

Aboriginal Mobilities and Colonial Serial Fiction

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THIS article examines how the structural necessities of serialised periodical fiction reinforced representations of settler and Aboriginal mobilities for Australian readers across the nineteenth century. It combines recent work on Indigenous mobility studies with Jude Piesse's articulation of the periodical as an 'inherently mobile form' (2) to explore how 'imagination of mobility' in popular cultural forms such as the serial helped 'inform judgements' about Aboriginal peoples and their practices for settler readerships (Cresswell 2). Rather than attempting to discern and catalogue the almost inexhaustible range of 'serial patterns' at play in the colonial archive, I foreground the 'mechanisms of containment' inherent in the form and narrative structure of the serial itself (Turner, 'Serial' 196, 205). More specifically, I suggest that through their representations of Aboriginal persistence and mobilities certain serials can resist 'the very modern concept of advancement, of moving forward' (Turner, 'Periodical' 184) that periodicals – and emerging narratives around colonial modernity itself – relied upon.

In *A World of Fiction* (2018), Katherine Bode draws attention to a surprisingly large collection of serials featuring Aboriginal characters, arguing that in nineteenth-century Australian periodical fiction 'the unsettled colonial condition is evoked by depicting, not repressing, the Aboriginal presence' (177). Although the majority of these characters remain 'roughly drawn sketches or stereotypes' whose narrative purpose largely serves 'to assist, and thereby to justify, the colonial mission', Bode also identifies what she refers to as 'pattern[s] of repression and emergence' in these texts that 'hint at colonization's potential instability' (178, 179). This article considers the 'limits' or gaps in the project of Australian settlement that these serial texts highlight through

an exploration of how settler authors formulated ideologically acceptable and more ‘suspect’ manifestations of Aboriginal mobilities and persistence (Ballantyne 115; Cresswell 58). It considers how the structure of the serial itself worked to reinforce perceptions of Aboriginal-settler frontier violence and white supremacy, while also drawing attention to moments where representations of Aboriginal mobilities and persistence appear to exceed the traditional bounds of the serial, disrupting its forward momentum and narratives of colonial progress and modernity.

By focusing on settler representations of Aboriginal communities, this project inevitably relies upon Anglophone literary studies and imperial history, but it also endeavours to draw from approaches and concerns formulated within the field of Indigenous studies in an effort to foreground Aboriginal presence and representations within these settler colonial texts. Taking up Alice Te Punga Somerville’s call for ‘assuming Indigenous presence and proximity rather than focusing on distance and loss’ in our engagements with the settler archive (‘I do’ 121), I consciously acknowledge Aboriginal presences in fictional settler texts, rather than contribute to their ongoing erasure from our literary history. Such an emphasis also highlights the ways in which settler spaces were ‘co-created by uneven Indigenous and settler capacities, rather than simply imposed’ (Lester and Laidlaw 7), and allows us to uncover moments of settler discomfort and unsettlement that operate as counterpoints to the larger imperatives of this periodical fiction to support and reinforce the colonial project.

Mobility studies can offer a valuable lens through which to re-examine texts that might, at first glance, appear to only perpetuate more generic, culturally non-specific stereotypes about Indigenous communities. This article identifies incidents in specific serials where Aboriginal presence and ‘their sheer persistence on the land’ offer potential ‘challenges to the categories of belonging through which settler societies reproduce white privilege’, as well as moments where the agency of Indigenous peoples to engage with (or shun) proffered connections with settlers are accentuated (Lester and Laidlaw 11; Standfield 4). Although settler and Indigenous mobilities were, by necessity, placed into a relational mode to help support colonial rule and settlement, a closer examination of ‘[t]he intersections between the forms of mobility that were integral to the functioning of imperial systems and established patterns of Indigenous movement and circulation [can] offer crucial insights into both the power and limits of empire’ (Ballantyne 115). I am particularly interested in the role serial fiction might have played in ‘ordering and taming mobilities by placing one against another – by producing some mobilities that are ideologically sound and others that are suspect’ (Cresswell 58). Some comparison of settler and Aboriginal mobilities will thus be necessary to uncover how certain mobilities were framed

and depicted in these narratives to appear innate, fundamental, or ‘natural’ to settler readers, while others were viewed as ‘disruptive’ and incompatible with colonial priorities and objectives.

The nineteenth century saw the development of a ‘thriving’ local newspaper press in Australia, with limited avenues for book publication for local authors ensuring that newspapers were ‘the primary publishers of colonial fiction’ (Morrison 308; Bode, *World* 65). In an effort to avoid privileging metropolitan perspectives, my preliminary findings are drawn from nine serials published between 1860 and 1900 in regional publications such as the *Manaro Mercury*, the *Warwick Argus Supplement*, and the *Goulburn Herald*, and in weekly companions such as the *Sydney Mail* and *The Queenslander*. These weekly companions to larger daily newspapers such as *The Sydney Morning Herald* and the *Brisbane Courier* were intended ‘as much for the country as the city reader’ (Arnold 256) and were specifically designed with ‘colonial distances and lack of distribution infrastructure in mind’ to ensure they did not go out-of-date as quickly as their daily counterparts (Bode, *Reading* 39). They were also the most likely to publish local (rather than overseas) fiction (Bode, *Reading* 38). The serials examined here all appear in Katherine Bode and Carol Hetherington’s ‘*To Be Continued . . .*: Australian Newspaper Fiction Database’ of titles digitised by the National Library of Australia in *Trove* (ca. 2015)¹ and, more specifically, from the curated dataset of extended fiction (around 9,200 titles) published in nineteenth-century Australian newspapers that Bode draws from to make her arguments in *World of Fiction* about the distinctive qualities of Australian serials and Aboriginal presence.

Digitised archives such as *Trove* are always provisional, uneven, and partial, limited by both what has been archived and what is deemed worthy of digitisation, and while Bode argues convincingly for the broadly representative nature of the *Australian Newspaper Fiction Database*’s curated dataset of extended fiction, it still contains areas of over- and under-representation. These include a higher proportion of the total newspapers published from earlier in the century; proportionally more metropolitan than provincial papers; and, a higher proportion of newspapers from colonies with smaller populations (Bode, *World* 68-76). In the chapter in which Bode makes her statements about Aboriginal presence in periodical fiction, she utilises topic modelling and decision trees to determine which proportion of certain topics (or word patterns) are more likely

¹Although Bode ceased harvesting fiction for the *To Be Continued* project in mid-2015, the project’s website allows members of the public to add their own *Trove* findings to the database and ‘since it was launched in March 2018 members of the public have added almost 2,000 titles’ (*TBC website*, accessed Sept 2020). However, it is unclear how many of these additions were serials or short stories, and whether these additions were adding in missing instalments or previously undocumented works of fiction.

to appear in texts with male or female authors, or by American, British, or Australian authors. Contrary to scholarly arguments that Australian fiction was largely derivative of overseas genres and traditions (Dolin 128; Askew and Hubber 115; Webby, ‘Colonial’; Webby, ‘Not Reading’), Bode found that Australian fiction was the ‘most distinctive category due to [its] representation of nonmetropolitan colonial life’ (*World* 169). All of the serials discussed in this article feature a high occurrence of Bode’s main distinguishing topic (Topic 80)² for ‘Australian fiction’, although not all of these texts have been officially classified as ‘Australian’ in authorship in the database. (For further details on Bode’s utilisation of topic modelling and decision trees in her analyses see *World* 160-73).

Seriality & Periodical Form

In *The Victorian Serial* (1991) Linda Hughes and Michael Lund draw compelling parallels between the ‘the virtues that sustain a home and the traits required of serial readers: endurance, perseverance and patience’ (16). Piesse has articulated how these values gain particular significance in British periodical ‘novels of serial settlement’ where colonial endeavours are depicted as requiring considerable investments of time, energy and resources for settlers to feel truly ‘at home’ (82). In contrast with the ‘curious sense of stillness’ Piesse’s novels of serial settlement offer (93), these colonial Australian serial texts rely heavily on the mobility of both settlers and Aboriginal communities in order to assert and reassure readers of their presence on the land.

To keep their readers coming back, periodicals as a whole – and serial narratives in particular – must consistently resist closure to retain their sense of novelty. However, periodicals also rely upon a ‘deep regular structure’ to stress their continuities in content, format and periodicity, and help retain their readerships (Beetham 98). In the case of serial periodical texts, this desire for continuity is reinforced by the tendency of many publications to ensure each instalment of the narrative appears on the same page, usually in an almost identical layout, and often with the same (or similar) advertisements next to them. By paying close attention to the serial aesthetics and practices at work across these texts, as well as the ‘effects of particular narrative tropes, modes, and formats’ (Stein and Wiele 5), we can gain greater insight into how Aboriginal characters and cultural practices were ‘mobilised’ in distinctive ways in these colonial serials to reach their larger narrative goals and help their settler readerships feel ‘at home’.

²Topic 80 contains the words: ‘creek sheep cattle horses men verandah hut country man horse track township blacks tree river squatter tea gum night’ (Bode, *World* 170).

As Liz Conor argues, the simultaneous occurrence of the industrialisation of print and the colonial exploration and settlement of Australia ‘entrenched the colonial social matrix out of which racial identities and their divisions emerged’ (231). The colonial serial was a generic form built upon a series of popular tropes and character types – the squatter, the bushranger, the Australian girl, to name just a few – to ensure readers could easily follow along with narratives that could often be extended over several months. Nevertheless, in their work on the production of these colonial character types in early Australian fiction, Ken Gelder and Rachael Weaver argue that despite their drives to endorse and support colonisation, such stories also offered a series of ‘micro-narratives’ that offered readers ‘narrative trajectories that . . . [could] either underwrite or challenge the ongoing project of colonial nation-building’ (27). By focusing on texts Bode associates with distinctly ‘Australian’ characteristics, we can consider how depictions of Aboriginal mobility work in opposition to the larger drives of these colonial periodicals to produce ‘affective, nation-affirming spatio-temporal cycle[s] that operat[e] through concepts of synchronicity and spatial cohesion’ (Piesse 46). Many of these serials appear to signal scepticism and uncertainty not only about the successful ‘settlement’ of certain regions, but even around the moral justification for Aboriginal dispossession in the first place.

Settler representations of indigeneity in literary culture have predominantly been examined for their utilisation as tools to dispossess native peoples of their identities, rights to land, and political and cultural sovereignty. As Bode argues, ‘[a] central argument in Australian postcolonial literary studies is that, beginning in the nineteenth century, fiction replicated the legal lies of *terra nullius* by not depicting Australia’s original inhabitants’ (*World* 176). Scholars have focused on how this concealment and repression lent a Gothic or ‘haunted’ character to these narratives (Carter; Gelder; Gelder and Jacobs; Trigg). Such readings have, however, largely been drawn from the study of novels rather than periodical fiction and are problematised by Bode’s discovery of this large archive of periodical serials featuring Aboriginal characters. Rachael Weaver’s survey of colonial violence in periodical short fiction also draws attention to ‘the openness with which representations of the violence of colonial settlement and Aboriginal dispossession were circulated’ (33). A closer examination of colonial periodical fiction’s engagement with Aboriginal characters and communities through the lens of mobility studies can therefore unearth new insights into ‘the social construction of mobilities’ within these serials that both supported and undermined the colonisation process (Piesse 47).

Indigenous Mobility Studies & Colonial Modernity

In recent years, scholars have endeavoured to decentre imperial geographies and draw attention to pre-colonial Indigenous mobilities and histories to recover early forms of Indigenous activism and decolonising efforts. (See, for example, *Banivanua Mar*, and edited collections by Ballantyne and Burton, Carey and Lydon, and Standfield). Studies in Anglophone Indigenous studies also increasingly emphasise the impact of migration and diaspora on Indigenous peoples (Harvey and Thompson Jr.). In the field of Indigenous literary studies, Chadwick Allen and Alice Te Punga Somerville have both developed innovative approaches to the exploration of Indigenous transnationalism and new methodologies for comparative approaches to Indigenous literary studies (Allen; Te Punga Somerville, *Once*; Te Punga Somerville and Allen). In *Once Were Pacific* (2012), Te Punga Somerville examines the intersections of indigeneity and migration in a range of Māori and Pasifika creative works and deliberately foregrounds Indigenous-Indigenous over Indigenous-settler relations. While emphasising connections and relationships, Te Punga Somerville also stresses the need to acknowledge the disjunctures or ‘disconnections’ that regularly occur between different Indigenous communities (*Once* xxiii).

Mobility studies explores the historical and ongoing inequalities of mobility across a wide range of disciplines, cultural texts and spaces and, as Tim Cresswell outlines, invites us to pay attention to ‘the historical conditions that produce specific forms of movement’ (53-4). One of the central emphases of this article is to probe the tensions in colonial periodical cultures between ‘a spatialized ordering principle seen by many to be central to modernity and a sense of fluidity and mobility emphasized by others’ (Cresswell 16). The writings produced by settlers largely reinforced what Ann Curthoys and Marilyn Lake have described as the ‘mobility of white modernity’ (18), framing Aboriginal mobility as ‘an excess – a threat to the principles of order’, rather than ‘as a central conduit of life in modernity’ (Cresswell 83).

Until fairly recently imperial histories of mobility have predominantly depicted Europeans as global mobile subjects so that ‘mobility becomes the property of colonizers, and stasis the preternatural condition of the indigene. The local, in turn, is rendered as static and comes to represent the immobility of “primitive” cultures and civilizations’ (Ballantyne and Burton 5). Nevertheless, as Rachel Standfield outlines in the introduction to her edited collection on *Indigenous Mobilities* (2018), the mobility of Aboriginal populations has historically been used *against* Indigenous communities both to deny their land rights and to justify coercive colonial policies to ‘settle’ these same communities (2). Thus, in contrast to the idea of Indigenous peoples as ‘intensely local’, settler discourse more prominently depicted Aboriginal people as ‘nomads with no attachment or claim to the land’ (Carey and Lydon 9).

While the figure of the nomad has been frequently utilised by writers as ‘a symbol of transience that disrupts the bounded value systems they have invested with moral worth’, this same figure is also often romanticised as a non-Western other without appropriate acknowledgement of the structural and societal forces that produces their apparent intransigence (Cresswell 36, 54). Shifts in Aboriginal protection programs across the nineteenth century increasingly responded to Indigenous mobility as a colonial governance issue and contributed to an emerging discourse around Indigenous ‘vagrancy’ as Aboriginal peoples became increasingly susceptible to social order policing. Amanda Nettelbeck’s work in this area highlights the ‘fundamental tension in protective governance between the objective to incorporate Indigenous people into colonial society and the perceived necessity to shield each race from the worst influences of the other’ (91). Protectionist rhetoric is a repeated discourse across these serials and is frequently paired with the prevalent ‘extinction discourse’ of the era which aimed to classify such Aboriginal communities as remnants of a dying race (Brantlinger 1).

Immobility and sedentarism can be just as freighted with representational meaning as mobility and take on especial significance in relation to Indigenous communities where rights to land were – and still remain – under constant attack. As Jane Carey and Jane Lydon remind us, discussions of Indigenous networks and mobilities are rarely ‘just a question of complicity versus resistance in the past but one of legitimacy and the politics of authenticity in the present’ (18). By consciously tracing and acknowledging Aboriginal representation in these narratives, the inescapable reality of Aboriginal presence for many settler authors is reinforced, even if they predominantly attempted to craft narratives that supported their own occupation and settlement of the land. By their very nature these texts cannot (and should not) be detached from their imperialist European perspective. Yet, foregrounding representations of Indigenous mobility and periodical form within these serials can open up spaces to partially, as Te Punga Somerville invites us, ‘sidelin[e] that [European] gaze and produc[e] spaces where its power is decentered’ (*Once* xviii).

Colonial Violence & Serial Structure

The ‘excessive’ mobility of nomadic communities is frequently utilised to propel the narrative action of these serials, usually via plots revolving around ‘unprovoked’ attacks against stations and the purposeful capture of white settlers. Robert Whitworth’s ‘The White Woman of Mundarra’ (*Sydney Mail*, 2 May-25 July 1863) replicates many of the tropes traditionally associated with ‘Lost Child’ narratives of this era and can be read as an articulation of Anglo-European apprehensions over ‘having sought to settle in a place where they

might never be at peace' (Pierce xii). The serial opens with a group of 'five stalwart men as ever trod the bush' cautiously approaching an Aboriginal camp because this particular tribe are believed to have recently murdered the wife of a stockman and 'carried off his only child, a girl of about twelve years of age with them into the bush' (*Sydney Mail*, 2 May 1863, 2). The serialised structure of Whitworth's story is reinforced to the reader through repeated cycles of pursuit, attempted infiltration of different camp sites, and the resulting flight from Indigenous pursuers across multiple instalments. Although these failed attempts might have frustrated reader expectations, they also create further suspense and anticipation for the final showdown between the adventurers and the child's captors. The serial's sense of discomfort is amplified through the repeated flipping of the power dynamics of tracker and tracked so that the reader is left unsure who is pursuing – and observing – whom at several key points across the narrative.

Similar strategies are also utilised in Charles De Boos's³ 'Tales of the Bar-ranjuee. No. 1. Morouya, the Black Eagle of Colo' (*Sydney Mail*, 17 May-16 August 1862) which manages to convey a sense of narrative momentum via its chapter titles alone. Chapters titled 'Trapped' (IV) and 'The Captive' (IX) which foreground the relative immobility of the serial's settler protagonists are followed by those stressing the mobility of these same figures: 'The Attack' (VII), 'On the Trail' (VIII) and 'The Trail Found' (XII). The serial notably contains two separate chapters titled 'The Rescue' (VII and XIII), once again emphasising the cyclical nature of these early settlement narratives, with both Aboriginal and settler mobilities over-emphasised and taken to their excess to help propel the action and retain reader interest. In De Boos' 'Morouya' and Magnus Badge's 'Bonshaw: A Moreton Bay King' (multiple publications, 1884),⁴ the serials' suspense is further elevated by offering alternating perspectives between each chapter to detail both sides of their Aboriginal-settler conflicts. The technique is utilised to produce especially tragic results in 'Bonshaw', where the reader discovers early in the narrative that the act of violence central to the serial's conflict was enacted by an escaped convict and wrongly blamed on an Aboriginal scouting party. This reveal leaves the reader awaiting the confrontation between the settlers and King Bonshaw's forces with an increasing

³This serial is credited to 'the Author of the Yo-Yo, My Holiday, &c' in the *Sydney Mail*, but has been attributed to Charles De Boos in the *Australian Newspaper Fiction Database*.

⁴Appearances of this serial catalogued in the *Australian Newspaper Fiction Database* (accessed Sept 2020) in 1884 include the *Benalla Ensign*, *Warwick Argus Supplement*, *Border Watch*, *Singleton Argus*, *Manaro Mercury*, *Kapunda Herald*, *Riverine Grazier*, *Shoalhaven Telegraph*, *Gympie Times* and *Port Adelaide News*, as well as a reprint in 1925 in the *Northern Champion*.

sense of foreboding and dread.

Aboriginal mobilities are presented as particularly suspect in these serials when Indigenous raiding forces are allied with outlaw bushranging forces. In both 'Morouya' and F.E. Lockwood's 'Genii of the Vanguard' (*Goulburn Herald*, 27 Oct 1899-2 Mar 1900) these tentative coalitions appear to exacerbate the most negative, bloodthirsty aspects of Aboriginal warfare tactics. As Billy the Birdcatcher, a reformed former convict now living 'almost entirely in the bush', remarks in 'Morouya': 'it's the bushranger and the like of them that have made them [the Barranjuee] worse nor they would have been, and put them up to half their mischief. Even the Broken Bay men have been made worse by bad whites' (*Sydney Mail*, 17 May 1862, 2, 7 June 1862, 2). Settler anxieties about the need to distinguish themselves from the behaviour and actions of 'bad whites' come to the forefront of many of these narratives, with figures such as Billy modelling more positive, equitable partnerships and interactions with local Aboriginal leaders, such as the eponymous Morouya.

Both 'Bonshaw' and 'White Woman of Mundarra' culminate in depictions of extreme bloodshed between Aboriginal communities and settlers which are tinged with articulations of settler guilt and apprehension, undermining and interrogating the more clear-cut adventure tropes of the colonial frontier. The final showdown in 'White Woman' is presented as fully justified to the reader due to the kidnap of a young settler woman and the murder of her mother, yet the serial's protagonist, Ned, finds himself 'heart-sick at the idea of the blood [they]'ve spilt', acknowledging that 'it's an awful thing to have killed so many of our fellow creatures' (*Sydney Mail*, 18 July 1863, 3). Overhearing these words, fellow combatant Dick Joyce argues that such bloodshed could not be avoided, and 'then he walked away to cut himself a pipe of tobacco, and wonder whether the blacks were fellow men after all, or whether they were mere wild animals, and he wished Ned hadn't said what he had, for it made him feel uncomfortable' (3). Although these feelings of discomfort are easily diffused and absorbed once they have been expressed to allow the narrative to return its focus to the new opportunities now available to its settler heroes, such articulations nevertheless cause momentary pauses in the story and create space for consideration of the associated 'costs' of successful settlement.

The dangers of such simplistic perceptions of Aboriginal communities are more explicitly challenged in Badge's 'Bonshaw' where the settlers themselves are the ones likened to 'wild animals' or 'devils'. After taking excessive enjoyment in the widespread slaughter of a native tribe (later revealed to be innocent of their assumed crimes), the narrator offers a damning portrait of a raiding party of stockmen: '[they] had enjoyed the day with all the pleasures of devils

rather than men. The dominating feeling . . . was that they had gone too far' (*Warwick Argus Supplement*, 2 August 1884, 1). The subsequent death of King Bonshaw, while tragically framed as a cautionary warning for settlers, is depicted as inevitable – 'all I can do is to die for my tribe' (1) – with his particular brand of savage nobility seemingly no longer compatible with these modernising times and instead presented as on the verge of extinction.

A different type of temporal distancing takes place in serials where unprovoked attacks on settler spaces are configured as evidence of an earlier, more treacherous time upon the colonial frontier which has now passed. Mary Hannay Foott opens 'A Whim of the Mistress' (*Queenslander*, 13 Oct-24 Nov 1894) with details of an attempted act of Aboriginal violence that took place 'long ago, when there were only a very few white people living in the Darling River country' (13 Oct 1894, 690). This violent act is thwarted by the swift action of an older Aboriginal man, Kombo, who overhears these plans and swims across the river to warn the station inhabitants of the pending attack. By framing such acts of unprovoked violence as taking place 'long ago', Foott's narrator creates clear distance between the precarious days of early settlement, and the stability of the narrative's colonial present, where Aboriginal presence is limited to station hands and native police trackers working *within* the structures of settler society, or else remembered through sites such as 'Kombo's Crossing' via that 'strange layering of Aboriginal connection, European colonization, and Aboriginal naming that often occurs in Australia' (Bode, *World* 178).

Aboriginal Presence & Persistence

Hughes and Lund argue that towards the end of the nineteenth century, when narratives of progress and imperial expansion were at their peak, the value of 'finding a fixed point of reference from which to determine one's own place' in history gained increasing traction (67). This concept is epitomised in 'Genii of the Vanguard' through the settlement of Tintora, which slowly grows in the reader's mind over their months of reading weekly instalments from a small makeshift structure into a large, prosperous station community. Although many of the central characters venture further into the bush in search of potential adventure and fortune, or else return to more metropolitan centres for commerce and society, Tintora remains the 'fixed point' around which a constellation of settler mobilities ebb and flow outwards in the serial.

Nevertheless, several of these serials gesture towards both an awareness of Aboriginal presence and stewardship of specific regions; they also raise concerns over what this presence meant for settlers' ongoing confidence in their own articulations of belonging, although the intrinsic biases of these settler texts ensure a predominantly positive response to attempts by settlers to gain 'permission'

to build new settlements in uncolonised bush locales. F.E. Lockwood's 'Genii' offers several examples of settlers establishing their stations on land after consultation with local Aboriginal leaders. The serial's protagonist, Will Attenborough, receives valuable advice on potential sites for productive settlement from an elder after an exchange of tobacco, leading him to 'set out for what is called "No Man's Land" (passing over the aboriginal claim to it)' (*Goulburn Herald*, 24 Nov 1899, 6). Such brief asides pervade many of these settler serials, subtly acknowledging the white privilege of these colonial endeavours and their ability to so easily 'pass over' or ignore other claims to the land. Badge's 'Bonshaw: A Moreton Bay King' opens with much stronger articulations of the negative influence of settlement. In a discussion between stockmen about the value of Aboriginal workers the more sympathetic settler characters in the narrative admit that, '[w]e have no right here. We are really interlopers' and that there 'is no reason why England should come and steal this land' (*Warwick Argus Supplement*, 26 July 1884, 3). In line with aforementioned depictions of Aboriginal bloodshed, such expressions of settler unease or discomfort around larger settler imperatives are usually quickly diffused in these serials, although in the case of 'Bonshaw' the tragic fate of its eponymous figure offers a much stronger critique of the ease with which settlers attempt to overlook Aboriginal claims to the land, implicating settlers in the decline and slow extinction of a once noble race.

Alternatively, the newly settled communities in these serials are depicted as thriving and developing via successful navigation of their relationships with nearby Aboriginal communities. As the community at Tintora in 'Genii' continues to develop and grow, they are regularly visited by a variety of Aboriginal people passing through the area for a wide range of purposes. 'Genii of the Vanguard' is particularly notable for its repeated depictions of larger Aboriginal groups, or 'forage part[ies]' arriving on station properties and temporarily taking up more 'fixed' presences on the land, usually setting up camps on the outskirts of the stations with many members offering manual labour in return for an exchange of goods (*Goulburn Herald*, 8 Dec 1899, 6).

Colonial stations and other bush industries relied upon the labour of Aboriginal peoples and other indentured labourers to succeed in their endeavours, and this presence is regularly acknowledged in these serials, though rarely with any serious exploration of the enslaved conditions many such figures worked in. 'Our Bush Parson', written by 'A Bush Naturalist' (*Queenslander*, 25 Dec 1880-15 Jan 1881),⁵ offers some of the most stereotypical representations of 'tame

⁵The first instalment of 'Our Bush Parson' appeared in the *Queenslander's* Christmas Supplement, but succeeding instalments appear in the standard edition of the periodical.

blacks', with the Aboriginal farmhands of Ulolo station exhibiting a childlike sense of wonder at the parson's Christmas service in the woolshed, which they view as a 'whitefellow corroboree' (*Queenslander* Christmas Supplement, 25 Dec 1880, 14). The figure of Dicky, who plays an invaluable role in helping the parson, John Calley, navigate his way back to the station after the great flooding of the Darling River, is referred to as both Calley's 'little black satellite' (*Queenslander*, 8 Jan 1881, 41) and 'his faithful black friend' (15 Jan 1881, 74), though as the first example suggests, any friendship remains heavily inflected by colonial power dynamics of master and servant. Although Aboriginal 'naval architecture' is described as both 'rudimentary' and 'primitive' in the text, it is only through Calley's deference to Dicky's superior knowledge of both waterfaring and the local habitat (to help select an appropriate tree to carve a vessel from) that the author is able to resolve the serial's central conflict and reunite the parson with his love interest, now stranded at Ulolo following the flood (15 Jan 1881, 73). Aboriginal mobilities and knowledges are thus depicted as essential to the successful resolution of both the serial and these settlers' aspirations for future settlement, even if the potentially subversive nature of such a role reversal in expertise is limited through Dicky's desire to 'faithfully hel[p] his master to overcome the difficulties of the flood' (73).

Beyond the narrative impulses of the serial form itself, more explicit acknowledgement of the cultural and structural forces within colonial society producing Aboriginal vagrancy appear in several of these serial texts. The role of native troopers in facilitating 'dispersing' expeditions is briefly explored in the *Bush Naturalist's* 'Red Dick, the Stockman' (*Queenslander*, 6 Jan-10 Mar 1883), a cautionary tale of the dangers of alcohol and bush hotels on settlers' morality. The Dead Finish Hotel, an unlicensed bush hotel run by a former convict in the Far North, is frequented by many untoward characters, including 'a sub-inspector in charge of native police', whose 'occupation he interpreted as a license to shoot down men, to capture women and children, to burn mi-mi houses, and to destroy native property in general whenever met with' (3 Feb 1883, 169). The officer in question easily overlooks the unlicensed nature of the establishment in exchange for alcohol and such behaviour reinforces the general atmosphere of 'lawlessness' of these regions, where 'even white men were murdered with impunity' (3 Feb 1883, 169).

Although the negative influence of alcohol upon Aboriginal communities is touched upon in many of these narratives, in 'Red Dick' the establishment of a bush hotel is also implicated in the disruption of the traditional mobilities of these same groups, with '[c]ontact with civilised Christians' teaching them 'nothing good'. The Dead Finish is revealed to support a small group of Aboriginals 'who preferred the lazy demoralising life of attending on the public house

to bush freedom, and its consequent trouble of hunting for their daily food' (3 Feb 1883, 169). Proximity to settler society is framed here as a corruptive force on the original inhabitants of these regions, drawing attention to the potentially damaging impact of settler contact on pre-existing Aboriginal dynamics of exchange and trade, and in the case of those attending upon the Dead Finish, sacrificing their 'bush freedom[s]' for a more stationary, and morally suspect, existence.

A major aim of Indigenous mobility studies is to challenge the 'assumption that Indigenous people were merely engaged in travel for European purposes or along European lines' (Standfield 3). Such non-European mobilities can be found in 'Genii' in an instalment where Will Attenborough finds himself stranded in the bush. In the chapter 'Lost in the Ranges', Attenborough is revived from a collapsed state after running out of food and water by a 'pitchery party, on their annual pilgrimage to the pitcher grounds' (*Goulburn Herald*, 15 Dec 1899, 6). Although he is encouraged to join the party, no deviations are made in the group's plans, and Attenborough travels with them for several weeks all the way to the Queensland border before he is spotted by mounted police who help return him to his station.

Given their settler authorship, these colonial serials inevitably stress the 'verticality' of Indigenous relationships with settler communities. Several texts, however, offer more 'horizontal modes of Indigenous-Indigenous connection', which appear to resist or temporarily decentre the settler gaze (Te Punga Somerville, *Once* xxvii). In 'Flora, the Castaway White Woman', authored by 'A Manaro Man' (*Manaro Mercury*, 6 Nov-11 Dec 1878), the constant motion of the Widbilligy tribe is predominantly motivated by seasonal hunting and foraging opportunities, though Flora, shipwrecked and adopted by the tribe, soon begins to suspect such movements are designed to avoid any interactions with settlers. Such movements not only extend the action and suspense of the serial's narrative across multiple issues by limiting its heroine's access to opportunities for escape or rescue, but also allow the author to focus on providing pseudo-ethnographic detail on Aboriginal societies to the reader.

'Flora' offers further insights into the allegiances and disputes between different Aboriginal communities via this same narrator, outlining how two tribes band together to fight off another (whom they only attack after women from their tribe are kidnapped). The two united tribes easily overpower their pursuers, and proceed to spend several weeks living together in 'perfect harmony', ensuring 'that they could support one another' in the face of further retaliation (4 December 1878, 4). Such narrative interludes beyond the bounds of settled territories briefly sideline settler imperatives by emphasising moments

of Aboriginal cooperation, with their initial joint attack justified though the inciting transgression of the kidnap of their women, and thus mirroring the actions of the settlers in Whitworth's aforementioned 'Lost Child' narrative. While these brief acknowledgements of non-European geographies and mobilities potentially disrupt settlers' expected perceptions of these communities, both Indigenous and settler characters remain similarly observed, ordered and 'contained' within the pseudo-ethnographic gaze of the narrator and the serial's larger narrative drive towards its final resolution – Flora's eventual rescue.

A particularly striking representation of Aboriginal persistence on the land appears in the form of the Batcheri tribe in 'A Strange Exploring Trip' (*Brisbane Courier* and *Queenslander*, 15 Apr-7 Oct 1876), written by Carl Feilberg under the pseudonym of 'Old Harry' (*AustLit*). This first-person narrative details the adventures of former sheep herder Jack Leeson, who in the course of his extended 'trip' finds himself adopted into a mountain community descended from Aboriginal tribe members and a group of escaped convicts who barter their knowledge and skillset in exchange for a place to settle far from the clutches of white society. The Batcheri live in a 'fixed' community with extensive agricultural operations, slab houses, and a fondness for the fine metals and jewels sourced from their mining operations. Initially compared favourably to 'real white swells' (*Queenslander*, 17 June 1876, 10), the Batcheri are soon revealed to the reader to have been negatively impacted by the more capitalist and utilitarian impulses of settler society. As Jack relates, '[t]he Batcheri were taught never to be ashamed of anything but of being poor', and '[t]hey never did a thing because it was right, they didn't know what that meant, only because it was useful to themselves, or because the law made them do it' (29 July 1876, 10). Alongside its protectionist commentary on the need to shield Aboriginal cultures from the excesses of settler society, this serial could be read as a cautionary tale on how attempts to 'civilise' Aboriginal communities had the potential to severely corrupt the more innate, natural priorities and mobilities of such groups. Notably, the serial dynamics of forward momentum, epitomised in the protagonist's former wanderlust and desire for adventure, are stalled and reversed in this narrative. Jack ends the tale back where he began it (working as a sheep herder), realising he had previously undervalued the affordances and pleasures of station life.

Conclusions

In his recent work on 'red readings', Scott Andrews considers how we might develop more 'native-centric' reading processes 'grounded in issues important to native communities and/or native intellectual histories or practices' (2018, i). For Andrews, 'a red reading produces an interpretation of a non-native

text from a native perspective' (i). While this article has not attempted to read colonial serials 'from a native perspective', it endeavours to be 'native-centric' in focus to explore the 'disruptions' and new readings that can be uncovered when we centre Indigenous presence, mobilities and perspectives in our analyses of settler serials (ii). More specifically, it highlights the ways in which the material and structural affordances of the serial format reinforced – and occasionally disrupted – representations of settler and Aboriginal mobilities in these texts. As Mark Turner reminds us, while the serial text 'always strives for and projects unity, to a greater or lesser degree, with its apparently unifying title, author, and structure . . . it is always liable to spin out of control, to start and stop, to diverge and splinter' ('Serial' 201). By aligning the disruptive potential of these serial narratives with their representations of Aboriginal and settler mobilities, I argue we can uncover moments when these texts appear to resist the rhetoric of forward momentum and advancement traditionally associated with colonialist endeavours.

Although these serial texts still predominantly favour stereotypical representations of Aboriginal communities, a 'native-centric' reading can underline and problematise 'the dominant culture's confidence in representations of itself' (Andrews iii). This emphasis has the potential to 'defamiliarise' narratives traditionally associated with settler constructions of otherness, co-habitation and belonging, producing 'new uses for them, regardless of their original meanings' (Andrews vi, v). Although the application of Indigenous studies perspectives to settler colonial texts remains a contested issue, as literary scholars we nevertheless run the risk of reifying or replicating settler colonial 'modes of domination' if we do not endeavour to 'deplo[y] a relational approach to settler colonial power, and . . . pa[y] attention to the conditions and contingencies of settler colonialism' (Snelgrove et al. 4). Although some tentative steps have been made here, far more work remains to be done to consider how we might productively apply Indigenous studies methodologies to settler colonial texts in a manner that supports ongoing decolonising efforts. I have endeavoured to outline here how the tracing of Aboriginal mobilities and settler articulations of Indigenous presence and persistence on the land in colonial serials, can work to undermine the scholarly narrative of Aboriginal invisibility in early Australian print cultures. By foregrounding how colonisation was imagined and discursively enacted by settler authors through these texts, our attention can also be drawn to the limitations and gaps in this process that writers sought to 'order' and 'contain' via each new numbered part and date-stamped periodical instalment (Turner, 'Serial' 205).

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