Stopped in our tracks: From 'giving an account' to an ethics of recognition in feminist praxis

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Abstract

When the Western Australian government announced in 2010 that Indigenous people would be compensated for unpaid wages, a Yindjibarndi woman named Bigali Hanlon submitted an application to access her government files so that she could lodge a claim. At the age of four, Bigali was taken from her home in Mulga Downs, Western Australia to live in a church-run hostel for 'fair-skinned' Indigenous children until she was sent into indentured domestic service as a teenager. Three large files document her history. These files, combined with in-depth interviews, and a film about Bigali and other Indigenous Australian people, *Walking Tracks Back Home,* form the basis of this paper. In reflecting on the issues raised by Bigali's story, we draw on feminist writing on the costs associated with being called to give an account of oneself, considering how listening might form the basis of an ethics of recognition in feminist praxis.

Introduction

Bigali Hanlon is a Yindjibarndi[i] woman born in 1940 at Mulga Downs in Western Australia. At the age of four, Bigali was taken from her mother and sent to live in a church-run hostel for 'fair-skinned' Indigenous children until she was 13 when she went into indentured domestic service. Wages were collected but were never paid to Bigali. When the Western Australian government announced in 2010 that Indigenous people would be compensated for unpaid wages, Bigali submitted an application to access her government files so that she could lodge a claim with the Western Australian Stolen Wages Commission. Three large folders document Bigali's life from her birth at Mulga Downs until she formally left care at the age of sixteen. The detail of the records in Bigali's files testifies to how Aboriginal people were subjected to extreme forms of 'governmentality' (Foucault, 1961), involving a surveillance of their everyday lives and the regulation of their movements.

The starting point for this paper came out of Bigali's application to the Western Australian Stolen Wages Commission, which required documentary evidence to support coherent claims from Indigenous Australians for unpaid wages[ii]. These claims coalesced around the need to give a persuasive account on the part of Indigenous people, but the effect of this process was that it positioned claimants in terms of a one-dimensional 'victim' subjectivity. Through her granddaughter, Talila Milroy, Bigali has shared her files compiled by the Department of Native Affairs. Talila is explicit that Bigali's story should not be told through a 'victim' discourse, thereby replicating this positioning, and her experiences of being called to account by the Stolen Wages Commission. Instead, Talila's view, shared by Bigali, is that the compulsion to present Bigali's story through a victim narrative should be 'undone' in order to highlight the ways in which, through this organizational process, this reificatory re-positioning of Bigali accentuates rather than recognizes her earlier exploitation. Drawing on feminist writing on 'generous encounters' (Swan, 2017), as well as Bigali's own act of generosity in sharing her story and documentation with us, we approach this tentatively, but with a commitment to showing how Bigali and other Indigenous people with similar stories to tell have been 'undone' by the Commissions to which they have made applications. Drawing on recent writing on a feminist politics of listening,

we aim to raise awareness of how the Commissions' requirements reduce the complexity of Indigenous people's lived experiences to provide coherent victim narratives in a way that replicates rather than recognizes the normative governmental regimes to which they have been subject[iii]. In our discussion of Bigali's story, we explore how the sharing of Indigenous people's narratives might be opened up beyond 'giving an account' (Butler, 2005) through a politics of listening premised upon an ethics of recognition.

Bigali's narrative begins in *media res*, when many things have 'already taken place to make [her] story possible in language' (Butler, 2005: 39)[iv]. While the State had documented details of her life, Bigali explained to her grand-daughter, Talila, that she didn't know much of the detail of her early life until she first read those files at the age of 70. When Bigali read a draft of this paper she wanted us to stress that she had to 'fight' the government to get them to release her files. On making application to access her files, Bigali was told that it would be too upsetting for her to read the material documenting her life. Her response to this was that she did not need to be 'protected', the State had already done enough 'protecting' of her, emphasizing that the pain caused is hers to feel.

Like Bigali's story, this paper also begins in *media res.* We do not situate our argument within a particular body of literature, or identify a 'gap' or relatively neglected theme in published research that we claim to be able to address to somehow 'close down' critique. In some ways, on the contrary, we take our cue from what we see as an act of incredible generosity. Bigali has shared her story with us, on the understanding that we would continue that generosity by telling her story more widely, including with and through academic audiences. She has also shared many recollections, feelings and thoughts about aspects of her story not 'captured' in the official files, and we use this word deliberately, in an interview with Talila and in a film, *Walking Tracks Back Home,* produced by her daughter, Michelle Broun, that is part of a wider project recording oral histories of Indigenous Western Australians[v]. Bigali's feedback and reflections on this paper have also shaped our narrative. Our desire then isn't to retell Bigali's story but to unravel the coherence imposed on her narrative by a governmental

process, and to emphasize how this process continues to act as an organizing one by imposing the conditional coherence of a 'victim' narrative on Bigali whilst purporting to offer the possibility of recognition and recompense. Bigali's account is part of a much wider story that constitutes a collective struggle for recognition. We consider here what form this takes, and what feminists can learn from and contribute to this struggle. In doing so, however, we are mindful of the need to reflect on the presumption that 'we' can somehow translate the stranger fetish into ethnographic knowledge (Ahmed, 2000).

As Swan (2017: 547) outlines, when hearing stories such as Bigali's 'the impulse towards action is understandable and complicated'. It is understandable because doing something is a defense against the shock (including the shock of the complicity that is revealed); it is complicated because of the impulse to make amends, to somehow reconcile or 're-cover' the past. The desire to act is as complex, Swan argues, because of the assumption of various subject positions on the part of those who feel a need to 'do' something: to make public a sense of moral outrage; to express solidarity, or to demonstrate optimism in the restorative capacity of the future, rephrased, Swan argues, as a rhetorical call to activism: 'what can be done?' Swan's critique of this impetus rests on the idea that the desire to act, albeit with the best of intentions, can work to 'block' hearing, a process that can 'stop the message getting through' (Ahmed, 2004, cited in Swan, 2017: 247). Putting it starkly, Swan argues that 'white researchers need to listen and learn', and stop trying to 'make a difference'.

For this reason, we do not develop an 'argument' as such in this paper, but rather try to tell Bigali's story, as far as possible, in her own words and those of her grand-daughter Talila. This raises important issues about the paper's composition and the process involved in re-telling Bigali's account of her life in the context of an academic journal (and academic seminars and conferences as well). As authors, we are all women – two of us academics, one of us (Talila) a medical doctor. One of us is a white Australian, one white English. Talila (Bigali's grand-daughter) is an Indigenous Australian. While Bigali chose not to become a co-author of the paper[vi], Talila worked closely with her to ensure that Bigali read

and commented on emerging ideas, arguments and text. We tried, as far as possible, to make the process as inter-subjective and dialogical as possible, with all insights revolving around Bigali's documentation and contribution, as her positioning in the process emerged not as the expert in a hierarchical or 'authentic' sense, but as the focal point around which complex layers of narrative gradually began to layer. This challenged presumptions about authorial reflexivity as we were particularly keen not to turn the focal point back onto ourselves, and credibility. Our aim was to raise awareness of Bigali's story, and those of others in similar circumstances, not by corroborating her account (and thereby replicating the same governmental processes to which she had been subject), but rather to actively listen, and in doing so, to collaboratively produce a critique of Bigali's subjection that she would recognize herself in. This principle, of mutual recognition, therefore underpins both the substantive focus of the paper, and the process of its production.

In this sense, our aim is not to 'close down' critique of the ideas and experiences we present, replicating the coherence we seek to 'undo'; on the contrary, we seek to open up a space for listening, thinking and reflecting. This presents a number of challenges that we consider in more detail below. Not least of these is that, as Ahmed (cited in Swan, 2017) insists, white people's yearning to make a difference often means that we see ourselves as the agents of 'good' praxis[vii]. Indeed, as Swan (2017: 549) and others have noted, critical race theorists and activists often view so-called 'white praxis' with 'suspicion and cynicism' (see also Sullivan, 2007, cited in Swan, 2017, 549). This carries the risk of further 'undoing' those whose stories we tell, exploiting their relative vulnerability, and un-reflexively replicating a white, middle-class, colonial philanthropy (Applebaum, 2010; Moreton-Robinson, 2003). In particular, Black feminists and activists have cautioned against mobilizing collective pronouns ('we', 'us' and so on) to signify a universal bond of identification organized primarily around gender difference. Doing so, as the grammatical and epistemological basis of speaking on behalf of Others as a justification for 'doing good' with one's privilege, whilst leaving the latter intact, has been the subject of increasing critique. Swan (2017: 547) puts it thus when summing up these growing

concerns: 'contra to the postfeminist marketing injunction, white feminists should not 'just do it''.

Rather, as Swan goes on to note, a commitment to listening can discourage the 'presumptuous and oppressive practices of speaking for' (Alcoff, 1991: 17, cited in Swan, 2017: 553). Listening not only stops the propensity to speak or act for in its tracks; it also has the capacity to reflexively undo the compulsion to tell, or give an account of oneself, through a seemingly coherent linearity. Listening, as the basis of a feminist political praxis, in this sense involves a kind of reflexive undoing of that linearity. This process can be risky, painful and profoundly discomforting, as Swan (2017) emphasizes. Yet as Moreton-Robinson (2008, cited in Swan, 2017) stresses, it is nowhere near as painful as exploitation and annihilation has been for Indigenous people. In this sense, Swan, Ahmed and others' call is not to arms but to ears, urging us not to act but rather to stop, and listen to the stories that others have to tell, on their own terms and in their own ways. For this reason, here and throughout the paper, we have resisted the temptation to turn the reflexive gaze on ourselves, seeking instead to retain the focus on Bigali's narrative which is told, as far as possible in her own words, and to open up space for a collective reflexivity through which to question who our thinking and writing is for, by whom it is produced, and in whose interests.

Following Swan (2017: 549), we ask therefore: What might *not* rushing to 'do' something mean? As Swan argues in her discussion of progressive praxis, 'listening may be one way in which white academics can contribute to praxis as a kind of 'not doing doing', or as a collective form of reflexive 'not undoing' in feminist terms (Butler, 2004). For Swan, drawing on Ahmed, this kind of generous encountering – a deliberate *not* doing, but actively listening, constitutes a possible basis for a phenomenological openness that has the capacity to 'stop people in their tracks', avoiding the kind of self-indulgent narcissism that is often badged as reflexivity in white academic research. Vachhani (2015: 148) hints at this in her critique of the presumption that to be 'defiant, activist and transformative', academic writing has to be masterful. As Moreton-Robinson (2003: 66) has put it, within the latter, white privilege often

remains 'invisible, unmarked and uninterrogated', while Indigenous women's subjectivities tend to be objectified as the basis of analysis or the focus of philanthropic intervention, a point to which we return below.

In *Gender, Work and Organization* there has been a growing engagement with Indigenous women's histories and contemporary struggles for recognition (Blackmore, 2011; Colley, 2013; Eveline and Booth, 2002; Eveline, et al 2009; Pio, 2007; Soni-Sinha and Yates, 2013). With the notable exception of Swan (2017), the focus of much of this work has been largely empirical, and then only in relative passing has there been a situated, sustained interest in the particularities of Indigenous Australian women's lives and work. Eveline et al (2009) argue that successful action needs to move beyond categorical distinctions between groups, to focus on intersectional experiences of injustice and appropriation (see also Colley, 2013), arguing that political representation of Indigenous women, especially in Western Australia, is particularly poor. They describe the governmental regimes to which Indigenous people have been subject in recent years as a 'textual mediation of indigenous subjugation' (Eveline et al, 2009: 17). But Eveline et al also emphasize the neo-colonial problems associated with subjecting Indigenous women's lived experiences to European and North American feminist thinking and ontologies of gender (see also Simpson, 2011). Here they pick up on earlier work by Eveline (2005) and Curthouys (1994) noting that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people continue to be perceived as 'rather exotic' in academic writing, reproducing a kind of epistemological geography that needs to be reflexively, collectively unraveled. De Ishtar (2004) interrogates this further, arguing that there is an urgent need to undertake research not on but *with* Indigenous people, 'to engage in reflexive involvement' rather than epistemologically distant scrutiny. To embark on this, de Ishtar urges us to work together towards what she describes as a 'relationship in praxis', developing an approach that can recognize and immerse itself in different ways of knowing and being as a step towards recognizing and reflexively undoing the silencing of Indigenous women's voices in debates about them.

Giving an Account

In presenting and discussing Bigali's story, we[viii] attempt this kind of immerision, but drawing on different accounts of her life to ask what effect giving an account of oneself can have. As Butler (2005: 121, *emphasis added*) reminds us 'any discourse, any regime of intelligibility, *constitutes us at a cost*'. Pio (2007) has noted how Indigenous people often spend their whole lives trying to 'prove their suitability' within white governmental regimes. Yet Aboriginal Australians have talked of getting 'tired of telling their stories: she's Stolen Generation and telling that hurts her all the time' (McKenzie, quoted in Maddison, 2011). Requiring Indigenous women to 'give an account' has come at a cost *but* in telling their stories, Indigenous people are 'doing something with this telling, acting on [the other] in some way' (Butler 2005: 51). In our discussion below, we examine the nature of the ethical relation that this process of giving an account establishes by exploring how we might allow stories such as Bigali's to re-circulate, reflecting on how we might 'learn without expecting the Other to teach' (Dreher 2009, cited in Swan 2017: 554).

The discussion below proceeds from Bigali's story, connecting and weaving her thoughts and embodied experiences to insights from feminist literature on recognition, difference and belonging, particularly writing by Ahmed (2000, 2012) and Butler (2004, 2005). We draw on the latter not to 'make sense' of Bigali's account but to reflect on how it guides us to in terms of understanding the lived consequences of organizational processes of differentiation. We consider Bigali's narrative as a poignant example of how the accounts that we give of ourselves to elicit recognition constitute powerful organizational processes that categorize difference and order it hierarchically. We also explore how feminist research and politics might listen to stories of lived experiences of this process, understanding more about its reifying effects and thinking through how stories such as Bigali's might be told differently. In other words, how might narratives be re-told to move beyond the subjective constraints of the accounts that we are compelled to give in order to be recognized as credible organizational subjects – those who might be recognized, respected and recompensed? We consider what form recognition might take beyond a politics

of accountability, and premised upon an understanding of difference beyond a relationship of appropriation.

In developing these thoughts we are mindful that as Jackie Huggins (1998, cited in Maddison 2009: xxxviii) has warned:

> The constant demand placed on Aboriginal people to be educators is tiring. Surely it is time for non-Aboriginal people to begin their journey of discovery by themselves. It is too much to be expecting Aboriginal women to be continually explaining their oppression – as if somehow it is their fault and they have to talk and write their way out of it. And do others really listen?

We also reflect on Nicoll's (2004) observation that it is because of a failure to hear, that some people need to keep telling their stories, again and again, and are mindful of the hurt this causes.

For us, Huggins' (1998) warning and our sense of responsibility in talking, thinking and writing Bigali's story raises a number of ethical dilemmas. On the one hand, we have an obligation to tell her story (this was her 'condition'), and on the other, in doing so we risk simply perpetuating the appropriation that forms the basis of Bigali's narrative, replicating past injustices and the tiring effects of the constant demands to which Huggins refers. And as Huggins also asks: 'do others really listen'? Where should we tell Bigali's story, and to whom? How? In responding to rhetorical questions such as these, we draw on insights from recent feminist writing on ethics and politics as well as Bigali's own reflections to try to move the discussion from a focus on a 'politics of regret' (Olick, 1999) and recrimination, to one of recognition. Drawing on Butler (2005) and Ahmed (2000: 154)[ix], we see this process as a political one– calling for a politics of listening that moves beyond giving an account towards an ethics of recognition.

For most non-Indigenous Australians their understanding of Indigenous communities and ways of life is largely acquired through media culture (Cutcher and Milroy 2010), leading to a reified 'stranger fetish' rather than the possibility of a recognition-based encounter in the way that Ahmed (2000) describes it [x]. Drawing on Ahmed (2000), we think about recognition as a struggle for acknowledgement of difference as the outcome of a shared history (one of abuse, exploitation and appropriation), rather than of attributed characteristics. This as an important counter to what Ahmed (2000) calls the 'stranger fetish' that is perpetuated by media culture, which frames our perception of the Other prior to our encounter. For Ahmed (2000), it is only by moving from a mediated way of knowing the Other to an immersive, proximal way of relating that we can open up the possibility of engaging in the kind of mutual recognition necessary to overcome a hierarchical organization and appropriation of ascribed difference. One of our aims in sharing Bigali's story, and our thoughts on why it is so significant beyond her own narrative, is to open up this possibility of an ethical and political openness to the Other in contrast to the coherent accounts that Bigali and others who have made applications to the Stolen Wages Commissions have hitherto been compelled to give as part of the 'Stolen Generations'.

Commissioning the self

The 'Stolen Generations' is a term that has come to represent one of the most oppressive of institutionalized dispossessions enacted by the white colonial administration in Australia from 1890s up to and including the 1970s. Throughout this extensive period, Aboriginal people were subjected to extreme forms of 'governmentality' (Foucault 1961). The constant surveillance and regulation to which they were subject was manifested in many ways. The 'full blooded' Aboriginal was isolated and kept with severe restrictions on movements away from the reserves requiring them to apply to obtain 'passes' that would permit travel off the reserve or across State lines. The 'half-caste' was seen as particular 'problem' that needed to be managed. Government policy based on eugenic beliefs of breeding out colour constructed Aboriginality as a 'primitive social order' composed of 'ritual murders, infanticide, ceremonial wife

exchange, polygamy' (Hasluck 1956: 2) The solution was to remove children categorized as 'half-caste' from their Aboriginal families and place them in state care where they could be taught proper 'civilized ways' under the protection of Aboriginal Welfare Boards.

Bigali herself was caught up in the latter process. One example of this, that we came across in her documents, is a file note from the Deputy Commissioner of Native Affairs, dated 1st May 1942 containing typewritten details as below, as well as some additional hand-written notes:

> Cards should note this child for removal when four years of age. Egypt [Bigali's mother] is of a dark type of halfcaste and possibly her child [Bigali] may be a little too dark for admission to Sister Kate's. However, this is a matter than can be determined by inspection at a later date.

Sister Kate's was a Children's Home to which Bigali was admitted on 3rd September 1946, at the age of four[xi]. Another similar document (a note in one of her files written by someone in the office of the Deputy Commissioner of Native Affairs, dated 19th December 1941) states: 'this child is obviously a quarter caste'. Bigali herself reflects on the underlying imperative of this chromatic categorization of people in the film, *Walking Tracks Back Home* (Broon, 2017[xii]) when she states that 'they [the 'protectors'] take you away from your family, your community, your language, your culture – it's genocide'.

The Australian Human Rights and Equality Opportunity Commission's report, *Bringing Them Home,* estimates that in the period 1910 to 1970 between 10 to 30 per cent of Aboriginal children were removed from their mothers (Langton and Barry, 1998). Goodall (1995) highlights how in the early years the policy was explicitly directed at removing girls reaching puberty from Aboriginal communities. For example, between 1912 and 1928 girls who were 12 and over made up 54% of the children taken, while boys who were 12 and over made up only 14% (Goodall 1995: 82). Children as young as three or four were taken by force or by coercion from their Aboriginal families on the reserves and adopted

out to white families or housed in dormitories (away from their families). While a number of studies have highlighted how concerns with 'racial purity' formed the basis of policies that saw the removal of so many Aboriginal women and children (Jacobs, 2005; Holland, 1995) less attention has been paid to the fact that these women and children formed a pool of cheap (often unpaid) labour. The removal process not only provided a pool of labour but also arguably set up a micro-economy in itself, one that reduced the ontological status of the people and communities involved to that of things. Another of Bigali's documents, dated 28th June 1941, illustrate this, referring to the cartage of goods to Port Hedland for 'three natives and luggage, and one Electrolux [vacuum cleaner]'. Presumably, the people, their effects and equipment were being sold and distributed as a 'package'.

Bennett argued as far back as 1930 that the removal of Aboriginal women and children from their communities was 'akin to slavery' (cited in Holland, 1995). Reynolds (1990: 169) describes how this 'slavery' benefited Europeans:

> The greatest advantage of young Aboriginal servants was that they came cheap and were never paid beyond the provision of food and clothing. As a result any European on or near the frontier regardless of their own circumstances, could acquire and maintain a personal servant.

This work in the service of white women and families served the dual purpose of training the young Aboriginal girls in white ways of housekeeping and mothering, as well as providing a cheap pool of reliable domestic labour to further white prosperity (Higman, 2002). This further supported the racial project of 'settling' Australia by positioning white women's primary role as that of reproduction, at the same time bolstering cultural superiority through the combined gendered and class connotations of freeing white women from domestic labour. Young Aboriginal girls were 'apprenticed' as domestic labourers with the hope that the training they would receive would not only benefit them but that they would become trainers of future nuclear families (Goodall 1995: 83). 'Domestic service', Higman (2002: 127) suggests, 'was a vital

tool in the civilizing and assimilationist missions, which meshed neatly with the desire to recruit useful labor within the archetypal household'.

To this end, not only were Aboriginal children forcibly removed from their families and placed into service, their wages were not their own but controlled by the State. As Kidd (2007: 8) explains:

> Governments around Australia controlled wages, savings and benefits belonging to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people for most of the twentieth century. Payments withheld included child endowment, pensions and even solders' pay. Much of the money held in trust was never paid.

Indeed, the legislation pertaining to Aboriginal people and the 'Protection Acts' enforced by the Australian government throughout the period of approximately 1890 to 1985 saw many Aboriginal people denied their entitlements to wages because of the control exercised by state and federal governments. Aboriginal people working under contracts of cheap labour had a majority, if not all, of their wages sent to the relevant Department in their State who 'managed' their money.

Children were largely 'apprenticed out' to properties in the country and households in the cities where, if they did receive wages, they were paid little. In most cases their wages were sent directly to the 'protector/trustees' of these 'wards of state' and the young workers never saw any of this money. They were often at the mercy of the white employers and easily subject to cruelty, long hours, poor food and sexual and physical abuse. Such practices were an integral part of the assimilation process, removing girls from a situation where it was feared they might 'breed indiscriminately' (with full blooded Aboriginals), placing them in homes where the risk of impregnation from white men was well known (Haskins 2001). This appears to have been common-place. For example, in 1915 Archbishop Donaldson visiting Palm Island (Queensland) observed that

'90% of the girls sent out to work as domestics returned pregnant to white men' (cited in Kidd, 1994: 273).

The sexual exploitation of these vulnerable girls by their white masters served the eugenicist argument underpinning colonial governmentality, reinforcing the construction of Aboriginal women as promiscuous and ensuring an ongoing pool of cheap labour. Choo (2001: 50) reflects on what it was like to grow up in a Catholic mission in Western Australia:

> The child is taken away from the mother and sometimes never sees her again. Thus these children grow up as whites knowing nothing of their own environment. At the expiration of the period of two years the mother goes into service so that it doesn't really matter if she has half a dozen children.

Research has revealed that often the State management of the wages taken from Indigenous workers and children led to fraud, mismanagement and misuse. These wages, along with other State and Commonwealth entitlements such as maternity benefits, invalid and widow pensions, are collectively known as 'stolen wages'. In October 2006, the Federal Government held a *Stolen Wages Senate Inquiry.* This inquiry received 128 submissions and published a report, *Unfinished Business: Indigenous Stolen Wages.* The report recommended that State governments allow better access to archives, fund education campaigns and provide legal research to support claimants in seeking compensation for wages or benefits never paid. Stolen Wages Commissions were held in four states: Western Australia, Queensland, Victoria and New South Wales. While there were differences in the terms of reference of these State commissions, there were important similarities in the way that claimants were required to present a coherent account of their life histories, supported by documentary evidence. In Butler's (2005) terms these accounts were given with the aim of persuading the Commissions of the intelligibility and credibility of the claims made but in doing so, they reified the complexity of applicants' lived experience and life beyond 'protection'. The accounts given to the Commissions in this

sense, 'flatten' the complex layers that constitute life stories such as Bigali's[xiii] in so far as they reduce the fragmentary recollections, often dependent upon aesthetic ways of knowing and understanding, to more 'factual', linear narratives that require applicants to unequivocally position themselves and each other as victims.

Bigali, like thousands of others, was called to give an account as an Indigenous child labourer. This required her to cohere her narrative in order to make it intelligible in governmental terms[xiv], as she was required to give coherence to the complexity of her lived experience. This meant assuming the subject position of a victim within the dominant terms of the account. A paradox of her life (and many others like her) is that Bigali has been called to account by the state, controlled and documented, indentured into a slave life, but at the same term rendered 'stateless'. In order to be recognized, the State which had caused the trauma and stolen wages in the first place, now required claimants such as Bigali to tell their story within the strictures of a pre-determined narrative. Further, telling the story was not in itself enough; applicants had to tell a verifiable story, supported by documentation which the State had compiled and would hand over only so that it could be re-presented in a way that credibility, in the form of recognition, to the claimants. In this way, historical injustices associated with categorizing and classifying people, separating them off from their families and communities, alienating them from their land, ways of life and language, are effectively replicated in the governmental processes associated with the Commissions that simply position the claimants as 'victims' of workplace exploitation.

Despite the State being responsible for managing the wages of Indigenous people under the *Protection Act,* many claims were rejected because of a lack of documentation. For example, in Queensland 3,200 applicants (37%) had their claims refused due to a lack of government records[xv]. Claimants' stories were not taken at face value, but required empirical substance that could be quantified. This, despite the fact that 'identity' was part of the process of removal of Indigenous people. Indigenous people had their names changed,

often several times, at the will of the State. For example, Bigali's name was changed to Sudan by the State when it started documenting her life from age five months, and then to Susan when she arrived at Sister Kate's aged six. She was given the name Sudan, just as her mother was renamed Egypt from her Yindjibardi name of Eejit (Native Affairs document 332/31). Bigali and her brother, Rommel, who was removed at the same time, were deliberately given different names in order to separate them:

> Sudan is given the surname of Raymond and is quadroon. If Rommel, half caste, is also given the same surname there will be a tendency to regard the two as being related in the years to come. By placing Sudan at the Children's Cottage we desire her to be raised as white. Had it been decided for Rommel to still claim his relationship of half-brother to Sudan, he too, would have been sent to Sister Kate's. In view of the fact that Rommel is to be educated at Moore River, it appears to me *the relationship between the two children is to be forgotten* (File Note Acting Deputy Commissioner of Native Affairs, 5th September 1946, *emphasis added*).

The Protectionist practices[xvi] documented in Bigali's government records were aimed largely at negating her identity prior to entering Sister Kate's, and served to reify the classification and hierarchical organization to which her and her family were subject. Until she reconnected with her relatives later in life, Bigali's story is one of remembering and longing: 'I used to climb a big pine tree, and that tree would be swaying and I would look out over the hills and I would think, "I'm gunna go home one day"' (*Walking Tracks Back Home*).

Protectionist policies were aimed at Indigenous mothers forgetting their children and their children forgetting them but it is non-Indigenous people who have chosen to forget by engaging in ethical distancing[xvii]. Ethical distancing consigns what happens to the 'past', stipulating that Indigenous stories be framed solely as victim narratives, which enables non-Indigenous people to insist, as Ahmed and others have written, that 'the past is not our responsibility because we weren't there'. Yet as Ahmed (2005: 72, *emphasis added*) also notes,

the dominant position that 'this history is not personal', negates the extent to which 'for the Indigenous testifiers, *the stories are deeply personal*'.

'Undoing' narrative coherence: Bigali's story

In contrast to the accounts required by the Commissions, Bigali's way of knowing and conveying her story is highly sensory and embodied, emphasizing emotional connection and relationality. We gathered the threads of Bigali's story from three main sources: the interview she did with Talila specifically for this project; a short-film called *Walking Tracks Back Home* and from the folders of documents that Bigali generously shared with us. Again, we reiterate that our aim is not to 're-tell' or re-frame her story, but to critically, reflexively 'undo' the imposition of coherence on Bigali's narrative. The impetus to tell the story has come from Bigali herself. Our challenge in this sense is to share the narrative without imposing our own coherence on it, in order to convey it faithfully and communicate it meaningfully; to this end, Talila has shared emerging insights and ideas with Bigali at various stages of the listening, talking, thinking and writing process. Emerging from this analytical process and reflective dialogue are three themes that we consider below, highlighting the importance of skin, smell and language to Bigali's ways of knowing and sharing her story beyond narrative coherence.

Before we explore these themes, the ethical consequences of this working relationship and process are important to reflect on. As Butler (2005: 51, *emphasis added*) puts it,

> So 'I' tell a story to 'you', and we might together consider the details of the story that I tell. But if I tell them to you in the context of a transference, *I am doing something with this telling, acting on you in some way*. And this telling is also doing something to me, acting on me, in ways that I may well not understand as I go.

When sharing Bigali's narrative in a number of different symposia and conferences, we have been struck by the way in which her narrative 'acts on' the audience in the way that Butler describes. We found that telling Bigali's story has opened a space for more Indigenous people to share their own stories. This has happened spontaneously with people choosing to share their family's story of 'being Stolen' at the end of our presentations. After one presentation, in a quiet space, one Indigenous elder shared his story a couple of weeks after hearing Bigali's. In the quiet of a campus office he recounted how his mother was born in the Cootamundra girl's home. His grandmother had been taken from her family and put into domestic service where she was raped. In contrast to these kinds of heart-rending and largely previously unshared accounts, non-Indigenous people have most often found it hard to speak; as a colleague, Jenny wrote: 'Words fail me - but I guess in some ways that's the point'. Echoing Swan (2017), Jenny hints here that she has been 'stopped in her tracks'; unable to articulate her thoughts or mobilize a desire to act. At various points of working together on this project, Bigali's story has had the same effect on us, and we hope that, as we consider the themes below, it will continue to do so on others.

Skin

The 'protectionist' processes discussed above were premised upon a chromatic categorization of Indigenous people to render them classifiable, and therefore containable, according to racialized norms of recognition, as the following extract indicates:

> I saw Egypt [Bigali's mother] on 13th November 1941 and her female child called Sudan [Bigali] at Mulga Downs Stations. The child is approximately five months old and appears to be a quadroon. However, sometime should lapse before this is decided with certainly as there is some tendency for half-caste natives to get darker coloured skin as they grow older. At the present I should say the child is quadroon (Handwritten note from Deputy Commissioner of Native Affairs, 19th December 1941).

In contrast to this reified, chromatic narrative of separation and control, in the film *Walking Tracks Back Home* Bigali and another woman (Sue Gordon), who was also taken to Sister Kate's children's home (see above), describe the importance of touch. They seem to do so in order to convey the importance, both at the time and retrospectively, of an embodied connection and collectivity otherwise denied them:

> It was really, really cold and we had to sleep on the verandah. That was one of the worst things, sleeping on the verandah, we used to jump into bed with one other but we always got into the trouble (Bigali, *Walking Tracks Back Home*).

> Most of the kids wet the bed. If you wet the bed you would strip off your clothes and jump into [another child's] bed hoping it was dry. So that bonds formed with kids. We would walk around arm in arm and it was holding onto something (Sue Gordon, *Walking Tracks Back Home*).

Ahmed (2000), drawing on Butler (1993) and Biddle (1997), describes the significance of this inter-corporeal sociality, this 'holding onto something' as Sue puts it, as an affectivity that somehow 'crosses a line', problematizing the difference that classification reifies, and the sense of shame it depends upon. As Biddle (1997: 227) has written, 'shame arises from a failure to be recognized', reifying 'being an object only for the other's jurisdiction'. In contrast, the affectivity of the skin that Ahmed (2000: 45-48) emphasizes 'opens out bodies to other bodies' in a way that is both ethically and politically important as a challenge to the bodily containment and separation that characterized life at Sister Kate's; again in Sue's terms, it involved a 'holding on'.

Smell

Ahmed (2000: 90) talks about dispossession as a process of leaving a space that one has been enveloped, inhabited by. Thought about in this way, migratory narratives can be understood as spatial reconfigurations of an embodied self, a

'transformation in the very skin through which body is embodied'. Bigali evokes this in her own recognition of the significance of smell and its connection to her sense of place and belonging:

> When I thirteen, I got sent out to a farm. That's what they did to all the kids. Send them out to farms, boys and girls. Cheap labour I got sent out to a place called Babakin. Which is quite a long way - It's up near Bruce Rock - and you worked on a farm. I chopped the wood, looked after a little baby, I cooked for the shearers, I did the cooking, I did a lot of things. That's where I got abused. I've never seen my money. They just bought me some clothes but I never ever saw any money. It was very lonely. I got along with them fine, but the farmer was abusing me. The old girl that was there - she was having another baby. Ah, that was a cold place that one. Ah, I hated the cold. But that is when I started to remember where I was born because the farmer took me out to where they sheered the sheep and tailed the lamb and they had a big fire. They threw all these tails in there and the smell - then I remembered I had eaten these things. The flames were just coming up, coming up and I could see black faces, I could hear noise and I could hear laughing and I went oh, I know where I've come from. I could smell it, you know (Bigali, interview with Talila).

Years later, Bigali went to live in Wittenoom (near Mulga Downs Station where she was born) to work. Bigali recalls walking along a creek bed pushing her daughter, Michelle, in a pram, and finding wild cucumber growing along the river:

> I opened it, and said "I've been here before", and that smell, I had flash backs of the station homestead and we were only 30 or 40 ks out of the homestead and I had never been there. Didn't know I was born there until I went back to Sister Kate's and insisted on knowing and they reluctantly told me, "you were born in Wittenoom" (Bigali, *Walking Tracks Back Home*).

Language

Bigali described in both the interview and the film how on returning to Wittenoom, where she was living, she sought out her family:

> I went up to this black fella[xviii] and unbeknown to me one was my cousin brother and one was my brother, Alec and brother Guinness. They were sitting on the ground and I went up to them and I said excuse me, do you know my mother? They said yes, I said, do you know who I am? They go yes. I said, where's my mother? She comes into town every Saturday to see you. Well why doesn't she talk to me? We've been told, we're not allowed to go anywhere near you by the boss. I got angry and it was the first time I got angry. I never used to swear before and I thought fuck, whose got the right to do this, who has the right to take away my baby, I would kill anyone who took my baby away, I would kill 'em.

Bigali talks very poignantly about being unable, on their first meeting as adult women, to speak to her mother in their shared language, reflecting on the different emotions this evoked in her mother and herself:

> When they came to visit me, Guinness [Bigali's brother] says this is your mum and this is your dad and they shook hands with me like I was a stranger. There's my skinny little mother, shaking hands, speaking [Yindjibarndi] language to me. I said I can't talk language mum. Well she screamed and wailed and carried on and then my sister Blanche, she's there, Alec's father, not my father, and brother, Guinness and somebody else, I can't remember who that was. They all come into the lounge room and I felt shame. I was so scared at what the neighbours would say and who they were and - mum was so distressed, she went into the kitchen, did all my dishes. I said mum you don't have to do my dishes, come in her with us. Poor old girl, poor old girl (crying) (Bigali, interview with Talila).

Biddle (1997) has argued that the kind of shame to which Bigali refers here is the result of a failure to be recognized, and to recognize others in return. Bigali's

sense of being a 'double stranger' is suggested when she recounts her inability to learn and speak her mother tongue language to Talila:

> For some reason I can't pick it up – I can understand quite a lot of the Yindjibarndi language but I can't speak it. I still feel divorced, from the rest of the [community], I don't feel like I'm really part of the community. I'm different and I know I'm different and I had to accept that a long time ago. It doesn't worry me, you know. Sometimes I used to say to my sister I should have stayed stolen then I wouldn't know you fellas.

Ahmed (2000: 128-9) describes her own experience of being called to give a 'double account' of herself, recalling how when she was fourteen years old two policemen stopped her and asked her if she was Aboriginal. She recounts replying, 'no', rather indignantly in response to this experience of being called to account. She explains how one of the policemen winked, and asked her if her skin tone was 'just a suntan', reflecting on how her denial of being Aboriginal and, as she puts it, 'failure to name or declare [her] race' implicated her in their structure of address, 'by rendering Aboriginality something to be disavowed'. Reflecting on this experience as an adult woman, Ahmed argues that the encounter opened up a space in which her subjectivity became 'unfixed by almost but not quite 'fitting' the visual prompt that triggers identity thinking'. Bigali seems to convey a similar sense of being 'undone' by this experience of being called to account and, like Ahmed, both regrets and resents the feelings of shame this engendered. Although she is now a proud respected elder within her own Indigenous community, Bigali continues to feel a sense of distance that is hard to convey, but which is poignantly suggested in her sometimes, thinking that she 'should have stayed stolen'.

Towards a politics of recognition

The Stolen Wages Commissions required Indigenous people to give an account of themselves. Drawing on Butler, and listening to Bigali's reflections discussed above, we see two ethical problems arising from this process, both connected to

what Butler (2005: 23) calls 'the social dimension of normativity that governs the scene of recognition'. First, the norms that govern the accounts claimants were compelled to give had the power to either bequeath or withhold recognition according to normative terms set by the State, and not the claimants themselves. Second, these normative frames of reference hold the potential to confer (or deny) the possibility of becoming a recognizable subject; in the case of the latter, the governmental process required assuming and attesting to a coherent 'victim' narrative. We address these two ethical concerns below and tentatively offer ways to move beyond this process of giving an account towards an ethics of recognition in feminist praxis.

In considering the first ethical concern we propose moving from a need for coherence to embracing the incomplete, the not quite there, the unfixable. As Bigali's story reminds us, our narratives are conditioned by the norms that establish the viability of the subject. Giving an account of oneself is not simply 'telling a story', but rather constitutes the subject as a narrative form in a particular way; the particularity of this 'depends upon the ability to relay a set of sequential events with plausible transitions but also draws upon narrative voice and authority' (Butler, 2005: 12). Hence, subjects come into being in the context of establishing a plausible, coherent narrative account. However, as Butler has argued elsewhere (see Butler, 2004), this coherence comes at the cost of complexity, as the account given is constrained and compelled by the norms governing subjective coherence, and the desire for recognition of oneself as socially viable. Ahmed (2000) develops a similar critique, arguing that coherent accounts impose (or in Bigali's case, replicate) a reified order through their interpretation of lived experience; in other words, they are an *organization* of lived complexity. This means that the accounts that we give of ourselves can never fully express or 'carry' as she puts it (Butler, 2005: 36) the fullness of lived experience. Requiring the Other to give a coherent account renders them 'non-recognizable' and then condemns them for this non-recognizability, as in the case of those claimants whose applications were rejected by the Commissions discussed above. Rather, they constitute a form of thinking that reifies that complexity in the service of narrative coherence. The paradox of this, the cruel

ontological trick it plays on us, is that producing coherence accentuates our 'undoing' (Butler, 2004) rather than alleviates it. As Butler (2005: 132) puts it, 'I become disposed in the telling'. This is because, as Bigali's story poignantly, painfully illustrates, coherent narratives can never do justice to the impossibility of communication that remains as a result of asymmetrical reciprocity.

In telling her story in a way that brings this dispossession, and its histories, scars and traumas to the fore, Bigali does two important – and generous - things. First, she reveals how the apparent coherence of the accounts required in governmental terms by the Commissions are just that – an imposition of coherence on an otherwise complex story. Biglai's story is not a coherent, linear narrative but rather a series of fragmented recollections, some of the most powerful of which have been underpinned by Bigali's aesthetic experiences and sensory understanding. Second, in doing so, the unraveling of this apparent coherence re-frames difference, in Ahmed's terms, as an outcome of historical positioning, re-siting difference as the outcome of an organizational process rather than reifying the illusion that difference is the outcome of ascribed characteristics attributable to those who are categorized and classified as different. As an important political act, this enables Bigali and so many others like her to reclaim her pain, and her right to grieve her own past, a right that has hitherto been denied her. As a reminder, in a way that powerfully reverses her sense of being called to account, Bigali asks: 'Whose pain is it? It is my pain, and you can't tell me what kinda pain I am allowed to have. It is not about protection anymore' (Bigali, *Walking Tracks Back Home*).

Here Bigali speaks directly to Ahmed's point (cited in Swan, 2017) that when white people 'feel bad' on behalf of Black and ethnic minority people, they reproduce a fantasy that they know how the Other feels. This appropriation both serves to contain the Other's pain, and to co-opt it; in taking on others' pain, white people can demonstrate their capacity for identification and solidarity such that empathic anti-racism becomes a kind of 'character reference' (Srivastava, 2005: 44, cited in Swan, 2017: 7). Bigali reclaims her pain as her own, stopping this appropriation in its tracks.

In this sense, and returning to Huggins, Bigali's story is profoundly autobiographical in so far as it ceases to be an account for or to others, told with the aim of persuasion; rather, it becomes poetic – fragmented, evocative, figurative, ethereal, and generously shared. Unlike the seemingly coherent, discrete narratives associated with accounts of difference that Ahmed (2000) reflects on in relation to equality and diversity for instance, Bigali's account is difficult to fully or even partially 'grasp', and therefore appropriate or co-opt. Travis (2010: 233), writing about the ethics and narrative distancing in Toni Morrison's novel, *Beloved,* makes a related point when she observes, 'woven through the narrative of *Beloved* is the motif of the fragment, a sign of the ineffable and the disruption of epistemological certainty'. Both Morrison and Bigali's stories told on their own terms do not offer narrative coherence and, as a result, 'challenge us to refrain from reaching after ethical closure' (Travis 2000: 233). Bigali reminds us of the need to be wary of our engrained disembodied academic writing practices that lead us to want to create coherence and clarity, to sound authoritative about the Other. Just as we should listen without expecting to be taught, we need to craft embodied ways of writing that do not seek to order, label or conclude. Rather, our writing as feminists needs to involve stitching, weaving of complex, shifting realities (Sommerville, 1991). Such writing might free us to write without needing to make a point and without concern to make dents or have impact (Cixous, 2004; cited in Pullen and Rhodes, 2015, 87). Boncori and Smith's (2019) reflexive narrative on miscarriage, and Katlia's (2019) auto-ethnographic account of becoming a mother are recent powerful examples of this kind of immersive, embodied writing that retains something of the 'raw', dirtiness of the text and refutes the impulse to clean it up (Pullen and Rhodes, 2008).

In relation to our second ethical concern noted above, the 'audience' and the need to persuade, we ask: How are we to respond to stories such as Bigali's? Butler (2005: 21) posits, 'an account of oneself is always given to another, whether conjured or existing and this other establishes the scene of address as a more primary ethical relation than a reflexive effort to give an account of

oneself'. For Butler (2015: 202) telling stories is a political act that can simply take the form of 'listening to, and recording, the details of the story that the other might tell'; this 'can come as the most extraordinary form of recognition'. What does Butler mean when she states that listening is a political act, embedded within a politics of recognition? Listening can perhaps enable us to counter the 'stranger fetish' (Ahmed, 2000) that Indigenous feminist and anti-racist writers have cautioned against, moving from a mediated knowing of the Other to an immersive, proximal way of relating that can open up the possibility of engaging in the kind of mutual recognition necessary to overcome a hierarchical organization of difference that calls the Other to account. It can also steer us away from the impulse to act, to 'do good', for the reasons discussed above. Yet Swan (2017: 8), drawing on Dreher (2009), warns that this kind of listening is not easy, it requires the listener to 'hear how Others experience her whiteness and her feminism' based on the realization that 'good intentions count for very little'. We also need to recognize that 'whiteness mediates listening bodies, ears and spaces' and that 'our' history and social relations will affect our ability to listen (Swan 2017: 8). Swan (2017: 8) draws on Ahmed to explain that the result of this is that we will already think we recognize who or what the Other is before we meet them and as a result will have prejudged them, rather than apprehending them in a particular encounter. To encounter the Other we need to 'develop knowledge of what is not fully present', through what Ahmed calls an 'ethical communication' that facilitates listening as the basis of political action and the redistribution of material resources. This entails listening without expecting to comprehend or fully 'grasp' the Other, accepting incompleteness in the Other's narrative and being willing to collectively, reflexively interrupt our own epistemological project to reflect on the (often inadvertent) impulse to act or to contain or 'stranger' the Other (Ahmed, 2000; Swan, 2017; Travis, 2010). It problematizes the accounts that Others feel compelled to give of themselves, framing these as instances of reificatory identity-thinking through which one-dimensional linear narratives are required to be constructed and evidenced. Through these narratives, as Swan (2017: 8-9) has argued,

> We transform the Other into a pre-determined, prejudiced, universalized figure rather than apprehending the particularity of our encounters with them.

This kind of recognition-based ethical praxis of listening would require us to question 'the modes by which we are addressed and asked to take up the question of who we are' (Butler, 2005: 30). Recognition in this sense is a simultaneously ethical, epistemological and political project. For Butler, it is the act of showing and telling, suffering and acting, within a 'crucible of social relations' that reveals how being called to account impinges upon, conditions and limits our intelligibility. Yet when we disclose ourselves, we are able to act on their schemes, 'undoing' them rather than being undone by them (Butler, 2004), challenging the norms of intelligibility that govern who is allowed to be a speaking being, 'subjecting them to rupture or revision, consolidating their norms, or contesting their hegemony' (Butler, 2005: 132). Drawing on Ahmed and Swan, a recognition-based praxis of generous encounters understood in this way is less about speaking or acting, than it is about listening and being 'stopped in our tracks' by what cannot be articulated through coherent, narrative linearity or documentary evidence. For researchers, it involves adopting a posture of vulnerability that requires us to be receptive to the limits of knowing and a willingness to stay with not knowing what to do or say (Page, 2017). As Swan (2017: 12, *emphasis added*) puts it, staying with not knowing involves listening

> In ways that are elusive and not easily reduced to prescription … encouraging us to challenge our ignorance-making practices of Othering by listening to the unknowable and ungraspable. *This means not fixing, pinning down or knowing the Other.*

What it might mean, however, is raising critical awareness of how organizational processes and practices do so, accentuating Others' pain whilst purporting to do precisely the opposite. In thinking about this, we have considered here how the sharing of Indigenous people's narratives might be opened up through

recognition-based politics of listening. In this vein, we do not offer a conclusion or seek to make an 'argument' as such, but rather 'another tentative beginning' (Pullen, 2006: 295) as this is articulated in Bigali's own words in the film, *Walking Tracks Back Home*. Here, Bigali reflects on how she has reconciled the past and states with passion in her voice how she was determined to:

> Make sure my children knew who their family were, where they'd come from. I was gunna let them grow up and be proud of who they are. Be Aboriginal: be proud.

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[i] Yindjibarndi people is the name of a distinct society of people who traditionally lived in the area near the town of Roebourne in the Pilbara region of Western Australia. The country of the Yindjibarndi people has been occupied for more than 40,000 years. The area is bordered by Kariyarra and Nyamal land to the north, Ngarluma to the west, Martuthunira and Kurrama land to the south and Nyiyaparli and Palyku land to the east. It is around the area of the Fortescue River. (http://www.wangkamaya.org.au/pilbara-languages/yindjibarndi-overview, accessed 2 March, 2019). Over 300 Indigenous Australian language groups and dialects covered the continent at the time of European settlement in 1788 (around 66 in Western Australia). Today only around 120 of those languages are still spoken and many are at risk of being lost as Elders pass away. Yindjibarndi is the strongest survivor of the many languages which came together in

Roebourne, and is also spoken in Onslow and other Pilbara towns.(https://www.waitoc.com/culture-experiences/aboriginal-culture/aboriginal-languages, accessed on 2 March 2019).

[ii] We consciously begin with Bigali's story rather than a more conventional 'positioning' or siting of her narrative in academic concepts and concerns. Reviewers encouraged us to share the story and Bigali's contribution to the paper in this way in order to enact its ethics and politics.

[iii] Important parallels can be noted here with feminist critiques of the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission – see Malkki (1997), Ross (2003) and Godobo-Madikizela et al (2005). As Ross (2003) emphasizes 'having voice' is not the same as 'being heard'. See also Coulthard's critique of the 'discourse of healing' in Canada in the 1990s which, he argues, positioned indigenous people as needing to account for the harm done to them rather than interrogating a system of acculturative violence (Coulthard, 2014).

[iv] Here and throughout the paper, we are very conscious of the challenges posed by bringing white western theory to bear on indigenous life stories; even the term to 'bear' suggests adding weight – an unreflexive epistemological pitfall we risk falling into – and connotes a 'weighing down', further containing rather than opening up. We hope that our focus on is engaging and sharing rather than further subjecting/subjectfying, but inevitably the process of producing an academic paper carries this risk. We cannot simply 'resolve' this tension, and trying to do so would be counter to the aims of the paper and wider project; rather our hope is to highlight what listening to narratives such as Bigali's might enact politically and ethically by refraining 'us' (authors, readers) from engaging in unreflexive action.

[v] The film *Walking Tracks Back Home* is part of a bigger project, *Indigenous Community Stories,* that has recorded 100 Indigenous Elders from across Western Australia telling the stories of their accomplishments and reflecting on their lives and culture. The project aims to record these oral histories for the nation to share. https://www.screenwest.com.au/news-events/2017/08/100th-indigenous-community-story-filmed-south-west/ accessed 2 March, 2019. This paper is one among several iterations (undoings) of a rich and complex narrative explored through varying media and involving multiple voices and reflections.

[vi] We invited Bigali numerous times to co-author the paper with us, but she declined, preferring instead to work with us collaboratively through Talila. Throughout the process, we were conscious that the social fields in which Indigenous women especially as situated are complex, and shaped by multi-layered historical processes and power relations.

[vii] Throughout the paper we use the term 'praxis' politically and epistemologically; that is, to refer to a dialectical relationship between theory and practice, thoughts and action, and as a way of knowing that transforms what is known through acting upon it.

[viii] Here and throughout the paper, we follow Swan's (2017) use of collective pronouns ('we', 'our' etc.) to refer to ourselves as the authors of this paper, and as the tellers of this story, in this particular form. We use these terms to speak to women not in order to re-centre whiteness but to 'call it to account' in Butler's (2005) terms.

[ix] In this aspect of their work, feminist writers such as Butler and Ahmed draw from phenomenological thinkers such as Merleau Ponty and Levinas in emphasizing the importance of touch as more than a physical form of interaction, but rather as an inter-corporeal, inter-subjective one.

[x] More than three decades ago, the then Prime Minister of Australia, Paul Keating, acknowledged the failure of non-Indigenous Australians to engage in this form of recognition in the much lauded Redfern Speech (1992): 'It begins, I think, with that act of recognition. Recognition that it was we who did the dispossessing. We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practiced discrimination and exclusion. It was our ignorance and our prejudice. And our failure to imagine these things could be done to us. With some noble exceptions, we failed to make the most basic human response and enter into their hearts and minds'.

[xi] Sister Kate's was named after Katherine Mary Clutterbuck (1860-1946), an Anglican nun, who ran orphanages for Aboriginal children in Western Australia. The Home was funded by the Aborigines Department to house 'fair skinned' Aboriginal children.

[xiii] A fascinating account of this complexity can be found in Tauri Simone's (2016) thesis, *Aboriginal Stockwomen: Their legacy in the Australian Pastoral Industry*, which documents not only the paucity of accounts of Indigenous women's contribution to Australian industry, but also the importance of developing culturally and methodologically appropriate ways of addressing that gap. Of particular note is that, whilst undertaking her research, Simone found that (because women were not allowed to be employed as stockworkers), their employment was often not recorded in government documents; they were literally written out. It was only through reading older drovers' diaries and notes that she was able to trace stockwomen's histories. In the process, she came across a number of cases of women, including a renowned horsewoman called Maudie Moore, who ran the Durham River Station in the Kimberely, who worked as Head Stockwomen. These women would have had responsibility for organizing the station and managing a large team of workers and animals, yet their stories have been excluded from dominant accounts, the complexity of their lives and their achievements erased. As Simone has put it, 'Aboriginal women are under-recognized and under-acknowledged for the participation that they've had … these were hard, strong women' (Morris, 2018).

[xiv] Bigali was fortunate in that her case was well documented, and unlike many others' experiences, her documentation remained largely un-redacted.

[xv] In Queensland in 2007 $19.5 million was paid to 5,553 'eligible' claimants. 4,211 people received $4,000 and 1,342 received $2,000.

[xvi] The Aborigines Protection Act 1886 (Act no. 1886 (50 Vict. No.25)) was passed on 2nd September 1886 and came into effect on 1st January 1887. This Act established the Aborigines Protection Board and enabled the appointment of Protectors of Aborigines. It gave wide powers to the Board and Protectors to involve themselves in the lives of all Aboriginal people in Western Australia, including the care, custody and education of Aboriginal children. The Act also empowered Magistrates to apprentice Aboriginal children to work until the age of 21 years. Parts of this Act were repealed in stages, from 1889.

[xvii] Blackmore (2011) describes the routine positioning of Indigenous mothers as 'unfit' within the normative regimes of racist governmentality that supported these practices.

[xviii] The Aboriginal English words 'blackfella' and 'whitefella' are used by Indigenous Australian people when referring to Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians (Appropriate terminology Indigenous Australians, www.flinders.edu.au/CDIP, accessed 2 March, 2019.