

# **Unsettling collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature**

Indigenous nation building and the role of settler allies

By

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## Summary

In the Age of the Anthropocene and the environmental crisis, governments in settler societies are increasingly forming collaborative arrangements with Indigenous sovereigns for the shared stewardship of nature. Settler decision making, however, continues to dominate in what is meant to be a partnership space. Current literature on co-management arrangements between settler and Indigenous sovereigns reports on persistent epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers to successful co-management outcomes. The role of non-Indigenous professionals in such arrangements is rarely examined, and as noted in the literature, there is a need to investigate allyship in the offices and meeting rooms of settler institutions to identify everyday practical action. Most importantly, sovereignty is an issue persistently discussed by Indigenous scholars, but very few studies have investigated the ways in which non-Indigenous people interpret and respond to Indigenous sovereignty when working as allies in partnership spaces.

To address this gap, this thesis asks the question, *what are the strategies and innovations employed by non-Indigenous professionals to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements?* I bring together scholarship from Indigenous studies, settler colonialism, posthumanism and allyship to explore how meanings of humanness are embedded in the concept of sovereignty. Indigenous sovereignty stems from an epistemology of relation, where humans are entangled within a complex network of relationships with more-than-human-entities, such as nature, animals, ecosystems, landscape, climate, and Spirit. Settler sovereignty is based upon Enlightenment ideas that

constructs humans in opposition to nature. Thereby, to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements non-Indigenous professionals working as allies must unsettle normative settler logics and colonial paradigms.

This thesis employs qualitative methods to investigate two sites – 1) the Kungun Yunnan Ngarrindjeri (Listen to Ngarrindjeri Speaking) Agreement (KNYA), South Australia, and 2) the Columbia River Treaty (CRT), United States of America and Canada. Across both sites, twelve non-Indigenous participants, largely academics, government employees, and legal experts, offer unique insights that showcase practical strategies and innovations that recentre Indigenous sovereignty and foster a decolonising practice of allyship. I am guided by Martin Booran Mirraboopa's (2003) Indigenist methodological framework of *Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing*. By adjusting to this inter-related triad, I argue, participants unsettle co-management arrangements through practical action in the following ways. In knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty the participants unsettle epistemological barriers by understanding their complicity in settler colonialism. They come to understand the mechanisms of structural injustice, and challenge everyday exclusionary practices of settler knowledge hierarchies to build ontological pluralism. Being attentive to proper forms of conduct in relationships with Indigenous sovereigns unsettles attitudinal barriers by embracing feelings of discomfort as a cue for critical self-reflexivity, engaging in multiple forms of listening, and building an ontology of truth. Doing work within settler institutions unsettles institutional barriers by following Indigenous leadership, transforming settler institutional frameworks, funding regimes, technological applications, and social networks.

This study will make an original contribution to knowledge that has cross-over contributions

- it fills an important empirical gap, while also providing insights for praxis, policy and informing solidarity pedagogy internationally.

## Declaration

I certify that this thesis:

1. does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university
2. and the research within will not be submitted for any other future degree or diploma without the permission of Flinders University; and
3. to the best of my knowledge and belief, does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Date: 20 June 2024

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## Figures

Figure 1: Map of Ngarrindjeri lands and waters (Ngarrindjeri Ruwe Empowered Communities n.d.) .....	21
Figure 2: Map showing the tribes and First Nations of the Columbia River Basin {McKinney, 2015 #28} .....	28

## Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations

Aboriginal	Aboriginal people is a term used in Australia and Canada to describe the original occupants who have lived on their lands for thousands of year before invasion and colonisation by Europeans. This is a broad term from the English language and communities across the variety of groups each have their own terms of identification in their own languages. In Australia, Aboriginal peoples refer to the original occupants across mainland Australia and Tasmania and does not include Torres Strait Islander peoples who are a separate group located on a cluster of islanders between the top of Australia and Papua New Guinea (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) 2022).
Collaborative arrangements	I use the term collaborative arrangements as a broad term to capture all forms of partnerships between settler and Indigenous sovereigns for the shared responsibility of nature. This includes informal arrangements, co-management agreements, and co-governance that operates on a nation-to-nation level.
Co-governance	Co-governance arrangements enact shared decision-making where Indigenous and Western sciences are valued equally. State institutions are decentralised in favour of community-led initiatives and the innovation for deploying Indigenous knowledges adheres to the authority of customary law (Hill, R et al. 2012).
Co-management	In the field of NRM, co-management is a broad term to describe a variety of arrangements between settler states and Indigenous governments that stipulate some form of shared decision-making over a defined area of land and/or water, either formal or informal. Co-management does not necessarily equate with co-governance or Indigenous self-determination (Swerdfager & Armitage 2023).
Country	For Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples across Australia, Country refers to more than landscape or territory and is capitalised to denote personhood. Country is a living body comprised of interconnected systems between landscape, all life, including peoples, and more-than-human Entities (Bawaka Country et al. 2013; Bawaka Country et al. 2016; Fforde, Knapman & Walsh 2020; Ngarrindjeri Tendi, Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee & Ngarrindjeri Native Title Committee 2007; Rigney, D et al. 2007).



CANZUS countries	CANZUS is an abbreviation for Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States who share common foundations of colonisation and nationhood based upon British law (Cornell 2015a).
CRT	Columbia River Treaty.
Environmental co-governance	Environmental governance represents decision-making about the stewardship of nature where state institutions are decentralised in favour of community-led initiatives who have increased self-determination (Hill, R et al. 2012).
First Nations	First Nations is the preferred term that groups across Canada use to describe themselves rather than the legal term 'Indian.' Only people registered as 'Indians' under the <i>Indian Act</i> , Government of Canada, can identify as First Nations (Government of Canada 2024b). First Nations are distinct from Metis and Inuit peoples in Canada. In Australia, First Nations is increasingly becoming the preferred term to collectively describe Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander groups because it recognises diversity (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) 2022).
Indigenous	Indigenous peoples is a collective name used on a global level to describe the vast mix of societies and communities who are the original occupants of their ancestral lands, with cultural, social, political, and economic practices distinct from the dominant societies that have invaded and colonised their lands (Government of Canada 2024a; Hill, R et al. 2012; United Nations n.d.). The term Indigenous was first used in forums and publications by United Nations. Since, it has been used in an international context as an inclusive term to identify groups who are in similar circumstances, seeking self-determination and resisting colonisation in a global Indigenous rights movements (Peters & Mika 2017). It is important to note that, terms such as Indigenous, are colonial terms from the English language and are predominantly used by governments (Peters & Mika 2017). Many communities around the world do not like the term Indigenous because it homogenises distinct groups into a single 'other.' Communities have their own terms of identification in their own languages that they prefer (Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) 2022; Peters & Mika 2017).

Indigenous sovereign/s	I use the term Indigenous sovereign/s to collectively describe the mix of groups across Australia, Canada, and the US. Indigenous is used in this term according to the above definition of Indigenous, specifically in relation to global Indigenous rights movements. While I recognise the problematics of the term Indigenous, it is an accepted term by the United Nations. The word sovereign recognises the independent nationhood of groups. Indigenous sovereigns is used interchangeably to refer to individuals, nations, communities or groups.
KNYA	Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement - Listen to Ngarrindjeri Speaking Agreement.
Land-nature	Land-nature is my term to describe land and nature as one entity.
Local council	Australia has three levels of government – federal, state, and local. Local government covers a municipal region and is managed by a council of elected members who have decision-making power and responsibilities at the closest level of government to communities (Local Councils n.d.).
More-than-human Entities	More-than-human Entities are systems of ecology, climate, landscape, spirit, water, and other Entities that are greater than humans but in which humans are embedded (Martin Booran Mirraboo 2003). Entities are capitalised to denote personhood.
NRM	Natural resource management (NRM) is a broad field in Western societies pertaining to the ownership and management of the Earth's resources, including the use of land and waters, mining, and fishing practices (Howitt 2001). NRM is not the same as environmental governance.
Relationality	Relationality is a framework that understands that humans are embedded within a complex network of inter-dependent, reciprocal relationships with the natural world, (Kimmerer 2013; Martin Booran Mirraboo 2003; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Watson 2012).
Settler	The term settler denotes non-Indigenous people who have taken up residence upon lands acquired through colonial occupation and are afforded power and privilege by the settler state, including unquestioned rights to property (Barker 2015; Simpson 2014; Wolfe, P 2006).
Settler colonisation	Settler colonisation is a distinct form of colonisation that occurred in CANZUS countries that aims to eliminate the

	previous occupants and acquire territory to extract resources (Barker 2015; Simpson 2014; Wolfe, P 2006).
Settler sovereign	I use the term settler sovereign to collectively describe nation states established by settler colonisation under British law, including CANZUS countries, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States.
Tribes	Tribes is the preferred term for Indigenous sovereigns in the Columbia River Basin in the US, also known as Indians or Native Americans (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). Lower case is used for tribes.
Western/the West	The 'West' is not a geographical location but a concept capturing wealthy, modern, democratic societies stemming from European traditions (Hall 1992).
<i>Note on spelling</i>	<i>This thesis uses Australian (UK) spelling</i>

## Contents

Summary .....	i
Declaration .....	iv
Acknowledgements.....	v
Figures.....	vi
Glossary of Terms and Abbreviations .....	vii
1 Preface .....	1
2 Introduction .....	10
2.1 Natural resource management and collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibly of nature .....	13
2.2 What makes a good ally? Exploring problems and possibilities of allyship in collaborative arrangements.....	15
2.3 Research question and aims .....	17
2.4 Two sites for investigation .....	18
2.4.1 Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement (KNYA) .....	20
2.4.2 The Columbia River Treaty (CRT) .....	27
2.5 The Study: Theoretical and conceptual frameworks .....	32
2.5.1 Theoretical frames: unsettling settler sovereignty.....	32

2.5.2	Conceptual framework Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.....	36
2.6	Significance of the study .....	38
2.7	Overview of chapters .....	40
3	Sovereignty .....	45
3.1	The politics of sovereignty .....	48
3.1.1	Meanings of humanness.....	49
3.1.2	Human relationships with land.....	53
3.1.3	Politics rights or human responsibilities? .....	56
3.1.4	Posthuman critiques of humanness in the West.....	60
3.2	Sovereignty and the amelioration of difference .....	63
3.3	Settler sovereigns' relationship with Indigenous sovereigns .....	66
3.3.1	A brief history of settler agreement making and breaking .....	67
3.3.2	The ongoing denial of Indigenous self-determination in settler societies.....	73
3.4	Indigenous nation building and environmental co-governance.....	75
3.5	Conclusion .....	83
4	Collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature.....	84
4.1	Typologies of co-management.....	86

4.1.1	Co-management to co-governance: a spectrum of engagement .....	88
4.2	Collaborative arrangements: persistent barriers and pathways forward .....	89
4.2.1	Epistemological barriers .....	90
4.2.2	Attitudinal barriers.....	93
4.2.3	Institutional barriers .....	97
4.2.4	Indigenous-led frameworks .....	100
4.3	Existing Qualitative Studies: exploring strategies and innovations .....	103
4.4	Conclusion .....	114
5	Unsettling allyship: building meaningful relationships.....	116
5.1	Decolonising the practice of allyship .....	118
5.1.1	The problem with settler allies .....	119
5.1.2	Examining binarism.....	122
5.1.3	Locating oneself within settler colonialism .....	124
5.1.4	From privilege confessions to Indigenous-led action in NRM .....	126
5.2	Unsettling Allyship.....	128
5.2.1	Locating oneself within Indigenous sovereignty .....	132
5.2.2	Unsettling agency .....	138

5.3	Conclusion .....	140
6	Unsettling Methodologies .....	142
6.1	Decolonising Western research through the lens of unsettling .....	144
6.2	Unsettling the ontology of land .....	151
6.3	Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing .....	158
6.4	Beyond institutional ethics: employing a relational ethics of care.....	161
6.5	Data collection.....	164
6.5.1	Sampling and recruitment at international sites .....	165
6.5.2	Interviews.....	168
6.5.3	Designing the questions.....	170
6.5.4	Analysis and thematic development .....	173
6.6	Conclusion .....	176
7	Knowing .....	178
7.1	Unsettling structural injustice: knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty.....	181
7.1.1	Settler complicity: “everybody is implicated” .....	183
7.1.2	Sovereignty: “understand how it works” .....	185
7.1.3	Power: “it’s all about the profits” .....	191

7.1.4	Social justice principles and democracy: searching for strengths in settler culture	196
7.2	Unsettling knowledge hierarchies: challenging everyday exclusionary practices	200
7.2.1	Challenging the West as culturally neutral	202
7.2.2	Protecting Indigenous knowledges: “I can’t tell you”	206
7.2.3	Knowledge sharing: shifting exclusionary practices	208
7.3	Unsettling ontologies of land: making connections	217
7.3.1	Thinking across boundaries: “everything must be taken into consideration”	218
7.3.2	Understanding relationality: “you’re already connected”	224
7.4	Conclusion	233
8	Being	235
8.1	Feeling unsettled: the cue for being reflexive	238
8.2	Listening: unsettling attitudinal barriers and building ontological pluralism	245
8.2.1	Listening-respect: the basics	247
8.2.2	Consistent listening: ‘showing up’ and ‘checking in’	252
8.2.3	Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan: listening to Ngarrindjeri speaking	257
8.2.4	Deep Listening, silence, absence: sitting with ‘not knowing’	262
8.3	An ontology of truth: the link between personal change and political action	271



8.3.1	Exemplifying endurance: persisting through sustained unsettlement .....	272
8.3.2	Optimism and the role of critical hope .....	276
8.4	Conclusion .....	280
9	Doing .....	282
9.1	Follow the leaders .....	285
9.1.1	Local Indigenous leadership .....	285
9.1.2	Global Indigenous leadership .....	288
9.1.3	Non-Indigenous leaders .....	290
9.2	Adjusting settler frameworks .....	295
9.2.1	Embedding institutional memory .....	296
9.2.2	Transforming the resource base .....	300
9.2.3	Utilising technology .....	306
9.2.4	Transposing hospital ethics into NRM: from bedside to streamside .....	309
9.3	Public acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty and community cohesion ...	317
9.4	Conclusion .....	323
10	Conclusion .....	324
10.1	Key strategies for recentring Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements: adjusting to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing .....	325

10.2	Unsettling the theory, policy, and practice of collaborative arrangements .....	327
10.2.1	Theoretical contributions .....	328
10.2.2	Applications to policy .....	331
10.2.3	Considerations for practice .....	332
10.3	Distribution of results .....	333
10.4	Recommendations for future research .....	335
10.5	Closing summary .....	336
11	Appendix .....	358

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# 1 Preface

I was born on the stolen lands of the Gadigal people, Sydney, Australia, from parents who were among the many recipients of the 'ten-pound fare' offered to British migrants under the White Australia Policy. I grew up on Kurna Yarta, only knowing the colonial name, Adelaide, and spent my childhood summers on Kumerangk playing in the Murray River. As a young child, I remember going to the South Australian Museum, seeing the 1835 Treaty that early settler, John Batman, made with the Kullin people on the lands now known as Melbourne. Two months after signing, the treaty was rescinded by the Governor (First Peoples' Assembly of Victoria 2020). While I looked at the scroll in the glass cabinet, I overheard adult conversations about how the Kullin people could not read or write and so signed their names with an X. Finding the old English script difficult to decipher, not long having learnt to read and write myself, I felt that the Kullin people must have been tricked into signing their land away if they could not read what they were signing. I thought this unfair and have carried a grave sense of injustice ever since.

I am a first-generation white Australian, with heritage from the United Kingdom. I come from a nature loving family – my granny used to say that if every person in the world hugged a tree at the same time each day, the world would be a different place. My mother was a veterinary nurse and had a career with the RSPCA throughout my childhood. Mum taught me that life is precious. As a young adult I spent ten years working for Worimi and Biripi artist and activist, Gordon Syron, and his wife Elaine. I met Uncle Gordon's nephew, fell in love, had two sons, and fell out of love. In addition to my eldest child, I have raised my brood

of three as a single mother, bolstering my identity as a feminist. With two Worimi and Biripi sons, who are now bursting into adulthood, I have actively participated in a variety of Aboriginal communities, taking my children to an Aboriginal owned and run pre-school, attending cultural events, volunteering on boards and committees, and building networks and friendships with Aboriginal people. I currently live on the lands of the Ramindjeri people on Ngarrindjeri Ruwe and work on Kurna Yarta at Flinders University with a strong community of Aboriginal academics. This locates me at the border of a marginalised, racialised population group, where I am privy to the conversations, knowledges, cultures, and politics of Aboriginal peoples. From this, I am not only intimately aware of the damage caused by colonisation, but I also experience it around me in my daily life because of my relationships with Aboriginal people. Simultaneously, I benefit from the theft and pillage of this beautiful, rich country, and the murder of innocent lives. I don't claim to 'know' Indigenous sovereigns because of these relationships, rather, they provide opportunity for me to better understand myself and my own culture.

Another, perhaps unconventional, example of my informal guidance is found through the relationship my sons have with their Worimi-Biripi grandfather in Spirit (deceased) who watches over them in the form of a bird: the Willy Wag Tail. Whenever they see the Willy Wag Tail, they excitedly call 'hello Charles' to their grandfather. When I see the Willy Wag Tail, I quietly thank him for watching over my children and keeping them safe (in a settler society that racially profiles them). Carrying this knowledge, I can be greeted by 'Charles' on the street or on campus which interrupts my colonial settler reality and reminds me of a multitude of threads that lead back to issues of sovereignty and colonisation. This familial

relationship with a bird is one of many threads in my life that are entangled with Indigenous sovereignty, including Spiritual beliefs, that I carry with me as I conduct my work.

For example, in conversation with a Ngarrindjeri friend who was telling me about the next steps on her life journey, she says, 'This black duck from Raukin is going to...', referring to herself as a 'black duck' (reproduced with permission). Our previous conversations have taught me of her ancestral ties to the black duck of Ngarrindjeri Ruwe, and so I understand this reference not as a figure of speech but an everyday expression of her ontological relationality. In my mind I see the black duck swimming on the Murray River. I think about the poor health of the river, a feature of the local landscape I witness day-to-day. Knowing that the river is the lifeblood for the physical life in the area, as well as much agricultural, economic, and recreational activity, I then reflect upon the sick river to embolden my determination to add my energy to Ngarrindjeri efforts to protect and restore the lands and waters that have been damaged by the colonial settler society I belong to. I remember the night of Ringbalin, the ceremony I attended on the bank of the Murray River where a Ngarrindjeri Elder told the audience that Ngarrindjeri laws serve to benefit the health and wellbeing of all life and all people, including settlers and future generations. In that moment, I followed the Elders instructions to internally direct my thoughts and energy to the river to help restore its health. This brings me back to my friend, the black duck, and how the wellbeing of her and her family is impacted by colonisation. My chain of thoughts here reveals the multiple inter-related connections between myself, Indigenous sovereigns, their territories, laws and traditions, and more-than-human Entities. Further, I show that critical self-reflexivity is not a single methodological step conducted in one research project - as if

my work exists in isolation to my life and my relationship with settler sovereignty. Rather, my work becomes unsettled with the continual practice of critically reflecting on my involvement with settler colonialism, rooted in my physical location on the unceded territory of Ngarrindjeri Ruwe among local Ngarrindjeri community. Further, by publishing these stories with permission from my sons and Ngarrindjeri friend, my relationship with Indigenous sovereigns threads my private life and this research project together through the act of following appropriate Indigenous protocols, that is, following sovereign law. While these relationships are not structured into my academic work, their leadership and guidance grounds my everyday reality. As such, in various ways throughout my personal life I gain leadership, direction and inspiration from Indigenous sovereigns and more-than-human Entities to further my efforts at unsettling settler sovereignty. From home-base, unsettling settler sovereignty is then extended to my professional life.

Professionally, my standpoint and positionality as a 'white woman' in the Western research academy grants me much power and privilege (Moreton-Robinson 2009). Living in Australia and working at a colonial institution within a racialised society, my intelligence and entitlement is never questioned. Rather, my white skin and socialisation positions me in society as a valued member, above 'othered' races, most especially Indigenous people (Frankenberg 1993; McIntoch 1998; Mills 1997; Moreton-Robinson 1999, 2009). In holding an awareness of this power, I am alerted to the possibility that I may abuse this power, intentionally or unintentionally. Without awareness of this positionality, I am at risk of blindly reproducing colonialisms. Further, I am aware of the danger of slipping into 'me-too-ism', self-absorbed 'navel-gazing' and self-congratulations when studying one's own culture

(Aveling 2013; Said 1978). To alleviate self-congratulations, I stay focussed on the fact that the racial, cultural, and national group that I belong to created and perpetuates colonisation. Therefore, what has historically labelled Indigenous people as 'the problem', is in fact a problem that myself, and my fellow non-Indigenous citizens of settler-sovereign states, inherit, benefit from, and sustain. If I am to engage in decolonising research, I must first locate myself in the centre of this problem, take responsibility, and show accountability and solidarity with Indigenous sovereigns to remedy it. Should I happen to make a dent in the colonial machine, congratulations are not required when cleaning up your own mess.

In the academic profession, I have been fortunate to receive the guidance of Indigenous academics on my supervisory team. Additionally, reading Snow (2018) provided inspiration to acknowledge my Indigenous friends and colleagues as informal advisors. I have had many spontaneous discussions in the staff kitchen or hallway with Indigenous faculty, where we casually chat about our work. Indeed, I had more discussions with one Indigenous supervisor in the staff kitchen than through formal meetings. Further, Snow (2018) reminded me of the PhD peer friendship I have with an Indigenous (Kamilaroi) academic I met when we were both undergraduate students. Now living interstate, we excitedly talk on the phone regularly about our candidatures, including the added juggle of single parenting, looking after our homes and gardens, while teaching during the global COVID-19 pandemic. This relationship also served as an informal 'member check'.

I must add here that I am not advocating for non-Indigenous researchers to demand time from Indigenous sovereigns, either as friends or colleagues. My ability to step into



Indigenous circles is facilitated through connection to 'mob' (family) via my children.

Nevertheless, my relationships with Indigenous sovereigns have been built through a long-term process of consistently showing up to events, both celebratory and political. It is this long-term building of relationships with local community and the Entities within that I encourage, which may take years or even decades to establish.

Because the Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement (KNYA) site is located within Ngarrindjeri Ruwe - my 'home base' and settler residence - it is here where my life is immersed in relationships with Ngarrindjeri people and Ngarrindjeri Yarluwar-Ruwe.

However, as the scope of this study is international, this complicates who I seek leadership from and how I go about it. With multiple international sites, this research is not located on the lands of one specific Indigenous sovereign that I can go to and 'consult'. The research is intentionally designed to be global so to capture more than one settler sovereign state and critique the mechanisms of settler colonialisms. This approach, however, creates further complexity. In studying the Columbia River Treaty site, to capture the United States and Canada, I am including 15 tribes and First Nations across the Colombia River Basin (and others) that my participants are in relationship with, and currently, I am not. Taking a global perspective on settler sovereignty restricts my ability to engage in real-life relationships with the many Indigenous sovereigns across both sites of my study. To remedy this, I attempt to build my relationships with tribes and First Nations of the Columbia River Basin through appropriate literature, as others have done (Carlson 2017; Snow 2018). I grant this is a superficial relationship and I carry hopes to one day travel to the Colombia River Basin to meet Indigenous sovereigns and the Columbia River.

Introducing oneself is an important protocol under the laws of Indigenous sovereignty because “the webs of kinship have to be made material through dialogue and discourse” (Martin Booran Mirraboo 2003; Simpson, A 2014, p. 9). Moreover, introducing myself assists to locate my positionality amid colonial systems of power and identify my standpoint as a non-Indigenous researcher. As such, this preface serves to pinpoint my relationship to both Indigenous sovereignty and settler colonialism. Reflecting on a position of colonial occupation, interrogating one’s sense of belonging on stolen lands, and reaffirming one’s relationship to Indigenous sovereignty is an ongoing process throughout the research project, academic career, and personal life. Ignoring settler positionality “is to risk perpetuating the idea that writing and knowledge is not produced by people who occupy specific temporal and sociocultural positions, positions often bound to or by colonialism” (De Leeuw & Hunt 2018, p. 3). Without addressing Indigenous sovereignty, this thesis would fall in line with the vast amount of scholarship that fails to acknowledge its own role in the maintenance of power relations. Thereby, I turn to standpoint theory as a key strategy for recognising my own vantage points as a non-Indigenous woman from Australia.

Standpoint theory highlights that researchers are not separate to their research - we are the creators of questions, designers of research context, co-participants in interviews, and authorities over what gets deleted (Chilisa 2012). The location of a researcher is not separate to the subject, but rather, researchers are situated in one of many historical socio-political positions that grounds one’s beliefs. The perspective of the researcher is always situated and is political from its inception (Denzin, Lincoln & Tuhiwai Smith 2008; Longino

1993). Indigenous researchers consistently acknowledge standpoint theory and its feminist origins for pioneering a methodological approach that centres knowledge construction through “the relationship between power and vantage points” (Ardill 2013, p. 329). Standpoint theory is used to articulate the experiences of marginalised people not as ‘natural’ but as outcomes of social organisation that determines power relations. It is therefore impossible to assume a position of ‘knowledge without a knower’ and classify knowledge construction into binaries of knower/known and object/subject, contrary to the principles of Western positivist science (Haraway 1988). Standpoint is thereby used to present arguments *in relation* to the position we have with ourselves and the world around us (Moreton-Robinson 2013; Nakata 2007). As such, the discussion below includes my standpoint in relation to Indigenous sovereignty and leadership throughout both my professional and personal life.

Introducing myself and declaring my standpoint demonstrates my ethical responsibility to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty and situate myself within it, to practice relationality, and work to unsettle colonial structures and settler logics. I return to this conversation in Chapter 5 when I discuss the methodological approach to this study and the appropriateness of myself, as a non-Indigenous researcher, examining the issue of sovereignty.

## 2 Introduction

The contemporary relationship between Indigenous and Western nations is one where there is an ongoing attempt to constrain Indigenous agency and sovereignty by temporal and spatial limitations imposed by colonial violations of Indigenous law (Alfred 2009; Bignall 2010; Bruyneel 2007; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Simpson 2014; Watson 2015). However, in Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and the United States (CANZUS countries that share British legal and political heritages) Indigenous peoples continue to resist colonial violation and maintain Indigenous governance, asserting their nationhood according to their own traditions of constitutionalism and sovereignty (Alfred 2009; Cornell 2015a, 2015b; Hemming & Rigney 2008; Hemming, Rigney & Berg 2011; Muller, Hemming & Rigney 2019). Concurrently, non-Indigenous people are increasingly listening to the voices of Indigenous sovereigns and working in solidarity, as allies, to add weight to nation building endeavours. At the core of this is a shift from a position of assuming authority and privileging settler sovereignty to one in which the strengths and leadership of Indigenous sovereigns is recentred (Denis & Bailey 2016; Kluttz, Walker & Walter 2020; Land 2015; Nixon 2019; Smith, A 2008; Sullivan-Clarke 2020a, 2020b). Critical engagement with allyship, as both a concept and a practice, requires meaningful recognition of Indigenous sovereignty.

In the West, natural resource management sits at the heart of nation building, British invasion and the political and social upheaval that accompanied colonisation across Canada, the United States (known as Turtle Island to Indigenous sovereigns) and the Australian continent. Indigenous sovereigns continue to see themselves as free peoples with control of

their lands and a strong duty to protect their country (Alfred 2009; Cornell & Kalt 2007; Deloria Jr. & Lytle 1984; Jorgensen 2007; Watson 2015). Nevertheless, the realities of settler colonialism attempt to thwart Indigenous agency and the ability to act independently when existing with and of their lands. The colonialist denial of Indigenous sovereignty is complex and has been both reproduced and challenged in different ways, in different spaces, across various eras, in Australia, Canada and the US. Indeed, rights to conduct land management practices has all but been ignored by settler sovereigns until recently. For some decades now, Indigenous sovereigns have engaged in strategic nation building efforts which is evident in the field of natural resource management (NRM) (Alfred 2009; Cornell 2015a, 2015b; Hemming & Rigney 2015; Hemming, Rigney & Berg 2011; Langton 2004; McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015; Rigney, D, Bignall & Hemming 2015). In this space, some non-Indigenous professionals work as allies to bolster the nation building endeavours of Indigenous sovereigns. Considering that non-Indigenous professionals who work in collaborative arrangements do so from within settler institutions bound by the ongoing legacy of colonialism. This asks us to question how this work is undertaken, what specific actions are employed in daily practice, and how it bolsters Indigenous nation building efforts.

In this thesis, I explore non-Indigenous strategies of allyship in the context of two sites: the Kungun Yunnan Ngarrindjeri Agreement (KNYA), South Australia, and the Columbia River Treaty (CRT), Canada and the United States of America. At both sites Indigenous sovereignty is being recentred by non-Indigenous professionals working as allies in collaborative arrangements. The KNYA is recognised as a pioneering, successful nation-to-nation agreement between an Indigenous nation and a government body (Hemming, Rigney & Berg

2011; Rigney, D, Bignall & Hemming 2015) demonstrating the ability of non-Indigenous professionals to uphold commitments to Indigenous sovereignty. The 1964 CRT, however, is an international treaty between Canada and the United States with two objectives, 1) the management of over 230 major hydroelectric dams along the Columbia River and 2) flood control (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). The 1964 CRT will be renewed in 2024 and a ground swell of non-Indigenous professionals are working to propel the call to have Indigenous sovereigns included as signatories. The KNYA and CRT sites are different in that the KNYA is a nation-to-nation agreements between one Indigenous nation, the Ngarrindjeri Nation, and a state body. The CRT site, however, includes a mix of tribes (the preferred term in United States) and First Nations (the preferred terms in Canada) who are negotiating with the settler states of Canada and the US. Both sites are both important as they present opportunities to explore and examine the ways in which non-Indigenous professionals build meaningful alliances with Indigenous sovereigns for the shared responsibility of nature.

Before describing the specific focus of the thesis, its significance and methodology, I will first discuss the field of NRM in the West and the development of collaborative arrangements with Indigenous peoples for the shared responsibility for nature. Because differences in terminology is noted as problematic (Dhillon 2021; Swerdfager & Armitage 2023; Whyte 2013), I clarify the use of terms commonly used in the field, including natural resource management, co-management, collaborative arrangements, and environmental co-governance.

## *2.1 Natural resource management and collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibly of nature*

Natural resource management in Western societies is a broad field pertaining to the ownership and management of the Earth's resources, including the use of land and waters, mining, and fishing practices (Howitt 2001). From industrialisation up until the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the natural world was exploited purely for the extraction of resources for capitalist and colonial gain. This resulted in mounting problems, such as toxic waste and steep reductions in available resources. As a result, the management of resources moved from ruthless and relentless extraction to include considerations on the damaging effects of industrialisation and the need to conserve finite resources (Howitt 2001). The West<sup>1</sup> began to experience a shift to global ecological sustainability concerns, environmental protection and NRM agendas. Scientific and technological approaches are centred, continuing to neglect social, cultural or political considerations – as well as different knowledges/practices around resource management and what it means (Howitt 2001; Natcher, Davis & Hickey 2005). However, resources do not exist as 'things' outside and separate to the social world but are bound with transactions of power, privilege, and wealth. Managing resources is fundamentally a matter of managing relationships not commodities (Howitt 2001; Natcher, Davis & Hickey 2005).

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<sup>1</sup> This thesis does not have the scope to explore the complexity of what is meant by the term 'West.' I refer to the 'West' not as a geographical location but as a concept capturing wealthy, modern, democratic societies stemming from European traditions, as per Hall's (1992) seminal work, *The West and the Rest: discourse and power*.

Significant to this thesis, since the 1980's, Indigenous sovereign resistance to colonial discourses around conservation and sustainability practices have shifted NRM approaches (Berkes 1993). The consistent voices of Indigenous sovereigns, along with global framings of human rights, including the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), have established an international policy platform that stipulates the rights of Indigenous sovereigns to have decision making power on environmental issues occurring on their lands. UNDRIP as an international policy platform has filtered down into the institutional policies of nation states, in various manifestations across the globe (Australian Human Rights Commission 2013; Nagy 2022; Westra 2008). Shared responsibility in NRM between settler and Indigenous sovereigns developed from informal considerations of Indigenous 'interests' to complex bureaucratic arrangements for policy and decision making ratified into legal agreements (Donoghue, Thompson & Bliss 2010; Natcher, Davis & Hickey 2005; Swerdfager & Armitage 2023). Such arrangements are generally called 'co-management' in the field of NRM, where the settler state has control of the resources and enters into an agreement with Indigenous governments for some form of shared decision-making over a defined area of land and/or water (Swerdfager & Armitage 2023). The term co-management, however, is problematic and as shown in Chapter 4, typologies of co-management arrangements are more complex than the term implies. Moreover, co-management agreements are not necessarily nation-to-nation agreements, where the settler state and Indigenous nations engage at a government-to-government level as equal, independent sovereign entities (Hemming & Rigney 2008; Hill, R et al. 2012). As such, I prefer to use the term collaborative arrangements to account for the spectrum of formal nation-to-nation agreements and informal partnerships. Nevertheless, any partnerships for



the shared responsibility for the stewardship of nature hinges upon the practice of meaningful allyship by non-Indigenous actors working in partnership with Indigenous peoples.

## *2.2 What makes a good ally? Exploring problems and possibilities of allyship in collaborative arrangements*

It is precisely this shared responsibility that lies at the heart of this thesis, and in particular, the role of non-Indigenous allies. As explored in chapter 4, current literature argues that despite the rise in collaborative arrangements, Western scientific and technocratic approaches in co-management continues to dominate decision making in what is meant to be a partnership space (Christie 1990; Deloria Jr. 1970; Ens et al. 2015; Howitt, Doohan, Suchet-Pearson, Cross, et al. 2013; Marchand et al. 2013; Marika et al. 2009; Muller, Hemming & Rigney 2019; Natcher, Davis & Hickey 2005; Singleton 2000; Youdelis 2016). Many so called 'progressive' co-management arrangements have been critiqued for largely maintaining a colonising relationship with Indigenous sovereigns (Adams & Mulligan 2003). As such, in practice, nation-to-nation decision making continues to be absent and the power and control of the colonising state is retained (Castro & Nielsen 2001). Cornell and Kalt (2007) explain that this is a 'standard approach' to development and NRM agendas where colonial paradigms impede equal decision making and settler sovereigns who play a top-down authoritative role. In contrast, an Indigenous 'nation building approach' follows the leadership of Indigenous sovereigns and adheres to the laws and knowledges of local Indigenous nations (Cornell & Kalt 2007). The Indigenous nation building approach has the potential to transform collaborative arrangements in CANZUS countries, however this is lost

when collaborative efforts are thwarted by colonial norms (Irlbacher-Fox 2014). Despite the best of intentions by non-Indigenous people to support the rights of Indigenous sovereigns, asymmetrical power relations and associated problematics are often reproduced (Foley, G 2000; Ritskes 2013; Sullivan-Clarke 2020a).

In addition to noting asymmetrical power relations, research inquiry into the co-management space is largely undertaken as case study evaluation in the form of non-qualitative reports. While persistent epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers are consistently reported in co-management literature, and Indigenous-led models are offered, qualitative investigation into the perspectives of non-Indigenous actors in the space is rarely undertaken. Most significantly, sovereignty is an issue persistently discussed by Indigenous scholars (Ardill 2013), yet little literature has investigated the ways in which non-Indigenous people interpret and respond to Indigenous sovereignty when working as allies in partnership spaces. Investigation into non-Indigenous allyship is important because to be able to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements must navigate a complex space, wrought with historical and ongoing colonial violence.

To address these gaps, this thesis will provide a qualitative study to explore the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals who work with Indigenous sovereigns for the shared responsibility of nature in site where Indigenous sovereignty is being recentred. There is a dearth of work that explores the strategies and innovations taken by non-Indigenous professionals to identify colonial dominance and foreground Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements. While the persistent epistemological, attitudinal, and

institutional barriers to successful co-management outcomes have been identified, little work moves beyond identifying the problems. Indigenous led models for co-management are also offered, yet comprehensive evaluation of how the models is used and understood is largely absent.

### 2.3 *Research question and aims*

It is not enough to just know the problem – we need to explore the strategies and innovations that work towards overcoming or removing persistent barriers. As such, this research is guided by the research question: *What are the innovations and strategies that non-Indigenous professionals employ to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements?* Fundamentally, this study aims to explore how non-Indigenous professionals working in collaborative arrangements with Indigenous sovereigns, counter the privileging of settler sovereign decision making. Specifically, this study aims to:

- Examine how non-Indigenous professionals recentre Indigenous agency.
- Critically examine how colonialisms are challenged by non-Indigenous professionals in collaborative arrangements.
- Elicit strategies that non-Indigenous professionals employ to recentre the transformations Indigenous peoples are working towards in collaborative arrangements.
- Identify how non-Indigenous professionals view their role as long-term allies.

To investigate non-Indigenous professionals who prioritise Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements, I have interviewed twelve participants across the two sites, capturing three settler sovereign states - Australia, Canada, and the US - using qualitative methods and thematic analysis. All participants are non-Indigenous professionals, predominantly academics, lawyers, and government employees, who follow the goals and aspirations set by the Indigenous sovereigns they work with.

## *2.4 Two sites for investigation*

I will now introduce the two sites of study in this thesis – the Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement (KNYA) and the Columbia River Treaty (CRT). The Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement is a legal agreement initiated by the Ngarrindjeri Nation in the south-east of South Australia. This thesis involves two Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreements, one made in 2002 with a local council on Ngarrindjeri Ruwe and the other in 2008 with the Government of South Australia (state government). The Columbia River Treaty is a legal agreement signed in 1964 between Canada and the United States on the management of the river system in the Columbia River Basin, from which Indigenous sovereigns were excluded. The CRT is currently under review with calls to include tribes and First Nations of the Columbia River Basin as signatories and decision-makers.

The two sites for investigation are distinct because they reflect Indigenous nation building principles rather than the colonial ‘standard approach’ to collaborative arrangements in CANZUS countries. Below, I draw on a key document from each site to outline the

exploitative relationship that settler sovereigns have built with the respective Indigenous sovereigns. First, is the *Ngarrindjeri Nation Yarluwar-Ruwe Plan: Caring for Ngarrindjeri Sea Country and Culture* (Ngarrindjeri Tendi, Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee & Ngarrindjeri Native Title Committee 2007). This document was written by organisations of the Ngarrindjeri Nation in response to the ongoing destruction of lands and waters by settler colonisation. Ngarrindjeri voices speak on behalf of Ngarrindjeri Yarluwar-Ruwe (Sea-Country), and the document aims to inform settler sovereigns, its institutions and society, of Ngarrindjeri's sovereign laws and responsibilities to Yarluwar-Ruwe. Second, I present the voices of fifteen tribes and eighteen bands affiliated with various First Nations across the Columbia River Basin, drawing from *A Sacred Responsibility: Governing the Use of Water and Related Resources in the International Columbia Basin Through the Prism of Tribes and First Nations* (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). This document was tabled at the CRT negotiations to argue for the inclusion of tribes and First Nations as signatories on the CRT as decision makers for the Columbia River, because of the value held in local Indigenous knowledges to address ecological issues, such as fisheries depletion and climate change.

Both documents detail the historic destruction of lands, waters, life, and society because of settler colonisation. Further, both documents address the serious challenges anticipated for both settler and Indigenous sovereigns in the face of climate change. Despite the challenges, the documents illustrate great confidence in the ability for Indigenous laws and knowledges to address such challenges, if settler sovereigns redistribute power and control in collaborative arrangements. The Ngarrindjeri Nation and tribes and First Nations across the Columbia River Basin continue to demand recognition of their identity as nations with their

own sovereign authority and rights to manage 'natural resources' on Ancestral territories. The descriptions below demonstrate the privileging of colonial paradigms that reproduces notions that the state is the final authority. This denies the agency of Indigenous sovereigns to define themselves and carry out the duties and responsibilities prescribed by their own sovereign laws and constitutionalism. The key documents clearly step out how Indigenous sovereignty stipulates the responsibility of people to look after the health and well-being of land and life beyond themselves as an integral part of economic, cultural, and legal frameworks that are not anthropomorphic.

#### *2.4.1 Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement (KNYA)*

Located in the south-east of South Australia, Ngarrindjeri have witnessed the destruction of their lands since colonial invasion and occupation. This includes the construction of a vast network of agricultural drains that redirects freshwater from wetlands to the sea, and barrages that inhibit the flow of sea water into the Murray River and Lake Alexandrina. These changes, in addition to introduced species, European farming practices, settler development, and colonial policies have seen the health of Yarluwar-Ruwe, Ngarrindjeri people, and economies deteriorate significantly (Ngarrindjeri Tendi, Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee & Ngarrindjeri Native Title Committee 2007). Figure 1 shows the Yarluwar-Ruwe region - the Lower Murray region of the Murray-Darling Basin, including the Lower Lakes, Coorong and Murray mouth. Yarluwar-Ruwe is an iconic area that is internationally recognised for its environmental significance, including protection under the intergovernmental treaty of the Ramsar Convention on Wetlands (Hemming & Rigney 2008; Ramsar 2014).



Figure 1: Map of Ngarrindjeri lands and waters (Ngarrindjeri Ruwe Empowered Communities n.d.)

Ngarrindjeri refuse to relinquish their sovereign responsibilities to care for Yarluwar-Ruwe, as seen in the quote below:

Our lands and waters must be managed according to our Laws to make them healthy once again. As the Ngarrindjeri Nation we must maintain our inherent sovereign rights to our *Yarluwar-Ruwe*. Ngarrindjeri people have a sovereign right to make our living from the lands and waters in a respectful and sustainable way (Ngarrindjeri Tendi, Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee & Ngarrindjeri Native Title Committee 2007, p. 10).

Ngarrindjeri legal frameworks and economies are based upon Ngarrindjeri people's responsibility to maintain the health of Yarluwar-Ruwe, a larger living body of which Ngarrindjeri people are a smaller part. Ngarrindjeri have a responsibility to care for Ngartji, non-human relatives, as the Yarluwar-Ruwe plan explains:

Ngarrindjeri people hold cultural and spiritual connections to particular places, to particular species of animals and plants, and all elements of the environment are part of our kinship system. Particular animal and plant species are the Ngartji (totem or special friend) of Ngarrindjeri people, who have special responsibility to care for their Ngartji. To care for Ngartji is to care for country (Ngarrindjeri Tendi, Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee & Ngarrindjeri Native Title Committee 2007, p. 12).

Ngarrindjeri Creation stories not only demonstrate the recording of major geological events from thousands of years ago but evidence the extent of Ngarrindjeri occupation and knowledge of Yarluwar-Ruwe (Ngarrindjeri Tendi, Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee & Ngarrindjeri Native Title Committee 2007). Obligations to Yarluwar-Ruwe have long been maintained by Ngarrindjeri through a formal governing council, Tendi, comprised of 18 Lakalinyerar (tribes).

In 2006, the Ngarrindjeri Nation made a statement in which both Ngarrindjeri sovereignty, knowledge, and the impacts of colonisation are evident:

Ngarrindjeri have occupied, enjoyed, managed and used our inhabited lands and waters, since Creation. We were here when the sea level began



rising about 18,000 years ago, and our ancestors watched the sea flooding over our coastal plains. We were here when the sea stabilised at its current level about 5,000 years ago. Our Creation stories record these dramatic changes. We were here when the European invaders began stealing our land and our resources; killing our people and our Ngartjis, such as Kondoli (whale) and Paingal (seal); polluting our rivers, lakes and Coorong; and draining our wetlands/nurseries. And we are still here! (Ngarrindjeri Nation 2006, cited in Hemming & Rigney 2010, p. 90).

The relationship between sovereignty and the human responsibility to care for nature is clearly expressed in *Ngarrindjeri Nation Yarluyar-Ruwe Plan: Caring for Ngarrindjeri Sea Country and Culture* (Ngarrindjeri Tendi, Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee & Ngarrindjeri Native Title Committee 2007). Such sovereign knowledges and laws not only manage the health and wellbeing of the natural world but provide specific instructions to humans on their roles and responsibilities to uphold sacred relationships based upon interdependence and reciprocity. The Ngarrindjeri Nation have developed several Caring as Country plans to detail their responsibilities to Country (Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority Inc., Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee Inc. & Research Policy and Planning Unit Flinders University 2016; Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority Incorporated 2013). In doing so, Ngarrindjeri leaders interrupt contemporary forms of colonialisms, such as the re-mapping of Yarluyar-Ruwe into state environmental management plans that continue to attempt to erase Ngarrindjeri. Formalising Ngarrindjeri identity through a high-profile management plan “is an example of theorized, strategic and transformative resistance,” that acts as a form of treaty (Hemming & Rigney 2008, p. 765).

However, the events that unfolded during the controversial ‘Hindmarsh Island affair,’ and the subsequent activism of Ngarrindjeri, led to the signing of the Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan (listen to Ngarrindjeri people speaking) Agreement between the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority and the local council in 2002. The controversy began when a development proposal was lodged with the local council in 1993 to build a bridge from the town of Goolwa across the Murray River to Kumerangk (Hindmarsh Island) (Hemming & Rigney 2010). Opposing this contemporary form of colonialism, the Ngarrindjeri Nation opposed the proposal, stating it would interfere with women’s sacred traditions. A cacophony of non-Indigenous ‘experts’ ensued, particularly archaeologists, and including the findings from the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission which concluded that Ngarrindjeri women were ‘fabricating’ their story of the site (Hemming & Rigney 2010). As a result of this decision, the *Hindmarsh Island Bridge Act 1997* (Cth) was passed in federal government that legislated for the construction of the bridge and related development activities in the Goolwa Wharf Precinct to go ahead.

The bridge was completed in 2001. In the same year, the developers attempted to sue several people who had opposed the bridge construction and delayed works. The litigation case saw Judge Von Doussa overturn the findings of the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission and state that Ngarrindjeri women were not fabricating their story (Hemming & Rigney 2008). The following year, in 2002, during redevelopment works of the Goolwa Wharf Precinct, an ancient grave of a Ngarrindjeri mother and child was unearthed. This burial site

was identified by Ngarrindjeri women during the Royal Commission. Its unearthing confirmed the story belonging to Ngarrindjeri women, raising questions about whose knowledge counts under colonial view. Hemming and Rigney, D (2008, p. 762) discuss the tensions around the settler denial of Ngarrindjeri sovereignty in the Kumerangk case:

The 1995 Hindmarsh Island Bridge Royal Commission constructed Ngarrindjeri interests in Yarluyar-Ruwe as nothing more than grassroots environmentalism rising in the face of modern, responsible development (see Hemming 1996). The kind of environmentalism with which Ngarrindjeri were being aligned was characterized as irrational, grassroots eco-activism and positioned as a threat to development and proper science-based research. The Ngarrindjeri women's knowledge at the centre of the issue was further devalued through association with what was constructed as 'radical' feminist interests (see Fergie 1996; Bell 1998; Collins 1998). Royal Commissioner Iris Stevens accused elders and leaders of fabricating Ngarrindjeri traditions and her findings all but declared the Ngarrindjeri people to be culturally extinct...

As Hemming and Rigney, D (2010, p. 92) argue, "Western constructions of culture, tradition and the past frame this context and reinforce the role of non-Indigenous experts as managers and protectors." The unearthing of the sacred site at the Goolwa Wharf precinct, however, turned this around. The Ngarrindjeri Nation sought legal action and entered negotiations with the local council, who formally apologised and signed the Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement on 8 October 2002 (Hemming & Rigney 2010). The KNYA is

different to most collaborative arrangements in that it is written under Contract Law, which applies laws or regulations to enforce any promises made (Legal Services Commission South Australia 2020). For the process of negotiating the agreement, Ngarrindjeri leaders made a decisive move to employ an independent lawyer from a high-profile firm rather than rely on services from the state-funded Aboriginal Legal Rights Movement Inc. (Hemming & Rigney 2008). The KNYA acts as a 'de facto' treaty that recognises Ngarrindjeri sovereignty through a contract law agreement (Muller, Hemming & Rigney 2019; Rigney, D, Bignall & Hemming 2015).

The commitments in the KNYA include acknowledgement of Ngarrindjeri as Traditional Owners, collaboration through ongoing bi-monthly meetings which facilitates Ngarrindjeri decision making, and Ngarrindjeri monitoring of any disturbances made to the ground. This local council have since maintained these commitments to the KNYA and continue to work with the Ngarrindjeri Nation as a sovereign entity. When Australia was hit with the Millennial drought, the Ngarrindjeri Nation signed another Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement with the Government of South Australia in 2006 (Government of South Australia 2013). Commitments made by the Government of South Australia included funding, quarterly meetings, and regular reporting. Annual reports on the KNYA with the Government of South Australia were published in 2013-15, however, activity around this agreement has since been stagnant. Nevertheless, the 2002 KNYA with the local council is internationally renowned to be the first agreement of its kind. Among other sites in CANZUS countries, the review of the CRT shows movement towards recentring Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements.

#### *2.4.2 The Columbia River Treaty (CRT)*

The Columbia River Basin (hereafter referred to as the Basin) is an important site because of the strong movement of non-Indigenous allies working to have tribes and First Nations of the Basin included as signatories in the renewed CRT. Situated on the west of Turtle Island and is the Ancestral home of fifteen tribes and eighteen bands affiliated with various First Nations (Bankes & Cosens 2012; Cosens 2016; McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). As seen in Figure 2, the Columbia River Basin system is roughly the size of France, with headwaters in the Rocky Mountains, stretching across the Canadian province of British Columbia and the US states of Washington, Idaho, Oregon, Montana, and Nevada – a varied mix of jurisdictions. Canada and the United States (US) entered into the 1964 CRT as an international agreement to formalise the management of the Columbia River that crosses the US-Canada border more than once (Bankes & Cosens 2012; Cosens 2016; McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). The focus of the 1964 CRT lay with the construction and administration of dams for hydropower production and flood risk management. Due to the distribution of downstream benefits and profits between the US and Canada, the CRT is regarded as one of the most successful transboundary water treaties (Cosens 2016). However, Indigenous sovereigns were excluded from the 1964 treaty and ecosystem function was ignored (Bankes & Cosens 2012; McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015).

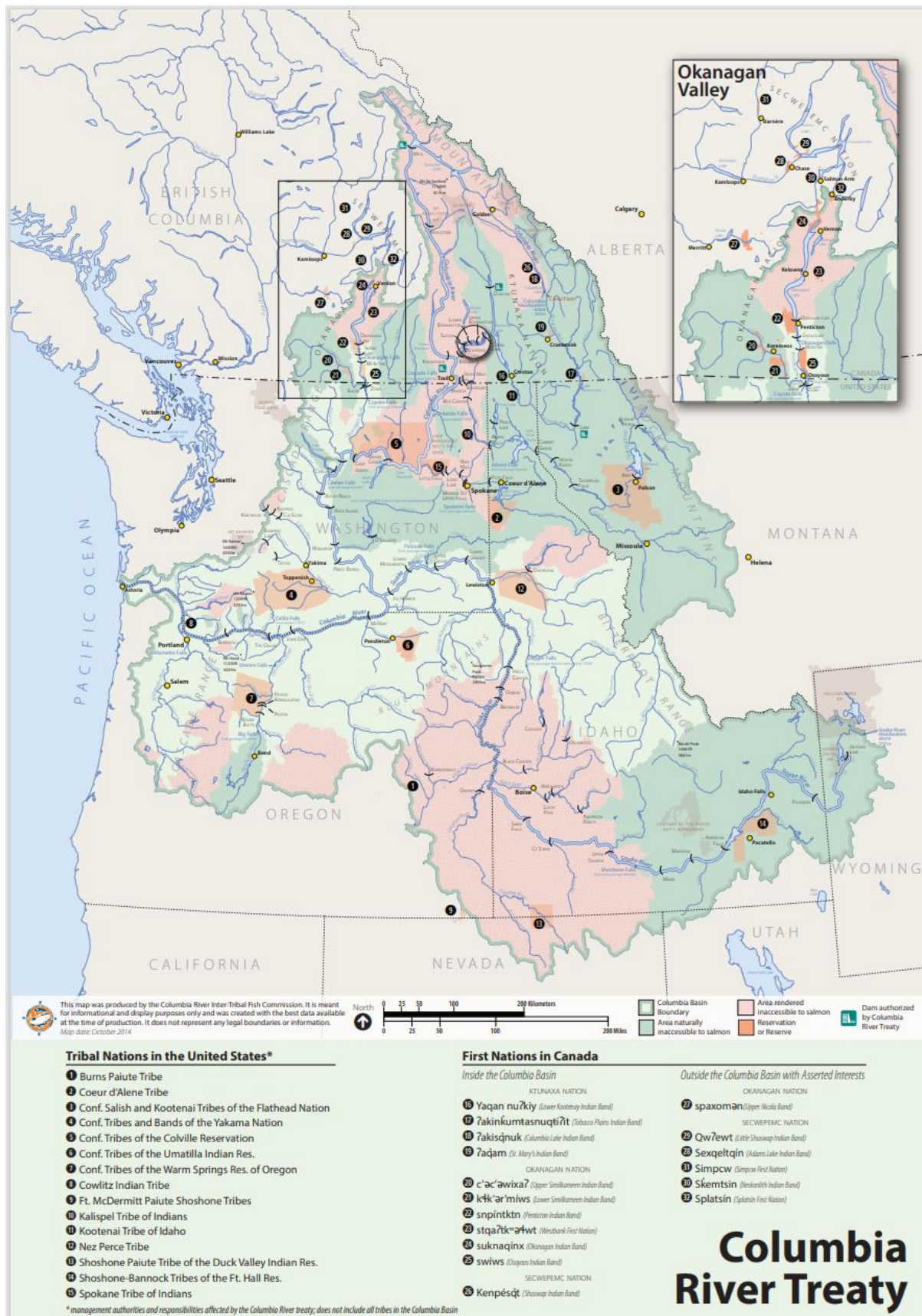


Figure 2: Map showing the tribes and First Nations of the Columbia River Basin (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015).

Since invasion and settlement, tribes and First Nations in the Basin have witnessed dramatic and destructive changes to their territories. The waters of the Columbia River are currently held back by over 230 major dams built by settler sovereigns for settler purposes - including hydroelectricity, flood risk management, irrigation, transportation, and recreation (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). The Columbia River generates more hydroelectricity than any other river on Turtle Island (Cosens 2016). Colonial settlement has interfered with the sacred responsibility of tribes and First Nations in the Basin, denying sovereignty, prohibiting self-determination, and limiting access to waters and salmon that sustain economies (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). The collective voice of tribes and First Nations across the Columbia River Basin states:

The stewardship of land, water, and other natural resources is not only an issue of self-determination for tribes and First Nations, but also a sacred responsibility. Ecosystem function and resilience has always been a core cultural value of this governance system (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015, p. 5).

Salmon are of specific importance to the sovereignty of tribes and First Nations in the Columbia River Basin. Sovereign laws instruct people to care for salmon, thereby salmon are central to human systems of governance, economy, and spirituality, as shown in the quote below:

Caring for salmon, the river, and other Columbia Basin resources is not just a system of governance, but also a sacred obligation. The cultural and spiritual identities of tribes and First Nations, albeit with variations, have

always been, and continue to be, sustained through the deliberate stewardship and use of land and water (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015, p. 19).

While tribes and First Nations have occupied the Basin for over 10,000 years, the sacred responsibility to care for land, water, and animals, such as salmon, is found in creation stories retold since time immemorial (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015).

On or after 2024, the CRT may be reviewed or terminated unilaterally by either party or by mutual agreement, providing that a minimum of ten years notice is given (Banks & Cosens 2012). As Canada and the US began looking to review the CRT, representatives from public universities began to convene and engage in dialogues across the US-Canada border that divides the Basin. In 2009 discussions on the future governance of the Columbia River formalised into the Universities Consortium with an aim to cross pollinate research and inform stakeholders across the Basin (Cosens 2016). In 2012, leaders from tribes and First Nations met with about 150 other individuals to discuss the interests, rights and roles of tribes and First Nations in governing the use of water and related resources in the Basin. Representatives from tribes and First Nations worked side-by-side with the Universities Consortium to produce a publication '*A Sacred Responsibility*' presenting the interests and aspirations of tribes and First Nations in the Basin in relation to modernising the CRT (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). Importantly, the review of the CRT in the US led to the establishment of the Sovereign Review Team, with members from the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Bonneville Power Administration, state governments, federal agencies



technical advisory bodies, and tribal leaders (Cosens 2016). Through the Sovereign Review Team, the fifteen tribes on the US side of the Basin demonstrated a high level of inter-tribal diplomacy to develop a set of 'Common Views.' To the north of the border, in Canada, British Columbia conducted a review process that included consultation with First Nations who had made claims to resources in the Basin (Cosens 2016).

Community interest in the Columbia River Basin amplified calls for the updated treaty to include two complimentary features, 1) ecological considerations and 2) for Indigenous sovereigns in the Basin to join as signatories and share decision making power (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). There is a clear paradigm shift in the settler community since the 1964 CRT, underpinned by notable biophysical changes and social movements seeking greater public participation. As Cosens (2016, p. 36) points out, "Possibly more dramatic than the decline of salmon populations is the fact that the dominant society now cares about that decline." The voices raised in response to the review of the CRT demonstrates considerable community investment in the many ecological and social issues facing the future of the Basin that is "leading to change, with or without treaty negotiations" (Cosens 2016, p. 42).

Through the above voices of the Ngarrindjeri Nation and tribes and First Nations across the Basin, I have illustrated how sovereignty is understood and enacted in their respective societies along with the issues faced from colonial violence. Next, I outline the theoretical and conceptual underpinning of the study.

## *2.5 The Study: Theoretical and conceptual frameworks*

In this thesis, I build upon the above foundational voices of Ngarrindjeri and tribes and First Nations in the Basin to examine the politics of sovereignty. It is critical to investigate how non-Indigenous professionals not only understand Indigenous sovereignty, but how they identify and interrupt the colonial mechanisms of settler sovereignty. As such, I now discuss two frameworks that underpin the study. First, I outline 'unsettling' as a theoretical frame for examining settler colonialisation. Second, I introduce Martin Booran Mirraboopa's (2003) conceptual framework of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing as the tool for analysing non-Indigenous allyship .

### *2.5.1 Theoretical frames: unsettling settler sovereignty*

Unpacking the ways in which sovereignty is understood by both settler and Indigenous sovereigns opens new ways of examining where the dominance of settler decision making in collaborative arrangements may originate. Central to sovereignty, as I will show, is how sovereign laws regulates human relationships with each other and the natural world. Because a shift from the colonial standard approach to a nation building approach is found at the KNYA and CRT sites, identifying the strategies and innovations that non-Indigenous professionals employ to recentre Indigenous sovereignty offers important insights for disrupting colonial paradigms and settler logics.

Settler colonisation is a distinct form of colonisation that occurred in CANZUS countries and forms the focus on my study. Settler colonialism is characterised by two concurrent traits; 1) the settler reproduces its community of origin and 2) the settler never leaves - unlike countries such as India where the colonists eventually left (Veracini 2010). Further, while other forms of colonialism seek to acquire labour, the primary interest of settler colonialism is twofold: 1) *eliminate* the previous occupants and 2) acquire territory to *extract* resources (Barker 2015; Simpson 2014; Wolfe, P 2006). The mechanisms of elimination and extraction underpin the colonial project of settler societies while deliberate marketing strategies of 'peaceful settlement' obfuscate colonial violence and dispossession (Veracini 2010). Here, it is important to note that colonial violence not only falls on Indigenous peoples, but also inflicts violence onto land and ecologies, driving the Age of the Anthropocene. Kyle Whyte (2018, p. 137) reminds us that "settler colonialism is violence that disrupts human relationships to the environment." Importantly, Whyte (2018) argues, settler ecologies operate as a colonial mechanism to disenfranchise Indigenous self-determination and collective continuance.

Indeed, settler colonial studies has long argued that the benign and domesticated images conjured by the terms 'settlement' and 'settler' continue to misrepresent the violence of invasion and occupation while affording power and privilege, through settler sovereignty, to only those who 'settle' (Fortier 2017; Krichauff 2014; Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Cornthassel 2014; Veracini 2013; Wolfe, P 1999, 2006). Further, the term 'settled' not only refers to the uptake of residency on the stolen lands of Indigenous sovereigns but also means "settled, done, finished, complete," incurring the "presumption that the colonial project has been

realised: land has been dispossessed; its owners have been eliminated or absorbed...clean-slate” (Simpson 2014, p. 11). Although problematic, I use the term settler to denote non-Indigenous people who benefit from residing upon lands acquired through colonial occupation that denies Indigenous sovereignty. Settlers who examine their colonial position, power and privilege become unsettled, yet they remain as settlers on Indigenous lands. While I may use the terms non-Indigenous and settler interchangeably, I prefer to use settler because of my focus on settler colonialism. For the same reason, I use the term settler sovereignty instead of Moreton-Robinson’s (2005, 2007, 2014, 2015) term ‘patriarchal white sovereignty’ to make the focus on settlement evident.

As well as a political challenge to settler sovereignty, the term unsettling in this thesis simultaneously signifies a personal, internal feeling of discomfort with one’s position as a settler. Unsettling captures a shift from reproducing settler norms to decentring oneself, one’s culture and history in ways that allow for a re-examination of the settler relationship with both Indigenous sovereigns and the place we call home. When something is unsettled, new possibilities are generated (Springgay & Truman 2019). Unsettling is nuanced, both personal and political, as Howitt (2020, p. 194) explains:

The verb unsettle carries ambiguity. It has overtones of both displacing from settlements that occupy space and make places of privilege and exclusion, as well as troubling the everyday discourses of erasure of the histories of settlement as invasion, occupation, dispossession and violence. It also carries an emotional content: feeling unsettled takes us outside our comfort zone.

My use of the terms settler and unsettling are borrowed from the fields of settler colonial studies and geography. I chose these terms because they are specific to the relationships between settlers and Indigenous sovereigns and the lands upon which we live. While whiteness has been a popular framework for examining relationships between settler and Indigenous sovereigns and racialised relationships, whiteness does not consider relationships between people and nature, including more-than-human Entities. As such, I apply the term settler to think through how non-Indigenous professionals might recentre Indigenous sovereignty by unsettling both their settler status and the colonial 'standard approach' to collaborative arrangements when working in partnership with Indigenous sovereigns.

To think through strategies and innovations that will recentre Indigenous sovereignty, I draw on theoretical foundations from Indigenous studies, settler colonial studies, and posthumanism. I chose these frames because they help me explore the ways in which settler sovereignty constrains and shapes co-management practices. Specifically, these theoretical foundations provide definitions, discussions, and critiques on sovereignty, how it is conceived by both parties, and how it is operationalised. They also help me to explain the significance of thinking through the ways that sovereignty prescribes human behaviour and frames the human relationship with nature. Together with the merging scholarship from the divergent fields of NRM and allyship, these theories help me to think through how settler norms can be challenged by non-Indigenous allies.

### *2.5.2 Conceptual framework Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing*

In order to investigate how non-Indigenous allies might unsettle the space of collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature, I am further inspired by the framework of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing – a concept put forward by Noonuccal scholar, Karen Martin Booran Mirraboopa (2003). The framework is intended as a tool for Indigenist research methods – and I discuss the appropriateness of my use of this tool as a non-Indigenous researcher in Chapter 6. In this thesis, I use the framework of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing to organise the analysis and presentation of the research findings, across Chapters 7, 8, and 9. Applying this decolonising tool assists me to identify how participants adjust to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, rather than reinforcing dominant colonial paradigms. Martin Booran Mirraboopa (2003, p. 209) explains that Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing are centred on “Entities of Land, Animals, Plants, Waterways, Skies, Climate and the Spiritual systems of Aboriginal groups” and are understood as below:

- **Indigenous ways of knowing** extend beyond ‘facts’ to include establishing what is known through Indigenous law as well as the teaching and learning of law in specific contexts.
- **Indigenous ways of being** establish relations between people and Entities that shape the proper forms of conduct around identities, interests, and connections.
- **Indigenous ways of doing** are actions, the fulfilment of responsibilities and the maintenance of relations. Ways of doing includes the use of “languages, art,

imagery, technology, traditions and ceremonies, land management practices, social organisation, and social control.

While I discuss knowing, being, and doing in turn, I note that these are not linear or progressive categories, but an entwined, interrelated, and continuously cocreated triad. In keeping with Martin Booran Mirraboopa (2003), building a bridge toward Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing for a non-Indigenous allies broadly falls into:

**Knowing** - issues of epistemology, knowledge and understanding.

**Being** - self-reflection on personal and cultural attitudes and biases that shape relationships.

**Doing** - taking action to redesign colonial institutional and systemic structures, including social organisation.

When referring to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing and sovereignty throughout this study, and specifically in the analysis, I acknowledge that I recognise the cultural authority of Indigenous sovereignties and continue to critically reflect on my own positionality.

Transferring the insights on Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing from Indigenous methodologies assists me to map out the strategies and innovations employed by non-Indigenous professionals working with Indigenous sovereigns. Importantly, I have identified

that the three pillars of knowing, being, and doing speak directly to the three persistent barriers to successful collaborative arrangements identified in the co-management literature in the field of NRM, being epistemological (knowing), attitudinal (being), and institutional (doing) barriers. Therefore, in the finding's chapters, I elucidate how non-Indigenous allies in collaborative arrangements employ strategies and innovations that recentre Indigenous sovereignty by adjusting to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

## *2.6 Significance of the study*

As indicated above, this study will make an original contribution to knowledge by providing a much-needed qualitative study, and specifically, through the identification of the strategies and innovations that non-Indigenous professionals employ to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in spaces of agreement making in collaborative arrangements. This contribution to knowledge has cross over contributions, as it has theoretical applications, and insights for praxis, policy and informing solidarity pedagogy internationally.

First, the thesis will provide practical insights and ideas for non-Indigenous professionals that work in collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature. Learning in any field relies heavily on guidelines and rules (Tracy 2010), and so, the examples of allyship in in this thesis offer pathways for non-Indigenous professional to build the capacity to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. This is not to propose foregone solutions, because decolonisation is not a destination and collaborative arrangements are unique to local Indigenous sovereigns.



Rather, the examples in this study showcase processes for collaborative work that focus on building meaningful relationships, not predetermined outcomes.

Second, the thesis is theoretically important. Exploring the concept of sovereignty extends the research inquiry beyond exploring relationships between people, to instead investigate the ways in which sovereignty prescribes the relationship that humans have with each other *and* with nature. Sovereignty and meanings of humanness is an important element, as I will show, for theoretical ruminations on the practice of allyship with Indigenous sovereigns in general, and the practice of allyship in collaborative arrangements. Moreover, the discussions that jettison sovereignty and humanness bring forth a unique theoretical contribution on unsettling the settler ontology of land and methodological investigations conducted by non-Indigenous researchers recruiting non-Indigenous participants.

Third, collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature are a political issue with real implications in the context of climate collapse. The extent of human consumption and mismanagement of natural resources has led to such profound consequences to the natural systems on Earth, that the current geological era has been called the Age of the Anthropocene: a period in Earth's history where human activity has induced changes that remake the circumstances for all life, to the point where the survival of many lifeforms, including humans and future generations, are now threatened (Castree 2001; Cudworth 2011). Recent decades have seen global political agendas and worldwide environmental movements discuss nature as a topic of critical importance (Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Service 2019). Findings from this thesis will

be useful to this international movement for addressing the challenges of climate change by working towards developing more successful partnerships with Indigenous sovereigns for the stewardship of nature.

Fourth, it is important to study places where there has been some movement towards meaningful acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty to develop decolonising practices of allyship. Issues of power are acutely manifest in the political interactions between Indigenous and settler sovereigns. By capturing how non-Indigenous people unsettle settler colonialism and develop innovations and strategies that disrupt regulatory mechanisms, such tools can be shared with other non-Indigenous people who work in partnership with Indigenous groups.

## *2.7 Overview of chapters*

Because collaborative arrangements are an agreement between two sovereign nations - whether or not Indigenous sovereignty is recognised by the settler state - it is important to first understand how each party understands sovereignty. In Chapter 3, I begin with a theoretical background for collaborative arrangements and track this by looking at how sovereignty is understood by both settler and Indigenous sovereigns. Specifically, I interrogate the ways that sovereignty prescribes human behaviour and how human identity frames and shapes the relationships that people have with each other and with nature. Settler sovereignty is based upon theories of humankind as being separate and superior to the natural world, while Indigenous sovereignty is underpinned by the concept of

relationality, where humans exist in a web of reciprocal, interdependent relationships. European meanings of humanness, consolidated during the Enlightenment Era, are embedded in the Western concept of sovereignty which drives the colonial habit of assuming authority. Goenpul scholar of the Quandamooka Nation, Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2015), aptly names this assumption of authority and possession as ‘patriarchal white sovereignty.’ The underlying human/other binary and the epistemological orientation for negation and amelioration of difference is endemic to the West and settler societies. Upon these foundations, settler sovereigns deny Indigenous sovereignty, privilege Western knowledges and practices, and hoard power and resources. The construction and operation of settler sovereignty steers the colonial ‘standard approach’ to co-management practices and allows for the dominance of settler decision making. In response, Indigenous sovereigns are advancing a ‘nation-building’ approach to change the basis of the relationship with settler sovereigns. To shift towards a nation-building approach that recentres Indigenous sovereignty, I argue that non-Indigenous professionals must navigate a complex space dominated by settler logics and colonial paradigms that are premised upon the construction of humans in opposition to land-nature.

In Chapters 4 and 5, I review literature that examines the perspectives of non-Indigenous people who work in collaborative efforts with Indigenous sovereigns. Chapter 4 concentrates on collaborative arrangements where settler and Indigenous sovereigns form partnerships for the stewardship of nature in conservation and sustainability efforts, largely referred to as co-management. The co-management literature is rife with examinations on the persistent barriers to successful co-management outcomes, with a heavy focus on the difficulty of

blending Western and Indigenous knowledges in collaborative arrangements. However, little work examines the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals in these spaces, how they understand these tensions and what strategies they employ to mitigate them. I argue that examining the role of non-Indigenous professionals is critical for the disruption of colonial binaries that manifest as persistent epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers in collaborative arrangements.

Therefore, in Chapter 5, I explore literature on non-Indigenous allyship and solidarity efforts to transfer established insights on the practice of allyship into the space of collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature. This includes the need to decolonise the practice of allyship and unsettle settler logics and colonial paradigms, such as the taken-for-granted notion that settlers have an unquestionable right to land. I take established insights and gaps identified from literature on co-management in NRM and allyship - where both fields examine settler and Indigenous relationships - to guide the direction of this thesis and analysis of participant narratives. To recentre Indigenous sovereignty and engage in decolonising practices of allyship in collaborative arrangements, I argue that non-Indigenous professionals must employ an unsettling agency in the everyday places in which they work.

Chapter 6 details the methodological approach, where I discuss the need to decolonise Western research and the usefulness of applying the concept of unsettling along with the framework of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Because this thesis is conducted by a non-Indigenous researcher investigating non-Indigenous participants, I review the associated problematics and explore unsettling methodologies to disrupt the

normalised, colonial settler approach to research. Additionally, I explore why it is important to study the role of non-Indigenous peoples, and how the concept of unsettling is a useful methodological framework to further assist decolonising efforts in research. To further inform unsettling methodologies, I delve into the settler ontology of land and turn to the idea of ontological pluralism where multiplicities, not binaries, are possible. I discuss the limitations of institutional ethics and benefits of a relational ethics of care. The methods of data collection are stepped out, tracing the analysis and thematic development of participant narratives from the KNYA and CRT sites in line with the framework of knowing, being, and doing.

The analysis of participant narratives is presented in Chapters 7, 8 and 9, where I argue that participants recentre Indigenous sovereignty by adjusting their knowledges, attitudes, and actions to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing, respectively. In this way, participants do not appropriate or adopt Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing but make space for Indigenous sovereigns to operate according to the nation building goals of the specific communities they work with. In Chapter 7, I demonstrate through participant narratives that knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty is the primary strategy for recentring Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements. I show that participants attend to issues of colonial structural injustice and the ways that they challenge everyday exclusionary practices based upon Western knowledge hierarchies. I reveal the ways that participants understand settler colonialism, their position and complicity within it. By unsettling epistemological barriers, non-Indigenous allies adjust to Indigenous ways of knowing and recentre Indigenous sovereignty. The usefulness of the methodological

approach emerges as participants demonstrate the disruption of binary logics, make connections across settler boundaries, unsettling the settler ontology of land and move towards ontological pluralism. In Chapter 8, I argue that non-Indigenous allies recentre Indigenous sovereignty by embracing feelings of discomfort as a cue for critical self-reflexivity, engaging in multiple forms of listening, and building an ontology of truth that is carried throughout personal and professional lives. Chapter 9 argues that non-Indigenous allies unsettle institutional barriers, by following Indigenous leadership, transforming settler institutional frameworks, funding regimes, technological applications, and social organisation to recentre Indigenous sovereignty and adjust to Indigenous ways of doing.

The narratives of participants illustrate important innovations and strategies for integrating the practice of allyship into collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature. A focus on the role of non-Indigenous professionals is a critical step for understanding how to transform current collaborative arrangements from a standard colonial approach to an Indigenous nation building framework.

### 3 Sovereignty

The British Crown's claim of sovereignty over Australia, Canada and the United States legitimised the onset of settler colonisation and persists as colonial denial of the rights of Indigenous sovereigns to self-determination. As discussed in Chapter 1, the settler colonial denial of Indigenous sovereignty continues to frame unbalanced power relations where settlers tend to privilege Western knowledges, practices, and decision making in collaborative arrangements. Regardless of colonial attempts to deny Indigenous sovereignty, Indigenous communities continue with nation building endeavours, practicing laws and traditions according to their Ancestral constitutionalism. To assist this thesis to identify how non-Indigenous professionals working in co-management arrangements recentre Indigenous sovereignty, I turn first to examine the ways in which sovereignty is understood by both settler and Indigenous sovereignty. As Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2021) specifies, sovereignty directs human behaviour through the structuring of laws over a specified territory, shaping and ordering relationships between people. Moreover, because collaborative is a matter of managing relationships that are bound with transactions of power, privilege, and wealth, the discussions below offer insight into the historic forces that shapes the standard colonial approach. As I will show, the stark differences in where humans are positioned in relation to each other, and the natural world, is a key source of tension between settler and Indigenous sovereigns. For non-Indigenous professionals who practice allyship in collaborative arrangements, navigating these complexities is core.

The first section attends to meanings of humanness embedded in both settler and Indigenous sovereignty that shapes the behaviour of humans. I track the points of contention between settler and Indigenous sovereignty, drawing from Indigenous studies, settler colonial studies and posthumanism. I demonstrate how Enlightenment theories on sovereignty underpin (1) meanings of humanness, (2) human relationships with land, and (3) political rights. I show how the theories of Thomas Hobbes and John Locke are highly anthropocentric and are foundational to operation of settler sovereignty. Here, the construction of the human/other binary established that only those defined as fully human possess reason, knowledge, and agency and are ensured the protection of the sovereign. In contrast, Indigenous sovereignties are underpinned by the concept of relationality and interconnectedness where humans are responsible to ensure rights to life are protected for all species and more-than-human entities. I finish the section by turning to the emergent fields of posthumanism and new materialism to show how non-Indigenous scholars in the Western academy are now debunking the human/other binary.

In the second section, I explain how the problem is not difference itself, but rather, the amelioration of difference. Western binary logic seeks to ameliorate difference by absorbing and assimilating difference into the dominant paradigm, which remains a highly problematic epistemological foundation to the settler denial of Indigenous sovereignty (Bignall 2010). By exposing amelioration as a technology essential for settler colonisation, I lay out the mechanisms that facilitate the privileging of settler decision making in collaborative arrangements. As such, I present the complex space which non-Indigenous professionals must navigate to identify colonial dominance and recentre Indigenous sovereignty. I argue



that the human/other binary which is endemic to the West underpins the colonial standard approach in partnerships.

The third section shows how the politics of sovereignty permeate the relationship that settler sovereigns have developed with Indigenous sovereigns. First, I provide a brief overview of the settler history of treaty making and breaking across Australia, Canada, and the United States. I then outline the contemporary relationship between settler and Indigenous sovereigns – the space that non-Indigenous professionals are located.

The last section discusses Indigenous nation building as the approach taken by Indigenous sovereigns to balance decision making in collaborative arrangements collaborations, in the face of ongoing colonial denial. Indigenous sovereigns in CANZUS countries continue to refuse to submit to colonial control and instead strategically work on rebuilding the nationhood prescribed by the sovereign laws specific to their own ancestral territories. The strategic efforts of Indigenous nation building have generated the rise in collaborative agreements and reframes the basis of the roles and relationship to settler sovereigns. To conclude the chapter, I discuss the impact of Indigenous nation building to intercept the colonial standard approach employed by settler sovereigns in collaborative to engender a nation building approach. The way that non-Indigenous professionals shift from the standard colonial approach to follow a nation building approach is critical to the practice of allyship and recentring Indigenous sovereignty.

### *3.1 The politics of sovereignty*

In this section, I will show the way in which settler and Indigenous sovereigns interpret the role of humans is vastly different. Indigenous sovereigns understand these relationships through the lens of relationality as interconnected, reciprocal networks. In the words of Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2021, p. 259), “Our ontologies, our ways of being Indigenous are inextricably connected to being in and of our lands.” On the other hand, settler sovereigns construe humans to exist separately to the natural world. Put simply by Moreton-Robinson (2021, p. 267), “Patriarchal white sovereignty is not born of the earth.”

In Western legal and political discourse, the concept of sovereignty has been prominent for centuries, yet no single definition exists. Rather, its meaning is dependent on the user, context, purpose, time, and place and is malleable in practice (Brennan et al. 2005; Grimm & Cooper 2015; Langton 2004; Moreton-Robinson 2021). Indigenous sovereigns have adopted the English words of ‘nation’ and ‘sovereignty’ as a way to communicate custodianship of territories and the lawful place of Indigenous peoples in response to colonisation and the denial of their existence (Deloria Jn. & Lytle 1984; Moreton-Robinson 2021; Watson 2002b). This strategic use can be shot through with ambivalence – for example, Chief Justice of the Navajo Nation, Robert Yazzie, states that ‘talk about sovereignty’ has become stale and largely centres on whether or not occupying nation states will ‘allow’ Indigenous sovereignty (Bruyneel 2007). Indeed, nation states and international legal frameworks continue to deny Indigenous sovereignty and only apply the term ‘nation’ in an anthropological sense, devoid of political and legal meaning (Watson 2002a). This raises important considerations in

relation to the way that non-Indigenous allies recognise Indigenous sovereignty in the face of ongoing colonial denial.

The ways in which sovereignty is conceived by both settler and Indigenous sovereigns unfolds as an ongoing project, and so the politics of sovereignty remains in a continual process of contestation (Bruyneel 2007). Nevertheless, three clear conflicts are found between settler and Indigenous sovereignty regarding meanings of humanness, the human relationships with land, and the allocation of political rights. I discuss these in turn below followed by posthuman and new materialist critiques of the Western construction of human as separate and superior to nature.

### *3.1.1 Meanings of humanness*

The first point of contestation centres on how meanings of humanness are deeply connected to meanings of sovereignty. Prevailing ideas about the separation of human from nature - coupled with truth-claims that categorised humans based on social differences - have constructed the economic, political and social formations of Western modernity, global framings of nation-states and international politics (Cudworth & Hobden 2012). Thus, in the West, humanness is a social construct tied to formations of power, setting apart human from nature, human from other animals and human from human. As I will show, the European concept of sovereignty is premised upon the human/other binary. During the Enlightenment era humans were positioned as superior over animals and plants and a specific type of human, the European man, as superior over other groups of humans. Such hierarchical

constructions denigrate the knowledges and capacities of both non-human species and Indigenous peoples.

Indigenous sovereignty is underpinned by meanings of humanness that situate humans *in relation* to other humans, species, and life support systems and protects the rights to life for all (Alfred 2009; Kimmerer 2013; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Watson 2015; Whyte 2021). In the West, meanings of humanness are constructed *in opposition* to animals, species, and other people. As such, the concept and practice of sovereignty in the West, and settler societies, is bound with both racism (Hemming 2007; Lopez 2005; Moreton-Robinson 2014; Reynolds 1996; Watson 2002a, 2015) and speciesism (Cudworth 2014; Singer 2006; Wadiwel 2002).

The Western meaning of humanness is premised upon a narrow definition developed during the Enlightenment era of 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century Europe (Anderson 2007; Braidotti 2013; Wolfe, C 2009). Enlightenment theories contended that the pinnacle of human evolution emerged through ‘civilisation,’ a process of rising above ‘a state of nature’ to living in cities governed by a sovereign authority. Here, only wealthy, European men were thought to have achieved full humanness (Anderson 2007). Theories of race separated colonised people from inclusion in the human family, thereby denying both human and sovereign rights to Indigenous peoples globally. With the ranking of humanness came the ranking of knowledges, where non-white, non-human knowledges are inferiorised (Anderson 2007; Tuhiwai Smith 2012).

Europeans saw themselves as the only fully evolved humans, claiming the 'white race' presides as the most advanced, intelligent, and moral form of human (Anderson 2001, 2007; Giddens 2006; Haggis 2004). Popular theories purported that the pinnacle of human evolution was the European man; a rational intellect, a citizen, a rights-holder, and property owner (Braidotti 2013; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Humans that were not male or European were denied intelligence, agency, and rights to life, as were non-human animals, species, and Entities (Cudworth 2014; Davion 2001). As pointed out by postcolonial scholars, Hall (1992) and Said (1978), this construction of non-Europeans as 'others' has been reproduced for centuries to establish political power in the West. Similarly, the construction of the human/other binary positions all life forms and life support systems as inferior and without political status, with animals ranked below humans and plants at the very bottom (Kimmerer 2013). Enlightenment ideas of humanness is intimately tied to notions of progress, modernity, industrialisation, and development, cementing the human/other binary in the Western imaginary. These ideas of humanness are now so deeply embedded, normalised and invisible in Western political frameworks, as leading posthuman theorist, Rosi Braidotti (2006, p. 1) states:

The term [human] enjoys widespread consensus and it maintains the reassuring familiarity of common sense. We assert our attachment to the species as if it were a matter of fact, a given. So much so that we construct a fundamental notion of Rights around the Human.

Compounding notions of human exceptionalism - from European racial superiority to the othering of all animals, species, and nature itself - are foundational to the meaning of sovereignty in the West. Personhood, knowledge, and agency can only be assigned to bodies who fit the criteria defined by Enlightenment notions of humanness. Such notions, and the subsequent manifestations of racism and speciesism continue to be carried into the space of collaborative arrangements by non-Indigenous people.

In contrast, Indigenous sovereigns position humans through the lens of relationality, where nature, all life, and life support systems are knowledge holders and teachers that humans learn from. As consistently reported by Indigenous scholars, the role of humans is to act as stewards and caretakers for all creatures, the ecological support systems that allow for life, and future generations (Alfred 2009; Bawaka Country et al. 2012; Deloria Jn. & Lytle 1984; Kimmerer 2013; Watson 2002a, 2002b; Whyte 2021). Indigenous sovereignty includes in its legal and social systems more-than-human worlds or entities who exist in complex inter-dependent relationships with humans. The role and positionality of humans in relation to land and all life, is an important consideration for examining the ways that non-Indigenous professionals understand Indigenous sovereignty in order to recentre it.

In summary, for both settler and Indigenous sovereigns what it means to be human is intimately tied with the concept of sovereignty. Western constructs around humanness established systems of inequality, as racism and speciesism, that are now ingrained in settler societies. These ideas operate in collaborative arrangements where settlers 'manage' the natural world and assume authority over Indigenous peoples. Indigenous sovereigns,

however, understand the unique qualities of humans as attributes that allows people to serve as caretakers, where various life forms and features of the more-than-human world possess knowledge, agency, and authority. Non-Indigenous professionals who work as allies to prioritise Indigenous sovereignty are thereby required to understand and navigate these contrasting relationships. I argue that the human/other binary, where non-European people and other species are subjugated, underpins the colonial standard approach to co-governance partnerships. Below, I expand upon the impact of the human/other binary and present another, intertwined point of contention regarding the European construction of humanness in opposition to land that permeates collaborative arrangements.

### *3.1.2 Human relationships with land*

The second point of contention between settler and Indigenous sovereignty lies in divergent understandings of the relationships that humans have with land. When working in environmental co-governance, non-Indigenous allies are caught in the tension between two incommensurable ideas on the relationship that humans have with land. The European construction of humans *in opposition* to land established ownership of property as key to sovereignty in the West, including the settler states of Australia, Canada, and the US.

The work of two prominent Enlightenment theorists, Thomas Hobbes and John Locke, contributed to notions of human exceptionalism as key to their theorising on sovereignty (Anderson 2007). European ‘mastery’ over land and the separation of humans from nature lay the foundations for legitimising settler sovereignty and the colonial project. Moreover,

mastery over land is integral to capitalist industrial development and settler economies. In 1651, Thomas Hobbes published *Leviathan*, in which Hobbes claimed that 'natural man' rose above a 'state of nature' to become 'civilised' (Eng 2015; Grimm & Cooper 2015; Ratulea 2015). Under these conditions, Hobbes suggested, sovereignty is achieved through a social contract where individual humans surrender their right to defend their natural rights to life in exchange for the regulated safety and protection of a ruler, sovereign monarch, or assembly (Eng 2015; Grimm & Cooper 2015). Hobbes' work is a key contributor to Enlightenment ideas, as presented above, where human evolution travels a linear path from 'savagery' to 'civilisation.' However, as Foucault (2003) notes, Hobbes ideas on 'natural man' in a 'state of nature' is a fantasy about what human interaction in European society might have been like prior to the formation of some form of sovereign rule. This metaphor of 'natural man' rising above a 'state of nature' to become separate and superior to the natural world remains embedded in the Western imaginary and is integral to the legitimising of settler sovereignty.

Building upon the work of Hobbes, John Locke was an influential theorist of the Enlightenment era who discussed the meaning of humanness in relation to the concept of sovereignty (Anderson 2007). The 'state of nature' introduced by Hobbes was seen as the initial state of existence for a pre-humankind that progressed towards path to modernity. Locke's theory of property alleges that human identity is evident in the practice of agriculture – an ability to 'master' nature. Locke argued that when humans transformed land and exerted one's labour to 'improve' land, this act of mixing ones 'sweat with the soil' constituted ownership and property rights (Anderson 2007; Gregory 2001). Moreover,



‘mastery’ over land produced a surplus of goods and products that sustains city living. Locke argued that where European society had transcended nature and achieved humanity, Indigenous societies remained in a stage of infancy, without the intellectual skills to undertake agricultural practices or form governance structures that sustained civil societies (Anderson 2007). Denying the presence of agriculture on ‘new lands’ not only opened up vast areas of land for colonisation, but reinforced notions of Indigenous sovereigns as savage and uncivilised due to a perceived lack of ‘mastery’ over land.

For Indigenous sovereigns, geographical landscape is central to Indigenous sovereignty, not only in terms of territory but because the behaviour of people is prescribed through spiritual obligations and metaphysical associations with land (Deloria Jr. & Lytle 1984; Foley, D 2003; Watson 2015). Land and water are not separated from each other nor held as a commodity to be bought and sold. Around the world, the name that Indigenous sovereigns assign themselves generally translates into English as ‘people of the land’ (Watson 2015), clearly linking human identity with belonging to place. Humanness, according to Indigenous peoples, is constructed *in relation* to the natural world, not in opposition to it, and is based upon the concept of relationality.

In summary, I have shown that notions of humanness in relation to the natural world fundamentally shapes Western and Indigenous ideas of sovereignty – and most importantly, the point of contention is how they differ. The above theories by Hobbes and Locke work in concert to police entitlements to political rights through specific meanings of human identity. These ideas of humanness are important because they feed directly into the

structure of settler sovereignty regarding political rights and whose voice counts – the pivotal issue regarding decision making in collaborative arrangements. The shared responsibility of tribes and First Nations in the Basin, and the responsibility for Ngarrindjeri to care as Country, requires self-determination based upon traditions of constitutionalism and nationhood. The issue of power and political rights is explored in more detail below.

### *3.1.3 Politics rights or human responsibilities?*

The last point of contention between settler and Indigenous sovereignty is the allocation of political rights according to meanings of humanness. John Locke's conception of 'popular sovereignty' and the 'body politic' is central to the operation of power in Western liberal democracy and notions of citizen rights. The anthropocentric framing of democracy in the West narrowly grants a political voice to only those classified as human according to the above Enlightenment notions. In collaborative arrangements, it is the unequal distribution of power that allows for the dominance of settler sovereign decision making. On this coalface, non-Indigenous allies working in collaborative arrangements must contest settler deployment of power in order to recentre Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination.

During the Enlightenment, the idea of 'popular sovereignty' emerged as an agreement between citizens that all 'men' are equal under the law. Here the 'rights of men' took precedence over the 'divine right of kings', toppling longstanding traditions of monarchies who claimed that their sovereign authority came directly from God (Grimm & Cooper 2015). Returning to the key Enlightenment thinkers discussed above, Locke agreed with Hobbes

that the transition from the 'state of nature' to civil society relieved the insecurity of individuals in their fight for survival. Locke insisted, however, that the ultimate power resided with the people, the 'body politic' who could lobby the state should the sovereign no longer provide for their rights and freedoms (Grimm & Cooper 2015). At this time, the 'body politic' is comprised of a select group of people, being *property owning* European men. In light of Locke's theory of property, this point is important because it shows the overlapping ties between sovereignty and property, where ownership of land is based upon separation, control, and mastery. Further, in settler societies, democratic frameworks exclude all non-human life and life support systems. Political 'rights' in the Western tradition centres on a human 'body politic' that exists in isolation from any larger more-than-human body. Locke's development of the concept of sovereignty to include the consent of the governed remains a prominent ideal in Western theories of government and liberal democracy (Brennan et al. 2005).

Conversely, Indigenous scholars have long argued that landscape holds authority and knowledges that issue the sovereign laws that govern human society. Consistent among Indigenous sovereigns around the globe, throughout time, and enduring throughout colonisation, are the principles of relationality and responsibility (Byrd 2011; Langton 2004; Moreton-Robinson 2015). Indigenous sovereigns have longstanding democratic institutions where political decision-making accounts for the rights of all life (Kimmerer 2013; Pascoe 2014; Simpson, A 2014). Kimmerer (2013, p. 112), explains that the fundamental principle of the Haudenosaunee's annual Thanksgiving Address is to uphold a "democracy of species." Humans are one species among many who are members of a democracy where humans

pledge mutual allegiance, interdependence, gratitude, and reciprocity with the living world.

Patriotism, Kimmerer states, is true love of country, loving the land itself.

This love is evident in the concept of ‘caring as Country’ held by Indigenous sovereigns across Australia who understand ‘Country’ as a larger living body comprised of interconnected systems between landscape, all life, and Entities (Bawaka Country et al. 2013; Bawaka Country et al. 2016; Fforde, Knapman & Walsh 2020; Ngarrindjeri Tendi, Ngarrindjeri Heritage Committee & Ngarrindjeri Native Title Committee 2007; Rigney, D et al. 2007). People are referred to as ‘belonging to Country’ in contrast to the Western tradition where land, as property, belongs to people. While caring for Country is commonly used to describe the responsibility of humans to look after Country, more recently, a more accurate translation of ‘caring *as* Country’ is being used. Caring *for* something implies a separateness to what is being cared for, whereas caring *as* Country describes the way Indigenous sovereigns in Australia see themselves *as* Country (Bawaka Country et al. 2013). Therefore, as Muller, Hemming, and Rigney, D (2019, p. 399) state, “When Indigenous nations ‘speak as Country’, they speak as a part of a living body; they speak lawfully through their rights and sovereignties to Country as part of a living whole.” Thereby, ignoring the voices of Indigenous sovereigns silences the voices of Country, as is evidenced in the dominance of settler decision making in collaborative arrangements.

Clearly, Indigenous sovereignty extends to more-than-human worlds where the rights to life are protected for all living creatures and the support systems that we all depend on. Humans

are not viewed as exceptional creatures with exclusive rights but are regarded as caretakers or stewards of the land. As Patricia Monture--Angus argues in the Canadian context:

sovereignty ... is not about "ownership" of territory in the way that Canadian politicians and lawyers would define those words. We have a Mohawk word that better describes what we mean by sovereignty and that word is "tewatatha:wi." It best translates to "we carry ourselves." This Aboriginal definition of sovereignty is about responsibilities and not just rights. I have heard many other Aboriginal people from many other Aboriginal nations say that this is also true, or similar, in their language (Monture-Angus, 2000, cited in Nicoll 2002, p. 27).

Incumbent to the concept of sovereignty described in the quote above, is the role of self-determination so that Indigenous sovereigns can 'carry' themselves independently. Indigenous sovereigns share a form of constitutionalism, despite unique differences between groups, that serves as a 'blueprint' for collective action and community decision making that values and includes political rights for all life (Cornell 2015b, p. 2). Contrastingly, sovereignty in the West is anthropocentric and focusses on human entitlements to political rights and not responsibilities. The conditions upon which settler sovereignty is claimed are based upon a perception of humanness that exists separately to the natural world, having risen above the 'state of nature'. Apparent in the Age of the Anthropocene is the pressing need for settlers to rethink our relationship with nature as separate and subordinate to humanity. Such reimagining's are required in collaborative arrangements to make space for new possibilities for the stewardship of nature and the political rights for more-than-human Entities. An Indigenous nation building approach to collaborative arrangements provide non-

Indigenous professionals in the space opportunity to renegotiate relationships and shift away from the standard colonial approach that dominates both Indigenous peoples and the lands they speak for.

#### *3.1.4 Posthuman critiques of humanness in the West*

European constructions of humanness have received much critique from postcolonial, critical race and whiteness studies in relation to power relationships between people. Critical animal studies and environmental philosophies have critiqued power relationships between people and animals/nature/land (Cudworth 2014; Cudworth & Hobden 2011, 2012; Donaldson & Kymlicka 2011; Singer 2001, 2006; Taylor & Twine 2014). This includes the term 'environment' because it reproduces an anthropocentric binary placing humans on one side and nature on the other. The recent development of posthuman studies and new materialism, however, considers a broader approach, accounting for a multitude of interconnected relationships between humans, and between humans and nature. By eliminating the ontological constraints of the human born from Enlightenment thought, posthumanism rethinks and recontextualises the human as part of a greater more-than-human self-sustaining system (Braidotti 2013; Ferrando 2016; Wolfe, C 2009). Contemporary debates emerging from posthumanism and new materialism have turned to critique Western anthropomorphism in ways that reflect Indigenous paradigms of interconnectedness. Posthumanism is reminding the West that humans are not separate and superior to nature. This puts to question the anthropocentric meanings of settler sovereignty in collaborative agreements.

The field of new materialism, often partnered with posthuman discussions, seeks to understand the relationship of humans to the physical world. Applying insights from disciplines such as physics and biology, new materialism moves away from the popularity of examining discourse and instead focusses on how the material world shapes humanness and our relationship with the natural world. For example, physicist Karen Barad (2003) explains that the dance of atoms forms the building blocks of the human body and because those same atoms exist in all matter there can be no separateness. Further, biologist, Donna Haraway (2008), explains that the human body depends on a symphony of tiny ‘messmates’, such as microbial gut bacteria, that inhabits the human body. Biologically, there can be no separation between humans and other life forms because we exist in interdependent relationships upon which our lives depend. As Cudworth (2011) notes, while the Western academy begins to position humans as an animal interlocked in webs of relations with species and nature, our social relations remain exclusively human, and humanist. This includes the concept of sovereignty, the structures of collaborative arrangements, and the non-Indigenous professionals who work within settler institutions.

Indeed, posthuman scholars pinpoint that the problematics incumbent to the Age of the Anthropocene lies with the concept of human as a unique individual who *is not* embedded in a complex biotic lifeworld (Cudworth 2011). Posthuman scholars identify the Enlightenment construction of humanness as the underlying problematic driving global social inequality and the Age of the Anthropocene (Braidotti 2013; Ferrando 2019; Wolfe, C 2009). Indeed, posthuman arguments are closely tied to the misuse of political and

economic power by sovereign states on a global scale, driven by capitalist industrial development.

While the Western academic tradition begins to critique its own philosophy and develops 'novel' ways of rethinking humanness, coining terms such as 'posthuman' or 'new materialism,' Indigenous sovereigns have always understood life on Earth as an entanglement of interdependent systems in which humans are embedded (Bignall, Hemming & Rigney 2016; Hokowhitu 2021). Indeed, scholarship emergent from Indigenous studies provides a growing wealth of literature that engages with the history of European humanism and its legacies, providing critical responses to colonisation (Byrd 2011; Krupat 2002). Discussions in posthuman studies rarely engage with Indigenous scholarship and understandings of humanness according to Indigenous sovereigns (Hokowhitu 2021). Thereby, posthumanism and new materialism have been critiqued for silencing Indigenous knowledges while claiming such knowledge as one's own - a form of colonial appropriation (Bignall, Hemming & Rigney 2016; Hokowhitu 2021). Nevertheless, posthuman critiques levelled at the Enlightenment notions of humanness remain valuable – for the West has begun to critique itself and the construction of humanness in opposition to nature. Many scholars are now calling for a recovery of multiplicities to contest continued binarism's that manifest as inequalities for humans, animals, and ecologies in modernity (Barad 2003; Bignall 2010; Braidotti 2006; Cudworth & Hobden 2011, 2012; Ferrando 2019; Hage 2017; Haraway 2008; Hardt & Negri 2000; Oxman 2016; Wolfe, C 2009).



As elucidated above, notions of sovereignty and humanness posit a point of contention between settler and Indigenous sovereigns. The human/other binary pertinent to the West locates European humans as superior to other humans, species, and land, and shapes formations of political power and rights. While the differences in constructions of humanness between settler and Indigenous sovereigns are clear, a deeper problematic lies with the way in which difference is perceived and managed in the West. This occurs because the human/other binary does not simply create a division based on difference, but because difference must be ameliorated, as will be explored in the next section.

### *3.2 Sovereignty and the amelioration of difference*

In this section, I dig deeper into the Western epistemological default to binary logic: an either/or dichotomy that presents two alternatives and demands that one alternative outweighs the other. With respects to the human/other binary, the 'other' is ameliorated either through exclusion from humanness or is absorption into the Enlightenment notion of human. The dominance of settler decision making, I suggest, occurs through this process of negation and amelioration.

CANZUS countries are "founded on the presumption of European superiority and the belief that Cartesian dualism, Enlightenment values and industrial capitalism were the hallmarks of a civilised society" (Kluttz, Walker & Walter 2020, p. 50). Binarism requires a dominant/subordinate position and invokes a power of independent control over physicality, time, and space (Bruyneel 2007). Specifically, the colonial worldview presupposes a

binaristic epistemology of dualisms that post-colonial scholar, Bill Ashcroft, calls the 'imperial binary' (Bruyneel 2007). A defining feature of colonial relationships is the us/them dialectic (Alfred 2009) constructing a boundary that blinds Western knowledge construction to alternative ideas (Bruyneel 2007). Ironically, settler sovereignty is structured upon binary categories of sovereign/citizen, non-Indigenous/Indigenous, and human/other while espousing equality for all (Curry 2004).

The Western epistemological default to binarism frames the ways Indigenous peoples and their lands are viewed, interpreted, and understood (Bignall 2010; Bruyneel 2007; Hardt & Negri 2000). This ultimately creates what Aileen Moreton-Robinson identifies as the 'logic of possession' – a mode of rationalisation. Moreton-Robinson (2015, p. xii) explains, the logic of possession is "underpinned by an excessive desire to invest in reproducing and reaffirming the nation-states ownership, control and domination" over Indigenous peoples lives and lands. Conceptions of nature remain bound by "*an inability to imagine human-natural relations in a nondichotomous way* [emphasis in original]" (Castree 2001, p. 210). Binarism, actioned through dialectical reason, positions every concept in relation to what it is not. Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 14) state simply, "Difference becomes the conduit of identification." This entraps Western epistemology into a logic of difference, as highlighted by Bignall (2010, pp. 32-3):

A given identity is thus established by its opposition to all that is different or is 'not'; however this determining relation to difference means that identity cannot be thought without difference, or as separate from the difference that it negates. Thesis and antithesis – being and nothing,

identity and difference, self and other, master and slave – are thus bound together into an ambiguous and unstable relationship, in which the two categories are at once opposed and united.

The goal of binary logic is to negate and assimilate the subordinate positions in order to possess the dominant position, which requires the constant policing of boundaries (Bignall 2010; Hardt & Negri 2000). The goal is to ameliorate difference (Bignall 2010). Traditional strategies for ameliorating difference include absorbing and assimilating difference into the main, getting to 'know' the other, making the strange familiar, domestication, claiming unity and sameness, and erasure (Bignall 2010; Hage 2017; Land 2015). This epistemological foundation is evident in environmental co-governance in the dominance of settler decision making. As such, the default to binarism and white possessive logics interprets collaborative arrangements as settler nation versus Indigenous nation where Indigenous sovereignty is ameliorated and absorbed into settler society.

The relationships that settler sovereigns foster with other forms of life and more-than-human worlds are controlling and consumptive. Moreover, Indigenous sovereigns are forced to live within a political-legal framework that is anthropocentric, adversarial to the natural world, enforced by military power, industrialisation, and capitalism, and is antithetical to their own laws and obligations (Burke 2002; Watson 2015). Thereby, when the citizens and systems of settler sovereignty engage with Indigenous sovereigns an automatic default is deployed to negate difference and assume the dominant position. This is key to the role of non-Indigenous professionals who possess settler logics and operate the systems of settler sovereigns.

In summary, I have unpacked the theoretical underpinnings of settler sovereignty solidified during the Enlightenment. When settler sovereigns attempt to work in a partnership with Indigenous sovereigns in the co-management of natural resources, these epistemological foundations are clearly problematic. Within this complex space, shifting from the colonial standard approach to an Indigenous nation building approach hinges upon the role of non-Indigenous professionals and how they reproduce or interrupt these dominant settler logics and colonial paradigms.

In the next section, I expand on the above discussions to trace the denial of Indigenous sovereignty and self-determination in its various contemporary manifestations. The background provided below illustrates the ongoing colonial violations upon which Indigenous sovereigns continue to rebuild their nationhood and constitutionalism. Additionally, I foreground complex circumstances in which collaborative arrangements are made, and the obstacles non-Indigenous professionals must face to recentre Indigenous sovereignty and engage in allyship.

### *3.3 Settler sovereigns' relationship with Indigenous sovereigns*

I now discuss how these contentions manifest in the relationship between settler and Indigenous sovereigns. First, I provide a brief history of settler sovereign agreement making and breaking with Indigenous sovereigns, with examples of historical treaties and litigation in the courts. This not only provides the historical background to agreement making but

illustrates why Indigenous sovereigns experience a lack of trust in the ability of settler sovereigns to uphold commitments. Second, I discuss settler sovereigns' use of a human rights framework to repackage the call for Indigenous self-determination into settler colonial policy, such as recognition and reconciliation. This exemplifies the traditional strategy for ameliorating difference by claiming sameness and unity as humans according to the Enlightenment definition. Here, the right of self-rule for Indigenous sovereigns is transformed into settler ideologies that appear to grant rights while simultaneously denying them. Because such rights reflect human rights discourses, not sovereign rights, Indigenous sovereignty is negated. As such, I demonstrate how the process of negation and amelioration is meted out in historical relationships with Indigenous sovereigns. Nevertheless, the nation building work of Indigenous sovereigns has produced the rise of collaborative agreements, despite the blocks, obstacles and tricks imposed from the settler state.

### *3.3.1 A brief history of settler agreement making and breaking*

In relation to current collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature, the history of treaty making in Australia, Canada, and the US provides a pernicious, untrustworthy foundation upon which contemporary agreements are built. Although treaty making is vastly different between Australia, Canada, and the US, the common thread is that previous treaties largely have not been honoured by settler sovereigns. The bending and breaking of prior treaty commitments elucidates the way in which settler sovereigns attempt to absorb Indigenous sovereigns into the main settler society, negating and ameliorating difference. The breadth and depth of treaty making literature is too broad to cover here,

however, I provide a snapshot of the early settler practices of sovereign treaty making which underpin contemporary relationships. Briefly, I show how the practice of amelioration is evident across the historical relationships that the nations of the US, Canada, and Australia have built with Indigenous sovereigns, including the tribes and First Nation of the Basin and Ngarrindjeri Nation. Upon this macro view of relationships between settler and Indigenous sovereigns, the role of non-Indigenous allies is critical for making the shift from a colonising standard approach in co-management to an Indigenous nation building approach that practices collaborative arrangements.

Across Australia, Canada and the US, each settler state has a complex history of agreement or treaty making, with vast differences both within and across the three nation states. The history of agreement making in the Columbia River Basin is further complicated by the drawing of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel that marks the international boundary between the US and Canada and divides the Columbia River Basin (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). The US-Canada border divided some the territories and communities of Indigenous sovereigns into two, so the single nation had to operate under US law south of the border and Canadian law north of the border (Simpson 2014). In the early colonisation of the United States, settler treaty making with Indigenous sovereigns was initially prolific due to competing interests by the British, French, and Dutch to secure trade deals and access to resources (Brennan et al. 2005; Westra 2008). The United States entered treaty negotiations with a spirit of joint occupation where Indigenous sovereigns governed themselves free from interference. In 1855, the US entered into several treaties with tribes in the Columbia River Basin, including the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation, the Confederated Tribes of the

Warm Springs Reservation of Oregon, the Confederated Tribes and Bands of the Yakama Nation, and the Nez Perce Tribe. These treaties guaranteed and secured the sovereign rights of tribes to continue with their usual fishing practices in the Columbia River Basin (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission 2021). The formal era of treaty making in the US ended in 1871 (Langton, Tehan & Palmer 2004; McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015; Nettheim, Meyers & Craig 2002). Following this period, Indigenous sovereigns were increasingly seen as *domesticated* within the US political system, rather than independent sovereign nations (Bruyneel 2007; Deloria Jn. & Lytle 1984), begging a process of absorption into the dominant settler society. Thus, regardless of the existence of the many long-standing treaties, Indigenous sovereigns in the United States became subsumed under the umbrella of the occupying settler sovereign, as they are in Canada and Australia. Nevertheless, sovereign rights remain legally embedded in these early treaties. Tribes in the Basin have had to fight to uphold their sacred responsibility and have these treaty rights honoured by the US (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission 2021).

In the Basin during the 1960s and 70s, several court cases sought to resolve disputes over the meaning of treaty rights that stipulated tribes are entitled to ‘a fair share’ of the salmon harvest, with the *U.S. v. Oregon* and *U.S. v. Washington* being the most prominent (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission 2021). Another court case that sought to protect treaty fishing rights resulted in the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act of 1975 where tribes took over roles previously performed by US federal agencies. Further, the Confederated Tribes of the Umatilla Indian Reservation in the Basin won a legal battle to account for the way in which dam operations interfered with natural waterways, salmon

runs and tribal fishing practices in the context of treaty rights (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission 2021). Following this, the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission was established in 1977 to oversee coordination, policy management and provide technical assistance to Umatilla, Warm Springs, Yakama, and Nez Perce. The four treaty tribes work together to protect and manage treaty fishing rights, locally, nationally, and internationally, to ensure the ongoing restoration of tribal fisheries and continuation of inherent sovereign rights (Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission 2021). The Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission played a major role in the CRT Review process and continue to uphold independent sovereign rights separate to the state. These examples illustrate the way in which settler sovereigns disregard original treaty obligations leaving Indigenous sovereigns in a position where they must take the settler state to court to reinforce prior legal rights. Such ongoing nation building work is foundational to the current review of the CRT and demonstrates the persistence and stamina of members of the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission in the face of ongoing colonial violations.

In Canada, early settler colonisation saw some 'peace and friendship' treaties made but these did not recognise sovereignty (Langton, Tehan & Palmer 2004; McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015; Tully 1998). From the mid-1970s Canada entered into modern treaty making with Indigenous peoples and slowly began to recognise rights of Indigenous sovereigns to legal title of their territories (Brennan et al. 2005; McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). Following Canada's signing of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous people (UNDRIP) in 2006 Canada has espoused the intent to engage with Indigenous sovereigns on a nation-to-nation basis (Stefanelli et al. 2019). Treaty rights in Canada



remains underdeveloped or non-existent, unlike the treaty rights of the Yakama, Warm Springs, Umatilla, and Nez Perce tribes on the US side of the Basin (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). The CRT site is thereby complicated by the US-Canadian boundary due to these different socio-political histories.

The claim of *terra nullius* (land belonging to no one) was applied in both Canada and South Australia (Brennan et al. 2005; Reynolds 1996). King George II issued a Letters Patent that gave instructions regarding the establishment of the colonial provinces that became Canada and South Australia. In each of the Letters Patent, King George stipulated the rights of 'natives' to the 'occupation and enjoyment' of their lands (Berg 2010; Brennan et al. 2005; Reynolds 1996). This directive did not speak to sovereignty, and was ignored in practice, however the legal rights to 'occupation and enjoyment' of territories remain embedded in these documents (Berg 2010; Rigney, D, Hemming & Berg 2008). In South Australia, the Ngarrindjeri Nation continue to work hard to hold the state of South Australia to account as per the instructions that were set out in the Letters Patent.

To date, the nation state of Australia remains the only settler sovereign in the world, birthed by the British Empire, to never have engaged in a treaty making process with Indigenous sovereigns. While the 1992 Mabo No. 2 ruling by the High Court of Australia resulted in the overturning of *terra nullius* and the legislation of 'Native Title' rights, these arrangements do not constitute nation-to-nation agreement-making. Rather, Native Title legislation demonstrates the power of settler sovereignty, through the courts, to authorise the non-existence of Indigenous sovereignty (Berg 2010; Buchan 2002; Moreton-Robinson 2007). For

example, the Ngarrindjeri Nation won a Native Title claim for part of their territory, having proven their continued connection to Country in court (PBC 2018). However, Native Title does not grant Indigenous self-determination or allow for development upon those lands (Commonwealth of Australia 2015; Rigney, D, Hemming & Berg 2008). This restricts the ability of Ngarrindjeri to build an economy upon their territory, where an independent economy is an essential facet of sovereignty. Native Title rights that are issued by the Australian courts do not adequately allow for the full expression of Indigenous sovereignty but exists as an example of negation and amelioration. Here, the settler state appears to grant rights but maintains authority and subsumes Indigenous sovereignty into state legislation.

While Indigenous sovereigns across the United States, Canada, and Australia have fought and won many battles in the courts of settler sovereign states, contestations of Indigenous sovereignty remain (Alfred 2009; Behrendt 2006; Brennan et al. 2005; Coulthard 2014; Deloria Jn. 1970; Deloria Jn. & Lytle 1984; Moreton-Robinson 2007; Reynolds 1996; Simpson 2014; Watson 2015). Prominent legal battles have won some rights including cases such as: *Cherokee Nation v. State of Georgia* 1831 in the United States that recognised Indigenous sovereigns as 'independent domestic nations' (Deloria Jn. & Lytle 1984); across Canada, a ground swell of court challenges from multiple Indigenous sovereigns resulted in the 'recognition' of 'existing aboriginal [sic] and treaty rights' in Canada's Constitution Act 1982 (Coulthard 2014), and; *Mabo No 2* 1992 in Australia overturned the claim of *terra nullius* (Brennan et al. 2005). While some rights have been won, such legal battles serve to reinforce Western notions of sovereignty by allowing settler sovereigns to claim that the matter has

been 'settled' in court (Simpson 2014). Subsequent twists and turns in settler colonial legislation and policy waters down or ignores the rights won in court, continuing to ameliorate difference and negate Indigenous sovereignty.

The history of settler agreement making and breaking illustrates the overarching colonial paradigms that shape current relationships between settler and Indigenous sovereigns when working in collaborative arrangements. Non-Indigenous professionals working for settler institutions come into co-management arrangements carrying this history with them. In conjunction, as shown above, political rights in settler societies are based upon a human/other binary that negates and ameliorates the sovereign rights of Indigenous sovereigns and the voices of the lands they speak as. Meanings of humanness are further embroiled in contemporary settler discourse of self-determination, recognition, and reconciliation which further compounds the power of settler sovereigns.

### *3.3.2 The ongoing denial of Indigenous self-determination in settler societies*

The most fundamental right that Indigenous peoples ask of settler sovereigns, and the world, is to recognise their right to self-determination. However, Glen Coulthard (2014), from the Yellowknives Dene First Nation, unpacks how Indigenous politics of recognition were hijacked by the settler state and reframed into discourses of 'reconciliation' that aimed to sooth the settler psyche from the historic injustices committed against Indigenous sovereigns.

Contemporary settler sovereignty now offers the gifts of civic participation to Indigenous 'people,' but continues to manipulate technologies of settler colonialism to undermine Indigenous sovereignty and its relationship to land. Amelioration and negation now operate through new forms of colonisation, including: 1) the re-imagining of Indigenous sovereigns from distinct nations to individual 'people' and then to 'populations' within frameworks of multiculturalism; 2) bureaucratic streamlining of settler governance structures into neoliberal ideologies; 3) continued dispossession from lands; and 4) continued extraction of resources for settler wealth (Simpson 2014). Colonisation not only denies the rights of Indigenous sovereigns but renders communities without land and an economic base which subsequently creates financial dependency on the settler state. Economic dependency is then weaponised by settler sovereigns to control and destabilise the governments of Indigenous sovereigns (Alfred 2009; Langton 2010).

In the event that the voices of Indigenous sovereigns are heard by settler sovereigns, settler debates on the issue of sovereignty, premised upon binarism, interprets the call for Indigenous self-determination as a choice between two false options: 1) deny Indigenous sovereignty and carry on as usual, or 2) acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty and watch the nation-state unravel (Alfred 2001a; Bruyneel 2007). While settler sovereigns clearly hold a more powerful position, contemporary settler sovereigns view Indigenous sovereignty as a threat to the stability of nation states and world peace (Alfred 2001b; Moreton-Robinson 2015). Irene Watson (2015), Tangankald and Meintangk of the Ngarrindjeri Nation, names this threat to peace as a 'paranoia', for 'peace' was never a lived reality in colonising settler states. Indigenous scholars explain that settler sovereignty creates a fantasy of a peace that

can never be achieved because it simultaneously inflicts and denies violence (Alfred 2009; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Watson 2015). This produces a contradictory tension which manifests as a form of psychosis in the settler psyche (Moreton-Robinson 2015; Veracini 2010; Watson 2015). Such contradictions - the ability to simultaneously grant and deny rights, to change the rules to suit oneself - are incumbent to the meaning and practice of sovereignty in the Western tradition (Agamben 1998).

The above demonstrates the way in which settler sovereigns persistently attempt to ameliorate Indigenous sovereignty through colonial mechanisms of power. The role of non-Indigenous professionals who work as allies to recentre Indigenous sovereignty is critical because they mediate this complex space as employees of the settler state. Moreover, non-Indigenous allies in collaborative arrangements are required to disengage with the standard approach driven by colonial paradigms and instead embrace Indigenous nation building endeavours. Thereby, in the following section, I discuss the principles of Indigenous nation building.

### *3.4 Indigenous nation building and environmental co-governance*

The rise of negotiated agreement making between settler and Indigenous sovereigns in collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature is an area showing promise for increasing Indigenous self-determination to improve and manage their own social, cultural, and economic conditions (Langton 2004; Palmer 2004). In conjunction, Indigenous sovereigns continue to uphold their roles and responsibilities, practice their

culture, love their Country, and rebuild their nationhood. With a surging practice of nation building, Indigenous sovereigns are re-building the institutional structures of their nationhood and strategically contesting the denial of their rights. In this section, I discuss the collaborative arrangements as an important site where Indigenous nation building is reshaping the relationship between settler and Indigenous sovereigns.

Indigenous sovereignty is more than a claim to independent political control but an announcement of continued survival throughout colonisation (Buchan 2002). Although the manipulations of settler policy illustrate ongoing colonisation, Indigenous sovereignty remains steadfast in the daily lives of Indigenous people who know that they have always been sovereign to their lands (Jorgensen 2007; Watson 2012). This means that while colonising efforts remain, the settler colonial project fails in its mission to eliminate Indigenous peoples, even in its neoliberal forms that nefariously repackage Indigenous recognition for absorption into settler society (Simpson 2014). To quote Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2021, pp. 258-9), “if Indigenous sovereignty does not exist, why does it require refusing by state sovereignty?”

Indigenous sovereigns “refuse to stop being themselves,” ignore their relations, neglect their ‘original instructions’, and accept that somehow, they have become ‘lost’ or weakened (Jorgensen 2007; Simpson 2014; Watson 2012). It is necessary to remember that Indigenous sovereigns have refused to be colonised since the onset of invasion (Barker 2015; Watson 2012). Further, the concepts of renewal and resurgence are integral to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing (Alfred 2009; Watson 2002a). As Watson (2015, p. 145) states,

“The resurgence of our ancient ways is an ongoing part of the earth’s natural cycles of being, and it is the law.” Resurgence and renewal of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing interrupt settler sovereignty and unsettle long standing fantasies about the extinction of Indigenous peoples and their land-based relationships (Barker 2015; Simpson, A 2014). The ontological understanding of renewal brought questions to the attention of Indigenous sovereigns around how to evaluate and develop options and strategies as independent nations (Cornell 2002; Simpson, A 2014). Oren Lyons, Faithkeeper, from the Onondaga Nation retells the words of her grandfather, to ‘get back to planting’ and sow seeds for a stronger nation (Jorgensen 2007).

Indigenous nation building is a strategic move to propagate economic self-sufficiency and political control so that Indigenous sovereigns can uphold their sovereign responsibilities. As Indigenous sovereigns increasingly identify, organise, and act as nations they remain bounded by multiple forms of colonial power and antagonism, deeply entrenched preconceived settler ideas on who Indigenous sovereigns are and how they should behave, and are undermined by centuries of colonial exploitation of economic resources (Cornell 2015a). Due to the forces of settler colonialism, Indigenous sovereigns now operate from a position of almost no political power (Hemming & Rigney 2008). Nevertheless, as I will show below, Indigenous sovereigns continue to act sovereign and find ways to engage in process of renewal despite ongoing colonial violations.

Natural resource agreements sit in a highly political space because settler sovereigns are required to recognise Indigenous sovereignty and shift dominant power structures (Muller,

Hemming & Rigney 2019). In *Unsettling Sustainability: Ngarrindjeri political literacies, strategies of engagement and transformation*, Ngarrindjeri scholar, Daryle Rigney, and co-author, Steve Hemming, explain that Ngarrindjeri are developing strategies for “unsettling sustainability” and “the relations of power found in spaces such as natural resource management” (Hemming & Rigney 2008, p. 759). Critical scholar Marcia Langton (2004), of the Iman people of Central and Western Australia, also uses the term unsettling in her work *Unsettling Sovereignties*. Langton (2004, p. 34), states that agreement making is a tool used by Indigenous sovereigns that, “to varying degrees, gives Indigenous people a genuine decision making role in a range of issues affecting their lives and their territories” (Langton 2004, p. 34). This requires settler and Indigenous sovereigns to directly negotiate an agreement that stipulates the conditions of the relationship and makes specific commitments. Negotiated agreements then become foundational building blocks for future relationships, as opposed to the usual top-down colonial apparatuses of administration (Palmer 2004).

Writing from the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management and Policy at the University of Arizona, Stephen Cornell names a set of three activities common to Indigenous sovereigns across CANZUS countries that form the process of nation building:

- (1) identifying as a nation or a people (determining who the appropriate collective “self” is in self-determination and self-government); (2) organizing as a political body (not just as a corporate holder of assets); and (3) acting on behalf of Indigenous goals (asserting and exercising



practical decision making power and responsibility, even in cases where central governments deny recognition) (Cornell 2015a, p. ii).

As such, Indigenous sovereigns are less concerned with how settler sovereigns recognise their rights and are more concerned with how to practice sovereignty as self-governing nations, even if settler governments do not agree (Cornell 2015a). In this way, Indigenous sovereignty continues to present a challenge for the state and an obstacle for the colonial project.

Indigenous nation building positions Indigenous sovereigns as independent governing nations, not as interest groups within broader frameworks of diversity or multiculturalism (Cornell & Kalt 2007; Jorgensen 2007). The term 'nation building', however, is misleading, as Indigenous sovereigns are not building from scratch but are re-building their nationhood based upon pre-existing principles, including the cycles of renewal and resurgence. Nation building refers to the process of building upon foundational sovereign capacities for institutional, jurisdictional, economic, cultural, and community self-rule (Jorgensen 2007). From a nation building approach, Indigenous sovereigns practice a practical form of sovereignty that is localise upon traditional territories but adds momentum to a nation building movement internationally (Cornell & Kalt 2007; Muller, Hemming & Rigney 2019).

The nation building approach, places decision making power in the hands of Indigenous sovereigns, who apply that power through their own governing institutions established upon the ideologies and politics of the nation (Cornell & Kalt 2007). As such, Indigenous leaders

continue to work on mobilising efforts to strengthen their nation building in the wake of colonisation, making strategic decisions based upon their sovereign laws. In this position, the role of settler sovereigns shifts from a top down, paternal role to an advisory role in which the settler state offers resourcing. As such, settler sovereigns remain as consultants, but decision-making power sits firmly with Indigenous sovereigns (Cornell & Kalt 2007).

When considering the colonial standard approach and an Indigenous nation building approach, Cornell and Kalt (2007, p. 3), state simply, “one works, the other doesn’t.” Cornell and Kalt (2007, p. 3), explain that the standard approach is framed upon Western ideas of development where settler sovereigns set the agenda and employ short term, nonstrategic decision making shaped by electoral cycles (Cornell & Kalt 2007; Muller, Hemming & Rigney 2019). Under this purview, the knowledges, culture and traditions of Indigenous sovereigns are seen by settler sovereigns as an impediment. Moreover, the standard approach is highly focus on economic development, job creation and transformation of local economy preferably through a large, once off project (Cornell & Kalt 2007). Here, Locke’s theory of property is evident, where mastery of land results in surplus profit. Due to such cultural biases and entrenched racism, prevalent in settler societies, the vast range of agreements around mineral resources, environmental management, national parks, and tourism, such arrangements have demonstrated faltering success and does not guarantee equity (Palmer 2004). Nevertheless, contemporary assertions of sovereignty enacted through negotiated agreements act as a ‘de facto’ treaty, which works in conjunction with Indigenous nation building (Cornell & Kalt 2007).

Extended research on Indigenous sovereigns with highly successful economic accomplishments in the US has been conducted over several decades by Harvard University and by the Native Nations Institute for Leadership, Management and Policy at the University of Arizona (Cornell & Kalt 2007). Findings identify that a nation building approach is more successful for both co-management outcomes and Indigenous economies. Significant shifts in a nation building approach includes reorganising settler institutions to account for the self-rule of Indigenous sovereigns in ways that respects the capabilities and politics of Indigenous governance structures. Funding regimes are changed from short-term project-to-project grants to larger block grants that allows Indigenous sovereigns to manage their own priorities and decisions. This also allows for the citizens of Indigenous nations the ability to hold their governments accountable (Cornell & Kalt 2007). Further, the evaluation criteria of programs are premised upon the needs of the community not the needs of funding agencies or settler bureaucracies. Importantly, a nation building approach requires settler sovereigns to recognise that sovereign decision making, and self-rule, includes the practice of making mistakes with the learning and accountability that comes with true autonomy (Cornell & Kalt 2007).

Far from the fears that Indigenous sovereignty is a threat to settler states, just relationships offer benefits to Indigenous sovereigns and settlers alike. The economic, social, and cultural benefits that Indigenous communities receive from self-determinations spin off into broader society (Cornell 2002). This is seen already in the Age of the Anthropocene in that 80% of global biodiversity exists within territories held by Indigenous sovereigns (Intergovernmental Science Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystems Service 2019). Notwithstanding, the

moral realignment that accompanies justice should be enough of a benefit for all settlers (Coulthard 2014).

As Indigenous sovereigns reaffirm their governance structures and practice their sovereign responsibilities, the role of settler sovereigns is shifted with hopes that this realignment will generate just relationships which are only possible with “the conception of a nation-to-nation partnership between peoples” (Alfred 2009, p. 156). Further, as Vine Deloria Jn, of the Standing Rock Sioux (Lakota) Nation, states, no lasting peace can be achieved unless “a radical change is made in the manner in which non-Indians perceive land” (Deloria Jn. & Lytle 1984, p. 255). In other words, settlers need to (re)learn their place upon stolen territories according to the concept of relationality. For Kyle Whyte (2018), settlers need to examine and challenge the mechanisms of settler colonisation, such as law, policy, and discourses of reconciliation, that disrupts the quality of relationships between Indigenous peoples and their lands. Indigenous scholars writing on Indigenous environmental justice, like Whyte (2017, 2018, 2020, 2021, 2023) and Anishinaabe scholar, Deborah McGregor (2005, 2014a, 2014b, 2018), advise non-Indigenous people to re-examine the notion that environmental challenges can only be resolved by Western science and forms of technology. Thereby, non-Indigenous professionals are located in a delicate space where they must strategise against dominant settler understandings in order to uphold a nation building approach and recentre Indigenous sovereignty.

### 3.5 Conclusion

This chapter has unravelled how sovereignty is understood and operationalised in contemporary collaborative arrangements. I have explained how Enlightenment theories are underpinned by the human/other binary which shapes settler relationships with Indigenous sovereigns and nature. Subsequent notions of humanness, racism and speciesism, land as property, and individual human rights drive the dominance of settler authority in collaborative arrangements. Despite such colonial powers, Indigenous sovereigns continue to assert and act as sovereign, upholding a sacred responsibility and the practice of caring as Country, and rebuilding their nationhood. Within this complex and often contradictory space, non-Indigenous professionals who practice allyship must navigate these tensions to challenge the standard colonial approach in collaborative arrangements. Therefore, the way in which non-Indigenous allies challenge settler logics and colonial paradigms is the fundamental consideration for this thesis, in particular, how they can shift from the colonial standard approach to a nation building approach that recentres Indigenous sovereignty.

In the next chapter, I follow on from these theoretical examinations to explore literature on arrangements between settler and Indigenous sovereigns for the shared responsibility of nature. As will be shown, a plethora of studies exist on a variety of collaborative arrangements, largely known as co-management, in the field of NRM. The co-management literature identifies persistent epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers to successful outcomes. However, as yet, little scholarly work has investigated specifically *how* non-Indigenous professionals can navigate these barriers.

## 4 Collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature

The underpinning theoretical meanings of settler sovereignty and its contemporary manifestations, laid out in the previous chapter, provides a macro picture of the complex space between settler and Indigenous sovereigns. In this chapter, I turn to the current literature on collaborative arrangements in which non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples work in collaboration on environmental, conservation and sustainability issues. Reviewing current literature that examines the role of non-Indigenous professionals in collaborative arrangements map out if and how non-Indigenous professionals recentre Indigenous sovereignty and shift towards an Indigenous nation building approach. It is also important to consider the current debates and insights from scholarship in the field to inform and guide this thesis.

Scholars concur that while the tensions between Indigenous knowledges and Western frameworks have been highly evaluated around the world over several decades, balanced decision making largely continues to be absent in practice (Alcantara & Kalman 2019; Ens et al. 2012; McGregor 2021; Moorcroft & Adams 2014; Reid et al. 2021; Ross et al. 2016; Snook et al. 2020). Much of this literature critiques the influence of Enlightenment ideals with regards to the construction of 'science.' My exploration of collaborative arrangements in the literature, however, explores the strategies and innovations implemented by non-Indigenous professionals that recentre Indigenous sovereignty. Identifying how non-Indigenous allies in collaborative arrangements work against settler logics and colonial paradigms to adopt a nation-building approach will fill an important gap in scholarship.

In this chapter, I first provide an overview of typologies of co-management arrangements. It is important to note that much of the literature reviewed in this chapter refers to ‘co-management’ as a catch-all term for a vast mix of partnerships between settler and Indigenous sovereigns that collaborate on environmental issues. However, several studies that have reviewed the typologies co-management have presented similar findings that rank collaborative arrangements into some kind of higher or lower order. I have collated these findings to demonstrate the difference between more tokenistic arrangements, where Indigenous sovereigns have little power, and arrangements where Indigenous sovereigns have control over governance. As indicated in Chapter 2, I prefer to use the term collaborative arrangements to capture all forms of partnerships, be it informal agreements or nation-to-nation agreements, because, as this discussion highlights, ‘co-management’ does not equate with shared governance.

Second, I explore the persistent barriers reported in the literature on collaborative arrangements in the field of NRM. I map these evaluations of into the three categories of epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers before outlining Indigenous led frameworks that aim to reduce settler barriers. Last, I review qualitative research into the perspectives of non-Indigenous actors in the space. Of the few studies that do inquire into the role of non-Indigenous professionals, findings show they possess limited understanding on two overlapping points: the lack of understanding on Indigenous sovereignty paired with minimal knowledge regarding the ongoing forces of settler colonisation (Baltutis & Moore 2020; Lukawiecki et al. 2021; Walker et al. 2021).

My search is limited to Australia, Canada, and the United States, to align with the sites of this thesis and capture the features of colonial settlement across CANZUS countries, although there is some overlap with other international sites in some studies. Aotearoa/New Zealand has made significant moves forward in environmental co-governance between the settler state and Māori with the pioneering legislation that grants personhood to the Whanganui River (Charpleix 2018). Because this legislation is so unique and ground-breaking compared to other CANZUS countries, I have excluded literature from Aotearoa/New Zealand to focus on barriers and pathways forward in Australia, Canada, and New Zealand. Legal agreements that focus solely on redirecting profits from extractive industries and do not include partnerships in decision making are also excluded because they do not address the issue of sovereignty. Defining such search criteria assists the thesis to navigate the breadth and complexity of scholarly literature broadly termed as co-management. Because of the broad use of the term, differences in interpretations, along with shifts driven by Indigenous nation-building, I now provide an overview of typologies of co-management arrangements.

#### *4.1 Typologies of co-management*

Given the diverse and complex historic and ongoing denial of Indigenous sovereignty and patchwork recognition of Indigenous rights to land across Australia, Canada, and the US, a vast mix of collaborative arrangements are broadly represented as ‘co-management.’ Erickson et al. (2022) note that the term co-management arose from the tribes on the US side of the Columbia River Basin who formed the Columbia River Inter-Tribal Fish



Commission in 1977. Since, co-management has been used as a cover-all term for an array of collaborative arrangements without a clear, specific definition (Erickson et al. 2022). Snook et al. (2022a) note that despite the variety of collaborative arrangements described in the literature as co-management, all such partnerships pose a challenge to power relationships between settler and Indigenous sovereigns. Importantly, as White (2020) reminds us, co-management does not equate with Indigenous self-government.

The interpretation of co-management is addressed by Swerdfager and Armitage (2023) who reflect upon the meaning of 'co' in co-management. As an abbreviation of 'collaborative' management (undertaking projects as partners, allies, or colleagues) or 'cooperative' management (working towards shared goals), Swerdfager and Armitage (2023) argue, both insufficiently describe the essence of shared arrangements for the stewardship of nature. Further, scholars note that 'management' is a Western term bound with top-down hierarchical control, compartmentalisation, operational assumptions, and regulatory mechanisms directed by written text in legislation, policy, and planning (Barry, Janice & Porter 2011; White 2020). While Western frameworks limit the essence and purpose of co-management, Swerdfager and Armitage (2023) remind us that the broad range of partnerships termed as co-management are always a form of institutional governance entwined with Indigenous concepts of self-governance.

#### *4.1.1 Co-management to co-governance: a spectrum of engagement*

According to Erickson et al. (2022), the multiple levels of engagement and participation of Indigenous sovereigns in co-management regimes can be similar to rungs on a ladder. This is supported by studies by Roden (2003, cited in White 2020) in Canada, Hill, R et al. (2012) in Australia, and a global study by Dawson, NM et al. (2024). These three studies similarly organise typologies co-management arrangements into spectrums that range from poor levels of engagement with Indigenous sovereigns at one end through to co-governance partnerships where Indigenous sovereignty is incorporated.

Obviously, the exclusion of Indigenous sovereigns is a historic and ongoing reality, as is tokenistic co-management arrangements that view Indigenous sovereigns as recipients of benefits and compensation (Dawson, NM et al. 2024). Hill, R et al. (2012), Roden (2003, cited in White 2020) and Dawson, NM et al. (2024) agree that where Indigenous sovereigns are considered to be stakeholders instead of a distinct nation their capacity to influence decisions is limited and Indigenous interests are subsumed among a variety of stakeholders. Another low order of co-management occurs with the integration of Indigenous knowledges into the frameworks of Western science and administration, that Roden names as co-option (White 2020). Hill, R et al. (2012), Snook et al. (2022b), and White (2020) concur that co-management arrangements are based upon settler colonial framework where Indigenous sovereigns are co-opted into the dominant system. Next, Dawson, NM et al. (2024). Hill, R et al. (2012), Roden (2003, cited in White 2020) describe a step up in co-management regimes that respect the contributions of both Western and Indigenous knowledges, values, and objectives and move into spaces of power sharing and intercultural participation. Full

autonomy for Indigenous sovereigns is not exercised however local Indigenous authority is respected.

Co-management arrangements of the highest order engage with Indigenous sovereigns at a level of governance, not management. Dawson, NM et al. (2024, p. 2) note that governance is seen in the social and political sciences as a holistic political concept and encompasses “aspects of authority, power, and control across different stages of decision-making and cross-scale interactions between actors and institutions.” Environmental governance, Hill, R et al. (2012) explain, entails decision-making about the stewardship of nature where state institutions are decentralised in favour of community-led initiatives. This higher order of collaborations value Indigenous and Western sciences equally and the innovation for deploying Indigenous knowledges adheres to the authority of customary law. Here, Indigenous self-determination is prevalent and co-management arrangements move up the ladder where Indigenous sovereigns have true autonomy and increased equity (Dawson, NM et al. 2024). Roden (2003, cited in White 2020) emphasises that the highest form of collaborative arrangements reclaims Indigenous power, lands, taking control of resources and lives.

#### *4.2 Collaborative arrangements: persistent barriers and pathways forward*

In this section, I compile persistent barriers and pathways forward from across the literature on collaborative arrangements, largely termed ‘co-management.’ To explore the barriers and organise the critiques identified in the literature, I employ the framework of epistemological,

attitudinal, and institutional barriers from Ross et al. (2016). These three key barriers are a useful framework for exploring the literature set because it lays out the obstacles that non-Indigenous professionals in collaborative arrangements must mitigate in order to rebalance the dominance of colonial settler decision making that thwarts Indigenous self-determination. Ross et al. (2016), including co-author Richard Sherman, ethnobotanist, and member of the Oglala Sioux tribe (Lakota), convincingly argue that the barriers that hinders co-management arrangements can be summarised into the three themes of epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers, which I explore below in turn.

#### *4.2.1 Epistemological barriers*

Differences in epistemologies between settler and Indigenous sovereigns, discussed in the previous chapter, clearly posit tensions and obstacles to collaborative arrangements. The operation of binarism, negation, and amelioration are evident in collaborative arrangements and are reproduced by non-Indigenous individuals and settler institutions. The current research on co-management arrangements concurs that despite the rise in co-management agreements around the world, the privileging of Western scientific and technocratic approaches in co-management continues to dominate decision making in what is meant to be a balanced partnership (Christie 1990; Deloria Jr. 1970; Ens et al. 2015; Howitt, Doohan, Suchet-Pearson, Cross, et al. 2013; Marchand et al. 2013; Marika et al. 2009; McGregor 2021; Muller, Hemming & Rigney 2019; Reid et al. 2021; Ross et al. 2016; Singleton 2000; Varghese & Crawford 2021; Youdelis 2016). Recurring discussions from these authors highlight how non-Indigenous practitioners value Western knowledges and science as

superior to Indigenous knowledges despite agreements that stipulate shared decision making.

Scholars examining collaborative arrangements continue to report that despite the ample attention given to the critical analysis of the similarities and differences between Indigenous and Western epistemologies, bridging the two remains difficult (Muller 2012; Reid et al. 2021; Ross et al. 2016; Varghese & Crawford 2021). Ross et al. (2016, p. 92) explain that notions of Western science as the only reliable source of truth creates “a divide across which Indigenous ways of being could not pass.” In line with discussions in the previous chapter, Reid et al. (2021, p. 253) states, the “Western scientific perspective is founded upon a utilitarian worldview where humans are in control of nature.” As such, the persistent Western belief in ‘knowledge without a knower’ sits in stark contrast to the relational knowledge systems of Indigenous sovereigns that are entangled with land. Scholars concur that attempts to ‘incorporate’ Indigenous knowledges is a form of assimilation, reinforcing the concentration of power in colonial settler structures (Hemming & Rigney 2008; Howitt 2001; McGregor 2021; Muller 2012; Reid et al. 2021; Ross et al. 2016). Meanwhile, the depth and extent of information that is held in holistic connections is lost when Western science attempts to categorise and extract Indigenous knowledges, what Nadasdy calls ‘epistemological cherry picking’ (2007, cited in Harmin, Barrett & Hoessler 2017, p. 1490).

One important study has explored this in detail. In Canada, Anishinaabe scholar, Deborah McGregor, is a leading advocate for the benefits of Indigenous knowledges in environmental issues, having worked for over thirty years with Indigenous organisations and government

agencies. McGregor's (2021) paper, *Indigenous Knowledge Systems in Environmental Governance in Canada*, exposes the blocks imposed by Western understandings of knowledge and knowledge systems. Specifically, is the way that the Western tradition interprets the term 'Indigenous knowledge.' McGregor (2021, pp. 1-3) explains that "Indigenous knowledge is not just "knowledge" (a noun) but a way of life, something that must be lived (a verb) in order to be understood ... it is not just the dictionary definition of knowledge with Indigenous tacked on." Not only is Indigenous knowledge conceptualised differently, as McGregor (2021, p. 2) and Watson (2015) explain, Indigenous knowledge *systems* are based on a relational philosophy where knowledge shared between people and their relations - landscape, all living things, the spirit world, Ancestors, and the ongoing future for all life. As Reid et al. (2021) points out, a critical element to Indigenous knowledges is the indivisibility between Indigenous peoples as knowledge holders and the lands in which knowledge is embedded.

The problematics of Western interpretations and classifications is found with the term Traditional Ecological Knowledge<sup>2</sup> (TEK) often used across the literature. For Berkes (1993), the word 'traditional' in Traditional Ecological Knowledge invokes colonial ideas of Indigenous peoples as primitive and locked in the past. Indigenous scholars consistently explain that Indigenous knowledges cannot be split into subcategories determined by Western science, such as 'traditional' or 'ecological' (Alfred 2009; Bawaka Country et al. 2012; Bawaka Country et al. 2016; Kealiikanakaoleohaililani & Giardina 2016; McGregor

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<sup>2</sup> Traditional Ecological Knowledge is defined by Berkes (1993, p. 1252) "as a cumulative body of knowledge, practice, and belief, evolving by adaptive processes and handed down through generations by cultural transmission, about the relationship of living beings (including humans) with one another and with their environment."

2021; McGregor, Whitaker & Sritharan 2020; Moreton-Robinson 2016; Whyte 2013). These scholars emphasise that it is critical for settlers working in the field to build an understanding of Indigenous knowledges in terms of its collaborative, relational processes.

An important point stressed by these scholars, is for non-Indigenous partners to not work with knowledge as 'data' but to work with the people of the land who are, in McGregor's words (2021, p. 3, emphasis in original) "*originally involved in acquiring/ generating, holding, and transmitting such knowledge.*" McGregor aptly repeats the suggestion by Potawatomi climate change scholar, Kyle Whyte, that Western institutions and individuals should instead figure out how to incorporate their knowledge into Indigenous governance systems. Albeit, McGregor (2021, p. 2) and fellow Indigenous colleagues argue that government institutions and agencies "are not ready to respect IKS [Indigenous Knowledge Systems] and Indigenous peoples." Indeed, McGregor (2021, p. 7) stresses that "One of the gravest omissions from the current approach to the development of an appropriate IKS/western science collaborative framework is the refusal to acknowledge the broader colonial, genocidal, and racist context within which all this work takes place." This leads to the next discussion on the attitudes and biases towards Indigenous people that stymies meaningful relationships.

#### 4.2.2 Attitudinal barriers

Two key attitudinal barriers include settler policing of Indigenous authenticity and the preference for technocracy over interpersonal skills. Several scholars note that the ongoing

habit of policing the legitimacy and authenticity of Indigenous knowledges is one of the most significant challenges (Bang, Marin & Medin 2018; Ens et al. 2015; Hemming & Rigney 2008; Muller 2012; Ross et al. 2016). For instance, Ross et al. (2016) and Ngarrindjeri scholar, Daryle Rigney, with co-author, Steve Hemming (2008, 2010), spend considerable time explaining how non-Indigenous people police a boundary placed on Indigenous peoples as either authentic or inauthentic. This binary places Indigenous people into stereotypes which Indigenous people are expected to fit and stymies meaningful relationships between settlers and Indigenous peoples and engenders colonial violations.

As Ross et al. (2016) argue, non-Indigenous people carry attitudes that romanticise notions of 'traditional' Indigenous people as 'authentic' - living in harmony with the land, without interference, actively practicing an ancient culture. Ross et al. (2016) explain that this can extend to the idea that Indigenous peoples had no understanding of conservation, living off the spontaneous gifts of nature, who would have otherwise 'trashed the place' if not for their small numbers. Hemming and Rigney (2008) emphasise the way in which the concept of culture is used in opposition to Western science. Such positioning concludes that the knowledges of Indigenous peoples fit a nature-based past that has no relevant contribution to the environmental issues of modernity. Thereby, these settler claims on Indigenous authenticity as 'traditional' conclude that Indigenous knowledges are not suited to contemporary NRM (Ross et al. 2016).

On the other side of the modern/traditional binary, Indigenous people who are labelled 'modern' are believed to lack the knowledge of their 'traditional' ancestors. Here, Hemming



and Rigney (2008) explain that when settlers assume that Indigenous peoples have assimilated into settler society, this attitude also concludes that Indigenous sovereigns have nothing to contribute because of a loss of perceived authenticity. This logic means that Indigenous peoples must be visibly 'traditional' and in possession of unbroken ancient cultural knowledges in order to be useful. However, as mentioned above, Indigenous knowledges labelled as 'traditional' are also dismissed. As such, Indigenous sovereignty is subverted on both sides of the authentic/inauthentic binary when both 'authentic' and 'inauthentic' knowledges are deemed to be irrelevant to contemporary environmental issues. As such, Ross et. al. (2016) and Hemming and Rigney (2008) illustrate how binarism operates in practice through the attitudes of non-Indigenous professionals. Similarly, scholars across Australia and Turtle Island stress the importance of non-Indigenous professionals fostering attitudes that develop meaningful relationship with Indigenous peoples in collaborative arrangements (Ens et al. 2015; Howitt 2001; McGregor 2021; Ross et al. 2016). This is therefore a space where shifting such perspectives is critical. Put simply by Ross et al. (2016), the practitioner attitudes arising from underlying cultural conditions will shape the success or failure of collaborative arrangements.

Historically, this has been problematic when non-Indigenous attitudes preference technological sophistication in NRM without consideration of social, cultural and political skills. Howitt (2001, p. 148) carefully explains some issues when non-Indigenous people favour traditional Western NRM technocratic practices and industrial processes:

In resource management, the technocrats silence voices from marginalised places and marginalised peoples and amplify voices of

advocates of industrialisation and development. The dominant narratives of resource development propose that 'history' begins only when a locality is linked by industry to the wider world, and that the important speakers in such narratives are company decision makers, government policy makers and the beneficiaries of development. They encapsulate a way of thinking which is simplistic, categorical and inadequate for the task of rethinking resource management in terms of justice, sustainability, equity and diversity.

The Western tradition of technocratic sophistication ignores inter-personal skills between practitioners and relationships with more-than-human worlds - the very core of Indigenous sovereignty. The values important to Indigenous sovereigns are disregarded, and as several studies show, the management of protected areas and species can position Indigenous practices of hunting as a criminal act (Moorcroft & Adams 2014; Ross et al. 2016; Snook et al. 2020). Ens et al. (2015) reminds us how the lack of settler understanding on the historical, social and cultural systems of Indigenous peoples impacts the attitudes of non-Indigenous professionals.

Here, I reiterate how important the attitudes of non-Indigenous professionals are when it comes to engaging in collaborative arrangements. As the above scholarship shows, the way in which Western science questions the authenticity of Indigenous knowledges indicates that the West has assumed authority over what and whose knowledge gets considered. When non-Indigenous professionals work with Indigenous peoples, such policing manifests in inter-personal relationships. Attitudes that preference technological abilities over

interpersonal and social relationships, as well as prioritising the environmental goals of settlers over the aspirations of Indigenous sovereigns, remain problematic. If we are to develop long term processes for rethinking through approaches to knowledge and shared responsibly in collaborative arrangements, understanding the role of non-Indigenous professionals should be central.

#### *4.2.3 Institutional barriers*

In conjunction with the above barriers, another commonly discussed obstacle are the institutional structures of settler sovereigns. Across the co-management literature, key institutional barriers emerge around issues of funding, inadequate legislative and policy arrangements, and issues at the 'decision making table.' The institutions of settler sovereigns are founded upon the underpinnings of Western epistemology. Therefore, the above epistemological barriers, such as compartmentalisation, binaristic thinking, and the privileging of Western knowledge, manifest in the structures of settler institutions.

First, in relation to institutional structures, funding is a pertinent issue. As Hemming and Rigney (2008, p. 760) recognise, resources flow "into non-Indigenous research and government departments, disproportionately to Indigenous spaces, if at all. What was increasing in Indigenous spaces was stress, workloads, and complexity; a direct cause of ill-health and community breakdown." Resources are funnelled into the hands of non-Indigenous consultants on short-term contracts through science-based research and government-industry-university 'linkage' grants that focus on environment, planning, and

development issues. The burdens that Indigenous sovereigns carry, Hemming and Rigney (2008, p. 767) explain, are compounded by the assumptions of government that communities “have the time, energy and resources to actively engage, or that Indigenous engagement is nothing more than being consulted by the ‘experts.’” When funding arrangements are externally prescribed by the state, this impedes successful, long-term collaborations by constraining Indigenous activities and the innovative strategies of non-Indigenous professionals (Ens et al. 2012; Muller 2012; Searle & Mulholland 2018).

Second, many scholars report on how Western bureaucratic systems, property rights, and institutional structures force Indigenous peoples to adjust their ways of operating to fit within the dominant model (Ens et al. 2012; Hill, R et al. 2012; Howitt & Suchet-Pearson 2006; Lukawiecki et al. 2021; Muller 2012; Ross et al. 2016; White 2020). In the words of Howitt and Suchet-Pearson (2006, p. 332) NRM projects “orientate thinking towards a linear narrative – with a unidirectional, progressive, controlled movement towards a coherent strategic target presumed desirable” into which Indigenous peoples in collaborations are disciplined. As Ens et al. (2012) argue, Indigenous methods are pushed aside when mainstream institutions and individuals perceive Western thoughts and practices to be credible, more efficient and faster.

Legislation and policy reform is critical. Swerdfager and Armitage (2023) explicitly point to the lack of institutional structures that account for, and keep up-to-date with, emerging expectations for co-governance in Canada. While collaborative arrangements evolve, state legislation remains antiquated and inadequate, and policy directives for co-management are

largely absent. Some headway has been found under Aboriginal and Treaty rights in the Canadian Constitution and land claims won in settler courts, however legislature to provide guidance and direction is not actioned. Moreover, claims to Indigenous sovereignty granted through settler structures have progressed in terms of land claims, but rights water and aquatic systems fall far behind (Swerdfager & Armitage 2023).

Third, co-management is often expressed in terms of guaranteeing Indigenous sovereigns 'a seat at the table' where decision making occurs. However, Lukawiecki et al. (2021), affirms that this offer does not ensure meaningful collaboration and Indigenous decision making. For example, Lukawiecki et al. (2021) explains that Indigenous sovereigns in Canada come to the table through implanted structures directed by colonial institutions prescribing a 'chief' and/or council as the representative, ignoring women, youth, and Elders in the community. Thereby, structural changes are also required so that Indigenous sovereigns can engage on their own terms throughout all stages of the process, according to self-determined structures of nationhood and constitutionalism. Baltutis and Moore (2020, p. 593) encapsulate, "Even if Indigenous nations are given a 'seat at the table,' this is a table that has been built by, and for, colonial actors, and does not consider Indigenous ways of governing, knowing or being." Further, Muller, Hemming and Rigney (2019, p. 401) surmise "the apparatus of the settler state is based on the assumption that people are separate from place." This point reminds us that the Western concept of sovereignty, and its subsequent political and bureaucratic frameworks, is based upon Enlightenment theories that believe human society is formed by rising above the 'state of nature.'

To shift from the colonising standard approach to a collaborative nation building approach non-Indigenous people and the systems they work with are required to follow Indigenous leadership. Toward this end, Indigenous-led frameworks are frequently offered alongside the critiques of persistent barriers.

#### *4.2.4 Indigenous-led frameworks*

Many scholars in the literature investigating collaborative arrangements propose Indigenous-led models that aim to balance decision making in co-management practices. Indigenous-led models are based upon Indigenous frameworks, and present an offering of just relationships between people, species, life support systems, and entities, not around tables built by settler colonialism that Indigenous peoples get invited to.

Reflecting the diversity of Indigenous sovereigns, the models are numerous. Yet, all seek to teach non-Indigenous professionals to better understand and work with Indigenous knowledges and practices. Most of the models include water, animals, or plants as teachers. While the term ‘relationality’ is not always used, the principles of interdependence, reciprocity, and responsibility to all life is ever present. The models are not simplistic, nor do they function as binaries, but integrate diversity, complexity, and connection. Some Indigenous led frameworks for collaboration include: Coyote Essentials (Marchand et al. 2013); Two Ways or Ganma; (Muller 2012); Two Row Wampum (Hallenbeck 2015; Hill, RWS & Coleman 2018); the Lakota Indigenous Stewardship Model (Ross et al. 2016); and for a neat table summarising several popular Indigenous-led models, see Reid et al. (2021, p.

246). Due to the detail which is required to adequately explain various Indigenous-led models, I provide only one yet insightful example from Reid et al. (2021) on the Two-Eyed Seeing model. The study by Reid et al. (2021) is a refreshing gem amongst the co-management literature because it doesn't merely describe an Indigenous-led model but evaluates three case studies on co-management in Canada where Two-Eyed Seeing is used in practice.

Reid et al. (2021) sought to move past discussions on 'integrating or incorporating' Indigenous knowledges and instead evaluated three case studies where the Two-Eyed Seeing model is employed in a collaborative arrangement. Two-Eyed Seeing, like other Indigenous-led models, is based upon combining Indigenous and Western knowledge *systems* with a focus on process and action rather than outcomes. Reid et al. (2021, p. 243) quote the words of Elder Dr Albert Marshall, who explains:

Two-Eyed Seeing (Etuaptmumk in Mi'kmaw) embraces "learning to see from one eye with the strengths of Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing, and from the other eye with the strengths of mainstream knowledges and ways of knowing, and to use both these eyes together, for the benefit of all."

Analysis of the three studies by Reid et al. (2021) identified that for two of the three studies, Mantyka-Pringle et al. (2017) and Abu et al. (2019), found that pairing settler and Indigenous knowledges, rather than methods of extraction, provided a more detailed picture and led to improved collaborative outcomes. Contrastingly, the third study, by Giles et al. (2016),

showed results that were contrastingly different. Here, despite having the Two-Eyed Seeing model in place, findings revealed that federal government representatives knew little about the knowledge systems of the Mi'kmaq people whom they worked in partnership with. None of the non-Indigenous participants mentioned any of the numerous Indigenous committees relevant to the partnership. Clearly, across the three studies reviewed, all non-Indigenous professionals had access to an Indigenous-led model, but not all of them engaged with the model and the Indigenous peoples who offered it. Thereby, Reid et al. (2021, p. 256) surmises that combining Western and Indigenous knowledges and practices is:

no longer an issue of awareness or method, as exemplified here, but rather the barriers are time (to build the requisite relationships), a general lack of incentives (little provocation away from inaction), and entrenched systems of political power or unsubstantiated perception of knowledge hierarchies.

Reid et al. (2021) identifies that it is not an Indigenous-led model that shifts outcomes, but rather, it is the role of non-Indigenous professionals. As such, the findings by Reid et al (2021) add weight to the focus of this thesis that more qualitative studies are needed, particularly with the aim of exploring strategies and innovation that can assist this to occur. No matter what Indigenous-led model is put forward, non-Indigenous professionals will not be able to work with any Indigenous-led model if they harbour internal settler logics and are resistant to change. What we need to understand more explicitly is *how* non-Indigenous people work with Indigenous leadership and knowledge systems in ways that address persistent barriers. For the non-Indigenous people who actively work to recentre Indigenous



sovereignty, what do they do differently to those who ignore Indigenous leadership? How do non-Indigenous professionals gain understandings and unsettle entrenched colonial systems and political power? What motivates action and what does action look like in practice? While limited, there are several qualitative studies that report on the perspectives non-Indigenous professionals in co-management and evaluate what strategies and innovations might be employed.

### *4.3 Existing Qualitative Studies: exploring strategies and innovations*

In this section, I review qualitative studies with participants who are non-Indigenous professions working in collaborations with Indigenous sovereigns. Qualitative studies that investigate the role of non-Indigenous people in co-management are rare amidst the plethora of work concerned with bridging Western and Indigenous knowledges. I have identified only five that solely focus on the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals, including my previous work. In addition, two studies that recruit both Indigenous and non-Indigenous participants are included, due to the explicit reporting on non-Indigenous perspectives. This small number demonstrates a lack of scholarly attention paid to the role of non-Indigenous professionals. Moreover, insights from these seven papers illustrate ongoing colonial violations in current practice. Indeed, the findings from these seven studies provide visceral examples how non-Indigenous professionals reproduce colonial paradigms in practice. However, only one reveals clear strategies and innovations from non-Indigenous professionals that recentres Indigenous sovereignty. Review of these studies assists this thesis to garner previously identified strategies for recentring Indigenous sovereignty and areas for further investigation into the role of non-Indigenous professionals in NRM.

A comprehensive study on thirty-nine regional partnerships involving Indigenous sovereigns sought to identify the factors that enable Indigenous sovereigns to maintain engagement in collaborative arrangements with multiple actors (Reo et al. 2017). The study investigates multi-actor collaborations regarding environmental collaborations with Indigenous sovereigns from Anishnaabek, Menominee, Cree, and Haudenosaunee from across the Great Lakes region. The selected sites were based upon collaborations where Indigenous decision making helped shape the initial planning that established the goals and framework of the collaboration. A total of thirty-four participants participated in semi-structured interviews who were representatives from contemporary Indigenous governments and the non-Indigenous partners from governments and organisations.

Like other studies below, a key barrier included the failure of non-Indigenous partners to understand Indigenous partners as sovereign nations with unique rights and responsibilities. Reo et al. (2017) highlight that the view held by non-Indigenous collaborators which positions Indigenous sovereigns as stakeholders, and not governments, is not up-to-date with the laws of settler states that mandate collaboration on a nation-to-nation basis. One participant reported an incidence when a US tribe suggested building a riparian conservation system with plants that have cultural significance. The participant stated that a non-Indigenous partner claimed that the use of Indigenous knowledges was a waste of time, saying, “We aren’t going to plant sweetgrass or whatever just so the Tribe can come and harvest it!” (Reo et al. 2017, p. 63).

Contrary, examples of successful collaborations established frameworks where the political authority, processes, protocols, cultures, and knowledges of Indigenous sovereigns was respected and embraced. Moreover, the authors note the criticality for non-Indigenous partners to understand the institutional structures, including social norms, biases, values, and priorities of settler culture. Importantly, Reo et al. (2017, p. 58) identify six key characteristics of collaborations where Indigenous sovereigns maintained a willingness to engage, “respect for Indigenous knowledges, control of knowledge mobilization, intergenerational involvement, self-determination, continuous cross-cultural education, and early involvement.” These findings from Reo et al. (2017) step out important foundations for understanding the dynamics in collaborative arrangements and engaging with Indigenous sovereigns in ways that does not cause Indigenous disengagement.

Walker et al. (2021) highlight exactly how non-Indigenous professionals adhere to the colonial status quo. Applying the model of Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing) to the research process, Walker et al. (2021) undertook discourse analysis on interviews with ten non-Indigenous professionals from corporate and government partnerships with Indigenous sovereigns in Canada’s renewable energy sector. Walker et al. (2021, p. 646) reveal that “most participants made clear that their business-as-usual approach would meet their criteria of reconciliation with Indigenous peoples.” While some participants claimed that they have undertaken new learning on the histories of Indigenous peoples, as the authors note, learning about the ‘other’ is “not the same as settlers doing the work of ‘unlearning’ to confront the violent nature of settler colonialism and settler complicity in this structure” (Walker et al. 2021, p. 651). Reflecting the attitudinal barriers above, the authors state that

participants are preoccupied with perceived inadequacies of Indigenous sovereigns and try to 'fix' Indigenous peoples. Walker et al. (2021) identify that such biases lead into a clear problematic with how the term 'partner' is understood as different from 'equal.' This study supports the points I raised in Chapter 2 regarding binarism, white possessive logics, and the settler assumption of holding authority that thwarts Indigenous self-determination.

Walker et al. (2021) found that non-Indigenous partners were superficially aware of the policy expectations stipulated in Canada's Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC). The TRC stipulates the right for Indigenous self-determination and recommends a nation building approach, yet findings by Walker et al. (2021) found that this was not translated into practice. As shown by one participant who states, "Recommendations in TRC are mostly common sense, about being nice and living with your neighbours. If you just buy into that, you should be fine" (Walker et al. 2021, p. 647). By viewing reconciliation as common sense, being nice, helping, and fixing Indigenous peoples, the opportunities that come with Indigenous nation building, including economic reforms, are nullified. Other participants, however, reported that they had their 'eyes opened' by working with Indigenous communities. Walker et al. (2021) provide one example from a participant who recalls feeling 'stupid' coming to an Indigenous community to discuss solar panels when the community was experiencing a crisis. However, the authors note that while there is value in such reflections from their participants, deeper and more consistent reflexivity is required by non-Indigenous professionals to shift the balance of power (Walker et al. 2021). Importantly, Walker et al. (2021) exemplify why it is important to fill the gap on research that examines non-Indigenous perspectives in a partnership space because it informs our understanding of

the operation of power anchored in settler colonial structures. The perspectives of non-Indigenous participants in the study by Walker et al. (2021), like others above, indicates the need for reform and increased settler allyship with Indigenous nation building endeavours.

Similarly, Baltutis and Moore (2020) explore how frameworks such as UNDRIP that are used by settler states to scaffold policy are translated into practice. This study is important to this thesis as it is situated in the site of the Columbia River Basin and the modernisation of the CRT. Not only do Baltutis and Moore (2020) examine the same site as this thesis, but they focus on the perspectives of twenty-six non-Indigenous professionals from a similar background as participants in this thesis, such as staff from local and regional governments.

Results from Baltutis and Moore (2020) are reported under three themes. The first shows that participants reaffirm the settler state borders of Canada and the US that divides the Columbia River Basin, negating the borders of Indigenous sovereigns throughout the Basin. The second theme observes changes in the approach to engaging with Indigenous sovereigns and shifts in the legal landscape that affects Indigenous self-determination, sovereign rights and title, and the interests of Indigenous sovereigns. The third theme illustrates the emergence of potential governance structures, particularly the Sovereign Review Team, that evolved through CRT negotiations (Baltutis & Moore 2020). Overall, the authors report that while the latter two themes point towards shifting power relationships, the perspectives of non-Indigenous participants reinforced notions that the governance of the Columbia River Basin is the purview of Canada and the US. Baltutis and Moore (2020) explain that although participants understood the important role of Indigenous sovereignty

in transboundary water management, they simultaneously reaffirmed state-centric discourses by de-centring Indigenous self-determination and sovereign rights. This fall back to settler colonial notions of territoriality, the authors surmise, leaves an uncertainty around how commitments to Indigenous nation building, underpinned by UNDRIP, eventuate in practice. Thereby, both Walker et al. (2021) and Baltutis and Moore (2020) agree that top down frameworks for Indigenous nation building, such as UNDRIP and Canada's TRC recommendations, do not hold traction in practice. Such findings, thereby, identify that the role of non-Indigenous professionals is the nexus for either maintaining settler hegemony or creating change. As these studies are similar to this thesis, I build upon the valuable insights on the role of non-Indigenous professionals.

The ineffectiveness of top down frameworks, is also found by Lukawiecki et al. (2021) in a case study on the processes and practices of Ontario's Great Lakes Protection Act of 2015. Lukawiecki et al. (2021) relay that some participants reported that Indigenous engagement was often undertaken as a 'tick-box' exercise to fulfil legal obligations rather than as a process for enacting change. Most participants agreed that a true nation-to-nation partnership was not evident, although shifts towards more balanced power dynamics showed some potential. Much of this shift occurred in the settler nation states understanding of Indigenous sovereigns as rights holders, not stakeholders.

Lukawiecki et al. (2021) make several recommendations for meaningful and honourable engagement with Indigenous sovereigns, including early and ongoing involvement that spans decades rather than on a project-to-project basis. To increase the understandings of

non-Indigenous professionals, Lukawiecki et al. (2021) spend some time discussing the importance of visiting Indigenous communities when invited. These scholars argue that visiting Indigenous communities allows staff to see first-hand the relationship between Indigenous peoples and water, while experiencing first-hand the opportunity to personally reconnect themselves with the waters that their jobs are designed to protect. Lukawiecki et al. (2021) suggest that visiting Indigenous communities also facilitates reciprocal sharing and learning and mitigates some of the structural barriers, such as Indigenous sovereigns having to travel to the offices of NRM institutions, which inhibits the full participation of Indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, it is important to remember that working with Indigenous peoples and visiting communities is not automatically an anti-colonial move construing allyship. As evidenced above, stubborn colonial paradigms are reproduced through the understandings, attitudes, and practices of non-Indigenous people.

Like Baltutis and Moore (2020), Dhillon (2021) also investigates non-Indigenous perspectives on boundaries - not the territorial boundaries of settler and Indigenous nations, but the contested boundaries between cultures, policy, politics, and science. Dhillon (2021) explains that these fields often work in silos and the overlay between them is disregarded. However, over the past decade some Indigenous-settler climate organisations have been working on bridging this gap by considering the situated experiences of Indigenous people and their sovereign laws. Dhillon (2021) undertook multimethod qualitative research, including semi-structured interviews with seven Indigenous and four non-Indigenous climate practitioners in the US. Similar to this thesis, Dhillon (2021) examines these sites because of the positive shift in the approach towards upholding Indigenous sovereignty. The sites for investigation

foster a nation building approach that aims to build healthier relationships and construct institutional and organisational systems that suit Indigenous frameworks. However, the studies reveals that uneven power dynamics and access to organisational resources remain. Dhillon (2021, p. 1) argues that “Tensions further arise from uses of new terminology to navigate longstanding struggles over places, political sovereignties, and human relationships to natural worlds.” This nod to the differentiating meanings of sovereignty and meanings of humanness is rarely mentioned in other NRM studies.

Among the non-Indigenous participants in Dhillon’s study, only one reported on the importance of understanding one’s settler position and centuries of historical ‘baggage’ when working with Indigenous sovereigns. This participant explains that non-Indigenous climate scientists who are resistant to incorporating socio-political contexts do not value the importance of understanding colonial history and insist on climate specific research with computation modelling (Dhillon 2021). As such, non-Indigenous participants discussed being stuck between the dominant environmental management discourses and the need to adopt a nation building approach. These participants explained how institutional academic structures expect non-Indigenous professionals to be at their desks, churning out work which they will be evaluated on. Such institutional frameworks, Dhillon (2021) argues, binds non-Indigenous professionals into a rigid and controlled environment that doesn’t allow for Indigenous frameworks or provide space for innovation. Dhillon (2021, p. 31) suggests that “[taking] into account how scientific cultures become tied to institutional structures and the political–economic considerations of knowledge production” is an effective strategy to combat this incompatibility. I take up this recommendation for investigating the role of non-



Indigenous professionals in collaborative arrangements. Indeed, practical strategies for addressing such institutional barriers remains a critical aspect for recentring Indigenous sovereignty.

Importantly, Dhillon (2021) provides astute examples of how the attitudes of non-Indigenous people impact Indigenous peoples, citing participants who are Indigenous women with advanced degrees in climate science. These female Indigenous climate scientists reported being questioned by non-Indigenous climate scientists to demonstrate their understanding and prove themselves qualified. Further, one Indigenous participant reported that NRM professionals who stick to dominant colonial narratives have “no intention . . . [of] trying to incorporate multiple ways of thinking” (Dhillon 2021, p. 13). This illustrates how dominant settler attitudes impinge upon interpersonal relationships in conjunction with the structural constraints of colonial institutions. Nevertheless, I am interested in exploring the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals who attempt to strategise against colonial constraints in sites where a shift from the standard colonial approach to an Indigenous nation building approach is evident.

Having an interest in the role of non-Indigenous professionals in NRM, my previous work (Searle & Mulholland 2018; Searle & Muller 2019) examined the perspectives of six non-Indigenous resource managers who work in Aboriginal Partnerships with the Department of Water and Natural Resources, Government of South Australia, (now called the Department of Environment and Water). Through the lens of critical race and whiteness studies, my study found that participants were highly critical of the systems of management within

government departments, and some took decisive action to adapt institutional structures to suit the governance models of the Indigenous sovereigns they work with. An important and rare example came from Jonnie, who explains that there are several language groups across the state zoned region that he manages. To get appropriate representation across the region, Jonnie recalls that for each group “we’ve borrowed from ... what [the First Nations groups] consider a culturally appropriate structure of having seven Directors” (Searle & Mulholland 2018, p. 14). Multiplied by the number of language groups, this working group comprised a large number of people. Jonnie understands that a working group of this size will move slower towards its goals and may be seen by other colleagues as “silly” or “a headache.” However, because “it works” for the partners he engages with, Jonnie states that the process is worthwhile. Participants in my study also practiced critical self-reflection on their personal views and attitudes but showed a tendency to focus on ‘traditional ecological knowledge’ at the expense of the broader issue of sovereignty. This inspired me to move on from theoretical frameworks of whiteness and conduct further work on the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals through the lens of sovereignty.

A recent inspiring study that examines the role of non-Indigenous professionals is the publication by Smith, W, Neale and Weir (2021), *Persuasion without policies: The work of reviving Indigenous peoples’ fire management in Southern Australia*. This study included eight ‘Aboriginal’ and twelve ‘white’ practitioners who collaborate on fire hazard management, largely on public lands. Smith, W, Neale and Weir (2021) report on the significance of ‘interpersonal factors’ including interviewee discussions that focussed on ‘fairly entrenched racism’ within government. For Aboriginal participants, the arising barriers

stemmed not from 'white culture' but more specifically from state institutions. For non-Indigenous participants, their concern focussed on establishing and maintaining healthy relationship with Aboriginal people by ensuring 'the right staff' are employed. As one non-Indigenous practitioner said, "if we do get the wrong people we've gotta try and move them on before they do that damage" (Smith, W, Neale & Weir 2021, p. 89). Indeed, non-Indigenous participants emphasised the importance of educating colleagues and the public about the intimate link between Australia's violent colonial history and cultural burning practices. Another non-Indigenous participant stated, "my whitefellas colleagues need to learn, and that's a really important part of my role. So, we're making some progress. Fuck, it's hard. It's hard to change that" (Smith, W, Neale & Weir 2021, p. 90).

The key finding in the study by Smith, W, Neale and Weir (2021) is that participants discussed expending labour to generate enthusiasm for cultural burning. Enthusiasm is directed at government staff across departments and levels, where support is needed. Visual presentations, workshops, and on-site burning demonstrations are some of the strategies used to generate enthusiasm, stabilise Aboriginal authority, and reassure public fears on the risks of fire. Thereby, persuasion tactics that seek to stabilise Aboriginal authority emerge through the labour of non-Indigenous allies who intentionally generate enthusiasm. The authors surmise that, "Generating and curating this form of enthusiasm is a form of interpersonal labour poorly captured in the existing literature surrounding collaborative resource management" (Smith, W, Neale & Weir 2021, p. 90). This study showcases the valuable insights that can be gleaned from exploring sites where non-Indigenous professionals demonstrate some transformative action. More studies like this are needed to

investigate how non-Indigenous professionals employ strategies and innovations, such as generating enthusiasm, that recentres Indigenous sovereignty in NRM.

The issue of sovereignty is of most importance. The embedded meanings of humanness, and the way in which sovereignty prescribes the roles, responsibilities, and rights of humans, must come to the fore. As Dhillon (2021) noted above, little work engages with ideas on sovereignty and humanness, and the associated power dynamics. Indeed, Dhillon's brief mention of this point has not been touched on by other authors in the field. As shown in the previous chapter, Enlightenment meanings of humanness are a core underlying problematic that has produced much colonial violence on Indigenous peoples, communities, and the lands they are of. Research that digs into this fundamental point of difference will fill a gap in understandings and practices that address persistent epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers.

#### *4.4 Conclusion*

Current debates in the co-management literature have interrogated how to bridge Indigenous and Western knowledges, concluding that efforts in this direction remain challenging. Persistent epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers enable the dominance of settler decision-making in collaborative efforts. Burgeoning studies on the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals highlight a lack of understanding on Indigenous sovereignty and the forces of settler colonisation. Importantly, some emergent strategies for managing these barriers, such as generating enthusiasm, showcases the

potential for further research in sites where non-Indigenous professionals work as allies to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. With these considerations, this thesis moves away from trying to understand how to blend Western and Indigenous knowledges and recognises the incommensurability of Western and Indigenous epistemologies. Instead, I place the emphasis on identifying the strategies and innovations that non-Indigenous professionals employ to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. To further aid the review of participant experiences and reflections I now turn to literature on non-Indigenous allyship where much groundwork has already been undertaken on decolonising collaborative relationships.

## 5 Unsettling allyship: building meaningful relationships

While the previous chapter covered the field of NRM and the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals, I now move to explore literature that examines decolonising relationships between settlers and Indigenous peoples. Research on non-Indigenous allyship provides a useful connection to NRM because it is centrally concerned with building meaningful, decolonising relationships in collaborative work with Indigenous sovereigns. Many alliances between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples emerge from activist work for protecting the environment in the form of public protest- related to how natural resources are managed. Other alliances campaign for Indigenous rights and truth telling, such as the removal of children from Indigenous families, murdered and missing Indigenous women and girls, and deaths in custody. In these collaborations, similar tensions to those found in the co-management literature have been mapped out. The purpose of this chapter is to examine an exciting trend in the allyship literature that identifies decolonising and unsettling strategies that non-Indigenous allies employ to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. Findings from the allyship literature provide a foundation to scaffold my investigation into non-Indigenous professionals in collaborative arrangements and directs me to where important work is required. Towards this end, I have drawn on research that captures the perspectives of non-Indigenous people who work in solidarity with Indigenous sovereigns. This allows the thesis to identify established findings and key considerations for the practice of allyship that works towards decolonisation. While the allyship literature is still developing, seminal insights are important to assist my analysis the participant narratives in Chapters 7, 8 and 9. Many insights revealed from studies on allyship explore the epistemological and

attitudinal barriers found in NRM. However, clear strategies for addressing institutional barriers are limited.

First, I discuss the importance of decolonising the practice of allyship so that solidarity efforts do not reproduce harmful colonialisms. I outline the problematics of allyship that maintains normative colonial practices and identify established decolonising strategies for the practice of allyship, including examining binarism, locating oneself within the structures of settler colonialism, and moving away from confessing one's privilege. These established insights guide the analysis of participant reflections and offer a clear pathway for this study based upon what already has and has not been identified as appropriate strategies and innovations in collaborative work.

Second, I review current research on non-Indigenous allyship that employed an 'unsettling' framework. These studies identify that the practice of critical self-reflection must 'unsettle' both internal settler logics and external colonial structures and occur at all times through daily life, not just in periods of organised public protest. Here, the literature shows that a critical step for settlers is to locate themselves within the structures of settler colonialism *and* Indigenous sovereignty, simultaneously. Interestingly, recent qualitative studies on non-Indigenous allyship that applies the concept of *unsettling*, highlight the importance of developing further work that investigates how settlers understand their relationship with place. This promising research into unsettling allyship reveals the criticality of understanding the relationship that settlers have to the lands that they occupy. Thereby, this focus on unsettling the settler relationship to land offers burgeoning insights for this thesis to

develop. Scholars on unsettling the practice of allyship call for new research to move away from sites of activism and public protest and turn to the places that settlers spend most of our time - at work and at home, in daily our lives. Because I focus on how non-Indigenous professionals perceive their work in collaborative arrangements, this thesis attends to this under-researched area of allyship. As I maintain, the role of non-Indigenous professionals is critical for embarking on a new direction in NRM that follows an Indigenous nation building approach. For this to occur, non-Indigenous professionals must engage in decolonised, meaningful relationships with Indigenous sovereigns.

### *5.1 Decolonising the practice of allyship*

In order to decolonise larger colonial structures and build meaningful alliances, decolonising the practice of allyship requires non-Indigenous people to examine binarism, to locate oneself as a settler with historic and ongoing settler colonisation, and shift the practice of self-reflection and settler confessions of privilege into actions that follow Indigenous leadership. Allyship cannot occur without action. Moreover, the actions taken must not reproduce harmful settler logics and colonial paradigms. Because the allyship literature has already made significant contributions to how non-Indigenous peoples can work with Indigenous sovereigns on decolonising efforts, these insights are important considerations for this thesis to understand. In particular, it offers insights that are transferable to collaboration for the shared responsibility of nature and how non-Indigenous professionals may employ strategies and innovations that recentres Indigenous sovereignty.



### 5.1.1 *The problem with settler allies*

Although not representative of the majority, settlers who show solidarity with Indigenous sovereigns have been present since the onset of colonisation (Brubacher 2008; Foley, G 2000). However, as Indigenous scholars Alfred (2009) and Foley, G (2000) note, settler support of Indigenous rights has a long history as a space fraught with asymmetrical power relations. The challenges that arise from non-Indigenous allyship are important to note, particularly when non-Indigenous people with good intentions unwittingly reproduce dominant settler structures. Indeed, Edwards (2007) and Ritskes (2013) agree that non-Indigenous allyship has often proven to be more harmful than helpful. Of particular concern are 'green-black' or environmental-Indigenous relations that have been subject to damning critique. Several scholars (Barker 2015; Hallenbeck 2015; Laden 2020; Salter 2013; Smith, A 2008; Vincent & Neale 2016), explain in detail, that when campaigns are focussed upon an environmental 'issue' Indigenous sovereignty is disregarded. Allies can perform solidarity while simultaneously hijacking the messages of Indigenous sovereigns to suit their own agendas (Tuck & Yang 2012; Whyte 2018). Indigenous politics then becomes a space for settlers to exploit opportunities to meet their own needs. In their often cited article *Decolonization is not a Metaphor*, Eve Tuck, Unanga scholar and enrolled member of the Aleut Community in Alaska, with co-author Wayne Yang (2012), step out the concept of 'settler innocence.' Here, settler allies target the source of injustice outwardly to governments or corporations and feel good about their solidarity efforts. Simultaneously, settler allies overlook the ways in which they maintain and benefit colonialisms in their everyday (Tuck & Yang 2012; Whyte 2018). These debates highlight how settler allies reproduce whiteness by acting as 'white saviours' trying to rescue or 'help' Indigenous peoples. Many allyship scholars concur that the desire to 'help' brings an attitude of

superiority and fails to recognise the causal factors behind the complex historical, economic, legal, and social conditions that Indigenous sovereigns face (Brubacher 2008; Laden 2020; Sullivan-Clarke 2020a; Wotherspoon & Hansen 2013). As qualitative studies in the previous chapter demonstrated, ‘helping’ positions Indigenous sovereigns as somehow lesser, in need of fixing, and fails to address colonial structures and settler complicity. This demonstrates the operation of settler logics across settings that are built upon notions of superiority and inferiority, be that in activism or NRM.

However, as Taiaiake Alfred (2009), Kahnawá:ke of the Mohawk Nation, explains, ‘the enemy’ is not the ‘white man’ but a colonial mindset which settlers can unlearn. Alfred’s (2009) comprehensive work, *Wasase: indigenous pathways of action and freedom*, argues that Indigenous peoples fortify their sovereignty through identifying as the nations they are and have always been, and through practicing culture, reviving language, and upholding responsibilities. Alfred (2009, p. 102) states, that while his nation, Onkwehonwe, are rebuilding and revisioning relationships to their sovereign lands, “we are at the same time offering a decolonised alternative to the Settler society by inviting them to share our vision of respect and peaceful coexistence.” Alfred’s offering of inclusion in a just and peaceful co-existence highlights the position that many Indigenous sovereigns stand in.

The way in which settlers respond, however, varies. As studies on non-Indigenous professionals in NRM show, colonial mindsets reinforce settler authority, yet non-Indigenous allies can play a key role in generating enthusiasm for Indigenous leadership. Alfred (2009) reminds us that those who engage in self-education and critical reflection learn to come to

terms with their own complicity in colonial occupation. In doing so, settlers establish new pathways for respectful relationships with both Indigenous sovereigns and the natural world. As such, the literature on non-Indigenous allyship is an important resource to discern the difference between settlers who engage with Indigenous sovereignty, and those who do not. Identifying this distinction and drawing out the strategies that non-Indigenous allies employ in collaborative activist work, informs this thesis in its investigations into the role of non-Indigenous professionals at the KNYA and CRT sites.

Over the past decades, the rise in non-Indigenous allyship that has been more harmful than helpful, has led Indigenous peoples to produce guidelines on 'how to be an ally' which have appeared online for Australian, Canadian, and American settler audiences (Gehl n.d.; May-Finlay 2018; Ritskes 2013; Vision Media Maker 2021). These guidelines come directly from Indigenous voices to offer settlers some basic tools for working in solidarity with Indigenous sovereigns on political campaigns. Generally presented as bullet point lists of dos and don'ts, all concur that the practice of non-Indigenous allyship must decolonise the construction and dissemination of knowledge, (re)shape individual and cultural behaviour, and transform institutional systems. While these online guides provide useful tips to the public, they are intended as quick and broad guides on *what* to do and not do.

A more in-depth exploration into *how* allyship is practiced is found in Claire Land's (2015) seminal work, *Decolonizing Solidarity: Dilemmas and Directions for Supporters of Indigenous Struggles*, targets the decolonisation of the practice of allyship. Land's book is a valued resource in the field, increasingly cited in further research on non-Indigenous allyship (for

example, Bacon 2021; Davis et al. 2022; Davis & Hiller 2021; Kluttz, Walker & Walter 2020; Laden 2020). Land (2015, p. 4) clearly states, “Solidarity should be directed to decolonization; and the way solidarity is undertaken needs to be decolonized.” In other words, moves towards decolonisation will be unsuccessful if the tools being used are colonising. Land’s qualitative study is situated in the south-east of Australia and investigates the perspectives of both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who have sustained long-term political activist roles outside of paid work. Land argues that this demonstrates involvement through personal dedication and not because ‘it’s their job’. Land offers important insights on how the work of non-Indigenous professionals can be understood. Indeed, Land suggests that further research on collaborations where experiences of a positive relationships are found could identify further possibilities for meaningful, decolonised non-Indigenous allyship.

### *5.1.2 Examining binarism*

Decolonising solidarity requires consideration of the concept of relationality and the practice of critical self-reflection to shift settler colonial logics away from binaristic thinking and build ontological pluralism. Being able consider other ways of thinking is an essential foundation to allyship and requires settlers to challenge Cartesian dualism in order to build some insight into how Indigenous sovereignty locates humans as being in and of the land. In line with discussions set out previously in this thesis, binarism and the construction of human/other underlies several problematic paradigms innate to settler colonisation that manifests in collaborative arrangements. Land (2015, pp. 84-5) unravels how positioning people in oppositions requires the policing of identities and asserts that “the idea of a discrete binary

with total purity on each side is both ridiculous and impossible: the Indigenous-non-Indigenous distinction and the treatment meted out in accordance with that distinction is one of the most pernicious manifestations of colonialism.”

Speaking specifically to the way that binaries constrain non-Indigenous people, Land explains that the ‘good anti-racist/bad racist’ binary sets up opposing sides of good/bad without acknowledging that even ‘good’ anti-racists are capable of mistakes, may blindly reproduce colonialisms and inflict harm, while continuing to benefit from colonisation. Land (2015) discusses the way in which activists use the good anti-racist/bad racist binary to engage in ‘power plays.’ As such, non-Indigenous people risk competing around who is the ‘better ally,’ or distance themselves from other ‘bad’ allies to avoid accusations of racism and gain approval from Indigenous peoples. Such power plays result in an inability for non-Indigenous allies to hold each other to account and colonial logics persist.

Along with Land, other allyship scholars raise the non-Indigenous/Indigenous binary as problematic. Sakar (2012) speaks of the layered complexity of being an Indigenous person on the stolen lands of another Indigenous sovereign. Despite Indigenous identity, Sakar (2012) self-identifies as a settler because they occupy stolen territory enveloped in colonial settler structures, problematising the Indigenous/non-Indigenous binary. Others also discuss the positionality of non-Indigenous people who are not ‘white’ and experience different degrees of racism, but still benefit as settlers (Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel 2014; Snow 2018). Rather than binary logics, scholars examining non-Indigenous allyship argue that alliances between non-Indigenous and Indigenous groups must be underpinned by the

concept of relationality (Laden 2020; Land 2015; Sakar 2012). The criticality for settlers to understand relationality, as outlined previously, is point consistently raised by Indigenous scholars (Alfred 2009; Byrd 2011; Deloria Jn. & Lytle 1984; Kimmerer 2013; Moreton-Robinson 2016; Watson 2012). As such, the practice of critically reflecting on binary logic offers a useful insight for this thesis to analyse participants narratives on the persistent barriers found in co-management. Likewise, coming to understand how settlers are embedded in the historical and ongoing forces of settler colonialism and therefore complicit in colonial violations.

### *5.1.3 Locating oneself within settler colonialism*

Research on non-Indigenous allyship highlights the problematics that come when ‘ally’ is positioned as an identity, what someone is, rather than understanding allyship as a practice that challenges the structures that both Indigenous and non-Indigenous people are enmeshed in. Indeed, locating oneself within the logics and frameworks of settler colonialism is a key point raised consistently throughout the allyship literature. Studies on allyship show an interesting trend over recent decades that increasingly develops more in-depth findings on the practice of self-reflection, as seen below, from which the non-Indigenous professionals in the field of NRM can learn.

The earliest qualitative study I found on non-Indigenous allyship, by Brubacher (2008), provides a baseline that highlights two developments: one is the increasing trend to study the allyship space; the other is found in the changing responses of non-Indigenous

participants in subsequent studies over time. Researching Canadian solidarity organisations with two Indigenous and eight non-Indigenous participants, found that discussions by non-Indigenous participants were focussed on 'colonisation' as an external structure. Here, the emphasis is placed on what governments have done to Indigenous peoples without considering how individual settlers are complicit in perpetuating colonial harms. Thereby, when non-Indigenous people position themselves as an ally, this can lead to the perception that one is lifted up out of settler colonial structures and absolved from responsibility. Brubacher (2008, p. 69) reports that when participants were asked, "what makes a good White ally?" only one out of eight non-Indigenous participants said, "I think in some ways the person would have to know who they are." Importantly, Brubacher's research – being the earliest qualitative investigation into the perspectives of non-Indigenous allies that I identified - highlights the absence of critical self-reflection in participant narratives. This finding reflects what Tuck and Yang (2012) name as 'settler innocence,' because participants do not connect their daily lives to the ongoing mechanism of settler colonialism that they maintain and benefit from. Further, Brubacher (2008, p. 58) identified that "there is no significant body of literature that discusses how non-Indigenous people can successfully avoid paternalism and how they should best play the ally role." Considering the development of studies on allyship to date, the growth in qualitative research on non-Indigenous allyship since Brubacher's study is substantial, as is research that maps the perspectives of non-Indigenous allies who shift away from the blindness to one's settler complicity. The insights gained from this work will therefore act as springboard for exploring how non-Indigenous professionals in collaborative arrangements understand their own positionality. Being able to identify one's complicity in settler colonialism must be a key step to shifting from the standard colonial approach to an Indigenous nation building approach.

#### 5.1.4 *From privilege confessions to Indigenous-led action in NRM*

Shortly following Brubacher (2008), studies by Lang (2010), Margaret (2010), and Wallace (2010) reported that non-Indigenous participants did indeed raise the issue of identifying their positionality and the importance of examining their own privilege. However, the use of the term 'privilege' in these studies is broad, with Lang (2010) naming 'power and privilege' and Wallace (2010) discussing 'privileges/status.' Margaret (2010) similarly uses privilege in the broad sense, with mention of 'white privilege' and privileges incurred by the benefits from 'colonial inheritance'. While this is valuable foundational work, debates have now risen on the usefulness of reflecting on 'privilege.' Fortier (2017), Hallenbeck (2015), and Laden (2020) argue that 'privilege confessions' are tokenistic because non-Indigenous allies may identify their unearned privilege but take little action towards decolonising colonial structures and their own settler logics. De Leeuw and Hunt (2018) add that 'unfettered self-reflexivity' recentres the feeling of settlers who continue to benefit from material and discursive power. These insights guide this thesis to account for how participants in this thesis may move beyond confessing their privilege and engage in committed long-term action.

Taking action is critical for decolonisation. Much attention has been paid to the practice of critical self-reflection, as an internal process for decolonising the mind, but few studies explicitly describe how self-reflection leads to taking action in practice. Chazan's (2016) paper, *Settler solidarities as praxis: understanding 'granny activism' beyond the highly-visible*, is an exception. Chazan interviewed members of the Raging Grannies activist group,



well known in Canada for staging theatrical demonstrations in spaces where older women are not normally accepted. Findings reported that participants were highly aware of the need to follow the leadership of Indigenous sovereigns. As one participant noted, “white people tell them what to do and when to do it for too many generations” (Chazan 2016, p. 463). Rather than ‘stealing the show’ with their usual antics, members instead asked Indigenous sovereigns what they needed, and then actively used their privilege in practical ways to resource the work. Another participant described hearing about an Indigenous-led action and contacted Indigenous leadership to ask what they needed. Leadership requested logistical support, requesting a tent and food be provided to activists guarding the perimeter of an Indigenous occupied territory, which the participant fulfilled. Chazan’s (2016, p. 466) study concludes that, “how solidarity is understood cannot be readily disconnected from how it is performed or practiced.” Thereby, Chazan’s study clears a pathway to exploring allyship as a practice that shifts critical reflection into action to resource the work of Indigenous sovereigns. Members of the Raging Grannies Group reveal an intentional shift from a domineering approach to public protest to one that reflects a nation building approach, following Indigenous leadership and resourcing their work.

The link between self-reflection and action is carried further by Laden’s (2020) study, *Allies of the Movement to Protect Mauna Kea: Non-indigenous Solidarity in Kanaka Maoli Protectivism*, conducted in Hawai’i. Laden (2020, p. 56) distinguishes the importance of practicing critical self-reflection that is far deeper than a confession of privilege, stating, “a true ally must be willing to face the discomfort of decolonization.” Laden (2020) explicitly identifies that the practice of allyship is not turned on for activist frontlines and turned off at

other times. Rather, allyship demands a process of self-reflection throughout daily life because we live, work, and play on the stolen territories of Indigenous sovereigns. Laden (2020) argues that if one's colonial position is not firmly on the minds of non-Indigenous allies at all times, a disconnection occurs.

Returning to the idea from Chapter 2 that sovereignty is centred on the relationship between people, power and place, the above literature on non-Indigenous allyship provides important insights into people and power. This work is invaluable for its pioneering contribution to scholarship on building meaningful, decolonising alliances between settlers and Indigenous sovereigns. However, the focus of these studies is humancentric and thus overlooks the significance of place, drawing largely upon theoretical frameworks of whiteness and critical race theory, which do not adequately account for entanglement with place and contested understandings of the human relationship to land. By moving away from anthropocentric interpretations and instead centring my study on sovereignty and its embedded meanings of humanness, I address an important gap. Indeed, emerging out of the allyship literature is a new trend that has begun to examine the relationship that settlers have with place, applying the concept of unsettling, which I explore below.

## *5.2 Unsettling Allyship*

In this section, I pick up on two important points identified above. One is to discuss the need for examining settler relationships with place. The other is to move on from allyship as 'activism' and instead make allyship an undertaking practiced in the everyday, wherever we

are. Recent theoretical scholarship and qualitative investigations on non-Indigenous allyship have introduced the term *unsettling* to shift investigation away from ‘white privilege’ to ‘settler privilege.’ This scholarship draws on the seminal works of Patrick Wolfe’s (1999) *Settler Colonialism*, Lorenzo Veracini’s (2010) *Settler Colonialism: A Theoretical Overview*, and Paulette Reagan’s (2010) *Unsettling the settler within: Indian residential schools, truth telling, and reconciliation in Canada*. I am inspired by the use of the term’s settler and unsettling in these studies. Specifically, in three qualitative studies on ‘unsettling allyship’ that I review below, discussions centre on the importance of non-Indigenous allies to understand where they are located according to the laws and frameworks of Indigenous sovereignty. Indigenous sovereignty is centred, and scholars investigate the relationship between settler identity and place. Building upon the practice of allyship, this work points to the dual nature of unsettling – as both an internal feeling and disruption of colonial structures. Thereby, the use of the concept of unsettling in these studies further assists me to think through the ways that non-Indigenous professionals may strategise to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements.

Exploring the settler relationship to place is of critical importance. Over a decade ago, Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 5) asserted:

Land is what is most valuable, contested, required. This is both because the settlers make Indigenous land their new home and source of capital, and also because the disruption of Indigenous relationships to land represents a profound epistemic, ontological, cosmological violence. This

violence is not temporally contained in the arrival of the settler but is reasserted each day of occupation.

As such, settlers exist in a highly politicised space: one we call 'home.' Tuck and Yang (2012) explain that contemporary settler norms reinvest in the mechanisms of settler colonialism each and every day, whether settlers are aware of this or not, regardless of the practice allyship. Settlers are conditioned, through discourse and the material benefits of settlement, to unquestioningly claims rightful ownership over land. Recent theoretical scholarship in the fields of geography and settler colonial studies, shows that authors have begun to discuss what *unsettlement* means for settlers. As Hiller (2017) explains, while colonisation and settlement are intertwined, 'colonisation' is a condition that Indigenous sovereigns and lands experience, whereas 'settlement' is a condition that settlers benefit from. When the framing is on 'settlement' what comes to the fore is a process of 'unsettling' that is required of settlers in order to advance decolonisation. Rather than viewing place as property, Howitt (2020) suggests that settlers need to adjust their relationships with place from 'possession to belonging,' to be 'possessed by' and be 'responsive to place.' In other words, confronting the settler default to white possessive logics. As such, Howitt (2020, p. 206) explains, "In shifting from assuming [settler] privilege to negotiating entanglement, we foster a shift in imagery from separation, distinction and difference to connection, relation, overlap, diversity." For Howitt, this presents a challenge for settlers that centres on how 'settlers can no longer become settlers.' Indeed, this challenge is compounded by the underpinning settler logics that assumes one entity must dominate and subsume the other, thereby viewing 'unsettling' as a threat. However, Howitt (2020) explains that unsettling is not a reversal of power and privilege, but an opportunity for optimistic, affective transformation.

The concept of unsettling, born from Canadian activist movements and academic scholarship, is neatly defined by Steinman (2020, p. 561) as “a framework for understanding the place and relationship of non-Indigenous people to Indigenous decolonization and settler colonialism.” Here, I note that Steinman’s reference to place is not limited to geographic location. Because Indigenous people are in and of the land, reference to place includes the place of settlers within the structures of Indigenous sovereignty. First and foremost, as many scholars who use the term unsettling explain, unsettling begins with genuine acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty (De Leeuw & Hunt 2018; Fortier 2017; Held 2019; Howitt 2020; Kluttz, Walker & Walter 2020; Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel 2014; Springgay & Truman 2019). Acknowledging Indigenous sovereignty is not a mere nod to the existence of Indigenous peoples but a genuine acceptance that the laws and knowledges of Indigenous sovereigns are as valid as those revered by settler sovereigns. Howitt (2020) clearly articulates that acknowledging Indigenous sovereignty is a direct move towards examining one’s relationship to land itself, the spaces occupied, and the attempted silencing and erasure of Indigenous people, both historic and ongoing. Howitt (2020) emphasises the need to challenge ‘taken-for-granted’ settler privileges, beginning with authentic acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty. This, of course, is the starting point for exploring how non-Indigenous professionals recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements.

### 5.2.1 *Locating oneself within Indigenous sovereignty*

Along with the above theoretical analysis of unsettling, some scholars have applied the concept of unsettling to qualitative research on the perspectives of non-Indigenous people who work in solidarity with Indigenous sovereigns. A small number of qualitative studies that pivot on the term unsettling explore how allies disrupt the ‘resilient and entrenched’ settler imaginary. I have only identified three qualitative studies, being Hiller (2017), Davis et al. (2022), and Bacon (2021), that investigate the perspectives of non-Indigenous people on allyship as ‘unsettling.’ These studies are qualitative works that investigate the perspectives of non-Indigenous allies and how they understand their relationship to place through both the frameworks of settler and Indigenous sovereignty.

I turn first to Bacon’s (2021) paper, *Who Had to Die so I Could Go Camping?’: Shifting non-Native Conceptions of Land and Environment through Engagement with Indigenous Thought and Action*. Expanding upon the need to locate oneself within historic and ongoing settler colonisation, Bacon (2021) turns to the need to locate oneself in relation to the lands that we have settled upon. Bacon identifies a lack of scholarly attention around how non-Indigenous allies understand their relationship between their own settler identity and place. As such, Bacon (2021) interviewed twenty-one non-Indigenous people in an effort to understand how non-Indigenous allies perceive their relationship to place and environment and how this shapes their solidarity efforts with Indigenous sovereigns. Reaffirming previous discussions in Chapter 2, Bacon (2021) notes that in the West, nature is viewed as an external ‘wilderness’ or ‘landscape.’ Participants reported that being with Indigenous sovereigns, in place, transformed their understandings and practices. For example, one

participant, 'James,' stated that working with Indigenous sovereigns reframed their settler understanding of the term 'environment,' to see the disconnection in the Western tradition, "where the environment is this other thing" (Bacon 2021, p. 254). The responses from non-Indigenous allies in Bacon's study revealed that they were highly aware of two intersecting histories that were alive in the same place, whether in natural or built environments. One history is that of Indigenous sovereigns extending back to creation, and the other is of colonial ecological violence, post-invasion. Bacon reports that through working in place with Indigenous sovereigns, non-Indigenous allies were able to see the invisible cultural norms which perpetuate ongoing settler colonialism. Therefore, discussions on the intersection of colonisation and place were widespread through participant responses - even connecting the erasure of Indigenous names and meanings of place to the disruption of the relationship between ecology and people. Bacon's identification of this double-layered history indicates that participants recognised the distinctive ways that the role of humans is understood differently by both Indigenous and settler sovereigns and how these differences intersect. Thereby, participants in Bacon's study reveal that understanding this dual history underpins the practice of allyship. This is a useful insight to apply in this thesis, considering that qualitative studies on the role of non-Indigenous professionals in Chapter 3 found that participants had little understanding of settler colonisation or Indigenous sovereignty.

However, Bacon notes that the settings in which solidarity occurred were at sites of political activism, not the place which allies call 'home.' Therefore, Bacon (2021, p. 261) suggests further research is required to understand if and how successful alliances are formed upon "the critical importance of strong bonds to local landscape and commitment to place." This

provides clear guidance for my study, to examine how participants at the KNYA and CRT sites understand this dual history in the place they call home.

To capture the moments that participants identified as ‘critical turning points’ for decolonising praxis centred on Indigenous sovereignty, Hiller (2017) undertook a narrative analysis of twenty-two Euro-Canadian solidarity activists who have worked with Indigenous sovereigns for at least two years. In *Tracing the spirals of unsettlement: Euro-Canadian narratives of coming to grips with Indigenous sovereignty, title, and rights*, Hiller (2017, p. 415) summarises that participant narratives describe “coming to grips with their implication, privilege, and responsibilities in light of colonizing history and Indigenous sovereignty and territory.” The specific mention of ‘Indigenous sovereignty and territory’ in the abstract of the article indicates a clear shift around how the study is framed, where the central tenet centres on sovereignty and land, rather than framings bound by race. Further, the identification of settler ally ‘responsibilities’ reflects framings of Indigenous sovereignty where settlers must follow Indigenous leadership. Hiller (2017) identifies how non-Indigenous allies, through long-term commitment, return to sites of Indigenous-led activism. Here, activism is not limited to environmental campaigns but highly political issues including the Idle-No-More campaign on murdered and missing Indigenous women in Canada. With continual exposure to the voices of Indigenous sovereigns, participants revealed how face-to-face experiences forced them to confront their settler status. For example, Hiller (2017, p. 422), tells the story of:

Josh, a young anarchist who, at the reclamation site at Caledonia, is publicly called out by a Haudenosaunee land defender and asked to



account for his specific connection to that struggle and territory: ‘What’s your connection to this place?’ Or of Jean, who recalls gut-wrenching moments of sitting face-to-face with residential school survivors and struggling to respond to their pointed question about her culture and people: ‘How could you have done this to us?’

Importantly, one participant likened such moments as a mirror that Indigenous sovereign’s position in front of allies so they can see their settler status reflected back, and thereby, directly locate themselves as responsible for colonial injustices. Further, participants recalled ‘ah-hah’ moments with epiphanies that settler colonialism is ‘all about the land.’ For example, Adam reported that he learnt to “situate himself in relation to a particular Indigenous territory, but to see all land as Indigenous – all space as contested” (Hiller 2017, p. 423). Connie, too, listened “over and over again to Haudenosaunee land defenders speak of land and history until her own long-held categories of ‘their land’ and ‘our land’ begin to dissolve in the face of a growing realization that Indigenous title underlies ‘whatever we might have on paper’” (Hiller 2017, p. 423).

While shifting critical self-reflection into practical action is identified in scholarship on decolonising allyship above, Hiller (2017) explicitly names this as two distinct but entangled cycles of praxis - an entwined process of internal reflection and external action that is a settler *responsibility*, rather than something that Indigenous peoples magically experience. The emphasis on settler responsibility comes through with more clarity in a subsequent paper co-authored by Davis, Denis, Hiller and Lavell-Harvard (2022) investigating non-Indigenous perspectives from three solidarity organisations across Canada. A firm

decolonising act in the design of this study by Davis et al. (2022) was to select participants based on the recommendations of Indigenous leaders. Davis et al. (2022) explicitly specify that the concept of relationality was used as a theoretical framework because relationality is core to Indigenous sovereignty and, as Land (2015) argued above, is essential for non-Indigenous people to build meaningful alliances.

Participant narratives illustrate how learning to listen to Indigenous voices and follow Indigenous leadership triggered the understanding that the fundamental agenda of the Canadian nation state is to 'take Indigenous land.' From maintaining long-term alliances, Davis et al. (2022, p. 17) unravel how participants came to realise that single issues, such as murdered and missing Indigenous women, or the need to build a bridge for an island-bound Indigenous community, or industrial megadevelopment proposals, "are part of an intentional inter-connected system of oppression and violence." With clear reporting on the voices of non-Indigenous participants, Davis et al. (2022) illustrate how allies uphold responsibilities to follow Indigenous leadership and employ practical strategies that centres Indigenous sovereignty while navigating the structural constraints of settler institutions.

For example, one participant, Elaine, working in an alliance between the Dene Nation and Canada's ecumenical community that began in 1975, describes navigating the institutional structures of the church that sought to maintain control of how funding towards Indigenous rights projects was spent. Elaine explains,

[Controlling funding] doesn't work. If you are really going to be an ally, you need to be willing to put the money in and let the [Indigenous] allies make the decision about how the money is spent, what the key struggles were, where you needed to be on the front lines (Davis et al. 2022, p. 14).

To ensure funding was in the control of Indigenous leadership, Elaine and other church staff worked behind the scenes, quietly undertaking fundraising efforts to “keep the church off our backs.” Another participant, Steve, mobilised his political connections as a Christian singer/songwriter, explaining, “You know, I got the ear of the mayor’s office, so I’d get counsel from [Indigenous leadership] on ‘what could we be saying to the mayor?’” This led to a period where Steve was calling an Indigenous leader “almost every day for months” to make sure he “didn’t do or say anything” that wasn’t approved. The actions of non-Indigenous allies, as shown in the study by Davis et al. (2022), provide pioneering examples of strategies that negotiate institutional barriers in practical ways.

As the co-management literature in Chapter 3 showed, working with Indigenous peoples does not automatically invoke a process of decolonisation. The allyship literature illustrates that what is required is ongoing and constant critical reflection on one’s location as a settler, whether visiting an Indigenous community, participating in Indigenous-led activism, or not. The above three studies on unsettling allyship demonstrate a shift in allyship literature that pulls together tighter links between settlers and their complicity in colonisation on two fronts. First, it narrows in on the relationships that settlers have with place. Second, these few studies open a much-needed pathway for further investigation into how allies work in practical ways to navigate barriers imposed by settler institutions. To further explore these

two aspects, I now draw on Steinman's (2020) theoretical, sociological article, *Unsettling as agency: unsettling settler colonialism where you are*.

### 5.2.2 *Unsettling agency*

Steinman (2020) reviews the use of the term unsettling, in both activist and academic circles across Canada and the US. The analysis identifies that the literature so far has not produced a clear model for unsettling settler colonialisms – and as such, , this thesis aims to address this gap. Steinman (2020, p. 562) observes, however, that “the more predominant use of unsettling focuses on the cognitive and emotional process of grappling with Indigenous sovereignty, one's miseducation and ignorance, guilt, one's own identity and relationship to place, and related uncomfortable topics.” Primarily, Steinman takes issue with the focus of allyship as activism in the literature. Instead, Steinman turns to question how settlers can appropriately use their agency to engage in processes of disrupting settler colonisation at all times - not 'wild' places that fall into the Western idea of conservation or protection but the places where we work. As such, Steinman (2020, p. 572) firmly argues that “In addition to standing with Indigenous people in front of the bulldozer, settlers' can unsettle the interwoven beliefs, discourses and practices of our institutions and organizations.” This is a critical point, and such insights are much needed in the field of NRM partnerships, particularly to address institutional barriers.

As the study by Smith, W, Neale and Weir (2021) in the previous chapter revealed, Indigenous participants viewed institutions as a larger obstacle to collaborative efforts over

‘white culture’ more broadly. This may be because of the ‘iceberg’ nature of settler institutions that Steinman (2020) describes, where only the tip is visible and 90% remains hidden underwater. It is the unseen mass which keeps the iceberg afloat that requires unsettling, that is, the structures and routine practices of institutions. Likewise, Howitt (2020, p. 206) reminds us that institutions are embedded in “legal parameters of ownership, exclusive rights and a right to exclude others – often with violence.” Nevertheless, because of the stubborn nature of institutions and the need to practice allyship every day wherever we are, Steinman urges non-Indigenous allies, including scholars, to consider a quotidian unsettling agency that is *disruptive*, *bounded*, and *modest*: disruptive because settler logics and colonial structures must be up-ended; bounded because settlers are always limited in knowledge and easily fall back into settler habits; and modest because allies must take a back seat to follow Indigenous leadership, spend more time listening, and maintain humility rather than upholding bragging rights or ‘settler innocence.’ Steinman (2020, pp. 567-8) suggests the below strategies for exercising a quotidian unsettling agency, which includes:

speaking up, reaching out, and almost certainly creating some discomfort by educating salient individuals that their words and actions are actively excluding Indigenous people and perspectives and reproducing colonial reality (whether or not ‘settler colonialism’ is stated as such). Such actions disrupt the taken-for-granted nature of institutionalized reproduction of settler colonial reality.

Like Howitt (2020), Steinman refers to the taken-for-granted settler reality. Unsettling this reality then brings about transformations to both settler institutions and one’s own internal logics because the disjoin between frontlines and everyday life - which Lang (2020) also

noted above - is replaced with a growth that “would likely function to nourish, deepen, and solidify one’s unsettling process” (Steinman 2020, p. 567). Importantly, Steinman notes the limitations to following Indigenous leadership in everyday places where Indigenous peoples are largely not present, unlike activist frontlines where instructions are delivered. As Steinman (2020, p. 562) urges, settler allies must turn their intellectual self-reflection into an *unsettled agency* that generates actions which “are anchored to and articulated with norms of following Indigenous leadership.” Therefore, Steinman (2020) recommends that settlers stay in line with the broad teachings and objectives of Indigenous sovereigns while exercising a degree of initiative and autonomy in the exclusive corridors and meetings rooms that settlers spend most of their time in.

Findings from the allyship literature point to important considerations for this thesis. First, is the need for further investigate the relationships that allies have with land. Second, is to move on from allyship as ‘activism’ and instead make allyship an undertaking practiced in the everyday, especially in the places that non-Indigenous NRM professional’s work. Third, recent theoretical scholarship and qualitative research on non-Indigenous allyship offers the term *unsettling* to make the shift away from examining ‘white privilege’ to ‘settler privilege.’

### 5.3 Conclusion

The above discernments revealed in the literature on non-Indigenous allyship provide clear guidance for this thesis to identify whether the strategies and innovations that emerge from participant reflections are: 1) established or revelatory findings, and 2) colonising or

decolonising moves. Research on allyship that applies the concept of unsettling sets the focus on the relationship that settlers have to the lands they occupy, especially when the spaces and places we occupy, including the workplace, are *a/ways* upon Indigenous lands. This is an issue of sovereignty. As such, by investigating how non-Indigenous professionals perceive their work in collaborative arrangements and recentre Indigenous sovereignty, this thesis attends to new developments in the field of allyship, as well as the field of NRM which significantly under-researched.

In the next chapter, I move to the methodology and methods - important aspects of the design of research that seeks to be decolonising. Just as the practice of allyship must be decolonising if it is to produce decolonising outcomes, the methodological framework must be based upon decolonising and unsettling principles that challenge the colonising traditions of Western research.

## 6 Unsettling Methodologies

As the previous chapters have shown, the settler colonial forces of extraction and elimination are pernicious, invasive, and stubborn. Further, Western science has played a formative role in othering both Indigenous peoples and nature, solidified during the Enlightenment era and extending into contemporary settler discourse, policy and the field of NRM. As such, the design of a research project conducted within an academic institution must be carefully considered to avoid the propensity for reproducing colonialisms inherent in Western research. Considering the propensity for non-Indigenous researchers to reproduce colonial violations, the practice of allyship is not just for participants ‘out there,’ it is also essential for researchers. It is crucial for non-Indigenous researchers to scrutinise all elements of the research process and closely examine the underlying social, cultural, institutional, and historical forces of settler colonialisms in order to conduct research that is not harmful to Indigenous sovereigns. Further, as discussed previously, I turn away from critical race and whiteness as a methodological framework because it only accounts for power relationships between humans. Instead, I draw on the work of unsettling methodologies which allows me to make the issue of sovereignty central. However, while useful for focussing on the position of settlers, current work on unsettling methodologies is limited by overlooking an exploration of what land-nature means to settlers. Therefore, I orientate this thesis to ontologically unsettle settler meanings of land-nature, which is core to NRM, allyship, and sovereignty. The chapter is divided into four sections.



In the first section, I discuss the need to decolonise Western research and lay bare some concerns for non-Indigenous researchers to avoid reproducing existing settler structures that are colonising. I note some key cautions for non-Indigenous researchers on the issues of appropriating and assimilating Indigenous knowledges, with some strategies to manage common mistakes. In the second section, I turn to literature on unsettling methodologies and present insights for unsettling allyship in research. As per studies on unsettling allyship, unsettling methodologies requires non-Indigenous researchers to examine the relationships they have with both settler sovereignty and Indigenous sovereignty. I extend current work on unsettling methodologies to include an examination of how settlers conceive of land-nature. Here, I show how bringing the work of critical thinkers from the Western cannon into conversation with Indigenous thought opens possibilities for non-Indigenous researchers to learn to think differently. I explore the relationship between the concept of nature and the operation of power, returning to the problem of binaries and ways to overcome dichotomous thinking. I draw on Howitt and Suchet-Pearson (2006, p. 324) who use the term 'ontological pluralism' to explain how words, ideas and propositions are building blocks upon which collaborations "are challenged by, and co-constructed with, contextualized multiple knowledges." Indeed, the ability to simultaneously understand both settler and Indigenous sovereignty is required for the practice of allyship yet is absent from studies on co-management practices. Thereby, identifying the building blocks that lead to ontological pluralism in collaborative arrangements, as opposed to binarism, is an important aspect for this thesis to incorporate. Moreover, Howitt and Suchet-Pearson (2006) direct their arguments for building ontological pluralism to non-Indigenous researchers. As such, I discuss my own responsibility to build ontological pluralism.

The third section explains the research framework of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, as articulated by Martin Booran Mirrabooa (2003). This guiding framework assists me to decolonise my research through two aspects. One is it provides a simple triad to recentre Indigenous sovereignty and account for more-than-human Entities in the analysis of interviews. The other, is to challenge my personal ontology in the interpretation of the thesis by using Martin Booran Mirrabooa as a reference point. After setting up these methodological frameworks, I walk through the limitations of institutional ethics and provide a relational ethics of care to account for upholding my responsibility to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in my research.

The fourth and final section, steps through the qualitative research methods for data collection and analysis to demonstrate how I have applied the methodological framework. I trace the selection of participants drawn from the KNYA and CRT sites. I then discuss the use of interviews for data collection and how I incorporated the concept of unsettling into the interview questions. Lastly, I show how I applied the framework of knowing, being, and doing to the analysis and thematic development to identify how non-Indigenous professionals in collaborative arrangements innovate and strategise to recentre Indigenous sovereignty.

### *6.1 Decolonising Western research through the lens of unsettling*

Because Western research is traditionally colonialisng and driven by the forces of extraction and elimination, in this section, I engage with the challenges of conducting decolonising

research as a non-Indigenous researcher. Internationally, Indigenous scholars have taken on the task of decolonising Western research, developing Indigenous methodologies. I show how non-Indigenous researchers, including myself, respond to the problematics that have been highlighted by Indigenous methodologies and apply caution to avoid colonising paradigms. As such, I address the issues regarding the appropriation and assimilation of Indigenous knowledges, the use of Indigenous methodologies, and centring non-Indigenous voices in this study. Lastly, I refer to scholarship that applies the concept of unsettling to the methodology and identify where this thesis will move such unsettling methodologies forward.

The epistemological underpinnings of binarism, as demonstrated throughout previous chapters, set the foundations for research to view Indigenous people through a colonising lens. The damages to Indigenous sovereigns incurred through research conducted by the Western academy is well documented and critiqued by Indigenous scholars, such as the objectification and dehumanisation of Indigenous peoples (Arbon 2008; Chilisa 2012; Denzin, Lincoln & Tuhiwai Smith 2008; Kovach 2009; Rigney, L-I 1999; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Kaurua and Narungga scholar, Lester-Irabinna Rigney (1999, p. 114) states that this legacy continues “to reshape knowledge construction of Indigenous Peoples via colonial research ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies, which are so fundamentally subtle and ‘common sense.’” Therefore, to decolonise traditional Western research practices, Indigenous scholars have developed Indigenous methodologies - a specific set of tools based upon Indigenous epistemological foundations and research traditions practiced for millennia (Chilisa 2012;

Denzin, Lincoln & Tuhiwai Smith 2008; Held 2019; Kovach 2009; Louis 2007; Rigney, L-I 1999; Tuhiwai Smith 2012; Wilson 2013).

Indigenous methodologies are a set of key principles that responds explicitly to settler colonialism. However, because these tools were designed by and for Indigenous researchers, debates have arisen on the appropriateness and ability of non-Indigenous researchers to apply Indigenous methodologies (Moreton-Robinson 2015; Rigney, L-I 1999; Wilson 2008). These debates present a challenge for non-Indigenous researchers, like myself, who seek an alternative to the colonising tendencies of Western research but are cautious not to appropriate Indigenous knowledges. Along with fellow non-Indigenous researchers (Aveling 2013; Carlson 2017; Lewis 2018), I agree that non-Indigenous researchers cannot *adopt* Indigenous methodologies because we are not Indigenous people - to claim it as our own is appropriation. Nevertheless, if this thesis seeks to recentre Indigenous sovereignty, I must begin by recentring Indigenous sovereignty in the research design, and in doing so, I need to be cautious of the paradigm I choose.

One of the key principles in Indigenous methodologies is to prioritise the voices of Indigenous peoples (Rigney, L-I 1999). In this thesis, however, I draw on the voices of non-Indigenous people. Doing so presents a danger because foregrounding non-Indigenous voices pushes Indigenous voices to the periphery and maintains discursive and material power for settler society (De Leeuw & Hunt 2018; Rigney, L-I 1999; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). However, in drawing on the perspectives of non-Indigenous allies I avoid what Martin Booran Mirraboopa (2003) names as '*terra nullius* research', where Indigenous peoples are

objectified as the subjects of research. Moreover, I agree with Veracini (2010, p. 15) who states:

It is important that we focus on the settlers, on what they do, and how they think about what they do. True, they have been the traditional subject of historical inquiry, and only recently the experience of indigenous people in settler contexts has been the subject of extensive scholarly activity. And yet, here are also risks intrinsic in focusing primarily on indigenous peoples and their experience. In a seminal essay, and in another context, but underlying a similar dynamic, Ava Baron noted that if we only investigate women, 'man' "remains the universal subject against which women are defined in their particularity." We should heed this advice, and similarly focus on settlers as well in order to avoid the possibility that despite attempts to decolonise our gaze, we continue understanding the settler as normative.

In this quote, Veracini reaffirms the importance of investigating the settler, not to perpetuate the myth of 'peaceful settlement' but to investigate the changing dynamics in the relationship non-Indigenous people have with Indigenous sovereignty. Accordingly, my goal is not to place a focus on settlers and ignore indigeneity, but to glean insights into how non-Indigenous professionals identify and challenge their role in settler colonisation when working in partnership with Indigenous sovereigns. Succinctly put by many Indigenous scholars around the world, Indigenous people are not the problem: the problem is colonisation (Alfred 2009; Byrd 2011; Deloria Jn. 1970; Moreton-Robinson 2015; Watson

2009). Hence, this study shifts the colonial gaze off Indigenous sovereigns and instead examines settler sovereignty, placing ‘the problem’ with those who created it.

The issue of sovereignty should be integral to research in Indigenous spaces; however, it is a topic often neglected by non-Indigenous scholars working in the field. This is demonstrated in Ardill’s (2013) systematic review of the Australian legal literature published in Indigenous contexts. The Australian legal literature falls into two groups: the first calls for the restoration of Indigenous sovereignties and consists almost exclusively of Indigenous scholars; the second group “is dominated by non-Indigenous people who speak instead of citizenship, shared responsibility, native title, reconciliation, rights, self-management, multiculturalism, colonisation and postcolonial theory” (Ardill 2013, p. 315). This review illustrates that non-Indigenous scholars writing around Indigenous contexts continue to silence the issue of sovereignty.

I agree with Ardill that non-Indigenous scholars must engage with the issue of sovereignty. If we are to interrupt ongoing colonisation, it is essential that non-Indigenous researchers acknowledge, respect and *work for* Indigenous sovereignty. As Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 1) state, any form of decolonisation must work toward the “repatriation of Indigenous land and life.” In this thesis, I aim to challenge the dominance of the settler state so that Indigenous sovereigns experience fewer colonial harms. Thereby, I recognise that Indigenous sovereignty is a site of resistance and empowerment (Denzin, Lincoln & Tuhiwai Smith 2008). As such, I seek to understand how non-Indigenous professionals add momentum to Indigenous nation building efforts that resists the colonial standard approach in NRM. By

investigating the perspectives of non-Indigenous allies who work with Indigenous sovereigns, I speak 'to my own' (Aveling 2013). Intrigued with others of my ilk, as non-Indigenous allies, I wonder: are we following the agenda set by Indigenous sovereigns? This is my primary research interest.

In the previous chapter, studies on unsettling allyship pointed out that learning the laws and teachings of Indigenous sovereigns opens opportunities for unlearning colonial habits. Knowledge sharing is an important element of building decolonising frameworks for research design which can lead to forms of hybridisation in knowledge construction that is generative and hopeful (Ahenakew 2016; Fortier 2017; Howitt 2020). However, as Cree scholar, Cash Ahenakew (2016, p. 321) argues, when attempting to merge Indigenous knowledges into non-Indigenous ways of knowing, "we are operating with severely uneven environments shaped by historical circumstances where the grafting/hybridizing does not happen as a mutual exercise, but as assimilation." Therefore, non-Indigenous researchers need to be skilled in taking guidance from Indigenous sovereigns without appropriating the knowledges or customs that have been shared, and without eliminating Indigenous peoples by way of absence (Fortier 2017). Further, we must carefully consider the implications and limitations that are inevitable when translating insights across non-Indigenous and Indigenous knowledges (Ahenakew 2016).

In *Unsettling methodologies/decolonizing movements*, Fortier (2017, p. 32) advises that non-Indigenous researchers can be responsible for avoiding appropriation by "being conscious of what aspects of these knowledge-sharing practices are borrowed and attributing them to

specific and particular Indigenous peoples and nations.” Put simply, we must cite the creators and keepers of Indigenous knowledges to locate Indigenous knowledges in their rightful place. The simple act of naming the owners of knowledge makes Indigenous peoples visible amid colonial silencing. Therefore, non-Indigenous researchers can *learn from* Indigenous sovereigns and *apply* the tools from Indigenous methodologies, such as questioning Western research traditions and its accepted norms to redress dominant colonising effects and power imbalances. However, as non-Indigenous researchers, we engage with insights from Indigenous methodologies as part of a process of unsettling ourselves and our work, not as owners and arbitrators of the tools (Fortier 2017).

In working towards decolonising Western research and engaging with the cautions laid out above, non-Indigenous researchers are now discussing how to practice allyship throughout the research process. Toward this end, several scholars have revealed useful insights by applying the concept of unsettling to the methodological framework (Calderon 2016; De Leeuw & Hunt 2018; Fortier 2017; Howitt 2020; Kluttz, Walker & Walter 2020; Nathan et al. 2017). I build upon these insights and seek to contribute to decolonising research by interrogating the relationship that non-Indigenous researchers have with land by digging deeper into the settler ontology of land through the lens of unsettling.

Established insights on unsettling methodologies are offered by Kluttz, Walker and Walter (2020), who argue, like Fortier (2017) above, that non-Indigenous researchers undertaking qualitative studies into allyship must account for their own complicity in settler colonisation and their responsibilities to Indigenous sovereignty. Similarly, De Leeuw and Hunt (2018)



challenge geographers to question how much they know about Indigenous sovereignty across the lands they study, urging colleagues to acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty, make Indigenous peoples visible, and engage in truth telling to fill colonial silences. Calderon (2016) makes a similar case to academics in general, arguing that research which is blind to the forces of settler colonisation functions as an ‘epistemology of ignorance.’ Non-Indigenous scholars Snelgrove and Dhamoon, in conversation with co-author, Tsalagi Cherokee man, Jeff Corntassel, call for researchers to engage in relationships and practices as ‘place-based solidarities’ that unsettle colonialism through “lived and contentious engagement with the literal and stolen ground on which people stand and come together upon” (Snelgrove, Dhamoon & Corntassel 2014, p. 27). Exposing research practices that reproduce extraction and elimination is critical to unsettling methodologies, yet none of the authors - except Howitt (2020) which I discuss below - go further to interrogate how land-nature is conceived of by settlers. Thereby, in the next section, I orientate this thesis to problematise meanings of land-nature in the West. That is, to question the meaning of ‘natural’ in natural resource management. Problematising the oppositional positioning of humans ‘rising above state of nature,’ embedded in settler sovereignty, is core to unsettling the colonial project and the consumption and management of nature as a resource.

## *6.2 Unsettling the ontology of land*

Building upon the theoretical meanings of sovereignty demonstrated in Chapter 2, in this section, I now centre this methodological discussion on the settler ontology of land. Western concepts of land-nature are linked with the operation of power, where the Enlightenment notion of humanness results in colonial domination over other peoples, species, and land-

nature. Moreover, political rights are only granted to humans and land-nature is viewed as a material backdrop for human needs. In NRM, these ontological foundations are embedded into policy, planning, management, and the overall approach to environmental issues, occurring as normal to non-Indigenous professionals working in the space (Castree 2001; Howitt 2020; Howitt & Suchet-Pearson 2006).

Chapter 2 also provided a counter point to the positioning of humans in opposition to land-nature that is endemic to settler sovereignty, by discussing Indigenous sovereignty and the contrasting understandings of the role of humans in relation to land, or Country. I now provide further debates and contentions from non-Indigenous scholars who problematise what is broadly conceived of as land-nature in the West. In doing so, I grapple with the ontology of land not to find a definitive answer but to embark upon a process of learning to think differently. This assists me to locate connection points between critiques of land-nature from the Western cannon with Indigenous scholarship, and importantly, with participants narratives. I show that I am aware of the dangers of colonising binaries such as human/other and culture/nature that restricts thinking. Moreover, my research stays attentive to the possibility of 'ontological pluralism,' where one can accept more than one ontology can be held in mind (Howitt & Suchet-Pearson 2006, p. 331). Due to the relationship between ontology and epistemology, building ontological pluralism requires 'epistemological stretching' to understand, engage with, and respect ways of knowing different to one's own (Harmin, Barrett & Hoessler 2017, p. 1490). In this way, I extend the concept of unsettling to problematise the settler ontology of land and examine how claims about nature work as instruments of colonial power, tracing a trend in the work of scholars

across the physical and social sciences (Barad 2003; Castree 2001; Castree & MacMillan 2001; Hage 2017; Reddekop 2014). I follow this trend to problematise the 'natural' in natural resource management.

In NRM, whether nature is used for conservation or development purposes, the problem with the settler ontology of land lies with the concept of land as a material backdrop on the world stage - a passive resource waiting for human consumption (Reddekop 2014; Whyte 2018). As Mathews (2001, p. 226) reiterates, what underlies the environmental crisis today is an "ideology of domination that pervades the political life of contemporary western civilization." This includes the field of NRM and its technocratic preferences that ignores the socioeconomic processes of modernity, despite the direct line that can be traced back to the discourses emergent from the Enlightenment (Castree 2001; Reddekop 2014; Whyte 2018). Grappling with ontology requires us to question our most basic assumptions about the world and how we understand reality (Arbon 2008; Bawaka Country et al. 2016; Bryan 2000; Reddekop 2014). As Bawaka Country et al. (2016) argue, all conceptual work is shaped by place/space and our actions in place/space. Reorientating settler ontology requires the research to pay attention to place/space as a living sovereign Entity and knowledge holder that co-exists with Indigenous peoples. Making visible places/spaces routinely normalised by settler logics, in the office, a cafe, or at home on the couch (Bawaka Country et al. 2013; Bawaka Country et al. 2016; Howitt, Doohan, Suchet-Pearson, Lunkapis, et al. 2013). To do so, it is important to interrogate how land-nature is understood in the West, and its multiple layers of meaning. As Deloria Jr. and Lytle (1984, p. 255) remind us, true self-determination

for Indigenous sovereigns cannot be achieved “unless a radical change is made in the manner in which [non-Indigenous people] perceive land.”

As Rifkin (2013) reiterates, ‘nature’ in the West is positioned outside of geopolitical constraints, which suspends the issue of sovereignty and the legal subjectivities that contributes to ones sense of personhood. Castree (2001, p. 5) explains, “Nature is both a concept and a physical thing to which the concept refers.” In Western society, the materiality of nature includes land and all its features, from animals to the weather, in addition to more abstract concepts such as ‘human nature.’ Castree (2001) claims that the Western concept of nature traditionally falls into three definitions – nature as external (as non-human raw material), intrinsic (having fixed attributes), or universal (a generalised sense of encompassing everything). These traditional definitions circulate discourses that do not attest to the truths of nature but create their own truths as social constructions specific to Western social formations in modernity (Bryan 2000; Castree 2001; Reddekop 2014). Whose truth is accepted becomes points of contention within social, political and ecological debates that are laden with value judgements underpinned by binaries of good/bad, normal/abnormal, better/worse (Castree 2001). Frustrated by these divides, a cohort of academics now seek to build understandings of nature as complex, relational, entangled, and agentic (Barad 2003; Bawaka Country et al. 2013; Bawaka Country et al. 2016; Bignall 2010; Braidotti 2006; Bryan 2000; Castree 2001; Cudworth & Hobden 2011, 2012; Ferrando 2019; Hage 2017; Haraway 2008; Hardt & Negri 2000; Latour 2007; Oxman 2016; Reddekop 2014; Wolfe, C 2009). Following this trend allows me to draw on Western scholarship that problematises the Western ontology of land-nature which informs NRM. Indeed, the state of flux created by scholars in the Western cannon presents opportunities that, as stated by

Arabana scholar Veronica Arbon (2008), can be applied to further the goals and aspirations of Indigenous peoples – only if contextualised appropriately and used with caution.

As previously noted, the aim of posthuman and new materialist scholarship is to eliminate the ontological constraints of Enlightenment thought and recontextualise the human as part of a greater more-than human self-sustaining system (Barad 2003; Braidotti 2013; Cudworth & Hobden 2011, 2012; Ferrando 2019; Wolfe, C 2009). Often cited is the work of feminist physicist, Karen Barad, who provides a critical examination of the human relationship to the material world. Barad (2003, p. 827) challenges “the positioning of materiality as either a given or a mere effect of human agency.” Nature is not a container in which humans exist, Barad argues, but is the phenomena of the smallest material units, atoms, that are in an ongoing process of *intra-activity* with each other *and* with the discursive practices attached to material phenomena (Barad 2003). All matter is thereby agential, not just the matter that forms human bodies. Barad calls this an ‘agential relational ontology.’ These insights offer non-Indigenous researcher’s opportunities to find our own way towards understanding a relational ontology and are critical for facing the challenges of our time. Bawaka Country et al. (2016) reiterate the message from prominent physicist Lee Smolin (2008), that “understanding politics and society within the context of a *relational* universe is the key question facing all the natural, human and social sciences in the 21st century” [emphasis added].

Moreover, scholars are debating the notion that only humans possess personhood and agency. By making the interconnectedness of global human society visible, other scholars

challenge the notion of human separateness and move towards a relational ontology. Barry, John (2002) and Bawaka Country et al. (2016) remind us that one decision in the office of a multinational corporation can quickly devastate the lives and economies of people and environments on the other side of the world. In the post-modern age of globalisation, Barry, John (2002) argues, humans as a species are increasingly vulnerable to what appear as normal events, yet remain blind to relations of cause and effect. Additionally, Bawaka Country et al. (2016) explain that the phenomenon of climate change is not an external unbounded event but manifests in a web of interconnected place-based relationships. Cyclones, government reports, mining, and public protest all occur within specific places entwined in relationships. Because the Western ontology of land does not acknowledge a larger system in which humans 'co-become' with nature, there is no sense of relationship, responsibility, or response (Bawaka Country et al. 2016). Interestingly, Hage (2017) notes that as the ecological crisis intensifies, along with our fears of natural disasters, the Western imaginary is increasingly thinking of nature as 'turning against us,' perhaps as payback for the damages we have done, implying that nature has agency. Further, the Western claim that personhood and agency are uniquely human traits is also met by Sassen (1996) who exposes how corporations are granted personhood and economic citizenship. Thereby, in a globalised society the power to hold governments accountable has shifted from its citizens, 'we the people,' to non-human global firms and markets. These debates reveal the contradictions to long-held Enlightenment notions that positions humans atop an external nature, rather than one actor among multiple more-than-human forces.

Nevertheless, as explained by Rifkin (2013, p. 322), 'settler common sense' is reaffirmed through daily actions that give rise to everyday feelings of ontological certainty. Settler common sense incorporates contradictory perspectives that frames the settler sense of self. Specifically, nature is positioned as external to the human, where land is defined by property law and framed by technocracy. Concurrently, settlers remain oblivious to the human geopolitical forces that reshapes nature, regulates access and control, and denies Indigenous sovereignty (Rifkin 2013). Changing the everyday actions that are driven by settler common sense, hinges upon how non-Indigenous professionals can shift from the colonial standard approach to a nation building approach in NRM. This requires making visible the social, economic, and environmental relations of power and privilege to imagine, build, and refine new possibilities where "multiple sovereignties, epistemological diversity and shifting identities coexist" (Howitt & Suchet-Pearson 2006, p. 332). To acknowledge, respect, understand, and engage with diverse sources of knowledge develops 'epistemological stretching' (Harmin, Barrett & Hoessler 2017, p. 1490). When we move from seeing our reality *through* our world view to see what our world view *is*, we engage in a process of overcoming the reproduction of the taken-for-granted everyday settler reality (Harmin, Barrett & Hoessler 2017; Howitt 2020).

Challenging one's own view in the seemingly ordinary routines of daily practice is critical for decolonising the discursive and material spaces of NRM (Howitt & Suchet-Pearson 2006; Rifkin 2013). This is beyond integrating epistemologies and ontologies that fit with one's established world view (Harmin, Barrett & Hoessler 2017). Accounting for more than one way of understanding reality is described by Howitt and Suchet-Pearson (2006) as

‘ontological pluralism.’ As Muller, Hemming and Rigney (2019, p. 405) note, other scholars refer to building an appreciation for Indigenous sovereigns and knowledges as ‘multiepistemic literacy’ (Kuokkanen 2007), ‘pluriverse’ (Escobar 2011), ‘onto-epistemological pluralism’ (Barad 2003), ‘walking with’ (Sundberg 2014), and ‘co-motion’ (Muller 2014).

Because of the inter-relatedness between epistemology and ontology, epistemological stretching leads to shifts in ontologies (Harmin, Barrett & Hoessler 2017). As ontology drives agency (Bignall 2010) ontological shifts that recognises the operation of power in settlement begin to disrupt the ongoing colonisation of land-nature, Indigenous sovereigns, and the settler sense of self (Harmin, Barrett & Hoessler 2017). Epistemological stretching and ontological pluralism, thereby, engender possibilities that address the dominance of settler decision making in NRM and shift collaborative work towards an Indigenous nation building approach. Unsettling the settler ontology of land is a key methodological imperative that shapes the analysis of participant narratives.

### *6.3 Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing*

As non-Indigenous researchers, we can begin to reconsider our own ontological perspective and trouble our common-sense understandings of humanness and the human relationship to the natural world around us. Doing so creates a form of allyship that works towards an ontological partnership in land-based understandings, without appropriation. Thereby, to decolonise my research, I bring the concept of unsettling into conversation with the



Indigenist research methodology of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, as presented by Martin Booran Mirraboopa (2003). Importantly, using Martin Booran Mirraboopa as a reference point enables me to challenge my personal ontology and build ontological pluralism in the interpretation of the thesis.

I am inspired by Martin Booran Mirraboopa's ideas to articulate an unsettling perspective so that this thesis can examine the relationships that non-Indigenous allies have with both settler and Indigenous sovereignty. The inter-related triad of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing allows me to scope participant narratives for relational ontologies that account for multiple, interconnected relationships. Through the lens of unsettling allyship, the research interest is to uncover how non-Indigenous allies translate the teachings of Indigenous sovereignty into strategies and innovations that challenge dominant settler logics and colonial paradigms. In doing so, I seek to identify Steinman's (2020) quotidian unsettling agency in the practice of allyship – to trouble settler understandings, forms of conduct, and daily practices that occur in the places we call 'home' and 'work.' With this focus, the research does not recruit and capture the voices of Indigenous peoples, but instead, it seeks to reveal if and how non-Indigenous allies understand and *follow* Indigenous voices. By engaging with these frames in the analysis, I scope participant narratives for the strategies and innovations they employ to recentre Indigenous sovereignty.

In Chapter 1, I introduced Martin Booran Mirraboopa's (2003, p. 208) definition of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing as centred on "Entities of Land, Animals, Plants, Waterways, Skies, Climate and the Spiritual systems of Aboriginal groups." Thereby,

more-than-human Entities constitute a critical element of this framework. Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing are constructed around relationships with the entities (Martin Booran Mirraboopa 2003). Establishing what is known about the entities constitutes knowing, identifying relationships between entities constitutes being, and maintaining these relations through actions that constitutes doing. What is known about the entities involves teaching and learning to understand the laws and knowledges of specific places and the relations within. Identities, interests, and connections, in certain contexts, directs proper forms of conduct for the relations between people and entities, where rights and rites to Country are earned. Thereby, Indigenous ways of knowing identify relations amongst the entities which then shapes responsibilities to these relationships as Indigenous ways of being. Individual and collective identities, roles, and responsibilities are expressed through ways of doing where knowing and being are synthesised through behaviours and actions. Indigenous relational ontologies manifests a reality where, “we are able to show (Do), respectfully and rightfully (Being) what we know (Knowing)” (Martin Booran Mirraboopa 2003, p. 210). Bawaka Country et al. (2016, pp. 461-3) further explain the inter-relatedness of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing:

Ultimately, place/space is doing; it is the real emotions, thoughts, starch, spiders, waterlogged yam and wind, that co-become as Bawaka; the real words, computer screens, fingers, eyes, PDF files and paper that co-become as we share the place of these words over time and space. This enables a reconceptualization of space/place binaries, a recognition of the diverse patterns through which space/place is constituted... It is in

doing that knowing and being emerge; it is by knowing and being that one does. And this includes telling stories, sharing knowledge.

This relational ontology recognises and respects all things in the overall system that constitutes Country (Martin Booran Mirraboo 2003). Maintaining relationships with all things accepts the multi-directional exchange of knowledges and agency between distinct yet entwined entities, including humans. However, acknowledging the agency of more-than-human actors does not result in endless possible actors with equal power. As Bawaka Country et al. (2016, p. 467) explain, “it means making this issue of power and agency a question, instead of an answer known in advance.” Because Western knowledge hierarchies position settlers as the only agent capable of finding answers to complex problems, unveiling power relations in NRM opens possibilities for exploring the questions that arise in collaborative arrangements in non-binaristic, non-authoritarian ways.

With the above methodological considerations laid out, I turn next to explore the ethical considerations across Indigenous and institutional frameworks for this study on allyship in collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature.

#### *6.4 Beyond institutional ethics: employing a relational ethics of care*

In this section, I discuss the formal and informal ethical dimensions applied to this research, for both Indigenous and settler institutional frameworks, and reflect on the potential ethical outcomes of this study. The ethics around decolonising research are multi-faceted, requiring attention beyond gaining ethical approval from a committee within a Western institution

(Carlson 2017; Nathan et al. 2017). Below, I first articulate the institutional ethical requirements I met for this study and highlight the limitations of formal institutional ethics processes in decolonising research. To counter the limitations of institutional requirements, I apply a relational ethics of care, in line with my understandings of relationality outlined in the Preface. I also consider potential ethical considerations for participants.

First, this research has been formally approved by the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee, the Government of South Australia, and the local council involved. Additionally, the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (NRA) were informed of my research, with a letter I wrote explaining the project. The letter was tabled at an NRA Board meeting, to which there was no dissent. From my inquiries regarding approval from Indigenous sovereigns and ethical bodies in Canada and the US, I was informed that no approvals were necessary as I was not collecting Indigenous knowledges or recruiting Indigenous peoples as participants. As a base, I draw upon the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander (AISATSIS) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research (2020).

It is important to note that across both sites, academic ethical guidelines do not consider my project to be 'Indigenous research' because it does not recruit Indigenous participants, conduct field work in an Indigenous community, or formally collect Indigenous knowledges. The formal institutional requirements for this project only required low level ethical clearance from my university and approval from the relevant government departments in South Australia to interview their staff. Thereby, I was not required to submit a high-level

ethics application to my university with additional ethics applications submitted to external institutional bodies, such as the Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies. Although my study was not classified as Indigenous research requiring high-level ethics clearance, the context of this thesis is located in Indigenous spaces. Therefore, my application to the Flinders University Social and Behavioural Research Ethics Committee was sent to the Flinders University Office of Indigenous Strategy and Engagement for approval. This provided a welcomed formal check on the ethical implications and potential impacts upon Indigenous communities from my research. Nevertheless, I am concerned about the risk of perpetuating colonial harms when research is *about* Indigenous sovereigns *without* the inclusion of Indigenous peoples as participants. For this reason, it was essential that I practice a relational ethics of care.

The subtle yet important ways I employ a relational ethics of care is expressed in the Preface of this thesis. There, I explained how I have practiced relationality and followed Indigenous leadership both at 'work' and at 'home,' as a fundamental imperative in everyday life, not as an item on a check list of methodological steps. Relational ethics of care is to understand oneself as embroiled in a process of intra-action, not with external and separate objects, but with matter and more-than-human Entities as part of oneself (Bawaka Country et al. 2016). In the context of this thesis, relationality includes an ongoing process of attentiveness and care, not just to the research project, but to Indigenous sovereignty. The Preface demonstrates how I follow Indigenous leadership, the ways in which I seek to unsettle my personal and professional colonial reality, and how I maintain relationships with Indigenous sovereigns, all life, Entities, and land, and remain open to multiple ways of thinking.

However, the role of the researcher is also to act ethically with the participants who volunteered to contribute to the study and ensure their safety and wellbeing, and also includes a relationality of care. Because unsettling oneself is both an intellectual and emotional act, participants are exposed to uncomfortable thoughts and feelings. Indeed, qualitative research holds much potential for incurring emotional costs onto participants “because of its open-ended, exploratory character; probing for details and depths of experiences ... can be stressful for all participants” (Warren 2002, p. 5). As such, informed consent is critical so that participants are aware of the context of the study, what will be required of them, and the potentiality for exposing their identities despite the care taken to uphold anonymity. Because I was attentive to participants responses, I found that participants were not stressed or confronted. Instead, they were enthusiastic to contribute to a study on allyship, which brought energy, optimism, and a sense of camaraderie between myself and participants as we talked through our shared experiences, our relationships to settler and Indigenous sovereignty, and ideas around nature.

Having stepped through the ethical considerations, I now turn my attention to the methods of data collection and show the application of unsettling methodologies.

## **6.5 Data collection**

Qualitative data collection for this thesis was undertaken to answer the research question, *what are the strategies and innovations employed by non-Indigenous professionals to*

*recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements?* In this section, I step through the process of sampling and recruitment for both sites, unpack the interview design and analytical approach, applying the above insights from unsettling methodologies. As this study explores social complexities, examining power and the socio-political influences around knowledge construction, it is suited to qualitative research (O'Leary 2010; Tracy 2010). The method of interview design allowed me to engage participants in conversations that captures data relevant to how they understand both settler and Indigenous sovereignty, what they see as key barriers, and how they work to mitigate obstacles. The framework of Indigenous ways, of knowing, being, and doing guides the analysis and allows for complexity and interconnectedness to capture possibilities of relationality, ontological pluralism, and account for more-than-human Entities.

#### *6.5.1 Sampling and recruitment at international sites*

In seeking to unsettle settler sovereignty, I drew on the expertise of critical allies from two key sites where Indigenous sovereignty is being recentred: the KNYA and CRT. The collaborative arrangements at each site are quite different because the KNYA is a legal contract between the Ngarrindjeri Nation and a state government body. Thereby, the KNYA is a nation-to-nation agreement for environmental co-governance that has been operating for some decades. The CRT site is more complex because the treaty is an agreement between the US and Canada where tribes and First Nations have been excluded. Within the Columbia River Basin, however, there is a mix of collaborative arrangements at various levels across multiple settler and Indigenous jurisdictions intersected by an international border. The focus of the CRT sits with the collaborative work between tribes and First Nations in the

Basin and the non-Indigenous allies who supported the document, *A Sacred Responsibility* (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015). Together, both sites include three settler nations (Australia, Canada, and the US) to capture the operation of settler sovereignty. The KNYA and CRT sites provided a suitable pool of participants who are non-Indigenous allies that follow an Indigenous nation building approach. Because I had a key contact at each site, this meant I could build on established relationships to invite participants. I recruited a total of twelve participants who are engaged in paid work with settler institutions and seeks to promote collaborative arrangements that exist on a nation-to-nation level. Ensuring that the sites were spaces allyship is already practiced with Indigenous sovereigns shored up my confidence that participants could speak to the research question and reveal strategies and innovations that recentres Indigenous sovereignty. To track the relationship between unsettling settler sovereignty and my process of data collection, I kept a formal 'audit trail' of research decisions and actions (Tracy 2010), which I trace below.

Most participants are employed by universities or government, many with backgrounds in law or working with NGOs. The CRT participants are predominantly academics whereas the KNYA site has a balanced mix of academics and government employees. Gaining insights from within a government department from the CRT site would have complimented the insights from participants working in government at the KNYA site, however, this did not eventuate. The spread of participants was balanced across the KNYA and CRT sites with six participants at each. Coincidentally, the six participants at the CRT site were also balanced with three participants each from Canada and the US. Although twelve participants is a small sample, as noted by Tracy (2010, p. 841), "If data are new, unique, or rare, a valuable contribution could be achieved with very little data." The participants I have drawn are



indeed rare and hold valuable insights into spaces where Indigenous sovereignty is being recentred.

#### *6.5.1.1 Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreement*

Participants from the KNYA site currently or have previously been involved with one of two legal agreements made with the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority: the 2002 KNYA with a specific local council and the 2009 KNYA with the state Government of South Australia. Some participants were involved in the creation of the agreement and others currently work to uphold the commitments made in the agreement. These participants are drawn from three pools: 1) the KNYA Taskforce, Government of South Australia, 2) the specific local council involved, and 3) individuals identified from relevant literature. The KNYA Taskforce was established to uphold the commitments of the KNYA on behalf of the Government of South Australia. Members comprised of elected government ministers and senior advisors from across all departments in the Government of South Australia, together with representatives from the Ngarrindjeri Regional Authority (NRA). Only one participant from the KNYA Taskforce accepted the invitation from a pool of six to eight non-Indigenous members. The second pool were drawn from staff at the local council, where three respondents out of eight agreed to participate. The third group were drawn from relevant KNYA literature with four respondents identified and two participating. This totals six participants at this site. Interviews were conducted face-to-face in South Australia with KNYA participants, in a location and time determined by the participant.

#### *6.5.1.2 Columbia River Treaty*

All CRT participants were involved in the Universities Consortium, as organisers and/or presenters, calling for tribes and First Nations of the Basin to be included in the modernisation of the CRT. Through my key contact I recruited five out of ten respondents. A further three were recruited through snowball sampling, where respondents forwarded my invitation to others. Interviews with CRT participants in the US and Canada were conducted via Skype or Facetime. The video calls were exciting and new to many CRT participants as they occurred prior to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent rise in video conferencing during lockdowns. Without experience of video calling for both participants and myself, I faced some challenges connecting online which resulted in a few late starts, rescheduling and/or trying another platform. Navigating the international timeline and missing some non-verbal communication presented further challenges with online interviews. Overall, online interviews through video calls allowed me to increase my sample size, bypass geographical boundaries, and gather insights from CRT participants in a timely, affordable and efficient manner (Lo Iacono, Symonds & Brown 2016). In total, I recruited six participants at the CRT site.

#### *6.5.2 Interviews*

I chose interviews to collect data because interviews provided accessibility and a rich engagement with a small sample of rare informants that are geographically spread (O'Leary 2010; Tavory 2020; Turner III 2010). In depth interviews allowed me to build an intimacy for the sharing of 'deeper' information and knowledge (Johnson 2002). Undertaking interviews provides opportunity to capture thick descriptions of participants experiences which

otherwise may be hidden from plain view (Johnson 2002; Warren 2002). Rather than seeking to acquire facts and establish a single truth, the interviews provided in-depth data under a constructionist paradigm - an ontological position where social actors continually build meanings around social phenomena – to allow for varied perspectives (Bryman 2008; Warren 2002). The meanings participants attach to the tensions between settler sovereignty and Indigenous sovereigns, points to how participants unsettle themselves and their work. Interviews provide data that is historically grounded – an important aspect for the recognition of how colonial history shapes contemporary relationships. Participant narratives move across time, from past recollections to thoughts on the future, and are full of cultural inferences that can be analysed for patterns and themes (Warren 2002). The patterns of meaning later show themselves as themes during the analysis phase (Braun & Clarke 2017).

While interviews are guided conversations (Warren 2002) and remain an important tool for data collection, qualitative interviews are not free from weaknesses and pitfalls (Johnson 2002; Myers, MD & Newman 2007). Interviews can intrude into and impact upon the social world they seek to explore, creating a contrived environment, conducted under time pressure, where strangers are expected to trust each other (Myers, MD & Newman 2007). Additionally, discussing allyship in the context of race, may spur self-censorship in a space where non-Indigenous people do not want to expose thoughts or actions that could be labelled as racist. Self-censorship remains an issue that limits the depth of data, however, this can be mitigated by mutual trust between research and participant (Myers, MD & Newman 2007). Trust is evident in my interviews as participants not only answered my

questions with interest and ease but asked questions, expressed interest in what the research findings might be, and offered additional information from credible sources, such as academic literature or official website relevant to the sites. Because semi-structured interviews are designed to be like a casual conversation, this allowed me to talk 'with' participants and explore their narratives for possible strategies and innovations employed by participants for recentring Indigenous sovereigns in collaborative agreements.

Participant interviews took place during 2018, lasting for approximately 60 minutes each and were audio recorded on a smart phone for transcription purposes. All participants have been de-identified and given an alias to protect participant anonymity and confidentiality.

### *6.5.3 Designing the questions*

The design of each specific question on the interview schedule was based on the principles of unsettling research methodology articulated above. To gather insights from participants and acquire more discussion from a small sample, I chose to conduct two interviews, where possible, with each participant. The second interview provided myself and participants opportunity to clarify confusion or expand upon points of interest that were raised in the first interview. My interview schedule for both interviews (see Appendix) included questions that focussed on how participants understood and navigated the tensions between settler and Indigenous sovereigns. These questions enabled me to explore the ways participants position themselves and how they recentre Indigenous sovereignty from within a settler colonial institution and the broader settler society. The key concern with unsettling is to

show how allies understand their relationship to both settler sovereignty and Indigenous sovereignty.

Crafting open-ended questions creates the space for participants to interpret and respond to the questions on their own terms, without the constraints of predetermined answers (Turner III 2010; Warren 2002). The first few questions serve as icebreakers but also gather background information important to flesh out the context of the sites. Thereby, the first questions were significant to gain a deeper understanding of the agreement, how the participant is associated with the agreement, the work conducted, and how the participant positions themselves within settler society (e.g., *Can you briefly explain your involvement with the KNYA/CRT?*). The next questions clarified participants' understandings of sovereignty. This was a crucial step in building the discussion with participants. In my previous research with the Government of South Australia, I had asked participants a question using the word 'sovereignty'. Several participants sought clarification, asking, 'what do you mean by sovereignty?' In this study, I wanted to clearly identify if and how participants understood sovereignty, so early in the interview I asked, *'How would you define sovereignty?'* Interestingly, at these sites where participants work according to an Indigenous nation-building approach, all participants provided in-depth descriptions of sovereignty. Drawing this out early in the interview established a solid foundation for the conversation based on a mutual understanding of the key term that is a central concept in this thesis.

The next set of questions sought to identify persistent problems that occur in unsettled spaces. Here, I used the term ‘Western sovereignty’ as a plain English version of ‘settler sovereignty’ to not restrict participants ideas. As this is an international study, the more generic term ‘Western’ allows for broader, global thinking while still specific to the site where they work. These main questions delve into how participants navigate persistent problems to develop strategies and innovations that uphold Indigenous sovereignty as prescribed by the agreement. One of these questions deliberately probed for participants perspectives on both the enabling and constraining structures of settler sovereignty (*In what ways do you think ‘Western ways’ enable or constrain collaborative work with Indigenous people?*). This was designed to see if participants spoke first to either enabling or constraining aspects and if they spoke to both. Again, the openness of semi-structured interviews and the flexibility with which participants can answer questions, offers insights into whether participants perceive settler sovereignty as an obstacle to their allyship. Towards the end of the interview, one question sought to contextualise the discussion internationally (*How does the international community influence your work?*). The final questions gave participants opportunity to speak to something I had not pre-empted or had not emerged from previous responses to questions (*What more do you believe can be done to support Indigenous sovereignty? Is there anything more you’d like to add?*).

Once transcriptions from the first interviews were complete, participants were sent invitations for the second interview. For those who scheduled a second interview, I searched their transcripts to identify points of discussion that needed elaboration, clarification, and exploration (*In the first interview, you mentioned [insert topic]. Can you tell me more about*

*that?*). In addition, all participants were asked two further questions, one directly to the role of non-Indigenous allies (*What is the role of an ally?*). The other was specifically designed to prompt a conversation about the river at each site as a more-than-human entity, as this was little discussed in the first interviews. As the human relationship with lands, waters, species, and Entities is what differentiates settler and Indigenous sovereignties, it was important to see if participants understand the river at each site as an entity with rights to life (*What are your hopes for the river?*).

All participants were sent the transcription of their interview for respondent validation (Torrance 2012) with more than half returning transcripts with comments and edits.

Clarifying the spelling of Indigenous names and words in the transcripts was an important aspect of this process as both myself and participants recognise that correct spelling and use of Indigenous words is a fundamental matter of respect and acknowledgement. Further, correct spelling and use of words from Indigenous languages makes Indigenous sovereignty visible which unsettles settler sovereignty. With the data set collected and approved by participants, I now step through the process of data analysis.

#### *6.5.4 Analysis and thematic development*

Previous discussions in this thesis have pointed to the propensities of Western epistemology to classify in binaristic and colonising ways, which is carried into Western research traditions. In this section, I step through the overall process of analysis, applying Braun and Clarke's (2012) method of thematic analysis. I needed to organise the data in a way that countered

historical research practices that classified the humanity of Indigenous peoples, mined for Indigenous knowledges, and ignored Indigenous sovereignty. As per discussions in the previous chapter, the practice of allyship must be anchored to Indigenous sovereignty. Further, the epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers outlined in chapter 2 needs to be addressed. Thereby, as discussed above, Martin Booran Mirrabooa's Indigenist methodology of Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing was used to trace the understandings, attitudes, and actions of participants.

First, I searched for the ways participants acknowledge Indigenous sovereignty. As a non-Indigenous researcher, I did not question the authenticity of Indigenous sovereigns, their knowledges, and practices when participants spoke of them. Second, in seeking to unsettle settler sovereignty, I searched for the ways participants critique Western traditions, how they understand settler colonialism, and how they act and behave in unsettling ways. Further, I problematised the coloniser not the colonised, reversing the gaze throughout the analysis stage to unsettle settler sovereignty. Last, I searched for ways participants practiced relationality with Indigenous sovereigns and more-than-human worlds.

To begin coding, I transcribed the interviews myself. While transcribing is an arduous task, I used the process to familiarise myself with the data (Braun & Clarke 2012; Halcomb & Davidson 2006). During transcription I jotted down bullet points noting the broad ideas expressed by participants which built initial codes. After I completed the transcriptions and imported them into NVivo, I conducted systematic, thorough, and inclusive coding of each transcript to 'make sense' of what the complete data set may mean. To do this, I used Braun



and Clarke's (2012) six phase approach to thematic analysis: 1) familiarise yourself with the data; 2) generate initial codes; 3) search for themes; 4) review potential themes; 5) define and name themes and; 6) produce the report.

I explored the data beyond a surface reading during the process of unpacking and repacking that data into initial codes while constructing and reconstructing the names and descriptions of codes. During this process I began to map common themes across the data set and identify the relationships between codes until a coherent and meaningful pattern emerged (Braun & Clarke 2012; O'Leary 2010; Tracy 2010). I began to see a pattern in the codes where participant narratives fell into three themes that I defined as: 1) an awareness of their settler position and their complicity in settler colonialism, 2) ways of behaving that they saw as important to building and maintaining relationships with Indigenous sovereigns, and 3) practical actions they undertook in their work. As such, Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing provides a fitting framework.

As previously emphasised, more-than-human Entities share citizenship with humans under the laws of Indigenous sovereignty. In other words, humans are not the most important being in the world (Martin Booran Mirraboopu 2003). Therefore, it is critical not to overlook more-than-human Entities as the core element threaded through Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. This brought forward conversations on place, landscape, water, animals, ecosystems, and other Entities and allowed me to identify if and how participants discussed more-than-human worlds, and how this may intersect with sovereignty. With

elements of *knowing*, *being*, *doing*, and *more-than-human* in mind, I re-read the transcripts and reviewed the codes, asking:

- 'Is the participant talking about their own understandings, their knowledge, awareness or thinking?' If so, I code to *knowing*.
- 'Is the participant talking about an individual way of behaving or a personal quality?' If so, I code to *being*.
- 'Is the participant talking about an act?' If so, I code to *doing*.
- Is the participant talking about human relationships with more-than-human Entities? If so, I coded to *more-than-human*.

From here, I played with the matrices function in NVivo to build tables and compare relationships between these four themes. I cross-tabulated themes and codes to identify connection points between themes, seeking a web of connections rather than applying a binaristic classification based on notions of either/or. The unsettling insights from participants are presented the following three chapters, titled knowing, being, and doing respectively.

## 6.6 Conclusion

For non-Indigenous researchers, like myself, the considerations for undertaking decolonising research are broad. Overall, in this chapter I have illustrated the ways in which non-Indigenous researchers need to exercise caution in the methodology they choose and practice allyship throughout the research process. I have explained the usefulness of

applying unsettling methodologies to this thesis and extended current insights on unsettling methodologies by further problematising the settler ontology of land and nature. Further, following the interdisciplinary trend across the physical and social sciences assist the thesis to understand how claims about nature operate as mechanisms of colonial power.

Moreover, Martin Booran Mirraboopu's framework of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, offers a scaffold for the analysis of participant narratives. The strategies and innovations identified from participant narratives are presented in the next three chapters - one of each is dedicated to reporting findings of how participants adjust to Indigenous ways of knowing, being and doing. The next chapter turns first to explain how participants adjust to Indigenous ways of knowing and recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature by knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty.

## 7 Knowing

In this and the following two chapters, I present the analysis of participant narratives from the KNYA and CRT sites according to my research question, *what are the innovations and strategies that non-Indigenous professionals employ to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements?* To address the aims of this thesis, I explore how participants counter the privileging of settler sovereign decision making and challenge colonial paradigms. Specifically, this analysis will critically examine how participants recentre the agency of Indigenous peoples, work towards the transformations in NRM sought by Indigenous sovereigns and explore how they understand their role as allies. Applying the guiding conceptual framework described in the previous chapter, each chapter is guided by one aspect of Martin Booran Mirrabooa's framework, Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. As such, this chapter is an exploration of knowing. To reiterate, Indigenous ways of knowing extend beyond 'facts' to include establishing what is known through the laws of Indigenous sovereignty. This includes understanding the laws of Indigenous sovereignty, the concept of relationality, and the contexts in which participants come to understand themselves to be learners and teachers.

Through participant narratives, I argue that knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty is a central strategy that participants employ to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements, and in doing so, participants employ strategies that unsettle epistemological barriers by adjusting to Indigenous ways of knowing. Here, I clarify that participants do not adopt or appropriate Indigenous ways of knowing, but they build

understandings of how Indigenous sovereignty operates, valuing Indigenous knowledges and knowledge systems, and subsequently disrupting settler logics and colonial paradigms. Much of the unsettling work exemplified by participants centres on making the structural injustice established by settler colonialism visible as well as making Indigenous sovereignty obvious. The analysis of participant narratives reveals that knowing the overlay of settle and Indigenous sovereignty includes three smaller steps: 1) possess in-depth knowledge of how the structures of settler sovereignty creates structural injustice; 2) unsettle knowledge hierarchies that exclude Indigenous sovereigns; and 3) unsettle the settler ontology of land.

In both the CRT and KNYA sites, analysis of interviews suggests that participants understand settler colonialism as an ongoing process premised upon the elimination of Indigenous sovereigns and the extraction of resources from ancestral lands, as defined by Wolfe, P (1999, 2006). Participants speak of their complicity in the violence inflicted upon Indigenous sovereigns and their lands, and express responsibility to address these harms. Participants also provide examples of adhering to their roles and responsibilities prescribed by Indigenous sovereignty in general, as well as specificities to Indigenous communities whom they work with. As such, their collective stories support the insights from the unsettling allyship literature in Chapter 4 where established strategies include examining binarism, locating oneself within settler colonisation, and moving from confessing privilege to taking action. Participant narratives occur in the context of NRM and therefore their insights address the limitations identified in the NRM literature in Chapter 3 that non-Indigenous professionals have little understanding of either settler colonisation or Indigenous sovereignty. This is important considering a key epistemological barrier to successful co-

management outcomes is to neglect historic and ongoing colonial violence over a preference for technocracy and a narrow focus on 'environmental' issues.

However, as I will show, participant narratives extend beyond the current literature because they discuss what they think about the operation of settler sovereignty and reveal how they strategise to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. A key factor identified in the analysis lies with how participants understand Indigenous ways of knowing. Importantly, the analysis provides qualitative data that supports the call by Davis et al. (2022) and Hiller (2017) for studies on non-Indigenous allyship to move away from activist frontlines and instead investigate the places that allies live and call home. The findings also demonstrates in practice Steinman's (2020) theory on a quotidian unsettling agency for the practice of allyship where investigation examines the everyday places where allies work and live.

In this chapter, I start by revealing how participants understand the operation of settler colonial structures that maintains structural injustice for Indigenous sovereigns. Next, I draw on participant narratives that challenge normative settler practices based upon knowledge and decisions-making hierarchies that exclude Indigenous sovereigns. Last, I provide examples of how participants think through the settler relationship to land and explore ways to build their own capacity for ontological pluralism.

Before moving into the analysis, I shall briefly return to terminology (also see Glossary).

Across both sites participants use different terminology to name Indigenous sovereigns.

Across the CRT site participants - Amanda, Melanie, Oliver, Stewart, Joel, and Leona - use the terms Aboriginal or Indigenous peoples, as well as First Nations (Canada), and tribes/tribal members (US). The KNYA site pertains to Ngarrindjeri (South Australia), and participants - Sharlene, Erin, Ryan, Drew, David, and Harry - use the terms Indigenous, Aboriginal and Black/Blak peoples, Nunga's, blackfella's and whitefella's, First Nations and Traditional Owners.

### *7.1 Unsettling structural injustice: knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty*

In Chapter 3, I concluded that participants in studies on non-Indigenous perspectives in NRM have little understanding of either settler colonialism or Indigenous sovereignty. Ignoring the forces of settler colonisation in NRM is a key barrier to successful co-management arrangements, as noted by several scholars (McGregor 2021; Muller 2012; Reid et al. 2021; Ross et al. 2016; Varghese & Crawford 2021). Here, the insights from the allyship literature provide a useful tool, because identifying where one is located within social structures is a critical first step towards solidarity efforts (Bishop 2002; Brown & Ostrove 2013; Myers, KA, Lindberg & Nied 2014; Nixon 2019; Pease 2010). For non-Indigenous allies, this requires locating oneself within the structures of both settler and Indigenous sovereignty (Davis et al. 2022; Hiller 2017). However, one cannot situate themselves within structures that are normalised through racialised structures – we must know what the structures are to be able to locate ourselves within them. To lay the foundations of this chapter, I demonstrate that the starting point for unsettling epistemological barriers is to possess in-depth knowledge of

how the structures of settler sovereignty creates structural injustice. As such, this section argues that knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty is a primary strategy that participants employ to unsettle epistemological barriers and recentre Indigenous sovereignty. My analysis of participant narratives supports the allyship literature, however, in the context of NRM it offers much needed insights on navigating epistemological barriers in collaborative arrangements.

To substantiate the importance of knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty, seen in participant narratives, I draw on Iris Marion Young's (2011) arguments on structural inequality. Young (2011) argues that structural injustice occurs when social processes dominate or deprive one group of people while issuing benefits to another through seemingly innocuous everyday actions. This also aligns with the call put forth by Steinman (2020) for a quotidian unsettling agency, discussed in Chapter 4. First, I show that participants identify that they are implicated in the colonial project and therefore responsible for addressing colonial harms. Second, participant narratives reveal in-depth understandings of how settler culture and policy maintain structural injustice. This leads to the third point on understanding the economic interests of settler sovereigns. Last, I discuss participant responses on how 'Western ways' enable collaborative work where participants revisit the fundamental principles of Western law, social justice, and democracy. As such, participants narratives reveal the intellectual work undertaken to establish what is known through Indigenous law as well as understandings that go beyond 'facts.'



### 7.1.1 Settler complicity: “everybody is implicated”

The following participant reflections are foundational building blocks underpinning the practice of allyship in NRM that illustrate participants knowing of how settler sovereignty operates is a primary strategy for navigating epistemological barriers and recentring Indigenous sovereignty. Moreover, participants locate themselves within colonial structures through the consistent use the possessive pronouns “we” and “our.” This is exemplified by Melanie (CRT) who locates herself within a culture of colonial domination when she states:

*As the dominant culture we’re so used to being in that position of power ... coming in with a very independent mentality. You don’t take no for an answer, and you go get what you want.*

Similarly, Amanda (CRT) locates herself within historic legal documents by using the word “we” when discussing the language in legal documents:

*It was the conqueror, and we will take what we want and those of you who were already living here were savages, and our court cases say things like that from the 1800s.*

In Amanda (CRT) and Melanie’s (CRT) excerpts, we can see an awareness ‘white possessive logics’ (Moreton-Robinson 2015). Both Amanda (CRT) and Melanie (CRT) describe the logic of possession – to “take what we want” upon the assumption of settler superiority. In relation to identifying one’s complicity in settler colonialism, Drew (KNYA) explicitly states:

*The fundamental thing I learnt right from the get-go is that everybody is implicated in the sort of coloniser-racist project.*

Drew (KNYA) connects the need for non-Indigenous people to first think about what they are doing in the space. In Drew's quote below, responsibility is explicitly placed on settlers, not only in the context of improving collaborative work but with the shaping of the Australian nation:

*There's a lot of inappropriate, unskilful sorts of things going on by whitefellas who maybe have good intentions but in the end it's just bloody awful ... So, you got to have more than good intentions in this space. One of the things that I worked out a few years ago was actually the problem is the whitefella's, so whitefellas need to be taking responsibility for what whitefella's should be doing differently, not telling blackfella's what to do or speaking on behalf of blackfella's. So, I've sort of clarified in my own mind that racism in the country is a problem and that it's a whitefella problem, so I can't see how we can be advancing as a nation on a whole range of fronts until whitefella's do something about that. That's basically my bottom line.*

In the reflection above, Drew (KNYA) exemplifies the cognitive work that underpins the practice of allyship with the recognition of structural injustice. Drew (KNYA) traces a clear path from the actions of individuals to the structures of the settler state, with the proposition that if "*whitefella's do things differently*" then there will be an improvement in relationships which leads to "*advancing as a nation on a whole range of fronts.*" This is important because the role of non-Indigenous people is rarely discussed in collaborative arrangements, nor are connections made to how the role of non-Indigenous people is influenced by, and in turn influences, broader social structures. Young (2011, p. 63) emphasises the problematics of how structural norms create injustice when "masses of

individuals believe they are following the rules, minding their own business, and trying to accomplish their legitimate goals.” This is deeply problematic in NRM when settler policy dictates the rules that non-Indigenous professionals follow. Understanding the unintended consequence of the normative everyday actions of individuals and institutions is critical for addressing structural injustice. Thereby, awareness of how colonial settler structures create structural injustice, and how all settlers are complicit in maintaining the colonial norms of settler society, are foundational strategies that unsettles epistemological barriers for the practice of allyship that follows an Indigenous nation-building approach.

### *7.1.2 Sovereignty: “understand how it works”*

In this section, participants show it is important to understand how settler sovereignty operates and further substantiate my argument that knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty unsettles epistemological barriers and recentres Indigenous sovereignty. Drew (KNYA) clearly articulates the attempted elimination of Indigenous sovereigns through contemporary government policy that seeks to disconnect Indigenous sovereigns from ancestral lands:

*You can see all the policies they’ve got in play, because if a nation can completely undermine Indigenous connection to Country, then Aboriginality starts to collapse and then of course you’ve won. The colonising project’s over.*

In the quote above, Drew (KNYA) can 'see' the forces of settler colonisation, particularly the elimination of Indigenous sovereigns, embedded in settler policy. In terms of allyship in NRM, Drew (KNYA) makes the everyday operation of an array of settler policies visible in the context of the colonising project. Likewise, when responding to the interview question to define sovereignty, Ryan's reflection below indicates a process of moving from ignorance to awareness when the everyday operation of sovereignty becomes visible:

*I think if you become aware of it and you understand how it works, you know, once you see it you can't tear yourself away and you can't be ignorant about sovereignty and how it works.*

Ryan (KNYA) compares his understanding of how sovereignty operates against the perspective of settlers for whom the everyday forces of sovereignty are normative and invisible. Ryan (KNYA) states:

*If you're never exposed to it and you never have to think about it, like most Western people do, you don't even understand it as a thing, like what does it mean as a word, how does it figure out in day to day? I think most people would just see it as how government works, just the way people might have complaints, like Western culture's got complaints about how the government wields its sovereign authority, or The Crown does. I still don't know the difference between The Crown and the government and how that murky space works because everybody, I think most people here in [South Australia] would go 'phht, The Crown and the Queen and all that sort of stuff: what does that have to do [with it]?''*

Although Ryan (KNYA) states that he remains unclear on “the murky space” between “The Crown” and the Australian government, he explains:

*There’s this central body or part of government that is there to protect the rights of The Crown at any cost.*

For this reason, Ryan (KNYA) suggests that moves towards reconciliation or negotiating agreements will fail because settler decision making will ultimately defer to the self-preserving interests of The Crown:

*You might have all these little arms of government like wanting to reconcile with Aboriginal people, you know, have amazing treaty negotiating processes. But when it comes back to The Crown where that authority, and that authority that’s vested in the ministers and created by the different acts of legislation ... so you have this part of government that fights tooth and nail to limit any sort of opportunity or interests for Native Title and then government on the other hand going ‘Ahh Closing the Gap, Reconciliation’, and it’s like you guys aren’t talking to each other, are you? Because you’re really trying to nail them here but you’re wondering why it’s not working over here.*

In this reflection, the importance of understanding how settler sovereignty operates through legislation, policy, and ministerial officials is evident. Not only does Ryan (KNYA) point to the contradictory nature of settler sovereigns’ relationship with Indigenous sovereigns, but in his words the source of structural injustice, the vested interests of the Crown, is evident despite the discourse of reconciliation. This in-depth understanding of how settler sovereignty

operates is central to knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty as a foundational strategy for engaging with Indigenous nation building in NRM.

As Young (2011) argues individual people and policies may not be explicitly unfair however the collective action of many individuals and policies produces structural injustice, which leaves no single person or policy to blame for the moral wrongs that are produced. This can be seen in Sharlene's quote below. When defining the meaning of sovereignty, Sharlene (KNYA) refers to how colonial structures mask the immorality of stealing land belonging to someone else, stating:

*I think that obviously colonialism created legal structures that came over the top of possibly the moral aspect of sovereignty that I see as being belonging to Traditional Owners.*

In using the words “*came over the top*”, Sharlene (KNYA) demonstrates a clear understanding of the domination of settler sovereignty over Indigenous sovereignty through the creation of settler laws that produce unfair circumstances. Similarly, David (KNYA) uses the term “*come in over the top*” when defining sovereignty, saying:

*What we see here in Australia is that there are Nations here, which is how I see Aboriginal groupings of people, Nations here who have had another nation come in over the top of them.*

When defining sovereignty, David (KNYA) explains how global frameworks of nation-states are underpinned by the Western concept of sovereignty:

*I think there's an international legal position in relation to well defined country-to-country idea of sovereignty and what we have, we have a situation where some people wish to impose that idea onto an intra-national situation and say 'oh, there's no other country.'*

The international framework of nation states is an imposition on Indigenous frameworks of nationhood discussed at length by Watson (2015) in *Aboriginal peoples, colonialism and international law: raw law*. Watson highlights the ongoing refusal of the United Nations to acknowledge Indigenous sovereigns as independent nations. Rather, international frameworks bind Indigenous sovereigns to the authority of the colonising settler state. David (KNYA) reveals an understanding of the nuanced layers of power that denies Indigenous sovereignty which is important to knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty. Within the binds of international frameworks of sovereignty, David (KNYA) notes how the settler nation state further denies Indigenous sovereignty:

*Then there's power interactions as well, so there's a position that's been taken by the state, or the Australian government, or the imposition by English systems into Australia, which deny power to whoever is here.*

Thereby, David (KNYA) has identified two layers of power in relation to sovereignty: international and national frameworks that conspire to deny Indigenous frameworks of nationhood and international relations. In Chapter 2, I noted that the Letters Patent issued by the British Crown to establish the colonies of South Australia and Canada stated that Indigenous sovereigns and their descendants were in possession of rights to the "actual occupation or enjoyment" of their lands. In the quote below, David (KNYA) raises the Letters

Patent to exemplify the intentions of the document to uphold the Western legal principle of 'just settlement.' David (KNYA) states:

*What we have with the Letters Patent is we have the country that's colonising or taking over a space actually saying, 'oh we do recognise there's someone there, we do recognise they have rights, we do recognise we are required to respect those rights and you're not to do anything that affects that position'. So, what's the law doing there? And we have the King exercising the power. So, the legislature can exercise the power, or the King can exercise the power, so we see with the Letters Patent, which the King usually exercises power to create, we see there being an understanding by the King, or at least the Colonial Office for the King, in relation to there being a need to sort something out here ... If you examine those words, well what's the concept here that's driving this? It's the idea of just settlement and so that concept is as important today as it was in 1836. And so, the drivers in relation to asking for treaty to be negotiated now with Aboriginal communities is driven on that notion of the idea of just settlement coming out of the original founding documents of the state.*

David's discussion above demonstrates the importance of identifying how colonial structures function to create opportunities to hold the state accountable to its own legal principles – in this case, the idea of 'just settlement.' Holding the state to account through historic legal documents is not a new idea, but is a well-used tactic by Indigenous sovereigns in defending inherent rights (Hemming & Rigney 2008). What is significant for this thesis is showcasing the perspectives of non-Indigenous people and how they think through the complex



implications of sovereignty in the context of collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature. This stands in stark contrast to studies discussed in Chapter 3, such as the study by Walker et al. (2021) that reported non-Indigenous participants took a 'business-as-usual approach,' and claimed that reconciliation was 'common sense' and about 'being nice.' Moreover, the studies on non-Indigenous perspectives in NRM highlighted how non-Indigenous people try to fix the perceived inadequacies of Indigenous sovereigns – a key epistemological barrier. Contrastingly, participants across the KNYA and CRT sites problematise settler sovereignty and work towards addressing the epistemological barriers that underpin structural injustice. These insights step out the primary strategy for recentring Indigenous sovereignty by knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty and understanding how the mechanisms of settler sovereignty operate.

### *7.1.3 Power: "it's all about the profits"*

In addition to the above discussion on the importance of understanding how settler sovereign power operates, participants provide in-depth descriptions on how the mechanisms of settler sovereignty are geared towards hoarding profits while denying economic justice for Indigenous sovereigns. Understanding the political and economic power generated off profits from capitalist developments is an essential element that unsettles epistemological barriers in collaborative arrangements. Thereby, participant narratives in this section, further support my argument that knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty is a key strategy that recentres Indigenous sovereignty. Indeed, when accounting for structural injustice, understanding how the settler forces of extraction

controls both settler and Indigenous economies is integral to knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty, which makes epistemological barriers visible.

NRM issues at both sites in this study originated out of capitalist development, with the development of the Goolwa Wharf Precinct at the heart of the KNYA, and the CRT centred on the development of the Columbia River to build a series of dams for hydroelectricity. Throughout their interviews, participants name the West as “pro-development”, “extractive” and “exploitative.” As critiqued by Indigenous scholars (Alfred 2009; Coulthard 2014; Langton 2010) in Chapter 2, many participants demonstrate an understanding of how settler sovereignty is underpinned by an economic system that hoards profits while denying Indigenous communities adequate living conditions. As Ryan (KNYA) states in his discussion on sovereignty:

*It is definitely about money and the ability for The Crown to maintain control over the economics of it.*

Likewise, all CRT participants place emphasis on the Columbia River as a rich extractive resource for capitalist endeavours that results in poor economic outcomes for Indigenous sovereigns. The excerpt from Melanie (CRT) below is explicit:

*That whole Columbia River Basin is just one big warmed up managed swimming pool for power electricity, hydro power ostensibly for flood control, but really, it's for hydro control, and control of people and dollars.*

Like Melanie (CRT) and others, Stewart's discussion reflects the problematics of the 'resources curse,' discussed in Chapter 2, where settler sovereigns profit off resource rich stolen lands, removing control of independent economies for Indigenous sovereigns. In addition, the dominant settler discourse then blames Indigenous peoples for the circumstances they experience. Instead, Stewart's narrative below clearly positions settler sovereigns as responsible for creating the conditions in which Indigenous people must live. Stewart (CRT) identifies that on an international platform in the United Nations, Canada sidesteps acknowledgement and accountability for economic deprivation to First Nations, Inuit and Metis communities. Further, Stewart (CRT) uses the word 'we' to locate himself as part of a structure that inflicts political, social, and economic injustices onto Indigenous sovereigns:

*We think that we're something [special] but we're right in there. South African's used to - in the UN whenever Canada got sanctimonious [about apartheid] - they'd say 'well here's a photo of your northern villages. Want to talk about it?' And the answer was, 'no we don't.'*

Again, this in-depth knowledge of how colonial paradigms operate is central to knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty as a strategy to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. This excerpt also speaks to Moreton-Robinson's (2015) argument that settler nation states deploy a veil of innocence, often actioned through silence, which is integral to the maintenance of 'white possessive logics.' Stewart (CRT) also connects the influence of the settler economic system upon collaborative relationships. His sentiment reveals a skepticism common amongst CRT participants that *A Sacred Responsibility* will not be adopted

in the modernising of the CRT, because of the implications for settler sovereigns regarding the redistribution of profits and the loss of political power. Stewart (CRT) states:

*Canada gets between up to three-hundred million dollars a year [from the US] depending on the price of power... Of course, the governments are reluctant to cut the First Nations in on that because again it would be a horrific precedent that, in their view, it would be a horrific precedent, so we'll see.*

Not only do participants like Stewart (CRT), Melanie (CRT) and Ryan (KNYA) identify how settler sovereignty is premised upon accumulating wealth, upon which the denial of Indigenous sovereignty is premised, but participants identify the relationship between capitalist economies and climate collapse. Melanie (CRT) provides a clear example in the excerpt below, identifying the connections between NRM, the settler forces of extraction, and how this impacts collaborative work with Indigenous sovereigns:

*You know, we are starting with that basic understanding. The Western industrial complex is to extract, it is an extractive resource mentality that views the world as one big rock to come into and use and commodify, these are its most basic capitalist methodology, that theory, you know the whole view of the world is that it is there for the taking and I think as a political ecologist I look at that and I see and understand that at the rate of consumption and the rate of extracted resource development, at the rate of polluting and extracting from the environment, we only think in terms of the immediate gratification and instantaneous profits and going from first*

*quarter to second quarter and so it is very much an individual society based on greed rather than need ... so I see a huge, ahh [pause] collision, a colliding of views and philosophies when I'm attending conferences and impending negotiations, review boards and webinars and teams. When I view that, it is culpable to see, especially at the higher echelons of government trying to negotiate with the sovereigns and the tribes as we call them in the United States ... [that] power structure will continue to serve the non-Indigenous communities and infrastructures only, at the expense of the Indigenous community and their resources.*

As indicted in chapter 4, current NRM literature identifies an urgent need for non-Indigenous professionals to contextualise collaborative work within the binds of colonial paradigms – and in this regard, Melanie's interrogation of settler ontology is exemplary. Such nuanced insights connect the overarching power of settler sovereigns to the denial of Indigenous sovereignty and control of profits generated off Indigenous lands. Participants reveal a level of understanding on structural injustice not previously seen from non-Indigenous perspectives in studies on collaborative arrangements. This attention to the complex ways that historic and ongoing colonisation operate is a primary strategy that unsettles epistemological barriers, underpinned by knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty.

#### *7.1.4 Social justice principles and democracy: searching for strengths in settler culture*

In the above narratives, participants easily identify the constraints of settler sovereignty on collaborative arrangements by understanding the mechanisms of settler sovereignty and the ways that structural injustice is created through the colonial project. Additionally, much work has theorised the constraints imposed upon Indigenous self-determination through colonial paradigms. The Western positioning of Western knowledges, particularly science, as culture neutral and value free is problematic and the operation of the knowledge/culture binary serves as a stubborn epistemological barrier. However, I was interested to see if participants could identify strengths in their own culture that aids collaborative efforts. I asked participants the question, “In what ways do you think ‘Western ways’ enable or constrain collaborative work with Indigenous people?” Participant examples of the constraining impact of settler colonisation are prominent throughout this thesis, however, identifying ways that ‘Western culture’ enables collaborative work proved to be a more challenging question for participants. This is evident in the quote below by Joel (CRT):

*Let me think about this, in terms of how does the Western culture enable?*

*I’m not sure I know that one. I’m probably better at how it constrains, it seems to me.*

Similarly, Drew (KNYA) begins with uncertainty, taking time to pause and consider his response, saying:

*I don’t know. That’s a complicated question, isn’t it? [pause] I would be locked up in a mental institution if I hadn’t listened to certain Western music.*

*Most of my social justice ideas I get from Western philosophy. So, there's obviously very powerful social justice resources inside of Western cultural practice. Ok. So, I think probably some parts of Western cultural practices are really open to learning from the other - I think I probably get that from Western culture - so being open to other cultures is not sort of a foreign idea to Western cultural practice. We're all children of the Western Enlightenment and at some point, then one needs to be putting one's hand up for saying that was a very good thing. But obviously with that comes a lot of other things which are truly and utterly appalling. So, it's mixed, isn't it? Being a subject of Western culture.*

In the quote above, Drew (KNYA) provides a complex response to identifying enabling factors: turning first to his own self-care by listening to music; then to social justice theory and a sense of openness to learning from peoples who have historically been classified as other; and the evolution of social justice principles through Western philosophy. Drew (KNYA) finishes his response with “*the utterly appalling*” consequences of Enlightenment thought while simultaneously identifying as a beneficiary of Western culture. Likewise, David (KNYA) turns to the basic principles of democratic theory, stating:

*the universal rights stuff that emanates through Western cultures - notwithstanding everything we've talked about - but they have the power to create greater equality.*

When considering possible enabling factors, both Drew (KNYA) and David (KNYA) take pause to think and include caveats to suggested possibilities. This is also seen in Leona's response

where she pauses and foregrounds her response with ‘in theory’ and ‘attempts.’ Leona (CRT), states:

*Well let me just try to be holistic here [pause]. Well, I think that Western democracy, at least in theory, makes attempts to, democracy has an open quality to it, it has an open-mindedness to it, and there is [pause] there is a grass roots system in democracy and so I think this is where there can be some meeting place in democracy. When I do talks to grass roots organisations, people who are not in government, who are just citizens, are immediately, generally speaking, once they have the information they’re immediately connected to the Indigenous view. Because they’re not constrained by policy by bureaucratic regulation, by the system of governance that is hierarchical, democracy has the ability to speak to people directly, so in that way I think it’s enabling.*

While Drew (KNYA), Joel (CRT), David (KNYA), and Leona (CRT) contemplate the possibilities found in Western law and democracy, Harry (KNYA) provides an example of democratic rights being actioned to challenge and change racist, colonial legislation. Here, knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty, and navigating both the constraining and enabling factors of settler frameworks is integral to the formation of Harry’s allyship.

Harry (KNYA) explained to me that he was driven towards promoting and protecting Aboriginal rights since a family incident occurred during his childhood. Harry (KNYA) grew up



on Ngarrindjeri Ruwe and he recalls that half the students at school were Ngarrindjeri, stating:

*I learnt most of the [Ngarrindjeri] language - you had to when you were in the school yard or else things would get a bit hectic for you.*

Harry could speak Ngarrindjeri with his school friends and his family lived next door to a Ngarrindjeri family. Harry (KNYA) explains that:

*Under the [SA] Police Act, Aboriginal people cannot consort with white people unless they have a letter to say that they are exempt from the Act. They call it the Dog Act, the Dog Registration Act.*

Here, Harry's narrative shows an awareness of state sanctioned racism, dehumanisation, and regulation of Aboriginal lives. As a child, Harry was also aware of an incident where a family member gave their Ngarrindjeri neighbour a lift to the shops. When a Police Officer saw them together, their Ngarrindjeri neighbour was arrested for 'consorting'. Harry remembers how his family member and their neighbour contested the arrest. Harry (KNYA) recalls:

*The action that took place after that caused the Police Act to be altered and that part of the Police Act was deleted and both [my neighbour] and my brother got an apology from the Police Commissioner and also from the Governor, the State Governor at the time. And this is back in 1957 and it was pretty profound. But it struck a chord in both our families that there was something wrong with the whole concept of how Aboriginal people can be treated like that.*

Harry's narrative highlights the racism in colonial structures but also indicates a confidence in the ability to change unfair structures based upon his childhood experiences. Harry (KNYA) provides a rare example of the potential for transforming unfair and unjust colonial structures when both the constraining and enabling factors are understood. Moreover, it shows that unsettling structural injustice comes through an awareness of how settler and Indigenous sovereignty intersect. Importantly, the nuanced and complex mechanisms of settle coloniality can be adjusted.

In summary, this section has illustrated how participants make visible the core of colonial structures underpinned by settler sovereignty. In-depth understanding of how colonial mechanisms, including capitalist hoarding of profits, maintaining settler power, and settler complicity, are evident in participant narratives. In the next section, I map out the strategies that participants employ in relation to bi-directional knowledge sharing between settlers and Indigenous sovereigns.

## *7.2 Unsettling knowledge hierarchies: challenging everyday exclusionary practices*

In this section, I illustrate how participants grapple with the boundaries of both settler and Indigenous systems of knowing, that contributes to some moderation of epistemological barriers. Unsettling knowledge hierarchies is a corresponding strategy that participants employ to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. Participants reveal how they challenge everyday exclusionary practices in the workplace and unsettle epistemological barriers by adjusting to

Indigenous ways of knowing. As argued by Wolfe, P (1999), settler colonisation is a two-fold project centred on elimination and extraction. In NRM, elimination of Indigenous sovereigns occurs through 'including' and assimilating Indigenous knowledges into dominant settler norms. Participants challenge the force of elimination by interrupting exclusionary practices around decision making based upon knowledge hierarchies. Through participant narratives, we see the intellectual work that underpins the practice of allyship in NRM as participants engage in exchanges of information. In these open exchanges, teaching and learning occurs both ways between settlers and Indigenous sovereigns.

Because participant interviews are centred on their work, I address the gap identified by Steinman (2020) in Chapter 4, who argues that studies on non-Indigenous allyship need to move away from activist frontlines and into the offices and corridors of settler institutions. Four specific strategies emerge from participant narratives that illustrate how participants unsettle settler knowledge hierarchies and epistemological barriers in collaborative arrangements. First, is to recognise that Western culture and science are not 'normal' but are socially constructed. Second, they aim to protect Indigenous knowledges from the forces of elimination and extraction. Third, they offer Indigenous sovereigns' information on the intentions of settler sovereigns along with context specific legal and scientific information on environmental issues and a variety of pathways forward. Forth, is the importance of the practice of standing back from the autonomy of Indigenous decision making. These strategies are particularly explicit in participant narratives as they explain how the KNYA and the Universities Consortium came into being.

### 7.2.1 *Challenging the West as culturally neutral*

The most fundamental of exclusionary practices that emerged from the Enlightenment is the ranking of human differences and the construction of European culture as superior.

Centuries of colonial discourse continues to position the West not only as superior but representative of normal and standard humanness, rendering all others inferior (Hall 1992; Said 1978). As noted throughout earlier chapters, the European construction of humanness lies at the heart of epistemological barriers in NRM.

In Drew (KNYA) and Ryan's narratives, they unsettle the notion that the West is normal and does not have a culture – a construct that reinforces the placement of settler knowledge systems on the dominant side of the knowledge/culture binary. Through the in-depth awareness of how settler and Indigenous sovereignty intersect, Drew (KNYA) makes visible the normalised settler perception that they are culture-neutral. Drew (KNYA) recalls an example from a recent teaching experience with a class of students from diverse backgrounds, stating that:

*The white kids quite often say they haven't got a culture. It's all the others that have got cultures.*

Drew (KNYA) is familiar with trends in anthropology and its colonising habits that have contributed to positioning Europeans as normal and standard. Drew (KNYA) points to how this idea continues to be evident in today's settler culture, however he notes a recent shift in anthropology:

*One of the things that's happened about anthropology in the last twenty or thirty years is, how do they put it, anthropology's come home, so anthropology now studies the sort of home countries. Given that culture is the phenomena that anthropology studies then of course the West has a culture. It's nonsense to think it doesn't.*

Similarly, Ryan (KNYA) emphasises the importance for non-Indigenous people to understand their own culture in collaborative work. Ryan spends some time making the point that Western knowledge construction is cultural and that settler scientists need to understand that science is socially constructed and not the only truth. Here, I return to two key points raised in Chapter 3. First is McGregor's (2021) argument that attempts to include Indigenous knowledges into Western frameworks only results in the extraction and assimilation of Indigenous knowledges and the exclusion of Indigenous peoples, outlined previously. Second is the argument by Ross et al. (2016) that a key epistemological barrier to collaborative arrangements is based in exclusionary practices around knowledge: where ongoing and historical forces privilege Western knowledges and denigrates other forms of knowledge. In the quote below, Ryan (KNYA) gives life to the arguments made by McGregor (2021) and Ross et al. (2016) when speaking candidly about the way government environmental management plans attempt to 'include' Indigenous knowledges into normative settler frameworks. Here, Ryan (KNYA) discusses the exclusionary practices around knowledge that are normalised in settler institutions and speaks back to the perception of Indigenous knowledges as 'cultural' anecdotes, myths, and legends. In doing so, Ryan (KNYA) makes these epistemological barriers visible:

*In terms of science, this department here relies quite heavily on a Western scientific approach to having an evidence base and making decisions based from that, and there's a lot of power that sits within science and its ability to act as a neutral, factual, objective area ... and so there's a really strong power base within the department around science, so for sciencey people to understand that their stuff is culturally based as well, so science is a cultural construction just in the same way that Aboriginal and Indigenous knowledges are a cultural construction as well. You know, I'm not trying to say one is better than the other, they've both got their benefits and limitations, but it's about respecting people's world views and knowledge bases...*

*Interviewer: Are you saying that science constrains collaborative work?*

*Ryan (KNYA): It can, particularly if it's seen as 'the way' of understanding things because there is a tendency to see Indigenous knowledges as subjective and cultural and that it's a curiosity, it's like a little artefact that's nice to understand ... so it's not part of the research project, or a part of science. It plays out in our management plans where in a lot of cases, Aboriginal history and culture will be put, there'll be a paragraph or a chapter on Aboriginal culture whereas the NRM science knowledge and understanding of things is just the way it is, it's just how the world works, it's just the fact. This stuff [Indigenous knowledge] is different, it's someone else's understanding, so I think that impacts on the relationship because*

*from a starting point we're seen as better and they're inferior, this is the main game and this is something you do around the edges, in terms of science and research, management planning, and in some cases because it's not understood and because white people have a tendency to not see their own culture and they see it as just the way that it is.*

Here, Ryan (KNYA) shows in practice how a hierarchical view of knowledge directly contributes to othering and continued division over coexistence, as argued by Reid et al. (2021) in Chapter 3. Ryan (KNYA) continues:

There's a lot of talk within different areas, like research is one, incorporating Aboriginal cultural knowledge or traditional ecological knowledge into our work, yeah, it's such a throw away comment because the only people who can do that are the Aboriginal knowledge holders. That knowledge doesn't work, it may work in some situations but probably works less effectively if you just rip it out of an Indigenous knowledge system and plonk it into a Western science system.

Ryan's discussion on government management plans illustrates arguments on structural injustice put forth by Iris Marion Young (2011). Rather than imagining that individuals are responsible for directly constraining the agency of other individuals, Young (2011) explains that social structures function in indirect and cumulative ways that blocks possibilities. Addressing structural injustice must be underpinned by understanding how the seemingly innocuous and routine actions we engage in everyday reinforces broader social structures that in turn shapes personal experiences. Identifying the constraint created through the

collective, normalised actions of individuals, Young (2011) argues, is a difficult task. In the discussion above, however, Ryan (KNYA) shows in-depth understanding on the significance and consequences of settler knowledge hierarchies and demonstrates a broad view of how structures create epistemological barriers by shaping power relationships between Indigenous sovereigns and individual settler scientists. In this way, Ryan (KNYA) unsettles epistemological barriers and adjusts to Indigenous ways being, by valuing Indigenous knowledges.

### *7.2.2 Protecting Indigenous knowledges: “I can’t tell you”*

Another example of unsettling knowledge hierarchies is found in Harry’s reflections. Here, Harry (KNYA) shows how valuing Indigenous knowledges is a powerful step to recentre Indigenous sovereignty and adjust to Indigenous ways of knowing. Harry (KNYA) does not verbally articulate notions of inferior and superior knowledges as Ryan (KNYA) did, but the following example demonstrates resistance to normative settler paradigms that assumes authority over Indigenous knowledges.

In 1992, Harry (KNYA) recounts his experiences when the Kumerangk/Hindmarsh Island issue first appeared. At the time, the 1988 Aboriginal Heritage Act (Government of South Australia 1988) mandated that development applications must meet the legislative requirements to consult with Aboriginal peoples. In Harry’s quote below, we see the operation of ‘white possessive logics’ during the initial steps of development. By following the laws of



Ngarrindjeri sovereignty, not settler sovereignty, Harry (KNYA) refuses to hand over Ngarrindjeri knowledges. Harry (KNYA) recalls:

*[The developers] came down to look at the place where they could set up their camp for their workers to build the bridge and the council had a look at it and said you better go up and see [Harry] because he knows the Aboriginal people pretty well and he might be able to tell you where and where you can't build. And then they came up to see me and I said, 'well I can't point those out to you.' So, what I said to [them] was that 'I can't tell you, but I am prepared to contact ... the Rupelli of the Aboriginal Tendi, or put it in more of white language, he was the Chairman of the Heritage Committee. The Rupelli said, 'well thank you, you hold your stance on that, you've been trusted with that information on that over the years from Elders we'll back you with that. We'll come over and talk' ... And they did. And that was the beginning of the lead up to KNYA.*

In the above quote, Harry interrupts colonial processes that ignores Indigenous sovereignty. By following Ngarrindjeri law and knowing the protocols around who has authority to speak and/or pass on knowledge, Harry (KNYA) actively intervenes to shift the focus of power from settler government to Ngarrindjeri. Harry (KNYA) has listened to Ngarrindjeri speak, absorbed the transfer of knowledge, and understands Ngarrindjeri protocols around holding and transferring knowledge. In this way, Harry unsettles the hierarchical and exclusionary order of settler knowledge systems. Moreover, deferring to Ngarrindjeri sovereignty and protecting Ngarrindjeri knowledges was a critical strategy demonstrated by Harry that surpassed epistemological barriers by interrupting settler authority. Additionally, Harry

shared important information with Ngarrindjeri, which further unsettles colonial knowledge hierarchies. Indeed, sharing knowledge with Indigenous sovereigns is another element that challenges everyday exclusionary practices in NRM, which I turn to below.

### *7.2.3 Knowledge sharing: shifting exclusionary practices*

Further to understanding Western science and culture as socially constructed and protecting Indigenous knowledges as key strategies for unsettling epistemological barriers in everyday practices, participants discuss the importance of sharing settler knowledge with Indigenous sovereigns. This specificity into what knowledge is shared, and how, is new to the literature on collaborative arrangements and allyship. Indigenous scholars reiterate the importance of returning research findings to communities who have been involved in, or are the subject of, academic research (Chilisa 2012; Denzin, Lincoln & Tuhiwai Smith 2008; Louis 2007; Rigney, L-I 1999; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). In this context, however, participants discuss the importance of sharing information with Indigenous sovereigns in general. This includes sharing insider information from government and up-to-date information on the issues that Indigenous sovereigns are concerned with. Further, participants stress the importance of providing examples of other nation-to-nation agreements from around the world, prior to the onset of negotiations. Rather than extracting Indigenous knowledges, participants direct the flow of information towards Indigenous sovereigns. As Hawaiian scholar, Renee Pualani Louis (2007, p. 135) argues, “sharing knowledge has to go both ways.”

Ryan (KNYA) provides an honest example, in his criticism of the government's decision to withhold, explaining:

*The run of the mill process that governments have, where this idea of not sharing information, being quite restrictive in terms of what's allowed to be communicated publicly versus what can't, you need to be aware of that but in a lot of cases if you just stuck to that, like I was saying before, things wouldn't change, the relationships wouldn't build, you wouldn't create different levels of trust and I think there's probably too much sense of 'oh we can't communicate these sorts things because there's a risk of creating a bigger issue.' I mean, there's a bigger issue created with not being open with what's going on, so sometimes being discrete about sharing that sort of information with your allies but needing to be quite clear that those things do have to be treated in confidence really. I know as a public-sector employee you're not supposed to do that, but I don't think things in a lot of cases would progress that well with relationships or partnerships if you're restrictive with the things you communicated and shared. I think it takes that extra element of input to make things work.*

Thus, we see that for Ryan (KNYA) sharing information is bi-directional and creates relationships of trust with Indigenous sovereigns. In this way, participant narratives reveal how they disrupt epistemological barriers by interrupting the Western habit of policing exclusionary practices around knowledge.

Sharing information and alerting Indigenous sovereigns to the plans of settler sovereigns to unsettle knowledge hierarchies is further exemplified through participant discussions on the Universities Consortium. Amanda (CRT), Joel (CRT), and Stewart (CRT) all speak to the importance of the Universities Consortium as a platform for sharing legal information with tribes and First Nations in the Basin. Joel (CRT) tells me:

*So back in about 2009 as the US and Canada were beginning to make rumbling noises about getting ready to take a hard look at renegotiating the Columbia River Treaty and the two countries were basically conducting studies independently of each other ... so they were on parallel, not intersecting, tracks ... I guess [my colleagues and I] were just thinking out loud for a while just in terms of what, if any, role should or could public universities play in helping inform and invigorate public policy generally, and in this case the Columbia River Treaty.*

At this stage, representatives from public universities from both Canada and the US formed the Universities Consortium to hold annual symposiums and cross-pollinate information across the international border that dissects the Basin. Sharing information was particularly important to Amanda (CRT) because of her knowledge of how historical colonial forces impact the economic, institutional, and organisational capacity of different tribes across the Basin. In the quote below, Amanda (CRT) explains how past colonial forces create current disparities on economic power, governance capacity, and legal rights between tribes to the south who were recognised as sovereign by the US and First Nations to the north whose sovereignty was denied by Canada. Additionally, the series of dams along the Columbia River

cut some tribes off from water flow and access to salmon while others were not. Amanda (CRT) states:

*Those tribes whose lands formally had salmon going through them and then were blocked, those salmon runs were blocked by dams, it took a lot longer for those tribes to gain recognition of their role as co-managers of fisheries in the Basin. The tribes that weren't in that position were recognised in the 70s for that and then were able to obtain funding through the salmon mitigation money that's available because of the hydropower system. And so those tribes recognised in the 70s have huge capacity, huge governance capacity, their fisheries agencies are considered among the most sophisticated in the Basin and they are definitely accepted at the table as co-managers of fisheries. Of the tribes whose lands were blocked are behind in capacity building and are just now gaining a voice and so the challenge is to provide information to all but to recognise the greater capacity needs for what are really the more northern tribes - the First Nations in Canada and the tribes in the northern part of the Basin in the US - and provide more outreach to them without ignoring the others.*

Amanda's reflections above highlights how knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty and the impact of structural injustice assists with unsettling knowledge hierarchies. Although Amanda (CRT) attends to the differences in needs between Indigenous groups, the work is not undertaken as a one-way act reinforcing epistemological barriers based on colonial notions that Indigenous peoples have inferior capacity and need 'fixing.' Like Joel (CRT) and Stewart (CRT) below, Amanda (CRT) demonstrates that the point of

providing information is not to 'educate' or 'improve' Indigenous peoples but to provide as much information as possible on the issues at hand before Indigenous sovereigns engage in the negotiation process. This is a matter of ensuring that Indigenous sovereigns have informed consent prior to negotiating agreements. Joel (CRT) reflects on the outcomes of the Universities Consortium that focussed explicitly on the interests and needs of tribes and First Nations:

*Probably over 200 people attend that particular symposium, and it did focus exclusively on tribal/First Nation interests in the Basin. We had people, First Nations from Canada and fifteen, sixteen tribes from the US and shortly within a week or two after that symposia some of the tribal leaders called us and said 'would you guys be willing to work with us to help us continue to learn about our role in the Basin, to learn about what we can and cannot do from the perspective of international law and in particular international water law?'*

Like Harry (KNYA) above, we see how participants pass on information and alert Indigenous sovereigns to the exclusionary moves of settler sovereign decision making. From there, both non-Indigenous professionals and Indigenous sovereigns engage in a working group over several years. Joel (CRT) continues:

*We work with them for the better part of five years ... we had a working group, it sort of varied from fifteen to twenty, somewhere in that ball park, representing all the tribes and all the First Nations in the Basin and we met*

*probably quarterly, we were on the phone at least monthly, we produced a document, a report.*

Both Joel (CRT) and Stewart (CRT) tell me that the information provided to tribes and First Nations include examples of other nation-to-nation transboundary water agreements. Joel (CRT) states:

*We weren't there to dictate or advocate this example or that model or that vision or that but to say here's what the world has to offer in terms of transboundary river basin organisations and we looked at 20, 30, 40 different examples and cases and tried to harvest lessons to them but always came back and we always stopped short, basically the way we talk about it in kind of day to day context, we're providing you options, we're going to stop short of providing a recommendation because that's not my job, I don't want that job, as soon as I start it's going to be wrong, it's going to be wrong I can almost guarantee it. I'm better at saying here are three good options for you and here, and even helping them think through and mapping out what the consequences are of the different options. If you do this option, this is likely to happen but on the other hand a positive impact that might happen, so you guys have to decide.*

Similarly, this approach is mentioned by Stewart (CRT) who recalls that he says to Indigenous sovereigns:

*Here's some places that had similar issues to what you have and how they were solved or not solved. How do you think we can work together cooperatively to fix what we need to fix here?*

Stewart (CRT) discusses the need to think through the appropriateness of information to different contexts, stating that:

*Lessons learned, and experiences are transposable, but you have to be very careful and do it with a great load of humility and thought as to what you can learn from one that is useful in another context.*

Again, participants demonstrate that sharing knowledge with Indigenous sovereigns engenders an ongoing relationship of teaching and learning. As Stewart (CRT) and Joel (CRT) demonstrate above, it is not just providing information that is important, but more so, their narratives reflect on the process of thinking through options, directed by Indigenous sovereigns, in a way that creates possibilities. It must be noted here, however, that sharing knowledge in this example is situated within the structures of settler coloniality, or in other words, at the colonial decision-making table. While it is important to identify how non-Indigenous allies recenter Indigenous sovereignty, the question remains, as posited by Lorde (2013), can you dismantle the masters house using the masters' tools? Nevertheless, by sharing information with Indigenous sovereigns, participants work to undermine the colonial power facilitated through withholding information. In preparation for the official CRT review, Stewart (CRT) explains, *"I've been working with tribes and First Nations on both sides of the border to try to facilitate a better, a better mousetrap."* Stewart's use of the word 'mousetrap' in reference to negotiations is interesting because he positions Canada and the



US as the mice. Stewart (CRT) indicates a scepticism towards the willingness of Canada and the US to relinquish the power acquired through hoarding profits and withholding information. However, Stewart (CRT) is highly aware of the quagmire of legal battles in Canada where First Nations are disputing land claims between each other. Upon this, Stewart (CRT) offers advice to tribes and First Nations while remaining alert to the fact that the decision is not his to make:

*My advice to tribes and First Nations on both sides of the border was yes you have rights, yes they're emerging, yes they're important but rather than constantly exhorting your rights, why don't you talk about the value added you could add to the process and the unique perspective you could bring and the on the ground capability and the additional legal, political, and whatnot, firepower you could bring to the process. And they largely declined that and went on and on about their rights. So, I think the concern in both Canada and the US was that this would turn into another proxy war where they're fighting about Aboriginal rights and title.*

Although Stewart (CRT) suggests that a better strategy for approaching the CRT review was for tribes and First Nations to focus on the benefits they can offer to the management of the Basin, rather than arguing entitlement to rights, Stewart (CRT) knows that the decision is not his to make. Not interfering with the decision making of tribes and First Nations is also noted by Amanda (CRT) and Joel (CRT). In Joel's words:

*If we mean sovereignty ... it's got to be homegrown. It's got to be organic.  
It's got to be what they decide that it is.*

As Young (2011) suggests, addressing structural injustice is not merely matter of redistributing resources and wealth, but is a matter of redistributing decision-making power. In this case, the way in which participants unsettle knowledge hierarchies supports Young's arguments on redistributing decision-making power simply by recognising that autonomy is central to sovereignty. This also reflects Nixon's (2019) model of critical allyship and 'stepping back' to make space for the autonomy and decision-making power of the group we show our alliance with.

Identifying and interrupting hierarchical and exclusionary knowledge systems that automate the dominance of settler decision making is a critical strategy not identified in current literature on non-Indigenous perspectives in NRM. As such, I argue that knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty enables participants to employ the strategy of unsettling knowledge hierarchies that position Indigenous interests as cultural and settler interests as authoritative. Challenging the assumed neutrality of Western science and culture, protecting Indigenous knowledges by following Indigenous laws, and sharing settler knowledge with Indigenous sovereigns are demonstrated by participants as steps that unsettle epistemological barriers based upon knowledge hierarchies. Above, participants exemplify how to unsettle knowledge hierarchies in the meeting rooms and office spaces of settler institutions, in the everyday, and recentre Indigenous sovereignty. In conjunction, studies on unsettling allyship need to investigate the relationship that participants have with the places in which they live, the places called 'home.' Therefore, in the next section, I draw on participant narratives that demonstrates how they grapple with meanings of place and home.

### *7.3 Unsettling ontologies of land: making connections*

Unlike current literature in NRM and allyship, this thesis centres on sovereignty and grapples with the ontology of land. In this last section, I turn to the most innovative strategies for recentring Indigenous sovereignty, unsettling epistemological barriers, and adjusting to Indigenous ways of knowing. I highlight participant narratives that illustrate the intellectual work around understanding both settler and Indigenous people's relationships to land. As argued above, understanding the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty is a foundational strategy. Here, I discuss how having an awareness of both settler and Indigenous knowledge systems assists to build ontological pluralism. Because moving away from activist sites is an important direction for research into non-Indigenous allyship, participant reflections of place and home offer novel insights on unsettling the ontology of land. Exploring participant perspectives on relationships to land is crucial because, as Muller, Hemming and Rigney (2019, p. 339) surmise, "One of the most significant acts of colonialism is to impose an understanding of Country as something separate from humans."

I first attend to a point raised consistently by all CRT participants, being the impact of the Canadian-US boundary throughout the Basin. Participants provide unique examples of how they identify complex structural forces created by the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel as barriers to collaborative work in NRM. Next, I show the learning that some participants undertake to unsettle their internal settler logics and build more relational understandings of place, land, water, skies, life, and Entities. By taking responsibility for their own learning, participants

grapple with ‘ontological pluralism,’ described in Chapter 5. Thereby, I show further how knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty is strategically employed by participants to engage in ongoing learning that generates understandings of complex inter-relationships with place and adjusts to Indigenous ways of knowing.

### *7.3.1 Thinking across boundaries: “everything must be taken into consideration”*

In Chapter 3, I outlined the Baltutis and Moore (2020) study that also drew participants from the CRT site and reported that the settler boundaries of Canada and the US are reproduced as normative. Contrary, CRT participants in my study centre the boundaries of Indigenous sovereigns and consistently speak on the damages incurred by the 49th parallel – the boundary between the US and Canada. Participants are careful to use the preferred names of distinct sovereign tribes and First Nations across the Basin, including differing pronunciation and spelling of the names on either side of the colonial border. Below, I show how participants think across boundaries in the place they call home and move away from binaristic, dialectical reason.

A clear example of thinking across boundaries is provided by Oliver (CRT). In the quote below, Oliver (CRT) traces a direct link between the historic drawing of colonial boundaries upon land and the ongoing continuum of dominant settler colonial decision making that negatively affects Indigenous sovereigns. Oliver (CRT) highlights how historic colonial forces remain active today and constrains the agency of Indigenous sovereigns:

*I spoke with a tribal elder whose ancestors lived where the international boundary was drawn by the Oregon Treaty of 1846 between Great Britain and the United States. As with so many other treaties, Indigenous people were not consulted. But they lived the brunt of the consequences. Indigenous families were forced to choose: north to British territory (later Canada) or south to the United States. Decision-makers in London and Washington D.C. were oblivious to the impacts. Just as decision-makers in Ottawa, Victoria, and Washington D.C. were oblivious to the impacts of the Columbia River Treaty on Indigenous people and settler families.*

There are several points I draw attention to from Oliver's quote above. First, is that Oliver's knowledge was given to him directly by a tribal Elder. When informed through a first-hand account of Indigenous history, Oliver (CRT) identifies how the decision making of settler sovereigns denies Indigenous sovereignty and inflicts unjust consequences. The second point is that Oliver's reflection shows an understanding how settler colonialisation divides and compartmentalises complex ecological and social systems into separate parts, providing several examples: the US-Canadian border created in 1846 divided the Columbia River Basin into two separate nation-states; the 1964 CRT divided the Columbia River into chunks where a series of dams divorced ecology from the river flow; and the displacement of both Indigenous sovereigns and settler families from their lands.

Like Oliver (CRT), Leona (CRT) describes the dissection of the Columbia River Basin in the late 1800s. Although such events occurred in centuries past, Leona (CRT) uses the pronoun 'we' which positions herself as the subject, stating:

*We just divided, we just chunked off the land, built these boundaries - US-Canada border, reservation here, reservation there, County lines, parcels for people to settle on.*

Leona (CRT) explains that the settler approach to land is to 'chop' something into pieces, reflective of discussions on the Western relationship to land in Chapter 2. She brings colonial history into current NRM issues as she tells me:

*And the women I know who are involved in the root digging, they talk about the roots like they're their friends. There's some restoration work being done in a park and the roots have continued to try to grow up even though there's a soccer field and a playground, and there's these roots just struggling to come up and the Indigenous women come up to see it and of course they're 'extinct', they're not resident there, right, so because they're 'extinct' they have to travel to the area.*

Leona (CRT) goes on to explain that the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel divided the Arrow Lakes Band in two: Arrow Lakes peoples to the north were declared extinct by the Canadian government but were recognised as sovereign in the US, south of the border. This meant that Arrow Lakes people on the northern side were forced to move south to retain sovereignty but subsequently had to identify as US citizens. Leona (CRT) continues to explain:

*They were here last year to look at the root gathering, the potential for root restoration in this park and they looked at the roots and said, 'Oh our sisters are crying out for our help. They need and want us to dig them, to work with*

*them'. So, their perspective is very open to these feelings, and they can just feel it. They're like 'Oh! Oh, we feel so bad for these roots!'*

I include Leona's narrative here to demonstrate her understanding of the familial relationships the women have with tree roots as sisters, through which, I suggest, unsettles Leona's settler ontology of land. More importantly for this thesis and collaborative arrangements, Leona (CRT) illustrates her ability to make connections between historical colonial events to the present, and the ability for the women to care for their sisters. Melanie (CRT), like Leona (CRT) and Oliver (CRT), provides an in-depth account of the complexity created by the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel and the impact upon collaborative arrangements. Melanie's discussion further exemplifies the criticality of thinking across boundaries to identify epistemological barriers to successful co-management outcomes by account for broader political and global forces.

Melanie (CRT) tells me that "*The Indigenous First Nations that I work with, the Ktunuxa,*" use a method for repairing riparian systems along dikes and riverbanks to prevent soil erosion and revitalise the fisheries in the Kootenay River, a tributary to the Columbia River within the Basin. I asked Melanie (CRT) what a riparian system was, and they explained:

*It's a very intensive biological ecosystem area where there are fish and insects and all kinds ... birds and trees and a whole range of microscopic life, just a whole ecosystem.*

Melanie (CRT) continues to tell me about the Ktunuxa system for repairing the riparian system, where the method is to:

*Plant trees and take great big old tree trunks, build them into the side of the dike or the side of the river ... [and] fill that in with more debris and shrubs and that provides a riparian zone where fish can live and spawn, an entire ecosystem of life that can actually live in there, while preventing the dirt and the edge and the dikes eroding any further.*

In contrast, Melanie (CRT) says:

*The traditional scientific engineered way of controlling and building dikes is through riprap, which are those big concrete blocks, they're as big as 3 feet by 2 feet, they're like great big, gigantic Lego blocks, and they just throw those up against the edge of the river ... there's nothing that can grow there, fish can't spawn, frog, turtles, beaver, any type of ecosystem function cannot exist in a bunch of riprap.*

In the quote above, Melanie (CRT) highlights the limitations of a purely technocratic approach in NRM in contrast to Indigenous methods. Here, Melanie (CRT) provides an explicit example of the limitations of technocracy in NRM, however, she tells the story to contextualise the complex forces that shape the willingness of farmers to work in collaboration with Indigenous sovereigns. Melanie (CRT) continues:

*So, what the First Nations Yaqaan Nukiy said - which is called the Lower Kootenay Band by the Canadian Government - was let's revive these dikes in a holistic way where we can prevent erosion for the farmers while building an ecosystem for fish revitalisation. Unfortunately, however, the farmers [in Canada] all said no. [The Kootenai tribe of Idaho] actually work together*



*very well with the [US] farmers and they built these revitalised areas where farmland and riparian areas were eroding, so they actually worked together. But on the Canadian side, north of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel there was no success. So, you've got the fish coming down the Kootenay River which crosses the USA border down into Montana, up into Idaho and the river starts travelling north, and there is spawning taking place on the US side, but as soon as you cross that international border, where the Kootenay River continues and then eventually flows into the Columbia River, there are no spawning areas for the sturgeon. So, it's a huge messy quagmire of politics and Indigenous politics and white colonial settler farm politics, government politics.*

What is important about this discussion is the complex consideration of broader forces, such as agricultural policy, farm subsidies, and international trade markets. Melanie (CRT) suggests that the reluctance of Canadian farmers is not merely an artefact of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel, where tribes south of the 49<sup>th</sup> parallel have established treaties and sovereign rights to lands and waters. As argued above, bringing the forces of colonisation into NRM is a crucial element to overcoming barriers in collaborations, however, Melanie (CRT) considers other social and economic forces in the age of globalisation, namely international export demands. Below, Melanie (CRT) demonstrates complex thinking across borders:

*It has a lot to do with those settler farmers and their mentality as well currently, and agriculture in Canada, although it also belongs to a huge neo-liberal development paradigm in North America. Canadian agricultural policy is a little bit different than Idaho agriculture in the USA. Both countries*

*offer a lot of subsidies to their farm sector. But in Canada, we have huge exports so most of the food grown in Canada is grown for export, as biofuels to fuel cars, or to grow grain for beef cattle. One export market then is not really food. So, the farmers are I think a little bit more protective of their farms ... there's a whole set of different parameters that may contribute to why that's happening on the Canadian side of the border. I don't think it's working in isolation just by saying it's a different set of historical treaties that were made on the US and that's why. Everything must be taken into consideration and contextualized.*

Melanie's narrative shows how she connects an array of structural forces, external to the project at hand, to identify the willingness of farmers to collaborate with Ktunuxa in land management practices. Oliver (CRT), Leona (CRT), and Melanie's narratives above clearly demonstrate the value of thinking across boundaries, recognising historic colonial forces, and considering broader social forces in contemporary globalised society. As such, rather than reproducing opposing binaries the insights revealed by participants demonstrates a logic that pulls together an assemblage of interconnected threads to navigate epistemological barriers. Thinking in multiplicities is further illustrated below, as participants reflect on the interconnectedness of life and the agency of more-than-human Entities.

### *7.3.2 Understanding relationality: "you're already connected"*

Participants explicitly discuss how learning the teachings of the Indigenous sovereigns they work with provokes deep reflection on the dysconnectivity of settler culture. Upon knowing

the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty, I argue that attention to understanding the Indigenous concept of relationality is a strategy that unsettles epistemological barriers and recentres Indigenous sovereignty, by adjusting to Indigenous ways of knowing. Studies (Davis et al. 2022; Hiller 2017) on unsettling allyship, discussed in Chapter 4, reported that non-Indigenous allies develop deeper understandings of Indigenous epistemologies when working with Indigenous peoples. David (KNYA) reaffirms this point, as seen in the quote below, and talks about the “*dysconnectivity*” of Western culture in contrast to the interconnectivity of Indigenous epistemology. David (KNYA) tells me:

*There’s sort of a cultural system that’s operating within Ngarrindjeri which I think is respect based and so you become more aware or more attuned to those issues as an extent, as a result of that learning, but you also get an insight in relation to there being a different knowledge system operating and other than our definitions and logic chains that we use, which have found certainty in the Western cultures. I think if there’s a concept of all things being connected then the sort of dysconnectivity that logic chains and definitions can result in, in actual fact are really sharply drawn and so if in fact the past, the present, and the future are all connected and if the birds, animals, plants, people are all interconnected with each other well then of course you can’t help but think about what your own knowledge system interplays.*

In David’s conversation, he not only places responsibility on himself to think about relationality and his own knowledge system but extends this to the role of government.

David (KNYA) continues:

*Ngarrindjeri people have said for a long time, all things are connected, so government now says back to Ngarrindjeri, all things are connected. We need to think about this in a manner that all things are connected.*

Here, David (KNYA) infers that government repeats the concept of relationality back to Ngarrindjeri without thinking through what it really means. I suggest that this is a form of deception because government claims to understand a Ngarrindjeri world view yet the non-Indigenous people within government have not engaged in epistemological stretching to build ontological pluralism. This important point raised by David (KNYA) critiques what may be termed as 'lip service' and advocates for deep, considered examination of one's own understanding of relationality.

For Drew (KNYA), unsettling the settler ontology of land begins at home but extends to self-education on the relational ontologies and epistemologies of non-Western societies across the globe. When I asked Drew (KNYA) what reconstruction of colonial systems might look like, he spoke to the need for expanding our understandings ontologies and epistemologies outside of our settler perspective:

*For me personally reconstruction is trying to work out different ways to relate to people who have got alternative sort of epistemologies and cosmologies to me - Indigenous nations, Buddhists, people from Southern Sudan, you know it goes on and on and on. As an aside, one of the things that if you take my ontology issue, it's possible to find different concepts that other groups use to name important things that are going on in the*

*culture. So, one of the concepts I'm interested in in cultures that advance a more relational ontology is a sort of profound sense of actually being responsible for the other because you are in relation. So, Pitjantjatjara Ngapartji Ngapartji, South African blackfella's have Ibantu, there's a word in South Sudanese called Chiang, I think the Timorese have a word, and this concept is quite foreign to whitefellas. Because we are fundamentally in relation with everything then we are responsible, and when you get up close to the way Indigenous people understand their communities then that's the way they start to talk about it. Not just with the other beings but Country as well. I'm in relation to Country. I'm responsible to Country. So, when you read between the lines on what the Indigenous Elders on Ngarrindjeri Country are trying to teach people then that idea is writ large. But whitefellas can't understand that because it's so foreign, because it's foreign ontologically. So, if we're trying to engage in dialogue with people who are coming from different world views, then how do we relate? So, Westerners just think they know everything and come in ways in which they're not being respectful of knowledges about the world that other people have. So, transformation for me is at that level. How can I engage in dialogue with people across cultural difference? That seems to me to be the fundamental transformational project.*

In the above passage, Drew (KNYA) answers his own question, “*how do we relate,*” by discussing the importance of taking responsibility for the lack of understanding and then seeking to fill that gap. As such, Drew (KNYA) clearly places the responsibility for learning,

developing understanding, and growing relationships upon himself. Drew (KNYA) shows that his interest in learning about relationality is not framed by the romanticising, exoticising discourses of the ‘noble savage,’ nor is it couched in logics of possession that claims ownership over Indigenous knowledges. Rather, Drew’s narrative, reflective of others, identifies the shortcomings of his own cultural frameworks as the problem that needs to be addressed. Having identified the gap, Drew (KNYA) then chases the concept of relationality across several non-Western societies to further develop his understanding, in addition to what Ngarrindjeri Elders have taught him. While looking abroad, Drew (KNYA) undertakes this self-education to continue to grow and nurture his own understanding of relationality in order to progress his relationship with Ngarrindjeri. As such, Drew (KNYA) recognises that building ontological pluralism is an ongoing project.

Knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty unsettles the settler ontology of land and builds greater understanding of relationality, in the places that participants call home. Erin (KNYA) talks about her love of home and uses her own feelings of place to try to get other settlers to imagine what connection to Country may be like for Ngarrindjeri, stating:

*So, I’m really lucky, [where I live]. We love those places, my family, we love those places. But I’ve known those places for twenty years and [Ngarrindjeri] people and their families have known these places for twenty thousand years or more, so I try to say to people, ‘You think how strongly you feel about that place then imagine your family has been living in that place for twenty, thirty, forty thousand years and what’s your strength of feeling*

*going to be? Even though you personally have only been around - I don't know - I feel like those ties, I don't know what they feel like [for Ngarrindjeri] but I feel like they must be really strong because I feel really strongly about it and other people do to, about having lived in a place for twenty years and you feel a sense of ownership over what happens in the town. So, of course these communities who have been here for tens of thousands of years feel very strongly about what happens here. And they've been so disenfranchised and yeah, so of course they're pissed off. I guess it reinforces for me, being able to project how I feel about a place and trying to use that as a way to explain to other people about connection to Country.*

Erin's adds new insights to studies on allyship for several reasons. First, Erin (KNYA) speaks personally about the place in which she calls home, in the everyday. Second, this example is a deliberate strategy geared towards unsettling the settler ontology of land. Beginning from the place we call home, and having some connection to that place, Erin (KNYA) encourages other settlers to imagine what that feeling might be like if multiplied by tens of thousands of years. This is a clear attempt to bridge a gap in settler understanding, based upon knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty. Third, Erin (KNYA) recognises that this analogy is limited in its ability to capture what connection to Country must feel like for Ngarrindjeri, yet she employs this strategy in effort to build some ontological pluralism in others.

Ryan (KNYA) provides a similar example of unsettling the settled ontology of land when he discusses the overarching strategy on nature conservation taken by the Government of South Australia. This is a clear example of the usefulness of insights from non-Indigenous allies who work within the institutions of government. Like Erin (KNYA) above, Ryan's narrative below unsettles the settler ontology of land by bringing his understanding of relationality into the conversation. The critique Ryan (KNYA) provides reveals that even in the attempts of settler sovereigns to support their population to 'connect' with nature, the default implication is that people are not connected to nature - demonstrating an epistemological foundation of separation. Ryan (KNYA) makes a firm reminder that humans are already connected to nature, but most people do not recognise this, stating:

*The current direction is about supporting people to connect with nature and it's kind of like, well you're continually saying they're separate things, people and nature are not connected. We're sitting on the ninth story of a building getting fed air from outside, so we're connected even here with our outside environment. If you're living and breathing, you are already totally connected; your life depends on the environment around you. Stop separating it.*

Ryan's voice unsettles normative settler ideas that position humans as separate to land. Indeed, Ryan (KNYA) articulates that the settler relationship with land is akin to a relationship of domestic violence rather than being a relationship of love and care:

*The environmental degradation that happens now within our Western way of being, that lack of relationship ... is more of a domestic violence situation*



*rather than caring, supportive relationship - if you want to use that sort of an analogy. Like, we can abuse, and we are abusing, the environment and its own sort of rights to its health and to those sorts of things aren't being respected. So maybe we need to really look at the relationship we all have and create or develop a personal relationship with your Country and have some reciprocal responsibilities to look after it.*

By suggesting that settlers develop a personal relationship *"with your Country,"* Ryan (KNYA) is advocating for settlers build a more loving relationship with the places we call home. This unsettles the settler ontology of land by explicitly identifying 1) the lack of connection and relationship to land that is inherent in the West, 2) that nature has rights to its own health, 3) settler neglect of nature's right to health creates an abusive relationship, and 4) settler reimagining's to the places in which they live, shift their ontology of land from one of separation, and develop a caring, supportive relationship. Again, Ryan (KNYA) clearly illustrates how knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty allows for building ontological pluralism. Further, I suggest that, like Erin (KNYA), Ryan (KNYA) is not advocating that settler can adopt an Indigenous relational ontology but encourages other settler to begin to *"create or develop"* responsibilities to look after the places in which we live.

Ontological pluralism is further illustrated by Leona (CRT) as she tells me of an occasion when she spoke to a group of school children about the Columbia River and the impact of dams. In the passage below, Leona (CRT) demonstrates an understanding of the river as an agential more-than-human Entities with rights to freedom. Leona (CRT) tells me:

*I said to the children, “How many of you like to be told what to do?” And none of them raised their hand. And I said, “well let’s flip it around now. How many of you like to do what you want, what’s natural to you?” And everyone raised their hands. And I said, “That’s what we need to talk about with our river system.”*

In this way, Leona (CRT) is trying to teach the children that rivers have agency and rights. Like Ryan (KNYA), Leona (CRT) refers to the river being controlled. Leona (CRT) continues:

*A little boy at this class last week said, he raised his hand, I think grade two, raises his hand, big goofy glasses and you know, just a hilarious little kid, and he looks at me with great seriousness and says, ‘You know when I go camping the water talks to me.’ And I thought, absolutely, we need more people like you. Though I think people have it when they’re very little and then the culture sort of deprograms it or something.*

Interestingly, in the quote below, Leona (CRT) implies that all people understand nature as agentic and relational, but settler logics are culturally transferred to young children. Thereby, Leona (CRT) seeks to unsettle the transference of settler logics to children. This is a unique insight not previously discussed in either the NRM or allyship literature and demonstrates how unsettling the settler ontology of land is employed as a deliberate strategy to build ontological pluralism. Harry (KNYA) also refers to educating children on relationality; however, this is from the position of Ngarrindjeri. In Harry’s quote below, he makes a clear connection between place, human identity, and sovereignty.

*[Ngarrindjeri] know where their Ngartji is, they know where their Ngartji belongs. And who tells them that? It comes through parents, it comes through connections, oh you're a sovereign, you're a Murray Cod, or something, and that's where you are supposed to be.*

Harry's narrative shows that he understands that for Ngarrindjeri, human identity is composed *in relation to place* and more-than-human Entities, such as Murray Cod, who exist in that place. Thereby, Harry (KNYA) demonstrates a clear understanding of Indigenous relationality and is aware of the cultural constructs within his own society. By holding space in his mind for two different ways of thinking about the world Harry (KNYA) builds ontological pluralism. Like Harry (KNYA), several participants simultaneously speak about their work in NRM as well as the places they call home. Their insights fill gaps in literature on unsettling allyship and clearly demonstrates the value of accounting for colonial forces, including the settler ontology of land, to overcome epistemological barriers in collaborative arrangements with Indigenous sovereigns.

## **7.4 Conclusion**

Throughout this chapter, I have demonstrated several elements found in participant narratives concerned with establishing what is known, beyond 'facts,' in specific teaching and learning contexts that pertains to Indigenous laws. Knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty is a primary strategy employed by participants that unsettles epistemological barriers and recentres Indigenous sovereignty. This is underpinned by making visible the structural injustice incurred from colonial paradigms, challenging the

everyday exclusionary practices of settler knowledge hierarchies, and building an understanding of relationality to move towards ontological pluralism. By adjusting to Indigenous ways of knowing, participants come to know what Indigenous sovereigns know about colonisation.

In the following chapter, I highlight participants discussions around appropriate behaviour and proper forms of conduct for building and maintaining relationships with Indigenous sovereigns based on Indigenous ways of being. Critical reflexivity and appropriate behaviours are underpinned by knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty and so, the relationship between knowing and being becomes evident. The triad is completed in Chapter 8, where participant narratives showcase the actions taken to restructure institutions and social systems that align with Indigenous ways of doing.

## 8 Being

As discussed in the Introduction chapter, natural resource management is a matter of managing relationships more than commodities (Howitt 2001). Nevertheless, literature on NRM co-management arrangements reports that interpersonal skills are neglected by non-Indigenous professionals over a preference for technocracy. Given that studies on the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals are limited, this chapter focusses on the ways that participants from the KNYA and CRT sites unsettle attitudinal barriers when working in collaboration with Indigenous sovereigns. Having demonstrated in the previous chapter that knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty is a primary strategy to recentre Indigenous sovereignty, I now argue that participants unsettle attitudinal barriers and recentre Indigenous sovereignty by adjusting to Indigenous ways of being.

As Martin Booran Mirraboopa (2003) explains, for Indigenous peoples, knowing one's responsibilities, and the relationship between self and others emerges from ontology. Upon various types of knowledge, the interconnected relationships with Entities become known. Moreover, "Without this knowing we are unable to 'be', hence our Ways of Knowing inform our Ways of Being" (Martin Booran Mirraboopa 2003, p. 209). Proper forms of conduct are important to Indigenous ways of being because inter-connecting relationships and individual roles are reinforced. In other words, identifying who is located where within the network of relations illuminates what roles and responsibilities must be upheld to the others. As noted in Chapter 1, this thesis aims to capture a shift in settler attitudes. Towards this end, insights gained from participant narratives shed light on persistent attitudinal barriers in

collaborative arrangements, such as policing Indigenous knowledges and identities.

Additionally, the analysis provides insights on unsettling the practice of allyship in everyday workplaces and offers strategies for unsettling settler logics and colonial paradigms not previously reported in NRM or allyship literature. Three key findings emerge from the analysis that reveal how participants employ 1) feeling unsettled, 2) listening-respect, and 3) building an ontology of truth as key strategies that address attitudinal barriers and recentre Indigenous sovereignty in NRM by adjusting to Indigenous ways of being. As previously demonstrated in Chapter 2, settler ontology is limited to only considering relationships between people. As such, what comes to the fore in participants narratives is a focus on their role as allies to Indigenous peoples, and less attention is placed on relationships and proper forms of conduct with more-than-human Entities.

The first key finding I present are participant reflections that illustrate how uncomfortable feelings are embraced as a cue for critical reflexivity. In turn, critical reflexivity allows participants to build self-awareness on their own attitudes and behaviours, shaping the refinement of proper forms of conduct in the practice of long-term allyship. In doing so, participants narratives highlight the strengths of feeling unsettled as a primary strategy that is pivotal to addressing attitudinal barriers in NRM and assists to move towards ontological pluralism. This is not undertaken in a way that 'adopts' Indigenous ways of being but unsettles settler logics enough to accept multiple ways of being in the world.

The second key finding hinges on the importance of listening to Indigenous sovereigns in ways that are antithetical to settler logics of possession and authority. In the context of

NRM, I cover some of the basic ground regarding listening and respect when working with Indigenous sovereigns. Further, participant discussions spotlight forms of listening that are not auditory: what is not said, along with other forms of Indigenous agency that participants perceive as silence and absence. These discussions on absence and silence demonstrates the necessary and sometime unresolvable challenges that come with long-term, committed allyship. As such, being comfortable with not knowing is revealed as a critical strategy because not knowing relinquishes the settler sense of entitlement to acquiring all knowledge, driven by the white possessive logics that normalise settler privilege. Following which, the KNYA is showcased for its critical attention to the Ngarrindjeri word for listening, 'kungan,' that is embedded in the title of this nation-to-nation agreement.

In the third section, participant narratives illustrate the link between personal change and political action through building an ontology of truth. Participants provide everyday examples of how they view their role as long-term allies and reveal that building an ontology of truth is a key strategy underpinned by consistency, honesty, endurance, and hope necessary for the long-term practice of allyship. Participants demonstrate proper forms of conduct with Indigenous sovereigns through the consistent practice of 'showing up' and 'checking in' over time, as well as revealing examples of owning one's mistakes. I attend to participant discussions on the commitment and endurance required in the face of sustained unsettlement and illustrate the role of critical hope against the forces of settler colonialism, inspired by Paulette Regan's (2010) arguments on living in an ontology of truth. Together, the analysis shows that feeling unsettled, listening-respect, and building an ontology of truth are

employed as key strategies that recentres Indigenous ways of being in NRM, and thereby, Indigenous sovereignty.

### *8.1 Feeling unsettled: the cue for being reflexive*

Counter to prevalent attitudinal barriers in NRM, participant narratives demonstrate that an essential aspect to the practice of allyship is to embrace the uncomfortable feelings that arise because of their knowledge of contemporary and historical colonial factors.

Understanding the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty, demonstrated in the previous chapter, brings forth unpleasant feelings, such as anger, shame, sadness, frustration, powerlessness, shock, and embarrassment. This is an issue of ontology and reveals the relationship between knowing and being, as the settler realities of participants are immersed in the complexities of settler colonialism. Analysis of participant narratives reveals that feeling unsettled is utilised as a tool for refining proper forms of conduct that adjust to Indigenous ways of being in collaborative arrangements. In this section, I draw upon excerpts where participants speak about uncomfortable emotions and how they manage feeling unsettled. I argue that participants employ feeling unsettled as a foundational strategy to unsettle attitudinal barriers and recentre Indigenous sovereignty. In doing so, I support established insights on the practice of critical allyship that reinforce the criticality of being self-aware and reflexive. Because the role of non-Indigenous professionals has had minimal attention in studies on collaborative practices, the following insights offer valuable contributions to navigating tensions and mitigating attitudinal barriers in NRM arrangements.



In *Unsettling the Settler Within*, Paulette Regan (2010, p. 230) states that rather than reinforcing colonising habits, settlers must attend our own unsettling responses “as important clues to our own decolonization.” This includes challenging the romantic settler myths we carry about ourselves, to question our beliefs, and adjust our attitudes – an issue of ontology. Importantly, Regan (2010, p. 236) argues that:

If we have not explored the myths upon which our identity is based, or fully plumbed the depths of our repressed history, we lack a foundation for living in truth. What we have instead is a foundation of untruths, upon which we have built a discourse of reconciliation that promises to release Indigenous settler-relations from the shackles of colonialism but will actually achieve just the opposite.

Therefore, as Regan (2010) continues, powerful insights emerge from reflecting on processes, even as they occur, through a leap of imagination and desire to create change in the world. As similarly argued by other allyship scholars, reflecting on one’s positionality and privilege is an uncomfortable, yet essential, skill for allyship (Bishop 2002; Held 2019; Kendall 2006; Kivel 2011; Pease 2010). Nevertheless, self-reflection remains a somewhat allusive concept that contains an inherent risk of overemphasising the self, telling confessional tales, reifying opposing identities, and neglecting the forces of broader social structures in which knowledge construction takes place (Dawson, J et al. 2022; Pillow 2003). This distinction is noted as a limitation to self-reflection as a confession, because “sayings are not always doings” (Ahmed, 2004, cited in McDowall 2021, p. 351). In Spivak’s words, “making positions transparent does not make them unproblematic” (cited in Pillow 2003, p. 183).

As such, scholars have stressed the importance of distinguishing between self-reflection on positionality and 'reflexivity,' which Dawson, J et al. (2022, p. 2) define as:

At its core, reflexivity involves an awareness and examination of the ontological and epistemological foundations that inform our existence and shape our thoughts and behaviours. Notably, reflexivity is concerned with the self in relation to others; that is, how our ways of knowing, being, and doing shape our interpretation of and behaviour towards people.

Importantly, for settlers in CANZUS countries, reflexivity includes building knowledges on historic and ongoing colonial structures and settler logics that drives power differentials (Dawson, J et al. 2022). Pillow (2003) makes a powerful argument for a 'reflexivity of discomfort' that moves towards the 'unfamiliar' and 'uncomfortable' while simultaneously recognising the limits of available language and tools to navigate the complexities of settler colonisation. While unsettled feelings may cause some settlers to turn away from the source of discomfort, and reinforce attitudinal barriers, scholars agree that discomfort provides opportunity for transformative learning experiences that lead to the adjustment of problematic attitudes and aids the identification of unjust social structures (Dawson, J et al. 2022; McDowall 2021; Nixon 2019; Pillow 2003). Importantly, Land (2015, p. 161) argues that decolonising solidarity requires non-Indigenous allies to engage with the practice of allyship as a long-term project that maintains and balances both self-understanding and political action. The coupling of developing self-understanding and engaging in political

action across time enables allies to take political action while being self-aware Land (2015, p. 161).

Across the interviews, participant narratives align with these existing assertions from the allyship literature that discomfort must be used as a cue for critical reflexivity. This critical reflexivity is evident when participants reflect on how their allyship is driven by their understandings of the injustices committed against Indigenous peoples. With knowledge of structural injustice, participants feel strong emotions, such as David (KNYA), who succinctly states *“injustice makes me angry.”* Indeed, it is David’s knowing of injustice that results in feeling angry. Leona’s expression more clearly illustrates how knowing brings unsettled feelings, stating, *“It’s that self-reflection, that awareness, that creates discomfort.”* More than merely confessing their privilege and expressing discomfort, participants make opportunities from these unsettled emotions to engage in critical reflexivity on how they conduct their work and where to refine their skills. Erin’s statement below succinctly captures this:

*I have had situations where I’ve been really frustrated, really frustrated, but you just have to take a step back and think about the bigger picture. There’s a bigger picture.*

While frustration is an uncomfortable feeling, Erin (KNYA) illustrates that discomfort serves as a trigger to ‘step back’ and engage with one’s own knowledge of the ‘bigger picture’ – that is, the broader forces of colonisation together with the teachings from Indigenous sovereigns. Being able to ‘step back’ is one of five key principles for critical allyship identified

by Nixon (2019), who distinguishes various forms of stepping back. This includes to step back physically, speak less, and listen more, or to step back metaphorically and give up being right about particular knowledges, communication styles, processes, or entitlements. Erin's example, like others, demonstrates that coupling uncomfortable feelings with knowledge of structural injustice enables her to metaphorically step back and place her frustration into context by considering the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty. By contextualising her frustration, I suggest that Erin (KNYA) avoids directing the frustration at Indigenous sovereigns and engaging in harmful attitudinal barriers.

Leona (CRT) highlights the emotional work that goes into the practice of allyship when telling me about a time when she was so overwhelmed with sadness that she had to leave a salmon ceremony. She explains that the sadness derived, in part, from the recent passing of an Indigenous friend who was honoured in this ceremony. However, Leona (CRT) explains to me that her sadness was compounded by her understanding of how settler and Indigenous histories and practices intersect. Leona (CRT) explains:

*Because I know the history, so I was upset, and I was doubly upset because of my friend, my Indigenous friend, having recently passed away. And we went up to the meal that they host because they believe that at the salmon ceremony, or at any ceremony, that they have to seal the prayers with sharing food. It's part of their cultural belief. And so they were hosting a banquet for all of us who were related to people who had stolen things from them, destroyed their ecosystem, and I was in such a state at that point, pretty much really upset, that I had to get out of there and I left and I said 'I*

*cannot share food with these people after everything we had taken from them.'*

Leona (CRT) demonstrates that she is not only attuned to the consequences of colonial settler violence, but she reflects upon and positions herself in the space of Indigenous sovereignty, claiming that it was inappropriate to leave *"because I was violating a cultural wish on their part"* to seal the ceremonial prayers by feeding the guests. Leona (CRT) continues:

*I think that I would say I kind of failed on the ally in that situation because I allowed my emotions to overwhelm me, and I didn't stay for food. But what I have found over and over again is that whatever we need to have healed in us is stimulated to a point of an opportunity to heal by our presence at these ceremony's, by the act of the ceremony, by the drumming, by the singing. It stirs things up.*

The layers of reflexivity driven by emotions are multiple in the quote above. Leona (CRT) reflects upon her role as a settler, as a guest in an Indigenous community with obligations and responsibilities to uphold, and as an ally. Moreover, Leona (CRT) names overwhelming emotions emergent from knowing the realities of settler colonialism as an opportunity for healing oneself. Leona (CRT) continues:

*And I watch other allies, people who have just come into the circle, and they're showing up at stuff, and I watch them just looking stricken, crying, feeling they have to leave before the meal is served! [Laughs] So, it's not*

*always easy being an ally because it requires some emotional healing, I think.*

In Leona's reflection, we see that she observes the emotional responses of 'new' allies as they adjust to knowing the realities of settler colonialism and its overlay with Indigenous sovereignty. Interestingly, Leona (CRT) describes seeing herself and her own experience of confronting her settler reality in the emotional responses of other allies, implying that this ontological shift in settler reality is an early step in a longer process of becoming an ally. Leona (CRT) suggests that these emotions must be attended to and healed, which inherently makes *'being an ally'* an uncomfortable and personally introspective process. In this, we see the entanglement of 'knowing' and 'being': Leona's knowing that *"all of us who were related to people who had stolen things"* were offered gifts by Indigenous sovereigns which then brought forth uncomfortable emotional responses. In turn, Leona (CRT) uses this discomfort as a cue for critical reflexivity on the long-term role of *"being an ally"* and the need for *"healing"* our former settler-selves. Across Leona's narrative above, her reflection is centred on moving away from seeing herself as having *"failed"* as an ally in the first instance. The value of feeling unsettled is summed up succinctly by Melanie (CRT), in the quote below. Melanie (CRT) describes reflexivity as a *"painful"* but necessary process for further knowing. Melanie (CRT) states that working with Indigenous sovereigns:

*Taught me to reflect and be a lot more reflexive of my own colonial assumptions, which is sometimes painful but through that pain much more learning is opened up to us.*

The above excerpt succinctly demonstrates how understanding the realities of settler colonialism brings forth uncomfortable emotions which must be managed in their role as long-term allies. More importantly, as participants have demonstrated, uncomfortable emotions are used as a cue for unsettling one's own settler identity and internal colonial logics. Regan (2010) also describes the way that strong emotions tied to the broader forces of settler colonisation are necessary for unsettling our settler-selves and embracing transformative socio-political change. Thereby, a key strategy for the practice of allyship with Indigenous sovereigns in co-management arrangements is to embrace uncomfortable feelings that arise from knowing the realities of settler colonialism as a cue for critical reflexivity. This underpinning internal work refines participants self-awareness of their own attitudes and behaviours when working with Indigenous sovereigns. In the following section, I turn to the next key finding in relation to being where participant narratives reveal how they unsettle attitudinal barriers in NRM, for themselves and other settlers.

## ***8.2 Listening: unsettling attitudinal barriers and building ontological pluralism***

In Chapter 3, I identified that developing interpersonal skills in collaborative work is neglected because of the preference for technocracy in NRM. Additionally, policing Indigenous knowledges and identities as authentic/inauthentic further contributes to persistent attitudinal barriers. Thereby, in this section, I attend to participant discussions on the importance of developing listening skills and being respectful. Participant's use of the words 'listening' and 'respect' are often coupled in their narratives, and so I employ Bignall's term 'listening-respect' defined as "*an attitude of relation* in which each acknowledges that the other has something to say" (Bignall 2010, p. 373, emphasis added). As such, listening-

respect is antithetical to colonial logics of separation, negation, and the amelioration of difference that reproduces colonial binaries such as superior/inferior, knowledge/culture, and authentic/inauthentic. Thereby, in the first part of this section, I provide examples from participants in the context of NRM that illustrate the basics of listening-respect as a foundational strategy that unsettles attitudinal barriers in NRM and recentres Indigenous sovereignty. I draw on participant narratives that offer nuanced insights to the practice of listening, including the practice of ‘showing up’ and ‘checking in.’ KNYA participants provide in-depth discussions on how they strategically use the KNYA as an instrument to recentre Ngarrindjeri sovereignty and unsettle attitudinal barriers within their everyday workplace. As such, participants demonstrate multiple forms of listening as a strategy to recentre Indigenous sovereignty.

Last, participants reveal an important insight on being attentive to listening that is not currently discussed in-depth in the allyship literature: that is, the practice of listening to silence, or what is not said. Rather than interpreting a perceived absence of Indigenous knowledges and cultural practices as inauthentic, I show that participants interpret silence and absence as Indigenous agency and autonomy – the bedrock of sovereignty. I draw on the concept of ‘Deep Listening’ that belongs to several Indigenous language groups across Australia, which extends listening beyond what one can hear with your ears, but with all the senses, and connects with something larger than ourselves (Brearley and Hamm 2023, Engels-Schwarzpaul & Peters 2023). Upon these nuanced discussions, I argue that listening-respect a strategy for unsettling attitudinal barriers and recentring Indigenous sovereignty in NRM.



### *8.2.1 Listening-respect: the basics*

Because listening to the voices of those we show solidarity with is essential to the practice of allyship, in this section I draw on participant narratives that speak to the importance of listening-respect. This point is fundamental to unsettling the settler logics that shapes the attitudinal barriers that are rife in collaborative arrangements, as evidenced in the literature on Chapter 3. Participants narratives across both sites provide examples on the basics of listening-respect as a key strategy that refines proper forms of conduct, adjusts to Indigenous ways of being and recentres Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements. As noted above, participants do not 'adopt' Indigenous ontologies of relation, but their reflections reveal a shift away normalised settler logics that opens possibilities for ontological pluralism.

Because listening-respect occurs between equals where each acknowledges that the other has something to say, overcoming settler logics and the well-noted inability for settlers to listen to Indigenous peoples is of key concern. As argued by Spivak (cited in Tuhiwai Smith 2012), when racialised and colonised peoples are positioned as inferior, colonisers cannot hear the voice of those they oppress and will continue to listen, think, and speak through a colonial lens. This ontological position shapes 'what can be heard' (Spivak, cited in Bignall 2010). Furthermore, Moreton-Robinson's (2015) analysis of white possessive logics carefully identifies the settler predisposition to assume authority over all knowledge and insists on the power to affirm or dismiss what is heard, or what is known. Likewise, Bignall's (2010) analysis of dialectical reason, presented in Chapter 2, further cements the ways in which the

settler ontology of difference, negation, and the amelioration of difference creates attitudinal barriers through the policing of binaries. Such colonial logics impede the ability to engage in listening-respect because the attitude is one of superiority and authority rather than being in relation with someone who has something equally valid to say. As such, unsettling settler attitudes must be underpinned by knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty and embracing ontological shifts that shape ways of being.

Across participants narratives, the words 'listening' and 'respect' were frequently coupled along with other attributes such as being humble and patient. For example, Drew (KNYA) states that

*The most important thing is developing a more respectful way of relating to Indigenous concerns and Indigenous aspirations, and then after that, then all the other things that need to be done could happen.*

Similarly, Joel (CRT) states that being respectful is fundamental to collaborative problem solving. As a professional negotiator, Joel (CRT) states:

*A fundamental piece of [collaboration] is respect and so people genuinely respect and not just say that they respect you but behave in a way that they respect the sovereign nature of tribes and First Nations.*

In the quote above, Joel (CRT) makes a distinction between 'saying' you respect someone and demonstrating respect through behaviour. This exemplifies the difference between a shallow version of knowing that it is polite to offer respect and more in-depth and accurate

knowing of the “sovereign nature” of Indigenous peoples. In Joel’s narrative, we see how he pays attention to the difference between allyship as a performance compared to ways of being underpinned by knowing one’s role as an ally within the framework of Indigenous sovereignty. As such, I suggest that knowing that Indigenous peoples are sovereign and understanding that authority is inherent to sovereignty, demonstrated in the previous chapter, allows Joel (CRT) to adjust to Indigenous ways of being.

Performances of allyship are tightly related to perceiving one’s role as a ‘helper.’ This is made explicit by Amanda (CRT) when responding to the question ‘what is the role of an ally?’

*Well, I can tell you what I think it’s not. It’s not to take that paternal approach ‘Oh here I am, I will save you, here’s what you should do, I’ll help you with this’ ... So, I think the role of an ally in the first place is to listen. So, what is it? What is the problem you are facing? What are the goals you want to achieve? And is there anything that right now - it would be my research, in my previous work as a mediator it would be in brokering agreements - that I can do to help but with you shaping what that looks like. So, I think that’s it - to listen and to let the questions and the work that you’re going to do for Indigenous people be directed and dictated by them.*

Similarly, the excerpts below from Ryan (KNYA) and Erin (KNYA) concur that an ally should not enter the relationship ready to help with established solutions and assumptions about what Indigenous people need. In response to the question ‘what is the role of an ally’, Ryan (KNYA) and Erin (KNYA) responded similarly:

*Ryan (KNYA): I guess an openness to understand from someone else's view  
- not come in with solutions - and try to work through some ideas.*

*Erin (KNYA): Seek to understand before you seek to be understood. Probably  
a good approach. Not assuming to know what people's needs are, actually  
asking them.*

Again, participants speak about setting aside assumptions about what Indigenous peoples need as fundamental to the practice of allyship. In this way, participants consistently acknowledge that they do not know what is best and instead are open to learning - reflective of knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty. Here, however, the element of listening-respect unsettles dominant settler logics and shapes participants ways of being to align with their non-authoritative role within the structures of Indigenous sovereignty. Oliver (CRT), Joel (CRT) and Stewart (CRT) also raise the importance of listening as a fundamental practice of allyship in NRM and refer to how the listening skills they developed through working with Indigenous sovereigns are transferred into other areas of their lives. For Joel and Stewart (CRT), this is in relation to listening to wives, girlfriends, and daughters in their personal lives outside of work, while Oliver (CRT) discussed the importance of listening in his profession outside of engagement with Indigenous peoples. As such, listening-respect enables allies to identify their roles and responsibilities for the practice of allyship. On the importance of listening, Joel (CRT) makes an interesting point about being comfortable with being quiet, stating:

*I think listening is probably one of the most important. And feeling  
comfortable and confident in yourself that you don't have to say something,*

*and I find that Indigenous people really respect that. And that's just something that I'm comfortable with in that space where I don't feel like I have to demonstrate I have a PhD and a bunch of hoohaa and you guys need to know that. So, I think that ability to be comfortable, confident, and be quiet, [laughs] which is often hard for me as I like to chatter at times.*

The point raised by Joel (CRT) in the latter part of the above quote demonstrates a valuable strategy for building interpersonal relationships with Indigenous peoples, in not feeling the need to assert one's qualifications and occupy space. This supports insights reported in my previous work (Searle and Muller 2019), that being quiet, listening, and observing are important qualities for managing whiteness. Joel's quote, however, provides further detail in the context of long-term allyship when working with Indigenous sovereigns. Joel (CRT) highlights, in everyday practice, the value in minimising discussions that focus on academic or scientific status. In the quote below, Joel (CRT) details the informal quality of conversations with Indigenous peoples that builds interpersonal relationships, based upon an attitude of listen-respect, and offering yourself as a person, not a professional:

*Part of it is just listening to their stories, acknowledging their stories, their histories, and their world views. And they want to know who you are. You know I could tell them, 'I'm [Joel], I work in a university, I have a PhD', and they're like 'But who are you? Tell us about your family. What do you do?' You know and so that kind of rocks your world and straight away you're talking about your daughters or whatever it is you're talking about. And so, it is at a very personal level...*

In the above quote, Joel's reference to how the personal quality of conversations with Indigenous sovereigns "*rocks your world*" indicates a shift in Joel's ontological position through the practice of Deep Listening. Ngangikurungkurr Elder, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann, explains that Deep Listening, or dadirri, is similar to 'contemplation' – the, inner, quiet, and still awareness that is Deep Listening. Moreover, Joel (CRT) recognises that this form of communication is important to Indigenous peoples, demonstrating how he adjusts to Indigenous ways of being, antithetical to persistent attitudinal barriers in collaborative arrangements that position non-Indigenous professionals as technocrats and superior knowledge holders.

Having demonstrated the basics of listening-respect in the context of collaborative arrangements, I now provide examples from participant narratives that demonstrate more nuanced understandings and applications of listening-respect. Below, I attend to participant discussions on 'showing up' and 'checking in' over time and consistent listening.

### *8.2.2 Consistent listening: 'showing up' and 'checking in'*

The importance of long-term consistent listening is demonstrated by participants as they discuss how they develop interpersonal skills and proper forms of conduct in NRM collaborative work. In this section, I highlight participant narratives that illustrate the way in which they unsettle their own internal colonial logics based upon knowledge hierarchies and refine proper forms of conduct. As an extension of listening-respect, I argue that consistent listening is a strategy to recentre Indigenous sovereignty through the practice of 'showing

up' and 'checking in' over time. Participants explain the principle fundamental to the practice of allyship, to listen to the voices of those they show solidarity with, not once, but repeatedly as a long-term process of relationship building that moves towards trust. In this way, participants attend to attitudinal barriers created by white possessive logics that view Indigenous knowledges as available for the taking and assumes that one can 'speak for' Indigenous sovereigns.

In her work, Amanda (CRT) often finds herself in situations where either Indigenous people are not present or are present but are not heard by settlers. Amanda (CRT) explains that in these circumstances tribes have asked her to raise their interests. This leads Amanda (CRT) to raise a second point when discussing the role of an ally. In addition to not behaving as a 'saviour,' trying to 'help' or 'fix' Indigenous sovereigns discussed above, in the quote below Amanda (CRT) emphasises the importance of listening and thinking about what to do with what you have been told.

*I think that the second thing is to, (and it's related to the first because it's part of listening but then it's also what you do with that information), is to be someone who can then express what you've heard to people in the dominant culture who maybe wouldn't listen to the Indigenous person. So maybe that's the role of translator or broker, and that's a - you know I say that and then I think there are problems with that too because that's stepping across the line into 'Oh I speak for someone who has a completely different culture and life than I do.' So, I think you have to be careful with that, but I have had success in doing that, as long as you're careful with the*

*communication and checking in to make sure you're not communicating inappropriately the interests of the particular Indigenous group.*

I highlight how Amanda (CRT) places consideration upon how the act of listening involves the acquisition of information. Questioning 'what you do' with the acquired knowledge indicates that Amanda (CRT) moves through a process of deliberation on how to remind colleagues that Indigenous sovereignty requires attention, without assuming ownership, taking possession of the shared knowledges, or reproducing incorrect or inappropriate information. Instead, Amanda (CRT) reflects on 'what you do' which is antithetical to dominant settler logics that take possession of Indigenous knowledges. Importantly, in the above reflection we can see that Amanda (CRT) takes pause to think about what she is saying and corrects herself, which shows reflexivity in action. Amanda (CRT) shows an awareness of the danger that she could easily assume a dominant position by 'speaking for' Indigenous sovereigns. Indeed, most participants, like Amanda (CRT), demonstrate an understanding of how 'speaking for' Indigenous peoples situate themselves in a position of superiority, reinforcing colonialisms. As such, 'checking in' is employed as a strategy to solidify understanding, particularly when participants undertake work to inform and educate the wider settler community. Throughout this section, we continue to see critical reflexivity in participant narratives and how they adjust to Indigenous ways of being.

Participants across both sites stress that building relationships with Indigenous sovereigns occurs over years and decades and requires allies to consistently keep in contact and deliver promised outcomes. As Amanda (CRT) states:



*It takes a whole lot of time and a whole lot of patience and a whole lot of showing up and following through on what you say you will do.*

Leona (CRT) also uses the term “*showing up*” and, reflective of others, states that committed contact with Indigenous peoples over time is required to build relationships. Leona (CRT) tells me she took every opportunity to attend local “*semi-public*” ceremonies to pray for the return of salmon.

*I think showing up is a broader term for continuing to act like an ally in the work that you do - to be an ally, not act like one [scoffs]. To be one.*

Leona (CRT) initially says, “*to act like an ally*” using the word ‘act,’ then scoffs at herself and replaces acting with being: “*to be an ally.*” Like Joel (CRT) above, Leona (CRT) makes the distinction between allyship as a performance or a practice. While Leona (CRT) continues to speak on the importance of showing up, in the quote below, a second reference to being is made.

*Just keep showing up whenever there’s an opportunity to participate in anything that they host, anything that they are involved in, or as I said, a ceremonial, an open ceremonial event, anything that you find out about just go, and just keep going. So, it’s the physical presence and the intellectual alignment if you will, the sharing of your gifts with them. I’ve done a tremendous amount of work for them that I’ve never been paid for, and they know that. Work for them meaning facilitate understanding in the larger community through my writing and no one pays me to do that. That’s a matter of the heart, its personal character, its ethics, and gradually over*

*time the respect comes. Does that make sense? It's in doing. It's in doing, in being, in being present. It takes a long time to build trust. It takes a long time. I've been at this twenty years. Twenty-five almost. So, there's no magic thing. It's just show up.*

By stating, *"it's in the doing, in being, in being present,"* Leona (CRT) first refers to 'doing' and then emphasises 'being,' indicating that being present and attentive underpins doing. I explore doing in the next chapter, however the interrelatedness of knowing, being, and doing becomes apparent in Leona's narrative on building meaningful relationships through showing up. This further demonstrated in Leona's reference to *"the physical presence"* (being) and *"the intellectual alignment"* (knowing). Similarly, when talking about her work as an independent writer, Leona (CRT) also speaks about how consistent checking in overtime builds trust.

*And once you've been at it long enough, like with the Sinixt, I have such a strong knowledge of what's good material, what they validate from the white world versus what they don't validate from the white world. I know that material so well over many years, that I don't have to do a lot of checking. And I have built up over time just that sort of integrity of material because I've worked on it with them, and about them, for so long.*

Maintaining relationships over time and planning for the time it takes to build meaningful relationships, is also emphasised by Joel (CRT) who explains that NRM projects with Indigenous sovereigns are *"at best a multi-year proposition."* As an example, Joel (CRT) told me about a recent project he was working on:

*This entire first year that I've been involved in that project I've spent lots of time on the road - going to tribal reservations, spending time on the river, going to meetings - with no particular agenda except to meet people and to get to know them and better understand them. And you have to do it face-to-face, and you have to go to them.*

While Joel (CRT) does not use the word listening in the above quote, consistent listening is implied in the advice to visit Indigenous sovereigns in person and spend time on the river without technocratic NRM agendas and processes. The point Joel (CRT) makes is to engage in a process of long-term relationship building. As such, Joel (CRT) unsettles the 'business as usual' perspective of non-Indigenous professionals reported in previous NRM studies.

Amanda (CRT), Leona (CRT), and Joel (CRT) provide examples of the nuances involved in listening-respect and show how they understand their role as long-term allies who reliably 'show up' and consistently 'check in.' This consistent listening enables participants to practice proper forms of conduct and adjust to Indigenous ways of being. In the next section, I move specifically to the KNYA, where participants show how they practice listening and observing colleagues in their workplaces.

### *8.2.3 Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan: listening to Ngarrindjeri speaking*

Turning specifically to the KNYA site, I now present participant discussions on the importance of having a legal agreement that specifies that the settler sovereign must listen to Ngarrindjeri speaking. Participants at the KNYA site emphasises how they use the KNYA as a tool to remind settler-colleagues that they are supposed to be abiding by the instructions

set out in the agreement. Here, we see how KNYA participants view their role as long-term allies to serve as listeners and agitators in their everyday workplaces. Participants demonstrate how they employ consistent listening across their workplace as a strategy to recentre Indigenous sovereignty by using the KNYA as a tool for 'checking in' with non-Indigenous colleagues. This provides a novel discussion on the value of a nation-to-nation agreement as a tool to recentre Indigenous sovereignty, unsettle attitudinal barriers and refine proper forms of conduct within the dominant settler workplace culture.

The criticality of listening is embedded in the name of the KNYA, providing an explicit directive to listen to Ngarrindjeri. David (KNYA) explains that in choosing a name for the KNYA, including the word 'listen' was a deliberate decision by Ngarrindjeri.

*Ngarrindjeri people felt as if they were never listened to and so they always had to hear but never were listened to. And so, the name of the agreement was to set down, or stamp down, in some sense how the relationship should be orientated, so 'listen to Ngarrindjeri people speaking - we have something to say that's important.'*

A legal document stating that Western sovereigns must listen provides a directive to act in a specified way. Below David (KNYA) unpacks why a supporting document that instructs non-Indigenous peoples and settler sovereigns to listen is important.

*So, Ngarrindjeri have their Kungun Ngarrindjeri Yunnan Agreements and so Ngarrindjeri can also use the Listening to Ngarrindjeri People Speaking title of those agreements to say, 'look, you're supposed to be listening to*

*us. That's what our agreement says, that's what we're supposed to do. You're not acting consistently with our agreement'. And so therefore you start to get some concepts into the brain that people who you're working together with, which might be government or whomever it might be, that we're supposed to be listening to these guys.*

David (KNYA) continues to explain in detail the process of being quiet, listening, absorbing the information, and thinking before one makes a response, speaking to a process of deep, not shallow, listening:

*I've learnt for the non-Indigenous person just to be quiet for a moment and listen very carefully to what people's experiences have been and then think very hard about what it is you've heard and what you think then you should say back to those people. So, listening to Ngarrindjeri people speaking, or listening to any Aboriginal people speaking, and then thinking yourself, and then interacting on it and being respectful... 'nobody is the font of all wisdom' I think is what I've probably learnt the most, and to some extent, it's not a deep concept.*

David's narrative, in both excerpts above, clearly addresses the prevalence and stubbornness of the settler inability to listen with statements such as *"you start to get some concepts into the brain"* and *"that we're supposed to be listening to these guys."* Because David (KNYA) refers to *"government or whomever"* his narrative is directed at trying to unsettle the settler ontology of non-Indigenous professionals who work in partnership with Indigenous sovereigns. This is not done in a way that expects non-Indigenous professionals to adopt a

relational ontology and appropriate Indigenous ways of being. Rather David (KNYA) speaks to unsettling settler attitudes underpinned by colonial knowledge hierarchies that position non-Indigenous people as superior and the sole authority. This may not be a major unsettling, but enough of a shift to allow for Deep Listening to occur and begin a longer-term process of learning to consistently listen to Ngarrindjeri. In this, we see that David (KNYA) understands his role as a long-term project aimed at unsettling the attitudes of non-Indigenous colleagues. Similarly, Erin (KNYA), Ryan (KNYA) and Sharlene (KNYA) discuss how they use the KNYA as a tool to remind staff of the legal commitment to listen to Ngarrindjeri. Below, Ryan (KNYA) explains that he understands his role as:

*Trying to influence others in the organisation... try to influence the way they'll go about doing their particular bits of work, making them aware of the [KNYA] commitments that are already existing. If something is being ignored taking the effort to put some of your other stuff to the side and make an effort to make people aware that they're being ignored and that there's obligation.*

Erin (KNYA) explicitly states that the institutional commitment gained through the KNYA allows her to refer co-workers to the legal commitments when they do not consider Ngarrindjeri interests in their work. Erin (KNYA) states:

*Within an organisation like Council, it's just keeping your ears open so that if you feel like engagement with Traditional Owners has been missed in a process you can speak up and say, 'have you thought about this?' That's the role that I can play, with the limited influence that I have.*

In this context, Erin (KNYA) refers to paying attention to listening to check whether her colleagues are following the agreement to listen to Ngarrindjeri speaking. If Erin (KNYA) notices that KNYA processes are not being followed, she can then make a reminder to her colleagues of the legal commitments. Similarly, when I asked Sharlene (KNYA) how she encourages staff to uphold the institutional commitments of the KNYA, she replied:

*I think you do a couple of things. You talk about the history and the symbolism, and you utilise the expertise of the other [staff] ... Some individuals are further along the journey with Aboriginal Australia than others and you use those [who are further along] to help back your circumstance. So, you say for example 'In this project we've had excellent engagement with Ngarrindjeri because of [a specific persons] strong relationship with Elders' and you bring other councillors into the story. So, it doesn't just look like it's administration trying to drive an agenda, but it actually involves a whole range of people and relationships.*

As such, Sharlene (KNYA), Ryan (KNYA) and Erin (KNYA) strategically use the KNYA as an instrument to unsettle settler attitudes that ignore, dismiss, or overlook Ngarrindjeri sovereignty. Participant attitudes reflect a position of being an agitator to the settler status quo, rather than reinforcing settler logics and attitudinal barriers. Rather than policing Indigenous knowledges and identities as authentic or inauthentic, these participants turn instead to listen out for, and monitor, the implementation of the KNYA in practice. In addition, another unique insight for the practice of allyship not previously discussed in depth emerges from within the context of NRM, where participant narratives discuss ways of listening which accounts for silence and absence.

#### *8.2.4 Deep Listening, silence, absence: sitting with 'not knowing'*

The final and most unique finding regarding employing listening as a strategy to unsettle attitudinal barriers is illustrated in this section. Participants show how they learn to become comfortable with not knowing and adjust their internal attitudes underpinned by the settler sense of entitlement to acquire all knowledge, driven by white possessive logics. I reiterate Regan's (2010) distinction between 'not knowing' as settler denial and ignorance, and 'not knowing' as a decolonising stance that relinquishes the desire to know how to solve what is referred to in Canada as 'the Indian problem.' Participants reflect on their responses to acts of Indigenous agency that leaves them feeling left with silence and absence when working in long-term partnerships with Indigenous sovereigns. Examples include when Indigenous sovereigns do not return phone calls or emails, do not attend scheduled meetings, or arrive to meetings late. While their frustration with silence and absence is evident, participants wrangle with their own settler logics and shift away from problematising Indigenous sovereigns. Through these reflections, I further argue that participants recentre Indigenous sovereignty by employing Deep Listening and being comfortable with 'not knowing' to unsettle attitudinal barriers and refine proper forms of conduct in ways that adjust to Indigenous ways of being.

As Bignall (2010, p. 18) explains, Western social and political philosophy "assumes that reality is productively driven by the desire to plug an original lack or absence." This drives the colonial desire to manage and ameliorate difference. Contrary, Bawaka Country et al. (2016, p. 461) explain that accounting for silence and absence embraces a relational



ontology because, “Absence has no meaning without presence, silence without speech, life without death, tractability without intractability.” Acknowledging silence and absence demonstrates the limits of the human capacity to understand the knowledges of more-than-human Entities (Bawaka Country et al. 2016). Moreover, absence and silence are important to the concept of Deep Listening, known as ‘dadirri’ of the Ngangikurungkurr language of the Daly River in the Northern Territory, and (Brearley and Hamm 2023). Ngangikurungkurr Elder, Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr Baumann, explains that dadirri is the most important, unique gift that can be bestowed upon non-Indigenous peoples. Dadirri is likened to ‘contemplation’ – the, inner, quiet, and still awareness that is deep listening (Tur 2018). Deep Listening is defined by Brearley and Hamm (2023, 259) below:

The Indigenous concept of Deep Listening describes a way of learning, working and being together. It is informed by the concepts of community and reciprocity. Deep Listening involves listening respectfully in ways which build community. It draws on every sense and every part of our being. Deep Listening involves taking the time to develop relationships and to listen respectfully and responsibly. It involves reframing how we learn, how we come to know and what we value as knowledge.

To begin, I provide an example of the unsettling effect of not knowing. When responding to the question, “What challenges or persistent problems have you faced and how do you overcome this?” Joel (CRT) replies with a lengthy discussion on his repeated experiences with Indigenous sovereigns that challenges the normative Western ideas of ‘process.’ In the quote below, we see how he grapples with not knowing. Joel (CRT) recalls:

*I remember mediating disputes with federal, state, local, tribal governments blah blah blah and convening meetings and the tribes wouldn't show up until eleven or twelve. And it's just like 'what?' You know, everyone else is flying in from Denver or Minneapolis or wherever they were flying in from for a three-hour meeting or something like that and the tribes aren't there. So, I don't know if that's intentional in terms of they know that that's an expression somehow of power on their part in terms of controlling the schedule, controlling the agenda.*

In the quote above, interestingly, Joel (CRT) suggests arriving late may be a deliberate expression of power and controlling the agenda – an act of agency and resistance to settler coloniality rather than an innate lack of capacity or ability. While Joel (CRT) still positions the punctuality of Indigenous sovereigns as a problem to be solved, in the quote below, he turns to identify his own expectations of Indigenous sovereigns to meet colonial time frames and the accompanying settler expectations and values on being punctual. Throughout this conversation, Joel (CRT) moves from point to point demonstrating his frustration with being in place of not knowing, through the repeated use of the phrase 'I don't know.' Joel (CRT) is clearly frustrated by not knowing the reason behind Indigenous agency and is frustrated with how it disrupts his ability to convene the negotiating process, highlighting the unsettling aspect to his practice of allyship. As Tuck and Yang (2012, p. 3) state "Solidarity is an uneasy, reserved, and unsettled matter that neither reconciles present grievances nor forecloses future conflict." This reserved and unsettling aspect of long-term allyship is further exemplified in Joel's reflection on everyday work processes, such as convening meetings:

*And then you invite them to the table and by the way we're going to start at eleven and they show up at two and you go what the hell is going on? Why weren't you there? And then you're in tailspin, and it's like 'I can't do this.' Right? And so that's where you learn patience and it's just like, ok guys you said you wanted to do it. So, this is what we got. We get what we get and let's just deal with it and respond as constructively and maturely as possible. And if we get frustrated then go to the gym and punch a punching bag or something, I don't know what to tell you. Go hit tennis balls, that's what I did.*

Across Joels' narrative, we see Joel accept that he has no control over Indigenous agency, and that he may never find a solution to 'fix' what occurs to Joel (CRT) as an impediment to his job as a negotiator. As previously noted by Baltutis and Moore (2020) and Lukawiecki et al. (2021) in Chapter 3, inviting Indigenous sovereigns to colonial tables does not ensure meaningful collaboration or allow for Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. While we see an ontological shift in Joel's settler reality, in having to step back from being in control and sit in a place of not knowing, the quote above also reflects a resignation to the current settler systems in place, and the agency of Indigenous sovereigns, as "*what we've got.*" While Joel's words substantiate the problems raised in the NRM literature, and provides insight into the practical, everyday barriers to collaborative work, what I highlight with this example is the way that Indigenous agency unsettles Joel (CRT). Specifically, I point to the frustration and emotional work and how this shapes Joel's attitude – swinging from wanting to fix the punctuality of Indigenous sovereigns to the acceptance of being in a position of not knowing, encased within the forces of his settler reality. Joel demonstrates

attempts at navigating diverse ways of being and agency. However, I suggest that Joel's reflection on being unsettled limits a braver reimagining of negotiation processes that may originate from the systems, processes, and ceremonies of Indigenous sovereigns, rather than a focus on punctuality. Nevertheless, this example remains insightful because of the nuanced wrestling with the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty, and how this shapes Joel's attitude.

In *Decolonizing Solidarity*, Land (2015, p. 169) reports that several Indigenous participants reported that "non-Indigenous people do not need to know the details of all the issues." Indeed, Land (2015) explains, having boundaries around what allies need to know, or not know, is important for creating boundaries that intrude into Indigenous peoples' lives. Yorta Yorta scholar, Treahna Hamm, explains with reference to Deep Listening, "Aboriginal people don't give information easily. You have to really listen. Not only listen with your ears but with your heart" (Brearley & Hamm 2023, 259). Below, participants demonstrate how listening to what is not said allows them to navigate the boundaries put in place by Indigenous sovereigns. Rather than policing Indigenous sovereigns, participants speak about how they do not need to know specific details regarding Indigenous knowledges or see 'traditional' presentations of 'culture'. Thereby, participants interpret silence and absences not as a form of inferiority or inauthenticity but as Indigenous agency. As discussed in Chapter 3, the authentic/inauthentic binary placed on Indigenous identity creates a core attitudinal barrier to collaborative relationships. Below, participants provide examples of being comfortable with not knowing as another strategy that recentres Indigenous sovereignty. Leona (CRT) and Ryan (KNYA) illustrate how listening to what is not being said counters attitudinal

barriers around policing the authenticity of Indigenous knowledges and identity. Moreover, nuanced practices of listening refine proper forms of conduct. For example, Ryan (KNYA) explicitly states that the expectations of colleagues to have an 'authentic' cultural experience with Indigenous sovereigns is a barrier to collaborative work. Like Joel (CRT) above, Ryan's example is situated in the context of meetings:

*Another element or barriers within an organisation like I work in, that a lot of the time people come to meetings or planning sessions with Aboriginal people and ... there's a level of this sort of expectation from some government employees that when you engage Aboriginal people, they'll share all this sort of stuff and when they don't I think people come away with this feeling of let-down, might be a feeling that they're not authentic, and then not legitimising that. It's an interesting area, particularly in planning and when the Nation, the ground that they will take is the principles and different goals and objectives they have. It's like, 'we'll use our knowledge to make those calls and share that with you, but we're not going to share that.' I think it irks white people in government a bit.*

In the quote above, Ryan (KNYA) notices how fellow non-Indigenous professionals can label Indigenous peoples as inauthentic when expectations of 'traditional' knowledges or cultural practices are not performed. In critiquing the way that colleagues' police the authentic/inauthentic binary, Ryan (KNYA) demonstrates that he does not mistake the withholding of knowledge as an absence of knowledge but is engaging in a process of Deep Listening. As self-determination and agency are the bedrock of sovereignty, prioritising Indigenous sovereignty means respecting Indigenous peoples' choice not to share their

knowledge. Thereby, Ryan (KNYA) positions himself, and his role as an ally, within the frameworks of Indigenous sovereignty and adjusts to Indigenous ways of being by giving up the settler sense of entitlement to acquiring all knowledge. This is similarly expressed by Leona (CRT) in the quote below, as she describes hearing about the paint used in local Indigenous pictographs, or rock paintings.

*I've heard references about Indigenous people and there being secret formulas for this rock art that there's the basic principle of the iron oxide mixed with deer fat or bear fat and animal fat basically, and then there were these mystery ingredients. And when I have heard [Indigenous] people talk about them, I haven't said 'so what are those?' You can tell - when they want to keep something secret - you can tell. And I'm just not one to ask a lot of questions. I try to listen.*

Like Ryan (KNYA) above, Leona (CRT) attributes silence and withholding information as Indigenous agency and provide an example of 'Deep Listening.' In the following two excerpts, Leona (CRT) expresses the need for Deep Listening with more-than-human Entities. This occurs first when providing a definition of sovereignty, where Leona (CRT) states that settler sovereigns do not listen to the sovereignty of natural systems:

*I think to me the greater definition of the word sovereignty involves a system, whether it be a human system, I think landscapes, ecosystems, can have sovereignty. We don't listen. We don't give them that sovereignty. We don't listen to them.*

Second, Leona's willingness to listen to more-than-human Entities is also captured below, where Leona (CRT) explains listening as a non-auditory experience and identifies "*feeling things, and sensing a presence, and getting curious*" as messages from Indigenous Ancestors.

Leona (CRT) recalls:

*So, I was told by [the] Indigenous people [that I work with] that it was the Ancestors who engaged me first. They have a term called tapping on the shoulder. 'You got tapped', they say to me, 'the Ancestors tapped you.' So, when I was out camping on the lake here and was feeling things, and sensing a presence, and getting curious about Indigenous history in the region, it was the Ancestors who woke me up. So that's by way of saying you honour their presence. It's not just, 'ok, there's a Tribal Office' and you know it's there. It can be simply that you honour the Ancestral presence.*

Leona's distinction between knowing where the 'Tribal Office' is and honouring the presence of Indigenous ancestors is an insight not raised by other participants in this, or other, studies on allyship or NRM. What is most telling in Leona's description of "*getting tapped*" is how it attributes agency to more-than-human Entities because "*the Ancestors woke me up.*" I suggest that Leona (CRT) implies that she heard the message from the Ancestors, through "*feeling*" and "*sensing,*" having engaged in a process of Deep Listening. This is an important aspect that acknowledges and respects Indigenous agency and, in this way, Leona (CRT) incorporates a relational approach by listening to Indigenous Ancestors. Deep Listening is further illustrated by Melanie (CRT) in the quote below. As Melanie (CRT) begins her response, she takes pause to think between the words, '*I could feel,*' when describing listening to Indigenous sovereigns. Interestingly, like Leona (CRT) above, Melanie (CRT) also

speaks to the generosity of Indigenous peoples to share food. When I asked Melanie (CRT) what she has learnt about herself, she recalls her experiences conducting life history interviews with Indigenous peoples:

*I [pause] could [pause] feel, for a very brief moment in time, some of the injustices that the First Nations people had to endure, simply by listening to them and giving them the ability to have a safe place where they could share those life histories, gave me a very brief glimpse, a moment in time to some of the historical wrongs, the emotional scars the abuse, that still I argue is continuing today ... a part of that was shared with me that was very difficult to listen to and as you know when you listen to Indigenous speak it is highly contextualized within their entire world, and so to be part of that world for a moment - I was invited into the home of this previous Chief to share in some of their tradition food so that was extremely compassionate on their part ... it was very humbling, I have to say that I was deeply humbled.*

Again, this is a process of Deep Listening underpinned by an attitude of relation and encapsulates how Deep Listening is employed as a strategy for recentring Indigenous sovereignty by reflecting on their role as listeners and adjusting to Indigenous ways of being. Through participant narratives above, we see a shift away from attitudinal barriers that view Indigenous peoples as in need of fixing. Again, this does not abdicate participants, or any settlers, from their complicity in settler colonialism, nor does it resolve tensions. Rather, the above insights reveal the unsettling aspect of long-term allyship, and how this provides opportunities for adjusting attitudes that reproduce the assumed superiority and authority that comes with a settler status. Because silence and absence unsettle settler logics, and



participants work through uncomfortable emotions, participants exemplify how being comfortable with not knowing unsettles attitudinal barriers and is a critical strategy to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements. These examples of not knowing, emerging from the settler offices and meeting rooms where participants work in NRM, are not a destination point but merely the beginnings of unsettling the settler sense of entitlement to and authority over all knowledge, which shores up attitudinal barriers. Moreover, the practice of Deep Listening demonstrates the power to shift settlers' ontological position and adjust to Indigenous ways of being.

Being comfortable with not knowing, extending listening-respect to perceived silence and absence from Indigenous sovereigns during long-term allyship that further unsettles participants internal settler logics and adjusts to Indigenous ways of being. These examples of consistent listening-respect, I argue, are strategies that recentres Indigenous sovereignty by unsettling attitudinal barriers. As such, participants demonstrate the relationship between personal change and political action, a topic I explore further in the next section.

### *8.3 An ontology of truth: the link between personal change and political action*

Having their reality of settler colonialism unsettled, I argue that participants further refine proper forms of conduct, adjust to Indigenous ways of being and recenter Indigenous sovereignty by exemplifying endurance and hope. These two elements are employed to consistently to create radical socio-political change. Participants speak to the challenges of engaging in sustained resistance to settler logics and colonial structures throughout their

work and personal lives. Here, participants move towards what Paulette Regan (2010, p. 16) calls an 'ontology of truth.' When discussing the potential for non-Indigenous people in settler societies to become allies, (Regan 2010, p. 215):

Real socio-political change will not come from hegemonic institutional and bureaucratic structures within these societies. If it is to happen, it will come from those people who are willing to take up, again and again, the struggle of living in truth.

The transformative possibilities that emerge when settlers live in an ontology of truth, Regan (2010) argues, is intimately tied to the role of critical hope. This is underpinned by the work of educator and activist Paulo Freire, and sociologist Henry Giroux, who identify the valuable of critical hope for transformative social change in the face of long-standing, stubborn structural injustice. Indeed, Taiaiake Alfred stresses that despite the enormity of confronting settler colonisation, decolonisation occurs through small, mundane personal choices underpinned by critical hope, made in the everyday (Alfred 2009; Regan 2010).

### *8.3.1 Exemplifying endurance: persisting through sustained unsettlement*

To continue with long-term allyship and to act politically, with self-understanding, participants provide examples of managing sustained unsettlement and the importance of endurance. In the quote below, David (KNYA) refers to several contradictory, or unsettling, elements that come with committed allyship:

*You're required to always have energy, you're required to sometimes put an argument, or ... make a point that's against the flow and so therefore you're required to sort of naively or idealistically push an issue because it's important. But then on the other hand, you're human and so therefore you get tired and grumpy.*

In the quote above, David's reference to 'naively or idealistically' pushing an issue 'against the flow' reflects the reality that moves towards decolonisation are, in some way, unrealistic. As David (KNYA) continues, we see further mention of the need for 'sustained energy' and a glimpse of critical hope in his statement that, as a privileged legal professional one 'should try' to overcome attitudinal barriers by listening, putting in the energy, and providing resources:

*I've always been angry about it, so I remain angry. Whether I've got the energy to continue to be angry, I think sometimes you need a break as well, so I think that it sort of comes back to that question you asked me a little while ago about why it is people do things and so I think when I see injustice it just makes me angry, and it still does. And I think that you should try and do something about it if you can. And so, lawyers do have a privileged position, they should listen to people from the margins, and they should try and do something about it if they have the energy and resources to do so.*

Similarly, Harry (KNYA) describes the endurance and commitment he exercised during the years of community division around the time of the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission. Because Harry (KNYA) supported Ngarrindjeri women's claims on the sacred site at the

Goolwa Warf Precinct his stance went 'against the flow,' which unsettled the Goolwa community, particularly those who were in opposition to Ngarrindjeri. Harry (KNYA) tells me:

*In the middle of all this we were suffering unbelievable persecution. One of them, we had our phone put on a silent number as people were ringing us up and just, middle of the night, and they would just put the phone down after we answer, all that kind of stuff ... And, the thing is, out of all of that [my wife] found the strength to say to me - because a couple of times I said I was going to pack up, this is no good for you - and she would say 'don't do that Harry, you will regret it for the rest of your life, and you may even blame me for that. You've got to go on.'*

Harry's story above describes years-worth of hostility from adversaries on the Kumerangk issue. In addition to phone calls in the middle of the night Harry (KNYA) was also the target of public protests at his workplace.

*One morning I went to work ... and as I went up to the door there's all these people standing there with placards, and they were boycotting me and because of the results that had been published about me being an unreliable witness and all that kind of stuff. And there were people there that I went to school with and I looked at them and I couldn't believe, I couldn't understand, and it was a very hot morning as I remember, and I went in, I went past them and said 'ok you people can do what you like but please don't stop anybody from coming through the doorway' and went in and then I thought, it's a rather hot day and there are toilets in here, so I went back*

*out and said to them 'look, I'm not asking you for favours but if you want cold water there's plenty in there, and if you need the toilets they're in there, but please leave your placards outside'.*

Harry's commitment to Ngarrindjeri highlights the strain of sustained unsettlement in the face of overt attitudinal barriers within the local community. Following the overturning of the ruling from the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission and the subsequent public recognition of Ngarrindjeri sovereignty, Harry reflects on his role:

*So, all in all I suppose I came out of it very well ... it was quite humbling to realise that had happened to me .... And you have to wonder sometimes, sometimes you give up too soon, people get discouraged too soon, or the opposition is too great, but that didn't happen and thankfully out of all of this came the KNYA and it was the first time it ever happened, and it became the model for local governments all over Australia ... so it all happened here and it's a mighty story.*

The quote above suggests Harry (KNYA) is reflecting on the possibility that he could have given up too soon in the face of strong opposition. Harry's sustained commitment to Ngarrindjeri sovereignty and endurance against opposition that invaded both his professional and private life, eventuated in what he calls "*a mighty story*." Moreover, the 2002 KNYA became a pioneering model for local government across Australia. In this way, Harry's act of critical hope, embracing an ontology of truth, and working alongside Ngarrindjeri to recentre Ngarrindjeri sovereignty contributed to the subsequent socio-political change created by the KNYA.

### *8.3.2 Optimism and the role of critical hope*

In this final section I draw on participants narratives to argue that being hopeful and optimistic are key strategies that unsettles attitudinal barriers in collaborative arrangements and provide further insights on the unsettling aspect of long-term allyship. I show that when CRT participants discuss their hopes for Indigenous sovereigns this is coupled with hopes for healthy lands, waters, and ecosystems in the Columbia River Basin. My analysis, however, reveals that KNYA participants, in contrast, express hopes for Ngarrindjeri, but this is not explicitly coupled with the Murray River. Through their work, KNYA participants understand that Ngarrindjeri 'Care as Country' and have a rightful responsibility to care for lands, waters and ecosystems is implicit when prioritising Indigenous sovereignty. Nevertheless, across both sites, participants demonstrate the link between personal change and political action. Below, I show that participants extend their hopes and desires beyond human relationships to more-than-human relationships. As Martin Booran Mirraboopa (2003, p. 209) 209 reminds us, "We are part of the world as much as it is part of us, existing within a network of relations amongst Entities that are reciprocal and occur in certain contexts." As participants further unsettle their own attitudes and as Regan (2010, p. 16) describes, unsettling the settler within requires living in an ontology of truth, where "Truth as an act of hope nurtures peaceful yet radical socio-political change that is the necessary foundation of reconciliation."

CRT participants consistently express a desire for a healthier river system and to recover salmon runs disrupted by dams. This discussion is pronounced at the CRT site as the most pressing issue around renewing the CRT is to include ecological considerations and

Indigenous sovereigns as decision makers to revive the Columbia River. The point I highlight here is the relationship between participants knowing of Indigenous sovereignty, hope for the restoration of natural systems, and hope for the future - all of which are seen entwined together in the quotes below when I asked participants “What are your hopes for the river?” Amanda (CRT) replies:

*Well right now, in the long term I hope that salmon can be recovered and that the tribes who are currently acting as co-managers continue to grow in that role... So, my short-term hope is that those negotiations are included in a way that represents, that includes the issues that tribes and First Nations brought to the table ... The one other thing that I could say that I’ve seen from the Columbia River Basin that I hope is a message that we’ll be able to get out from this process as it unfolds is that very much in the review process in the US side ... they set up a process where the tribes were on what they called the Sovereign Review Team and the tribes were represented in that as were the States. And that, just that, calling it the Sovereign Review Team, was huge.*

The Sovereign Review Team is mentioned by many of the CRT participants. As I explained in Chapter 2, this working group consisted of representatives from the fifteen tribes on the US side of the Basin with representatives from state and federal government, and technical advisory bodies including the US Army Corp of Engineers. As Amanda (CRT) highlights, naming tribes as members of the Sovereign Review Team means that Indigenous nations are acknowledged as sovereign. Other participants speak similarly about Indigenous leadership

as a source of hope for addressing the challenges of climate change, as shown in Oliver's quote below:

*I think running the river less as a machine and more as a river and building a community of the Columbia underpinned by values that recognise the importance of the river now and throughout time. But I mean, those are, some of those objectives seemed just unachievable but with the leadership of tribes those objectives now seem much more achievable.*

In Oliver (CRT) and Amanda's quotes above, we can see that the health of the river, hopes for the future, and Indigenous leadership are bound together. This is representative across participant responses at the CRT site. At the KNYA site, however, Erin and Ryan place less focus on the river itself, and more attention on recentring Ngarrindjeri sovereignty.

*Erin (KNYA): Yeah, well with the river, because I'm involved in our advocacy around a healthy Murray-Darling Basin. So, that is our hope, that the Basin Plan will return the river to a sustainable level of take, and health, and ... that Coorong, Lower Lakes, Murray Mouth will continue to be part of a healthy working Basin, that we get a fresh water future which means we get enough environmental water coming down the system ... for Country I guess that my hope is that the NRA are able to work their way through their own kind of organisational issues and still be a strong, well even if it's not the NRA that they're still able to have strong representation for their community.*



*Ryan (KNYA): it's more about the people and their futures and interests and things, that's kind of what motivates me more ... yeah, that [Country] gets healthier, and I guess for me that people are involved in it more.*

I highlight here an interesting disconnect in KNYA participant narratives between the health of the Murray River and the role of Indigenous sovereigns. Sharlene (KNYA) and Erin (KNYA) discussed Council's work on river health and work with the NRA as separate issues. In the excerpt below, Sharlene (KNYA) notices this disjuncture as she speaks, again demonstrating critical reflexivity in practice. Sharlene (KNYA) describes Council's advocacy for the Murray River as:

*Another thing that's very important to our community and very important to our Chamber.*

In saying work on river health is 'another thing', Sharlene (KNYA) means 'in addition to the KNYA'. As such, she separates the work done on river health from the work around the KNYA. Initially the separation is invisible to Sharlene (KNYA) as she lists much advocacy work that Council has conducted for the health of the Murray River, including federal, state, and local government initiatives, and using the media to draw attention to the plight of the river. As she discusses these initiatives on river health, Sharlene (KNYA) realises this disconnect:

*It's really important that we don't lose sight of the mechanisms we've got to keep our river healthy and basically support the [Murray Darling] Basin Plan rally cry. So, we do a lot of work, it is pivotal. I suppose, interestingly, we don't liaise with, if we were to have a leader to leader [KNYA] meeting I probably wouldn't put it on the agenda, but maybe I should because I know*

*that Ngarrindjeri are being engaged by other government bodies for their view on cultural elements of water and river, so maybe that's something I can cross-pollinate better.*

*Interviewer: It's interesting, even when we're talking, you're thinking all the time about what you can do better.*

In this excerpt, Sharlene (KNYA) connects Ngarrindjeri sovereignty with the health of the Murray River. Sharlene identifies the disjoin between river health and work with the NRA and she embraces an opportunity to “*cross-pollinate better*” through an attitude of optimism and hope. Embracing an ontology of truth more accurately reflects the realities of settler colonialism, and thereby, recentres Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous ways of being in NRM.

## **8.4 Conclusion**

Across this chapter, I have shown that participants unsettle attitudinal barriers in NRM by employing strategies that recentre Indigenous sovereignty and adjust to Indigenous ways of being. The analysis of participant narratives identifies three key strategies essential to the practice of long-term critical allyship in collaborative arrangements: 1) feeling unsettled, 2) listening-respect, and 3) embracing an ontology of truth. The way in which participants adjust to Indigenous ways of being largely remains within the realm of interactions between people, yet some movement towards a relational ontology that includes more-than-human Entities is visible. Participants unsettle their own internal settler logics and shift away from the constraints of binarism and towards an ontological pluralism that considers there are

multiple ways of being in the world. Making room for the ontological positions different to our own is only possible upon knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty. This base knowledge enables participants to identify their roles and responsibilities to Indigenous sovereigns and reflecting on proper forms of conduct. While critical reflexivity is an individual process of unsettling that builds an ontology of truth, work that unsettles external colonial paradigms and settler logics meets sustained resistance that requires commitment, stamina, and critical hope. In the following chapter, I add further dimension to the interrelatedness of knowing and being through participant narratives on doing.

## 9 Doing

The fulfilment of responsibilities and the maintenance of relations *as actions* are essential elements of Indigenous ways of doing. Taking action that is transformative is also essential to the practice of allyship. In the prior two chapters, I have shown that participants fulfil responsibilities to Indigenous sovereigns and recentre Indigenous sovereignty, on two levels. Chapter 6 identified that participants take responsibility for *knowing* the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty, one's complicity in settler colonialism, the mechanisms of structural injustice, and the possibility of ontological pluralism. Chapter 7 revealed that participants take responsibility for *being* attentive to proper forms of conduct in their relationships with Indigenous sovereigns. While knowing and being require forms of action, in this chapter, I focus on transformative action taken in everyday NRM workplaces that disrupts colonial institutional structures. In their practice of allyship, participants are responsible for *doing* work that unsettles institutional barriers and recentres Indigenous sovereignty. This includes a critical examination of how participants adjust the structures of settler institutions, including leadership, governance, and the social organisation of collaborative work. Thereby, this chapter is critical to completing the inter-related triad of knowing, being, and doing. As Martin Booran Mirraboopa (2003, p. 210) explains:

Our Ways of Doing are a synthesis and an articulation of our Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. Our Ways of Doing express our individual and group identities, and our individual and group roles. Our behaviour and actions are a matter of our subsequent evolution and growth in our individual Ways of Knowing and Ways of Being. We become tangible

proof of our ontology and its construction of our Ways of Being and Ways of Knowing. That is, we are able to show (Doing), respectfully and rightfully (Being) what we know (Knowing).

To reiterate, the practice of allyship requires settlers to take everyday actions that subvert the dominance of settler logics and colonial paradigms. Transformation then occurs through seemingly small, yet radical acts that recentres Indigenous sovereignty. Paulette (Regan 2010, p. 218, emphasis added) states, “[unsettling] demands that we challenge ourselves to *think* and *feel* and *act* with fierce courage and humble tenacity in the struggle to right our relationship.” Exploring the strategies and innovations that participants take with decisive action to challenge institutional barriers is a critical next step for collaborative arrangements. The final insights from participants provide explicit and innovative examples for the theory and practice of allyship that addresses structural barriers, thereby contributing important insights to unsettling institutions.

Important to Indigenous ways of doing, are the actions that contribute to social organisation and control (Martin Booran Mirraboopu 2003). For Indigenous sovereigns have more control over the formation and function of governance structures in collaborative arrangements, this requires settler sovereigns to adopt a nation building approach (Cornell & Kalt 2007; Jorgensen 2007). The call from scholar on unsettling allyship to move investigations away from the front lines of political activism and into the offices of settler institutions is addressed in this chapter and integrated with the principles of Indigenous nation building. Moreover, as argued by Muller, Hemming and Rigney (2019, p. 399) “Indigenous agency, grounded in Indigenous governance and sovereignties, is driving innovation and decolonising

environmental management by making space for new ways of thinking and being ‘in place.’”

Thereby, to embrace the transformations that Indigenous sovereigns seek, non-Indigenous allies must make space within the structures of institutions for Indigenous agency according to Indigenous sovereignty and its embedded meanings of place. Here, the agency of participants, underpinned by the shift in their settler ontology, works to loosen the constraints of settler colonisation and recentre Indigenous sovereignty through transformative action.

The analysis of participant interviews reveals pioneering strategies and innovations that unsettle dominant colonial governance structures and social organisation. First and foremost, is strategically following Indigenous leadership. I exemplify how following Indigenous leadership, locally, globally, and on public platforms is a primary strategy for unsettling institutional barriers in collaborative arrangements. Second, participants reveal examples of adjusting settler frameworks to follow the leadership of Indigenous sovereigns. This includes how they embed Indigenous sovereignty into institutional memory, transform resourcing, utilise technology, and transferring human hospital ethics standards from the bedside to the streamside. To close the analysis, I finish the chapter by highlighting how public acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty brings social cohesion to settler communities. This is an important insight, where participants express feeling joy and satisfaction incurred through the collective unsettling work of many non-Indigenous allies who recentre Indigenous sovereignty and come together in public assemblies. Returning to the discussion in Chapter 7 on structural injustice, this chapter presents examples of

adjusting institutional settler frameworks in routine operations to mitigate structural barriers in the everyday.

## *9.1 Follow the leaders*

Because a decolonising and unsettling practice of allyship and a nation building approach in NRM requires allies to follow the leadership of Indigenous sovereigns, I first focus on several forms of leadership presented by participants. At a local level, this means that allies follow Indigenous leaders from the local Indigenous community who have sovereign responsibilities to a specific place. Alongside this, the nation building work of Indigenous sovereigns is tied to global Indigenous networks across settler societies (Hemming & Rigney 2008). As such, participants also follow the leadership Indigenous sovereigns from across the world bring to NRM, such as the work of Māori and Whanganui River. Moreover, participant narratives reveal that non-Indigenous leaders are critical for implementing and maintaining institutional change.

### *9.1.1 Local Indigenous leadership*

In this section, I discuss the value of working in close partnership with local Indigenous people – the sovereigns of the lands upon which we work. Both Amanda (CRT) and Joel (CRT) speak highly of their Indigenous colleagues and the complimentary roles that Indigenous and non-Indigenous people take. This is captured in the quote below by Joel (CRT), as he discusses working in close partnership with Indigenous colleagues on a more recent project in the Colorado:

*One of my colleagues that I'm working with in the Colorado, co-directing and co-facilitating, he's a Native American - actually that's the piece I wanted to mention to you that's really fundamentally different between the work we did in the Columbia and the work we're now doing in the Colorado, and so let me just go off on that tangent for a second - is that my work now in the Colorado, I am joined at the hip and frankly don't do, in terms of our engagement with tribes in the Colorado, I don't do anything without the consultation and agreement with my co-facilitator ... who is a Native American. OK? So, having a team basically co-directing and co-facilitating this project. I come at it from a Western perspective and he's coming at it from a very traditional Indian perspective. It opens a lot of doors and there is a lot of respect for the both us and we've developed a pretty close friendship pretty quickly in part because I think we're both willing to listen and spend time together without needing to accomplish a whole lot of stuff. So, I would say just in terms of you know one of those variables in how to do this better, more effectively, more efficiently, is that's a great way to integrate those two cultures, is to have people who have that ability to work side by side. We're basically providing leadership, so we're co-leading this initiative, and I don't think it would be possible for either one of us to do alone because I bring skills he doesn't have, and he brings skills I don't have.*

The phrase that Joel (CRT) uses in the excerpt above, *"I'm joined at the hip"* with his colleague, emphasises a point that he had thought about prior to our interview and wanted to raise – that is the importance of working in partnership. As seen in previous chapters, Joel



(CRT) has previously demonstrated the unsettling elements of his work - respecting Indigenous sovereignty, viewing Indigenous knowledges as equally valid as Western knowledge, and clear on his role as an ally. Here, doing comes into play because Joel's emphasises "*how to **do** this better*" and integral to this is to have non-Indigenous and Indigenous people work side by side. As Joel (CRT) states, "*I don't **do** anything*" without this partner and "*it would [not] be possible for either one of us to **do** alone.*" Having two people, or a team, comprising of Indigenous and non-Indigenous people who provide leadership together, each with their own strengths, reflects the principle of the Haudenosaunee Two Row Wampum, where two boats travel down the river in parallel (Hallenbeck 2015; Hill, RWS & Coleman 2018). This sits in contrast to the co-management literature and the consistent reporting on the dominance of settler logics and colonial paradigms which render Indigenous sovereigns without decision making power in collaborative arrangements. Joel (CRT) does not take the lead but stands back to recognise the agency of Indigenous sovereigns grounded in two ways of cultural exchange. Here, the capability of Indigenous colleagues is viewed as valued, contrary to studies on the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals that problematise the capacity of Indigenous peoples as deficit. Moreover, Joel's narrative reiterates his previous point that the relationship is nurtured through spending time together without doing "*a whole lot of stuff.*" This is contrary to Western processes that seek speed and efficiency.

From Joel's strengths-based perspective, institutional barriers in NRM are unsettled because the capacity of Indigenous peoples and practices are valued as a critical element of successful co-management. By adjusting to Indigenous ways of doing and working alongside

Indigenous practices, Joel (CRT) interrupts the settler assumption that 'West is best' and thereby makes space for Indigenous ways of doing in collaborative arrangements. Again, this reflects the ability of allies to 'step back,' an essential element to the practice of critical allyship, identified by (Nixon 2019). However, I suggest that this move is more akin to 'stepping aside' because Joel (CRT) walks alongside Indigenous leadership.

Joel's examples occur in spaces where the leadership of a particular Indigenous person is accepted by the Indigenous community and are engaged in a collaborative NRM project on the sovereign territories of that community. Following Indigenous leadership is a core strategy consistently discussed across the allyship literature, however, in the section below, I provide further context to the various ways that allies can follow Indigenous leadership.

### *9.1.2 Global Indigenous leadership*

In conjunction with local Indigenous leadership, participants across both sites refer to following global Indigenous leadership to unsettle dominant, and problematic settler approaches to NRM. In this way, participants recentre Indigenous sovereignty more broadly, looking to international examples that unsettle settler institutional frameworks and adjust to Indigenous ways of doing. As such, following Indigenous leadership both locally and globally is used as a strategy to unsettle normalised approaches to co-management. As noted by Hemming and Rigney (2008) in Chapter 3, global Indigenous networks across settler societies are important for the local nation building work of Indigenous sovereigns. In 2017, the Whanganui River was the first river in the world to receive the legal status of

personhood within a settler sovereign framework, based upon “the ontological understanding of the river as an indivisible and living whole and as the spiritual ancestor of the Whanganui Iwi (a Māori tribe)” (Kramm 2020, p. 307). This legal agreement stipulates that the human voice to speak on behalf of the Whanganui River is formed jointly between two people, one nominated by the Whanganui Iwi and one by the Crown, shifting the dominance of settler decision making and creating new identities (Charpleix 2018). The work of Māori and the granting of personhood to the Whanganui River in Aotearoa/New Zealand is an example raised by both Ryan (KNYA) and Oliver (CRT). Ryan (KNYA) discusses this shift as a pioneering example to follow. When responding to the role of an ally, Ryan (KNYA) replies:

*There's some international examples in Canada and New Zealand - it's legislated that Indigenous knowledge has a part to play and plays a role in environmental assessment, so I guess looking abroad to what that looks like and how it's done is important to that aspect of the work. For the last three or so years we've been following the Waikato and Whanganui Rivers co-management processes that underpin them but also the personhood for non-human things. And in some cases, living in South Australia and working in this department is sort of like, I'm dreaming if that's ever going to happen here, but I think those sorts of ideas are the, those insights and solutions to the environmental degradation that happens now within our Western way of being, that lack of relationship.*

What is interesting about Ryan's quote above is that not only does he follow international examples of Indigenous nation building in other settler societies but reflects on the

possibilities of legislating the rights of more-than-human Entities in South Australia. While Ryan claims he is “*dreaming*” that this shift will occur in Australia, we again see the underlying power of critical hope, discussed in the previous chapter, as Ryan (KNYA) reflects on possibility. On the other hand, Erin (KNYA), Sharlene (KNYA), and Harry (KNYA) point to how Ngarrindjeri are viewed as leaders on an international platform because of their nation building work and the KNYA. Erin (KNYA) states:

*[The KNYA and the work of] the NRA is actually quite considered leading practice at an international level and [the NRA has] taken it to a lot of international conferences and they do cultural exchanges with other Indigenous groups, in America and all kinds of places. And they're really proud of that on an international level. They've got something they can hold up which is really leading at the time and continues to be leading practice ... at an international level in terms of Indigenous self-determination.*

In the above narratives, participants like Erin (KNYA) further illustrate multiple and interconnected practices of following Indigenous leadership. In conjunction, participants speak to the role of non-Indigenous leaders of settler communities who follow Indigenous leadership on a public platform, as seen below.

### *9.1.3 Non-Indigenous leaders*

At both sites, another aspect to following Indigenous leadership and adjusting to Indigenous ways of doing centres on the way that non-Indigenous leaders of settler communities model the following of Indigenous leadership. During the formation of the KNYA and its initial

implementation, the work of the mayor of the council is heralded by Sharlene (KNYA) and Erin (KNYA). The importance of strong, committed non-Indigenous leadership is evident in Erin's quote below:

*But following the Hindmarsh Bridge debacle they chose not to ignore it and to really take a step. At the time there was nothing like [the KNYA] that other councils were doing, so it's really that kind of visionary leadership back in 2002 to take that step ... without those particular people who made that particular decision the KNY Agreement wouldn't have happened. So, it's a product of personality as much as, you know it starts with a personality who is in a position of power, committed to the issue, and from there over the past 20 years it's worked its way down through the organisation. And we're absolutely not perfect. It's a work in progress but the relationship between [the mayor] and the leaders of the NRA at that time, built on mutual respect, enabled that kind of agreement to be formed and then for the focus to be maintained. It would have been really easy for that document to be signed and then not actually implemented.*

Here, we see the relationship between being and doing, as Erin (KNYA) describes the individual commitment of the mayor to build a meaningful relationship with Ngarrindjeri and take leadership to engage in transformative action. The sense of continuing to uphold the initiative of previously leaders is also evident in Sharlene's quote below:

*We've had the benefit of leaders who are respected by Ngarrindjeri. So, [a male staff member] and a female [staff member] ... they led the relationship building at the time of the development of the KNYA, and I think the respect that they were held in [by Ngarrindjeri] was pivotal to building the trust, the trust relationship. And then from there, it's been about us, as leaders and executive of the organisation, setting the tone as I said about what's non-negotiable.*

As Sharlene (KNYA) continues, she provides an explicit example of ongoing leadership within the organisation for “*setting the tone*” with regards to the institutional commitment to listen to Ngarrindjeri. In the excerpt below, Sharlene (KNYA) recalls the response by council leadership when a staff member questioned how long a certain project would take to progress when following the KNYA:

*[The organisation's leader] said, 'It's absolutely critical that we have the appropriate engagement with Ngarrindjeri on this project. It's a sensitive site and that's what we're doing. We're working with them, and we will get it done properly.' So, he showed leadership in that conversation. So, I guess it's about the leadership, the benefits, enlisting your heroes or the things that sit above the individual's personal view. For example, the KNY Agreement sits above any one individual view. It's fifteen years old now and it runs on the board, it's something that you can highlight and point to as being a glue if you like.*

In another example, Sharlene (KNYA) explains how the institution set the tone on what is 'non-negotiable' with regards to development applications. Sharlene (KNYA) explains how the KNYA is enforced by the organisation:

*So, it's about us explaining to clients who might be wanting to build something on the Meeting of the Waters site that says we need to allow time for Ngarrindjeri to give feedback on your development application. So, it's about us representing the importance of the relationship to others.*

Another layer to non-Indigenous leadership is found in having both female and male non-Indigenous leaders, which Sharlene (KNYA) touched on earlier. This example is also found in Harry's narrative. Harry (KNYA) believes that having a male and a female representative from council facilitated relationships with Ngarrindjeri men and women respectively, stating:

*Whenever there was some issue with [Ngarrindjeri] women, they would only talk to her and then she would take it to council and whatever. And the men's side came through [the male representative].*

Having both male and female allies again points to the layers of leadership required to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. Further discussion on the role of non-Indigenous leadership is found in Oliver's narrative. Oliver (CRT) reflects on his role as a leader and the long-term strategising involved in networking and waiting for the appropriate collaborators. He states:

*In the early 2000s, I began looking for opportunities for how we might combine [my work and] the ethical conflicts involving the Columbia River –*

*especially involving ethical principles of justice and stewardship. But the opportunity did not present itself and years passed. [Later, at a conference] ... I talked to [the director of an Indigenous organisation] about using the Columbia River Pastoral Letter as a framework for a conference on the [Columbia River] Treaty, and the past and future of the Columbia River. [The director] was supportive. I then sought permission from the 15 tribes and First Nations with management authorities within the Columbia River Basin. With their approval I reached out for help to [a] retired Lutheran Pastor ... in the summer of 2013.*

In Oliver's recollection, we see multiple layers of leadership and building networks with leaders across both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities. What is important to note in Oliver's quote above, is the way in which Oliver (CRT) did not push ahead with his idea to bring his work into collaboration with tribes and First Nations of the Basin. Oliver (CRT) began looking for opportunities but *"the opportunity did not present itself."* Rather than forcing his idea, Oliver (CRT) waited for years until he met the director of a major Indigenous organisation and then worked to bring networks, such as the religious community, together.

From these rare examples, we see the multi-faceted ways that participants use their own leadership roles, and that of others, to follow Indigenous leadership and adjust to Indigenous ways of doing in collaborative arrangements. What shines through is that these examples provide insight into unsettling the daily practices within settler institutions by following Indigenous leadership to collaborate on Indigenous nation-building efforts. In the



next section, I focus deeper into how participants recentre Indigenous sovereignty by adjusting normalised institutional settler frameworks.

## *9.2 Adjusting settler frameworks*

In this section, I argue that participants employ strategies that unsettle institutional barriers by adjusting institutional settler frameworks to recentre Indigenous sovereignty and Indigenous ways of doing. The examples provided by participants are underpinned by the above commitment to follow Indigenous leadership and manifest as innovative actions, including, embedding Indigenous sovereignty into institutional memory, transforming resourcing, utilising technology, and transferring hospital ethics standards from the bedside to the streamside.

As discussed in Chapter 3, NRM scholars have highlighted the constraints of institutional barriers for over a decade (Baltutis & Moore 2020; Ens et al. 2012; Hemming & Rigney 2008; Lukawiecki et al. 2021; Muller 2012; Muller, Hemming & Rigney 2019; Ross et al. 2016; Searle & Mulholland 2018; Searle & Muller 2019; Smith, W, Neale & Weir 2021). Indigenous scholars have long drawn our attention to institutions, in general, as an apparatus that reproduces colonial norms, including the exclusion of Indigenous sovereigns (Moreton-Robinson 1999; Nakata 2007; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). Due to the stubbornness of ‘white possessive logics,’ decolonising institutions requires acute attention to transform colonial frameworks and governance structures (Moreton-Robinson 1999). Few institutions, however, have made genuine progress in transcending settler colonial barriers (Howitt

2020). Thereby, in this section, the insights gained from participants across the KNYA and CRT sites provide much overdue strategies for recentring Indigenous sovereignty in the governance structures of settler institutions.

Central to allyship, action includes the use of one's privilege and power to work towards the removal of unfair and unjust structures that appear normal and remain invisible to most settlers. Unsettling settler workplaces involves disrupting the 'taken-for-granted' institutional reproduction of coloniality and results in transformations that deepen the internal unsettlement of non-Indigenous allies, nourishing the practice of allyship (Howitt 2020; Steinman 2020).

### *9.2.1 Embedding institutional memory*

In this section, I dig deeper into participant reflections on the practices and process of settler institutions and the everyday conduct of business. David (KNYA) reminds us that the Ngarrindjeri word kungun (listening) was used as a deliberate strategy by Ngarrindjeri to install institutional memory into the structures of governments and organisations. David explains:

*You could look at the KNY Agreements and say, 'they say nothing much', so it depends on how you understand what it is you're looking at. But what we were endeavouring to do, is we were endeavouring to create relationships and set principles which are agreed to. So, contracts sometimes articulate those rights and obligations, but also what they do is they create a stopple*

*principle, ok? So, if you accept something in a contract as being a truth, that Ngarrindjeri are the Traditional Owners for the area, or Ngarrindjeri do speak for their Country, and their community, well then, the other function that a KNYA has is to operate on a stopple principle and now can't deny that's the case. Within the Ngarrindjeri community, the leaders were also aware that agreement-making provided them with some level of certainty in relation to where they were at in terms of a particular relationship which then could be handed on to the next generation, so they don't have to keep having the same conversation all the time. So, it's also an ability to be used as a stepping-stone into the future ... Because otherwise you just have to keep having those same conversations over and over again.*

With the KNYA in place, as David (KNYA) explains, Ngarrindjeri have already stepped out instructions for the settler institution to listen to Ngarrindjeri speaking, in perpetuity. Sharlene's (KNYA) quote supports the objective of the agreement to listen to Ngarrindjeri, stating:

*[The KNYA] is [pause] evidence of um, [pause] commitment and acknowledgement and apology. It's black and white contract law but it still represents a lot of other non-tangible things.*

Like David (KNYA) above, Sharlene (KNYA) identifies how the agreement, as a legal document, represents the underlying relationship between the organisation and Ngarrindjeri. Below, Erin (KNYA) and Ryan (KNYA) further exemplify how the agreement

serves as an instrument to remind staff of institutional commitment. Both expresses the importance of a formal agreement to provide structure in an institutional setting.

*Erin (KNYA): It does really, really help in an organisational context, like without the KNYA, I think this level of staff commitment to consultation and negotiation and cultural heritage protection, it'd be much harder without that kind of structural, institutional commitment.*

*Ryan (KNYA): If you're talking about government, they do have the capacity and the decision-making authority to make space for Aboriginal Nations to act on their own terms, so a culture shift. In a lot of cases, you do need staff within an organisation, you need a mandate or a direction like the KNY Agreement to go, 'There's the mandate for me to act in this sort of way' and shift the culture.*

While the KNYA provides the instruction to listen to Ngarrindjeri, the possibility that settler commitment will dwindle always remains possible, particularly in the translation from policy to practice. As a leader within a settler institution, Sharlene (KNYA) lists several practical examples of how she upholds the institutional commitments and works to embed institutional memory through daily action. Sharlene (KNYA) explains:

*The need to be persistent, consistent, and opportunistic and just look for that leverage and time, as opportunities arise, maybe when you least expect them. But if you've got a radar for them, you can utilise them as a key point ... for example ... the weekly CEO report ... And it does take time and energy and commitment but that's our job.*

Indeed, throughout Sharlene's narrative, we see a sense of pride in her institutional role as an ally. This is explicit in the quote below:

*I'm motivated by that intellectual opportunity to look for ways to improve our relationship with Traditional Owners and in our working lives, I guess.*

In this statement, Sharlene (KNYA) further demonstrates the inter-relatedness of knowing, being, and doing where "intellectual opportunity" is positioned alongside improving "relationships" with Ngarrindjeri "in our working lives." Sharlene (KNYA) provides yet another example of the action she takes in her everyday work practices:

*My levers are that I work [in senior management] and so, for example, with this meeting today, the CEO already had another meeting and the PA said, 'oh does he need to go to this [Ngarrindjeri] function?' And I said, 'Oh well, let me explain. This is really important, a great opportunity' and looking at the other meeting he had, it could be moved. So, I was able to provide that feedback, so for me that's me being an ally to the relationship. Also, the fact that I got asked the question, shows that we've got a good system in place, that it didn't just get lost in the programming of the diary. I was asked my opinion, I was able to give it, we got a result, the CEO is going to this [Ngarrindjeri] event, and we'll probably build some good networks from it. So, for me that's the role of a good ally is looking out for the interests of the overall vision and mission, using whatever opportunities come your way.*

In this simple example of interrupting the scheduling of the mayor's diary with a reminder of the importance for the organisation to uphold its relationship with Ngarrindjeri, Sharlene's

action recentred Ngarrindjeri sovereignty. Sharlene (KNYA) continues to imagine new ways to recentre Ngarrindjeri sovereignty within the institutional frameworks of the council, reflecting on how to:

*Bring in other people so it's not just single officer reliance ... to involve my senior staff so the responsibility around Ngarrindjeri and government, so that I can share the responsibility and share the knowledge so it's more pervasive ... It's more likely to be institutionalised if it's not driven by an individual.*

While the KNYA stands as a respected document, it is the ongoing action of staff like Sharlene (KNYA) within the institution that unsettles normalised workplace culture and settler logics that ignore, dismiss, or overlook Indigenous sovereignty. Through seemingly small daily acts of transformation, participants unsettle standardised institutional processes and adjust to Indigenous ways of doing. Embedding institutional memory is important to build movement towards decolonising NRM. More importantly, is that embedding institutional memory respects the hard work of previous generations of Indigenous peoples, many now passed, so that the successes they achieved are not forgotten. This also alleviates the need for future generations of Indigenous sovereigns to repeat the battles that their ancestors have won.

### *9.2.2 Transforming the resource base*

Further strategies that recentre Ngarrindjeri sovereignty within settler frameworks is seen below where participant narratives explore possibilities for transforming the economic

resource base. Resourcing is a key issue identified in the NRM literature on co-management, as presented in Chapter 3. In this section, I focus on strategies and innovations drawn from participant narratives that adjust institutional settler frameworks to redirect finances in ways that flow into the independent economies of Indigenous sovereigns. Participants illustrate unique innovations not previously reported on redressing the institutional barriers created when two partners operate on an unequal resource base. Normalised settler funding arrangements generally adhere to a project-to-project model, externally prescribed by the state, that issues short-term buckets of funding. Under this regime, settler sovereigns control the allocation of funding, and therefore the decision making, which is antithetical to an Indigenous nation-building approach (Cornell & Kalt 2007; Ens et al. 2012; Jorgensen 2007; Muller 2012; Searle & Mulholland 2018). In the quotes below, participants reflect on ways to counter the forces of settler colonialism so that Ngarrindjeri can operate according to their own sovereign ways of doing.

Firstly, Ryan (KNYA), David (KNYA), and Drew (KNYA) in South Australia all critique the ‘treaty talks’ that the Government of South Australia began with Indigenous sovereigns in 2016. All three express disappointment that the ‘treaty talks’ were not about a relationship between equal sovereigns, but rather a *“goods and services agreement”* or *“trinkets and blankets.”* In Ryan’s words:

*The recent treaty negotiation process in South Australia and, I guess, the limitations that were based around that, that focus was more around government service delivery rather than a higher-level relationship between sovereign powers.*

Here, Ryan (KNYA) explicitly identifies the difference between co-governance arrangements that reflect a nation-to-nation partnership and the standard colonial approach where government attempts to maintain colonial relationships by paternally providing services. For Ryan (KNYA), Erin (KNYA), and Sharlene (KNYA), who work to uphold the institutional commitments of a nation-to-nation agreement, the issue of disparate economies remains a barrier to their collaborative efforts. Ryan (KNYA), Erin (KNYA), and Sharlene (KNYA) imagine the possibilities that could open if the activities of Ngarrindjeri were not constrained by a limited economic base. As stated succinctly by Erin (KNYA):

*[Council] should resource [Ngarrindjeri] to be able provide us with the level of service that we need ... we don't have somebody [at Ngarrindjeri organisation] to answer our phone calls or return our emails, but we still want to do the right thing according to the agreement, but it's difficult when they're not staffed to manage it at their end. So, that's the biggest challenge.*

Similarly, when I asked Ryan (KNYA) what transformation and reconstruction of collaborative arrangements might look like, he replied:

*A lot of reconstruction is around the resourcing base and the governance ... so what does that look like in a transformed way? Do we go, well government doesn't do Aboriginal engagement as such, by itself, what we [should] do is we resource Aboriginal Nations to do that work, that's their role, we have a proper equal partnership in this, and we stop investing in government department capacity to do that work and we go that [work is]*



*more appropriate to sit within the Aboriginal representative organisation ...*

*They're the ones to set our NRM targets related to Aboriginal interests, not some board dominated by non-Indigenous people maybe with one Aboriginal representative on it. So, the governance and the resourcing things are obviously quite tied together. Governance defines where you're going to make your spend and other important things, and it also defines where the money is going to go as well. So, I guess those two sorts of pillars are really important in reconstruction.*

Reconstructing collaborative arrangements, for Ryan (KNYA), Erin (KNYA), and Sharlene (KNYA), must include transforming governance and resourcing so that Indigenous sovereigns, like Ngarrindjeri, have an adequate income to resource their autonomous work. In the quote below Ryan (KNYA), like others, imagines the possibilities that could come if Ngarrindjeri had a strong, independent economic base. Ryan (KNYA) continues:

*Then you've got more pointed projects where you go, 'We already do a rivers assessment to figure out the health of streams and wetlands. How about we resource and support some research and development for Aboriginal Nations to develop their own tools which are based on their own knowledge systems and based on their own knowledge through their own institutions?' So, Aboriginal people can go out to the same stream or creek and use the knowledge their Old People have passed down to them and determine and define the health of that place and then we can come together on that basis, on how we inform the decision making and the governance is based within an Indigenous worldview as well so a proper way of bringing those two*

*together and talking about them in governance, cos they're always going to be quite separate and when they come together on different things they can be brought together in more of a collaborative governance arrangement as well to come up with new insights and new ideas, directions.*

In Ryan's description of transforming funding arrangements, we can see a reference to Etuaptmumk (Two-Eyed Seeing), discussed in Chapters 2 and 3. The study on collaborative arrangements that practice Etuaptmumk, by Reid et al. (2021), reported on the benefits of Indigenous peoples and NRM agencies conducting and comparing independent evaluations of water health. Ryan (KNYA) leans toward this potential but remains aware of the underpinning reality that the work of Indigenous sovereigns, such as Ngarrindjeri, remains impeded by limited financial resources. Sharlene (KNYA) provides an astute example of taking action to adjust settler frameworks and redirect finances. In the quote below Sharlene (KNYA) explains at length the initiative she took to begin implementing an institutional arrangement suggested by the CEO of a Ngarrindjeri organisation.

*[The CEO] came and presented on an economic development, on a model that he was presenting to a range of local governments in their lands, that we support, [to] have a service fee agreement where we provide [a set amount if money] a year and we would receive the engagement services that we needed.*

In other words, rather than paying the Ngarrindjeri organisation for services as they arise, the proposal was for local councils provide an upfront annual fee. This arrangement would enable the Ngarrindjeri organisation to cover the basic running costs. Excited about the

proposal, Sharlene (KNYA) set out to demonstrate a cost-benefits account that quantified the services that council currently requires from Ngarrindjeri. In addition, all staff had the opportunity to put forward new ideas on how they could extend their engagement with Ngarrindjeri and what this would cost if Ngarrindjeri was paid on a project-to-project arrangement. Sharlene (KNYA) explains:

*What I did is I set up workshops with all the staff around [our] organisation.*

*We logged how many projects we had coming up for the financial year, and what we would need [and] welcome Ngarrindjeri input on, and it was something like 40, 42 projects, it was really extensive. All the staff around the table were saying 'I would benefit from having Ngarrindjeri input from this parks and gardens project, I would benefit from having Ngarrindjeri input on this cultural event we're running,' and when you made it explicit it was amazing. It worked out to be more than [the annual fee] worth of value when I quantified it.*

In this way, Sharlene (KNYA) took decisive action within the institution to justify that making the commitment to an annual upfront service fee was economically viable. If the institutional arrangements were adjusted to pay the Ngarrindjeri organisation an annual service fee, this would provide a stable income to resource the underpinning administrative work, including staff to answer the calls requesting engagement. Currently, payment on a project-to-project basis leaves the Ngarrindjeri organisation without infrastructure. The quote from Sharlene (KNYA) below succinctly summarises this point:

*Engagement takes time and labour, and time and labour takes resources to fund. So, it's very difficult to do the right thing by the agreement if the people that you need to engage with aren't [financially] supported to engage.*

While the inequities created from disparate economic bases has had much attention across NRM evaluations of co-management, Indigenous studies, and allyship, I have not identified such clear examples of adjusting institutional frameworks away from piecemeal funding and consultations fees to formalise an annual income paid in advance to Indigenous sovereigns. At the time of interview, the annual fee that Sharlene (KNYA) discussed had not yet reached fruition, however these discussions are critical new imaginings that reframes resourcing. Moreover, transforming the resources base also shifts who has agency and the economic independence to function as a sovereign nation. As such, Sharlene's example, along with Ryan's above, demonstrate the possibilities for future gains that would come if Ngarrindjeri had the economic independence to facilitate Ngarrindjeri ways of doing.

### *9.2.3 Utilising technology*

Further insights on adjusting settler frameworks are shown in the next section, where participants discuss the use of technology to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. Central to the function of settler institutions is the use of technology. As prior discussions have evidenced, a narrow focus on technological sophistication in settler approaches to NRM is problematic. The privileging of technological approaches in collaborative work is critiqued for neglecting colonial forces and interpersonal skills. However, in this section, participants illustrate forms

of technology that bolster collaborative work in NRM. As Marchand et al. (2013) note, Indigenous sovereigns are open to accepting new technologies but not at the expense of their cultural values. In contrast, settlers rely on technology to solve social and economic problems without considering their own cultural values when deciding upon the use of technology. Below, we see how participants use technology, largely information and digital technologies, in innovative ways to recentre Indigenous sovereignty within settler institutions. Both Sharlene (KNYA) and Ryan (KNYA) mention an intranet site used internally by staff within the government institution they work for that alerts staff to the commitments of the KNYA. Sharlene (KNYA) describes embedding alerts into the staff's information systems after Ngarrindjeri won a Native Title claim in 2017, that legislated rights to specific areas of land. Sharlene (KNYA) tells me:

*I've worked with our line area who looks after [council's] property portfolio to do the standard operating procedure for staff to [know] how and where Native Title might be invoked, particularly for notifications on works on lands that have Native Title associated with it. So, we've worked with our lawyers to have standard operating procedure developed and that's been put in place, and we've done the mapping on our GIS, geographic information systems, so when staff go to research a parcel of land they can see immediately if it's got Native Title linked to it.*

Ryan (KNYA) explains a similar system used within the Government of South Australia:

*Every project in the department, when they initiate it they have a development plan, so there's a template around all the different things you*

*have to consider and we built a link into that [and] that took you off to a spot where you named the region you would be working and that would let an Aboriginal Engagement staff member in that region know that something is being planned. But it would also give a list of all the different agreements that are in place in that region, with Aboriginal Nations, so you would have to take into consideration. So, if the KNYA is in there, [and] say you were doing a project in the south-east of the Adelaide Mount Lofty regions, that KNYA will come up so it will make someone aware that's there and you've got to consider it. But you can lead everybody to water but make them actually go it, is another thing.*

While Ryan (KNYA) emphasises the usefulness of utilising information technology to recentre Indigenous sovereignty, he maintains a critical view of how the use of such systems can be “pretty patchy” in practice. In the quote below, Ryan (KNYA) reflects on the realities of project planning in a large government department:

*As organisations go along, people make their own versions of those project plans, and the work you've done previously is not necessarily getting picked up anymore. So, it's just a continual process of updating those things ... I think for that agreement in particular, ensuring that there's particular officer staff member in the department that's got carriage of it as well and that when initiatives or projects in that region go through it's not just at the project planning level, so officer level. There should also be something that triggers a more senior level to go 'that's nice you've done all these things*

*but how does that measure up against the commitments in the KNY Agreement?’ That sort of stuff, there’s bit of a gap in that in think.*

Ryan’s reflections here demonstrate a considered use of technology that brings Indigenous sovereignty into staff workstations and onto their computer screens. Remaining vigilant to the normalised settler processes that erase Indigenous sovereignty, Ryan (KNYA) highlights the need for institutions to update information systems and appoint a senior staff member who has the specific responsibility for ensuring that both the system and staff continues to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. This example from Ryan (KNYA) illustrates the attention required to recentre Indigenous sovereignty, not only once, but as an ongoing practice of allyship that guides other staff through routine practices within settler institutions. Such insights demonstrate the value of investigating allyship in the offices and work-places of settler institutions to showcase the everyday strategies and innovations that recentres Indigenous sovereignty.

#### *9.2.4 Transposing hospital ethics into NRM: from bedside to streamside*

Previous chapters have discussed the limitations of inviting Indigenous sovereigns to the decision-making table. This is further compounded by settler institutions and logics that view humans as separate to place and nature. Thereby, in this section, I focus on a unique innovation presented by Oliver (CRT) to take NRM decision-making to the ‘streamside’ in the Bedside to Streamside Project. Oliver’s innovative strategy stems from his work with ethical standards used in hospitals for life sustaining treatment. As other participants discussed in Chapter 7, some opportunities for addressing structural injustice can be found in the basic

principles of Western legal and social justice frameworks. Here, Oliver (CRT) illustrates an example of applying accepted ethical principles for human healthcare, actioned routinely in hospitals, to unsettle colonial frameworks in the field of NRM. By taking principles for human healthcare to the critical care of nature - who has incurred relentless damage through settler colonisation - the Bedside to Streamside Project places more-than-human Entities and humans on an equal level.

Oliver's work on the Bedside to Streamside project is a strategy aimed at compelling settler sovereigns to recognise that Indigenous sovereigns speak their lands and settler sovereigns have an ethical responsibility to listen to and follow Indigenous decision-making in NRM.

Oliver (CRT) describes the emergence of the Bedside to Streamside Project:

*Most of our work [on hospital ethics] focused on drafting, piloting, and launching state-wide a form ... to improve the quality of ethical decision-making at the end of life. Our work also started our Bedside to Streamside Project: applying the tools that we use in our hospital ethics committees to ethical conflicts involving the natural world for the purpose of improving the ethical quality of decision making.*

This well-developed strategy is based upon decades of working in alliance with Indigenous sovereigns and a network of NGOs, including the ecumenical community. What makes this narrative insightful to the practice of everyday allyship is the time Oliver (CRT) spent waiting for opportunities to network with appropriate people, without independently pushing forward to develop the project. As discussed above, the leadership of Indigenous sovereigns



is paramount, and non-Indigenous community leaders who follow Indigenous leadership on a public platform are key actors in generating institutional change. Central to the establishment of the Bedside to Streamside Project was Oliver's attention to the high level of collaboration with Indigenous and non-Indigenous leaders that was required. Oliver (CRT) brings together highly valued principles from settler society to fortify the importance of Indigenous leadership in NRM: one being ethical standards developed by physicians for critical care in hospitals and the other is the Columbia River Pastoral Letter from the Catholic Church.

In the lead up to the CRT Review, the Catholic Bishops of the Columbia River Watershed published the *Columbia River Pastoral Letter: Caring for Creation and the Common Good, an International Pastoral Letter* (Washington State Catholic Conference 2001). This document explores "biblical and Catholic Church teachings about stewardship; the need to respect nature; and the need to recognize and promote the common good" (Washington State Catholic Conference 2001, p. 1). Around a similar time, there was growing movement in the Catholic Church to repair its relationship with Indigenous peoples. Pope Francis publicly apologised "to the Indigenous Peoples of America for the Catholic Church's role in the brutalities of colonization" (Madden 2015, para. 1) and continued an Apostolic Journey in meeting with Indigenous sovereigns across the South and North American continents (Pope Francis 2022). Oliver (CRT) worked with a retired Lutheran Pastor to embrace this movement, recalling:

*[A retired Lutheran Pastor] and I began a planning process to bring together the tools that we use in hospital ethics committees with the Pastoral Letter*

*to support a broader public discussion about the impacts of the dam-building era on one of the richest salmon rivers on earth, and on Indigenous people.*

By bringing together two stands of ethical imperatives from settler society, health care and pastoral care, Oliver (CRT) seeks to inform public discussion through language that speaks to settlers with the aim of recentring Indigenous sovereignty. The inter-relatedness of knowing, being, and doing are evident in the excerpt below, where Oliver (CRT) recalls waiting for over a decade for the appropriate opportunities to arise to move forward with the project:

*In the early 2000s, I began looking for opportunities for how we might combine the work of the Columbia River Pastoral Letter and our Bedside to Streamside Project in addressing the ethical conflicts involving the Columbia River – especially involving ethical principles of justice and stewardship. But the opportunity did not present itself and years passed. But then at that first meeting [on the CRT Review] at [the] office [of an umbrella Indigenous organisation], I talked to [Indigenous leadership] about using the Columbia River Pastoral Letter as a framework for a conference on the Treaty, and the past and future of the Columbia River. [Indigenous leadership at the umbrella organisation] was supportive. I then sought permission from the 15 tribes and First Nations with management authorities within the Columbia River Basin. With their approval I reached out for help to retired Lutheran Pastor ... in the summer of 2013.*

In Oliver's quote above, we see the employment of multiple strategies that adjust to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. First, Oliver (CRT) demonstrates knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty, identifying where Western social justice principles can be applied, taking responsibility for addressing colonial violations while knowing one's place within Indigenous sovereignty. Second, Oliver (CRT) is being attentive to proper forms of conduct and following Indigenous protocols regarding permissions, while maintaining endurance and critical hope when waiting for the right opportunity. Oliver (CRT) 'shows up' at a meeting at an umbrella Indigenous organisation and 'checks in' with Indigenous leadership. Importantly, by bringing biblical teachings on the respectful stewardship of Earth into conversation with Indigenous knowledges, along with accepted principles in hospital ethics, Oliver (CRT) unsettles knowledge hierarchies by placing Indigenous knowledges as equally as valid to settler values from both medicine and religion. This builds ontological pluralism. Oliver (CRT) employs these strategies during the foundational work that underpins transformative action. That is, Oliver (CRT) undertakes work that follows Indigenous leadership and enrolls non-Indigenous community leaders, with a goal to embed institutional memory into settler frameworks so that Indigenous decision-making is brought forward. The Bedside to Streamside project essentially seeks to inform the CRT Review process and act as a policy directive for the ethical responsibility to heal the damages to nature by listening to the voices of those who know nature best. As Oliver (CRT) explains:

*For example, ... in the ER [emergency room], and an elderly woman with severe dementia is brought in by ambulance, [the physician does not] make decisions for her. One of [the] first responsibilities is to find a loved one who*

*can speak for this person. This concept in ethics is called substituted judgment of surrogate decision-making.*

To elaborate, substituted judgement of surrogate decision-making occurs when a patient is unable to communicate. Thereby, the closest person to the patient, who most understands the patient's values, is required to make a decision based on the what the patient would want. Oliver (CRT) describes how the ethical principle of surrogate decision making is applied in the Bedside to Streamside Project:

*When you move from the bedside to the streamside, the concept of surrogate decision-making persists: you are facing the impacts of decisions on children, generations unborn, and nonhuman life. Who speaks for them? Who gives voice to the voiceless? The wildlife and fish are clearly impacted by our decisions, but they don't have a voice. The river itself is clearly impacted by human decisions but doesn't have a voice - unless someone steps forward to give it voice. So, it's this concept of surrogate decision-making which is so important in critical care units or in the emergency room is also critical when we move out into the natural world and are dealing with future generations, fish and wildlife, rivers, the voiceless. We are challenged at every turn to give voice to the voiceless. What's happened in New Zealand by giving the Whanganui River personhood is one solution to the ethical challenge of surrogate decision-making.*

In the quote above, Oliver (CRT) positions the ethical responsibility to care for humans and nature as equivalent, aligning the critical care of humans to the critical care of nature which

requires ethical decision-making in NRM. This unsettles the human/other binary. Oliver (CRT) further unsettles colonial paradigms and settler logics by positioning Indigenous sovereigns as the voice for the voiceless, “*future generations, fish and wildlife, rivers,*” acknowledging that Indigenous sovereignties are based upon relationality and thereby authorises the right to speak for nature (Muller, Hemming & Rigney, D 2019). Interestingly, Oliver (CRT)’s narrative implies that settler sovereigns, as the dominant decision-makers in NRM, are not in relationship with the river, and land-nature, and thereby not equipped to make informed decisions on nature’s behalf. By incorporating an understanding of the settler ontology of land, the Bedside to Stream Project recognises the limitations of the epistemological foundation of human/other that is embedded in settler sovereignty. In doing so, Oliver (CRT) displaces the settler reality that unquestioningly assumes superiority, ownership, and mastery over land. Here, the ethical tool of surrogate decision-making identifies that Indigenous sovereigns maintain an intimate relationship with their territories. As Oliver (CRT) continues:

*Recognising Indigenous sovereignty is key for the survival of Indigenous people and the Columbia River. Having lived with the river from time immemorial, Indigenous people are best positioned to give voice to the river, to provide substituted judgement for salmon and other species imperilled by the dams.*

In previous chapters I established that traditionally, NRM decisions are made at the negotiating table – however, Indigenous sovereigns have historically been excluded from decision-making tables that are fundamentally colonial institutions. As such, Oliver’s practice of allyship provides an innovative example of adjusting the frameworks of settler

institutions. Entrenching Indigenous decision-making into NRM through policy built upon the ethical principle of surrogate decision-making would embed institutional memory into the departments and agencies of settler organisations. The Bedside to Streamside Project guides a process of transformation that focusses on outcomes where decisions are made by Indigenous sovereigns. This sits in contrast to the standard colonial approach to NRM that considers the voices of Indigenous sovereigns as participants or stakeholders who are included and consulted. As Reed et al. (2023, p. 514) remind us, “there is a clear unwillingness to recognize Indigenous jurisdiction and Indigenous understandings of land as systems of reciprocal relations.” When the endpoint is focussed on the self-determination of Indigenous sovereigns, there is opportunity for NRM to release the constraints that inhibits the self-determination of nature. Such recognition will nurture the ceremonial grounds of Ancestral territories where Indigenous peoples find solutions to repair colonial violence (Reed et al. 2023).

Oliver’s narrative address epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers in NRM by challenging the fundamental assumptions inherent in the settler reality. The above narrative from Oliver sits in stark contrast to the persistent critiques of collaborative arrangements, presented in Chapter 3, on the problematics incurred because Indigenous sovereigns are required to adapt to Western structures to participate (Ens et al. 2012; Lukawiecki et al. 2021; Muller 2012; Ross et al. 2016). Taking decision making away from colonial tables to the ‘streamside’ where Indigenous sovereigns speak as and of their lands, and practice their own ways of doing, is a complex strategy demonstrated by Oliver (CRT). While the outcome is focussed on transformative action to adjust settler institutions in NRM, Oliver’s narrative is

abundant with examples of allyship where multiple, co-constitutive, and overlapping strategies are employed at epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional levels. The culmination of multiple, entwined strategies employed to recentre Indigenous sovereignty is discussed further in the section below, where I demonstrate that the collective action of settlers to recentre Indigenous sovereigns brings joy.

### *9.3 Public acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty and community cohesion*

This thesis has sought to capture a paradigm shift that is calling for Indigenous sovereigns to lead in NRM. Through the analysis I have illustrated the persistent actions of individual participants that work to recentre Indigenous sovereignty and unsettle epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers in NRM. I now explain the most unique result emergent from the analysis of participant narratives on long-term allyship in the everyday spaces that participants work. At both the KNYA and CRT sites, the unsettling work of participants led to public acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty. In these moments, participants report experiencing community cohesion.

Bignall (2010) explains that such historical discontinuities mark shifts in public agency. When reconciliation occurs as both a settler responsibility and the actualisation of individual actions in local contexts, the collective movement brings forth “a community mode of feeling, thought and belonging, which embody alternative ways of being in the world” (Bignall 2010, p. 12). When settlers connect with Indigenous sovereigns without binarism,

negation, and amelioration, this new modality brings joy. Moreover, it is possible for new modalities to become entrenched in the structure of settler institutions (Bignall 2010). This is evident in participant narratives where we again see the role of critical hope, not as individual attitudes reported in Chapter 8, but through collective, public acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty.

Participants at the KNYA site speak to a paradigm shift in their local community after Ngarrindjeri sovereignty was recognised with the formal apology from council following the Kumerangk/Hindmarsh Island issue. During the Hindmarsh Island Royal Commission, the local community was divided into two groups: those in support of protecting the Ngarrindjeri women's sacred site and those in support of the construction of the bridge. When Indigenous sovereignty was denied, the tension could not be resolved. After Indigenous sovereignty was recognised the division in the community and the relationship between non-Indigenous and Indigenous peoples shifted to one founded upon respect and acknowledgement. In Sharlene's words, the signing of the KNYA demonstrated "*respect, acknowledgement and apology*" to Ngarrindjeri. However, during the years of the Kumerangk issue the local community was divided between those who supported Ngarrindjeri women and those who agreed that the women were fabricating their story. Both Sharlene (KNYA) and Harry (KNYA) describe the division in the community and how public recognition of Ngarrindjeri sovereignty resolved division. Sharlene (KNYA) explains:

*Our history, the origin of the energy behind the KNYA, it came from a point of adverse relationships, a time of very difficult situation with the Hindmarsh Island Bridge and a lot of divided community opinion. So, it was born out of*



*need if you like, to either continue with an adverse environment or to try and heal and try and do something to find a different path ... it sounds a bit silly to say we've benefitted from a difficult time in history, but I think that's part of it. It was like a rallying point, we could all say that situation was not great, let's move forward from here, so it was a trigger, a rallying point.*

Similarly, Harry (KNYA) reflects on the release of emotion and the joy felt by the local community:

*It wasn't until after Judge von Doussa overturned the Royal Commission, these people in their own way and in their own time have apologised to me and that they shouldn't have been up there [protesting at my office]. But you know things turned out alright afterwards because what happened afterwards was so joyous. I remember saying to [a colleague], I was conducting the meeting and there wasn't a dry eye in the house, and it was unusual in the chamber, it's pretty stiff business ... [but] there were members with actually tears dropping down their cheeks and the whole thing changed really after that. In fact, you go up the street now and I bet you anybody would even admit to having a bad feeling about Aboriginal people at that time. I mean, the harmony is amazing, the town has completely changed. And KNYA is something I believe is probably a document that does more than what it set out to do.*

Put simply, the public acknowledgement of Ngarrindjeri sovereignty removed the division in the community between those for or against the voices of Ngarrindjeri women. With the

question of Ngarrindjeri sovereignty removed, Harry (KNYA) remembers that the tension between opposing groups in the local community were transformed to become harmonious. Over a decade later, Sharlene (KNYA) recalls the mix of tears and joy when attending an event to acknowledge the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the KNYA. Following the anniversary celebrations, Sharlene attended another event regarding the granting of Ngarrindjeri's claim to Native Title. Sharlene (KNYA) recollects:

*After I came back from the Native Title Consent Determination I could not focus on work, I was like on a natural, had adrenaline basically, because we'd gone, they'd been this incredible momentous occasion in the sense that for me it was momentous, because to me twenty years of time negotiating Native Title to finally get that consent, I thought that was an amazing thing to be there and see.*

This reflection elucidates the intimacy of the ongoing relationship between the Ngarrindjeri Nation and staff at the council where the partnership extends beyond routine business and embraces celebration and joy. Having attended the Native Title Consent Determination, Sharlene (KNYA) describes the event as “*momentous*,” making an emotional impact upon her where she felt adrenaline and amazement. From Sharlene and Harry's narratives above, we see how the story of the KNYA is upheld in the community not as a single event, but as an ongoing expansion of a relationship based upon the recognition of Ngarrindjeri sovereignty. It is in the public retelling of the story of the KNYA that continues to grow, almost as a community legend, which demonstrates how the agreement serves the interests of the broader community, becoming as Harry said above, “*a document that does more than what it set out to do.*”

The same reporting of experiencing community cohesion and joy occurs at the CRT site. Unlike the KNYA which has been upheld by the council since 2002, the CRT is still under review, which leaves the Basin community without a history of being guided by an agreement. Here, the shift in the settler community occurred as a grassroots movement, calling for the acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty as the opportunity arose with the CRT Review. Similar to participant narratives from the KNYA site above, the quotes below from Melanie (CRT), Joel (CRT), and Amanda (CRT) reveal a sense of community cohesion.

*Melanie (CRT): there is a ground swell of people throughout the Basin who are wanting to be so heard, come together collectively and go to the negotiating table and say look, there is people power, we have collaborated, our synergies have come together, undeniably, we have offered solutions that we have a say in the way the Basin will be governed in the future, those are part in place and they are there right now, whether all of those groups, which are the tribal nations, the First Nations, the NGOs, smaller government bureaucracies can come together because of this passion, this passionate involvement and concern for the Basin.*

*Joel (CRT): [It was] a tremendous turnout ... probably over 200 people attend that particular [University Symposium] and it did focus exclusively on tribal/First Nation interests in the Basin.*

*Amanda (CRT): I'm driving down ... about four hours from here and joining a conference ... it's coming together of the ecumenical community and the*

*Indigenous community to talk about our ethics with respects to each other and with respects to the land and the water, and when I see that and when I see how many people go to these meetings, they've been held all over the Basin in both Canada and the United States, and how many people come and how heartfelt their desire is to reconcile these issues, it also gives me hope that Western culture and Indigenous culture can reconcile with and move forward to a better future.*

These reflections testify to a shift across settler communities where a “groundswell” of people come together to discuss the care of the Basin. At these large community gatherings, that are geographically spread across the Basin and held repeatedly over several years, Indigenous sovereignty is consistently recentred. For Amanda to embark on a four-hour drive to attend such a conference, this demonstrates committed individual action. Yet, it is the collective action of many people assembling with heartfelt desire to reconcile that inspires Amanda (CRT). This is similarly reflected in the excerpts from Melanie (CRT) and Joel (CRT). Because the routine actions of individuals in settler institutions creates structural injustice, their collective allyship unsettles institutional structures, ranging from the academic community to the ecumenical community. Considering that Indigenous scholars have identified that nurturing fantasies of peaceful settlement - while denying colonial violence - is a form of psychosis in settler societies, these descriptions of community cohesion above provide a valuable finding. The paradigm shift at both sites demonstrates that acknowledging Indigenous sovereignty is not a threat to settler society, but an action, that when employed collectively, manifests as repair and healing for settlers. No single strategy or innovation produces this broader community shift to recentre Indigenous

sovereignty. Such spaces of transformation are generated through the consistent employment of multiple co-constituted strategies, practiced over time, and the collective allyship of participants that work to adjust to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

#### *9.4 Conclusion*

In this chapter I have argued that strategies employed to recentre Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative arrangements unsettle institutional barriers by adjusting to Indigenous ways of doing. Participant narratives across this chapter provide illuminating examples of following Indigenous leadership including non-Indigenous community leaders who adhere to Indigenous leadership. Such examples are new to the field of NRM and illustrate the basic principle of both allyship and Indigenous nation-building – that is, to follow Indigenous leadership. Because structural injustice occurs through the routine acts of many individuals, the above examples provide critical insight into the ways that the simple, yet radical acts of individuals can transform the everyday practices of settler institutions. Participants have demonstrated how they embed Indigenous sovereignty into institutional memory, restructure resourcing, utilise technology, and transfer human hospital ethics standards into NRM. Overall, the sustained efforts of Indigenous sovereigns, together with settlers who practice allyship and follow Indigenous leadership, is propelling a nation building approach. Here, opportunities for increased success in the stewardship of nature are created and some constraints upon Indigenous self-determination are lifted. Most importantly, it is also a space where settler communities experience community cohesion once Indigenous sovereignty is publicly and authentically acknowledged.

## 10 Conclusion

In this final chapter, I present the overall findings of this thesis, the contributions to theory, policy, and practice, and suggest recommendations for future research on environmental co-governance. This thesis has shown that the role of long-term allies is central to challenging the colonial paradigms and settler logics that constrains Indigenous decision making, self-determination and nation-building in environmental co-governance. The non-Indigenous professionals who participated in this study are shifting away from assuming authority and perpetuating colonial violations when working in collaboration with Indigenous sovereigns. Their meaningful engagement with Indigenous sovereignty, opposed to denial, demonstrates critical attention to the practice of allyship, not in sites of public protest, but in the everyday spaces and offices where participants work. Participants have illustrated the value of managing relationships, not commodities, to develop long term processes for the stewardship of nature according to an Indigenous nation-building approach. From across three settler sovereign states - Australia, Canada, and the US - the voices of these non-Indigenous professionals provide valuable insights that contribute to policy, practice, and theory for collaborative arrangements for the shared responsibility of nature. Findings reveal that the non-Indigenous professionals in this study recentre Indigenous sovereignty through the application of multiple entwined strategies and innovations that adjust to the inter-related triad of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Before discussing the original contribution of this thesis, and areas for further research, I first provide a summary of the key strategies that recentres Indigenous sovereignty.

## *10.1 Key strategies for recentring Indigenous sovereignty in collaborative*

### *arrangements: adjusting to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing*

While Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing are entwined, the foundational strategy, or the entry point for unsettling settler logics and colonial paradigms, begins with building knowledge. Knowing the overlay of settler and Indigenous sovereignty is a foundational strategy employed to recentre Indigenous sovereignty and is underpinned by three specific strategies.

First, is to engage in an ongoing process of developing in-depth knowledge of how the structures of settler sovereignty creates structural injustice. Here, identification of one's complicity in settler colonialism, and responsibility for addressing colonial violations, is vital. Second, is to challenge Western knowledge hierarchies that exclude Indigenous sovereigns and Indigenous knowledges, largely through recognition of Western science as socially constructed. Third, is to build an understanding of relationality and unsettle the settler ontology of land. In this way, participants begin to see, understand, and then disrupt the colonial constraints upon Indigenous ways of knowing. These strategies are critical for mitigating the epistemological barriers that are embedded in the standard colonial approach, to shift the dominance of settler decision-making and undertake an Indigenous nation-building approach. Essentially, before Indigenous sovereignty can be recentred, non-Indigenous professionals must first understand how the forces of settler colonisation constrain Indigenous self-determination.

Upon more in-depth understandings of both settler and Indigenous sovereignty, and locating our position as settlers, non-Indigenous professionals can then refine our behaviours according to our role as allies. Findings show that a central strategy employed to recentre Indigenous sovereignty is to adjust to Indigenous ways of being. Here, the laws, protocols, and practices of Indigenous sovereigns shape our inter-personal relationships with Indigenous people and directs the ways in which non-Indigenous professionals engage. Importantly, this pivots upon the everyday practice of critical reflexivity. I have shown that feeling unsettled is an important cue for engaging critical reflexivity upon external colonial paradigms and internal settler logics that reproduce attitudinal barriers. Critical reflexivity opens up for further strategies that adjust to Indigenous ways of being. Findings support that the practice of listening-respect is essential to meaningful allyship yet go further by identifying the importance of listening to silences and absences and sitting with the unknown. Moreover, critical reflexivity enables non-Indigenous professionals to unsettle the settler reality that assumes ownership and possession of Indigenous lands. Internally, unsettling one's settler ontology builds an ontology of truth and opens possibilities for long-term allies to view nature and more-than-human Entities through a relational lens. From this position, the findings show that non-Indigenous professionals begin to reflect upon multiple ways of being in the world. Unsettling external colonial paradigms and settler logics, however, is difficult work that meets sustained colonial resistance. Thereby, consistent effort and stamina is required, buoyed by critical hope and an ontology of truth.

The last pillar of the triad – the least discussed in the literature and the most needed in practice – is adjusting institutional settler frameworks. As revealed in the findings, taking



action in the workplace is critical to recentre Indigenous sovereignty and address perhaps the most stubborn barrier in environmental co-governance – institutional barriers. Results from this thesis identify further strategies hinge on the impact of respected non-Indigenous leaders who adhere to Indigenous leadership and recentre Indigenous sovereignty on a public platform. Critical adjustments to settler institutions focus on changes to funding regimes, making use of technological applications, such as staff intranets, and importantly, transferring accepted ethical principles for the critical care of humans to the critical care of nature. By unsettling the normalised settler structures around governance, social organisation and control, non-Indigenous professionals fulfill roles and responsibilities as allies to Indigenous sovereigns. With decision-making power and resourcing in the hands of local Indigenous sovereigns, Indigenous peoples can speak for/as their Ancestral territories according to Indigenous ways of doing. Importantly, findings show that the unsettling work of non-Indigenous professionals does not result in the breakdown of settler society. Instead, public acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty brings cohesion, hope, and joy to settler communities.

### *10.2 Unsettling the theory, policy, and practice of collaborative arrangements*

The findings of this study offer a number of important contributions for the theory, policy, and practice of environmental co-governance. Because settler colonisation inflicts violence onto land and ecologies, insights from this study provide pathways forward for restoring the severed relationship that settler societies - and the West more generally – have constructed between humans and nature. In the Age of the Anthropocene, where global superpowers place the stewardship of nature atop political agendas, these findings point to critical

processes that work towards more successful partnerships with Indigenous sovereigns in environmental co-governance. Upon the global backdrop of climate collapse, I have showcased the voices of experienced non-Indigenous professionals who value Indigenous leadership as critical for addressing the challenges of climate change. The contributions to theory, policy, and practice that emerge from this thesis do not prescribe foregone solutions – just as settler colonisation is not an event but an ongoing process, decolonisation is not a sequence of predetermined steps towards a fixed destination. Rather, the contributions from this thesis can generate more meaningful and successful collaborative practices for the stewardship of nature in the Age of the Anthropocene.

#### *10.2.1 Theoretical contributions*

This study has provided original theoretical explorations on the underpinning meanings of humanness embedded in both settler and Indigenous sovereignty. Investigating sovereignty sheds light on how the Western construction of the human/other binary not only drives the operation of racism, but also speciesism, the framing of human rights in settler societies, the notion of land as property, and nature as an external resource for human needs – all important aspects to collaborative arrangements. This analysis puts to question anthropocentric meanings of sovereignty that frame settler understandings of the ‘nation’ in collaborative arrangements. Importantly, these theoretical contributions open further discussion on how meanings of humanness shape the regulation of power politically, socially and with more-than-human Entities. Interrogating settler sovereignty through the interdisciplinary fields of colonial settler studies posthumanism, and Indigenous studies

generates new possibilities for scholarly engagement with Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing, which centres on more-than-human Entities.

Calls for Indigenous self-determination will not be understood by settlers if Indigenous self-determination is viewed through an anthropocentric lens. Thereby, this move to simultaneously consider colonial violence upon both Indigenous sovereigns and land-nature is a valuable contribution to scholarship in the fields of colonial settler studies, allyship, and NRM. Moreover, these considerations contribute to the growing interdisciplinary trend across the physical and social sciences, broadly known as new materialism and posthuman studies, that provoke a rethinking of current meanings of humanness in the West.

I address the gap in the NRM literature on the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals and revealed that novel pathways for exploring this space contributes new insights beyond attempts to merge Indigenous and Western knowledges. An important aspect underpinning an unsettling approach is the authentic acknowledgement of Indigenous sovereignty – to see Indigenous sovereigns as the sovereigns that they are, how they see themselves. Thereby, this thesis accepts the incommensurability of Western and Indigenous epistemologies in ways that does not attempt to negate and ameliorate Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing. Rather, the target of enquiry is based upon how non-Indigenous professionals accept difference, make adjustments to embrace difference, and build ontological pluralism. I have shown that, fundamentally, it is not the *bringing together* of incommensurable knowledge systems that offers potential for the collaborative stewardship of Earth. Rather, it is the work of settlers to recognise that there is more than one way of understanding the

world. The skill lies with the ability to recognise difference without the logic of binarism. The point is not to adopt, integrate, merge, or assimilate Indigenous knowledges into NRM, but to loosen the colonial constraints upon Indigenous self-determination. From here, Indigenous sovereigns can undertake the work they need to do to fulfill their sacred responsibility and care as Country according to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing.

This thesis also makes theoretical contributions to methodologies that attend to decolonising research conducted by non-Indigenous researchers who recruit non-Indigenous participants. Indigenous methodologies provide clear principles for research in Indigenous spaces, with a focus on working directly with Indigenous participants and communities. Taking these critical principles, along with the concept of unsettling, is a burgeoning methodological approach for enquiry into the role of non-Indigenous allies. Here, I have contributed to recent scholarship on unsettling methodologies by theoretically unravelling the settler ontology of land built upon Enlightenment notions of 'rising above a state of nature.' Further, I have demonstrated the usefulness of Martin Booran Mirraboo's (2003) framework of Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing for decolonising methodologies. These contributions, including reflections on my own roles and responsibilities to Indigenous sovereignty, build upon considerations for non-Indigenous researchers, the practice of allyship in research, and the connection between professional and personal life.

### *10.2.2 Applications to policy*

While Indigenous nation-building is written into the legal obligations and national standards of settler states, previous research has shown that top-down policy directives are not easily translated into practice (Smith, Neale & Weir 2021). This thesis, however, provides explicit examples of how non-Indigenous professionals apply nation-building principles to policies and procedures within settler institutions. In particular, the examples of adjusting settler institutions in Chapter 9 – allocating senior staff with carriage of recentring Indigenous sovereignty, providing an annual service fee to the organisations of Indigenous sovereigns, embedding Indigenous sovereignty into staff intranet sites, or transferring established human ethics principles to the critical care of nature – are all directed by changes to policies and procedures. These promising examples provide practical insights into how settler institutions can implement policies that build their own capacity and generate institutional memory that follows an Indigenous nation-building approach. Because Indigenous nation-building principles are new frontiers for non-Indigenous professionals in NRM, the insights revealed in this thesis will assist policy makers to understand how Indigenous sovereignty may be recentred in the formal directives of institutions. Under the standard colonial approach, environmental co-governance will continue to be unsuccessful. The most critical shift required by settler institutions is to use policy to redirect funding and decision-making to Indigenous sovereigns, so they have the autonomy to work according to their own ways of knowing, being, and doing.

### *10.2.3 Considerations for practice*

The above theoretical application of unsettling in this study has shown to be a useful tool for exploring colonial paradigms and settler logics in environmental co-governance that shape the everyday practice of NRM professionals. I have demonstrated that the challenge to settler sovereignty is both political and personal, and shown the value of undertaking research enquiry into the everyday work of NRM professionals. This move away from activist sites was identified by scholars on non-Indigenous allyship as an important trajectory for the field of allyship and this thesis has taken this step. Unsettling the settler ontology of land that frames the settler reality, scaffolds settler institutions, and shapes the everyday routine work of NRM professionals, as I have shown, makes an important contribution to scholarship. The examples from this thesis are drawn from the coalface of environmental co-governance and provide explicit direction on how to move away from colonising habits and shift towards an Indigenous nation building approach. As Smith, W, Neale and Weir (2021) identified, the enthusiasm of non-Indigenous professionals who recentre Indigenous sovereignty was more powerful than policy directives. As I have shown, personal acts such as engaging with critical hope and an ontology of truth, are valuable practices for non-Indigenous professionals working as allies. Importantly, this thesis guides non-Indigenous professionals to attune their practices to identify and disrupt the everyday regulatory mechanisms of settler colonisation in NRM. The examples provided attend to interpersonal interactions between settlers and Indigenous peoples, such as issues of policing Indigenous authenticity, which interferes with meaningful relationship building. Moreover, I have highlighted the value of engaging with critical reflexivity in practice to unsettle one's own internal settler logics and build ontological pluralism. By providing guidance on how non-Indigenous professionals can develop their understandings of sovereignty and identify the

tensions that commonly occur in practice, non-Indigenous allies can work towards implementing strategies and innovation that recentres Indigenous sovereignty. As such, I now discuss the distribution of the findings for this thesis.

### *10.3 Distribution of results*

Because of the above contributions to theory, policy and practice, mobilising the findings of this thesis is a vital last step in the research process. As Indigenous methodologies state, a key decolonising move for non-Indigenous researchers is to return research results back to the communities involved in the research (Louis 2007; Tuhiwai Smith 2012). While individuals and communities from the Ngarrindjeri Nation, and tribes and First Nations across the Columbia River Basin, did not directly participate in the research project, their knowledges are indeed captured in this thesis. Further, the thesis is primarily interested in recentring Indigenous sovereignty and draws on Indigenous conceptual frameworks. As such, if my research is to recentre Indigenous sovereignty and contribute to decolonising settler societies, it must be non-extractive, relational, and accountable (Louis 2007; McGregor 2021). As such, I now discuss the distribution of findings, how this research has reciprocal benefits to both Indigenous sovereigns and settler allies.

All participants in the study will receive a digital copy of the full thesis via email. In addition, findings from this thesis will be summarised in a short report written in concise, plain English for a broader non-academic audience. Chapter 2 of this thesis will be developed as background information in the introduction of the summary report, identifying the problems

in collaborative arrangements and existing approaches discussed across Chapters 3-6. The bulk of the summary report will focus on the strategies and innovations of participants, showcased through participant quotes, to demonstrate the practice of adjusting to Indigenous ways of knowing, being, and doing to recentre Indigenous sovereignty. This report will be distributed to all participants in this study, along with Alexandrina Council and the Government of South Australia. Organisations of the Ngarrindjeri Nation will be emailed a copy, as will the participants listed in *A Sacred Responsibility* (McKinney, Paisley & Stenovec 2015, p. 4), including members of organisations of tribes and First Nations in the Columbia River Basin. Included in the emails will be an offer to deliver presentations (online or face-to-face), a request to forward the summary report on to relevant parties, and permission to upload to organisational websites. I will seek out other relevant organisations in the fields of environmental protection and Indigenous reconciliation who can upload the summary report to their websites.

As the thesis has shown, shifting from the standard colonial approach to an Indigenous nation-building approach hinges on the role of non-Indigenous professionals. Improvements in the epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers to successful outcomes in collaborative arrangements will benefit the process of Indigenous nation building.

Distribution of the findings spreads opportunities for unlearning colonial habits, building decolonising frameworks, and knowledge sharing, all of which builds healthier relationships that support and benefit Indigenous sovereigns. Access to the thesis findings benefit all settler allies who are seeking to decolonise their workspaces, in co-governance and beyond, with opportunities to avoid further settler violations to Indigenous sovereignty and



Indigenous people. Unsettling settler logics and colonial paradigms generates a reciprocity that benefits Indigenous sovereigns. In turn, benefits are received by settlers because we have the opportunity to stop engaging with colonial violence. Ongoing benefits of this research may also be found by providing inspiration for further research on the role on non-Indigenous allies in Indigenous nation building.

#### *10.4 Recommendations for future research*

Considering the current lack of qualitative studies on the perspectives of non-Indigenous professionals in NRM, more research is needed on strategies and innovations to recentre Indigenous sovereignty, unsettle settler sovereignty, and decolonise collaborative arrangements. From this thesis, two important considerations for further enquiry emerge. One might aim to capture strategies that recentre Indigenous women's sovereignty. Another is to make bolder moves to include spirituality as a key theme.

Some threads in participants discussions made references to issues of gender which deserves greater investigation – such as having both male and female representatives from government engage in negotiations with Indigenous sovereigns, and reports from climate scientist who are Indigenous women that withstand non-Indigenous people questioning their qualifications. The silencing of Indigenous women's voices, the logic of patriarchal white possession, and gendered violence are key issues of concern for Indigenous women (Moreton-Robinson 2005, 2007; Simpson 2014). Designing a research project based upon feminist inquiry would move this research into a space that identifies the specific impact of

settler sovereignty as patriarchal and address “ongoing, gendered violence against land and [Indigenous] women perpetrated by and as a result of settler colonialism” (Simpson 2014, p. 34). As noted by Hania and Graben (2020), Indigenous women are absent in the governance structures of the NRM sector and collaborative arrangements, yet their knowledge is vital.

Another aim may be to address the lack of spirituality in social science research (Chilisa 2012). As relationships with the Spirit World are part of Indigenous epistemologies (Foley 2003), not investigating these relationships omits a large section of the connections and cycles that constitute relationality. Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2012, p. 78) states, “The values, attitudes, concepts and language embedded in beliefs about spirituality represent, in many cases, the clearest contrast and mark of difference between indigenous [sic] people and the West.” The lack of reference to spirituality in this thesis is marked in both the literature by non-Indigenous scholars writing in this space, as well as in the narratives of participants in this study, with minor exceptions. A bolder framing on spirituality, applied to the design of interview questions and analysis of data would speak directly to spiritual concepts and relationships with more-than-human worlds.

### *10.5 Closing summary*

The shift in settler allyship reveals a shift in the approach towards the relationships that non-Indigenous professionals foster with the Indigenous sovereigns that they work with. This important shift removes the colonial habit to ‘fix’ Indigenous sovereigns in environmental co-governance and instead focuses upon making adjustments colonial paradigms and settler

logics. Upon the basis that the problem lies with the ongoing forces of settler colonisation, effective strategies and innovations that embrace an Indigenous nation building approach and address persistent epistemological, attitudinal, and institutional barriers are revealed. When the colonial constraints upon Indigenous self-determination are lifted, both settler and Indigenous sovereigns, along with human and more-than-human citizens, can cooperatively share the critical care of Earth. Here, we appreciate each other's gifts and engage in reciprocal relationships of care.

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## 12 Appendix

### Interview Schedule 1

- Can you briefly explain your involvement with the KNYA? How long have you been doing this work?
- What interests you or motivates you to do this work?
- How would you define sovereignty?
- When participating in this process, how do you recognise Indigenous sovereignty? What do you do in response?
- What challenges or persistent problems have you faced? How do you overcome/manage this?
- As a non-Indigenous person doing work that supports Indigenous sovereignty, what have you learnt about *yourself*?
- What have learnt about Western culture?



- When Indigenous and non-Indigenous relationships have a fraught history how do you build relationships?
- In what ways do you think 'Western ways' enable or constrain collaborative work with Indigenous peoples?
- If decolonisation is not just deconstructing colonialism, but also transformation and reconstruction, what does reconstruction look like?
- How does the international community influence your work?
- What more do you believe can be done to support Indigenous sovereignty?
- Is there anything more you'd like to add?

### Interview Schedule 2

- In the first interview, you mentioned [insert topic]. Can you tell me more about that?
- Other participants have raised [insert issue]. What are your views?
- How do you discuss issues with colleagues who don't understand the importance of Indigenous rights? What do you say to them?
- There's been much reference to the difference between tribes in the US having treaties established early on compared to First Nations in Canada. Do you think this has made a difference to the relationships these countries have with Indigenous peoples?

- What is the role of an ally?
- What are your hopes for the river?
- Is there anything further that you've thought about since we last talked?