

Opening Old Wounds: Innovation in Contemporary Australian Crime Narratives

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Statement of Originality

This work has not previously been submitted for a degree or diploma in any university. To the best of my knowledge and belief, the thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the thesis itself.

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Summary

Opening Old Wounds: Innovation in Contemporary Crime Narratives

This thesis examines three examples of innovation in recent Australian crime narratives that engage with prominent political and social justice issues. It focuses on how narratives are shaped and reworked as they move across media, recalibrating the relationship between the local and the global as they circulate in the broader “crime culture”. The three case studies are situated within the astonishing growth and global popularity of Antipodean noir since 2016. The thesis argues that a combination of innovative storytelling techniques and engagement with social justice issues have revitalised Australian crime culture and contributed to the international enthusiasm for Antipodean noir crime narratives.

The first case study explores *Mystery Road*, an open-ended long-form crime thriller by Indigenous filmmakers featuring Aboriginal Detective Jay Swan. *Mystery Road* began as a stand-alone film in 2013 and has since developed into an ongoing television series. The second case study examines *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane*, a multiplatform true crime investigation by journalists who bring a feminist perspective to an old crime. Informed by the global #MeToo movement, *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* uses an open, participatory model of storytelling to recruit audiences into the investigation process, provide expertise to the core team and help reframe gender politics within the criminal justice system. The final case study examines how Jane Harper’s international bestselling crime novel *The Lost Man* engages with worldwide discussions about domestic abuse and the criminalisation of coercive control in some countries. It explores how women’s manifest civil, political and human rights in Australia have been undermined by new forms of psychological violence and intimate terrorism that have been allowed to flourish in the agribusiness sector.

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Introduction

Speaking at this year's Bloody Scotland, the international crime fiction festival held in Stirling in September, [Michael] Robotham recalled a conversation from 2013, when he was working on a book set in Texas. "My UK publisher said he'd rather it be set in the UK or the US - anywhere but Australia because no Australian crime novel had ever become a big international hit". "Until one does," was Robotham's reply.

Jacquie Byron, Antipodean Noir: Is Crime Melbourne's Biggest Export? Sydney Morning Herald, October 18, 2019¹

True-crime podcasting is now among the most popular long-form content available world-wide, and...Australian podcasts are up there with the best of them.

Sally McCausland, The New Golden Age of Australian True Crime, Inside Story, December 20, 2016²

Please note: *The Teacher's Pet* podcast will be temporarily unavailable in Australia, pending Chris Dawson's trial for the murder of his wife, Lyn.

Teacher's Pet, The Australian, April 4, 2019³

Jane Harper's first novel *The Dry* (2016) and Hedley Thomas' true crime podcast *The Teacher's Pet: The Unsolved Murder of Lyn Dawson* (2018) bookend a period in which Australian literary crime culture has crystallised into a popular global phenomenon. As recently as 2013 publishers actively discouraged crime writers from using an Australian setting if they ever hoped to reach an international readership.⁴ In 2016, *The Dry*, Jane Harper's crime novel set in a small Australian town gripped by drought, opened a magic door and the rules of the

game changed completely.⁵ The same year a true crime podcast won one of Australia's most esteemed awards for journalism.⁶ By April 2019, when Hedley Thomas' *The Teacher's Pet* podcast was removed from the website so that the murder trial of Chris Dawson could proceed without media influence, more than 28 million people around the world had downloaded the series.⁷ In the space of six years Australian crime narratives have moved from the periphery to the centre of a global, highly diversified literary crime culture characterised by new ways of understanding crime and innovative approaches to telling crime stories.

This thesis examines three examples of innovation in contemporary Australian crime narratives. It focuses on how stories are shaped and reworked as they move across media, recalibrating the relationship between the local and the global as they circulate in the broader crime culture. I have adopted a case study approach in order to explore how the selected crime narratives operate as discursive nodes for specific political and social justice issues. The 'old wounds' of the thesis title is designed to conjure how each of the three case studies attempts to deconstruct and reshape a particular historical crime narrative. The temporal frame these narratives occupy varies: in the first case study it is two hundred and forty years, in the second it is twenty years, and the third it is intergenerational, flexible and governed by the vagaries of memory.

Crime Culture, World Crime Fiction

I take a broad view of Australian crime narratives, using the framework of "crime culture" as outlined by Gunhild Agger in her working paper, *Crime Fiction and Crime Journalism in Scandinavia* (2010).⁸ Agger identifies the emergence of a new "crime culture" at the end of the first decade of the twenty first century; a period in which the fields of crime fiction and crime journalism began to converge and operate as an autonomous, highly mediated and specialised culture.⁹ There are no doubt differences between Scandinavian crime culture and how Australian crime culture has crystallised in recent years, though the two countries are both embedded in a globalised media culture and share many features.

At a structural level, the new crime culture is constituted out of six basic characteristics.¹⁰ Crime narratives are now very easy to access and available to a much wider audience than in the past, in a range of different media formats and in many different

languages.¹¹ Audiences for crime have radically expanded in the last twenty years and its appeal crosses the gender and generational lines of previous eras.¹² Crime texts also receive much more attention from literary and media professionals than in the past, and new products are reviewed and widely discussed.¹³ As the market for crime narratives expands, greater prestige and respectability accrues to producers in the field.¹⁴ The field of crime culture is broken up into areas of commercial and professional expertise that specialise in adaptation across formats.¹⁵ The final characteristic of contemporary crime culture is that it attracts a great deal more academic interest than in the past, both domestically and internationally.¹⁶

I sketch out a more detailed context for each narrative in the following chapters, but at this stage it is worth making a few connections between the crime culture framework and the specific texts I examine in the remainder of the thesis. Accessibility is a prominent feature of all the examples I have chosen. The *Mystery Road* franchise, which forms the case study in chapter one, has been widely distributed internationally and is easily accessible. The first two films *Mystery Road* (2013) and *Goldstone* (2016) were both released through the international film festival circuit and after their cinema release were marketed in subtitled DVD formats. *Mystery Road: The Series* (2018) was first released through the *Australian Broadcasting Corporation* (ABC) television network and is now accessible in DVD format as well as through the live streaming services such as iTunes, YouTube, Google, Amazon Prime (in Australia, the UK and the US). *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* (2018), which is the case study that forms chapter two, sold into the international market very soon after its first domestic release and television screenings were planned for the UK and Ireland. Jane Harper's *The Lost Man* (2018), which forms the case study in chapter three, was released in print, ebook and audiobook formats. It was also translated into seventeen languages and won an award from the Swedish Crime Writers Academy for the Best Translated Crime Novel 2019.¹⁷

The two television releases *Mystery Road: The Series* (2018) and *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* (2018) are excellent examples of how the audiences for crime narratives have grown and diversified in recent years, bringing greater prestige to what was once a relatively specialised area of interest. There is also evidence of diversified commercial and professional production techniques in the examples I have chosen, particularly in the case of *Mystery Road* (2013 -2018), where the migration from film to television involved a complete rearrangement of production techniques from an auteur format (where one person performed all the central roles: writing, directing, cinematography, editing and composing the soundtrack) to a much

more specialised form of collaborative work involving teams of screenwriters and pre and post-production personnel.

Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane (2018) was a multiplatform release and as such specialised commercial production techniques were built into the project from the outset. There is evidence that special attention has been paid to the adaptation from one format to another in Jane Harper's *The Lost Man* (2018). At the end of the audiobook Jane Harper and Stephen Shanahan, a voice artist who has worked on all her novels, discuss the process of adapting the novel for audio. Harper notes how she might modify her writing to make the transition from novel to audiobook smoother because being too specific about a character's speech patterns asks the voice artist to accomplish a technical feat to maintain the quality and integrity of the work that may not have even been an issue in the print version.¹⁸

All the texts featured in the case studies were professionally reviewed and discussed, though not all have been the subject of scholarly attention at this stage. The *Mystery Road* films (2013, 2016) were reviewed in the popular press and on vlogs, and have also been the subject of scholarly articles.¹⁹ *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* (2018) was professionally reviewed as an example of innovative storytelling and was also a finalist at the 2019 Walkley Foundation Awards for Excellence in Journalism.²⁰

There is no doubt that a fully developed literary crime culture has emerged in Australia in recent years though it would be counterproductive, at least for my purposes, to analyse these particular examples in the narrow context of national trends. In his 2014 article *Crime Fiction as World Literature*, Stewart King argued that adopting a world literature analytical approach is one way of connecting texts "across national, cultural, linguistic and temporal borders" because it involves a shift in emphasis from the national to the international, from production to consumption and from writers to readers.²¹

King's framework is a helpful way of approaching the case study texts because they all address global audiences, manipulate the relationship between the centre and the periphery, operate as systems critiques and are closely involved in how political issues are being reframed, restaged and debated in different parts of the world. At the same time there are explicit links drawn up in each of the texts between the global issues they induct and embed as structural features, and the local cultures they foreground and manipulate. In their close analysis of local

cultures each of the crime narratives discussed in the case studies provide what King refers to as “windows onto specific cultures and societies” making the internal norms of each community visible and intelligible from the outset.²²

The link between the local and the global is constituted as a dynamic set of variables in the *Mystery Road* (2013-2018) franchise. Political and social justice issues that are densely woven into the worldbuilding of the series take on greater salience when compared with how Indigenous groups in other settler-colonial societies address new forms of dispossession in their crime texts - from mass incarceration, new waves of child removal, and ongoing frontier wars, to the acknowledgement of contemporary human rights violations. Each component of the series takes a different geographic setting and explores how Aboriginal people grapple with the issues in that locale. In *Mystery Road* (2013), the local effects of the global War on Drugs is a central theme and *Goldstone* (2016) depicts multinational mining-creeper as a new form of dispossession. *Mystery Road: The Series* (2018) is set in the Kimberley, an area of Western Australia where Aboriginal people are represented as having a little more autonomy than those in the towns of the earlier films. The central concerns for the Indigenous inhabitants of the fictional town of Patterson revolve around arresting new forms of economic colonisation, historical truth-telling and land reparation.

Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane (2018) sets up the relationship between the local and the global using a quite different set of variables. This true crime narrative is a multiplatform work of collaborative storytelling deeply indebted to feminist practices emerging from the global #MeToo movement. It investigates misogyny in Australia’s criminal justice system at a time when women’s stories of oppression and systemic gender-based violence are taking on much more political significance in many countries around the world.²³ At a local level the narrative opens onto an enclosed hypermasculine sporting culture in northern Sydney, revealing how a community-wide code of silence and denial have allowed sexual predation to flourish.

Jane Harper’s novel *The Lost Man* (2018) is deeply engaged in global discussions around domestic abuse, coercive control and modern slavery in the agribusiness sector. In liberal democracies such as England, Scotland and Ireland, coercive control is regarded as a capture crime, though here in Australia we are still some way from understanding this form of psychological violence, sexual and economic exploitation as a human rights violation.²⁴ *The*

Lost Man (2018) is set on a vast, isolated and very profitable cattle farm in south-western Queensland. The farm is part of a small community where hegemonic masculinity is the central organising principle and it is not always easy for women to tell the difference between being kept safe from the challenges of everyday living in this environment and being held hostage.

Globalisation, the State and Postcolonial Crime Fiction

In their 2016 book *Globalization and the State in Contemporary Crime Fiction*, Andrew Pepper and David Schmid note how globalisation has had a profound impact on the structure of the crime novel.²⁵ The ability of police forces to act with authority, fight crime and apprehend criminals can no longer be assumed given that national borders are much more porous in a globalised world and organised crime has begun to mimic the structure of multinational corporations.²⁶ The complicated relationship between the legal and illegal economy is foregrounded in the first *Mystery Road* film (2013) where police corruption and the profitability of a militarised drug war is made explicit. In *Goldstone* (2016) the mining company operates very much like an autonomous state within a state - complete with its own paramilitary force - and a policeman such as Jay Swan has a quite limited range of powers to investigate crime.

If the power of the state is relativised in the *Mystery Road* stories, in *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* the state is represented as a powerful regulatory force, inserting itself into the sexual and reproductive lives of women through different parts of the criminal justice system, from the child protection agency to the regular police force. Lane was accused of murdering her newborn baby in 1996. Although no body, no witnesses and no substantial evidence that a murder ever occurred has been presented, she became the subject of a police investigation that lasted almost a decade. During the trial she was punished harshly by the courts when she was constructed as a modern day Medea by the prosecutor in the case, and then doubly punished in the media for transgressing gender norms as an aspiring female athlete who violated the ideals of motherhood.

In *The Lost Man* (2018) the state is less visible because in this part of the country the rules and norms are set by the community and one policeman works a territory the size of a small country. Nathan Bright learns just how swift community punishment can be when he is

banished from the small town near his property for almost a decade in retaliation for failing to render assistance to a (wealthy white) motorist in distress. The women find themselves in a place where isolation is its own kind of punishment and shocking domestic abuse goes unremarked. Normalised violence is compounded by an immigration regime that delivers young backpackers into modern slavery for eighty-eight days of farm work, as a condition of renewing their working visas. Routine sexual harassment and the deaths of backpackers due to forced labour in stifling heat have both been cited in recent social justice campaigns clustered around the “88 Days a Slave” documentary and the Instagram hashtag of the same name.²⁷

While all of the case studies critique state authority in different ways *The Mystery Road* (2013-2018) stories are the clearest examples of postcolonial world crime fiction, as outlined by Stephen Knight in his essay *The Postcolonial Crime Novel* (2015).²⁸ In this essay Knight argues that the term postcolonial has often been used to describe all works produced in countries that were previously colonised, though more precise use of the term describes works that “...imply at least some resistance to empire” whether it be “modern mercantile versions of exploitation rather than the original forms of empire”.²⁹ Ivan Sen’s films are firmly grounded in a critique of empire when they reframe colonisation as a state crime. They draw on the genealogy of critical Indigenous crime writing Knight outlines as taking shape from the 1990s in the work of Mudrooroo Narogin, Phillip McLaren and Nicole Watson.³⁰ *Mystery Road* (2013-2018) also sits comfortably alongside Warwick Thornton’s more recent historical crime thriller, *Sweet Country* (2017), which takes a highly critical stance against the imperialism of the 1930s.

Fact, Fiction and Augmented Consciousness

As outlined above, in the expanded field of crime culture the migration of narratives across different media and formats is either built into the process and occurs simultaneously on first publication or it happens relatively quickly afterward. Another distinguishing feature of crime culture is the volatile exchange that occurs at what Katy Shaw calls the “interface of fact and fiction”.³¹ The traffic between fact and fiction can occur in many different ways, from how a narrative is reshaped to meet the needs of a particular format in the process of adaptation, to the generic conventions demanded by the specific arena a writer chooses to publish their work in. As Lili Paquet points out, when skilled professionals from the criminal justice arena

write crime fiction, there are subtle shifts in how the novels operate, the messages they convey and how these works are received by audiences.³²

According to Gunhild Agger the exchange that occurs at the fact/fiction interface is not so much that one overwrites the other, or that crossing the border from one side to the other transforms fact into fiction, or fiction into fact; rather “a blurred, more complex relationship between fact and fiction” is produced.³³ The concept of an “augmented consciousness” is one way of describing the porous borders and close intertextual and paratextual links built up between crime narratives that operate on the fact/fiction interface and the dense discursive nodes they produce.³⁴ Agger’s “augmented consciousness” is a particularly interesting approach to the works that form the case studies that follow because even though *Mystery Road* (2013-2018) and *The Lost Man* (2018) are works of fiction and *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* (2018) is a piece of true crime narrative journalism, they draw on, reference and strategically mobilise an array of related texts from crime culture.

Mystery Road’s fictional status is particularly interesting because it draws on the lived experiences of Indigenous people and represents current political and social justice issues without having to endure the invalidation of lived experience that characterised the History Wars of previous decades. In some ways the *Mystery Road* (2013 -2018) stories function as amplified fact on the ground of fiction. As open-ended narratives they are able to reframe contemporary debates and directly involve audiences in the project of working through socio-political issues, using complex storytelling techniques.

Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane (2018) is a true crime narrative that operates as metanarrative - the reinvestigation of a botched police investigation and a trial that was a blatant miscarriage of justice. It highlights how the police investigation into Tegan’s murder and Keli Lane’s conviction rested on a combination of institutionalised misogyny and a compelling narrative of feminine evil constructed by the prosecutor at trial. Lane refused to speak to the media at the time and predictably the news coverage was based on a standard Medea narrative pre-packaged for use when a woman is suspected of killing her baby.

A year after Lane’s conviction Rachael Jane Chin, a journalist who covered the trial, produced the first true crime narrative about the case, *Nice Girl: The Story of Keli Lane and her Missing Baby, Tegan* (2011).³⁵ In 2012 Wendy James published *The Mistake*, a novel based

on the Lane case.³⁶ The novel fed into a much larger global discussion about how women were buckling under the pressure of impossible standards of motherhood and being constructed as murderers in show trials featuring inconclusive diagnostic categories such as SIDS or newly popular classifications such as Munchausen Syndrome by Proxy. The feminist orientation of *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* (2018) provoked the ire of a group of true crime enthusiasts in Brisbane who took to the podcasting microphone to produce *Problem Child: The Story of Keli Lane and the Murder of Baby Tegan* (2019), which attempted to wrest back control of the story and reinscribe the prosecution narrative as the final word on the topic.³⁷

In interviews Jane Harper is clear about how her years working as a journalist prepared the way for her transition to novelist.³⁸ She brings journalistic research techniques to her fictional work and the social justice issues so clearly animated and explored in *The Lost Man* (2018) are embedded in contemporary debates about domestic abuse, coercive control and the safety of international backpackers in the Australian farm work visa scheme. That is not to say *The Lost Man* (2018) can simply be reduced to a set of political issues, rather the “augmented consciousness” of the novel in Australia’s newly emergent literary crime culture animates it in ways that enhance the reading or listening experience and invest it with particular relevance.

In the following chapters I focus on how innovative storytelling has reshaped the crime genre, launching a popular movement that has been alternatively referred to as outback noir, Antipodean noir or Australian noir. In chapter one I focus on how a group of Indigenous filmmakers have moved into the crime genre and used an open-ended long-form storytelling format to launch sustained critical attacks on colonialism, its neo-colonial legacies and regenerated forms. In chapter two I turn to a discussion of how true crime has taken shape as a critical vehicle for feminist crime writers and how an open collaborative storytelling format can operate to reinstate women’s stories that have been systematically erased by the criminal justice system. In chapter three I trace how one crime novel patiently unearths an insidious violent networked neopatriarchy and systematically goes about dismantling it.

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Chapter 1 : Dispossession, Apology and Restitution in ‘Mystery Road’ (2013-2018)

Given the treatment of Aboriginal characters in crime fiction, it would be unsurprising if Aboriginal writers made a deliberate choice to avoid the genre. Some however, have chosen to transform the genre through the trope of characters that bring Aboriginal voices to the centre of the narrative. The subversive nature of Aboriginal crime fiction is consistent with a writing tradition that has always been closely aligned with activism.

*Nicole Watson, Deadly Detectives: How Aboriginal Australian Writers are re-creating crime fiction*³⁹

[Ivan] Sen and [Rachel] Perkins stand as two of the most experienced Aboriginal directors working today, and the contrast in styles is interesting when juxtaposed... The grittiness of Sen’s films draws out a sense of menace from the violence that lies just underneath the surface of small towns, and in his world the past feels like it can never reconcile with the future. The world Perkins creates is more polished – history holds secrets, but they are hurts that can be healed. It is a more optimistic view of the world and one that is perhaps a better fit for a television audience.

*Larissa Behrendt, Mystery Road Review – TV Spin-off Unearths Ambitious Tale of Small-Town Secrets.*⁴⁰

In this section I explore the world of *Mystery Road* (2013 - 2018), an open-ended long-form crime-thriller featuring detective Jay Swan (played by Aaron Pedersen). The *Mystery Road* stories are a local example of how the crime fiction genre has taken on new relevance as a popular vehicle for working through highly charged political debates in recent years. The

stories are remarkable for the way they flip the script on the police procedural, narrating events from the point of view of a complex, highly conflicted Aboriginal character. Aboriginal characters have featured in Australian crime stories since colonisation, although stories told from their point of view are relatively new.⁴¹

The *Mystery Road* concept was initially developed by Ivan Sen who wrote and directed the first two films: *Mystery Road* (2013) and *Goldstone* (2016). *Mystery Road* (2013) screened at international film festivals in Busan, Toronto, Sydney, Melbourne and London before its limited cinema release on 17 October 2013.⁴² It was also included in the Pyongyang International Film Festival in 2014.⁴³ *Goldstone* (2016) opened the Sydney Film Festival in 2016 and screened at festivals in Toronto and London before its cinema release on 7 July 2016, where it attracted a wider audience than the first film.⁴⁴

In 2018 the *Mystery Road* storyline was developed into a six-part TV series, *Mystery Road: The Series* (2018). It began screening on the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) network on 3 June 2018 during NAIDOC Week, a yearly celebration of Indigenous cultural life. Ivan Sen wrote the outline for the extended TV version, a team of screenwriters developed the script and Rachel Perkins took the job as director.⁴⁵ The series reached a wide domestic audience and currently ranks as the third most popular title on Australian free-to-air television in the last decade.⁴⁶ After its first national screening the broadcast rights to the series were acquired for distribution across US and UK networks and a further series was commissioned for release in 2020.⁴⁷

From Outback Noir to State Crime

Reviewers have so far treated the *Mystery Road* stories as individual texts, exploring how they rework genre conventions and stake out new territory for Indigenous filmmakers. For instance, in a series of reviews Greg Dolgoplov argued that *Mystery Road* (2013) signalled Ivan Sen's move into the mainstream with an Indigenous lead character and *Goldstone* (2016) consolidated his "outback noir" aesthetic agenda.⁴⁸ In two later reviews Sarah Ward discussed how outback noir functions as generic space in which contemporary racial conflicts are staged and worked through.⁴⁹

In an article in *Australasian Cinema Studies* in 2015, Anne Rutherford analysed the problem of “the cinematic body” in *Mystery Road* (2013) and how Jay Swan’s authority was constructed on screen as an energetic non-verbal exchange between actor and audience as he moved “across two worlds – black and white”.⁵⁰ In an article for the same journal in 2016, Peter Kirkpatrick drew on the renewed scholarly interest in the historical figure of the tracker and how Indigenous filmmakers have reengineered a stock two-dimensional character into a complex, ambivalent figure fluent in both cultures.⁵¹ In *Mystery Road* (2013), he argues, the Indigenous detective Jay Swan is one iteration of the contemporary tracker as “cultural mediator”.⁵²

While these works have illuminated some of the postcolonial issues at stake in the first two films, my interest in this case study is in how the *Mystery Road* stories recontextualise colonialism within the crime genre and reframe it as a “state crime” against a particular class of people – Aboriginal Australians. According to Michael Grewcock, “the foundational violence inherent to settler-colonialism” is an ongoing “criminogenic” process organised around Indigenous dispossession and the control of land enacted through diverse forms of structural violence.⁵³

Reading the *Mystery Road* stories not as individual stand-alone texts, but as works-in-progress, it is possible to see how they capture and interrogate diverse forms of structural violence and the overdetermined legal processes that simultaneously criminalise Aboriginal people and erase crimes committed against them. The particular combination of storytelling strategies that make up the world of *Mystery Road* undermine the established generic logic of the police procedural, disorder hierarchies, contest authority and throw the meaning and interpretation of crime into crisis. The enlarged spatiotemporal scale of state crime, and a shift to the point-of-view of an Aboriginal policeman, involves the viewer in actively trying to make sense of how systemic violence is integrated into ongoing Indigenous dispossession.

Dispossession in the Mystery Road Films

In recent years there has been a growing interest in the Global War on Drugs and its relationship to the mass incarceration of racial minorities in developed countries around the world. For instance, Michelle Alexander’s book *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the*

Age of Colorblindness (2010) put forward the thesis that the War on Drugs was being used to drive the mass incarceration of African-Americans and implement new forms of racial segregation and prison slavery.⁵⁴ Despite widespread claims that the election of President Obama ushered in a new “post-racial” era, Alexander argued that “we have not ended racial caste in America; we have merely redesigned it”.⁵⁵ Alexander’s observations are important in the Australian context because, according to Noel Pearson, an Aboriginal lawyer academic and land rights activist, Indigenous Australians are now “the most incarcerated people on the planet Earth”.⁵⁶ Pearson’s 2017 statement has been relentlessly contested and fact-checked by those with the most to gain from the mass incarceration of Aboriginal people, however there is no way to gloss over its accuracy “based on the best available international data”.⁵⁷

In a 2019 Vice News investigation into mass incarceration as a form of systemic violence, Mahmood Fazal reported recent statistics that “Indigenous Australians...make up two percent of the general population, but a staggering 28 percent of the male prison population and 34 percent of the female prison population”.⁵⁸ In an interview with Fazal, Vickie Roach, an Indigenous academic, writer and poet who has spent significant time in prison since she was removed from her family, described the long-term impact of imprisonment and how she now finds it increasingly hard to distinguish between life inside prison and life in the wider culture:

I’m starting to feel like the edges are blurred between prison and what this is. It’s not prison so the alternative is freedom but I don’t feel free. I feel like the same things are being imposed on me out here as they were in prison. I’ve just kind of stepped out of this smaller prison into a larger prison.⁵⁹

The radical indistinctness between inside and outside of prison that Roach captures so well is one way of articulating the link between Aboriginal dispossession from the land and the instrumental violence of mass incarceration.

***Mystery Road* (2013): Chemical Incarceration and Weaponised Indifference in a Small-Town Drug War**

In *Mystery Road* (2013) Ivan Sen takes up the problem of dispossession in the context of a small-town drug war on the Australian frontier where the whole town operates as prison for the Aboriginal population through a combination of racial segregation and chemical incarceration. The town in the film is modelled on one that Sen grew up in where cultural and linguistic diversity gave rise to “territorial...microcommunities”:

This kind of town has lots of untapped stories. They are a melting pot because you’ve got Indigenous people from different areas coming together into a community, mixing with local white people as well as local Indigenous people. So you’ve got all kinds of conflicts coming out of that.⁶⁰

The film opens with Jay Swan returning to his hometown after training in the city. The community he left several years ago has been transformed in his absence, meth labs have sprung up on the edge of town and biker gangs patrol the streets. Swan’s first case involves the murder of an Aboriginal teenage girl, Julie Mason, whose body is found dumped beside the highway. Soon a second girl, Tarni Williams, is found murdered, her throat cut and her body displayed in the same way. Jay uncovers the main players in a large drug network operating in the town and he begins to suspect that the missing and murdered teenager girls were being trafficked in exchange for drugs. In a scene in which Jay confronts the Sergeant about child prostitution operating openly in the town, the issue is minimised and rationalised: “it’s only rumours Jay, nothing’s ever been officially reported”.⁶¹ This scene - and particularly the dismissive attitude toward the Aboriginal victims of crime - was inspired by events directly drawn from Sen’s own life experience:

A few years ago, a distant cousin of my mother was found dead under a roadway in northern NSW. She had been stripped and brutally murdered. The police have seemingly done nothing to bring her killer to justice and this has

brought resentment from the local Indigenous community.⁶²

The systemic racism of selective policing is thrown into stark relief in the film's key scene where Jay requests help to investigate Julie's murder and the disappearance of another Aboriginal teenager, Nellie Dargan. The Sergeant abruptly dismisses his appeal on the grounds that all available resources have been allocated to the drug squad and the theft squad. The Sergeant makes clear that missing and murdered Aboriginal girls are a low priority when he tells Jay that "there'll be more than a few black girls to worry about if this town turns into a fucking war zone".⁶³ Jay's response is angry: "for some people it already is a war zone".⁶⁴ The long silences and tense exchange of dialogue in this scene reinscribe a racial divide that runs from the frontier wars of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries right up to the contemporary drug war.

On the surface, *Mystery Road* (2013) is a dark, melancholy film in which vast multicoloured desert plains and breathtaking sunsets form the rolling background scenery for an ugly pantomime of frontier violence. In the context of militarised government intervention into Aboriginal communities over the last decade, the world of *Mystery Road* (2013) can be interpreted as a crime-thriller deeply informed by the iconography of post-9/11-era drug war films.⁶⁵ These films induct large institutional structures into the transnational War on Drugs: militarised police forces, private security contractors, and, indeed, whole armies tasked with fighting drug cartels and narco-states.

The war-film status of *Mystery Road* (2013) is signalled in its visual language from the beginning; in the drone footage of the town, or in the footage filmed from inside Jay's car as he patrols the streets of the housing estate. It is evident in the scenes where the women display their wounds. Mary, Jay's wife, has a prominent bruise on the side of her face and Crystal, his daughter, has her wrist bandaged. They both tell Jay they sustained these injuries fighting. The visual language of wounding is one way of directing the viewer's attention to how Aboriginal people are dehumanised in the drug war by exaggerating the threat it represents to the general population and how stereotypes of Indigenous criminality and victim-blaming are encoded in the febrile political rhetoric of law and order.⁶⁶

While there is a shootout staged at Slaughter Hill in the end of the film, this small-town drug war has none of the spectacular violence of a film set at the US/Mexican border,⁶⁷ nor does it engage in the brutal political street theatre of Duterte's drug war in the Philippines.⁶⁸ Instead, in *Mystery Road* (2013) the drug war takes the form of a grinding bureaucratic law and order crackdown, an ongoing state crime inextricably linked to the frontier wars of settler-colonialism. What looks like institutional failure, corruption and shocking neglect of the Indigenous population is something far more insidious: a series of calculated, interlocking war crimes perpetrated in an ongoing genocide. Crimes in which structural violence has been crafted into what Aboriginal activists have come to refer to as "weaponised indifference": a powerful technology of dispossession that constructs Aboriginal people as criminals at the same time as rendering even the most serious crimes against them invisible.⁶⁹

***Goldstone* (2016): Mining, Sex Trafficking and the Corruption of Indigenous Authority**

In *Goldstone* (2016), Ivan Sen turns his attention to the mining industry as a way of exploring the complex, competing economic interests at work in outback frontier towns. In an interview after the film's release, he stated that for this project he was most interested in the impact of "big business and government on indigenous communities".⁷⁰

In the opening scenes *Goldstone* has a rundown transient look but there are multi-layered power structures at work here: a secretive mining company with a heavily armed private security force, a ruthless local Mayor taking bribes from the mining company, and a lone policeman trying to keep the Broken River Aboriginal community in check at the behest of the Mayor. Jay Swan arrives in town in search of a Chinese girl who has been reported missing. It quickly becomes clear that Jung Mai, the missing girl, was one of a group of sex workers operating out of a bar near the mine. Josh, the local policeman, has been instructed by the Mayor to move Detective Swan out of town as quickly as possible, although his attempts prove futile because Jay is here on Federal authority and he is convinced that the missing girl has been trafficked. The sex workers, like the workers at the mine, operate on rotating fly-in-fly-out rosters, so it is difficult to keep track of individual people. The sex trafficking plot runs like a dark vein throughout the film, operating as an extended metaphor for human commodification. It charts how labour exploitation is authorised in remote mining towns by

employers who use legal loopholes and unconscionable contracts to subordinate the human rights of individual workers.

The main plot takes on the problem of how the economic interests of multinational corporations usurp the legal mandate of police forces, Aboriginal representative bodies and even the authority of governments. In the town of Goldstone, the mining company operates according to its own rules. Josh warns Jay not to go near the mine because the Furnace Creek Mining Corporation's (FCMC) private security force has the right to shoot him on sight if he is found near the mine. Ignoring the advice Jay is soon picked up and dragged off to the mine manager's office for interrogation. Johnny, the manager, wants Jay to understand that as a policeman, he has no authority here:

You might work for the Crown...so do we. The difference is we keep this country in business, see it's all about... standards of living...we can't stop the wheel turning for anyone, including you.⁷¹

The ruthless tactics employed by FCMC are highlighted in scenes directly connected to the manipulation of Aboriginal representative bodies. FCMC pay large bribes to Tommy, the head of the local Land Council, in exchange for a vote in favour of the expanded gold mining lease. The company attempts to disorder the whole Broken River Aboriginal community by smuggling alcohol into what had previously been a dry settlement. Jimmy, Broken River's tribal elder, is impervious to pressure and even walks out of the FCMC agreement signing ceremony. The Mayor, who holds a huge financial stake in the deal going through, concocts a plan to have Jimmy murdered and she pays Tommy to stage his death as a suicide.

Goldstone (2016) charts how the economic imperatives of the resource sector contribute directly to Indigenous dispossession. The film sets out to capture the complexity of Aboriginal experience, notably in the character of Tommy, who functions as a symbol of moral ambivalence and the harbinger of modernity. At the beginning of the film, Tommy is depicted as a man power-hungry enough to murder a tribal elder and sever all traditional connections to the land in exchange for money, when he is forced to choose between economic development

and sustainable culture. By the end of the film when he confesses to the murder, he has become someone who deeply regrets the way he was compromised by the Mayor and the mining company and how he has become alienated from his community by his own actions.

***Mystery Road: The Series* (2018): Massacres, Apologies and Restitution**

The first two films achieved their aims through shocking juxtapositions crafted for the cinema in which sublime landscapes were contrasted with the grim violence of carceral archipelagos along the frontier. The six-part television series *Mystery Road: The Series* (2018), however, is spread over a much larger canvas, aimed at a wider audience, and takes up a different kind of aesthetic and cultural work altogether. The shift to a different medium transports the narrative from a public cinema to a private domestic space and in the process collapses the distance between the characters on screen and the viewer. Generically, the TV series sheds many of the hybrid features so important to the films and it extends the genre in a different way by taking on a complex historical restorative justice task alongside what begins as a relatively routine criminal investigation.

Nicole Watson, an Indigenous lawyer and crime fiction novelist, argues that Aboriginal authors often construct their crime narratives around the reconciliation of racial differences in such a way that “engagement leads to collaboration between the writer and the reader” and ultimately “...both work to deprive settler discourse of its legitimacy”.⁷² This strategy is evident in how the TV series engages in the careful orchestration of viewer empathy, providing space for non-indigenous viewers to inhabit unfamiliar histories and formulate fresh perspectives on intractable political issues. Two important sub-plots are developed, scripted, and brought to an ideal resolution in the series: how truth-telling about the massacre of Aboriginal people might take place and how the restitution of stolen land might be negotiated.

The series is set in the small town of Patterson, in the Kimberley region. It begins with the disappearance of two young workers from Ballantyne Station, a nearby cattle property. Jay Swan arrives to assist the local police chief Senior Sergeant Emma James, a woman with a long family history in the area. On the surface the missing teenagers appear to lead normal lives, but their secret lives are quickly uncovered. Reese Dale is a white middle-class private

school educated youth, with a history of drug problems, who arrived in town a few months ago as a backpacker working under a false name. Marley Thompson is a local Aboriginal teen from a good Christian family and a rising AFL football star, but he returns home to Patterson telling his family he is taking a break, never mentioning that he has dropped his professional football career and resigned from his club. Marley and Reese become close friends at work and they hatch a plot to smuggle drugs into town and sell them at the Patterson rodeo.

The disappearance of Marley and Reese threatens to upset the plans of some very important people. The man with the most to lose is Tony Ballantyne, the cattle station owner. Ballantyne Station is up for sale and the Aboriginal Land Corporation has agreed to Tony's asking price of eight million dollars. He is anxious to close the deal because the underground aquifer which is the property's main selling point has been thoroughly depleted. The disappearance of two of his workers threatens to delay the sale and if the deal fails to go through he stands to lose a lot of money. The other man with the most to lose is Keith Groves who runs the Aboriginal Land Corporation, a local Indigenous body tasked with buying back traditional lands from pastoral leaseholders. Keith wields a lot of power in the town through a combination of open patronage and covert terror tactics. He regards Marley as a "cash cow" and his disappearance threatens to diminish Keith's reputation in the eyes of the community as a man who controls everything.⁷³

Marley is eventually found hiding out in a hut on the edge of town. When he is arrested for Reese's murder and brought in for questioning, he stridently maintains his innocence. Under pressure he relates how he and Reese met up one night with Tyson Zein, a local security guard and their drug source. A violent altercation took place, he and Reese were tied up, thrown in the back of Tyson's ute and driven out to the highway where they split up during an escape. Trying to verify Marley's story Jay recovers Reese's body from the bottom of Black Springs, a waterhole not far from the highway.

In episode five of the series, *The Waterhole*, the emphasis shifts from the specific crimes – Reese's murder and how the teenagers were enticed into drug smuggling – to a more general concern with how contemporary Australian frontier towns have been shaped by historical state crimes.⁷⁴ The scenes that deal with Emma's discovery that her grandfather poisoned five traditional landowners on the family property and then covered it up, emphasise

how massacres were normalised on the frontier – even justified in the struggle over access to resources.

Emma: Everything we were told when we were growing up, how the Ballantynes were fair and how they were different...everything we weren't told. What are we going to do?

Tony: Do? It's already done.

Emma: No it's not, not for them. You didn't see Dot's face yesterday.

Tony: It was a hundred years ago.

Emma: They were killed in our name, five people murdered for some water.

Tony: Well! Welcome to the whole of human history.

Emma: I'm not talking about human history, I'm talking about you and me and Dot.⁷⁵

The dialogue between these two characters is so familiar because it rehearses well-known discourses on Australian race relations where each rhetorical move on one side of the debate is designed to maintain official denial of settler-colonial genocide, while on the other side the reality of relationships between individuals constantly disrupts historical grand narratives.⁷⁶ In a follow-up scene where the rolling argument about the massacres escalates, Emma's emotions are pitted against Tony's economic imperatives:

Tony: You need to leave it alone Em. We're trying to sell the place. You go making apologies, the papers start writing stories about massacre sites. Now a lot of people won't care but a few might. Certain parties

might not want to be associated with it – or pretend they don't and drop the price. Either way we lose.

Emma: Where's this coming from Tony?

Tony: You want to take a million dollar haircut because of something someone did a hundred years ago? Someone we never even met?

...

Emma: I want to stay here, where I was born and I want to find some way to not feel ashamed every time Dot looks at me.

Tony: Ashamed? What are you talking about? Ashamed? Where's the shame, we've done nothing wrong.

Emma: It was a crime. It has to be answered.

Tony: How? What are you going to do? Hold a healing ceremony? It won't change a bloody thing.

Emma: I don't know.

Tony: I want no part of it.

Emma: You are part of it Tony.⁷⁷

By the end of the scene it is clear that Tony's unwillingness to admit that he stands on stolen land and lives off the proceeds of crime, is inseparable from the profit he stands to make on the sale of Ballantyne Station. His real concern is how public disclosure of the massacre site might reduce the value of his property and further complicate the fraud he intends to carry out over the depleted aquifer. This particular fraud reformulates and redeploys longstanding settler-colonial wealth extraction strategies. It also reprises the struggle that led to the original massacre, although this time the land is being returned to traditional owners at a radically inflated price and thoroughly depleted of its most valuable resource: water.

A pivotal scene in *The Waterhole* episode works through the volatile politics of how to apologise for the past, an issue that has been vexed by failure in colonial-settler societies for decades, but especially so in the first decade of the twenty-first century. As Michael Tager points out, official apologies to Indigenous people in Canada, the US and Australia between 2008 and 2009 often faltered based on their narrowly defined scope or lack of specificity.⁷⁸ Apologies failed because they were too vague or expressed regret for past harms rather than using the words “apologise” or “sorry”, and in the case of the US, apologies to First Nations people were not endorsed or delivered by the President.⁷⁹ In 2008 Prime Minister Kevin Rudd apologised to Australia’s Stolen Generations for the trauma caused by past child removal policies but he failed to identify it as part of a genocidal pattern or offer any financial redress.⁸⁰ The apology scene in *The Waterhole* was perhaps even more politically freighted because the current rates of Aboriginal child removal have escalated in the last decade.⁸¹

Exactly what Emma says and how she says it when she visits Dot at the Aboriginal Land Corporation office to offer an apology is particularly important. This scene is carefully orchestrated, as Emma attempts to negotiate a new relationship with Dot personally, and the traditional land owners more generally, by acknowledging the harm her family has caused them. Emma’s anxious jerky body movements in this scene somatise the struggle in moving beyond historical amnesia and the official denials of frontier genocide. Her apology begins smoothly enough “I’m sorry I didn’t know”, but then quickly deteriorates as she is lost for words, caught in a maddening loop that breaks before she can get the words out.⁸² She starts again, and again:

Emma: ...I keep thinking of what I can say to you but
 nothing...I just never, you know...I never...I mean I
 know it went on...we all know (wipes her eyes)...but
 I just never thought...my family, you know...I just
 never...I didn’t ask the question”.⁸³

Dot: Look Emma, your mob had forgotten, but you know
 now. That shows some respect.

Emma: Doesn’t feel like enough.⁸⁴

Although she stumbles, Emma's apology is received as sincere. She is also clear about the specific nature of her transgression when she failed to critically assess the received family wisdom that other people might have been involved in massacres but the Ballantynes were not. It is at this point that Emma, and the viewer, come to understand that there is another secret history of the nation in what is not said and not written down.

In the final episode of the series *The Truth*, all of the strands of the plot are drawn together. The restorative justice plot moves beyond an apology to the problem of how financial compensation for past crimes might be negotiated. This point is particularly important for a group of people who have seen successive governments make promises that are rarely backed up by decisive action. In some of the closing scenes of the series Emma and Dot arrive at a solution that restores the land to the traditional owners at a much reduced price: the Aboriginal Land Corporation forms a partnership with Emma and offers a buy-out of Tony's share for two million dollars. The scene where Emma and Dot negotiate the sale price for Ballantyne Station is very brief and contains no dialogue.⁸⁵ The follow up scene, where Emma presents Tony with a cheque and explains the terms of the agreement is more drawn out. It emphasises Tony's initial reluctance to accept the sum offered - a quarter of price he was seeking - and then his slow realisation that he has no other choice.⁸⁶

Tony:	What's this?
Emma:	It's a cheque from Dot and the NWAC.
Tony:	Two million. No.
Emma:	It's all yours. They want to buy you out.
Tony:	What about you?
Emma:	Well I set up a partnership with them. I'm staying.
Tony:	To do what?
Emma:	Something...nothing. ⁸⁷

While a two million dollar buyback hardly represents adequate restitution for genocide and land theft, this fictional scenario puts forward the idea that halting the process of dispossession, opening negotiations, listening to and respecting the wishes of Aboriginal people is a good first step in a very long process.

Recalibrating the Local through the Global in *Mystery Road*

The *Mystery Road* stories address a wide audience and many of the stories in the franchise easily translate into other contexts. It is a world constructed out of scalable generic conventions that allow local issues to be recalibrated in the context of global “crime culture”.⁸⁸ Issues such as the War on Drugs and the impact of global mining practices on the lives of Indigenous peoples are felt in many places around the world.⁸⁹ The dense interconnectedness of the state and big business is a familiar formation, although its exact configuration is specific to each location. Similarly, the genocidal state crimes of settler-colonialism are ongoing and take diverse forms. For many settler societies the problem of how to reconcile with Indigenous peoples, acknowledge historical human rights violations and redress ongoing contemporary harms, is far from simple or straightforward. The *Mystery Road* stories bear many of the hallmarks of what Luis Garcia-Mainar has called “the introspective realist crime film”.⁹⁰ They form an open-ended complex narrative that takes up the “peripheral point of view” of an Indigenous policeman, and critically engage with social and political issues over an extended number of episodes. In doing so, they immerse the viewer in the process of reflecting on what is going on in that world.⁹¹

The programmatic nature of Australian state crime was revealed to the public recently when Professor Lyndall Ryan and her team at the University of Newcastle published the first comprehensive massacre map of the country in 2017.⁹² *Mystery Road: The Series* (2018) engages with the “macro” issue of genocide and brings it down to an individual “micro” level, modelling and scripting how things might play out between two individual people. Emma, the local police chief, has a personal stake in delivering an apology, providing restitution and heading off her brother’s water fraud in the land buyback by traditional owners. Dot, a representative of the Aboriginal Land Corporation, is also invested in finding a way forward because she is a vital link between the Indigenous community, their traditional lands, the police and the white community of the town.

The world of *Mystery Road* is crime fiction as political writing, just the sort of “activism” that Nicole Watson identified.⁹³ It is also deeply influenced by global trends in film and television production that emerged in the first decade of the twenty-first century. According to R. Colin Tait the narrative complexity and historical revisionism embedded in the “HBO-ification of genre” that occurred during this period, brought with it the deconstruction of founding national myths and close scrutiny of how those core myths were intimately tied up in contemporary social problems, systemic failures, poverty and crime.⁹⁴ Tait makes a convincing argument for how the radical revision of genre over the last two decades has been part of a broad transformation in which the fictional worlds created by filmmakers within specific genres, mark out new subject positions for audiences. The introduction of historical complexity and moral ambiguity into these worlds furnishes “the viewer with a larger cognitive map, allowing them greater insight into their own times”.⁹⁵

The enlarged cognitive maps Tait argues for are an integral part of how narratives are shaped as they move across media and storytelling becomes a much more collaborative process between different cultural producers and viewers as they are passed from hand to hand. In a review of *Mystery Road: The Series* (2018) in *The Guardian*, Larissa Berendt remarked on the generosity of spirit that exists between Ivan Sen and Rachel Perkins, Australia’s two most experienced Aboriginal directors, when he handed over his auteur films for TV adaptation. Sen’s tough uncompromising filmic style is quite different from Perkins’ lighter touch and her deep engagement with adapting Hollywood genres for a local consumption. As Jennifer Gautier notes:

Perkins imports Hollywood’s most powerful export into a local context, stretching its boundaries and rewriting its definition, effectively Indigenizing it. She appropriates the genre film as a mode of telling stories about Aboriginal life and culture, but she cracks open this traditionally closed form to invite audience reflection and participation.⁹⁶

In Perkins’ hands, the confronting small town drug plot of *Mystery Road* (2013) becomes a framing device for a deeper exploration of historical issues and the scripting of pathways forward in *Mystery Road: The Series* (2018). It is a series that invites a wide audience to engage

with political and human rights issues in nuanced ways that go far beyond the rigid stereotypes we are so used to seeing Indigenous issues reduced to in the political arena.

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Chapter 2: Deconstructing Medea Narratives in True Crime: ‘Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane’ (2018)

True crime media campaigns encourage listeners to doubt the outcome reached in a court of law by presenting a very distorted, incomplete and partisan view of the facts of the case, even if the journalists involved are intelligent people motivated by good intentions.

*Rachel Jane Chin, Lawyer and Journalist*⁹⁷

As I turn off my TV having binge-watched the three episodes of *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* on Netflix, there’s a sickening feeling gurgling away in the pit of my stomach. The now 44 year-old Keli Lane, currently sitting in a prison cell for the murder of baby Tegan, is a woman who has undeniably had her sexual history weaponised against her. Like so many women who appear in a courtroom for one reason or another, she may as well have had her past sexual partners paraded before the jury on pitchforks.

*Melissa Shedden, Whimn.com.au*⁹⁸

Juries love a secret baby.

*Annalise Keating, How To Get Away With Murder*⁹⁹

In this section I examine *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* (2018), an open-ended multiplatform true crime narrative developed by the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC). The narrative is organised around a three-part television series screened on the ABC network from 25 September – 9 October 2018 that attracted over a million viewers for each

episode.¹⁰⁰ Supplementary digital content developed around the TV series included web articles about breaks in the case as they happened and these pages recorded roughly 2.4 million visitors.¹⁰¹ “Making of” podcasts designed to capture a female audience were distributed through *Mamamia*, Australia’s largest women’s media network, on the program *No Filter*.¹⁰² A Facebook group of over 30,000 web-sleuths joined the investigation providing expertise, theories and tips.¹⁰³ *Exposed* (2018) is a locally produced example of a true crime narrative adapted to the post-disruption global media landscape that was conceptualised around collaborative storytelling and a high level of audience participation.

The Renovation and Reinvention of Global True Crime

Exposed (2018) is part of a new wave of global true crime podcasts and documentaries that interrogate how legal truth-claims are constructed by picking apart their seams and inspecting their internal workings. In a 2016 review article, Stella Bruzzi identified a diverse group of true crime narratives that appeared to constitute an emerging genre.¹⁰⁴ She argued that series such as *The Staircase* (2004), *The Jinx* (2015), *Serial* (2014) and *Making a Murderer* (2015) all shared a common interest in “the law and how it can be represented, the truth, evidence and miscarriages of justice”.¹⁰⁵ Like *Exposed* (2018), podcasts such as *Serial* (2014) and television series such as *Making a Murderer* (2015), are complex open-ended narratives that, as Bruzzi points out, foreground uncertainty around their subject’s guilt or innocence.¹⁰⁶

These projects routinely direct the viewer’s attention to the larger institutional structures and cultural practices at work in the production of criminality by focusing on subjects who confound the simple binaries foundational to law and order discourses. For instance, *The Staircase* (2004) centred on the complicated status of Michael Peterson, a bisexual married man accused of murdering his wife.¹⁰⁷ *Serial* (S1: 2014) raised troubling questions about whether or not Islamophobia was one of the deciding factors in the murder conviction of Adnan Syed, a Pakistani-American.¹⁰⁸ *Making a Murderer* (2015) interrogated the extent to which Steven Avery’s criminality was built on a combination of his low socio-economic status and a long history of police harassment.¹⁰⁹

Bruzzi’s work delineated how contemporary true crime narratives about wrongful convictions foreground power inequalities and the uncertain legal status of minority groups.

However, criminologists such as Elizabeth Yardley et al. argue that these narratives erode the authority of experts, appropriate, commodify the emotional experiences of victims and quite possibly represent a trend in which there is “potential for compassion to become the new face of conservatism”.¹¹⁰

In this case study I intend to demonstrate something quite different: that the new wave of feminist true crime narratives represent a politically engaged mode of storytelling designed to recalibrate power relations within the criminal justice system. *The Exposed* (2018) production team go to great lengths to avoid the appropriation and commodification of Keli Lane’s emotional experiences. The series provides a space for her to speak, a right that was systematically taken from her during her trial by various state actors including the child protection agency, the police, the prosecution and even her own defence team.

Changing the perspective in Feminist True Crime

In the context of the #MeToo movement and a broad cultural reassessment of how to represent women’s experiences, *Exposed* (2018) stakes a claim to a place in the emerging genre of feminist true-crime narratives. Documentaries such as *Lorena* (2019), *Mommy Dead and Dearest* (2017) and *I Love You Now Die* (2019) develop a rich context for understanding the specificity of women’s crimes, from the power imbalances engendered in everyday sexual politics to the often obscure and sometimes coded language of violence women use to communicate their distress.

Exposed (2018) is close in purpose to Joshua Rofès Prime Video series *Lorena* (2019), a documentary retelling of the Lorena Bobbitt story. Privileging Lorena’s perspective and doing away with the standard documentary technique of narration to bring about cohesion, this four-part series examines the years of domestic abuse and marital rape that prompted Lorena to retaliate by slicing off her husband’s penis in 1993. It analyses how the intense media focus on John Wayne Bobbitt’s penis (the police hunt to recover it, the technicalities of its surgical reattachment and his post-surgical rise to porn-stardom) crowded out any discussion of the domestic abuse that Lorena suffered. The series put forward the proposition that Lorena Bobbitt’s trial could have provided the perfect opportunity for a public discussion of domestic

violence, but that opportunity was lost when she was constructed in media coverage as a volatile, potentially murderous, Latina.¹¹¹

Erin Lee Carr's true crime documentary *Mommy Dead and Dearest* (2017) demonstrates how simplistic notions of victimhood are no longer serviceable when vulnerable subjects resort to seemingly justifiable violence to escape untenable situations.¹¹² *Mommy Dead and Dearest* (2017) built on Michelle Dean's viral BuzzFeed true crime narrative about a case involving Munchausen by Proxy.¹¹³ In 2016 Gypsy Rose Blanchard was convicted of second-degree murder after collaborating in a plot to kill her mother. Dee Dee Blanchard kept Gypsy Rose housebound, drugged and confined to a wheelchair while defrauding money from welfare authorities and charitable donors for her support. Desperate to escape her confinement, Gypsy Rose started an online romance with Nicholas Godejohn, a teen who lived with autism, drawing him into a murder pact. The Blanchard murder posed troubling questions about maternal violence and the culpability of a child/woman who had been kept as a hostage since birth. It also raised questions about how the health system was implicated in the torture of Gypsy Rose and how the legal system and the broader community aided and abetted Dee Dee's fraud.¹¹⁴

In her third true crime film *I Love You, Now Die* (2019), Carr focuses on a case that calls into question the power of female language and its use as a conduit for violence. The film takes up the case of seventeen-year-old Michelle Carter who was convicted of inciting the suicide of her boyfriend, Conrad Roy, by text message. The film never loses sight of how cyberbullying has been implicated in current thinking about suicide as it explores eighteen-year-old Roy's long history of depression. It details how the physical abuse Roy was subjected to by his father was never introduced into evidence at Carter's trial, and neither was the fact that his mother was aware of his wish to end his life, though did nothing to intervene. Despite expert testimony that Carter was in an abusive online relationship in which Roy had the upper hand, in the courtroom Carter was constructed as a powerful teenage witch and Roy as her hapless victim.¹¹⁵

Like *Lorena* (2019), *Mommy Dead and Dearest* (2017) and *I Love You, Now Die* (2019), *Exposed* (2018) develops rich contextual material around a complex crime, though this time the focus is on sexual and reproductive politics. The *Exposed* (2018) narrative follows the re-investigation of a case of infanticide by two journalists, Caro Meldrum-Hanna and Elise Worthington. Meldrum-Hanna handles her subject, Keli Lane, with detached professionalism

and cognitive empathy; a stance that is particularly sensitive to the power imbalances that frame women's sexual experiences and reproductive choices.

Narration, Empathy and Transparency in True Crime

The most popular true crime podcasts are often made by women who come from outside the true crime or crime reporting traditions who are willing to manipulate the conventions of the genre in order to shift its focus.¹¹⁶ Sarah Koenig was the first of the mainstream journalists to set about dismantling the rigid stereotypes and long-standing conventions of true crime, coming up with a winning formula in *Serial* (2014), a program that was structured like a novel and set a high bar for audience emotional engagement.¹¹⁷

Connie Walker's award-winning podcast *Missing and Murdered: Finding Cleo* is a recent example of the sort of true crime narratives journalists produce when they move into the field. Walker, a Canadian Indigenous journalist, uses a unique narration style designed to provide the audience with insider knowledge and deep insight into the issues she investigates.¹¹⁸ As one critic recently remarked, Walker is "not only telling us a story, but she's demonstrating how to tell the story".¹¹⁹

This dual process of storytelling is one of the defining features of *Exposed* (2018) and like Walker's *Missing and Murdered: Finding Cleo*, it is designed to build trust with the audience by operating transparently. In an interview about the series, Meldrum-Hanna observed that "distrust in the media and what journalists do has never been higher".¹²⁰ The central aim of the series was to "...rip down the wall between journalist and audience - viewer, reader, listener" and promote open dialogue.¹²¹ Meldrum-Hanna saw the making of *Exposed* (2018) as an opportunity to develop new ways to communicate with audiences by opening up the work that journalists do to public scrutiny. The series was formulated as a work-in-progress, or television-in-the-making project, one that allowed the audience to see exactly how a story was put together.

The ideals of transparency and trust-building are realised in numerous ways in the series. All episodes include footage and dialogue that makes very clear to the audience exactly how the series is orientated, whose viewpoints are represented, who participated and who did not.

Episode 1: Truth and Lies includes footage of Meldrum-Hanna trying to persuade Lane's former water polo teammates to do on-camera interviews, her frustration as she receives rejection after rejection, and dialogue about how she makes sense of that development.¹²² In *Episode 2: Missing to Murder*, Meldrum-Hanna relates to Worthington how the first detective in the Lane investigation, Matthew Kehoe, is unwilling to do an on-camera interview for reasons that become clear later in the episode.¹²³ In *Episode 3: Reasonable Doubt*, footage reveals how the solicitors and barristers who acted as Lane's defence team at her trial either hang up on Meldrum-Hanna mid-call or otherwise make themselves unavailable in games of phone-tag.¹²⁴

The collaborative storytelling structure of *Exposed* (2018) involved the recruitment of a Facebook group of co-investigators and appeals for information during the program's screening. As Meldrum-Hanna remarked in various "making of" articles and podcasts, outsourcing parts of the labour on the investigation made for an unruly, though ultimately very rewarding experience. It provided the core *Exposed* (2018) team with a pool of skills and expertise to call upon, and also allowed them to test theories and verify the accuracy of information they received.¹²⁵

A Podcast for TV

By 2016 Keli Lane had been in prison for six years and had exhausted all of her legal avenues of appeal when, as a last resort, she wrote to Caro Meldrum-Hanna, an ABC journalist, after seeing her investigative work on the network's *Four Corners* program.¹²⁶ In her letter, Lane claimed that she had been wrongly convicted, reasserted her innocence and requested Meldrum-Hanna's help to find Tegan, the child she was convicted of murdering.¹²⁷ The journalist was sceptical but eventually agreed to reinvestigate when Lane waived privilege releasing the full legal brief of evidence to the ABC and accepted that Meldrum-Hanna would not advocate for her innocence.¹²⁸

In many ways *Exposed* (2018) is an unusual choice television because Lane is serving a long prison sentence and maintaining visual contact with her would be entirely out of the control of the production team. When the Department of Corrections refused the ABC's request to carry out filming at the prison facility, a series of phone interviews emerged as an alternative

possibility.¹²⁹ However prisoners are unable to receive phone calls; they can only call out between 9am and 3pm, and each call is limited to six minutes duration.¹³⁰

Exposed (2018) turns all these constraints into structural features and the result is a fascinating hybrid of fly-on-the-wall documentary and a “podcast for tv”.¹³¹ The series mobilises an impressive array of visual material: photographs, documents from the case file, police interview footage, and on-camera interviews with friends, family and experts, all of which are standard TV documentary techniques. It also dispenses with narration, instead conjuring a polyphony of competing voices and points of view that require a high level of viewer engagement to sort through the details and formulate an opinion. While Lane’s voice is foregrounded, it is not the only one used to guide the reinvestigation of the case. Meldrum-Hanna and Worthington provide a multi-layered context for the crime and in the process reshape Lane’s image from a Medea-like figure to that of an ordinary adolescent who was out of her depth in an unhealthy environment where older men sexually preyed on very young girls.¹³²

The most striking aspect of the series is how it produces a complex narrative that simultaneously delineates a space for a woman to speak and provides novel structures for the representation of her experience. It cuts audio of Lane’s voice into dramatic re-enactments of her version of events and then blends these into an already richly textured visual environment. The fast-paced editing style activates a peripheral vision directing the viewer’s attention to the interstitial spaces out of which Lane’s story emerges. This representational strategy produces a more complex and much more interesting narrative about a woman who has been portrayed as entirely two-dimensional to date.

Complex Crimes and The Unreliable Narrator

The term unreliable narrator has historically been used to describe fictional characters, though the new wave of true crime documentarians have taken it up as a way of understanding vulnerable subjects whose perception of reality is inseparable from the ways they have been victimised. For example, Walker’s informants for *Missing and Murdered: Finding Cleo* were all Indigenous people from Canada’s Stolen Generations who had been traumatised by

government removal programs. In a recent interview Carr talked about the challenges of working with unreliable narrators such as Gypsy Rose Blanchard:

...when you're making films about crime you can't always trust the subject because they have a reason to lie to you. So what do you do? You go towards the evidence, you look at the medical records, you look at police reports, you talk to both sides of the story.¹³³

The procedure of cross-checking and verifying information is thoroughly integrated into the *Exposed* (2018) investigation, as is the understanding of Keli Lane as an unreliable narrator. Meldrum-Hanna and Worthington operate with the tacit understanding that the truth of a woman's bodily experience is highly subjective and, in the context of trauma, it may not even be retrievable at all. At the beginning of the first episode Meldrum-Hanna lays out the ethical framework for the project when she locks Lane into a verbal contract to be as truthful as she possibly can. This call segment is part of a longer introductory conversation about Lane's reproductive choices and how she concealed them from her family and friends. It captures how Meldrum-Hanna goes about building trust with her audience and with her subject:

CMH: I'm gonna lose you very soon but I want to ask you.
You know part of making those choices and what
you've been harshly criticised for...

KL: uhuh, mmm.

CMH:was telling lies, telling lots of lies over many years.

KL: Yeah.

CMH: You know you were lying then, will you be truthful
with me through this?

KL. A hundred [percent] (beep)¹³⁴. I wouldn't have sought
you out and I wouldn't have been pushing for seven
years and had my life dug into and exposed and my

family, my friends, my partner. I (beep) would never do that to them and it's such a huge responsibility. And I could sit here, Caro, and do my time. I'm halfway through. But, nuh, no way. I, I'm happy for you to go to the ends...ends...I want you to go to the ends.

CMH: OK.

KL: I look forward to it.

CMH: Well, OK. It's going to take us to some tough....(call cuts off).¹³⁵

In this scene Meldrum-Hanna constructs a safe space for Lane to speak at the same time as treating her as an unreliable narrator. The agreement for her to be truthful also allows viewers to suspend disbelief at the same time as knowing they can verify information on the main Facebook site and the ABC *Exposed* (2018) website as new information is published.

Women at Work

Exposed (2018) foregrounds the investigation not only as process but also as a specific type of methodical, detailed, archival work. The opening scenes of the series find Meldrum-Hanna and Worthington at their desks surrounded by piles of paper waiting for Lane to call. They have completed their background research, read the substantial legal brief and all the existing media reports of the trial. The camera focuses on the clock, the call is late and there is anxiety around whether or not this project is even going to get off to a reasonable start.

When Lane's first call comes in there is a palpable sense of relief and viewers are introduced to Lane for the first time through her voice. Visual contrasts are set up right from the beginning between the phone calls, which require careful handling as they move across difficult emotional terrain, and the flurry of activity going on in the office. Worthington starts the timer on her iPhone as Lane's call comes in, puts it where Meldrum-Hanna can see it as she talks, then starts urgently scribbling on post-it notes, tearing them off and sticking them on

various surfaces. At the start of the episode she is surrounded by paper as she speaks directly to the camera:

I guess looking at the next...six months or so is completely daunting and overwhelming because, there's just so much to do and there are so many challenges with this story. Getting people to talk to us. It's something that happened twenty years ago, so long ago, even finding original documents from the time is going to be really difficult. It's not like you can just Google it and get things to come up.¹³⁶

Throughout the series footage reveals how the photos on the wall used to visually represent the investigation are moved around as they work. On the opposite side of the desks is a temporary room divider, a half-wall where post-it notes designating particular theories have been stuck with coded messages underneath. This office is not the clean organised space of a police procedural where the murder-board is graced with mug shots of the suspects and elegant handwriting sums up the investigation. Footage of the workspace clearly conveys that this sort of work is messy, time-consuming, and labour-intensive. Close-up shots under the table reveal a spare pair of shoes, a discarded lamp, and a hairdryer, reinforcing how the work bleeds over into the journalist's private lives.

The systematic detailed work of re-investigation is supplemented by the excitement of breaks in the case. In *Episode 2: Missing to Murder*, a large cache of 20,000 files is offered to Meldrum-Hanna by an anonymous source, many of which relate to the Lane case.¹³⁷ Meldrum-Hanna and Worthington find and interview numerous witnesses who corroborate Lane's version of events and the most important witness provides a sworn statement.¹³⁸ A police artist is called in to create a Comfit image of the man Lane says was the father of her child Tegan, something that has been a routine part of police investigations for decades but was not done in this case.¹³⁹ By *Episode 3: Reasonable Doubt* the women find concrete evidence of police corruption when they interview a police "built witness" who was coerced into saying he was Tegan's father and then used in a witness swap at the trial.¹⁴⁰

Witness manipulation is only one part of the complex behind-the-scenes gaming sketched out in episode three. Anthony Whealy QC, the judge who presided over the case, made clear that he did not believe Lane's conviction was valid, a concern he reiterated in an interview in *Episode 3: Reasonable Doubt*.¹⁴¹ Whealy famously struggled with the prosecutor throughout the trial. Notably, the judge expressed disapproval over the opening address in which Mark Tedeschi detailed a theory about how Lane had disposed of the baby's body at the Olympic Park site - a theory there was no evidence to support and that had to be withdrawn the next day. Throughout the trial Tedeschi wove a narrative of feminine evil around circumstantial evidence to convince the jury that there was a clear moral equivalence between telling lies and murdering a baby.¹⁴² Whealy was so concerned about the prosecution's narrative that he gave explicit instructions to the jury that telling lies does not make someone a murderer and that people lie for many different reasons.¹⁴³

The detailed investigative work the women do forms a central narrative thread in the series and like many contemporary true crime series, it reveals systemic failures in the criminal justice system. Such failures include shoddy policework, outright police corruption and prosecutorial misconduct that has gone unremarked. Most of all, the series demonstrates the breathtaking misogyny that powers the system itself. Lane's voice was subjugated, her experiences were invalidated and then completely erased by a system that is only tuned to hear the voices of powerful men.

A True Crime Audio Memoir in Six Minutes

The second narrative thread developed in the series, and the one that restores Lane's voice, is drawn from the podcasting repertoire. Lane spoke to Meldrum-Hanna by phone from the prison in six-minute blocks with the knowledge that she was speaking to a much larger audience who might be sympathetic to her cause and could possibly help her. There were clearly many phone calls that went into producing the raw material for the edited six-minute versions distributed throughout each episode. These short clips of Lane's voicework provide a rich listening experience for an audience attuned to podcasting, as they produce a text that most closely resembles a modern true crime audio memoir.¹⁴⁴

In the space of eighteen minutes spread over three episodes, Lane's recollections run the gamut of sexual and reproductive political issues. She begins with accounts of her pregnancies, how sick she became after a traumatic late-term abortion,¹⁴⁵ what it was like to play in a water polo grand final while she was nine months pregnant and everyone pretended not to notice,¹⁴⁶ and what it felt like to give her children up.¹⁴⁷ She provides insights into how she learned as a child to compartmentalise her emotions through her athletic training and never show pain.¹⁴⁸ In a move that completely overturned the public image of Lane as cold, callous and uncaring, she related vivid memories of the day she handed Tegan to her father.¹⁴⁹ Perhaps the most unsettling section is when she relates how her defence counsel and his team were ill-equipped to counter the tactical manoeuvres by the prosecution that ultimately secured her conviction.¹⁵⁰

Episode 1 : Truth and Lies disperses eleven audio segments totalling six minutes across just under an hour of viewing. Some sections are as short as five seconds (00.00.05). Others, like the first two introductory pieces, are much longer (00.01.15 and 00.01:00 respectively). Front-loading the first episode with audio of Lane's voice is an economical way of orientating the series, as it immediately provides context about the conditions under which she is able to speak, her motivations and stake in the game. It also makes clear her interest in crowd-sourcing audience expertise and information that might help her case:

Electronic voice of the prison call monitoring system: You are about to receive a phone call from an inmate at Silverwater Women's Correctional Centre. Your conversation will be recorded and may be monitored. If you do not wish to receive this call please hang up now. Go ahead please.

KL: Hello, Caro. How are you?

CMH: Hi Keli. How are you? I'm well, thanks for calling.

KL: Oh, thank you. I got caught up at work. It's a little bit noisy on the wing, but it's so good to talk to you finally.

CMH: OK. I know we've got limited time. We've got six minutes. So I guess what I'm interested to know is...Why did you write to me?What do you hope will come of this?

KL: Well obviously, the biggest hope is that someone comes forward with my daughter. She'd be an adult now, she's twenty, twenty-one. So she obviously has had her whole life, perhaps not knowing that she's my child. I don't want to interrupt her life. I don't even necessarily...need to meet her. But obviously, for my family, for myself, I want to show that I did not harm her and I certainly did not kill her.¹⁵¹

The proposition put forward at the beginning of the series is that this is a space where Lane's voice will be heard, and that any information she provides will be treated as credible and worthy of investigation. This tacit agreement is encoded in footage of Meldrum-Hanna at her desk listening as Lane speaks to her on the phone, sometimes taking notes. This listening motif is repeated throughout the series and is designed to build empathy and trust between Meldrum-Hanna and her sources - and by extension the audience. Such empathy is amply demonstrated roughly forty minutes into *Episode 1: Truth and Lies* when Meldrum-Hanna asks Lane about the adoption of her first child and struggles to put herself in Lane's position:

CMH: I was really interested to know what happens to you, in your heart and, I guess, in your head after you give your first girl up? Because to me, if I try to place myself in your shoes, I'm thinking, I'd be doing anything to avoid being in that scenario again...'cause it was just so hard.

KL: Yeah, it was so hard. And I certainly didn't think I'm gonna go out and do that again. I'd be crazy, literally. It was a carelessness and a lack of self-protection and

then you know, drinking a lot. Drinking and not using the pill correctly or not asking my partner to use protection and not having control of the situations I was in. When it was done, it was done and she was safe and she was happy and they let me know everything's good and I could just move on, you know. Just put it out of my mind (beep)...¹⁵²

At the beginning of *Episode 2: Missing to Murder* the series arrives at a turning point as Meldrum-Hanna poses a high-stakes question: whether Lane killed her baby. It is a moment of anxiety for viewers because we know that Lane could simply hang up and never ring back. Two and a half minutes in Meldrum-Hanna frames the question with sensitivity and even provides Lane with an exit strategy:

CMH: You said before Keli, you didn't want to give her away but you couldn't take her home and I've got to ask you this. Is there any way that you could have done something to Tegan? You could have harmed her?

KL: [interrupts] There is no way

CMH: Without you knowing or intending to...

KL: There is no way. There is no way. I could have just left her there. If Andrew didn't turn up – he told me he was gonna turn up – and if he didn't turn up I would have just left her there. Or. I would have gone down the exact same path as before. I would have asked for some help. I would have asked to see an adoption agency. I would have done the exact same thing that I did eighteen months earlier.¹⁵³

Lane refuses to take the option Meldrum-Hanna offers her. She even provides a credible explanation as to why there was no need to kill Tegan, bringing a persuasive logic to her story.

Turning Fiction into Fact: Re-enactments and Repetition

Restoring Lane's voice in audio segments and providing a space for her to speak is only one component of the second narrative thread in the series. The integration of visual material in the form of dramatic re-enactments is a strategy designed to fill out and consolidate her version of events. Amongst documentary filmmakers of the observational school, dramatic re-enactments have long been regarded as a fictional technique that has no place in the cinema verité repertoire. However in recent years, a new generation of filmmakers have broken away from formal constraints in an effort to capture a range of different experiences.¹⁵⁴ As Stella Bruzzi observed, re-enactments have undergone a revival amongst true crime documentary makers at roughly the same time that the use of film footage (or "evidence verité") has been normalised in courts.¹⁵⁵ Re-enactments offer up a different kind of truth, one that undermines the optical fundamentalism that what is in front of the camera is a singular unassailable truth. Re-enactments emphatically problematise the border between "evidence and narrative fiction".¹⁵⁶

The *Exposed* (2018) series integrates short re-enactment sequences, many of which are repeated, embellished and designed to achieve diverse representational goals, but ultimately reinscribe Lane's experience. The core re-enactment sequence involves an actor cast as Lane walking down a corridor in the hospital carrying a baby. This soft-focus footage is shot from behind and accompanied by a soundtrack of amplified footsteps, an aesthetic strategy that constructs Lane's narrative as a memory sequence and one that operates in opposition to the sharp focus of the interviews with major players in the case.

The long re-enactment sequence inserted between the interviews represents Lane's memory flashbacks. It begins with the core sequence of her and Tegan's father walking down the hospital hallway. In the hospital foyer she hands the baby to him and the camera follows the man and his family out of the hospital, into the carpark and then into the street as they drive away. Splicing re-enactments into the interviews is designed to alert the viewer to competing narratives and by the end of the series, the repetition and extension of soft-focus re-enactment

loops have come to represent how Lane's reality was undermined; how her recollection of events was subordinated by various institutional actors in a systematic program of erasure.

Demythologising Medea in *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* (2018)

In the courtroom Lane's five concealed pregnancies were constructed as a bizarre and specifically feminine form of deception, yet interviews conducted by Meldrum-Hanna reveal that many people around Lane were aware she was pregnant. Instead of offering help and support her water polo teammates and her adult coaches (who had a clear duty of care) colluded in a program of collective denial that ultimately isolated her. Audience feedback to the *Exposed* (2018) website and the Facebook group indicates that concealed pregnancies in adolescence are not nearly as unusual as the prosecutor would have the jury and the public believe.¹⁵⁷

The Exposed (2018) series sheds light on how viciously Lane was punished for a crime she may not have committed. In *Episode 3: Reasonable Doubt*, we learn that before the inquest in 2004 and the relentless police undercover operation that lasted till 2008, the Deputy Coroner offered her an immunity deal if she would reveal how and where she had disposed of Tegan's body. Keli Lane has always maintained her innocence and, just as the prosecutor intended, she was convicted on the strength of the lies she told: lies designed to conceal her pregnancies, lies that jumbled fact and fiction, lies she hoped would mislead or even appease state authorities. She misnamed the fathers of her children on birth certificates, substituted digits on contact phone numbers on hospital paperwork, gave wrong house numbers in the right street to adoption agencies, and lied to a child protection case worker about how many babies she had given birth to.¹⁵⁸

Like Medea aboard the *Argo* casting parts of her brother's dismembered body into the sea to delay her father's pursuit, Lane tore up the patriarchal motherhood script scattering documentation before those who sought to regulate her sexuality and her reproductive choices.¹⁵⁹ She was offered up as a ritual sacrifice by the NSW Crown Prosecutor at a time when the split between motherhood (a patriarchally circumscribed role based on biology) and mothering (a nurturing role, a type of labour that anyone can take up) threatened to undermine traditional cultural models of kinship.¹⁶⁰ Nicholas Cowdery, the head of the NSW Department of Public Prosecutions, was very clear about the need to legally regulate "the relationship

between a new mother and child”.¹⁶¹ For Cowdery, Lane was a woman who embodied all the doubleness of “ambivalent motherhood”¹⁶². He went so far as to argue that she even represented a substantial threat to “the virile young male portion of the community” if she had been allowed to go free.¹⁶³ Lane was thus consciously constructed as an unruly, dangerous woman; a body that the state had to regulate in order to “protect” men.

As Barbara Barnett and Nicola Goc have pointed out, the myth of Medea is a timeless resource, a narrative framework mobilised against women either suspected of killing their children, such as Lindy Chamberlain,¹⁶⁴ or women who buckle under the relentless labour of raising children unsupported, such as Akon Guode.¹⁶⁵ Women cast in the role of Medea inspire primal fear, not because, as in Euripides, they assume the power of gods, but because as David Vann’s rendition of the much older myth makes clear, they conjure the doppelgänger of patriarchal authority in the form of autonomous, unassimilable, female power/knowledge.¹⁶⁶

If Euripides’ *Medea* was a play about men’s deepest fear of maternal violence and what would happen if a woman was allowed to seek revenge, the very public battle over the meaning of motherhood encoded in the Keli Lane case was a clear reversal of the revenge dynamic. It is obvious from interviews conducted by the *Exposed* (2018) team that the representatives of the child protection and judicial authorities – John Borovnik, Mark Tedeschi and Nicholas Cowdery - saw themselves as involved in a pre-emptive strike in the struggle over contemporary genealogy, kinship structures and gender roles, at a time when increasing cultural diversity and the democratisation of reproductive technologies threatened to bring down the house of assumed white male privilege.

The *Exposed* (2018) series sets out to reshape Lane’s public image from a cold, callous, “slutty” “baby-killer”, to that of an ordinary woman vilified for the sexual and reproductive choices she made at a particularly vulnerable time in her life. It deflates the mythic battle for control inscribed on the body of Lane, a woman cast as a modern day Medea. Most significantly, the series demonstrates how true crime narratives can operate as a politically engaged practice and how they can contribute to the renovation of institutions that shape the everyday lives of women and people from cultural minorities.

Endnotes

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- 131 . Johnson, 2019.
- 132 . Fray, *Fourth Estate*, 22:23 – 22:46, 2018.
- 133 . "Documentarian Erin Lee Carr Discusses her Latest Film 'Mommy Dead and Dearest'", 4.49 – 5.04, 2017.
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- 148 . *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane*, episode 1, 45:09 – 45:41, 2018.
- 149 . *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane*, episode 2, 00:44 – 02:24, 2018; *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane*, episode 3, 28:30 – 29:26, 2018.
- 150 . *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane*, episode 3, 36:22 - 36:23, 47:36 - 47:49, 52:09 - 52:26, 2018.
- 151 . *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane*, episode 1, 01:12 – 02:27, 2018.
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- 154 . Bruzzi, 251. Mike Menghetti, “Self-Exculpatory Imaginings: Reenactment and Observation in The Act of Killing,” *Canadian Journal of Film Studies* 25 no. 2 (Fall, 2016): 39-61.
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- 156 . Bruzzi, 270-271. T. Christian Miller and Ken Armstrong, “The Unbelievable Story of Rape,” *ProPublica*, December 15, 2015, accessed October 28, 2019, <https://www.propublica.org/article/false-rape-accusations-an-unbelievable-story>. The separation between journalism and crime fiction has become increasingly hard to distinguish and it is often when journalists make the choice to move into fiction to broaden their audience that certain issues gain traction. A good example is “The Unbelievable Story of Rape” by Miller of *ProPublica* and Armstrong of *The Marshall Project*, which was made into the Netflix series *Unbelievable*.
- 157 . Fray, *Fourth Estate*, 34:50 – 35:42, 2018. As Meldrum-Hanna told Peter Fray in the *Fourth Estate* interview, many women from the audience wrote emails about concealed pregnancies. One woman said that, like Lane, she had three and still no one knows of the three children she had as a teenager. Meldrum-Hanna went on to speculate about how differently Lane’s trial might have turned out if this sort of evidence was heard and Lane’s behaviour had been, if not normalised, then at least contextualised.
- 158 . *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane*, episode 3, 16:46 – 17:19, 2018. As Michelle Ruyters from the *Bridge of Hope Innocence Initiative* explained in this segment, there was no evidence to implicate Lane in a death so the prosecution charged her with three counts of perjury in order to have her sexual history and the birth of her

previous children admitted into evidence. From there it was a simple case of creating a moral equivalence between lies and child murder to secure her conviction.

159 . David Vann, *Bright Air Black*, (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2017). For this part of the story I draw on Vann's novel set during Medea's time at the end of the Bronze Age, not when Euripides play was performed in 431 BC.

160 . So Mayer, "Medea's Perineum," *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities* 23 no. 1 (2018): 188-193. In a review of Maggie Nelson's *The Argonauts*, Mayer emphasises the difference between the patriarchally defined role of "motherHOOD" and the labour involved in "motherING". A shift in understanding that, she argues, is informing new models of kinship.

161 . *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane*, episode 3, 10:08 – 10:39, 2018.

162 . Ruth Cain, "'Just What Kind of Mother are You?': Neoliberal Guilt and Privatised Maternal Responsibility in Recent Domestic Crime Fiction," in *Motherhood in Literature and Culture: Interdisciplinary Perspectives From Europe*, edited by Rye, Browne, Giorgio, Jeremiah and Six (London: Routledge, 2017). Cain argues that ambivalent motherhood contains a potent mix of "gothic" and "guilt".

163 . *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane*, episode 3, 10:41- 11:18, 2018; Belinda Jepsen, "One of the Most Shocking Moments in the Keli Lane Case Came from an Unlikely Source," Mamamia.com.au, October 11, 2018, accessed October 4, 2019, <https://www.mamamia.com.au/keli-lane-abc-exposed/>. "Keli Lane: Nicholas Cowdery Resigns as White Ribbon Chair after Comments Made on ABC's Exposed About Killer's Sex Life," *ABC News*, October 11, 2018, accessed October 20, 2019, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-10-11/nicholas-cowdery-resigns-white-ribbon-chair-keli-lane-comments/10366714>. After this episode was aired Cowdery was accused of "slut-shaming" Lane and he was forced to resign as the Chair of White Ribbon Australia, an anti-domestic violence organisation.

164 . Barbara Barnett, "Towards Authenticity: Using Feminist Theory to Construct Journalistic Narratives of Maternal Violence," *Feminist Media Studies* 13 no. 3 (2013): 505-524; "Medea in the Media: Narrative and Myth in Newspaper Coverage of Women Who Kill their Children," *Journalism*, 7 no. 4 (2006): 411-432. Nicola Goc, "Framing the News: 'Bad' Mothers and the 'Medea' News Frame," *Australian Journalism Review* 31 no. 1 (2009): 33-47.

165 . Helen Garner, "Why She Broke: The Woman, Her Children and The Lake: Akon Gudoe's Tragic Story," *The Monthly*, June 2017, accessed September 10, 2018, <https://www.themonthly.com.au/issue/2017/june/1496239200/helen-garner/why-she-broke>. Akon Guode was a thirty five year-old South Sudanese widow with seven children who arrived in Melbourne as a refugee, three of her children died when she drove her car into a lake at Wyndham Vale.

166 . David Vann, *Bright Air Black*, (Melbourne: Text Publishing, 2017).

Chapter 3: Staging Wounded Masculinity and Domestic Abuse in Jane Harper's 'The Lost Man' (2018)

The day Zeus came to the safe-house
and shoved a sawn-off shotgun
through the letterbox calling softly
like he was calling to the cat
that terrible croon
SWEETHEART,
I'M HOME.

Had them kettled for hours.
Oh yes they were mightily changed.
Maddened, fuguing. Dissolved to rivers,
shaking like trees in a hurricane.
Some of them damaged in their entrails,
two thrown from high windows;
impossible to save.

*Fiona Benson, Vertigo & Ghost*¹⁶⁷

People taken hostage against their will generally can't wait to be released, so they can go back to their old life. In domestic abuse, the relationship in which they are captive is their life, and they will go to great lengths – and ignore severe pain and distress – to preserve it.

*Jess Hill, See What You Made Me Do*¹⁶⁸

In this section I examine *The Lost Man* (2018), Jane Harper's third best-selling crime novel and her first stand-alone narrative. Since her first novel *The Dry* (2016) was published, Harper's work has been described by reviewers as being at the vanguard of outback noir, "the hottest new crime wave" sweeping the globe.¹⁶⁹ Although her novels all have much in common with other outback noir narratives set in regional and remote Australia, my interest in this case study is in exploring how *The Lost Man* operates as an (outback) domestic noir narrative, one centrally concerned with intergenerational trauma and gender-based violence.

Australian Domestic Noir: Viral Hits

The Lost Man is not the first of the global best-sellers to highlight the normalisation of domestic abuse and to represent the dark side of the Australian family as a contemporary iteration of an historical penal colony. Liane Moriarty's *Big Little Lies* (2014) was more recognisable as a domestic noir novel because it was written by a female author and focused closely on the experiences of its female characters. The novel presents a complex picture of how women's lives are touched by domestic abuse and the sort of moral dilemmas they grapple with when faced with the need to seek professional help, protect their children or leave an abusive relationship. As Elena Alvarez notes, the three main characters in *Big Little Lies* — Celeste, Madeline and Jane — operate as a prism through which different aspects of women's lives can be seen.¹⁷⁰

Celeste is an upper middle-class stay-at-home mother who finds that her marriage has morphed into an abusive relationship during a long period of grief over four consecutive miscarriages.¹⁷¹ She was a competent, well-educated woman who worked as a lawyer before her marriage to Perry, a successful hedge fund manager.¹⁷² At first when Perry hits her, Celeste threatens to leave him if he does it again, but when the physical abuse continues she finds herself lacking the energy and focus to carry out her threat.¹⁷³ Gradually the violence escalates and becomes a prelude to complex, and for Celeste very confusing sexual encounters that leave her feeling morally compromised, complicit in the violence and unable to call herself "a proper domestic violence victim".¹⁷⁴ Eventually, she comes to the realisation that Perry will kill her.¹⁷⁵

Celeste is an example of the complicated characters that have come to populate domestic noir narratives over the last decade. She dismantles long-standing stereotypes of victimhood by showing how domestic abuse is not confined to a particular class or income category. *Big Little Lies* and *The Lost Man* take up the issue of domestic abuse in radically different contexts, though they both interrogate the pervasiveness of gender-based violence, revealing how it is normalised across generations and embedded into family structures.

From Domestic Noir to Outback Domestic Noir

At first glance it might be difficult to see how a novel about three brothers who live on an outback cattle property might fit into the category of domestic noir, given that readers have come to recognise stories about women told from a female point of view as emblematic of the genre. In a recent anthology *Domestic Noir: The Twenty-First Century Face of Crime Fiction*, Laura Joyce argued that:

...domestic noir is a capacious, flexible category that encompasses realist writing about domestic violence, intersectional feminism, religion, mental illness and women's rights but it can also include fantastic and even supernatural storylines.¹⁷⁶

Although the formal properties of the genre are malleable, its central concerns remain consistent, adhering closely to the scrutiny of gender roles and the manipulation of what constitutes masculine and feminine.¹⁷⁷ In a discussion of the historical antecedents of twenty-first century domestic noir narratives Fiona Peters points out that:

...some attempts to write from "the female perspective" are theoretically and politically restrictive...if the position is maintained that only female protagonists represent femininity, the subgenre risks becoming unnecessarily restrictive.¹⁷⁸

Peters' observation is important because *The Lost Man* explores sibling and intimate partner relationships from a male perspective and how the men in the Bright family struggle, and ultimately fail, to live up to an idealised model of patriarchal masculinity historically embedded in Australian bush mythology.

In a recent article on *Rural Masculinity* (2016), Berit Brandth and Marit Haugen point out that contemporary farming communities are still very much structured around “hegemonic masculinity”.¹⁷⁹ Land ownership devolves to first-born sons, men manage the properties, the families are organised around a strict gender hierarchy and women usually “‘marry in’ to landowning families” from outside the community.¹⁸⁰ These traditions are roughly mirrored in the fictional rural community in the narrative, though there are some variations on the power structure. For instance, in the Bright family, it is Cameron, the second son, who manages the property and takes up the role as head of the household. Nathan, the eldest, marries the only daughter of a local cattle baron, relinquishing part of his share in the family property when he and Jacqui move to a property nearby, gifted to them at their wedding. Jacqui is in an entirely different position to the other women in the Bright family because she is able to mobilise the resources and support to leave when her marriage to Nathan breaks down. Ilse, Cameron's wife, and Liz, the family matriarch, arrive at Burley Downs with few resources or support of their own and are effectively held captive when their marriages take a violent turn.

Coercive Control and Domestic Abuse

All the characters in *The Lost Man* are anchored to specific, situated points of view and this is an effective technique for capturing the aspects of domestic abuse that have come to be known in legal discourse and anti-domestic abuse campaigns as “coercive control” or “intimate terrorism”.¹⁸¹ It was Evan Stark, a forensic social worker, who popularised the term coercive control in the 1990s.¹⁸² At its simplest coercive control is a set of micro-technologies designed to hold a person hostage using any combination of isolation, domination, intimidation, threats and blame and denial.¹⁸³

In his book *Coercive Control* (2009) Stark overturned the common understanding of domestic abuse as an essentially private matter of interpersonal conflict, reframing it as a

human rights violation – an historically specific form of psychological violence aimed at women as a class of people.¹⁸⁴ In traditional patriarchal cultures men were automatically authorised to extract resources, labour and sex from women, but in contemporary liberal democracies that support a range of women’s civic, political and human rights, women operate as relatively autonomous individuals.¹⁸⁵ Stark argues that coercive control emerged in the late twentieth century as a strategic response to female autonomy - a way for men to reconstruct a “patriarchy in miniature” in their intimate relationships.¹⁸⁶

In line with feminist legal scholars Stark argues that coercive control is indistinguishable from “other capture crimes like hostage-taking or kidnapping”.¹⁸⁷ It is a form of behaviour that has recently been criminalised in England and Wales (2015), Ireland (2018) and Scotland (2019), but Australia is still some way from legislating against this form of psychological violence.¹⁸⁸ Many researchers in the area of intimate terrorism, including Stark and psychiatrists such as Judith Lewis Herman, regard coercive control as a flexible, scalable system designed to hold almost anyone in captivity - from intimate partners and family members, right up to large numbers of prisoners-of-war.¹⁸⁹

As Jess Hill notes in her recent book *See What you Made Me Do: Power, Domination and Domestic Abuse* (2019) coercive control is a particularly insidious global problem because:

[It] is not just violence. It’s worse. It is a unique phenomenon, in which the perpetrator takes advantage of their partner’s love and trust and uses that person’s most intimate details – their deepest desires, shames and secrets - as a blueprint for their abuse.¹⁹⁰

Moreover, she argues, there is a coherent logic to the pattern of behaviour that makes up coercive control and even though the triggers for its activation are varied, they can all be traced to incidents where men have been made to feel powerless by either the threat or the reality of other men’s violence.¹⁹¹ Coercive control is first and foremost a shame-management strategy designed to externalise intolerable feelings of humiliation by displacing them from self to other – from men who are dominated and controlled by other men, to the women and children they believe they have the right to subordinate.¹⁹²

In order to understand how Harper captures the details of coercive control - and this is a form of domination that is all about the micro-management of victims – it is necessary to concentrate on the technical aspects of her writing, because she explores situated viewpoints as a way of making this particular crime visible.

Staging Wounded Masculinity

In his recent edition of *Australian Crime Fiction: A Two Hundred Year History*, Stephen Knight argues that Harper's first novel *The Dry* (2016), a police procedural featuring detective Aaron Falk, differs markedly from traditional approaches to criminal investigation in that it "tends to manipulate viewpoints rather than use detection as a means of discovery".¹⁹³ Knight's observation is crucial to thinking about *The Lost Man* because Harper's handling of the spatial dynamics of the gaze has become a distinctive feature of her work.

In a recent interview with Astrid Edwards from *The Garret* podcast, Harper described how she develops the psychological disposition of her characters by constructing their world, and their place in it in cinematic terms:

...in this scene...what are these people actually thinking?
What are they seeing when they look around and when they
look at each other? When they think about their
backgrounds and how it brought them to this moment? ¹⁹⁴

Harper brings her characters to life in such a way that there is a smooth continuity between looking and seeing, thinking and knowing. Flashbacks, partial views, different levels of character penetration and the intersection of reciprocal gazes are all techniques that allow her to play with an interior/exterior doubling between the landscape and her character's psychological states. In *The Lost Man* this doubling operates so that the harshness and isolation of the landscape is mirrored in the particular type of psychological violence either suffered by or inflicted upon the characters.

Staging is one way of understanding how the spatial relationships in a scene are organised, how bodies are physically arrayed in space and how the emotional economy between characters operates. According to Charles Baxter in *The Art of Subtext: Beyond Plot* (2007), staging is analogous to stagecraft or stage direction in theatre or cinema:

Staging in fiction involves putting characters in specific strategic positions in the scene so that some unvoiced nuance is revealed. Staging may include how close or how far away the characters are from each other, what their particular gestures and facial expressions might be at moments of dramatic tension.¹⁹⁵

In *The Lost Man* Harper stages masculinity as a specific set of spatial relationships between male bodies either in the landscape or the domestic spaces of the homestead.

When Nathan meets Bub at the stockman's grave in the opening scenes, the men look directly at one another rather than down at Cameron's body, which lies at their feet under a "faded tarp".¹⁹⁶ In close proximity, their gestures are muted, their conversation thrown off-kilter as it stops and starts - the weight of what is not said filling the space between them. Bub's speech and micro-expressions convey the weight of a shared history:

Nathan tried again. 'How long have you been here?'

Bub thought for a moment, the way he often did, before answering. His eyes were slightly hooded under the brim of his hat, and his words fell a fraction of a beat slower than average speaking pace. 'Since last night, just before dark.'¹⁹⁷

The image of Cameron's body being uncovered and loaded into the ambulance in chapter three foreshadows the unveiling of long buried family secrets and the workings of Cameron's interior life that is revealed in the following chapters:

The tarp slipped loose as Cameron's limp form was lifted onto a stretcher. Bub had been right. Their brother didn't look injured, at least not in the traditional sense. But heat and thirst did terrible things to a person. He had started to remove his clothes as logic had deserted him, and his skin had cracked. Whatever had been going through Cameron's mind when he was alive, he didn't look peaceful in death.¹⁹⁸

The hidden psychological injuries leading Cameron to his death are explored over the remainder of the narrative where the amplified language of gesture morphs into violence, and later, a systematic framework of coercive control.

Across two generations of the Bright family domestic abuse takes different forms. In a long flashback in chapter seventeen, Nathan reflects on how the targeted use of silence, followed by unpredictable episodes of savage punishment, allow Carl Bright to command absolute obedience from his wife and sons. The flashback begins with Nathan and Cameron running away from home and managing to ride their horses as far as the stockman's grave on the edge of the property, before Carl arrives to take them home. On the way back to the homestead Nathan sits in the car "looking at the back of his dad's head and wishing he would start shouting. It was the stillness that scared him".¹⁹⁹ When Carl finally punishes the boys he strips them of any means of imaginative escape from the family by making them burn their most precious possessions: for Cameron it is books about World War II and for Nathan it is his guitar.²⁰⁰

Carl's violence is unpredictable and is often designed to shift blame for a transgression from Cameron to Nathan:

The back of Nathan's head bounced against the wall with the sharp smack. Carl hadn't even bothered to look at him properly as he'd lifted an arm and taken a swipe, his attention focused on Cameron.²⁰¹

While his father's misdirection initially shocks him, Nathan becomes so resigned to such outbursts that he knows better than to try to fight back: "the blow had come too fast for Nathan to defend himself...sometimes it was easier not to".²⁰² Exhausted resignation leads him to the realisation that he has become his father's captive, powerless to resist because he is "still flooded with the same terror he'd felt his whole life. The feeling that came whenever Carl raised his voice or his hands or both".²⁰³

The experience of growing up under Carl's reign of domestic terror leads Nathan and Cameron to make very different choices about how to be a father when their families arrive. For Nathan:

A large part of his reluctance around fatherhood, he realised after Xander was born, had been fear...he had stumbled his way through by thinking about how his own father would react to any given situation and then – with sustained effort at times – doing the exact opposite.²⁰⁴

Cameron too, struggles to overcome Carl's legacy of violence, though both Ilse and his daughter Sophie bear the scars of his failure to escape such well-established patterns of control and his inability to tolerate even the slightest challenge to his authority. Sophie's broken arm and Lo's depression and fearfulness hover in the midground of the narrative, as markers of the physical and psychological injuries Cameron inflicts on those around him, until they are foregrounded in the concluding chapters. In chapter thirty-five, Harry sums up the dilemma victims of intimate terror all over the world contend with – the contradiction between the public and private faces of their captors:

'Look, Cameron was a smart bloke. A lot smarter than Carl, but you know that. Carl was a violent aggressive bastard and didn't care who knew it. But Cam was never like that. He wanted people to like him and respect him. And they did, didn't they? Underneath though' – Harry said nothing for so long that Nathan thought he might not continue. 'I'd

started to wonder if Cam was more like your dad than he let on. Maybe worse even, because he was clever. He could hide it better.²⁰⁵

Isolation and Enclosure

The setting for *The Lost Man* is just the sort of environment in which coercive control thrives because the basic rules of survival in this part of the country hardly differ from the features of captivity. Descriptions of the landscape at the beginning of the book emphasise how perception distorts distance, and how the terrain plays tricks on the mind of the observer. The Prologue begins with a scene from the point-of-view of the pilot who discovers Cameron's dead body:

From above, from a distance, the marks in the dust formed a tight circle. The circle was far from perfect, with a distorted edge that grew thick, then thin and broke in places. It was also empty...the pilot would spot the car first, with its hot metal winking... a flash of blue material against the red ground ...would catch his eye. A work shirt, unbuttoned and partially removed. The temperature the past few days had hit forty-five degrees at the afternoon peak. The exposed skin was sun-cracked.²⁰⁶

Just how easy it is to become disorientated is spelt out during the search for Cameron's car, which is mysteriously located some distance from where his body was found.²⁰⁷ Even people like the Bright brothers, who have lived in the area their whole lives, find themselves mistaking one place for another as they scour the area:

They repeat the procedure. Stop, circle. Nothing but more of the same. Nathan was losing hope and had opened the passenger door to climb back in when he heard a soft tapping on the window. Xander was pointing and saying

something...Nathan could make out nothing as he squinted against the sun. He bent down, aligning his view with his son's. He followed the line of sight until, at last, he could see. On a distant outcrop, on its rocky peak, there was the dull glint of dirty metal.²⁰⁸

The terrain is by turns monotonous and deceptive. As Nathan and Xander tell Sergeant Ludlow in chapter four, in this part of the country there can be floods without rain and people can be confined to their properties for weeks at a time.²⁰⁹ A different set of perceptual tricks are evident when Nathan, Bub and Xander return to the family homestead in chapter five. When they first arrive the house appears serene, peaceful and welcoming:

The homestead glowed like an oasis as the red desert gave way to lush lawn and well-tended garden, kept green by bore water. The house itself, with its sweeping verandah, looked plucked from a country street in a time when homes were still generous and sprawling.²¹⁰

Before long the house takes on the look of a remote penal colony. The men are free to move around the property and visit the small town of Balamara, a three-hour drive from the homestead, to socialise, shop and drink at the pub.²¹¹ Ilse, Cameron's widow, Liz, his mother, and Katy, a backpacker employed to help around the house and teach the children, have few opportunities to leave and the situation is the same for the children, who are home schooled.²¹² A diary by the telephone in the homestead keeps track of everyone's movements: the time they leave, when they expect to return and where they will be while they perform their tasks.²¹³ On the surface such regulation is predicated on safety concerns, though it is easy to see how it could slip into an insidious form of micro-management. As Evan Stark notes the specific mechanisms of coercive control are directly drawn from "the microdynamics of everyday life" and it is the details of domestic life that controlling men use to exploit their partners.²¹⁴

Gaslighting

As an adolescent Cameron learns to manipulate the perception of people around him with the strategic aim of stripping them of resources and extracting various kinds of labour or services. When he returns from university with an agribusiness degree he takes control of all money flowing in and out of Burley Downs. While Bub is held captive, financially abused, and forced to work unpaid for years when Cameron refuses to release his inheritance, it is the women who come to live and work at the property who are by far the least empowered.²¹⁵

After a decade living at Burley Downs as Cameron's wife, Ilse comes to the sudden realisation that she has no bank account, no money of her own, no outside social support and no reliable car in which to leave the property. The full extent of her captivity begins to take on clarity for Nathan when he suspects that Cameron has been systematically sabotaging her car.²¹⁶ His suspicions are finally consolidated when Ilse tells him how Cameron turned her into a non-citizen with no personal history or identity documents:

My passport had expired. Neither of the girls even has one.
He'd taken my driving licence and residency documents,
in theory to file away, but when I wanted them, I couldn't
find them. I haven't had a paid job since I worked in the
pub. I don't have any family in this country, no real friends.
And people around here liked Cameron. If they had to
choose a side, it wouldn't be mine.²¹⁷

Ilse's estimate of how much help she would receive from people if she tried to escape is probably realistic because domestic abuse remains at epidemic proportions around the world – a crime that is “invisible in plain sight”.²¹⁸ As Jess Hill notes, simply working towards gender equality is not a solution by itself because what is at stake is viewpoint - a matter of how we look and what we see – as well as the credibility of the victim.²¹⁹

The most interesting aspect of *The Lost Man* is how Harper uses a wide-angle lens to explore the intricacies of coercive control as a system – from a standard macro-technology

such as isolation, right down to the individualised micro-technologies of gaslighting. There is an authenticity to the narrative that reflects much of the research in the field because women like Liz, Ilse and Katy, who find themselves taken hostage, come to the realisation slowly. A series of small incidents that could be interpreted in many different ways, in hindsight, turn out to be of greater significance when the time to escape has long passed.

The Stockman's Grave

The stockman's grave is arguably the most symbolically significant image of the book:

In the centre is a headstone blasted smooth by a hundred-year assault from sand, wind and sun. The headstone stood a metre tall and was still perfectly straight...The name of the man buried beneath had long since vanished and the landmark was known to the locals – all sixty-five of them, plus 100,000 head of cattle – simply as the stockman's grave.²²⁰

The iconography of the grave proliferates throughout the narrative in such a way that it forms a spatial limit - the edge of the enclosure that is Burley Downs. It haunts the narrative, surfacing at different times to shift meaning, direction and point-of-view. In the first telling of the story in chapter six, it takes the form of a ghost story about a cattle rustler set in the late nineteenth century. The stockman disappeared from his camp one night and mysteriously reappeared three days later having been found dead far from the camp.²²¹ In another version of the story that Cameron tells his daughter, the stockman is a careless, stupid man who climbed through a fence with a loaded gun and “accidentally blew his own head off”.²²² In another iteration the stockman was murdered in retribution for the rape of an Aboriginal girl.²²³ In its final telling, the story takes the form of a family romance in which a man sacrifices his own life to save his family from death in a dust storm.²²⁴

By the end of the book the stockman's grave operates as a visual symbol of coercive control - a death threat both real and imagined. It is a site that might be described as a physical embodiment of Cameron's original shame; the place he reaches before his first escape plan is thwarted by his father.²²⁵ The site exerts such power over him that he paints a picture of the grave and places it in the Bright family lounge room where it takes on the status of an icon that

no-one is allowed to touch.²²⁶ The aura of the grave is amplified when an image of the painting is uploaded onto the internet, drawing tourists from around the world to the site.²²⁷ If the aim of coercive control is to plant an idea of the perpetrator's omniscience in the mind of the victim, then images of the stockman's grave operate as a material embodiment of such power.

Most of all the stockman's grave, and all the images of it that map out the space of Burley Downs, operate as what Maria Tumarkin calls a "traumascap", sites that are "marked by the traumatic legacies of violence, suffering and loss" and where "the past is never quite over".²²⁸ It is a type of "wounded space" in which time bends and is homogenised into a material object of great power.²²⁹ It is in the process of reflecting on the trauma of Cameron's death at the gravesite that Nathan is able to excavate an older, more influential trauma that has shaped the lives of the Bright family and to understand these hidden wounds.

Intimate Terrorism in *The Lost Man*

The Lost Man (2018) takes a wider view of domestic abuse in the context of coercive control and invites both male and female readers to understand the topic differently. The most insidious aspect of the technique is how victims are forced to see the world through the perpetrator's eyes and adjust their behaviour accordingly. The novel features a male character who draws on his own experiences of domination and marginalisation to reverse the dynamic of the gaze, see the world through the eyes of the victims and respond with empathy and compassion.

Writing about domestic abuse can be a fraught enterprise easily relegated to the margins. Life writing on the topic is often dismissed as yet another misery memoir and fiction that dramatizes the issue is regarded as a fusion of melodrama and sadomasochistic pornography – a niche market for women. Even when novels such as *Big Little Lies* (2014) become global bestsellers and are adapted for the screen, they are often treated with scorn by male reviewers. For example, James Delingpole reviewed the first season of the *Big Little Lies* (2017) TV Series in the UK *Spectator* as "girl pornography".²³⁰ In a *New York Times* review, Mike Hale wrote that "the women's stories, however well acted and artfully photographed, are just a compendium of clichés about upper-middle-class angst", little more than "lifestyle pornography".²³¹

Such critical strategies are part of a systematic, culture-wide approach to women's stories more generally, and the representation of violence against women in particular. As researchers, psychiatrists, social workers, counsellors and people working in the women's shelter movement have long pointed out, there are several important challenges to tackling domestic abuse. Firstly, it is not always a covert crime hidden away in the imaginary dungeons of suburbia – though that does sometimes happen – it is more often in full public view, though hardly visible because it has been so normalised. The second problem is that our criminal justice system is entirely constructed around a male orientated “violence model” where physical damage is the benchmark for intervention and the main measure of hurt caused to a victim. The third problem is that leaving an abusive relationship can be logistically impossible because there are many women who, like Ilse, find themselves unable to leave home because the nearest support is hundreds of kilometres away. Even if women can negotiate the labyrinth of financial and logistical obstacles, statistics tell us that that leaving can be lethal.²³²

Coercive control deploys strategies on the domestic front pioneered in the prison-of-war camps of the Korean War and is a technique that is still used as a means of amplifying the physical captivity of enemy soldiers in the War on Terror.²³³ As Stark points out it is an effective strategy for constructing a widely dispersed, networked, miniature neo-patriarchy inside a state that manifestly supports the civil, political and human rights of women and the protection of children.²³⁴ Intimate terrorism is, arguably, the political unconscious of the global War on Terror – its displaced, unacknowledged Other. It is a battle for control that continues to escalate forcing women and children to live their lives in a liminal netherworld, a non-place that Jess Hill refers to as “underground”.²³⁵

The Lost Man is packaged as a standard crime novel though Harper flips the script in a series of complex spatial manoeuvres that make domestic abuse visible, moving it from the hidden recesses of the background into the brightly-lit foreground of an outback domestic noir narrative. While it opens with the discovery of a corpse and ends with a solution to the crime, it manipulates genre conventions in new ways. The depiction of violence against women, both physical and psychological, is filtered through the character of Nathan Bright, a man whose point-of-view shifts radically as he learns to see through his brother's gaslighting to the damage he inflicted on his partner, his children and siblings over decades. In the process of examining

his own wounded masculinity Nathan comes to the realisation that he is not quite the victim he thought he was.

While women begin as peripheral characters hovering in the background of the narrative, they take on greater nuance and complexity as their stories are revealed in the second half of the book and they are brought into the foreground. The novel stages a particular type of wounded Australian masculinity, examining it with empathy, curiosity and an understanding that if global projects such as #MeToo, #domesticviolence and #88daysaslave are to maintain momentum, both men and women need to be involved.

Endnotes

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- 172 . Moriarty, Loc 1747-1752.
- 173 . Moriarty, Loc 1905-6.
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- 183 . Domestic Violence Action Centre *The Power and Control Wheel*. accessed 22 December, 2019. <http://www.dvac.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2015/06/Power-Control-Wheel.pdf> The Duluth Power and Control Wheel is a common infographic used by social workers and anti-domestic violence campaigners in support groups for women and men's behaviour change programs.
- 184 . Stark, Loc 155.
- 185 . Stark, Loc 2582-2590.
- 186 . Stark, Loc 2959.
- 187 . Stark, Loc 3090.
- 188 . McGorrery and McMahon, 2019.
- 189 . Hill, 14-41. Hill traces the development of coercive control as an effective method of mental captivity to the prisoner of war camps of the Korean War to its use by individual men in their intimate partner relationships.
- 190 . Hill, 6.
- 191 . Hill, 111-133.
- 192 . Hill, 195-226. Workers in the field of domestic abuse are quick to point out that women can be coercive controllers as well, though statistically and anecdotally it is rare. Men usually have the financial resources to escape, and while they may be beaten and badly injured by their controlling female partners, they are rarely murdered. Most women who kill their male partners have been victimised and think of it as their only means of escape and a variation on this scenario is revealed in the final scenes of *The Lost Man*.
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- 209 . Harper, 35-36.
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- 214 . Stark, Loc 283-340.
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232 . Hill, 233. Several websites in Australia keep track of domestic homicides which currently hover around one woman murdered by an intimate partner per week. Destroy The Joint's *Counting Dead Women* project at <https://www.facebook.com/DestroyTheJoint/>, and the ABC website dedicated topic page at <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-12-25/domestic-violence-increase-christmas-what-should-you-do/11805534>.

233 . Hill, 17.

234 . Stark, Loc 2959.

235 . Hill, 43-82.

Conclusion

Each of the crime narratives examined in this thesis demonstrates a subtle shift in emphasis from a close concentration on crime to an exploration of diverse forms of imprisonment, captivity and punishment. This manoeuvre switches the attention of viewers and readers from the bloody corpse of the most generically formulaic murder mystery to a close examination of the motivation for a crime, the events leading up to it, or how a series of previously invisible crimes might lead to a more spectacularly visible one.

In the *Mystery Road* (2013-2018) story complex the locked room device foregrounds how regenerated forms of segregation in small frontier towns operate as carceral archipelagos for Aboriginal people, mirroring both the mission system of the early twentieth century and the prisons of the present day. In the first film, Aboriginal girls are held in drug-enhanced captivity, confined to a few streets by the police and the biker militia, before being trafficked and murdered. In the second film, the Indigenous inhabitants of Goldstone are confined to the small area of Broken River and plied with alcohol while they are systematically dispossessed by the mining company. In the television series, the Aboriginal people of Patterson have formulated an escape plan and are in the process of buying back large tracks of their stolen land.

In *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* (2018) imprisonment takes a very literal, recognisable form because Lane is serving a long prison sentence. The challenge the series set for itself is how to overcome the physical constraints of prison and devise an escape plan for Lane that allows her to connect with her audience through different channels from television and audio to social media. The open, participatory storytelling format provided Lane with a way to project her voice and her image beyond the prison walls and tell her own version of what happened to her, in her own words.

In *The Lost Man* (2018) the crime is relegated to the paratextual space of the prologue and the main body of the novel draws the reader into a meditation on how mental captivity can happen slowly, below the level of awareness. The narrative excavates how imprisonment can be in the eye of the beholder; a gendered perceptual trick that slips in and out of focus as much as it functions as a time bomb that women only realise is there when it is far too late to escape

the blast radius. As a weapon of the new networked neopatriarchy gaslighting is most effective because it allows the perpetrator to maintain plausible deniability.

Each of the crime narratives discussed addresses a global audience with the explicit aim of recalibrating local power structures and dynamics from inside crime culture. They each take up historical narratives of stereotypical criminality, deconstruct them piece by piece and rebuild them into more complex instruments for inspecting the society in which we live. The *Mystery Road* stories reframe the heroic grand narrative of white Australian colonial conquest as a legal transgression - an ongoing state crime. They shift the viewpoint to an Aboriginal policeman to tell a much more complex and compelling version of the national story, using new generic conventions that, as Tait observes, furnish viewers with enhanced cognitive maps and new ways of being and knowing.²³⁶ *Exposed: The Case of Keli Lane* takes up the Medea revenge tale so often mobilised in cases such as these to explain how and why a woman might kill her baby. It employs a collaborative storytelling format to crowdsource new ways of understanding a crime that may or may not have occurred and mark out new subject positions for women within the criminal justice system. A slow process, certainly, but one that is well worthwhile and in lock-step with the global #MeToo movement. *The Lost Man* digs deep into the mechanisms of intimate terrorism, domestic abuse and coercive control to expose a secret system of underground black sites populated largely by women and children. It reverses the dynamics of the gaze to allow a central male character to see the world through the eyes of women victimised by a system of hegemonic masculinity that is deeply destructive to men, women and children. This sneaky, subtle book exposes a nerve and prods it until the reader understands that, in an era of manifest female enfranchisement, the state monopoly on violence has been outsourced to an opaque networked neopatriarchy waging psychological warfare in our most intimate domestic spaces.

The three examples of twenty first century Australian crime narratives examined in this thesis represent a particular stream of work that engages directly with prominent political and social justice issues. They are emblematic of how Australian cultural producers have used innovative storytelling techniques to restage local issues, capture a global audience for Antipodean noir and move from the periphery to the centre of global crime culture. The astonishing growth and popularity of Antipodean crime narratives since 2016 is an area wide open for research and analysis because crime culture has become a diverse staging ground for

a polyphony of larger conversations about social and political issues, critiques of national identity and gender politics.

Endnotes

236. Tait, 56.

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