

Words that matter: Yindyamarra, Wiradjuri resilience and the settler-colonial project in Tara June Winch's *The Yield*

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In recent decades, the concept of resilience has gained currency in various scientific disciplines (MacKinnon and Derickson 2012, 254), including the social sciences and humanities, which have also contributed to problematizing and critiquing sometimes reductive perceptions of the concept. Critical analyses of various cultural narratives within literary scholarship pointed to the complexity and double-edged nature of resilience, echoing recent critiques of resilience as having been co-opted by the neoliberal, late capitalist regime (Bracke 2016, 851) due to its capacity to move away from collective accountability for social injustices by placing emphasis on “individual responsibility, adaptability and preparedness” (Joseph 2013, 40). Such complexity is visible, among other groups of literary narratives, in contemporary Indigenous cultural production.¹ On the one hand, resilience is used to evoke the positive connotations of adaptation and persistence, highlighting survival, resistance and continuance of Indigenous peoples and their cultures – in Gerald Vizenor’s terms “survivance”² – despite settler-colonial policies of extermination and persisting pressure to assimilate. On the other hand, Indigenous narratives also started to communicate a sustained critique of resilience as perpetuating settler-colonial dominance and cultural hegemony – for example, through endorsing or even appropriating selective traditional Indigenous knowledges and principles (particularly those related to ecological awareness and land management) by environmental and eco-critical discourses, while simultaneously denying Indigenous people their political, cultural, and land sovereignty.³

Contemporary Indigenous narratives originating in settler colonies, such as Canada, the USA, Australia, and Aotearoa/New Zealand, often tell intricate stories of resistance, reclaiming, and healing, but also stories which simultaneously foreground the precarity, vulnerability, and marginalization of Indigenous lives which are still disempowered in the current settler-colonial project⁴ and governed by dominant neoliberal regimes. In his introduction to *Why Indigenous Literatures Matter*, Daniel Heath Justice explains that Indigenous stories have the power to “heal the spirit

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as well as the body, remind us of the greatness of where we came from as well as the greatness of who we're meant to be, so that we're not determined by the colonial narrative of deficiency" (2018, 5). Given that increasingly, Indigenous literatures are also framed within the transnational turn (Sharrad 2020, 2–4) and consumed globally, even though not unproblematically (Ng 2018, 3), I believe that analyzing Indigenous narratives can be useful for a better understanding of concepts such as resilience, which on the one hand draws on the ability of the subaltern to survive and adapt but on the other it can also foreclose the possibility of other, differently organized worlds (Bracke 2016, 851). Thus, on the example of a recent Australian Indigenous novel, *The Yield* by the Wiradjuri⁵ writer Tara June Winch (2019), this article demonstrates how a contemporary literary text can be instrumental in unpacking the entangled notions outlined above and drawing attention to the double-edged nature of resilience. By close reading several key moments from the novel, it shows how the text creates intentional ambivalence by highlighting, on the one hand, the linguistic and cultural renewal (that I call resilience-as-survival) but how it also questions resilience of Indigenous existence by pointing to the ongoing oppressive nature of the current settler-colonial project, whether in the space of mainstream museum or environmental degradation (that I call resilience-as-risk).

The Yield, awarded the prestigious Miles Franklin Literary Prize in Australia in 2020, foregrounds the dialectic of precarity and loss on the one hand, and resilience and reclaiming on the other. Three voices take turns narrating: in the present time, the young, displaced Wiradjuri woman August returns to her hometown (tellingly named Massacre Plains) from England to attend her grandfather's funeral. Similarly to many Indigenous narratives of return and healing, this character must come to terms with her Indigenous cultural legacy and family, as well as continuing dispossession and loss. In other words, August's story is one of "returning to Country, family, language, and culture" (van Neerven 2019) but also of working through both individual and collective trauma. This part of the narrative is rather conventional both in its realist style⁶ and themes which draw on the collective experience of the historical trauma of colonization. The second narrating voice belongs to August's grandfather, Albert Gondiwindi, whose life story, covering a large part of the 20th century, is encoded in the entries of the dictionary of Wiradjuri words which he was composing in the last years of his life. The dictionary plays a crucial role: not only does it provide an insight into Wiradjuri culture as the translations are always accompanied by a fragment from Albert's life, but it also reclaims the almost lost language. As such, it becomes a key piece of evidence of Wiradjuri cultural resilience in the Native Title⁷ legal battle and in preserving the Country vis-à-vis the power of extractivist industries. Albert's story-through-dictionary also provides a more experimental framing to the novel. The third narrating voice belongs to the 19th-century Lutheran missionary, Reverend Ferdinand Greenleaf, who, after decades of his service at Massacre Plains and after having witnessed the growth as well as the decline of the Mission that he established, comes to an awareness that his presence damaged, rather than benefitted the Wiradjuri. His letter that he writes at the end of his life to the British Society of Ethnography is a testimony to the 19th and early 20th century state- and

Church-induced assimilationist policies, and to the rise of nationalism and racism underlying the newly established settler nation.

RESILIENCE-AS-SURVIVANCE

The positive connotations of Indigenous resilience-as-survival are most clearly articulated through the stories of Albert and August Gondiwindi. In spite of having a first-hand experience of assimilationist and racist policies, having been taken away from his family and grown in a Boys' Home, Albert ends up leading a content, meaningful life enhanced by a happy union with his wife Elsie and their central position within the local Indigenous community. His resilience-as-survival is facilitated mainly through the guidance of his Ancestor spirits who regularly visit him (Albert calls this time-travelling) in order to teach him about Wiradjuri Country and Law, so that in due time Albert can become a fully initiated keeper of Wiradjuri culture and language. However, Albert's position is tested during the most tragic moment in his life which plagues him with guilt. He fails to protect his granddaughters, August and Jemma,⁸ both already traumatized by their absent, incarcerated parents, from being sexually abused by a member of their extended family. Jemma's attempt to entice the perpetrator away from her younger sister leads to her disappearance that keeps haunting August throughout her life, until it is later revealed that Jemma has been killed by the perpetrator. Once Albert realizes what happened and confronts the abuser, he acts according to the Wiradjuri Law, with a payback: he spears Jimmy in his leg but before he can extract the location of Jemma's body, Jimmy dies. This confrontation and execution of justice occurs completely outside of settler law and dominant regime. It could be argued that this co-existence of the two systems of law attests to the slippages in the imposition of the settler nation-state's governmentality on Indigenous populations, and the survival of the millennia-lasting system of tribal justice.

August's resilience-as-survival consists in taking over from Albert and making Wiradjuri Country and Law visible to the settler nation-state. Her journey to achieve this is both physical and spiritual. She suffers from multiple traumas while still a teenager: dysfunctional parenting, sexual abuse, and the haunting image of her missing sister lead to her anorexia, general numbness and apathy, lack of emotional response, inability to create meaningful human connections, and a tendency to run away from problems. As in many Indigenous narratives of return and healing, it is the reconnection with Country and family that finally wakes her up from the state of "long hibernation" (Winch 2019, 294). The novel is at pains to suggest, however, that this is a complex, lengthy and gradual process, which is visible, for example, in how August relates to the surrounding landscape and her home place. At first, August perceives the landscape around the Prosperous House, her family's home, from a detached perspective of a tourist: "visual heat that radiated from the split bitumen and the sparse foreboding landscape" where everything is "brownier, bone drier" (13) provides a bleak outlook which is matched only by the prospect of the opening of a huge tin mine, to which everyone, including the Gondiwindi family, seems resigned. Gradually, August begins to feel at home again, not only literally in the Prosperous House

where “she remembered where everything was” (183), but also in her spirit when she starts learning, both Wiradjuri and settler way, about the history of the place. She realizes that she is to inherit the custodianship of the land from her grandfather, land which is about to be destroyed by the mining company. Suddenly, “she was here, she thought, and she cared about something and for her family for the first time in forever” (294). While everyone else dismisses the idea of Albert’s last project, August suspects early on that he was on to something, that “he was trying to explain how the land was special” (188). This would prove crucial for lodging a Native Title claim that could, in theory, stop the mine. The result of such a claim, however, would be heavily dependent on the sound evidence of what has been termed as a continuous occupation of the land by the Indigenous claimants.⁹

One piece of such evidence can be the proof of existing language. The notion of cultural resilience-as-survival helps unpack the novel’s thematization of the survival of the Wiradjuri language. This is presented through several paradoxes and ironies: while traditional Indigenous storytelling has been now conventionally recognized as an important tool and method of preserving cultures and justified as such vis-à-vis Western privileging of writing, the novel reveals that eventually it is the language recorded in a provisional written dictionary that would serve as evidence in the future Native Title claim. The following conversation between August and Aunt Nicki, a middle-class Aboriginal woman working for the town Council, points to the well-known history of Indigenous languages disappearing under the assimilationist doctrine and to the role of Native Missions in the process:

‘There’s no language here. Our people’s language is extinct, no-one speaks it any more so they can tick that box on their government forms that says “loss of cultural connection.” You see?’

‘Poppy taught us some.’

‘Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes song? Yeah, he taught me that too. But I mean language that is connected to this place, this landscape.’

‘Nana told me last night Poppy was writing a dictionary.’

‘Even if he was writing it, won’t change anything. They grew up on the Mish, remember, and language wasn’t allowed.’ (146)

Nevertheless, Aunt Nicki is proved wrong, as this particular language does survive in two written records: Albert’s dictionary lists fragments of both Wiradjuri language, a “language in a state of resurgence” (van Neerven 2019), and Albert’s biography.

The use of the dictionary entries also contributes to the novel’s specific poetics. Paul Sharrad stresses that the entries “present a fundamental challenge to monologic language and form” and “break narrative flow and disturb the smooth dominance of English” (2020, 11). To add to this narrative complexity, the actual *New Wiradjuri Dictionary* (2010) by Stan Grant Sr. and John Rudder, which served as a model for Albert’s dictionary, is added at the end of the novel in full length, signifying the connection with the reality outside of the fictional world of the novel. What is more, it is listed in a reversed alphabetical order, emphasizing the cultural difference even more. However, even though Albert’s dictionary gets lost after his death, his archi-

val research which August traces leads to the discovery of the original list of 115 Wiradjuri words composed by the Reverend Greenleaf in order to make a connection with the people he was trying to convert to Christianity (Winch 2019, 151). Together with Greenleaf's letter/testimony which records the history of the Prosperous Mission, it becomes a crucial piece of evidence of the Wiradjuri's survivance and also Reverend's biggest contribution and a kind of redemption for his role in the decline of Wiradjuri culture. The irony that archival research, conventionally a Western means of organizing information and knowledge, must be relied upon to bear witness to the Wiradjuri cultural survival is not lost on the readers.

RESILIENCE-AS-RISK

There are probably very many alternative models to resilience. Danny MacKinnon and Kate Driscoll Derickson, instead of resilience which they perceive as too tied to neoliberal capitalism, offer the concept of resourcefulness which, in their view, could overcome some of the limitations of resilience tied to power distribution (2012, 263). Sarah Bracke also voices an important critique of resilience as being part of neoliberal governmentality (2016, 851) and warns that resilience can contain attempts "by the centres of power to incorporate subalternity into the contemporary neoliberal political economy" (853). In this article, I relate resilience predominantly with risk as something which may increase a person's vulnerability to both external and internal factors and expose them to danger or harm. This connection can be then useful in helping counterbalance the overly positive, but already compromised connotation of the concept of resilience.

Apart from rehearsing the more conventional representation of resilience as the ability to "bounce back" and somehow to always recover from whichever catastrophe or crisis comes in the direction of Indigenous communities,¹⁰ Winch's novel also challenges this conception of resilience by critiquing the continuing and pervasive nature of the settler-colonial project and showcasing how it co-opts Indigenous resilience. This critique transpires in several moments in the novel. Firstly, there is a number of sometimes more, sometimes less subtle details that point directly to the colonial violence and the history of genocide, assimilation, and racism embedded in the settlement of Australia. Among others, it is the name of the fictional town of Massacre Plains, abbreviated by the characters to just "Massacre", that unapologetically targets the space of settler-colonial violence, one, as Ellen van Neerven reminds us in her review of *The Yield*, "without a treaty" (2019, n.p.). It is also the references to painful mementos of the 19th and 20th centuries that surface in the fragments of both Albert's and Reverend Greenleaf's stories. These mementos include policies of forced removals of Indigenous children by the authorities with the aim of creating a class of dependent, cheap labor and domestic servants; racially motivated violence and frontier brutality of early settlers in remote areas; displacement and assimilation through concentrating Indigenous families and clans in missions, making them dependent on government rations; coerced conversion to Christianity, resulting in the loss of Indigenous languages, cultures, sovereignty; and the land being gradually controlled by settler ownership. All of these markers of colonial violence func-

tion in the novel in the same way they function in most Indigenous narratives: as interventions in hegemonic narratives and sites of anti-colonial protest. They are also a reminder that Australia is a “postcolonizing”, rather than postcolonial, nation-state (Moreton-Robinson 2003, 3),¹¹ as becomes clear from the fact that the Prosperous House, home of the Gondiwindi family, must be destroyed and the inhabitants dispossessed yet again in order for the settler state (represented by the mining company) to economically prosper.

Secondly, the novel’s critique of settler colonialism is visible in the representation of Australia’s mining industry, as it demasks how the Australian nation-state’s existence and economy based on extraction of resources¹² is founded on the eradication of Indigenous sovereignty and on the possession of the land through dispossession of Indigenous peoples. This logic has been theorized by Patrick Wolfe who argues that settler colonialism “destroys to replace” (2006, 388) in the sense that in order for the settler colony to expropriate and re-possess land and resources to succeed economically, the original populations native to the land must be erased and replaced by the settler-colonial society. Thus, the key goal is the dispossession of Indigenous people, which only then leads to cultural genocide. Wolfe makes it clear that “the primary motive for elimination [of the Native] is not race (or religion, ethnicity, grade of civilization, etc.) but access to territory. Territoriality is settler colonialism’s specific, irreducible element” (2006, 388). This scenario is clearly visible in Australia where mining and other extractivist industries, alongside pastoralism and agrobusiness, have always been a major factor in taking up the land in remote parts for exploration and extraction, irrespective of close proximity of Indigenous communities and their sacred sites, thus effectively dispossessing Indigenous people.

It is well-known that mining companies use their enormous financial resources to co-opt dissent and opposition, be it environmental campaigns or Indigenous land rights claims, by various kinds of sponsoring benevolent activities, crisis communication management and investment into the local communities’ infrastructure. The novel demasks these strategies when August has a chance to see educational kits donated to the town’s school by the mining company in Massacre Plains which, not surprisingly, turn out to be indoctrinated with the company’s values and promises of prosperity, employment, and care of the community’s needs:

The graphics were as chaotic as a Happy Meal Box. Crosswords featured words like emerald, diamond, ruby, iron, ore, silver, opal. A mole in a hard hat was the mascot. He wore a tiny orange waistcoat. There were drawings of industrial drills burrowing down into the layers of the earth, a cross-section view. In one of the layers the designers had drawn a skeleton of a stegosaurus. (Winch 2019, 243)

In short, August is quick to evaluate this as “pure propaganda – bite-size, child-size, colourful, cheery brainwashing” (243). Apart from eliminating the potential opposition from the local town through promises of employment and investment (depicted in the novel by various minor characters welcoming the mine as an opportunity and targeting both green activists and the Gondiwindi family for challenging the proposal), the mining company also has to eliminate the Gondiwindi family. Not because they would be the rightful owners of the land, as it turns out that the land is legal-

ly Crown land, de facto owned by the government, but because they are attached to the land through their ancestry – in other words, they belong. And Indigenous belonging, as Aileen Moreton-Robinson explains, “continues to unsettle non-Indigenous belonging based on illegal dispossession” (2003, 4). Thus, in Wolfe’s logic of elimination, the Gondiwindi family, who threaten the interests of the settler-colonial nation-state through their belonging, must be displaced and dispossessed.

Ironically, the fact that this plan does not come to fruition is due to the presence of a group of young environmental activists who settle (as settlers do) the peak of Kengal rock, a Wiradjuri sacred site, to organize a blockade and lock-in to protest the mine. This setup seems to be pointing to a classic conflict between “green” and “black” politics, but in fact it evolves into a curiously queer encounter between August and Mandy, one of the activists, which foreshadows what is still a rare synergy between the usually white eco-activism and Indigenous land rights activism. August is supposed to be on her home territory, having the authority of coming from the line of traditional owners, and she approaches the female activist with a hint of a condescending smirk upon hearing they are “water protectors” (Winch 2019, 134). In contrast, August comes across as rather ignorant, after Mandy gives her a lecture about the geology of the Kengal rock and the general topography of the place, clearly based on her archival research, while also acknowledging its spiritual significance. August feels she has been “made small by this woman” (136) but is also impressed by her knowledge and confidence. This confidence turns queer when Mandy’s seemingly blunt “I noticed you” (137) is softened by her touch of August’s hair and compliment of her eyes. August’s confused but not unfriendly response provokes a reading that implies a sexualized subtext (even though it is not developed further in the novel) which complements the otherwise explicitly politicized dynamic between the two women, and by extension the two groups.

This dynamic is further probed in the following short exchange between August and Mandy which again indicates uneasy politics dovetailing the relationship between the two political groups whose agendas sometimes overlap but most often they clash:

‘Whose mob are you?’ August asked [...].

‘What do you mean?’

‘I mean, are you Koori or what?’¹³

‘No, I just care.’

‘That’s nice.’

‘You think I’m not allowed?’

‘I didn’t say that, I said it’s nice—it’s nice that you give a shit.’ (135–136)

The tension present in this exchange subtly refers to a long history of strained relationships between Indigenous and environmental activist groups, mostly based on the environmental organizations overlooking the intersections of racism and colonization and the implications of settler colonialism for Indigenous communities’ sovereignty (Pickerill 2018, 1123). It is the Indigenous character in this exchange, however, who offers a reconciliatory gesture and a promise of future alliance, which materializes later when the green activists, apart from orchestrating

a boycott by locking themselves to the machines, also coordinate a distraction in the form of firing the land, thus appropriating a traditional Indigenous farming technique. The strategic but spontaneous alliance between the Indigenous family and the eco-activists, based on mutual respect, is effective only to the point of attracting media attention but otherwise is too small-scale to stop the bulldozers assisted by the police.

The third aspect of the novel which unsettles the settler-colonial project is the museum – another representation, apart from the mine, of neo-colonial space and an extension of the settler-colonial project. It shows most clearly when August and Aunt Missy visit an ethnographic museum where Indigenous artefacts, including those from Wiradjuri culture, are displayed in glass cases. The visit of the two Indigenous women to look for artefacts belonging to their own culture opens into multiple meanings. They look for objects that were stolen in the past by the station-owning settler family of neighbors who, on the one hand, allowed the Gondiwindi family to stay in the Prosperous House, therefore on Country, but on the other hand they were also complicit in the history of exploiting Indigenous farmhands as cheap, most commonly unpaid labor. In a racist bout, Eddie, the last descendant of this family and August's childhood friend, shows her museum index cards that he discovered as a proof that his father donated very precious objects and artefacts to the museum, most of them much older than the European presence on the continent: message sticks, axe heads, anvil stones, wooden clubs, shields, and, finally, milling grinding stones, anvil stones and fire stones (Winch 2019, 218–219) which prove not only the presence of a sophisticated culture but also the “evidence of agricultural activity, dated: circa, 10000 years” (219). This betrayal is also framed with irony: the objects and artefacts preserved in the museum can now validate a Wiradjuri Native Title claim.

The two Gondiwindi women's visit to the museum is confrontational for them: the space teems with colonial authority, the size is intimidating, the space sterile, the displays designed to tell a familiar story of one vanishing nation and the progress of another. Declan Fry interprets the museum as a “fraught site” which embodies “liberal condescension and masquerade, and the hypocritical tableau of milling security guards who intervene to prevent the two Wiradjuri women from photographing Country” (2020, n.p.). While the visit makes the aunt “sick to the guts” (Winch 2019, 263) and in her vexed state she even confronts the guards, August likes the museum and is even prepared to go through the humiliating experience of having to fill in paperwork in order to “book a viewing” of the collection of her own culture's artefacts (264). However, at that moment, August also begins to feel the weight of the custodianship of the land inherited from her grandfather:

August wanted to hand the papers back and to tell them everything, draw them close and whisper that their lives had turned out wrong, that she and her family were meant to be powerful, not broken, tell them that something bad happened before any of them was born. Tell them something was stolen from a place inland, from the five hundred acres where her people lived. [...] tell them that she wasn't extinct, that they didn't need the exhibition after all. (264)

This quote communicates the core values of Indigenous resilience-as-survival, but the power of the message is undermined by the fact that August only imagines voicing such an empowered critique of the settler-colonial space but in the end, she does not and remains silenced.

As the novel comes to a conclusion, the resilience of Wiradjuri culture surfaces through various fragments: it mirrors in Albert's tape on which he speaks (as opposed to writing the dictionary), carefully pronouncing the Wiradjuri words; in the detailed anthropological research based on the museum collections which estimates the Gondiwindi culture to be thousands of years old, "tick[ing] the boxes to classify as a civilization" (307); in the burial ground containing the bones of former Indigenous Mission residents, which was unearthed when the mining bulldozers started digging; and, finally, in the "resurrected language, brought back from extinction" (307) by both Albert's spoken and Reverend's written lists of words that matter, words which had the power, if not to stop the mine, then at least to lead to events that did. In this optimistic scenario, even the land seems to be partly restored as the river, dry for decades, fills with water after heavy rains which then impacts the resilience of the entire ecosystem.

YINDYAMMARA, IN LIEU OF A CONCLUSION

One of the Wiradjuri words in Albert's dictionary is *yindyamarra*. It translates somewhat uneasily into English as respect, but its complex meanings also include to give honor, go slow, take responsibility, live well, show gentleness and kindness (Burambabili Gulbali 2017, n.p.).¹⁴ For the Wiradjuri people, Albert writes in his dictionary, *yindyamarra* is "a way of life" (Winch 2019, 106). It could be argued that it is a principle that may be juxtaposed to the concept of resilience as a yet another alternative, one that explains better the intricacies of Indigenous lives. In the novel, Albert's dictionary entry explains that "only equals can share respect, otherwise it's a game of masters and slaves – someone always has the upper hand when they are demanding respect" (106). Having the knowledge of one's own language is a key player in this equality, but the novel goes beyond the mere demonstration of the resilience of Wiradjuri language and culture. Indeed, it places emphasis on the inseparable relation between the language and the land, just as Stan Grant explains in an interview that, "the language doesn't belong to people, it belongs to land" and that for the Wiradjuri, "language is who you are and where you belong" (Burambabili Gulbali 2017, n.p.).

However, the novel also presents an interesting paradox in terms of who calls for respect towards the language and the land. Again, it is the white female environmental activist, Mandy, who not only reminds August of the significance of Indigenous languages for cultural renewal and by extension the Native Title, but she also stresses that it is imperative for settlers to learn at least "a handful of words [of] the local language" (Winch 2019, 298), just like migrants or even tourists do after they arrive in a foreign country. It is Mandy who voices a critique of settlers who "don't have the vision, the respect, to bother learning the native language!" (299) In other words, it is not just the preservation of the Wiradjuri language but also the respect shown

by the settlers (and any other migrants) who must learn this language, that can secure the equality Albert Gondiwindi had in mind. Mandy also seems to understand that “learn[ing] to respect the culture where we [settlers] live [...] [is] learn[ed] through looking after the land” (299), thus adhering to the principle of *yindyamarra*. The novel even performs this textually when it opens and concludes with Albert’s voice which introduces and comes back to the Wiradjuri word for Country, prompting the readers to try pronouncing it themselves: “*Ngurambang* – can you hear it? – *Ngu-rambang*. If you say it right it hits the back of your mouth and you should taste the blood in your words. Every person around should learn the word for *country* in the old language, the first language” (1). This echoes the imperative for settlers formulated by Mandy: they should not only hear but also speak, feel and taste the Indigenous language. This could be a central message of the novel: it shifts the weight from resilience which is imposed on Indigenous peoples and their cultures towards decolonization, meaning that the burden of active engagement with Indigenous cultures and languages is upon the settler population. This could also tie in nicely with another important concept listed in Albert’s dictionary, *gulba-ngi-dyili-nya*, “to know yourself, be at peace with yourself” (157) – in other words, perhaps a more effective alternative to reconciliation.

NOTES

- ¹ The term Indigenous is used as a neutral term referring to the native inhabitants of settler colonies of Australia, New Zealand, Canada and the USA. The term Aboriginal refers specifically to Indigenous peoples of Australia. This article uses Indigenous, Australian Indigenous, and Aboriginal interchangeably.
- ² Vizenor first introduced the term survivance in his 1993 book *Manifest Manners: Narratives on Postindian Survivance* but since then he has been developing and commenting on the concept in other, more recent publications. In *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence* (2008) which Vizenor edited and introduced with the chapter “Aesthetics of Survivance”, he defines and describes survivance in the following way: “Native survivance is an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion; survivance is the continuance of stories, not a mere reaction, however pertinent. [...] Survivance stories are renunciations of dominance, detractions, obtrusions, the unbearable sentiments of tragedy, and the legacy of victimry” (1).
- ³ For a detailed discussion of how global calls for Indigenous resilience may perpetuate colonial practices, see Lindroth and Sinevaara-Niskanen 2019.
- ⁴ Settler colonialism can be defined as “an ongoing system of power that perpetuates the genocide and repression of indigenous peoples and cultures. Essentially hegemonic in scope, settler colonialism normalizes the continuous settler occupation, exploiting lands and resources to which indigenous peoples have genealogical relationships” (Cox 2017).
- ⁵ Wiradjuri refers to the largest Aboriginal group in New South Wales. They are the traditional custodians of areas bordered by the Macquarie, Lachlan, and Murrumbidgee Rivers (Narradera, n.p.).
- ⁶ In their reviews, both van Neerven and Sharrad refer to the style as “Aboriginal realism” (van Neerven 2019, n.p.) and “social realism of a long line of Australian novels” (Sharrad 2020, 10). However, I contest this perspective as *The Yield* arguably interweaves a realist plotline with passages informed by Aboriginal mythology and spirituality (e.g., Albert talking to and being guided by the spirits of his Ancestors). In addition, the novel draws on the so-called Aboriginal Gothic, which works with the concept of haunting and the idea that monstrosity dwells in the colonial violence (see Bellette 2022).

- ⁷ Native Title is the result of the Native Title Act passed in 1993 which reacted to the Australia High Court decision in “Mabo v. Queensland (No. 2)”. In this so-called “Mabo Case”, the doctrine of *terra nullius* was overturned and the fact that Indigenous people have occupied the land prior to European settlement was recognized. Native Title sought to recognize the claims by Aboriginal traditional owners to their lands (for more details, see AIATSIS 2022).
- ⁸ The name Jedda resonates in Australian cultural production as a strong reference to a 1955 film of the same title made by Charles Chauvel. In the film, Jedda is an Aboriginal girl growing up on a station in the care of a white woman and raised to assimilate and forget about her Indigeneity. Alice Bellette claims that Winch’s strategy in using the name Jedda might also be “subverting the settler-colonial gothic trope of the lost white child, where Jedda as a character may also represent the spectre of missing Indigenous children across the globe but particularly in Australia, with its ongoing racist policies of child removal” (2022, n.p.).
- ⁹ The Native Title claims involve extremely complex legal proceedings. Indigenous claimants are supposed to prove a continuous and unbroken connection to their Country since colonization. However, in many cases this is very difficult, if not impossible, due to the systemic nation-state’s policies of extermination and assimilation of Indigenous peoples and their cultural genocide. For an overview, see a detailed explanation of the Native Title process on the Kimberley Council website (Kimberley Land Council).
- ¹⁰ Thinking about Indigenous resilience cannot bypass the increasingly vocal literary discourse which frames colonization as an apocalyptic event that Indigenous people already survived. This framework has become popular among an increasing number of contemporary Indigenous writers who explore post-apocalyptic futures and Indigenous survival in genre fiction such as sci-fi, horror, speculative fiction, dystopic fiction, fantasy, and futuristic fiction. Critically acclaimed Australian examples of such fiction by Indigenous writers include Alexis Wright’s *the Swan Book* (2013) and Claire Coleman’s *Terra Nullius* (2017b). Coleman herself commented on Indigenous apocalypse: “We don’t have to imagine an apocalypse, we survived one. We don’t have to imagine a dystopia, we live in one” (2017a).
- ¹¹ Australian Indigenous scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson uses the term “postcolonizing” to refer to Australia as the nation-state in which “migrancy and dispossession indelibly mark configurations of belonging, home and place” (2003, 23) and where “the active, the current and the continuing nature of the colonizing relationship [...] positions us [Indigenous people in Australia] as belonging but not belonging” (2003, 38n).
- ¹² Mining is a major contributor to the Australian economy; the country is one of the world’s largest exporters of coal, iron ore, bauxite, alumina, and many other resources. About 60 percent of mining sites in Australia are found in remote spaces and in close proximity to Indigenous communities (Transparency International Australia 2020, n.p.). In many remote places, opening or operating a mine is highly controversial and the relationships between Indigenous and other rural communities and mining companies are often very tense.
- ¹³ “Koori” is a term used for Indigenous people from south-east Australia, predominantly New South Wales and Victoria.
- ¹⁴ The complexities of the concept of *yindyamarra* as a Wiradjuri way of life are introduced and explained in a short educational video “Yindyamarra Yambuwan”, all in Wiradjuri language, prepared in collaboration with the Wiradjuri community and patroned by Dr Stan Grant Sr. AM, Flo Grant and Jimmy Ingram. The project is part of the website created by Burambabili Gulbali Incorporated association with the aim to “manage and maintain [First Nations’] own knowledges, identities, and ways of being and living” (2017, n.p.).

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Words that matter: Yindyamarra, Wiradjuri resilience and the settler-colonial project in Tara June Winch's *The Yield*

Indigenous resilience. Resilience-as-survivance. Yindyamarra. Tara June Winch. *The Yield*.

This article explores the implications of the concept of resilience in contemporary Indigenous narratives in which resilience is commonly evoked in reference to the adaptation and persistence of Indigenous peoples and their cultures despite the settler-colonial policies of extermination and persisting pressure to assimilate. Simultaneously, however, Indigenous narratives also present a sustained critique of resilience as perpetuating settler-colonial dominance and cultural hegemony through co-opting Indigenous adaptability by global neoliberal governmentality. The analytical part uses the example of a recent Australian Indigenous novel, *The Yield* by the Wiradjuri writer Tara June Winch (2019), to demonstrate how a contemporary literary text can be instrumental in unpacking the entangled, double-edged nature of resilience. A close reading of several key moments from the novel points to its intentional ambiguities which not only highlight the linguistic and cultural renewal (which I call resilience-as-survivance) but also problematize Indigenous resilience by critiquing the ongoing, oppressive nature of the current settler-colonial project, whether in the space of the mainstream museum or environmental degradation (which I call resilience-as-risk).

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