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"No longer ever hungry but forever hungry": Food and Aboriginal Realism in *The Yield*

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Abstract

Apocalypticism has become the new normal of Australian life with climate change accelerated disasters like bushfires and droughts rampant across the country. These disasters inevitably draw attention to the inextricability of Australia's island-continent space, unique ecology and the postapocalyptic scenario of "settler realism". *The Yield* by Wiradjuri writer Tara June Winch, winner of Miles Franklin Award 2020, features a perilous occasion where the female protagonist August endeavors to save the Gondiwindi people from extinction against land dispossession at the hands of a mining company. Drawn on the interrelation of narrative and the environment informed by the scholarship of ecological narratology, this material-ecocritical reading treats food as a major narrative agency in *The Yield*, including the modes of food production, distribution, and consumption circulating among manifold entities and various forms of eating disorders of human and non-human bodies across time and space. This paper takes *The Yield* as an example to test the Indigenous novels' capability to display the postapocalyptic present where quotidian crises inhabit the heart of Aboriginal realism and to investigate how the conflation of apocalyptic realism and Aboriginal realism contributes to the ambivalent but no less affirmative rhetoric of crisis in the Anthropocene.

Keywords

Indigenous Australian literature, Aboriginal realism, material ecocriticism, food and eating disorders, risk and crisis

While reviewing the 2020 Miles Franklin Award winner *The Yield* by Wiradjuri writer Tara June Winch, Ellen van Neerven compares it to two other acclaimed Indigenous novels—Kim Scott's *Taboo* (2017) and Melissa Lucashenko's *Too Much Lip* (2018) and categorizes them as exemplary works of "Aboriginal realism", which sounds rather contentious as the Indigenous writing rarely sits comfortably with "realism" for its complicity with settler colonialism and capitalism in Australia's context. To understand what "Aboriginal realism" means, the opinion of Melissa Lucashenko on her creation of *Too Much Lip* may serve as a good point of

departure: "the story has shifted a bit in the last 10 or 15 years from 'The Blackfellas don't exist any more; they've all died out,' to 'Look at the terrible, dysfunctional, evil Blackfellas'" (Maxwell 9).

For Lucashenko, this transformation from the emphasis on the mummified or dead Aboriginal culture in an elegiac tone to a realist portrayal of their living reality is critically significant to "take that narrative back into black hands" (Maxwell 9). By the same token, drawn on the economic and political legacy of a highly respected Aboriginal statesman Tracker Tilmouth who proposed a human-based strategy of building an economic fortress for the Aboriginals to survive in modern-day Australia, Alexis Wright warns that there is a danger in either the environmental policies or cultural policies of Australia to regard the Aboriginal community as a museumsque society for the politicians' and the environmentalists' valorisation of the pristine wilderness without any human intervention and of the "pure" Aboriginals in their perpetual poverty, as they assume that the Aboriginals can survive solely through their spirituality (22). Lucashenko and Wright's call for more attention on the living reality of Aboriginal people demonstrates the hypocrisy of the current policies of environmental and cultural preservation, which is a prime example of Lauren Berlant's "cruel optimism" [1] that to make the audience feel good is simply taken as the triumph of justice. More importantly, it exposes the inadequacy of the Indigenous writing to attend to the specificities of the Indigenous life and its failure to provide a genuine critical agency for bringing out a change in either the politics or the public cognition.

Nevertheless, we may see why realism is not an apt literary form for writing the reality of the Indigenous people. Realism appears to be anachronistic today for the Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers alike as it has been marginalized since the advent of (post)modern aesthetic much celebrated by postcolonial literary studies. Australia has a long realist tradition which can be traced back to the anti-colonial bush writing in the legendary 1890s and the strong left-wing social realism from the 1940s to the 1960s for promoting social justice in the urban area for women and the working class. However, the radicalism embodied in realism is limited to the non-Indigenous society and it is the postcolonial and the multicultural turn in the 1970s that brought forth a historical occasion to re-examine the realist tradition and since then Aboriginal writing began to play a role in the landscape of Australian literature. The decline of realism is a welcome change in Indigenous literary practices for its complicity with nationalism, sexism, racism, and androcentrism. Considering

the fact that the Indigenous writers the Indigenous writers when multiculturalism policy was taken into effect at the zenith of postmodern aesthetics, Indigenous writers showed a propensity to employ life writing and poetry to establish a counter-text of the literary canon set up by the white majority due to these forms' identification with Indigenous oral tradition, which equally works to reveal the truth of the past and destabilize the interpretations of Aboriginal history dominated by the settler colonizers. Besides, for its resonance with the cultural practice of "Dreaming" and "Time Traveling", Australian Indigenous writing also employs the literary techniques in postmodernism such as polyphony and pastiche to accommodate a variety of textual materials such as myths and songs. Magical realism is exemplary in this innovation as can be found in Alexis Wright and Kim Scott. In any case, realist fiction has rarely enjoyed priority in Aboriginal Australian writing.

Then what makes the reading of "Aboriginal realism" (hereafter AR) possible? The key question here is to what extent Aboriginal realism is identified with the generic conventions of literary realism and to what extent it is not. First of all, the understanding of literary realism is unduly narrow nowadays for it is never beyond a Eurocentric-metropolitan provenance. The configuration of Aboriginal realism has to draw on the distinctive socio-political formation of Australia as a settler-colonial society with particular attention to the specificities of the Aboriginal community. Yet it also entails methodological and critical insights from the conventional theories of realism. In his theorization of "settler realism", Hamish Dalley identifies that the relationship between the settlers and the colonized in the settler frontier is nuanced compared with that between bourgeois and the proletariat in Georg Lukács' theory of critical realism. Different from the progressive view of history achieved through the synthesis of opposites at the end of the novel, "settler realism" follows a genocidal "logic of elimination" and "zero-sum" so that there is no synthesis or higher unity to be fulfilled. Thus, "settler realism" is at odds with Lukács' concepts of metropolitan realism as it is "nonprogressive, materialist, and committed to the continuity of past and present" (477) and it is "not an early stage of capitalist modernity but an ongoing structural relationship" (467). Dalley's position of "settler realism" is useful for charting a very different set of temporal and spatial axis fundamental to AR: the non-progressive view of history means that Australian society has never been post-colonial for the Indigenous, and the logic of zero-sum entrenched in settler colonialism promises no utopia for a collective respecting difference. It means a constant derangement of timeline and location and the ongoing oppression and frustration will remain in the narrative to dismantle the possibility of settling

the conflicts and enabling a sense of totality.

Moreover, as Indigenous and non-Indigenous writing is increasingly mediated by apocalypticism in the Anthropocene, the distinctive time consciousness and the absence of synthesis registered in "settler realism" resonate with another conception of "Apocalyptic realism" by Rebecca S. Oh in which she sees the cognitive gap on apocalypse between two worlds: one consists of "the global elites and powerholders" who regard Apocalypse as what will happen in the future and thus own a speculative vision of it, and the other consists of the global South subalterns, namely the exploited subjects of racism, colonialism, capitalism, and neoliberalism whose Apocalyptic vision lies in the past and therefore can only be consigned to "futurelessness" or serve the role as "sacrificial subjects" in "Western capitalist futures", thereby the argument that for the global subalterns "apocalypse does not belong within the genre of future speculation but becomes part of realism" (3). Once again, hope or agency is not to be found by the sacrificed as they share a different "future" to the privileged. Whereas the distinctive view of history and future renders a critical edge for the Aboriginals as each disastrous event is a mimesis of the historical apocalypse in the past—the chaos brought by climate change is as much as that by the violent colonial intrusion two centuries earlier, and it discloses the particularity and unevenness of apocalyptic experience which will not be confined to a referential historical experience but resurface in each catastrophic circumstance if the fundamental structures of capitalism and colonialism remain intact. Thus, what seems unthinkable and improbable in the final destruction turns to be intelligible from the perspective of Aboriginal realism and this is also a recognition of the representability of language that has been severely dismissed by the deconstructionists.

It is the braiding of the past, the present, and the future in Aboriginal realism that aligns it with Rob Nixon's idea of slow violence: "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (2). The task of Aboriginal realism is to engage the representation of the slow violence in the narrative and disclose how it plays out across temporal and spatial scales, especially in a contingency of an event where the assemblage of all kinds of relations is summoned. To this end, this reading has to resort to the theory of material ecocriticism in conversation with "ecological narratology", which has not yet been studied exhaustively, but already had its framework set up by the scholars working in the field of narratology and ecocriticism as can be found in David Herman's

Narratology beyond the Human (2018) and *Environment and Narrative* (2020), edited by Erin James and Eric Morel, with the latter underscoring the new directions of econarratology: it firstly concerns the representation of the non-human narrators and secondly the narrative ethics, i.e., shaping the environmental ethics of the reader; and thirdly the turn to cognitive science entailing keen perception of spatial and temporal categories as well as mental, affective and bodily interaction with the environment in the narrative, with a particular attention on the "non-Anglophone, indigenous, and postcolonial texts", oral history, and the "transmedial econarratological scholarship" marked by a profusion to non-literary narratives (6-15). As econarratology attests, the understanding of fundamental narrative categories such as narrator, character, and storyworld is undergoing dramatic change, which can be captured in the reading and criticism of not only the emerging new genres of fiction such as climate change fiction but also the literary canon. Taking climate fiction as an example, Axel Goodbody pinpoints the following four aspects for studying ecological narratives: "(a) spatial scale, (b) time scale, (c) agency, and (d) narrative closure" (309). Following this trajectory, to define 'Aboriginal realism' is deeply invested in unveiling how the slowly unfolding catastrophic trope of the Indigenous life is mediated through the entanglement of a variety of human and non-human agencies and its capacity to create a porous chronotype in the narrative.

Through the reading of Tara June Winch's The Yield, I propose that the non-human agency of food can serve as such a site where the temporal and spatial scales can be vastly expanded as well as varied to accommodate the ongoing sense of apocalypse and the unfolding of slow violence. Though in this story the immediate crisis is the land dispossession by the mining company, the focus of this article is on the underlying crisis of food insecurity and eating disorder, which works as a thread running through the threefold narratives in the story and interplays with other human and non-human agencies to conflate Aboriginal realism with ecological realism. The three narrative dimensions deploy different forms of writing, including grandpa Albert's dictionary of Gondiwindi vocabulary which can also be seen as an encyclopedia for indigenous culture and a book of family history, and clergyman Reverend Greenleaf's journals on his encounter with the indigenous people when he opened the Prosperous Mission for the native inhabitants back in 1880, and lastly the female protagonist August Gondiwindi's narrative of the present protest against the land dispossession.

Agency: The Uncanny "Play-Food Trickery"

We do not need food theorists to tell us how profoundly the mechanism of food production, marketing, and consumption has affected our way of thinking, perceiving, and behaving in daily life. Literary food studies have gained wide currency recently out of the inherent intimacy with a variety of political, racial, and gendered fabrics. As Gitanjali G. Shahani notes in *Food and Literature*, food is "a key ingredient in literature" and it plays the role "as subject, as form, as landscape, as polemic, as political movement, as aesthetic statement ..." (2), which is especially true with the increasing concern on the Apocalyptic future when food is the last resort of survival and thus a crucial focal point in the emerging fields of posthumanism, eco/environmental studies and new materialism. For instance, Timothy Morton asks this question in *Cultures of Tastes, Theories of Appetite*: "Is food a sign or a thing?" (265). For Morton, food consumption is one kind of cultural practice, which assembles the material and the transcendental together: "eating becomes praxis, a term suggesting the fusion of the theoretical with the practical" (270). This liminality found in food is especially true in the case of The Yield, where every reference to food triggers a linkage to abundant cultural and historical connotations. From the very beginning, the geo-political layout of the Massacre Plains Town where the story sets in is strongly enacted through a distinctive foodscape:

> Murrumby River divided the people in town. Epithets were procured off supermarket shelves: Chocolate Milk were the old Mission Gondiwindi north of town, south of town in Vegemite Valley was where the blackfellas in the government housing lived, pegged after the salty sandwich spread, dark as molasses. In the centre of town was where the middle class lived, according to a census like theirs, and were dubbed the Minties; named after the white, sticky candy sold in individual paper wrappers. (Winch 18)

Different sites in the town are named after the representative food attributes of the inhabitants, thereby constructing a social space and narrative space in terms of the ethnic and social hierarchy. Some of the food-named places with blatantly racist implication, according to Winch, are real names that can be found on the map of Australia. Consequently, specific food in the local life serves as a material substance, a framework of the space, and a narrator of history, which is a compelling account of how a non-human agency is composed

of the entangled, hybrid, and complex relations in both the geographical reality and the cultural discourse.

The thinking of food in the light of material ecocriticism rejects Cartesian dualism and it evokes an ontological confusion in the "storyworld". The discursive quality of food as a narrative agency attunes to Jon Hegglund's term "weird narratology", which is caught in a dialectic of "natural narratology" underscoring the mimetic depiction of human experientiality and Jan Alber's notion of "unnatural narratology" stressing the estranging aspects of nonhuman narration. In other words, the reading of the nonhuman narration in the Anthropocene entails a reconsideration of unfamiliarity and uncanny in the text, of what is possible but inconceivable, and of what is "unnatural" but "natural". After the mournful sermon on the Country Albert preaches in the first chapter, Winch introduces the narration of August Gondiwindi who has been working as a dishwasher in England for a decade since she left Australia, with three key episodes, namely the news of grandpa Albert's death, the headline of black rhino's extinction, and finally August's reminiscence of humiliating food experience when she lives in poverty with her parents, through which all the apocalyptic, postcolonial-Aboriginal and environmental threads are braided together. August's memory about food proceeds to a full staging of uncanny food: "there just being imitation play-food, a little plastic lamb chop, plastic-cast apple with no stem" (Winch 15). With laughter and tears, August calls the play-food in the lunchbox the humor of her mother. It is already an eccentric occasion that entails further contemplation on the ontological status of food. The play-food here is misplaced—a simulation of genuine food designed for game-playing is placed in a context of real dining. The cynicism lies in the valorization of the symbolic meaning of toy food, pretending that the human body's need for substance is minor and thus rendering the act of food consumption absurd. For one thing, the food illusion displayed by the play-food conjures up the obfuscating effect commonly used in the political discourse of Australia. Since the 1970s, the transition from the White Australia policy to Multiculturalism is accompanied by "the new racism" underpinning the 'cultural wars' according to "the principle of cultural incommensurability stands in for that of biological inviolability (Huggan 16). As such, racism disguises itself as new racism, generating illusions for temporary satisfaction whereas downplaying the real conflicts in social reality.

For another, the Australian government's health promotion project for Aboriginal inhabitants further illustrates the "play-food trickery". It is known that the health condition of the

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders are far below the average level of their white counterparts. The gap has its historical reason: the Aborigines have undergone a transition in their dietary model from "a traditional, varied and nutrient dense diet, high in fibre and low in fat and refined carbohydrates, to an energy-dense westernised diet, high in fat and refined sugars" (Whalan et al. 576), which has proved detrimental to the health of the Indigenous people as it increases the risk of diabetes, cardiovascular disease, and cancer, let alone obesity and malnutrition commonly found in the Aborigines and Torres Strait islanders, especially for children and young adolescents. In 2007, the Council of Australian Governments (COAG) launched *The Close the Gap Campaign* for health quality between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians within a generation (by 2031). However, a December 2017 Australian Institute of Health and Welfare report reveals that the mortality and life expectancy gaps are widening due to accelerating non-Indigenous population gains in these areas and the 10-year-review of this Campaign released in 2018 is far from being satisfying for its poor governance and changing political settings and its failure to supply sufficient health goods and services, improve infrastructure (an adequate and capable health workforce, housing, food, water) and increase the income and to promote education for the Indigenous (Holland 26-27). The inadequacy reflected in the health policies testifies August's observation of the entrenched food hierarchy: "there is something to food, August thought, no longer ever hungry but forever hungry – it made them different or the same" (Winch 191). The land rights, health promotion projects, and policies on education, economy, and environment are like a placebo, serving to make the government and politicians look good. "It was like an illusion", back to Alexis Wright's quotation of Tracker, "he was referring to how there seemed to be a total concentration on keeping the purity of Aboriginal culture by starvation—a blindness to reality …" (22). By creating an uncanny scenario of food, the "play-food trickery" becomes a lens of slow violence ironically reflecting the striking contrast between the impoverished reality of the Aboriginal communities and the self-satisfying political practices. The juxtaposition of the "play-food trickery" with the imagery of death and extinction reverberates with the lack of futurity of Indigenous people apocalyptic realism points out earlier and it represses the affirmative impulses of the Indigenous people.

Toxic Food Circulation across Different Timescales

The irony embedded in the "play-food trickery" alone has disclosed the deceiving contours of the cultural policy, the public health policy, and the food distribution in Australia. And the

narrative agency of food is amplified if putting it in a broader timespan covering the threefold narratives and even beyond it to a geological dimension. The threat of toxic chemicals is inscribed in each stage of ecocriticism from the landmark work *The Silent Spring* to today's wars on food contamination by herbicides or nuclear radiation. Thus, the food agency of poison and toxicity plaguing Native Australian communities is crucial to unveil the hidden food violence in history and reality imposed on humans and non-humans alike. In August's narrative, her tragedy is not so much about the shortage of food or eating disorders as the arrest of her parents for private cultivation of marijuana in their house. The separation from her parents is a traumatic event for August, but this punishment might be understood by some readers as justified considering Marijuana's status as food taboo endangering the security of the modern state. However, along with the shifting points of view of narration, the story comes to question justice codified by the prevailing rhetoric of food taboos. The poisonous food is taken as a tool of genocide back to the colonial time as identified in Albert Gondiwindi's monologue:

> They gave us blankets, Missy – they took the land that way too – with smallpox-infected blankets! They put arsenic in the flour, Missy! They divided us and ruled! They thought that us 'Stone Age' people needed to be exterminated come hell or high water. (Winch 200)

Albert's quotation questions the rule of social Darwinism used as a pretext for the settlers' killing of the Indigenous people and other creatures which are othered as vermin inflicting the grazing pasture, which is documented in Albert's dictionary as well. The terror of genocide mobilized through the abuse of toxins works in complicity with other forms of violence in favor of settler colonialism's inner logic of zero-sum. As recorded in the narrative of Reverend Greenleaf, any settlers who murder the Aborigines, usually the enforced labor of the sheep station, would not be brought to justice, whereas any Aborigines who offend the settlers must undergo inhuman punishment such as flogging or hanging. With this historical background in mind, justice becomes a poisonous word for the Indigenous. And this toxic food circulation inspires the readers to reconsider the idea of toxicity and crime in a vicious cycle of poverty, criminality, and incarceration in Aboriginal circumstances. As Albert utters: "both Jolene (August's mother) and Joey (August's cousin) made mistakes but the punishments outweighed the crimes. As much as the government wants to convince the

the population otherwise, it is an old thinking–locking us up as a solution" (Winch 154). Poisoning and being poisoned, the Indigenous and the non-Indigenous are all modifying each other's subjectivity and autonomy empowered by food. The settler colonialism's genocidal biopolitics towards the Aboriginal lives exposes itself and becomes so problematic and discursive in more than two centuries from 1788 to today. The circulation of the poisonous food and its political underpinnings across different timescales serve as a compelling account of the crisis of extinction formerly informed by the "play-food trickery". When time destabilizes justice and the risk of extinction can be perceived everywhere, AR in many ways approximates to "probation" used by August sarcastically to describe the fate of Gondiwindi people (211).

Nevertheless, drawn on the ambivalence in Mel Y. Chen's account of "toxic animacy" where a toxic substance can be animated to formulate a racialized scenario in the media representation as well as to inform different kinds of intimacy beyond the dichotomy of life-death and humans-nonhumans, the toxic animacy in food circulating in the energy chain from the colonial past to the present, develops an odd intimacy with the Aboriginal people. For one thing, the movement of toxic animacy plagues not only the physical bodies of generations of the Aboriginal people but also the local environment and ecology, thereby embodying a scenario of slow violence; for another, this toxic animacy has already become an integral part of collectives of humans and nonhumans from which certain autonomy and activism against the continuation of slow violence can be generated. To this end, we need to pay special attention to how August adapts and transforms her anorexic body as well as the morbid country.

Closing with the "Yield": Rebellion, Resignation, and Regeneration Town

The long-term socio-historical crisis of food insecurity and violence is reified at the confrontation between the human and the non-human bodies' anorexia with the capitalist scheme of gluttony embodied as the mining project. August resists food consumption when she finds herself at her grandparents' house after a decade's escape which is replete with traumatic memories: the arrest of her parents, the death of grandfather, the missing of her dear sister Jedda informingthe eternal sense of loss as she was thrown into the water by Uncle Jimmy after one of his sexual assaults and never got found after his death. As tragedies mount on her, August's anorexia is aggravated, and considering the kinship between food

and affects, this can be interpreted as a rejective gesture of "eating" her repressive feelings, in other words, a symptom of deep melancholia. Moreover, it turns out that melancholic anorexia is a contagion that can spread from the human entity to the environment:

> August … walked to the edge of the riverbank where the water level dropped down, way down to bare sand at the bottom. The roots of white-box gums dangled out to nothing through the sides of the bank. They'd started to stop growing leaves when August had left this place and no koalas would climb the trunks for food anymore. There wouldn't be anywhere for the platypus to swim. (Winch 105)

The drought-afflicted scene of the vernacular environment is resonating with the exhaustive, half-starved human body and this landscape in malnutrition illustrates how the amalgamation of anthropogenetic climate-change and socio-environmental injustice prevent the oppressed from accessing food, vitality, and hope. This endemic associates August's famished body with the lifeless country and she comes to realize what her grandmother Elsie said: "'please don't be a victim, Augie. It's an easy road, that one. I never let Alb walk it. The land, the earth is the victim now – that needs an army, I reckon. She's the one in real trouble.'" (76) and "food isn't just the things you can eat. That's all" (77). In this regard, the Aboriginal agency of liberation from victimhood and melancholy should be attributed to food.

By contrast, the food consumption pattern that the mining company represents is a form of gluttonous depletion of natural resources. The capitalist overconsumption penetrates every aspect of August's life even during her self-exile to England when she worked as a dishwasher coping with the food waste every day in the restaurant. Between the two poles of anorexia and gluttony, the narratives of Reverend Greenleaf and Albert Gondiwindi offer an alternative philosophy of food consumption in Indigenous culture. Reverend Greenleaf recounts how the Aborigines help the Mission survive the famine in the wake of the severe drought when the ration supplied by the council fails to reach him. It is the Aboriginal way of fishing, foraging tubers, and native potatoes, and storing food that saves Greenleaf, and meanwhile opens an access to the spiritual life of the Indigenous that alters his understanding of Christianity. Greenleaf realizes: "'why am I only hidden with Christ in Paul? Why can they not be hidden in God with Baymee (the spirit ruling Gondiwindi)?' The answer I decided upon was that I should be flexible with words" (Winch 120). A covert transition

from Christianity to animism is observed in Greenleaf, and the fact that Greenleaf replaces "Lord" in his sermon with "Him" to represent either Baymee or the Lord attests to his epiphany on comprehending the spiritual agency of all material beings on the earth. However, the resurgent animism here is not so much the primitive and religious form of understanding the world as the renewed animism in Graham Harvey's account underscoring the nonhuman sentience and the relationality among the human and the non-human beings. More specifically, it can be interpreted as "animist materialism", which is "an animistic mode of thought … embedded within the processes of material, economic activities and then reproduces itself within the sphere of culture and social life" (Garuba 269). Like what Reverend Greenleaf notes in his journal: "he told me that Biyaami is the creator, but we don't worship Him or His son. We worship the things He made, the earth" (Winch 416), Garuba's animist materialism borrows heavily from Raymond Williams' cultural materialism and it registers the intimacy between the abstract socio-political discourse and its material underpinnings, which also echoes the emphasis on the self-articulating capacity of non-human beings in material ecocriticism. It dislodges the Western dichotomy by inscribing the moments of re-enchantment within the interstices of the modern and the rational in the hopes of mitigating the anxiety of food crisis and other circumstances of precariousness.

Besides, the agricultural practices recorded in Albert Gondiwindi's dictionary further elaborates on the Indigenous epistemology of food production and consumption, as suggested in the contradictory meaning of the word "yield" in English and Gondiwindi language with the former emphasizing "the things that man can take from the land" and the latter "the things you give to" (Winch 27). Bruce Pascoe's book *Dark Emu* has attracted considerable critical attention on reviving the agricultural history of Australia's First People on housing, farming, and cultivation that has been deliberately repressed and overlooked by the European settlers, not merely hunting and gathering as commonly recognized. In the same fashion, Albert's dictionary as an encyclopedia of Gondiwindi culture shares the realist aspiration with *Dark Emu* and other historical novels to verify the truth of history. Albert Gondiwindi, once a child of the Stolen Generation, returns from the Boy's Home and settles in Prosperous House, and different from his fellows, he is willing to inherit from the ancestors the collective experience and knowledge of his people. The food hunting process described in Albert's dictionary has nothing to do with cruelty, but more like a ritual paying due respect to the earth: "If you eat the fish, it's important to know how to treat it after it's died for you" (Winch 42). Counter to the food production line of processing, packing, storage, transport-

tation, and display in the supermarket for urban inhabitants, Albert values the first-hand observation of food, and he considers f fishing as creative as other cultural activities that can shed light on how to live a good life and build the organic network of the community and family. Under the entry "fishing-ngalamarra", Albert writes:

> Never buy fish from the food mart, or the restaurant, or Nemo's fish and chip shop in town. You want to eat it? You catch it! Everyone should learn four things – how to ngalamarra, how to love someone boundlessly, how to grow your own vegetables, and how to read. The patience for ngalamarra, respect for loving, the soil for gardening and a dictionary for reading. [1]

Albert's food philosophy attunes to that of Thoreau, both of which underline that the process of obtaining food has to be learned by humans to cultivate the man as a nature lover capable of empathically interacting with nature. This intimacy one develops with food is also in line with what Deborah Rose Bird calls "slow ethics" arising from the "slow food" and other daily circumstances—the ethical relationship between local food producers and customers celebrating quality rather than quantity, connection rather than fragmentation, mutualism rather than personal interests (6).

To resume the traditional diet pattern of the Indigenous sounds unrealistic per se, yet as Bruce Pascoe notes: "restoring Aboriginal pride in the past and allowing that past to inform the future will remove the yoke of despair from Aboriginal people" (167). The insights provided by the indigenous food philosophy and the agricultural history will be a cure for the collective melancholia of the Aboriginals today. Whereas this is not the only available prescription given by Winch as she has her protagonist physically engaged in the protest against the land dispossession of the mining company, thereby transforming her affective disposition by reworking her corporeal qualities to activate the politicizing force. August's resumption of normal eating is accompanied by her action to prove the liveliness of Gondiwindi civilization and reclaim the land, which seems to be a sign of transition from self-repression to rebellion. But if August's former anorexia is to take her body as the last resort of resistance to exploitation, her final acceptance of food is more like an utter resignation to the food chain designated by the capitalist norms, registering its vulnerability to external manipulation. However, calling this a resignation is not that appropriate. As she is physically

involved in the protest with the conservationists, August comes to see something larger than her conundrum of eating or not eating: "she felt whole, fighting for something, screaming in the field rather than eating it, tasting it, running away" (Winch 227). The realization that the Aboriginal lives are huge and boundless embraces the food-mediated cosmology suggested by Albert and thus expands the narrative agency of food constrained by August's anorexia.

The political radicalism unleashed through the blending of food agency and the human body is also an utter rejection of being sacrificed to pave the way for a future exclusive to the global elites. This doing destabilizes the consistency of the capitalist and colonialist mass exploitation from within for it invites the Trojan Horse—Aboriginalism into the city. In this virtue, how to understand the animation of August's starved body is as tricky as understanding the antinomy of the "yield" given by English and Gondiwindi language. The ambivalence Sianne Ngai has identified in the negative affect of "antimatedness" may help encapsulate the ambivalence embedded in the "yield" made by August: "just as animatedness integrates the two contrasting meanings of automatism, then, the affect manages to fuse signs of the body's subjection to power with signs of its ostensive freedom" (100). It is no surprise that what protects the Prosperous is the deep-time-empowered agencies, including the Aboriginal relics accidentally dug out by the bulldozers, the Gondiwindi artifacts reclaimed from the museum, and the Indigenous vocabularies and agriculture documented in Albert's dictionary which are brought to daily use by August. Winch renders a utopian vision for the yield by closing the story with the symbolic triumph of Gondiwindi people and the rainfall in the wake of the lingering drought. In sum, the liminality characteristic of the perpetual struggle between anorexia and gluttony, between rebellion and resignation mediated through food agency has become the definitive core of Aboriginal realism, which is not devoid of the political agency and the affective agency to emancipates the Aboriginals from the ecological melancholia.

Conclusion

Aboriginal writing is a risk narrative for the fraught reality of extinction, food insecurity, and resources depletion that the Indigenous community is facing is much more immediate and complicated than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Drawn on the approaches provided by material ecocriticism and ecological narratology, this article interrogates how food agencies can traverse across different spatiotemporal scales to engage various scenarios of slow violence, including the deceptive political discourse, the problematic criteria of justice, and the gluttonous capitalist mode of consumption. A key message is that the crisis of extinction/genocide/starvation does not reside in a single catastrophic event but disperses around in quotidian life, thus Aboriginal realism entails more attention on the entanglement of the material and metaphysical agencies to understand how daily reality is mediated through the discursive crises. Besides, the author renders the paradoxes of the "yield" of the human and non-human bodies—the juxtaposition of resignation and autonomy, as the definitive attribute of Aboriginal realism. All in all, this reading of Winch's The Yield from the perspective of Aboriginal realism is to explore an aesthetic, epistemological, and ethical alternative for decoding the trope of decay and regeneration in the Anthropocene/ Capitalocene.

Notes

1. Lauren Berlant (2011) illustrates in *Cruel Optimism* how the promises of good life given by politicians make people feel good but can no longer be sustainable in the present. Cruel optimism "exists when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing" (p. 1).

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