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A POETICS OF DE-COLONIAL RESISTANCE: A STUDY IN SELECTED POEMS BY EVELYN ARALUEN CORR

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ABSTRACT

First Nations peoples in Australia, as in many other colonized countries, were forced to acquire English soon after the arrival of the colonists in their country during the second half of the 18th century. In response to their land dispossession, Indigenous Australian poets adopted and adapted the language and literary forms of colonists to write a politicized literature that tackles fundamental subjects such as land rights, civil, and human rights, to name but a few. Their literary response can be traced back to the early 1800s, and it had continued through the 20th century. One example is the poem “The Stolen Generation” (1985) by Justin Leiber, which has since been considered a motto for the struggle of Aboriginal peoples against obligatory removal of children from Aboriginal families. This paper aims at examining 21st century politicized literary response of Aboriginal poets. It sheds lights on the poetry of Evelyn Araluen as a telling paradigm of decolonial poetics, demonstrating her role in the political struggle of her peoples. Analysing representative poems by the poet, including “decolonial poetics (avant gubba)” and “Runner-up: Learning Bundjalung on Tharawal,” the paper examines the interdisciplinary nature of her poetry, and demonstrates how the poet transgresses the boundaries between poetry and politics, so as to be utilized as an effective tool of political resistance.

Keywords: *Aboriginal Australians, Aboriginal poetry, Araluen, colonisation, de-colonial poetics, radical politics.*

INTRODUCTION

Broadly speaking, colonialism is a concept that denotes the political domination of European power from the 16th to the 20th century, which has been examined by many postcolonial (radical) theorists. Colonized peoples have been suffering from the subsequent postcolonial policies, even though formal colonisation came to an end with the emancipation of the Americas during the 18th and 19th century, and the decolonisation of a large part of the Global South during the late 20th century, including Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean, Pacific Islands (Guerin et al., 2011, p. 361-361). In fact, it was the consequences of colonialism that gained the attention of many postcolonial

theorists and paved the way for the emergence of Postcolonialism, which refers to a historical phase undergone by Third World countries after the decline of colonialism. The formal onset of Postcolonialism or “third-world studies” can be traced back to around the mid-20th century with the decolonization (independence) of India (Tyson, 2007, see also Guerin et al. 2011, pp. 361-363). As a theoretical framework, postcolonial criticism “seeks to understand the operations—politically, socially, culturally, and psychologically—of colonialist and anticolonialist ideologies” (Tyson, 2006, p. 417). This theory attempts to comprehend how and why the colonized peoples developed the way they

did in postcolonial era, beside examining the elements and circumstances that formulate the postcolonial identity of a colonized people.

Frantz Fanon's works *Black Skin, White Mask* (1952), and *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961)¹, as well as Chinua Achebe's novel *Things Fall Apart* (1958) were influential texts in postcolonial studies. Other key texts are: *The Pleasures of the Exile* (1960), by the Caribbean writer George Lamming, which critiques William Shakespeare's play *The Tempest*, and *Orientalism* (1978), by American-Palestinian theorist Edward Said. The latter work is breakthrough contribution and a foundational work in postcolonial studies. Inspired by the concept of "discourse" by Michel Foucault² (1926-1984), Said, in this book, examines the cultural representations that are the bases of orientalism—how the Western world perceives the Orient. In fact, Said examines orientalism as a specific form of othering, an ideology that has been

practiced in Europe, Britain, and America. The objective of orientalism is "to produce a positive national self-definition for Western nations by contrast with Eastern nations on which the West projects all the negative characteristics it doesn't want to believe exist among its own people" (Tyson, 2006, p. 420). In fact, it was this Eurocentric ideology that paved the way for the colonization of many countries across the globe, including Australia.

The arrival of the First Fleet of eleven ships, coming from Portsmouth, England, to Australia in 1787, under the command of Captain Arthur Phillip, unfolded a new phase in the history of Indigenous Australian peoples. This historic convoy, which carried over 1500 men, women, and children to the other side of the globe, led to colonization of Aboriginal country and the dispossession of its natives. Although Aboriginal peoples have inhabited Australia for more than 65,000 years (Clarkson *et al.*, 2017), the early colonists came to consider Aboriginal country terra nullius (a land that belongs to no one). With the advent of the colonialists, Aboriginal peoples faced killing, massacres, disposition, and forced removal of their children, to name but a few injustices.

First Nations peoples in Australia, as in many other colonized countries, were

¹ *The Wretched of the Earth*, for example, has been a significant inspirational text for "postcolonial cultural critics and literary critics who seek to understand the decolonizing project of Third World writers..." (Guerin *et al.*, 2011, p. 363).

² Said borrows the notion of "discourse" from Foucault in order to formulate his theory. To put it simply, Foucault defines "discourse" as a system of statements "by which dominant groups in society constitute the field of truth by imposing specific knowledges, disciplines and values upon dominated groups" (Ashcroft, Griffiths, & Tiffin, 2007, p. 37). Said deploys discourse to portray the system of statements that is created surrounding the East and to reveal the function of this discursive system. He explores the discourse via which the West fabricates and dominates the Oriental.

forced to acquire the language of the colonizers, soon after the arrival of the colonists in their country during the second half of the 18th century. Indigenous Australian intellectuals and political activists utilized English to resist the colonists and to express their peoples' political demands and aspirations. Moreover, in response to their land dispossession and the political hegemony of the colonists, Indigenous Australian writers adopted and adapted not only English, but also literary forms of the colonists to write a politicized literature that tackles fundamental subjects such as land rights, civil, and human rights, to name but a few. Their literary response can be traced back to the early 1800s, and it had continued through the 20th century.

Since the early 1960s, Aboriginal Australian poets have been more and more engaged with the politics of decolonisation, voicing or reflecting their peoples' political activism. This avantgarde, politicized literary movement of the First-generation Aboriginal poets, namely Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker) (1920-1993), Jack Davis (1917-2000), and Kevin Gilbert (1933-1993), was a catalyst that inspired young generation of Aboriginal poets during the 21st century. Evelyn Araluen is among the nationally distinguished Aboriginal contemporary young poets, whose poetry can be seen as

a continuation to the literary ideology of the First-generation Aboriginal poets. The aim of this paper is to examine the poetry of Araluen as a telling paradigm of an interdisciplinary, decolonial poetics. It demonstrates how this poet utilizes poetry in voicing the political claims of her people. It focuses on how she transgresses the boundaries of poetry and politics to utilize her poetry as an effective tool of political resistance.

ALWAYS WAS, ALWAYS WILL BE ABORRIGINAL ACTIVISM

Paraphrasing postcolonial theorist Fanon, Linda Tuhiwai Smith (1999), the leading theorist on decolonization of Maori in New Zealand, argues that "imperialism and colonialism brought complete disorder to colonized peoples, disconnecting them from their histories, their landscapes, their languages, their social relations and their own ways of thinking, feeling and interacting with the world"³ (p. 28). Smith refers to the ethnic cleansing experienced by many colonized peoples across the globe, including Aboriginal Australians. These perpetually incurable consequences of colonisation resulted from the colonialists' supremacist

³ For more about the marginalisation of Aboriginal history and the role of Aboriginal poetry of the 1960s in reviving it, see Furaih, Ameer. Chasib. (2018). 'Let no one say the past is dead': History Wars and the Poetry of Oodgeroo Noonuccal and Sonia Sanchez. *Queensland Review*, 25(1), 163-176. <https://doi.org/10.1017/qre.2018.14>

ideology. In fact, the cultural and linguistic destruction of Aboriginal peoples was so comprehensive that “out of an estimated 500 language groups on mainland Australia when the British arrived, barely half that number of languages were to survive” (Foley, 2000, p. 6). The decrease in the number of Aboriginal native languages in Australia was a vivid indication to the decline in the population of Aboriginal peoples, which was resulted from their being treated brutally, particularly during the early phases of colonialism. This led the early colonists to espouse a belief that Aboriginal peoples would “die out”⁴, an epistemological misconception that gave the early colonists the rights to push them off their lands onto the then newly established government reserves. This belief further justified the establishment of the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) of the 19th century and the implication of the would-be assimilation policy of the 20th century (Foley, 2000, p.4).

Consequently, Aboriginal peoples have been socially, culturally, politically marginalised, and this marginalisation can be seen in the formal application of the institutionalized racism in Australia which,

⁴ In 1909, the Protection Act authorized the foundation of “the first Australian ‘concentration camps’ to provide a place for the doomed race to die off” (Foley, 2000, p.7).

according to theorist Lois Tyson (2006), refers to “the incorporation of racist policies and practices in the institutions by which a society operates”⁵ (p. 361). One example of this institutionalized racism can be seen in the formal endorsement of the White Australian Policy in 1901. Beside denying their rights to citizenship, the newly established Australian federal Constitution refused to count Aboriginal peoples in the national census in 1901.⁶ Therefore, as a postcolonial policy, socio-political racism can be seen as the invention or the side effect of colonialism (Silva, 2007).

Even though Aboriginal peoples have resisted this socio-political dominance for more than two centuries, their formally recognized political reaction occurred in 1925 with the establishment of the first Aboriginal political organization, namely The Australian Aboriginal Progress Association (AAPA).⁷ Although

⁵ For example, “education; federal, state, and local governments; the law, both in terms of what is written on the books and how it is implemented by the courts and by police officials; health care, which can be racially biased in everything from the allocation of research dollars to the location of hospitals to the treatment of individual patients; and the corporate world, which often practices racial discrimination in its hiring and promotion despite whatever equal-opportunity policies it officially claims to have” (see Tyson, 2004, p. 361).

⁶ “In reckoning the numbers of the people in the Commonwealth, or of a State or other part of the Commonwealth, Aboriginal natives shall not be counted” (Attwood & Markus, 1999, p. 213).

⁷ Founded by Aboriginal activist and elder Fred Maynard (1879-1946), this organization campaigned for “freehold title to land, the cessation of the removal of Aboriginal children and the abolition of the NSW Aborigines Protection Board (APB)” (Foley, 2007, para. 3).

AAPA was a short-lived political organization, started and ended in the years 1925-1927, it inspired First Nation political activism for generations to come, motivating them to engaged in demonstrations, marches, and sit-ins, to name but a few resistant strategies. AAPA not only paved the way for other Aboriginal political activists to establish the Civil Rights and the Black Power movements of the 1960s and 1970s,⁸ but also could be the backbone of the Must Fall activism of the 21 century. According to Araluen (2017b.), “[t]he structure of ‘Must Fall’ resistance has been extended to fees, rape culture, science and outsourcing, and has become one of the most recognisable decolonial discourses across Africa, Europe, America and, increasingly, Australia” (p. 4).

Aboriginal activism was so persistent that it could have achieved relative improvement in the socio-political status of Aboriginal peoples. This can be seen in the 1967 referendum, which asked, in one of its two questions, the approval of the voters for counting Aboriginal peoples in the national census (Attwood & Markus,

⁸ For more about the genesis, the development, as well as the role of Aboriginal poets in promoting the Black Power radical ideology, see Furaih, Ameer. Chasib. (2017). ‘For their fights affect our fights’: The Impact of African American Poetics and Politics on the Poetry of Lionel Fogarty. *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature* 2017. 1: 1-13. <https://openjournals.library.sydney.edu.au/index.php/JASAL/article/.../11777/11490>

1999). The result was that the referendum gained 93 % of votes. The dawn of the 21st century marks another profound, positive “shift” in the political history of Aboriginal peoples. In 2008, Australian Prime Minister Kevin Rudd announced a “Federal Government Apology” to Australia’s Indigenous peoples’ Stolen Generations. In his speech, Rudd referred to them as “the oldest cultures in human history” (Rudd, 2011, 14).

However, the Aboriginal’s optimism that institutionalized racism would come to an end was short-lived, since marginalization against them has continued through the second half of the 20th century and the dawn of the 21st century. For instance, during the 1960s and 1970s, the impact of the institutionalized racism was extended to many mainstream historians and critics in the academia. This was manifested in underestimating and narrowing the (inter-) national impact and engagement of the Aboriginal radical political movements of the 1960s and 1970s. In the article entitled, “Black Power in Redfern 1968-1972,” Gary Foley (2001), who was a distinguished Aboriginal Australian Black Power activist, states that the achievements of the activists of the Aboriginal Civil Rights movement were not praised “by the predominately male, *non-indigenous Australian historians* who have since

written about that era.... [Those] historians have *trivialized, marginalized and dismissed* the achievements and historical influence of the so-called Australian Black Power Movement” (p. 1, italics mine). Furthermore, the 21st century witnessed a continuation of the marginalisation of Aboriginal peoples’ politics, culture, and history. For example, in *Telling the Truth About Aboriginal History*, Bain Attwood (2005) discusses Keith Windschuttle’s *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (2002), which is clearly one of the most controversial historical accounts in Australia:

This work denies that Aborigines were the original sovereign people of this country, and so denies that the British invaders usurped this; it denies that Aboriginal people engaged in warfare to defend their control of the country, and so denies that they resisted their dispossession; it denies that whites killed large numbers of Aboriginal people on the frontier; it denies the role the British invasion played in the displacement and depopulation of Aboriginal people, and so denies that the colonisers had some responsibility for this; and it denies the humanity of Aboriginal people and the value of their culture (p. 151).

This socio-political situation, which has been resisted by many contemporary Aboriginal activist-poets, including Araluen, has not restrictively been experienced by Aboriginal Australians. In fact, all postcolonial societies “are still subject in one way or another to overt or subtle forms of neocolonial domination, and independence has not solved this problem” (Guerin et al., 2011, p. 361).

A DECOLONIAL POETICS

A descendant of the Bundjalung nation, Araluen was born, raised, and writing in Dharug country. She is a teacher and researcher, working in Indigenous literatures at the University of Sydney. Early in 21st century, she is nationally recognized as a radical Aboriginal poet. In 2017, she was the winner of the Nakata Brophy Prize for Young Indigenous Writers for her work, “Muyum: a transgression.” She had previously been a runner-up for the award in 2015, for her poem “Learning Bundjalung on Tharawal.” Araluen’s poem, “Guarded by Birds” (2018), has won the Judith Wright Poetry Prize. In addition to poetry, she widely published criticism and fiction. In 2019, she was elected as one of the two new co-editors for *Overland* magazine.

Araluen has been engaged in the on-going political activism of her peoples during the 21st century. An example of her

activism is her leading of “late-night workshops on decolonial theory.... Some sessions have ended with direct action or vandalism” (Araluen, 2017b., p. 5). She is also a founding member of Students Support Aboriginal Communities, a NSW network of grassroots activists. Araluen’s politicized poetics goes hand in hand with her radical political activism. She prioritizes voicing Aboriginal peoples’ socio-political and cultural aspirations in her poetry, responding to land dispossession, and the implication of constitutional discrimination, to name but a few. For instance, in “Wangal Morning,” she warns about the potential radical confrontation that is latent in her and, by extension, in Aboriginal peoples:

I’m still asleep
 but you know I will wake
 if you need
 (Araluen, 2017a.)

In fact, Araluen’s political agenda is informed by a blatant denouncement of the internalized White supremacy in Australia. The demands that she calls for in her poetry include, but not limited to, land rights, fair treatment according to the constitution, fair employment, an end for discrimination (colour line), an end for death in custody and police harassment.

In fact, Araluen, like several other Aboriginal writers, is arguably more interested in “political decolonisation and decolonisation theory... than [in] scholarly post-colonialism, an academic discourse which has only rarely interested Aboriginal writers” (Minter, 2013, p. 158).⁹ In “Resisting the Institution: On Colonial Appropriation,” Araluen (2017b.) poses the following question: “Is it possible for an institution of Knowledge production in a settler-colonial state such as Australia to function as an agent of decolonisation?” (p. 4). This question comes in the wake of Araluen’s reflection on a campaign waged at the University of Sydney calling for “the renaming of the Wentworth building and for the removal of a statue of William Charles Wentworth from the Great Hall”¹⁰ (Araluen, 2017b., p. 4). While Araluen admits that decolonial theory provides Indigenous peoples with “the tool to deconstruct and challenge colonial infiltrations into our worlds and minds, decolonial practice within the academy is restrained to that which the

⁹See Smith, L. T. (1999). *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*.

¹⁰ Wentworth is one of the founders of the university, honoured in colonial memory for his 1813 expedition with Gregory Blaxland and William Lawson across the Blue Mountains, a journey that precipitated the pastoral exploitation of Wiradjuri country. Less known is Wentworth’s interference in the 1838 trial of seven white stockmen who massacred up to thirty unarmed Gamilaraay people at Myall Creek, in which he prevented Aboriginal witnesses from giving testimony that would have likely resulted in conviction (Araluen, 2017b., p. 4).

institution regards as profitable” (Araluen, 2017b., p. 5).

Postcolonial and decolonial theories have their own divergences and convergences. In other words, although these two movements are to some extent overlapped as far as their political strategies and ideological orientation, these theories are not a replica of each other. In addition to certain commonalities that brought them close to each other, there are striking disparities between them: “Whereas postcolonial theory is associated with the issues of hybridity, diaspora, representation, narrative, and knowledge/power, theories of decolonization are concerned with revolution, economic inequality, violence, and political identity” (Kohn, 2010, p. 536). Postcolonial theory describes the political and theoretical struggles of pre-colonized societies that witnessed the transition from political colonisation (or dependence) to sovereignty. On the other hand, decolonial thinking emerged as a reaction to the colonial power during its early stage and it is in effect a radical confrontation to Western Eurocentric ideology (see Quijano, 2007, p. 542). As far as their socio-political contexts in which each theory emerged, the former theory is mainly developed by Indian theorists who are connected to what is called the Subaltern Studies Group (SSG)

or Subaltern Studies Collective, a group of South Asian scholars interested in the postcolonial and post-imperial societies. The decolonial theory, however, is younger, and its roots can be traced back to Latin American scholars. Coined by socialist Anibal Quijano, this theory focuses on “untangling the production of knowledge from what they claim is a primarily Eurocentric episteme. It critiques the perceived universality of Western knowledge and the superiority of Western culture. Decolonial perspectives see this hegemony as the basis of Western imperialism” (Quijano, 2007, p. 178). What can bring these theories into an approximate framework is their common ideological attitude, namely resisting the colonial dominance on the so-called “Third-World” countries. These theories lucidly expose their contraposition to Westernized colonialism, regarding it as “the underlying logic of the foundation and unfolding of Western civilization from the Renaissance to today...” (Mignolo, 2011, p. 2).

Araluen’s poem “decolonial poetics (avant gubba)” demonstrates the poet’s radical, decolonial literary ideology:

when my body is mine i will tell them
with my belly&bones

do not touch the *de*
 or let your hands burn black
 with your unsettlement
 there are no metaphors
 here
 when i own my tongue i will sing
 with throat&finger
 gobackwhereyoucamefrom
 for i will be
 where i am for
 when i am aunty
 i will say, jahjums,
 look what we made for you
 look what we carved from the earth
 to clean and to heal
 so you may have a place
 and when i am dead
 they
 will not
 say my name
 and when you are dead,
 you can have poems.

(Araluen, 2017c., italics original)

In this poem, Araluen utilizes what might be called a linguistic resistance or counter-attack, which is expressive of her blatant, anti-Eurocentric poetics. For example, one can notice the use of what some critics describe as Aboriginal language along with standard English. In the subtitle of this poem, Araluen changes the term “avant garde” into “avant gubba”. This phrase comprises an English adapted word ‘avant’ (originally a French word) and an Aboriginal slang word, ‘gubba’, which is used by Aboriginal peoples when they refer to a white person. The word “jahjums” is another example for the synthesis of Aboriginal-English languages: “when i am aunty / i will say, jahjums”. It seems that this linguistic mixture invites us to read the poem as an example of relational poetics that creates a space for the contextualisation or reviving a minor culture/ language. Moreover, Araluen uses this linguistic mixture to attack and deform English, the main tool used by the White’s culture to promote their belief in superiority and universalism, a hegemonic ideology that led to the destruction of Aboriginal languages and the cultures. The poet’s resistance to the hegemony of English and, by extension, the Western literary canon, can be seen in the spiral form of the poem, her rejection of capitalisation, lack of spacing (“belly&bones”, “throat&finger” ,

“gobackwheryoucamefrom”), the use of ampersands (“&”) or chatting language, and the use of spaces within and between the lines. Araluen’s radical, decolonial position reminds me of Aboriginal scholar and poet Peter Minter’s (2013) argument that “[a]esthetic decolonisation goes hand-in-hand with political and territorial decolonisation, especially in neo-colonial settler societies such as Australia” (p. 158).

In addition to its poetic form, the content of this poem is radical. Araluen uses her poetry as an agent for generative, communicative political engagement with the dominant culture. To achieve that aim, she pushes the established literary boundaries, rejecting the status quo in writing poetry: “there are no metaphors here” (spacing original). Resisting the established rules of the canon is a common tendency in Araluen poetry. One example is her poem “Muyum: a transgression”, which is, according to Jonathan Dunk (2018), “a vivid narrative poem, or lyric essay, or not quite either” (p. 5). This literary estimation of her poetic skills is a proof that the poet rhizomatically transgresses the established genres of Westernized literature and formulates a poetic zone where she can interconnect poetry with narrative (history) and politics. Similarly, in “decolonial poetics (avant gubba),” the poet refrains from using Westernized conventional poetic traditions

or aesthetics, which is represented by this figure of speech (“metaphor”). She is not interested creating an implicit comparison, which is the case with the traditional use of metaphor (see Saeed, 1997, p. 302). Instead, she talks directly, using the collective pronoun “I” in voicing her peoples’ socio-political demands. The result is a politicized, interdisciplinary poetics that marks with a vivid unapologetic, confronting tone:

do not touch the *de*
or let your hands burn black
with your unsettlement

There is no compromise here. Instead of appealing to the mainstream society for understanding, Araluen presents herself here, not as a passive sufferer, but an active combatant, occupying a position of strength. The prefix “*de*” is crucial in these lines, and in the literary and political identity of Araluen. This poetics reflects her radical politics, because Araluen believes that “radical imagining is critical to any liberatory discourse” (Araluen, 2017b., p. 7).

Furthermore, Araluen (2017b.) argues that “[f]rom an Indigenous standpoint, there is merit in such an [decolonial] approach within the current stage of *dreaming*” (p. 7, italics added). In “‘Dreamtime’ and ‘The Dreaming’ –

an introduction,” Christine Judith Nicholls (2014) not only discusses “Dreaming” as an all-embracing concept that provides rules for living, a moral code, as well as rules for interacting with the natural environment, but also a “holistic” concept. As a religio-cultural worldview attributed to Australian Aboriginal beliefs, the term Dreaming “isn’t something that has been consigned to the past but is a lived daily reality” (para. 2). Engraving Aboriginal socio-political experience in the “holistic” term Dreaming is crucial here. This enables Aboriginal peoples to sustain their connection with their own cultures (past), plan their ways to deal with their “daily reality” (present), and express their own aspirations for the future. To emphasise the ongoing political resistance of Aboriginal peoples, Araluen’s poem is structured in a way that echoes the three stages of the Dreaming: the past (her infancy), the present (adulthood), and future (“when i am dead”). In each of these stages, the poet has a distinctive way of protest.

During her infancy, she will let her body (‘belly&bones’) resist the settlers: ‘when my body is mine i will tell them / with my belly&bones / do not touch the *de*.’ In Araluen’s poem, everything in her body is personified and has a voice: her ‘belly&bones’ and her ‘tongue.’ What seems crucial here is that the body has a

voice only when it is “mine” or reflects the true essence of Aboriginality, in form (“bones”) and content (“belly”). To unapologetically possessing an Aboriginal body and set of mind is to get rid of the sense of in-betweenness and hybridity, resulted from the destructive impact of the mainstream culture.

The poem continues to the second stage of Araluen’s life: “when i own my tongue i will sing / with throat&finger/ gobackwhereyoucamefrom”. When Araluen grows up, her ‘tongue... will sing,’ not write. She will ‘sing with throat&finger,’ voicing her peoples’ command: ‘gobackwhereyoucamefrom.’ Perhaps the symbols ‘throat&finger’ are interrelated here. The ‘throat’ is a symbol of orality as it is where the voice is produced. When the “tongue” is the poet’s, the singing (orality) will be Aboriginal. The second symbol, ‘finger,’ which is part of the hand, may refer to the act of writing or the transcription of the Aboriginal voice produced by the Aboriginal “tongue.” The transcription of traditional Aboriginal voice (or orality) into a Westernized (or modernized) written form resulted in a hybrid poetic content, or Aboriginal poetry. This is the same idea of poetic hybridity referred to in the title ‘avant gubba’ and in the linguistic mixture of Indigenous and English words discussed earlier. This hybrid poetics, although

adopted from the mainstream culture, is also adapted as a tool of resistance against them.

Finally, Araluen expresses her own aspirations for the future. Her poetry will carry on the struggle when her body will be buried:

and when i am dead
they will not
say my name
and when you are dead,
you can have poems.

In these lines, Araluen refers to the importance of poetry in immortalizing the struggle of Aboriginal peoples. Although the poet seems pessimistic about the shortness of her life and mortal nature of her body, she is confident that her struggle will be alive forever through her poetry, whose effect can be immortal in the minds and hearts of her peoples. The poet aspires to create out of her poetry a sustainable socio-political force, which reflects Aboriginal cultural heritage, and is capable of building a politically radical Aboriginal generation in the future.

Another example is Araluen's "Runner-up: Learning Bundjalung on Tharawal". This poem reflects the poet's

awareness about the linguistic hegemony in Australia:

.....
It is hard to unlearn a language:
to unspeak the empire,
to teach my voice to rise and fall
like landscape,
a topographic intonation.

(Araluen, 2016, p. 27)

Here, Araluen reflects a problematic relationship with the colonising tongue, which stems from her realisation about the significant role English plays in constituting postcolonial identity in the colonies of the British Empire. One example can be seen Nigerian writer Chinua Achebe who states that:

Is it right that a man should abandon his mother tongue for someone else's? It looks like a dreadful betrayal and produces a guilty feeling. But for me there is no other choice. I have been given the language and I intend to use it (Thiong'o, 1995, p. 391).

Therefore, many critics and theorists of the colonial discourse theory, including Said, Homi Bhabha, Gayatri Chakravorty

Spivak, and Fanon, came to consider English a postcolonial language, beside regarding the realities of Postcolonialism (race, ethnicity, (inter)national politics, diaspora) the true nature of global society today (Ashcroft & Ahluwalia, 2008). For example, in *The Wretched of the Earth*, Fanon (1961) discusses how language was adopted to serve the imperialist ideology of the colonists through creating the stereotypes of the colonizer-colonized, master-slaves. Similarly, driven by this common colonialist ideology, the early colonists imposed English on Aboriginal peoples, forcing them to speak, write in English, or Australian English (AusE.), as it is compulsorily used in schools and universities. English is also the language of the Constitution in Australia and is used to conduct government business. Local or native languages have restrictively been utilized at home or in small gatherings of native peoples.

Obliged to use AusE., Araluen seems troubled by her role as a writer: “It is hard to unlearn a language: / to unspeak the empire.” As a colonizing language, it contributes to the destruction of the cultural and linguistic heritage of Aboriginal peoples. This bilingual situation is indicative of Araluen’s futile attempt to “unlearn” English. Realising that English has always played a role in the sense of in-betweenness in the (former)

British colonies, the poet adopted a distinctive poetic style which intersects many native dictions, in addition to standard English ones, as the title of this poem indicates: “Runner-up: Learning Bundjalung on Tharawal.” This style reflects her strategic plan, not to “unlearn the language,” but to adapt or “... learn the language” (English) and utilises it to “speak” on the behalf of her peoples. The result is distinctive kind of poetry that resists classification according to the established, Westernized literary standards. The above poem is a telling example of this poetics; it is an elegant first-person account of the poet’s frustrated endeavors to “unspeak the empire.” In this poem, her decisively Indigenous voice, tone, as well as her unique mixture of languages is an obvious reflection of her decolonial ideology as she attempts to deconstruct, not only the literary standards of the canon, but also the long-established, socially entrenched racist tropes in contemporary contexts. The poem continues:

So in this place the shape of my place
I am trying to sing like hill and
saltwater,

to use old words from an old country
that I have never walked on:

*bundjalung jagum ngai, nganduwal
nyuyaya,*

and god, I don’t even know

if I'm saying it right.

.....

Because to hold him is to hold the tree

that holds these birds I cannot name,

and a word spoken here

might almost sound like home.

We are relearning this place through
poetry:

I open my book and say, *wayan*,
here is a word which means road, but
also root
and in it I am rooted, earthed,
singing between two lands

I learn that *balun* is both river and
milky way,

and that he is *baray-gir*, the
youngest child

and the top of the tree,
where the *gahr* will come to rest —

.....

(Araluen, 2016, p. 27)

By emphasising the idea of singing, the poet consciously rooted her poetics in the Aboriginal oral traditions. By “sing[ing] like hill and saltwater,” Araluen does not only appropriate personification, which is a formal poetic style, but also revived Aboriginal oral culture. This is to resist the 19th century perspective of the superiority

of the white culture to Aboriginal traditions “which prevented all but a few early observers from even conceiving there was anything of interest in Aboriginal oral tradition, let alone trying to record it” (Ross, 1986, p. 232). In fact, the colonialist ideology was informed by “the colonizers’ assumption of their own superiority, which they contrasted with the alleged inferiority of native (Indigenous) peoples, the original inhabitants of the lands they invaded” (Tyson, 2006, p. 419). This practice of judging all who are different as less than fully human is called *othering*, and it divides the world between “us” (the “civilized”) and “them” (the “others” or “savages”). Among the main objectives of Araluen’s poetry is to deconstruct the colonialist’s intellectual, linguistic, social, and economic theories that resulted in false epistemological error about Aboriginal peoples’ social status, and false understanding of their native world. Accordingly, her poetry offers an intellectual space for Aboriginal peoples to speak up for themselves, in their own political and literary voices, and thus produce distinctive, interrelated cultural discourses of philosophy, language, society, and economy. This is to create a balance between the imbalanced us-and-them (the colonist and the colonial subjects). To achieve this socio-cultural balance, the poet also goes beyond the

mere or passive act of cultural revival or representation. She uses Aboriginal native language as a legitimate medium of poetic expression, which again moves against the accepted rules of Western aesthetics. This is why the poet stresses the importance of poetry, not only as a tool adapted from the “master”, but as an instrumental medium through which Aboriginal linguistic and cultural knowledge are conveyed to the mainstream culture: “We are relearning this place through poetry”. She is teaching Aboriginal native vocabularies through their contextualisation within the mainstream tools, namely English language and poetry: “I learn that *balun* is both river and milky way”.

CONCLUSION

Araluen’s poems discussed here are telling representation of the mixed-genre poetry that is written by or about Aboriginal peoples of Australia. She adopted and adapted the language and literary form of the dominant culture as a tool in her political, decolonial struggle, voicing her peoples’ demands for land rights, in addition to human, and civil rights. Rejecting the notion of “Arts for Art’s Sake,” her poetry plays a significant role in resisting the hegemony of the state, reflecting the atrocities imposed upon Aboriginal peoples, and proposing ways to revive her peoples’ history, culture, and language(s). What is significant in the

poetry of Araluen is her writing from within the academy. Unlike other Aboriginal poets, she is now a faculty member at university of Sydney. She is not only teaching and promoting Aboriginal literature at the academic level, making Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students aware of the significant and unique literary contributions of Australian First Nations peoples, she also struggles for the recognition of her and Aboriginal English as a legitimate language for literary expression. She experiments with the boundaries of language and poetry, proposing new possibilities for literary writings in Australia. Thus, her poetry can be seen as a continuation to the poetics of the first and second generations Aboriginal poets. By emphasising the significance of “singing” or Aboriginal orality as an inspirational source in writing her poetry, she not only represents the tension between orality and textuality, but also produces a poetic space where Aboriginal peoples can effectively communicate with the dominant culture.

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