. He says he's got all the money. Well! We haven't got the money neither. And now, all it took was a simple flick. (404)

In this way, while throughout her novel Wright denounces inequality, racism, rape, and death—in a so-called postcolonial environment—by using characters such as Stan Bruiser, the mayor of the town who is known to rape Aboriginal women, she also pairs the gravity of the situation with humour and laughter. However, humour is not used to polish, minimize, or even de-dramatize the current outcomes of a colonial state over the local population; on the contrary, comedy is used to enhance the reality and violence of these situations. Towards the end of the novel, Will Phantom, another protagonist, along with a few of his companions who oppose the construction of the mine, decides to blow it up; the men succeed thanks to "the old Pizza Hut box someone had left on top of those bowers that added that little extra fuel" (408). Much as the cultures of the Australian Aboriginal and non-Indigenous protagonists of the novel float side by side in order to create the specific environment of Desperance, comedy and seriousness work together in the novel as a whole. In this way, Wright makes her readers think about colonial institutions and their current, ongoing effects. She cleverly disguises her powerful argument with humor as a way to surprise us,

the readers, as we are laughing; in effect, we find ourselves laughing at a hurtful truth, one that is filled with injustice and hypocrisy. In addition, by pairing grave issues with comedy, the author creates a feeling that demystifies, unsettles, and ridicules colonial discourses, as well as the society that comes with them. In line with other Indigenous authors, such as Cherokee novelist Thomas King, Alexis Wright juxtaposes two different worlds and, in the words of Ojibwe writer Drew-Hayden Taylor, her writing, on the one hand, "smashes racist notions…with Native humor, wittily subverting Western assumptions of White superiority" and, on the other hand, it "parodies, questions and disrupts established master narratives, Eurocentric epistemologies, and conventional historiography, and instead creates…alterNatives" (qtd. in Gruber 335). This experimental creative space of "in-betweenness" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 218), in which such alternatives flourish, thus becomes a zone where literary borders can be explored, and categories, genres, identities, and cultures can meet, connect, and intersect.

While showing the many abuses and injustices faced by the Pricklebush people, *Carpentaria* paves the way for hope for a better future and for social change. For instance, once the mine has exploded, the narrator ponders, "[n]ow we were looking at the world like it was something fresh and inviting to jump into and do what you jolly well liked. That was our dormant emotions sitting down inside our poor old hearts got stirred up by the Fishman when we listened to him talking in that fetching, guru type voice of his, saying we gotta change the world order" (405). The story that the characters offer here is not the one that one usually hears: first, they resist the official version that has, until then, excluded the Pricklebush people. However, Wright does not simply tell the story of a corrupted, unfair world that suddenly breaks free from all the injustices as the mine explodes: *Carpentaria* is not the story of a colonial world versus a local people. Rather, the two worlds meet, clash, and eventually blend together, thereby infusing a part of each cultural

world into the other. The story of the town, then, is the story of wars among each and every world; in the end, it all collapses into the space of the town:

> But this was not vaudeville. Wars were fought here. If you had your patch destroyed you'd be screaming too.… If you are someone who visits old cemeteries, wait awhile if you visit the water people. The old Gulf country men and women who took our besieged memories to the grave might just climb out of the mud and tell you the real story of what happened here. (11)

Here, the war caused by Angel Day over the dump land has reopened wounds that "[recalled] tribal battles from the ancient past" to people "who had been getting on well, living side by side for decades…. Living in harmony in fringe camps was a policy designed by the invader's governments" (26). The author does not accuse or blame someone or something in particular; she simply depicts and shares contemporary realities—sometimes sad, immoral, and awful ones. Wright's storytelling is, in this way, surreal: it is a blend of seriousness and humour; it is mystical, lyrical, and prosaic; and, importantly, it includes Dreamtime narrative and storytelling, while also tackling social and political questions and issues. The result is an epic reading that not only honours Indigenous sovereignty—and Wright's own Aboriginal heritage—but also attests to the devastating outcomes of colonization and of the colonial system. Her unique way of writing resists the all-too-common trope of Indigenous peoples as passive victims; however, *Carpentaria* also embraces ills and sorrow just as much as it does hope and justice. And, ultimately, this is why the act of storytelling is so important.

3.3 Perception of Time in Desperance: A Counternarrative Where Worlds Meet

The nation-state of Australia, coupled with Wright's opening chapters, which conveyed the official narrative of the country as one that built its own history, is challenged from the onset of the novel. Specifically, the way in which Wright writes and tells her story takes a nonhierarchical approach to events in time and space, thereby creating what Australian anthropologist W. E. H. Stanner called an "Everywhen": "One cannot 'fix' The Dreaming in time," wrote Stanner. "[I]t was, and is, everywhen…[and it has] an unchangeable sacred authority" (Stanner 1979, 24). In this way, Wright gives access to the counternarratives of the Waanyi people and asserts their importance in building history. Furthermore, she stresses local accounts—and what are often considered unofficial records—in an urge to awaken and sensitize her readers, both non-Indigenous and Indigenous, while also shamelessly defying established Western perspectives of time, space, inheritance, and history as concepts that are viewed according to a straightforward, linear span. The inhabitants of Desperance, for instance, live through events that affect their own local community, something they know and are familiar with, while also being connected to a diverse number of cultures and peoples, and observing the effects of globalization on their world; all these coexist in a unique environment. As the following example demonstrates, this worldwide development brought about quick changes to the northern town, and new flows of various peoples and companies, especially the massive "Gurfurrit" mining company, descended upon it. Mentioning the river near Desperance, the narrator tells us that "anybody and everybody thought they might ride this river like some legendary buck-jumping wild horse called Diesel or Gidgee or Mulga" (10), and that the stones and rocks in the bed of the river "looked like the growth ring of a powerful, ancient being" (10). However,

> [o]n the water, [the inhabitants] would cast a line here, a line there, over the sides with state-of-the-art fishing tackle, but no knowledge of the way of the river. Nothing was thought about it. There were a considerable number of people living in the region now, with the great influx of mine workers who had nothing to do on their days off. More new mines became established in the region with little regard to anyone's say-so. (10)

Wright here acknowledges and recognizes the constant movements that cross over borders—local and national—as her characters interact with these. In "Translocal Temporalities in Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*," Lynda Ng explains that "Desperance functions as a microcosm of Australian society, illustrating the racial divide through its depiction of the centralized white Uptown folk and the [Indigenous] Pricklebush mob, who live around the perimeter of the official town. There is a clear disparity between the cultures, beliefs, and even language of the two sides of Desperance" (110). In addition, these disparities are affected by internal conflicts among the different communities. Nevertheless, transnational narratives insist on difference as a positive aspect; ergo, the diversity in *Carpentaria* only reinforces the fluidity of Indigenous knowledges and perception of time-flow and space. At the onset of her novel, Wright challenges the limits of Western time: the past is not only about an ancient, earlier gone and lost time. Rather, within the framework of a broader, larger official chronological narrative—larger than that of the traditional settler approach of time—Wright ingeniously touches upon something different, another version and understanding of time, another version of history to assert new "forms of temporal recognition" (Rifkin viii). Scholar Mark Rifkin suggests new ways—other ways—of defining temporalit-y/-ies and of "explor[ing] the potential [to conceptualize and trace] modes of Native

time that exceed the terms of non-native mappings and histories" (ix). In *Carpentaria*, time and the matter of the past appear instead as dynamic features that circulate through and span across the present, the future, and the past. Throughout and within that time span—that "everywhen"—the various narratives exist, coexist, and interact with the current events introduced in the text. The notion of time and its conception appear to travel and to radiate in a nonlinear way: as a result, it emerges as unfamiliar to Western readers: the past is entrenched within the present and is a complete part of it. Thus, through her storytelling and, more specifically, through her reconsideration of time and its effects, Wright makes her readers feel and experience the ongoing consequences of colonization on Indigenous ways of life in the northern part of Australia, as well as of the white culture that came with it.

That said, the two cultures do not appear as distinct from one another or strictly detached. Lynda Ng claims that one should notice that "Wright's assertion of the [Indigenous] is not an exclusionary strategy to label white mainstream culture 'foreign'"; in her view, Wright "argues that recognition of the [Indigenous] is an important means for a nation to learn how to operate productively in a globalized context" (111). The cultural encounters and interactions in *Carpentaria* are thus an indication of the transnational aspect of Wright's work that must be understood as being in constant movement, and in which the two different worldviews necessarily meet.

Moreover, Alexis Wright's second novel introduces a brutal, even violent, natural environment into the Gulf of Carpentaria. Aboriginal knowledge is firmly tied to this place. As noted earlier, in the novel's opening pages, we learn about an "ancestral" and "creative" serpent (1) that shaped the valleys, the landscapes, and the river beds:

> It came down those billions of years ago, to crawl on its heavy belly, all around the wet clay soils in the Gulf of Carpentaria. Picture the creative serpent, scoring deep into—scouring down through—the slippery underground of the mudflats, leaving in its wake the thunder of tunnels collapsing to form deep sunken valleys. The sea water following the serpent's wake, swarming in a frenzy of tidal waves, soon changed colour from ocean blue to the yellow of mud. The water filled the swirling tracks to form the mighty bending rivers spread across the vast plains of the Gulf country the serpent travelled over the marine plains …. When it finished creating the many rivers in its wake, it created one last river…which offers no apologies for its discontent with people who do not know it. This is where the giant serpent continues to live…. They say its being is porous; it permeates everything. It is all around in the atmosphere and is attached to the lives of the river people like skin. (1–2)

The inclusion of the traditional story is important here, for it is filled with environmental knowledge. From the very start, the Waanyi author draws an important parallel between stories and knowledge. Indeed, we learn on the following page that

> the inside knowledge about this river and coastal region is the Aboriginal Law handed down through the ages since time began. Otherwise, how would one know where to look for the hidden underwater course in the vast flooding mud plains, full of serpents and fish in the monsoon season? Can someone who did not grow up in a place that is sometimes underwater, sometimes bone-dry, know when the trade winds blowing off the southern and northern hemispheres will merge in the summer? (3)

As reported by Wright, Australian Aboriginal knowledge is linked to a specific place: "it takes a particular kind of knowledge to go with the river whatever its mood" (3). Knowledge is drawn, not from archives or official records, but is found in the stories, the land, the water, and the people. In her article entitled "'This Land Is Me': Indigenous Australian Storytelling and Ecological Knowledge," Susan Barrett argues that the "remembrance of ancestral knowledge emphasizes the strength of the Indigenous relationship to the land; it may not be at the forefront of their preoccupations but it is never forgotten" (36). However, it is quite the contrary that Wright seems to emphasize here. Indeed, for Normal Phantom, the leader of one of the three communities that share the land of the gulf, the environment and the sea in particular are not always in the forefront; more than that, it is known that

> [he] could grab hold of the river in his mind and live with it as his father's fathers did before him. His ancestors were the river people, who were living with the river from before time began. Normal was like ebbing water; he came and went on the flowing waters of the river right out the sea. He stayed away on the water as long as he pleased. … The old people say the groper lives for hundreds of years and maybe Normal would too. (6)

In such a unique place as the Gulf of Carpentaria, where opposing forces meet and end up flowing side by side, the character of Normal possesses traditional wisdom connected to the environment and, more specifically, to the river. He appears to be completely devoted to the rivers, the seas, and all bodies of water, to the point that he gives fish a second life by painting them and transforming them into jewels. Barrett argues that "Indigenous knowledge of the land is embedded

in the stories of the *Dreaming* which not only describe the creation of the world but also contain information about the nature of the landscape and the climate" (30). That is the reason why "the stories," she continues, "differ slightly from one region to another" (30). The Dreamtime narrative in *Carpentaria* and thus the description of and information about the landscape and the climate are illustrated in part by the relationship that Normal cultivates with the sea. This magical relationship is highlighted in "Norm's Responsibility"—the eighth chapter—which can almost be read as an epic story on its own. During his voyage to take his friend Elias's body to sea, Norm seems to hardly differentiate the worlds in front of him –and the readers as well hardly do so:

> There was no denying it, the voice of the wind was relaying her needs, and could easily have been deciphered …. Heavens only knows how he managed to keep standing in the rolling boat, but his body, wavering with the rolls like a spring, somehow maintained balance, while every last bit of his bodily strength planted his feet to the bottom of the boat. She shoved him roughly in the back again, before kcontaining him in her embrace when he looked like falling… (260 –261)

Norm Phantom carries the legacy of his people's history. The past, present, and future do not seem to have specific, separate meanings for him; or, rather, they do mean something that is different from the traditional Eurocentric understanding and vision of time and time passing. His voyage at sea must thus be understood in terms of a different temporality and spatiality: Norm's world is filled with spirits—human and other—with whom and with which he interacts and communicates. When he is the main character of a chapter, the actions are narrated from his perspective and according to his vision but his reality and his world have no boundaries, either spatial or temporal.

The land, especially in its relation to Normal Phantom, is in turn depicted as a character of its own, from which Norm learns: his knowledge of the land represents not only his experience, but also that of his Ancestors. In this way, his perception of time and space resist a linear chronology and thus, the narrative conveys a sense of continuity and fluidity. This shows the everlasting link between knowledge, land, and human beings—life can evolve according to a peaceful collaboration among the three entities.

Wright also points to the consequences of trying to shape the environment by force when one deliberately decides to ignore one's natural surroundings and the resources and knowledges it can provide. Indeed, the impact of the mining industry is referred to here and there throughout the story, but the mine is eventually destroyed in a climactic moment in chapter 11, entitled "The Mine." The message that Wright conveys in this act of destruction is very clear: any attempt at correcting, revising, or modifying the environment will have cataclysmic consequences. In effect, the story of Will, Normal Phantom's son, informs us that the mining company chose to locate itself on sacred land with government support. Ignoring property law, Will decides to blow up the mine's pipeline. Following this event, the company decides to take revenge and starts several fires, for which Will is blamed, in the town. Will decides to leave with his wife and son with the help of his father's friend, Elias. But the mining company sees them flee and murders Elias. Hoping to catch Will as well, they capture his wife and throw her out of one of their helicopters. Will decides then to return to the company site and bomb the actual mine:

> It happened so fast when the fiery whirlwind shot into the bowsers and momentarily, lit them up like candles. Well! It might have been the Pizza Hut box someone had left on top of one of those bowsers that added that little bit of extra fuel, you never know,

> for the extra spark, or it would have happened anyway, but the wick was truly lit. (408)

In targeting the mine, illegally established on traditional land, Wright makes her readers think about the environment as something that people can and have relied on for centuries. She suggests, rather, that the land itself has reactions and feelings; in this way, it has a human aspect. It is not some*thing*, but indeed some*one* you can communicate with and from whom you can learn; it also has the potential to strike back whenever it is in danger. The hurricane in Desperance, which sweeps the city in a few hours, proves this at the end of the novel. Similarly, the sea, as well, appears mysterious and mystical: like the creative serpent, it is a powerful being that can provide a person with as much as it can devastate and take back. Both are tightly connected—and not only through the traditional creation story—as Wright teaches us: the serpent "[leaves] in its wake the thunder of tunnels, collapsing to form deep sunken valleys. The sea water following the serpent's wake, swarming in a frenzy of tidal waves, soon changed colour from ocean blue to the yellow of mud" (1–2). In other words, the sea and the serpent created the world together.

3.4 Conclusion

Wright takes her readers and her characters on essentially the same journey: told from an Australian Aboriginal point of view, the characters of the town of Desperance seem to move in and out of Dreamtime. Horrible truths are plainly spoken alongside hurricane disasters, love, birth, renewal, and hope. Through the depiction of the past, present, and future as intimately intertwined, Wright reveals the full extent of the significance of the land to its inhabitants, and the ties that link

them. There is no hierarchy in the events that she introduces, only the violence of nature – for example the climate or the hurricane – paired with the violence of human beings. Thanks to the use of the Dreamtime narrative and Australian Aboriginal traditional knowledge, Wright alleviates the separations between past, present, and future, in order to gather them together into a single space; in this way, she honours Aboriginal epistemology and history, while also exposing a collective experience of time. Wright infuses her narrative with these aspects so as to include Waanyi and Australian Aboriginal culture on—and in—her own terms. Thus, it is within the structure of a larger narrative that she weaves events together, a conjunctive move that can resonate with both Indigenous and non-Indigenous readers. Moreover, Desperance, a town where racism has infected all human relationships and the spirit world, which is on the verge of disappearing, is threatened by a dangerous mining industry that takes up more and more space on sacred grounds. However, while Wright acknowledges the great loss encountered by Indigenous peoples, she also acknowledges life and hope as concepts that stretch over time and bring together Indigenous experience and traditional knowledges. By evoking the Dreamtime narrative alongside stories of damage perpetrated onto the community by colonization, the novel *Carpentaria* remains firmly rooted in Aboriginal culture, in Waanyi culture, while also speaking to Western culture. As such, it attests to the activism and resurgence of Indigenous voices. Indeed, *Carpentaria* is not a novel entirely about loss and disaster: it also celebrates Australian Aboriginal story, storytelling, history, languages, culture, traditions, and knowledges from the past, present, and future, as well as an understanding of time and space, before and after (and despite) contact. Wright's depiction of the different time periods thus shakes up the hierarchical aspects of the events she introduces. *Carpentaria*, ultimately, is a testimony of the many voices that are present in Australia. Wright, in

her writing, demonstrates how her culture has not only survived, but also thrived in spite of an ongoing systemic attempt at erasure.

4. *Star Waka*: Creating New Cultural Frameworks

Robert Sullivan's collection of poetry *Star Waka* highlights aspects similar to those in *Carpentaria*, but it is located within the specific and unique situation of Aotearoa-New Zealand. In this section, I am interested in looking at how the local and global interact in the collection of poems and how specifically, through personal questions and acts of travelling and navigating, the Maori author addresses the burning topic of colonization and ensuing issues (political or cultural), all through a multiplicity of different voices. Indeed, the poems convey a sense of diversity, and—much like *Carpentaria*—move away from the binary opposition between Maori culture and white settler culture. The collection is full of imagery that relates to culture and identity and, once again, much like Wright's novel, the work itself puts an emphasis on diversity and difference as positive aspects, which a country can build on to create a new cultural "nested identity" (Tuhiwai Smith, 126). According to historian Stuart Banner, as the first encounter between the Maori and the British happened, and because the Maori people were already cultivating the land when settlers arrived, the latter thought the local populations were "evidently farther along the path to civilization than some other peoples the British had encountered elsewhere," and thus would be "more easily assimilated" (49). Similarly, Chadwick Allen highlights that in *We Are the Ocean* (2008)—a series of essays by Pacific scholar Epeli Hau'ofa—a "new and optimistic" view of Oceania (10) is needed, in the sense that there is no dominant versus dominated, or colonizer versus colonized. To the author, Oceania appears as a "sea of islands," to which Hau'ofa adds:

> Oceania is vast, Oceania is expanding, Oceania is hospitable and generous, Oceania is humanity rising from the depths of brine and regions of fire deeper still, Oceania is us. We are the sea, we are the ocean, we must wake up to this ancient truth and

> together use it to overturn all hegemonic views that aim ultimately to confine us again, physically and psychologically, in the tiny spaces that we have resisted accepting as our sole appointed places and from which we have recently liberated ourselves. We must not allow anyone to belittle us again, and take away our freedom. (qtd. in Allen, 10)

Indeed, the Pacific itself is a space of migrations, exchanges, and communication, one that exists across and beyond national borders. New Zealand in particular, as demonstrated in Sullivan's poem xxii, "Tea o marama II," became the land of many Pacific Islanders. In *Migration and Transnationalism: Pacific Perspectives*, author Helen Lee claims that during the mid-twentieth century, New Zealand sought to recruit workers from all over the Pacific islands and countries. As a consequence, the number of Fijians, Samoans, and Tongans emerging in today's rich and diverse culture in Aotearoa doubled: "[T]he many pathways that have led Pacific Islanders to New Zealand have resulted in a 'Pasifika' population in which Samoans are the largest group, followed by Cook Islanders, Tongans, Niueans, Fijians and Tokelauans," she adds, quoting Stahl and Appleyard (10). Thus, the transnational aspect in Sullivan's poetry not only recalls the encounter between two languages or cultures; transnationalism in *Star Waka* also makes references to several countries and thereby encapsulates a whole new motion that evolves "through space and time, through landscapes and generations, cross[es] borders, [and] infiltrat[es] languages, cultures, and communities" (Allen 2). With this history in mind, one might wonder what happens when one juxtaposes diverse Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures, and what can be learnt from it. In the words of scholar Kristine Moffat, the second part of the twentieth century in the country was a phase of transition, and two distinct literary trends appeared: the first one was centred around the

creation of "a genuine local literature that was not derivative of British models" (2), and the second trend was to "awaken society from its homogenous complacency" (2). Thus, it is important that even though Sullivan's poetry emphasizes multiculturalism, many people were also not particularly in favour of this diversity and turned toward a more local approach. That said, Sullivan's poetry gives us a contemporary answer to new cultural standards by way of his engagement with the notion of space: a literary and linguistic space that translates an encounter between the main cultures present in Aotearoa-New Zealand from a decolonizing perspective. Far from pitting one culture against one another, this new approach to language favours connection, cohabitation, and conversation. Second, not only does his poetry reveal this blending, but it also demonstrates the importance of the connections throughout the whole Pacific Ocean and the Pacific Islands as well. As such, new frameworks of cultural identity can be built around the constant interaction of the local and the global. Each poem displays a particular space, in which boundaries are pushed away and transgressed, enabling a proximity between the text and the readers through storytelling and orality, and providing an intimate knowledge about shared questions and events.

4.1 Beyond the Dichotomy of Cultures

Globalization of the island has led to a rethinking and remodelling of the notions of home and locality: today, as both the global and the local are so intimately involved in the cultural vision of New Zealand, new forms of expression must, necessarily, find a way to re-associate with one another, so as to formulate new methods of communicating—or, at the very least, methods of communicating that reflect the contemporary diversity at play. In this way, one can read the various encounters and contacts in *Star Waka* brought about first by colonization and later by migration as

having released cultural and literary creations, which have become something special and particular to a specific place: the local meets the international, the unknown, and is then infused into the regional, which then in turn influences the local, which in turn has an impact on the regional and the global. "All traveling, all over, all the time," says Allen (3). As a result, meanings and words are constantly reworked and reinterpreted across geographies and generations. This intergenerational and multicultural aspect of Aotearoa-New Zealand is cleverly translated throughout Sullivan's collection of poems—for instance, in poem ix:

> and he tries to remember
>
> but remembering is for things
>
> of experience
>
> these things he hasn't experience:
>
> the timing of a hundred
>
> following birds across an Ocean
>
> diving into the Ocean
>
> and coming back up
>
> how huge an Ocean is
>
> composing chants
>
> to move people
>
> across the Ocean
>
> to set out from Hawaiiki
>
> knowing the return is death (13)

The mention of Hawaiiki here acknowledges the traditional place of the origin of the Maori people, yet it is also the original home of the Polynesian gods and, more generally, of the Polynesian peoples, before they scattered across Polynesia and the various neighbouring islands (Hoturoa Barclay-Kerr, "Stories: waka- canoes" n.p.). Sullivan's poetry thus goes beyond the dichotomy one can expect between the colonizer and the colonized as he brings in the notions of verticality and horizontality, for instance in poem 43: "The South Pacific Forum met recently in Rarotonga./ CHOGM meets soon – they've readmitted Fiji./ The powerful and the powerless/ across (internationally) and vertically (internally)./ Power is on show in Polynesia regularly" (47). Instead of opposing the two directions commonly used to represent Indigenous and Western knowledge systems, the horizontal and the vertical, both are associated with something else, something is added, and they have something more: the international and the internal are respectively linked to the horizontal and the vertical. Indeed, as argued by Prentice, "the implicit grid-mapping image of power ('across' and 'vertically,' 'internationally' and 'internally') is interrupted by the semantic ambivalence that haunts the affirmative images" (118). In addition, Polynesia is introduced as a place of power, a place that controls its space. Thus, the opposition between two worlds is replaced with the addition of two other concepts so that the cultural and multilingual aspects of New Zealand are organized not according to a Maori-English or an Indigenous-white settler dynamic, but rather around something else, around interdependent factors such as languages or cultures of the world. Since neither the English language nor the Maori language can find an equivalent in the other, they establish a connection. Linguistically, then, the hierarchy of English—the colonial language—over Maori is displaced, and enables the author to make the best of every aspect of his current world:

Stroke past line 1642

into European time

Stroke past 1769

and the introduction of the West …

Crews alight, consign waka

to memory, family trees, remove

the prowed tauihu, drape

the feathered mana

around the whare-womb

of the next crew

who are to remember waka

into the beginning

of centuries years minutes hours seconds

long and short hands centered

on Greenwich …

And you, Urizen, Jupiter, Io Matua Kore,

holder of the compasses–

wind compass, solar compass,

compass encompassing known

currents, breather of the first breath

in every breathing creature,

guide the waka between islands,

between years and eyes of the Pacific

out of mythologies to consciousness (110–111)

In this way, Sullivan's writing shares his position on a multicultural society—a view that is, again, not necessarily shared by everyone. He gives rise to and suggests lateral connections and different ways of communication among peoples rather than (vertically) imposing a debate between Indigenous and settler societies. The Maori poet and his work have thus moved away from a longing recall of the past; rather, he establishes a continuity through the past, the present, and the future. Furthermore, his writing insists on the continuous validity of one's heritage and legacy. The poems call for the acknowledgement of the tremendous and stimulating force of one's community's cultural memory, such as Maori legends and stories, as well as the acknowledgement of the experience and outcomes of colonization. However, since the poems deal with the many contemporary political issues of decolonization, they also emphasize difference and thereby disturb the confrontation between two cultures within the context of a globalized and settler colonial world so as to shed light on the multiple angles of the cultures present in Aotearoa-New Zealand.

In "Decolonial Translation in Embodied Auto/Biographical Indigenous Performance," settler scholar Eva Karpinski suggests that "the mental shift from the colonized to the decolonial mind requires moving away from the injured self and excavating deeper layers of one's embodiment and spirituality as means of decolonizing the self" (158). The process of decolonizing one's mind and of dislocating colonialism is reflected in Sullivan's choice not to translate certain non-English phrases in his poems. From the onset, one is immediately amazed by the blend of languages woven throughout the collection. The first poem of the book, "He karakia timatanga," is a prayer "to guide waka out the throat" (1):

1 the chanted rhythms

2 *hoea hoea ra*

3 storms

4 *hoea hoea ra*

5 a thousand years

6 *hoea hoea ra*

7 fleet mothers of tales

8 *hoea hoea ra*

9 I greet you in prayer oh star oh waka…

10 and pray for your combination here.

11 *He karakia mo korua, e te waka, e te whetu o tea o nei.*

12 Star and waka, a prayer for you both. (1–2)[6]

In this example, Sullivan's emphasis on the words in Maori might be a way for non-native speakers to ease one's way into his writing: it is the only time he marks this emphasis in the collection. However, while the words are accentuated, one does not have access to their meaning. Thus, one might think that line 11 is a literal English translation of line 12, but one cannot be sure; at best, one can guess or try to find out by responding to Sullivan's invitation to do research. To translate these lines would acknowledge the prevailing position of English; thus, translation and the act of translating would become evidence of colonial imposition, intrusion, and power. Moreover, not providing his readers with a translation also bestows on the author an authority on stories, one that he is not ready to share or give up. Likewise, in poem xxiii, "Tea o marama II," another word is highlighted: "In 1990 I went to *the* Waitangi celebrations" (26). "No," he writes in poem viii, "I

[6] For the purpose of my research, I numbered the lines in the extract that is discussed. These numbers are not in the original work of Sullivan.

cannot make this like maker of waka –/ reach into my heart/ heal wood of its rough cuts/ take what isn't mine to *take*" (11). In these examples, although in different places in the collection, "the" and "take" can be read together as a reference to the colonization of Aotearoa, or "the take" of the land. Or, Sullivan could be referring to "the take" made by the waka as he pursues the poem with "riding rivers in judgement/ waka everywhere–/ taking their content to the settlements/ … why it that each time I stand / I is sway? And the crew sways too?/ star waka is in every waka-/ land fell a thousand years ago/yet waka still searches for star" (11-12). Ultimately, by emphasizing elements of both languages—not only prayer words, but also colloquial language, including verbs and articles—Sullivan presents his readers with a unique idea, that there is no hierarchy between Maori and English, and neither is considered foreign or external to the other; they are presented as equals. Much like in Wright's novel, then, there is strong evidence of heteroglossia[7] in Sullivan's work as well.

Thus, while the presence of a collection of heteroglossic poems de-emphasizes the predominance of English, it also unsettles the non-Indigenous reader as well, who is confronted by the restricted extent of his or her linguistic and cultural knowledge. This process of decentering the English language is in line with author Paulette Regan's argument in the introduction of *Unsettling the Settler Within* (2011), where she suggests that non-Indigenous people must go through their own process of decolonization. In a Canadian context, tackling the issue of residential schools and the 2008 governmental apology, Regan states that "[her] own deepest learning has always come when [she] was in unfamiliar territory culturally, intellectually, and emotionally. It seems to [her] that this space of not knowing has power that may hold a key to decolonization for

[7] The *Cambridge Dictionary* defines this concept (which applies to both literatures and languages) as: "the fact of there being two or more different types of language or opinions in a text" and "the fact of there being two or more languages or types of a language in a place".

settlers” (18). Regan thus encourages and promotes the making of a space for Indigenous (counter)narratives as a way of avoiding the continuity of a colonial relationship. Similarly, the same excerpt of Sullivan’s poetry would be a completely different reading experience for Maori readers who, whether they speak the language or not, might feel more connected to it, and find a sense of kinship and community in it. The lack of transparency in the meaning of the Maori words thus obliges Sullivan’s readers, first, to focus on the rejection of submitting to a colonial literary model and, second, to think about difference as a positive aspect. Then, it calls for a particular attention to the process of translation and change, of metamorphosis of the language: readers have to accept that some words cannot and/or will not be translated. Sullivan’s poems thus offer us, readers, a particular space in which both English and Maori, and every culture that forms Aotearoa, are, or have come to be, in a state of balance. Parallels may be drawn here with the Anishinaabe concept of *biiskabiyang*, which Michi Saagiig Nishnaabeg artist, scholar, and activist Leanne Betasamosake Simpson explains as a decolonial process of return to balance. In her work *As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance* (2017), she defines the concept of *biiskabiyang* as “a manifesto to create networks of reciprocal resurgent movements with other humans and nonhumans radically imagining their ways out of domination, who are not afraid to let those imaginings destroy the pillars of settler colonialism” (Simpson 10). In other words, instead of focusing her thoughts on the settler state, Simpson uses the concept of *biiskabiyang* to direct her energy towards a process of “Indigenous nation-building” (Charlton 2018, 140). With regards to Sullivan’s poetry, the nontranslation of words in Maori decenters the focus on the English language. Instead, much like Simpson, he suggests a coexisting space where both Maori and English are acknowledged, and in which a cultural and linguistic balance that starts with and centres around Maori knowledge can be restored.

Moreover, as Baxter and Smith have claimed, Sullivan's poetry benefits neither "'first' nor 'second' language, neither 'source' nor 'target,' metropole nor colony, locating [his] argument for sovereignty in a kinetic space of translation, [and] identifying the process of moving between heterogeneous languages which are irreducible to national literatures" (263). This approach to language and, ultimately, to literature, thus favours a cohabitation of a multiplicity of idioms and generates a conversation among different languages. Similarly, the space provided by the pages themselves grants access to various systems of communication, which further demonstrate how multilingual works—in this case, a work in Maori and English—can be read not only side by side, but together as well (Wendt qtd. in McDougall, 39). Indeed, Sullivan writes:

> To understand one's culture one must speak
>
> the language of its poetry, world
>
> philosophy, reach untranslated
>
> ambiguities. For language deals out
>
> meaning. Meaning is the star above our
>
> species. Specifically, our waka
>
> … Spray out its narrative
>
> with whakairo. In many places
>
> we share ancestry, jokes, communities
>
> of spirit grown up above settlement –
>
> and so this waka has passed its

> thousandth line, Maoria and Pakeha,
>
> stars knowledge of places only referred – (63)

The word "Pakeha," used above, refers to an English person, a foreigner, or a European, someone introduced from or originating in a foreign country ("Pākehā" n.p.). Much as in Alexis Wright's writing, the reader is immersed in a lexical world of encounters, connections, and communications—between Maori and Pakeha—a world that goes beyond the linguistic boundaries of one's country or ethnicity. This new language emerges when it collaborates and is combined with another, not when it is ruling over another. And that is precisely when new meaning arises: when there is no verticality or hierarchy, but rather a paired reciprocity.

However, the new meaning of language that Sullivan creates to translate the Pacific experience of a multicultural literary account does not appear as the story of a minority. Being Maori and telling the stories of Aotearoa-New Zealand does not constitute occupying the position of a forgotten, secondary people: Sullivan refuses to let his cultural inheritance die. Here, again, one can draw a parallel between Wright's work and Sullivan's: both authors, although complying with the Western written way of telling stories refuse to assimilate and are very emphatic about that. Sullivan's collection of poems opens with the following statement:

> I wrote *Star Waka* with some threads to it: that of each poem must have a star, a waka or the ocean. This sequence is like a waka, members of the crew change, the rhythm and the view changes – it is subject to the laws of nature. There are three sections, indicated by the change in title numbering from Roman to Arabic to 'waka'

numbering. Occasionally a poem's numbering breaks into another part of the sequence. (opposite 1)

The stories thus remain firmly rooted in Maori traditions, while also being converted into a Western textual form. This is important, because the issue of literary space is at stake here: Sullivan creates his own through writing, and thus sets aside the imposed colonial forms of production. Instead, he uses them to his advantage to create an anticolonial literary product that, through a range of poems, images, stories, political topics, and semi-songs, expresses a literature entrenched in the multiple histories, languages, and geographies of his country. Ultimately, what makes a country's culture seems to be set free by Sullivan: he breaks away from a system that is not his, and he generates his own. He glocalizes[8] his poems, which in turn create a new literature that redefines Western ideas of what literature is, or has been to date. Notably, Kanaka ʻŌiwi author Brandy Nalani McDougall refers to Samoan poet Albert Wendt, who coined similar new forms of expression used alongside other Indigenous languages as "indigenized Englishes," which, according to Wendt, are there "to declare our independence and uniqueness; to analyze colonialism itself and its effects upon us; to free ourselves of the mythologies created about us in colonial literature" (qtd. in McDougall, 39). This stance is supported by McDougall, who insists that "rather than a sign of colonial assimilation and apathy, the wide use of Indigenous Englishes in contemporary Indigenous Pacific Literatures should be seen as a sign of cultural revitalization and continuity as well as reflective of strong decolonization and cultural sovereignty movements" (39). Likewise, Sullivan's efforts to create a space of his own moves towards a space of new locality

[8] As defined by Allen, and as noted earlier, the term "glocal" is characterized by the fact that "the local launches into the regional, national, or global only to become local again and again. (Hence the coinage of the 'glocal.')" (3). Allen coined the adjective "glocal," which I extended into a verb here only to talk about Sullivan's poetry.

and a blending of local and global—glocal—elements. In poem xvii, "Some Definitions and a Note on Orthography," for instance, one can read

> in English the waka
>
> is canoe
>
> but the ancestral waka
>
> were as large
>
> as the European barks
>
> of the eighteenth century explorers
>
> size isn't the key factor here
>
> it is the quality of the crews
>
> their similar systems of navigation
>
> the common purpose of settlement
>
> and the labelling which is English
>
> which I do not need to spell out
>
> except to say that it is still very
>
> difficult to procure word processors (21)

In this way, Sullivan articulates a space in which the various global, national, and traditional languages, histories, traditions, and cultures find a place to coexist. His poetry translates a powerful belief in his Maori heritage and cultural legacy, but, more than that, it transcribes a sense of sovereignty. The Maori people are not presented as a minority producing a minor literature that is marginalized; rather, the medium he uses (or reappropriates) to render his work—a body of work that tackles an incredible range of topics and narrative forms—is used as a distinct strategy to

counter the colonial cultural establishment. Ranging from poetic free verse to prayers and poems that can be sung, and from burning issues such as land to genealogy, travelling, the preservation of the environment, Western and Maori cultures meeting, and the creation of myths from around the world, Sullivan manages to encapsulate all of these in “one hundred poems, and 2001 lines” (*Star Waka*, opposite 1). Reading *Star Waka*, therefore, is about reading mediations of an author who, to refer once again to Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman, is steadily rooted in his community, yet at the same time routed in global memories that collapse into the specific geographical space of Aotearoa- New Zealand.

4.2 Spatial and Temporal Space: Encounters between the Local and the Global

Much like *Carpentaria*, Robert Sullivan’s collection of poems *Star Waka* challenges the Western ideas of time and space in the context of a globalized world, through the struggle of finding a language specific to the unique situation of Aotearoa-New Zealand. *Star Waka* highlights personal questions, addresses the act of travelling and navigating in Oceania and across the world, and tackles the burning topic of colonization and the issues—political or cultural—that it carries by lending its pages to different voices. The poems thus convey a sense of diversity and, as noted above, move away from the binary opposition between Maori culture and white settler culture. The collection is full of images and imagery in relation to culture and identity. Dealing with contemporary political issues of decolonization, *Star Waka* emphasizes differences and disturbs the confrontation between two cultures so as to shed light on the multiple angles of a multifaceted culture. Once again, the work emphasizes diversity and difference as positive aspects, as things that a country can build upon to create a new sense of cultural identity. The poems, furthermore,

evoke an incredibly large range of topics, from prayers to futuristic space travels and genealogy, to name only a few. The local and the global are thus in constant contact and interaction, and Sullivan highlights the multiplicity of heritages. The lines “In the Centre I saw *Don Giovanni* / starring Kiri Te Kanawa, / and a few other operas” (25) certainly attest to this, by making references to both cultures. And, again, in poem xxxvi:

> the introduction of large
> European ships to New Zealand waters
> made quite an impact
> ballistical even
> yet we must think
> about the hardy voyagers
> life in Europe was no pleasure cruise
> they must have had desperate
> existences back home
> I acknowledge their bravery to sail over the edge of the world
> into Hades
> the infernal Greek and Latin-ness
> of many headed creatures (40)

However, it is not simply plurality that makes his work transnational. As the author writes, “Star Waka is a knife through time. Crews / change, language of each crew changes / as fast as sun burns ground and tongues curse him” (3). The poet, as well as the poems, never seems to settle down

and appears, instead, as if in endless movement between different times and spaces. In this way, the heterogeneity of the 2001 lines can be conceived of, for instance, as a representation of the differences and contradictions in Aotearoa-New Zealand, and of the effects of colonization. It seems as if each poem opens a space—a physical one on the page, as well as a more spiritual one beyond—for a particular time period or cultural moment, while being connected to other ones at the same time: for instance, as presented on pages twelve and thirteen of the collection. The poems viii and ix are presented as separated, fragmented entities, yet they can be read as one, as the ending of poem viii suggests: "made stars in patterns on wood / and the justice of heaven/ (which is black /remember" and the next poem begins "and he tries to remember / but remembering is for things / of experience" (12–13). Even though the poems could be perceived as divided, Sullivan "[draws] out the threads of difference within each—their multiple heritages and histories, their past, present and future networks of filiation and affiliation, and indeed the complex dimension of subjective and collective experience buried under those identifications," argues Prentice (113). This also suggests that even the room on the page is continuous, like space. The idea and use of space are also made clear in Sullivan's note at the beginning of the collection: he informs us that "each poem must have a star, a waka or the ocean," and that "this sequence is like waka, members of the crew change, the rhythm and the view changes—it is subject to the laws of nature" (opposite 1). These three points of reference emphasize movement and fluidity among several bodies that, we are told, are subjected to change and to the laws of nature. Prentice further claims:

> [t]he collection comprises 101 poems (the first, a karakia – a prayer or incantation – unnumbered), and 2001 lines, invoking the millennial moment it spans in both time (date of publication on the threshold of a new century and a new millennium) and

> space (the Pacific as the site for the first dawning of the year 2000). The poems articulate this spatio-temporal threshold with a constant theme of voyaging. (116)

Here, Prentice's "spatio-temporal threshold" (116) can be tied to what he further calls the "complex dimension of subjective and collective experience" (113) with the medium that the Maori poet uses: a book. The transnational aspect of this work—that is to say, the synergy between peoples, ideas, nations, and states—is part and parcel of the physical medium he uses. The collection of poems—published on paper—allows the writer to have a worldwide and a transnational impact, as well as an effect on the local nations. Thus, *Star Waka* is an example of the concept of glocalization, which, as defined by Roland Robertson (in Riemenschneider 2000), engages in the restoration of a locality. In this sense, *Star Waka* is, in itself, a production of national culture resulting from influences brought by local and international flows and travels. However, Riemenschneider specifies Robertson's theory further. He claims:

> [T]he process of creating one's own space through writing or painting or music, for example, set in as part of the anti-colonization movement preceding globalization in its more far-reaching repercussions. In fact and certainly in the context of Pakeha-Maori history, 'locality' had never been totally negated or even erased but had been remodelled within the framework of imposed colonial productive and aesthetic structures. To look at present-day Maori cultural practices then, it would be more fruitful to consider the mutual implications of global and local processes perceived as hybridization and defined with respect to cultural forms as "the ways in which

> forms become separated from existing practices and recombine with new forms in new practices". (141–142)

Whether they be Maori or settler, the "cultural practices" that Riemenschneider refers to have emerged due to travels, routes, and voyages. The very form of the collection, then, demonstrates the influences of these different flows. Thus, alongside Wright's discourse on the different belief systems that flow side by side, Sullivan's poems encapsulate the various cultures present in Aotearoa, co-existing and meeting; nevertheless, they never completely blend because of an inherent resistance. Sullivan's work is also similar to Wright's literary creation in another way: it appropriates the Western written way of telling stories to communicate contemporary poems about Maori culture today. But Sullivan's poems are not words that can only be narrated, as the collection demonstrates: his poetry is also very personal—the first poem is a prayer, and is addressed to the collectivity (Maori and settler), much like "*Waka* 77" or "*Waka* 78 *An historical line*," both of which recollect the history of the islands. It is noteworthy that, in *Carpentaria*, Wright's use of the creation story about the Rainbow Serpent also allows her work to be grounded in traditional stories, much like Sullivan's. The fact that they both open with a creation story and a prayer further grounds their work in Indigenous epistemology and knowledge and centres their voices. What makes Sullivan's work a glocal piece of literature is its compound structure, where narrative is coupled with free verse, together with its content, which speaks to each and every one of his readers about personal and collective events. Riemenschneider states:

> With Sullivan and other Maori poets' work we could thus speak of their disembeddedness (Giddens) since they can be used quite apart from any specific

> personal or social, let alone ritual event. This, however, does not totally erase their 'locality'. On the contrary, it enforces the need upon the writer to create his own space, to 'localize' the poem, and it is my thesis that Sullivan makes use of a number of distinct poetic strategies to achieve this…. (142)

Indeed, one of the poetic strategies used to create this transnational disembeddedness is the sense of orality that is recurring throughout the collection, and which is also reminiscent of Thomas King's storytelling practice in *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (2003). The Cherokee author masters the art of writing while introducing an oral aspect—as related to Indigenous storytelling—and brings these two apparently opposed practices together, so as to fuse them and have each complete the other. This combination of orality and writing—or what Stó:lō writer, teacher, and educator Lee Maracle calls "oratory"—is crucial to an understanding of the breadth of Indigenous literature. Indeed, Maracle explains that oratory is a "place of prayer, [a place] to persuade" (7) and that from story and poetry, there comes the "value of resistance" (11), which in turn leads to "the reclaiming of the sacred and significant self" (11). In other words, when Maracle uses story and poetry, "[she moves] from the empowerment of [her] self to the empowerment of every person who reads the book" (11). Words thus have a crucial and sacred role to play, and, as stated by Maracle,

> [w]e regard words as coming from original being—a sacred spiritual being. The orator is coming from a place of prayer and as such attempts to be persuasive. Words are not objects to be wasted. They represent the accumulated knowledge, cultural values, the vision of an entire people or peoples. We believe the proof of a thing or

> idea is in the doing. Doing requires some form of social interaction, and thus *story* is the most persuasive and sensible way to present the accumulated thoughts and values of a people. (7)

In similar fashion, Maracle, King, and Sullivan make use of several literary devices that allow their readers to question what they read, while also offering them an opportunity to reflect upon the importance of what makes history. Oratory reduces the distance that a written work might create between the writers and their audience. And, as it is written storytelling, it creates a proximity to the actual story for the readers. In this way, Sullivan, much like Maracle and King, approaches poetry and story as the continuation of telling into writing.

Similarly, like King, Sullivan directly addresses his readers—"it is wrong isn't it? /don't you think it is wrong? / who thinks it is right? / is this extraordinary?" (22)—and tells them a story. For instance, Sullivan tells the history of Aotearoa-New Zealand and beckons his readers into the telling: "They broke them where they confiscated them. / Burnt them. The iwi hid the old ones / we have today. Or built them again. / They had the psychological template" (87). As such, he actively participates in his story, and, by extension, so do his readers. The sense of orality – of dialogue – in his work brings it alive, makes it current and present, and breaches the strict boundaries of time and space. In *Waka 79*, for instance:

> Uncle Sam carved my mother a model waka –
>
> he reached into history and pulled it out/ from all the symbols available.
>
> I have tried to draw a waka with words,
>
> but it is becalmed by its own weight,

and the grunting of its maker.

Uncle Sam's work is not for sale. (88)

Here, punctuated with a touch of humour, Sullivan draws several parallels between past and present, written and oral storytelling, Maori and settler cultures, and Western and Indigenous literary traditions. In line with travelling across and through borders, poem 46 clearly highlights this point: "it is feasible that we will enter / space / colonise planets call our spacecraft *waka* / perhaps name them after the first fleet / erect marae transport carvers renew stories / with celestial import / establish new forms of verse / free ourselves of the need for politics / and concentrate on beauty" (50). The first line of the free verse poem refers to "we," a pronoun that can be read in two ways: we, the people on earth, the human beings, or we, the Maori people. The encounter between the local and the global is made present, and the exact separation between the two is ultimately hard to pinpoint. The future is seen in global terms, suggesting that maybe "we" will all cross boundaries and go beyond them, into space. Yet, Sullivan writes about colonized planets that would "call our spacecraft waka," so the "we" here might refer to the Maori people, rather than to human beings in general. This colonization of space appears as a place where one "concentrate[s] on beauty," where one can "write in freefall picking up the tools / our culture has given us / and to let them go again / knowing they won't hit anyone / just stay up there / no longer subject to peculiarities / of climate the political economies / of powers and powerless" (50). It is an imaginative and inventive cultural place, a place where one can create a new home, a new world.

In *Contemporary Maori Cultural Practice: From Biculturalism towards a Glocal Culture,* Dieter Riemenschneider specifies that Sullivan's vision of a "paradise in outer space" can be interpreted as another version, a re-vision of "the European 'canoes' Utopian search for paradise

in the expanse of the Pacific that resulted in exporting their own imperfect world, as much as the waka's travelling into space may end by exporting and being tied down to our global imperfection" (145). In this way, the fluidity and movement of the ocean and of the waka, the wide range of themes, topics, free verse, and personal and communal conversations, all these elements in Sullivan's art, evoke the possibility of a new transnational culture, and of a literature that reimagines a literary culture at the crossroads of Maori and Western knowledges, while also expanding the spatial and temporal limits imposed on Indigenous peoples by Western ideas. Moreover, the idea of fluidity, of unstructured movement, which is present throughout the collection, is brought to another level in his poem "Waka 57 El Nino Waka," in which he exposes the consequences of Western exploitations. Sullivan's poem, a call for activism and for environmental change, demonstrates what could be considered the unsettling nature of the land, if one sticks to Western perspectives on the matter: "Whatever the reason for El Nino – deforestation of North and South America, / for example …: droughts and floods and storms/ around the rim of the Pacific, the great fluid / of the compass a-bubble with this burst artery. … El Nino is blood from our mother. She bleeds / internally, then from ocean into air in a maelstrom" (64). The fluidity of the sea evolves into something more and more confused and tumultuous, and the results of that climactic chaos are the smooth flowing of migration, of movements of people and merchandise. The "mother of all living creatures" (64) is bleeding, and appears to suffer the consequences of the significant changes brought upon by the encounter of these two worlds across the Pacific region. This utter confusion, as felt by the ocean, is a strong reminder of those meaningful developments and variations that are seen as unfair to the Indigenous populations living in those parts of the globe: "Then we send people with cameras: to show lakes / turn to mud, to show a tower or a field of cane / snap in a hurricane. I don't have any answer for El Nino. I am too small" (64). A crucial

parallel is drawn here between the smooth global flow of people and the very turbulent and troublesome changes to the climate. Sullivan shows how the abundance of goods and mass migration, which are consequences of colonization and industrialization, as well as the maintenance and control of these, can only lead to tragedy. With "El Nino [bursting] into the sea as rapidly as it [is bursting] into our popular culture/ and our livelihoods," Sullivan is suggesting that the colonial system is far from over; and that indeed, this postcolonial world still relies on anything (peoples, goods, lands) that can be annexed and made profitable. For now, it seems that Sullivan does not know whether this exploitation will continue or whether one can do something about it: "these words are too affected by El Nino to possess any objectivity at all" (64). This poem appears as a warning, some call for more environmental awareness and knowledge. In line with Maracle, Sullivan moves from the empowerment of himself to the empowerment of every person who reads his collection of poems (Maracle). In this way, the strategies employed by the writer attempt to dismantle the divisions between two traditions.

Similarly, in writing about Oceania's oral cultures in relation to "Euro-American" (359) written texts, Houston Wood claims:

> One especially prominent commonality is the reliance in both oral and written cultures on discussions of "how contexts shape content"; and in both oral and written cultures, accuracy emerges from "a process of negotiation involving conversations across divergent perspectives, with challenges and counterchallenges." By emphasizing orality, then, a cultural studies for Oceania will not repudiate an interest in reliability and validity. Rather, researchers will open themselves up to a wider range of sources than do current researchers who privilege written texts (359).

Sullivan, similarly, focuses for the most part on the content of the poem, the message he wants to convey, and the voicing of it. Thus, literary boundaries are fractured and a dialogue is created with his readership. What Sullivan reveals is a truth, another truth: a truth that allows for the challenging and the unsettling of Western versions of History, and the ability to reconstruct—or deconstruct—perceptions of Aotearoa-New Zealand. The emphasis on orality that King, Sullivan, and Wright place in their individual writings advocates, in a similar fashion, for a different perspective and enables the idea of another truth—one that is different from the master narrative—while also seeking to unsettle the idea of one single Western (vision of the) truth. Sullivan's work, ultimately, seeks to upset the foundations arbitrarily established by another culture in order to encourage a new vision of, as well as a resistance to, important and defining events.

4.3 Conclusion

Ultimately, Star Waka serves to challenge boundaries and national containment. The stretching over time and the movement of the ocean are, in part, responsible for the fluidity that Sullivan transmits in his collection of poems. The other aspect is the language he uses. The term "waka," meaning a canoe or spirit medium, can also refer to "allied kinship groups descended from the crew of a canoe which migrated to New Zealand and occupying a set territory" (Sullivan, 4). Star Waka, as stated earlier, opens with a prayer, but it is made up of poems that tackle issues of travelling, colonization, familial inheritance, contemporary popular culture, and future space travel, with some references to Western culture—such as Roman law in poem xiv, "*Ka huri ahau ki e reo o tea o pouri*" (18). The blending of these global and local elements is the very essence of Sullivan's work: it is a process in which the local meets the global. The cultures of several countries

interact in front of the reader's eyes as they unfold on the pages. Through intimate and collective issues, Sullivan asks questions about colonization and addresses them; he reflects on the contemporary consequences and issues, but from a perspective of decolonization, while also engaging with the multicultural aspect of New Zealand. He rejects the submission to a colonial literary model and refuses to translate Maori words into English; that said, he does not reject it entirely. Instead, he embraces every culture, and looks for a circulation, a conversation among the various languages around him. Each poem offers a specific space, while always keeping a connection to other poems. The spatiotemporal environment highlights the multiplicity of voices and gives a sense of symbiosis among the many influences, local and global, present in Aotearoa.

5. *Night Fisher*: A Visual Narrative that Disrupts Stereotypes

The increasing influence of internationalism and multiculturalism on literatures and literary studies has further helped to put the term "transnational" at the forefront. Dealing with languages, cultures, identit-y/-ies, migrations, movements, and globalization, transnational literatures have enabled the creation of new literary methods to tackle and question established national and generic borders. So, to what extent can the genre of the graphic novel be considered transnational? As a medium, why is this genre ideal for conveying such a narrative? When asked by scholar, artist, and author Michael Alexander Chaney to specify what comics have that other literary media do not, the three editors of *Transnational Perspectives on Graphic Narratives* (2013), scholars Shane Denson, Christina Meyer, and Daniel Stein highlighted the bridging capacity of the genre: whether it comes to crossing boundaries, cultures, borders, or languages, all three scholars have turned their critical attention to the movement and fluidity that the graphic novel enables. Stein further claims that "[the graphic novel] encapsulates fluid action in a single perfect moment that always suggests so much more than is actually depicted.… [C]omics involve the reader as an accomplice in narrative sense-making more, or at least in different ways, than other media" (qtd. in Chaney 6). Meyer for her part adds that "they can overlap and inter-connect, super-impose, or shall I say, deconstruct conventional spatio-temporal relations," and that "despite or rather because of, their form, their static frames and motion scenes captured on paper, [graphic novels] allow for different practices of reception than a novel or a film for example" (6). Finally, Denson specifically agrees on the reframing of time and space, which "becomes possible through the interplay of co-present panels that can be surveyed at once, then can be taken singly, and that can arrange themselves in linear and non-linear patterns" (6). Thus, in the field of transnational studies, the illustration-driven

medium is an ideal instance: the emphasis on pictorial storytelling strengthens the relations between words and images, as it relies more on the visuals than the language. Transnational graphic novels, such as *Night Fisher*, thus allow for a shift in perspectives, and depict a globalizing and connected world. Moreover, studying graphic novels through the lens of transnationalism recognizes them as "reaching, or rather, moving across borders" (Denson, Meyer, and Stein 2013, 2), "[b]ut also, more importantly so, they urge us to explore the transnational dynamics that have come to shape contemporary forms of graphic storytelling at the crossroads of cultures" (2).

Interviewed by Lucy Bourton, Hawaiian-born author, illustrator, and teacher R. Kikuo Johnson explains that, for the most part, "[his] illustrations are designed to be 'read' more than 'viewed'" (Bourton "R Kikuo Johnson on the importance of narrative in his illustrations," n.p.). As such, the genre of the comic book[9], for Johnson, is a means of translating "multiple possibilities and situations" (Bourton), since the reader can view and interpret his illustrations in a way that will be different from another reader's. With regard to his inspiration for *Night Fisher*, Johnson explains that he was away in Italy when the World Trade Center towers fell on September 11, 2001, and that "along with the shock of it came a wave of patriotic emotions…I still had my identity of being from Hawai'i—I didn't lose that—but I had expanded to embrace 'from being America' as well" (Cathay Che "The Illustration Man," n.p.). In this chapter, I argue that Johnson's graphic novel, through its use of language—visual and textual—presents his readers a transnational border-crossing narrative. Johnson uses illustrations and text to create a conversation between the two forms, and to invite the reader to take part in his narrative. In addition, his personal story allows him to capture the process of movement, from continental North America to the Island of Maui,

[9] For the purpose of this research, I use the terms "comic book" and "graphic novel" interchangeably.

in order to question the fluidity of the concept of identity and to infuse his literature with an educational aspect. Finally, with an unfiltered depiction of Hawai'i, the Brooklyn-based artist challenges the official narrative about the archipelago and unsettles it with the help of his "unique visual-verbal interface" (Denson, Meyer, and Stein 5).

5.1 The Graphic Novel: A Universal Language?

The opening pages of *Night Fisher* immediately put the reader in the middle of a fight between a teenager and a fish depicted through black and white spaces, meeting and clashing (figure 2). Yet the following double pages, which depict an ocean by night, welcome us with calm and serenity (figure 3):

Figure 2, page 7

Figure 3, pages 8 and 9

With this juxtaposition of tensions and spaces, Johnson suggests that his readers need to pay attention and look at every detail, almost that they should scan his art from top to bottom. Indeed, the paradise-island-themed comic book conveys a sense of both intimacy and fascination, as we follow the story of Loren Foster, who evolves from a young man at the edge of adulthood attending

private school, surrounded by his father and best friend Shane. Johnson varies the point of view from which the reader can observe the character's evolution. Moreover, each perspective relates to Loren, whether it is from the first-person "I" or from the third-person "he." The reader watches Loren, but is also privy to what he thinks. Johnson explains: "[T]he tension between the image and the words forces the reader to be active and involved in deciphering the story" (qtd. in Che). It is up to the readers to look for clues in the words and in the pictures to have a more complete sense of Loren's personality.

For instance, Jem, one of Loren's friends, does not believe him when he says that Shane did not come to school because he was sick: "Sick, riiiight. Seriously though, he's not answering his cell" (23). Later, on page 41, Shane, Eustache, and Loren are in a car, waiting for Jon to deliver methamphetamine to a client, when Shane tells Eustache to "'SIGH,' Shuddup" (41), to which Eustache later answers "**Naw**, that's the way the V.I.C.E work—they hide shit by keeping it out in the open!" (41). Unfortunately for the three boys, the client overdoses right in front of their eyes and Loren screams, "[U]se your cell! Call ninewonwon!" (43). These three examples reveal how Johnson makes specific use of his characters' words—their personal slang, to be precise—and how they become extensions of their bodies and emotions: while some words are in bold type (for instance, when the characters are angry or surprised, as in "It's **Friday**" and "**Already**? I've only got two more days to prepare!" (102)), others have their font size reduced, so as to translate the character's sense of embarrassment. For example, when Eustache asks Loren, "You a virgin, skip?," to which Loren answers, "A virgin? Um, well if you mean have I ever had *intercourse*… no." When Eustache further insists, "'No,' you're not a virgin?," Loren says, "No, I am...one but I've gotten **head** before—Shane—you know about me and Lacey…" (49). In these examples, not only are the emotions and feelings transcribed, but also their urgency can be heard—or at least,

visually experienced—in the way that Johnson transmits them onto the page and to his readers/audience. Moreover, Johnson also pays particular attention to sounds and everyday noises. First, the graphic novel is peppered with onomatopoeias like “uh” (49, 103) and “er” (49). Then, when Loren tries methamphetamine for the first time, one of its effects is that he appears to hear buzzing (47–48). Thanks to the illustrations, which depict wasps flying around Loren’s ears on a black background, and the textual translation of the sounds on the page, the reader can relate to Loren’s somewhat nightmarish experience. Johnson’s readers can thus hear and see the story unfolding in front of their eyes much like a movie, thereby participating in Loren’s felt experience.

In addition, the black and white visuals, the illustrations of large empty spaces such as pools (81), and the drawings of the sea (8–9, 18–19, 59), which differ from the luxuriant depictions of nature and the local flora (12–13, 14–15, 71, 86, 137), all deliver a sense of contradiction and attraction from Loren’s perspective, while also providing a sense of oppression that he, his father, who cannot afford to pay the bills anymore (94), and his friends, all feel. The night sky, on page 32 (figure 4), not only translates, but, importantly, strengthens Loren and Shane’s sense of alienation and isolation: it looks as if the two teenage boys are about to be violently absorbed by the colossal military installation’s shadow.

Figure 4, pages 32 and 33

This passive form of violence presages the violence on the following page, where Eustache and Shane start to fight (see figure 4). Yet those tensions and the overwhelming sense of oppression are almost immediately broken by the use of humour, when the two fighters yell at each other because they cannot seem to be able to fight properly—one is too “sloppy” and the other “always get licked” (33)—so they decide to stop. In these illustrations, every detail seems important in translating the tensions felt by those living on the island.

According to journalist and editor Lucy Bourton, some readers noticed the recurrent use of the colour blue in Johnson’s work. Johnson himself has not specifically mentioned this habit, and it is only after reading the interview conducted by Bourton that I noticed myself that in the black-and-white world of *Night Fisher*, two colours are used, but only for the front and back covers: blue and red (see figures 5 and 6).

Figure 5, front pages

Figure 6, back cover

In response to Bourton, Johnson found three reasons for this choice. The first one has to do with printing needs. Secondly, because of his approach to drawings, he usually starts with "a pair of complementary colours: yellow-purple, green-red, or orange-blue" (qtd. in Bourton). In this way, the colours "seem brighter" and achieve the "graphic pop" that Johnson is aiming for. The third reason, according to Johnson, is that "[I seem] to always return to [pure cyan ink] because over the years [I have] realised what a versatile colour it is. It can read as warm or cool, day or night, bold or quiet" (qtd. in Bourton). Thus, the pure cyan ink used by Johnson on both covers of *Night Fisher* responds to each reader's interpretation—either a bright, cold, or warm colour that depicts either a daytime or a nighttime landscape. As one can observe in figure 5 the colour blue is used to depict water, the mouth of a river, or just a river. On the back cover (see figure 6), a river is depicted as well. The blue, mixed with the black and white colours, offers a sense of peacefulness and calm, but water can be a powerful natural element also – as seen in *Carpentaria*. Juxtaposed with its contrasting colour, orange, on the immediately following page, cyan is thereby accentuated. Like two forces that come together, like the two flows of knowledge mentioned by Wright earlier, the contrasting colours act as complementary.

Throughout *Night Fisher*, Johnson tells his readers two specific stories that are closely intertwined: the realistic and unapologetic teenage years of Loren and a more genuine depiction of Hawai'i. From a theoretical perspective, the multiplicity of layers present in the narrative move beyond the binary between oral and written work, making the graphic novel appear as orature (Silva, 102). As Hawaiian scholar Noenoe K. Silva states, she uses this term, orature, in the same way as Kenyan novelist and theorist Ngũgĩ wa Thiong'o does, who defines the word as "the arts communicated and received orally…to counter the tendency to see such arts as inferior to written literature" (qtd. in Mukutu 23). Johnson expresses language and human interaction through the use of a graphic narrative; he offers his readers the experiences and exchanges between Loren and his friends –thereby becoming what Lee Maracle calls an *orator* (9). Indeed, Maracle defines such a person as "simply someone who has come to grips with the human condition, humanity's relationship to creation, and the need for human direction that will guarantee the peaceful coexistence of human beings with all the things under creation" (9). She asks: "What is the point of presenting the human condition in a language separate from the human experience: passion, emotion, and character?" (9). This "human condition," Silva and Maracle would agree, is exactly what the readers are faced with in *Night Fisher*: Johnson gives his audience something real, something in process; he offers his characters thought and interaction, as they come to age.

Overall, Johnson's language is an illustrative one. Johnson's editorial choice was to use local Hawaiian words here and there, then explain them with the help of a lexicon. This tool, located at the very end of the book, helps us pronounce and understand the meaning of words such as "batu" and "haole," which, respectively, refer to "Hawaiian slang for crystal meth amphetamine, a narcotic whose popularity has reached 'epidemic' proportions in the islands according to local media" and "common slang meaning, *Caucasian*. Formally, the word is ha'ole, … Hawaiian for

foreigner (lit. 'without breath')" (143). Moreover, these "Notes" (143) are also in effect a bibliography, encompassing remarks and details about the different maps present in the graphic novel, and giving book references and explanations about the evolution of the island's flora and fauna throughout the years. While this historical and lexical device is there to guide Johnson's readers through the story of Hawaii, one would think, nonetheless, it also seems as though he did not want his readers to see it.

Indeed, apart from the fact of being located on the very last page of the graphic narrative, there is absolutely no mention of it, anywhere. On the pages to which the cultural lexicon refers, there is no indication that one has to go to the end of the book to understand what "batu" or "haole" mean, or to understand what factors lead to "the decimation of Hawaii's dry land forests" (143). Why make such a device available but not signal it? On the one hand, it seems as though Johnson wanted his audience to understand Loren's world, his own world, and Hawaii's history by their own means. On the other hand, not making any reference to the information could imply that it is, indeed, "simply" a tool, and that one can choose not to use it. Johnson may have decided not to include any indication of this, hoping to stimulate his readers' minds and curiosity. Françoise Mouly, art editor at the *New Yorker*, claimed that Johnson's graphic works encompass "a discoverable, ha-ha moment when the reader gets the joke and feels complicit. The reader is invested in making it come to life" (qtd. in Che). In this way, the reader becomes active in looking for clues or in trying to understand Hawaiian words; one becomes invested *in* the story, thus becoming an accomplice of Johnson and thus being privy to a form of "insiders' knowledge." From her perspective, Noenoe K. Silva sees the different literary characteristics of the Hawaiian language as how it survived the introduction of writing by the missionaries. She states that

> Hawaiian language – even everyday communication – and literature are characterized by word play and figurative language. Multiple layers of meaning, *kaona*, are highly valued. This is so pervasive in the language that Mary Kawena Pukui, premier twentieth-century scholar of the language and literature, felt it important to add a foreword to the Hawaiian-English dictionary cautioning against translating if one is unaware of the possible meanings …. (102)

Silva adds that "without the difference being marked, the reader is free to let her mind ponder the multiple meanings" (103). Thus, one can take the notes at the end of Johnson's graphic novel as being there to encourage his readership to think, deduce meaning from context, even rely on their imagination, and engage with the narrative as being part of something bigger than, simply, Loren and Shane's adventures on Maui. In this way, the language he uses to create the graphic novel generates an active relationship and enables an exchange between the author and his audience/readers through the story, so that the readers actively participate *in* the narrative.

5.2 Crossing Borders to Understand Each Other

However, does one really need to translate the text when one can rely on the language of pictures? The literary genre of *Night Fisher* allows it to be read anywhere in the world, without words. Indeed, many pages of the comic book are filled with illustrations, yet are wordless. One of Johnson's classmates and long-time friends, Paolo Rivera, attested that Johnson had a different approach to art and to the graphic narrative: "He was looking at things through the lens of subtext" (qtd. in Che). As many scholars working in the field of comic books and graphic narratives have

highlighted, although being very different media, images and words seem to build the perfect model when placed in conversation. They both aim at representing and conveying a message; they both share signification and acts of communication. Words and images act upon an interdependent relation, functioning like a duet, each emphasizing the other. American scholar and Professor Charles Hatfield characterizes comic books as an "art of tension" (132) as the genre

> can exploit the tension between picturing and writing without incorporating words per se, as the growing body of "mute" or "pantomime" (that is, wordless) comics attests. Such comic often rely on diagrammatic symbols, such as panels, speed or vector lines, and ideograms, to gloss or reinforce what's going on in the pictures. Nor does the "written" text within balloons or captions have to consist of words in a conventional sense (133-134).

In this way, the reader does not need words and dialogue to understand the story, which makes the graphic novel, the perfect genre to study from a transnational perspective. As such, the world created by the images and the words in *Night Fisher* constitutes a tension-filled liminal space that demonstrates and highlights Loren's feelings and, particularly, his sense of isolation and alienation. Originally from Boston, Loren came to Maui six years before; over time, his impression of being a foreigner and of not being completely integrated into the island's life has not faded, and he remains uncomfortable, as if he had been displaced. Loren appears to feel marginalized: he cannot find a sense of identity or belonging, as if he were stuck between several places and spaces. Loren's story tells us about the difficulties related to crossing borders and understanding one's culture. Yet this universal language conveyed through the use of graphic narratives still needs

some context and cultural explanation. Indeed, *Night Fisher* provides us with this context, while introducing us to a range of perspectives on Hawaii and, importantly, refuting the clichés one might have of paradisiac islands, as filled with exoticism, palm trees, and hula girls—in other words, as the perfect touristic destination for a colourful vacation stay. However, we are invited—encouraged, one could say—to view and understand human interaction and culture on Maui through the lens of the protagonist. *Night Fisher*, then, by depicting a page-wide Royal Patent dating back to 1853 (51), and by using local Hawaiian words here and there, all from Loren's point of view, allows us to perceive a culture and people from a perspective other than our own, the one we know best, the one we are familiar with, and, possibly, not the most accurate one. With the help of his characters, Johnson stresses the urge to learn about others' points of view and to understand them.

Likewise, in *Cosmopolitanism,* English-Ghanaian author Kwame Anthony Appiah invites us to rethink and remodel the imaginary boundaries that separate people in his discussion of the Golden Rule: "Do unto others what you wish done to yourself" (60). As he points out, when one applies this rule in a transnational context, one might encounter some issues when one needs to be familiar with someone else's culture and to figure it out:

> The idea behind the Golden Rule is that we should take other people's interests seriously, take then into account. It suggests that we learn about other people's situations and then use our imaginations to walk a while in their moccasins. These are aims we cosmopolitans endorse. It's just that we can't claim that the way is easy (Appiah 63).

As a consequence, the spaces created by transnational narratives become useful in the sense that they translate lived experiences and allow us to recognize a multitude of perspectives. When we apply this philosophy to the comic book, we discover that Loren and his friends do not seem to evolve in the same space: they do not feel comfortable in the same environments. Loren points out that he still feels like “a sore thumb at the mall” despite being on the island for six years (75), and that he, like his friends, does not want to spend his life in one unchanging space. We learn on page 133 that Shane will be going to study at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), but that Loren has avoided thinking about college because he cannot make up his mind (75). This creation of new spaces by going back and forth from pictures to words is accomplished through the blending of several characteristics and elements of spaces that already exist. As a result, the creative lexical space highlights the very borders—visible and invisible, lexical and geographical, cultural and social, for instance—that have shaped the individual experiences, which in turn have marginalized the protagonists. Loren’s story tells us that he moved so that his father could open his own dentist’s office (16–17). They now live alone in a gigantic house that Loren’s father can no longer afford. The teenage boy does not have any social life at the beginning of the narrative; he goes to school and does not seem to have adjusted to it. Loren’s difficulties adjusting and his social marginalization, at first, reveal a “counter” aspect of transnationalism and its effects on individuals: he does not fit into a select “category.” Loren has trouble classifying himself and finding his own place because, as Florian Groß states in “Lost in Translation: Narratives of Transcultural Displacement in the Wordless Graphic Novel,”

> [t]he transnational is a double-edged sword; just as much as it facilitates exchange and global understanding, it also leaves in its wake those subjects stuck in a transnational limbo between spaces.… While [wordless graphic novels’] visual

> aesthetics are deceptively simple and transparent, they speak of the peril of not-belonging. Their narratives are thus ironic testaments to the difficulties of understanding one another across cultural and national borders. (201–202)

Applied to Loren, movement is a key concept concerning the double-edged sword of transnationalism. In the narrative, Loren is continuously on the move: having relocated from Boston to Maui, he now lives in his father's house, from which he will go to school. His routine appears mundane: he does his homework, mows the lawn and takes methamphetamine. He also sneaks into a hotel and is on the lookout when his friends want to steal a "six horse power generator" (110). The reader thus observes his sense of displacement, his awkwardness in finding "a place to fit in": he refuses to help his father with the backyard, but eventually mows the lawn; he fails school exams, but later decides to work on them and he passes; he is not entirely comfortable engaging in petty crime with his friends, but still participates in these activities. The readers feel Loren's sense of alienation as he tries to adjust to the different environments and situations.

Ultimately, the tensions between words and images, black and white, and calm environments and energetic transitions from one panel to another allow Johnson to create visual conversations between his work and the readers, thus allowing his readers to take an active role in Loren's adventure. He also gives his readers the option of translating the Hawaiian words into English, if they want to, thereby, offering them an alternative. The genre of the graphic narrative, and the way in which this artist in particular approaches it, not only shows a story, but quite literally tells it, as well: in effect, the illustrative medium, much like Wright's and Sullivan's writing,

focuses on language, but another one, a different one, which effectively demonstrates the various tensions at play in the narrative of *Night Fisher*.

5.3 The Paradise Island Debunked

The insular location that is Maui illustrates well the coming of age of Johnson's main character and his gradual acceptance of the island. *Night Fisher* subtly draws a parallel between the person and the place in which he lives. As such, the premise of this third part is that Johnson depicts a realistic and unapologetic portrait of Hawai'i and of Maui in particular, one which may appear more than baffling to his readers in order to unsettle the official narrative about the paradise island.

Indeed, in the same way as Wright does in *Carpentaria*, Johnson offers his readers another voice, another version of the official narrative depicting Hawai'i, a narrative that counters the national, invented narrative of the island as heaven on earth. In an interview with Cathay Che, Johnson reveals that when he designed *Night Fisher,* he realized the controversy it might cause: "As a writer from Hawai'i, anything you write that doesn't fit the narrative of Hawai'i as a paradise is going to be a surprise to readers" (qtd. in Che). Thus, he chose to rely on the reader's imagination to rethink the island and upset the myth of Hawaii as a (tourist) paradise. In this way, his work re-creates cultural relationships and gives another representation of life on the archipelago. The unique genre of the graphic novel, additionally, enables Johnson to reach a wider audience with his message: Loren evolves in an environment that is far from being the praised and glorified heaven on earth. It is not the festive idyllic tourist atmosphere one would expect. Rather, poverty, economic difficulty, loss of land, drug use, petty crimes, abandoned shops, and a sense of isolation and alienation constitute the paradise that the reader encounters in Johnson's detailed depictions.

The naturalistic style of the graphic novel further introduces us to the weight of a harsh reality. The black-and-white panels emphasize these tensions between the negative spaces and the positive ones. Yet not only do the black spaces serve to define and shape the characters, but they are also associated with peacefulness and tranquility, as one can observe in the opening pages of the comic book (figure 3), as discussed earlier in this chapter. All these elements, including the lack of colour, as well as the problems the characters face throughout the story, unsettle the preconceived idea of Hawaii as a flawless location. In this way, the graphic (counter)narrative, similar in some ways to *Carpentaria*, echoes Sullivan's poems as well, as far as movements and flows are concerned. The tensions between the local and the global are brought out by the regularly recurring depictions of numerous maps and various plants and by the information about human, animal, and plant migrations.

This encounter between the local and the global is specifically developed and expanded from page 122 to page 127. Indeed, Loren, on his way to school, walks through deserted parts of the town (122), as well as the parking lot of a supermarket, which the reader can identify as a Walmart (122), where many people are present (123). Then, he finds himself on the other side of the town, but this time, in addition to being empty, this area is also abandoned: Loren comes across a closed travel agency store for rent (124), in the window of which he sees his reflection, and which stands right next to a mural of what appears to be an advertisement depicting a topless woman saying "Aloha." Loren and the reader are exposed to a network of influences from all around the world: from local to global, from accurate to superficial or clichéd depictions of Hawai'i. While these clichés are present, so is the failed consumerism. To the readers, the depiction of the travel agency conveys a sense of sovereignty of the island and its inhabitants: no matter how hard the U.S.A have tried to established capitalism and false publicity on Maui, it has ultimately failed.

Then, for instance, at the bottom of page 125 (see figure 7) , the reader can see a fruit and vegetable market and people from different ethnic backgrounds, speaking different languages; these people appear to be Hawaiians, yet they are—were—outsiders, who now seem to have become part of the Hawaiian population.

Figure 7, page 125

This mingling is further accentuated on pages 126–127 (figure 8), where Johnson chooses to superpose images of plants and people, the same market people from various ethnic backgrounds. This double page echoes Loren's teacher earlier in the text: "About one half [of the plants] were transported in bird droppings…. [H]umans managed to find their way here about 1200 years ago. Their cargo included almost thirty new species of flora" (82). Like the melting pot of immigrants on the island, the new plant species introduced are now part of the Hawaiian landscape and considered "native". This parallel drawn between plants and people recalls a form of assimilation, and the gradual acceptance, of "foreign" goods and populations, while also prompting the reader to question the idea of the geographical isolation of Hawaii.

Figure 8, pages 126 and 127

Indeed, Johnson peppers his visual work with clues to the various encounters between local and global elements, and to the way in which these encounter have, or will affect the island. First of all, spread out on four pages, right at the outset of the graphic novel, before any drawings of Loren and his story, a depiction of the evolution of the island of Maui takes place in seven stages (figures 9, 10, and 11). The geography evolves before the eyes of the readers, and while this may imply not only that changes will happen in Loren's life, but also that his surroundings and the environment have and will continue to evolve as well. As such, nature is an active character that plays an important part in the protagonists' lives.

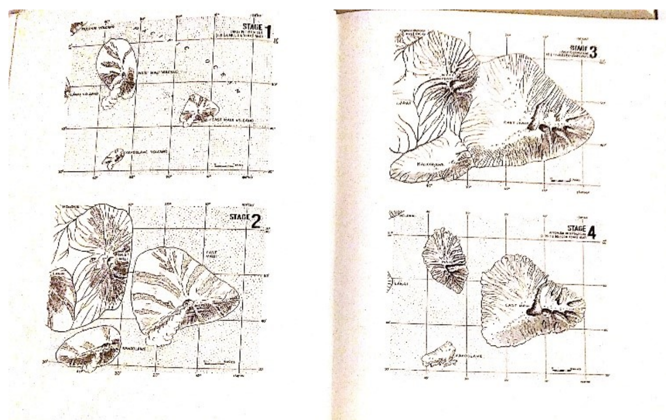

Figure 9, pages 2 and 3

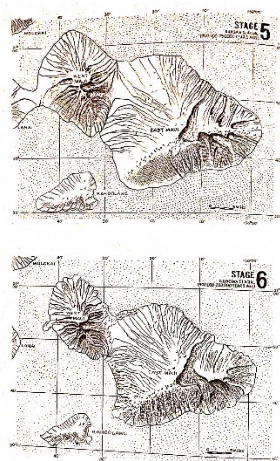

Figure 10, page 4

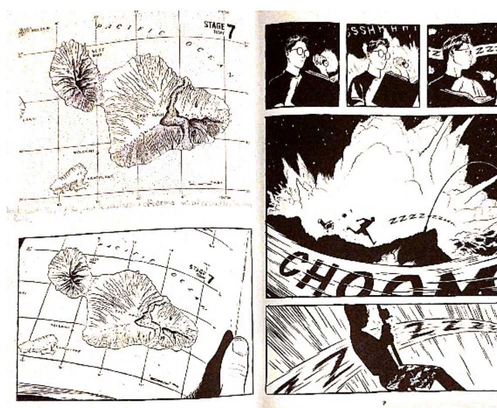

Figure 11, pages 6 and 7

The juxtaposition of these pictures of the evolving island with those of Loren looking at them right before running toward his fishing rod can be interpreted as another tip on how his life will change and evolve in the future; just like the formation of the islands, Loren's life will change, too. He will not feel permanently in this state of alienation and will evolve, like the islands did, to (perhaps) become an integral part of Hawai'i one day. In this way, Johnson tackles issues of belonging and preconceived ideas, and sheds light on the environmental and social problems that have arisen from the different flows that have reached Hawai'i. He relies on his reader's vision and imagination to explore this topic of migration, as well as the multiplicity of changes and adaptations.

Power relations and the struggle among several bodies further echo the struggle for the land and space of the island, and are cleverly depicted in the graphics of *Night Fisher*. Johnson sets the tone of the relationship between the Hawaiian land and its inhabitants. Indeed, the juxtaposition of images itself is a representation of this struggle for space—both factually and physically, as seen, for instance, on page 12 (figure 12). The angle of the drawing suggests that

Loren is going to crush and flatten the plants, and indeed he steps on a thistle. This action, this crushing, can be interpreted as reminiscent of the Hawaiian lands being officially annexed by the United States in 1898—an annexation that is carefully explained in *Hawaii's Story by Hawaii's Queen* by Liliuokalani.

Figure 12, pages 12 and 13

However, Loren hurts himself in the process—the prickly head of the thistle gets embedded in his foot. This can be read as the land striking back and preventing Loren from effectively crossing some boundaries, its boundaries. Indeed, if one understands the thistle as an other-than-human being with its own agency – Cherokee writer Daniel Heath Justice explains that "[other-than-human] peoples have their languages; all have customs, habits, strengths, weaknesses, and personalities," and that "good relations [between human and other-than-human] require acknowledgement and, importantly, mindful accommodation of difference" (38) – then it is evident that, in *Night Fisher*, the flora is there to remind Loren of its agency as something – or rather some*one* – that is as important as he is. For in fact, the nature of the relationship between Loren's family and the land they live on can be qualified as hostile and contentious: in the next panel, we see that his father is trying to landscape the yard. Loren gets hurt because his father

"[hasn't] weeded there yet" (13). The small plant acts as if it wanted to prevent the protagonist from going further on the land by signaling to Loren and his father that they cannot or will not always be able to shape their natural surroundings. In this way, nature—or "the Plant peoples," as Justice calls them—is an important, crucial character in the graphic narrative: it has agency. As suggested by Justice,

> [i]t's only due to the generosity of the Plant peoples that we've managed to survive to this point, as they each provided a cure to one of the Animal-inflicted maladies. And although some cultures and many individuals have worked to act more responsibly in our relationships with these other-than-human peoples, as a species we've repaid their generosity with wide-scale extinction, deforestation, climate catastrophe, and poisoning of the earth, air, and water. (39)

Justice insists on this relation of interdependence and interconnection between humans and other-than-humans. Here, I see the thistle acting as a reminder to Loren of this connection between him and his surroundings. And, in spite of all Loren's father's efforts, Nature will claim its ground: "I'm trying to straighten out this tree, but this is as far as it'll go" (15), says Loren's father, while the readers can observe a palm tree slightly more twisted than the others, and which is starting to take over the family patio. This antagonistic relationship further escalates when Loren and his father refer to their yard as "the Jurassic Park annex in front of our house" (15), and when the laborious work to straighten up the palm tree is compared to "putting braces on a smile full of cavities" (15). Later, "the yard proved a bigger liability that either of us foresaw, and within a year, it was the blight of Makamaka Heights" (17). The inhospitable relationship and tension between

the outsiders that are Loren and his father and the native land are highlighted throughout the story through the use of images of nature and plants taking over, as one can observe on page 18 (figure 13), in which the natural space is taking over Loren's house, or later, when Loren mows the lawn (71). While the "outsiders" may try to contain nature, the environment will nevertheless always grow wild.

Figure 13, page 18

That said, while the notion of place is central in transnational literatures, displacement must be taken into account as well, as it is closely linked to the formation of identity. In this vein, Ashcroft suggests:

> The dialectic of place and displacement is always a feature of post-colonial societies whether these have been created by a process of settlement, intervention, or a mixture of the two. Beyond their historical and cultural differences, place, displacement, and a pervasive concern with the myths of identity and authenticity are a feature common to all post-colonial literatures in [E]nglish. (9)

On page 23, for instance, Johnson depicts Loren and his friend Jem resting on the school water fountain. The fountain is drawn as if it were the tail of a whale coming out of the ocean, supporting and maintaining the boys. Even in the midst of a concrete environment such as a schoolyard, nature and natural elements are present, reminding Loren at the same time of the omnipresence of the ocean. However, the concrete element of nature is manmade; thus, it may suggest the overwhelming presence of human beings still having a great influence over and trying to model Hawai'i's nature. As the story unfolds, so does Loren's evolution. The story ends with Loren's full acceptance of his new home, or, at least, with a different view of his environment: "This was the last beach in Kihiei without any condos" (101), he says, to which Eustache responds, "[n]ot all rich Ha'oles wanna live in Makamaka Heights, skip" (101). This sentence reveals that Loren has changed his perspective, and now seems to understand the agency of "the Plant peoples" (Justice, 39) and the disastrous exhaustive land exploitation, all for the purposes of tourism and/or simply to maintain a paradisiac version of Hawai'i. In the last pages, he finally welcomes his new environment and surrenders to it. According to Iris-Aya Laemmerhirt, the last two pages depict

> the teenager's newfound belonging in the environment.… The grass grows tall around him, and he comes almost invisible as part of the Hawaiian landscape. This image, which brings the narrative to a close, visualizes the idea of Hawaii as a heterogeneous, transnational space: Loren, with his American background, does not fuse with the landscape to the point of indeterminate "oneness." (90)

However, while he does become an integral part of the space, he is neither simply "American" nor completely "Hawaiian"' (90), argues Iris-Aya Laemmerhirt. I argue that Loren has finally found a

place where he feels comfortable enough to evolve properly, but that this does not prevent Johnson from portraying his character's sometimes unstable growth. Loren's identity, ultimately, is tightly tied to Hawai'i. Loren and the land have been subjected to changes, not always chosen; in this way, these elements mirror each other, and enable them to grow and evolve together.

5.4 Unsettling Maui

In Johnson's work, we are introduced to Hawaii in its raw reality, as well as to the brutal consequences of its colonization and annexation. What Johnson shows is that every moment, no matter how insignificant it may seem, is infused with its own weight and truth. The New York-based author chooses to depict moments—for example the page-wide royal patent that officially grants one of Loren's acquaintances a parcel of land, which, we learn on the following page, is now worthless—that seem to interact with Loren's apparently casual attitude, in order to create innovative storytelling moments. By unsettling the official narrative about the Sandwich Islands, Johnson lets his readers see a reality that echoes through time, space, and peoples. This unsettlement and the resistance that he presents, then, lie, in part within his readers' imaginations on one hand, and within another, less official narrative, on the other. Indeed, the portrayal of Maui, Hawai'i, and life growing up on this island is introduced without being romanticized or judged; one of these depictions, for instance, is of Loren's first experience taking methamphetamine. It is neither idealized nor criticized nor condemned. It is depicted with as much realism as possible: to take it, one must find the right people, pay for it, and deal with the effects of the drug on one's system. The fate of his characters, however, is not explicitly depicted at the end of the graphic narrative. Johnson gives us hints here and there about Loren, of what he might become. The same

process is applied to Loren's friend, Shane, and his acceptance to MIT: the details of the characters' lives are left to us, the readers, and to our imaginations. Imagination and images are connected: the reader is the one left to be the creator of the "finalization" of the graphic novel. Johnson plays with this genre to redesign our image of Hawai'i: with the continuity of the graphic narrative, thanks to our imagination and to a different depiction of Hawai'i, the questions concerning Loren's future remain unanswered. The ending is unexpected, as it leaves room for questions and pondering – requiring of the reader an active participation in the story's enfolding. Just like the island of Maui, Loren is affected by changes and shifts. These modifications shape him and make him evolve.

The relationship between Maui Island and the US is explicitly depicted as an ongoing colonial one in *Night Fisher*. As mentioned before, the land is at the core of Hawaiian culture and identity; however, it has been thoroughly commercialized and Westernized and is thus a reminder of the island's history and inheritance. Moreover, the land embodies theses tense relations, and so does Loren. Rebecca Hogue explains that the development of Hawai'i into a capitalist "product" (147) occurred because of the tourism industry that took advantage of the importance of the land. The impact of this kind of business has created an abundance of issues related to land, water, and other local resources:

> In the early 21st century, Hawai'i had become something unrecognizable to both Hawaiians and its early settlers. With the introduction of increasingly more foreigners and a host of new immigrant laborers to support Hawai'i's tourism industry, Hawai'i's economic growth perpetuated the tensions created by colonialism. By the mid-20th century, Hawai'i itself became a product …. [W]ith the exposure of

television shows, Hollywood films, and a booming tourism industry, it became marketed as a haven for those wanted to escape the pressures of their world. (148)

Similarly, in *Night Fisher*, the prevailing position of tourism on the economy of Hawai'i is depicted on pages 79–80 (figure 14), when Loren and his friend Shane illegally go into the swimming pool of a hotel to swim. There is a receptionist, who appears to be Caucasian, although she has a flower in her hair and is dressed with a Hawaiian shirt or dress; since she is at the front desk, one can assume that her appearance is meant to represent the "authentic" image of Hawai'i that the hotel wishes to give its customers. She yawns rudely, but gets suspicious of the two young boys entering the hotel at 1:37 a.m. (79).

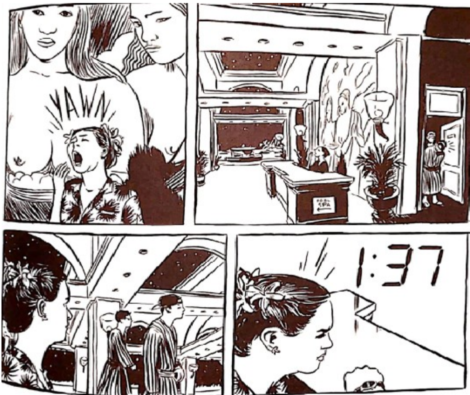

Figure 14, page 79

It is notable that her yawning is set in front of a mural of two semi-naked Hawaiian women. Thus, while the exotic romantic perception of Hawai'i is perfectly wrapped up in a collective imaginary bow, the receptionist's disdain resonates with the shallowness of the tourism industry on the island and its failing attempt at maintaining a certain picture of the fiftieth state—one that seeks to match the stereotypes of the archipelago as a paradise at any cost. Indeed, the hotel depicted in *Night*

Fisher appears to be quite luxurious—the main hall is huge, spacious, and shiny, everything looks very clean, plus it has a large pool and a spa. Money and tourism are clearly linked, so keeping up this appearance of a paradise on earth is a matter that concerns the state and the government; otherwise, any other perceptions of Hawai'i—such as the one Johnson is highlighting—would be disastrous for the economy. That said, the desire to spread an erroneous representation too quickly for money can also be detrimental. While the "Hawaiian" receptionist should convey a sense of authenticity, so does, as mentioned above, "the huge wall painting of two half-naked and supposedly indigenous Hawaiian women behind her" (86), as noted by Laemmerhirt. Indeed, according to her, the painting represents Gauguin's *Two Tahitian Women*. She adds:

> [I]t shows how hotel owners, who decorate their front desks with paintings of *Tahitian* and not Hawaiian women – thus rendering them more or less interchangeable – reimagine Hawaii for their visitors by mixing different Western imaginings of the South Sea. (86)

In line with the type of humour used by Drew Hayden Taylor, Thomas King, and Alexis Wright, I argue that Johnson, here, is seeking to debunk the Western, romantic—and, in this case, ignorant—vision of Pasifika peoples. Rather, he chooses to educate his readership by making them complicit in that "ha-ha moment" (qtd. in Che), prompting them to reflect afterwards. Thus, as "authenticity" fails, Hawaii becomes a land of fiction, a product of imagination entertained by false representations. Importantly, these wrong depictions have a direct impact on the people there, as well as on the construction of their identity, whether they be Native Hawaiians or, like Loren, originally mainlander. Ultimately, these wrongful representations only strengthen and highlight

the tensions on the island—the receptionist, the painting, and the two teenage boys trying to maintain a sense of cultural identity and the readers are exposed to the harmful consequences that these false expectations imposed by powerful institutions have on the inhabitants. This is resonant with Cherokee writer Thomas King's *The Inconvenient Indian*, which describes how Indigenous peoples have been mistreated and misperceived in what is now North America. Johnson—like King—seeks to debunk the wrong and/or preconceived ideas of Indigenous peoples as represented throughout history. According to King, "when we look at Native-non-Native relations, there is no great difference between the past and the present" (*The Inconvenient Indian* xv). To illustrate his argument, King shows the necessity of demystifying the official account of history—or, to use his words, the "national chronicle" and the "bundle of 'authenticities' and 'truths'" (T*he Inconvenient Indian* 3)—that we have imagined as constitutive of history. Rather, we should approach it in the following way:

> It is…a love affair we celebrate with flags and anthems, festival and guns. Well, the "guns" remark was probably uncalled for and might suggest an animus toward history. But that's not true. I simply have difficulty with how we choose which stories become the pulse of history and which do not. (T*he Inconvenient Indian* 3)

History, or rather, what makes history appears dependent on the ones who control it: "[Assumptions] are especially dangerous when we do not even see that the premise from which we start a discussion is not the hard fact that we thought it was, but one of the fancies we churn out of our imaginations to help us get from the beginning of an idea to the end" (King, "Godzilla vs. Post-Colonial" 10). Thus, in line with Thomas King, Johnson seeks to expose an unofficial,

unstereotyped, and unromanticized account of Maui Island. By disproving the assumptions that one might have about the archipelago, Johnson debunks the official narrative of Hawai'i, reestablishes another truth, and mocks the nation-state that built this lie for commercial and colonial purposes.

5.5 Conclusion

Consequently, the genre that Johnson chooses, a graphic novel, immediately indicates the importance of images, visual representations, and their impact on and significance for the readers. This genre, which mixes illustrations and text, thus promotes a transnational approach when one takes into account images and their influence in today's media. The genre also establishes a conversation among the reader, the author, and the characters. Moreover, Johnson's approach ensures that his readership actively takes part in the story and is invested in it. The readers play a key part in the development of the story, as the author relies on their imaginations to tackle various subjects (migration, language, and destruction of land for the benefit of toxic tourism). The language he chooses—the language of pictures, notably, but also the language of the text—creates a powerful means that allows Johnson not only to cross borders of the literary genre first, but also to capture the transnational process of movement, as his main character moves from continental America to Maui. This movement brings the struggle to find identity to the forefront and facilitates the process of learning about a more genuine perception of Hawai'i. Johnson's unfiltered depiction of the island is both realist and unidealized, and thus mocks and upsets the numerous official colonial accounts of Hawai'i as a romantic paradise on earth. In the same way as Wright and Sullivan describe their respective places, Johnson depicts the local characteristics of Maui Island in the twenty-first century alongside the effects, more or less visible, of (neo)colonization.

Consequently, he creates a climate of tension between images and words, local and global, “new” inhabitants and Hawaiians. Thus, the new resistance literature we are introduced to through Johnson’s graphic novel goes beyond the depiction of Loren’s growth: the baffling portrayal of Hawai’i also sheds light on greater environmental problems.

6. Conclusion: Envisioning Connections through Transnational Stories

> Nineteenth-century imperialism erected boundaries that led to the contraction of Oceania, transforming a once boundless world into the Pacific Island states and territories that we know today. …The new economic reality made nonsense of artificial boundaries, enabling the people to shake off their confinement. They have since moved, by the tens of thousands, doing what their ancestors did in earlier times: enlarging their world as they go, on a scale not possible before.
>
> ——Epeli Hau'ofa,
>
> "Our Sea of Islands" (155)

Moving away from Western visions means broadening one's mind and establishing new cultural references. Indigenous transnational literatures highlight the cooperative and communicative aspects that occur between the local and the global. Through an analysis of works in three different literary genres, Alexis Wright's novel, Robert Sullivan's poetry, and R. Kikuo Johnson's graphic novel, I have sought in this thesis to provide a sense of the coexistence of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous worlds and cultures as standing side by side and influencing one another. In all three texts, one witnesses the collaboration and interactions that happen within a local environment, but also more broadly: these authors' works reach across borders and go beyond national and generic boundaries, in order to reach a state of transnationalism. Moreover, all three works put Indigenous perspectives and knowledges at the centre. As a result, they unsettle Western definitions, which enables them to write their own truth, their side of the story, in their own terms. The counternarratives I have investigated each reveal a specific, local environment–the Gulf of

Carpentaria, Aotearoa, and the Island of Maui–, and each one of them is also considered within the larger global context of the end of the twentieth century and at the start of the twenty-first. All three works wrestle with questions of identity, language, and cultural frameworks, both in relation to their respective homelands and in a contemporary international context.

In my second chapter, which focused on Alexis Wright's *Carpentaria*, I highlighted the author's investigation of the consequences of colonization in Queensland, Australia. Through the use of humour and the Dreamtime narrative, Wright addresses issues around Aboriginal land-title rights and speaks to her readers by educating them on the many Aboriginal voices present in Australia. In addition, she blurs the boundaries between the physical world and the spiritual one as a way to question Western assumptions on the matters of culture, land, and space. She connects various worlds, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, physical, geographical, and spiritual, and the links she establishes between knowledge, language, space, identity, and authority through the use of the Dreamtime storytelling provide her readers with a new perspective on what it means to be Australian Aboriginal today. She blends two ways of telling a story, Aboriginal and Western, so as to introduce an active community that seeks to unsettle her readers' assumptions about a so-called postcolonial world. The use of the Dreamtime narrative, specifically, sheds light on the ongoing effects of colonization and the importance of resurgence narratives. In addition, her novel reveals how time and space are nonlinear; rather, they can be conceived of as a continuity.

Then, I looked at Robert Sullivan's collection of poems *Star Waka*. The Maori author considers colonization through several lenses: travel and navigation, prayers, personal thoughts, and collective and shared points of view. In this way, the collection emphasizes diversity and it upsets the strict separation between Maori and non-Maori cultures in order to build new cultural frameworks and new cultural identit-y/-ies. Thanks to the star, the waka, and the ocean, present in

each poem of the collection, Sullivan stresses difference, diversity, and movement among languages, cultures, countries, and spaces, and captures the constant motion among various flows, all of which give his work its transnational aspect. The poems further suggest another approach to culture and cultural standards: indeed, by engaging with notions such as space, the author translates the many encounters between the two main cultures in Aotearoa. Much like in *Carpentaria*, the two main cultures do not appear to compete with one another; on the contrary, they stand side by side, meeting, yet never clashing. Sullivan's poetry highlights the importance of connection, communication, and exchange, throughout the Pacific: these constant interactions between the local and the global, in turn, enable new frameworks from which to think about his poetry. Ultimately, he relies on the diversity of his poems both to unsettle boundaries and to establish an intimacy with his readership.

Finally, R. Kikuo Johnson puts an emphasis on the language of pictures. His graphic narrative *Night Fisher* strengthens the relation between words and images. Johnson, relying on the different forms that language can take, depicts a world that has suffered from globalization. Indeed, far from presenting the paradisiac depictions of Hawai'i that are all too often part of an invented official narrative, the Brooklyn-based artist's comic book seeks to reveal the consequences of this particular narrative on the island; it is an unapologetic, realist version of Hawai'i that does not favour the official line. *Night Fisher* invites its readers to think about and to participate in the narrative by relying on their imagination and upsetting any preconceived perceptions of the island of Maui, thereby accounting for the effects of neocolonization. The unique aspect of the genre and the way in which Johnson uses it therefore create a powerful literary vehicle that crosses borders and depicts the processes of continuous movement and adaptation. As such, the tensions that are

created throughout the graphic narrative clearly demonstrate the potential of a transnational resistance literature, and its capacity to debunk improper representations of Hawai'i worldwide.

6.2 Towards a Transnational Investigation

Overall, this thesis investigates how the works of Wright, Sullivan, and Johnson create a transnational space through, and by, their literary artwork, thanks to a language in two of its forms–visual as well as textual. This space of "in-betweenness" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, and Tiffin 218) gives access to a form of language in its own right: a language that is re-modelled and used as a tool, the purpose of which is to cross and transcend borders, while also calling the readers' attention to these. Language, in its many forms–pictorial, lexical, sung, poetical, prosaic–thus challenges our knowledge of borders and spaces. In this way, *Night Fisher*, *Carpentaria* and *Star Waka* offer their readers, each in its own way, a view of language that we are not familiar with. While this might generate difficulties in communicating or even create awkwardness and apprehension for the various readers and audiences, nonetheless, the transnational literary and generic languages that are represented in these works are there to help us highlight and understand changes, to shed a light on new ways of making connections, and to foster conversations that are more appropriate to the twenty-first century. Ultimately, this is important to the three authors, who, through language, keep a strong and never-ending bond with their respective homelands, Australia, Hawai'i, and Aotearoa-New Zealand, while also reaching international readers in a globalized world. As scholars Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin highlight, the results of colonization and migration have led to consequential changes in cultural experiences and expressions. They argue that the meaning of a word has, in fact, no "'essential' meaning" (42), for it can be modified wherever it culturally exists; in each person's reality or environment, words can have different

meanings or uses. Thus, while Johnson relies on the universal language of graphic narratives to tell a transnational story, by paying attention to every little detail that reveals the blending and pluri-vocal aspect of Hawaiian culture, Alexis Wight, for her part, seeks to bridge the gap between two streams of knowledge, Australian Aboriginal and settler. She further recognizes the cross-cultural influences that this encounter has led to, and looks for new ways to define and understand her country: as such, she blends the various voices, sounds, and uses of Dreamtime storytelling in order to unsettle her readers. As a result, the novel celebrates Aboriginal traditional stories in a contemporary context. As far as Sullivan is concerned, like Wright, he does not oppose Indigenous culture to Western culture. Both authors mix their respective cultures with their colonial legacy, in order to give birth to new legacies. In his collection of poems *Star Waka*, Sullivan gathers several cultural legacies from different countries and creates a unique movement towards, across, and beyond space and time. He encapsulates a diversity of languages and cultures by gathering various encounters and communications in a meeting place that allows them to coexist, thrive, and evolve. Both South-Pacific authors, in this way, choose to emphasize difference to render it beneficial, an advantage of transnationalism. On the contrary, while not being opposed to the positive aspects of that process and while recognizing the perks of Hawaiian life, Johnson sides with a darker feature of transnationalism: the destructive aspect of globalization and mass tourism on the island. Nonetheless, all three authors blend, rather than contrast, the multiplicity of voices in their stories–stories that have shaped their respective cultural and lexical heritages, and which challenge, transcend, and resist colonial qualifications of a standard, local language.

Ultimately, the cross-cultural context in which the writers under investigation in this thesis are writing enables a new kind of literature, a common transnational one that gives voice to

Indigenous activism and movements by taking advantage of the flaws of Western perspectives while also challenging them. They call upon their readers to think about, and act towards, change.

"But what of the future if we take comfort in allowing people more powerful than ourselves and more fearful to do the thinking for us?" asks Alexis Wright in her speech "A Question of Fear," to which she answers, "I wonder if we as a nation take many opportunities as we should to learn more about other people" (Wright, "A Question of Fear" 00:03:54). Aligning herself in this way with philosopher and teacher Kwame Anthony Appiah, she suggests that we all indeed need to take a more profound interest in, and be more considerate of, other civilizations. In this vein, Indigenous writers have systematically established themselves within literary and artistic milieus and raised their voices globally in the hope of creating a network of resistance and alliance. Johnson, Wright, and Sullivan create such networks through their work by writing back against Western perceptions and by challenging, rethinking, and unsettling boundaries, so as to forge a new kind of literature that relies on, and is defined by, continuous malleable movement, imagination, diversity, and collaboration. Such works promote the importance of Indigenous voices, specifically those concerned with environmental sustainability, and raise the question of the management of the land, especially when it comes to remote locations. Often, what seems to be something very local is in fact a matter that concerns Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples throughout the world. Indeed, in her essay "Approaching Indigenous Activism from the Ground Up: Experience from Bangladesh," Eva Gerharz claims that Indigenous activism and rights movements have allowed Indigenous peoples to be included in, and better represented by, development agendas. It is in the creation of those new spaces that their voices are able to address global institutions and support global issues such as environmental care (129). She adds:

> Indigenous populations are often constructed and represent themselves as confined to remote localities. The movements' positioning as localized and the relating of their claims to their special relationship with the land on which they live turns their local space into an important resource when they are negotiating for [I]ndigenous rights in global forums. They therefore constitute a case that exemplifies the dynamics of activism stretching across scales of spatiality from localization to globalization. (129)

In this way, it is at the crossroads of Aboriginal Australian, Maori, Hawaiian, and Western literatures that Wright, Sullivan, and Johnson have built their own transnational literatures. Their works bring together what appears to be contradictory cultures, yet they find the means by which to reconcile them, by emphasizing images and imagination, while also accounting for their inherent tensions. It is on their readers' creativity and creative minds that they rely, because it is the very idea of "imagining through projecting outwards," says Wright ("A Question of Fear", 00:13:47-49), that will help readers understand how meaning and thoughts are produced and constructed, and thus, how history is built. As such, meaning, ultimately, occupies a decisive place in their works. How is it constructed, and to what end? The answer we are given lies within the authors' counternarratives: they offer other definitions and meaning of time, space, stories, knowledges, and, most importantly, perspectives. In other words, not only do their works take place within a binary cultural balance, but they take place *among* a multitude of voices, of cultures, of histories (personal, communal, and national). *Star Waka*, *Carpentaria*, and *Night Fisher*, all written from a perspective of rethinking and unsettling boundaries, each challenges and breaks away from Western traditional thinking by creating alternative forms of knowledge: within a network of alliances, they incorporate their own perspectives of history and, importantly, give voice to

unofficial accounts. The Dreamtime narrative, the spiritual worlds, the land, the ocean, migration, colonization, time, and space are all at stake and are useful tools to help us understand each other. Indeed, it is by building new frames of reference, historical and cultural, that our universally connected world can start to change and evolve towards something better. An evolution or even an improvement in our relations to the world, to people, and to the environment may allow our perspectives to broaden.

Ultimately, transnational literatures can help us to understand the continuous encounters between the local and the global, and thus encourage us to appreciate and comprehend what surrounds us. The collaborative aspect that stands out of these transnational works gives their readers a sense of difference and of its potential: the authors insist that this distinctness is not something inferior; it is not something "less than" Western perspectives. On the contrary, it is through the creative alliance between two or more cultures that a new, better world can be established, and cultural relationships can be built.

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