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Unsettling Australia: Disturbing White Settler Homemaking in Peter Carey's *True History of the Kelly Gang*

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Abstract: Proceeding from Australia's specific situation as a settler colony, this article discusses how the ambivalences and fissures of settler subjectivity shape processes of homemaking. Settler homemaking depends on the disturbance of Indigenous Australians' homelands via dispossession, exclusion, and genocide, but it equally depends upon the creation of a white settler subject as innocent, entitled, and belonging to what has been called 'white indigeneity'. The article traces this double disturbance in Peter Carey's novel *True History of the Kelly Gang* (2000). Carey's rewriting of the iconic Kelly legend uncovers the dangers of a possessive, male, white indigeneity based on effacement and exclusion. The novel's critical staging of Ned Kelly's construction of Australia as a home for a new class of 'natives' challenges an essentialist white Australianness and its narratives of embattled settlement, independence, mateship, and the Bush. The novel shows that the creation of this national character is based on the denial of Aboriginal ownership and agency. Ned's narrative of Irish victimhood and his formation of a new sense of Australianness is therefore doomed to repeat the violence, discrimination, and exclusion of colonialism that he seems to decry.

Keywords: settler colonialism; homemaking; Australia; aboriginal dispossession; whiteness; Peter Carey

In 1855, Michael Normile, an Irish emigrant to Australia, writes a letter home to his father. In this letter, he states: "A man having a comfortable living at home with his Family Convenient to Chappel and market and a good Bed to Lye on, I would advise him to stop there, for he has many ups and downs to encounter before he has a comfortable home in this country" (quoted in Fitzpatrick 1994, p. 72). In 2019, cultural studies scholar Lisa Slater similarly thinks about her belonging in Australia: "If I were to zoom in on my idea of home, like a GPS for deep and persistent feelings, you would see a farm tucked into and surrounded by a national forest, complete with freshwater creeks, cavernous Moreton bay figs, hills for rolling down: an early childhood home, [...] a place where I first lived, where I came alive and learned to see" (Slater 2019, p. xi). In the 164 years that divide these two imaginaries of home, Australia has turned from a hostile and uncomfortable space into a place of wistful childhood memories, from a non-home into a place of intimate belonging.

It is this process of turning Australia into a home for settler subjects that I am concerned with. Proceeding from Australia's specific situation as a settler colony, I will address the ambivalences and fissures of settler subjectivity that shape both collective and individual processes of homemaking. I argue that settler homemaking depends on the disturbance of Indigenous Australians' homelands via dispossession, exclusion, and genocide, but that it equally depends upon the creation of a white

settler subject presented as innocent, entitled, and, ultimately, truly belonging to what has been called “white indigeneity” (Lawson 2004, p. 157; see also Mullaney 2007).¹

At first glance, these two premises seem mutually exclusive, but myths of settlement and nation-making show that “seizing a continent and alternately destroying and governing its original people shaped how white Australians came to see themselves as independent citizens” (Curthoys and Mitchell 2018, p. i). For most individual settlers, the white Australian claim to sovereignty took the shape of establishing control over land and making a home. These processes were based upon the creation of a white indigeneity because “indigeneity is constituted by the notion that one is already at home” (Spark 1999, p. 58). However, this making of home unmade the homes and communities of Indigenous Australians, a fact that was duly overlaid by settler subjects’ self-image as victims of oppression and tyranny. Being at home is therefore founded upon the disturbance of somebody else’s homeland, but this new sense of home remains insecure in spite of multiple processes of effacement and national narratives of self-victimization.

The material for my analysis is Peter Carey’s novel *True History of the Kelly Gang*, first published in 2000 and winner of the 2001 Booker Prize. The novel deals with bushranger Ned Kelly’s life and family as well as with the famous Kelly outbreak and the outlaw’s capture and death in 1880. In a skillful ventriloquism of the historical Jerilderie letter, dictated by Ned Kelly in 1879, Carey gives his version of Kelly a vivid and unique, yet highly unreliable voice and calls into question, in his provocative doubling of “true” and “history”, the ‘truth’ of Australianness, whiteness, or victimhood (see Kern-Stähler 2003; see also Pons 2001, pp. 64–5; Eggert 2007). For my interest in the ambivalences of settler homemaking, this novel is specifically relevant for three main reasons. Firstly, Ned Kelly is, in spite of his controversial status, one of Australia’s best-known national icons and often presented as the epitome of a typically Australian spirit of anti-authoritarianism, loyalty to your ‘mates’, and egalitarianism, an image of an allegedly ‘national character’ probably best described in Russel Ward’s contested *The Australian Legend* (see Ward 1958, pp. 1–2). The Kelly story sets the stage for a national story of belonging and identity and connects Australians to their homeland.

Secondly, the novel focuses on Ned Kelly’s Irish Catholic roots and therefore discusses a part of Australia’s settler society that encapsulates, in a nutshell, the duality of resistance and effacement that I started with. The ambiguous position of the Irish as both victims and accomplices of the British colonial system throws into relief the problematic narrative that, to a lesser extent, shapes all myths about Australian nation- and homemaking (see MacDonagh 2001, p. 447; see also Akenson 2005, pp. 454–56). Although often presented as “comparatively more benign colonizers”, the Irish in Australia were not simply on the wrong side of the colonizer–colonized dichotomy and the victims of a brutal and unjust system (McGrath 2013, p. 109). Like other white settlers, they were equally “the agents of colonial rule, and their own subsequent development—cultural as well as economic—does not simply align them with other colonised peoples” (Loomba 2005, p. 14; see also McGrath 2013, pp. 118–20).

Thirdly, the novel explicitly focuses on Ned Kelly’s transformation from seeing himself as an Irish victim of English oppression to creating a specifically white and male Australian ethos of belonging and entitlement. He thus effectively adopts the position of the battler and the victim in order to efface Indigenous dispossession and to create and make plausible a new sense of white indigeneity.² The ambivalent position of the Irish in Australia and Ned Kelly’s iconic story therefore enable a more far-reaching analysis of the complex and multiple disturbances of home in settler societies at large.

Proceeding from a short breakdown of research on settler colonialism and settler subjectivity, I will analyze Carey’s version of the Kelly story by first focusing on encounters with Indigenous

¹ Concerning my usage of the term ‘white’, I want to stress that I do not apply it as the description of an existing racial category or a specific phenotype based on genetic variation. Instead, ‘white’, like all racial markers, connotes a racialized identification and socio-cultural construction and does not exist in terms of a biological or genetic fact (see Miles and Brown 2003, pp. 88–9). In the case of whiteness, it specifically ascribes unearned privilege to those allowed to identify and be accepted as white (see McIntosh 2013).

² For the national myth of the battler and the victim, see Curthoys 1999.

Australians to then, in a second step, zoom in on Ned's creation of an Australian self that enables him to present Australia (and not Ireland) as his home and entitlement.

1. Settler Colonialism and the Disturbance of Home

In her discussion of the term 'colonialism', Ania Loomba looks at dictionary definitions of 'colony' which, taken from the Latin 'colonia', means farm or settlement and describes both "a settlement in a new country" as well as "a body of people who settle in a new locality, forming a community" (OED definition, quoted in Loomba 2005, p. 7). She then turns her scrutiny to the remarkable avoidance of any "reference to people other than the colonisers" and states: "Hence it evacuates the word 'colonialism' of any implication of an encounter between peoples, or of conquest and domination. [...] The process of 'forming a community' in the new land necessarily meant *un-forming* or *re-forming* the communities that existed there already" (Loomba 2005, pp. 7–8, italics in original). Loomba's argument shows what is also salient for homemaking processes in settler colonies: the dispossession and destruction of other peoples' homes that is both ignored and made invisible.

Research on settler colonies takes up studies of colonialism, but stresses that "settler colonialism supersedes rather than *reproduces* the colonial rule of difference; settlers win by *discontinuing* unequal relationships rather than maintaining them" (Veracini 2017, p. 3; see also Curthoys and Mitchell 2018, pp. 11–2). Justified by the ideology of 'terra nullius', settlement as a mode of domination focuses on the possession of land and is, therefore, in a first step, geographical: "settler colonialism turns someone else's place into space and then into place again" (Veracini 2017, p. 5; see also Moreton-Robinson 2003, pp. 24–8).

In a second step, settler colonialism encourages continuing chains of (regulated) immigration because the ultimate goal is to stay in the new locality. Settlers, specifically in later stages of settlement, were therefore relatively autonomous from colonized labor,³ a fact that first resulted in genocide and later spurred on theories of the "vanishing" or "doomed races" of Indigenous peoples: "Such extinction narratives serve a political purpose in settler societies, to both forget and move on from violence and to nullify current political claims by living Aboriginal people" (Edmonds and Carey 2017, p. 375; see also McGregor 1993). Patrick Wolfe's influential definition of settler colonialism therefore states that its primary logic "can be characterized as one of elimination" (Wolfe 2005, p. 867; quoted in Curthoys and Mitchell 2018, p. 14). A permanent homeland is thus established by way of displacement (see Veracini 2017, p. 4), justified by doctrines like supercessionism, "the notion that settlers had a right to replace indigenes [...] based on claims of British moral and racial superiority" (Edmonds and Carey 2017, p. 377), and perpetuated by measures like the White Australia Policy that aimed at regulating immigration and population growth (see Carey 2011).

Finally, in a third step, this permanence of the new settlement and the ongoing un-forming or disturbance of the Indigenous communities has the consequence that settler colonialism "has typically resisted formal decolonisation" and continues to be a mode of domination (Veracini 2017, p. 3). This is encapsulated in the ironic comment of Australian poet Bobbi Sykes on the issue of whether Australia can be called postcolonial: "What? Postcolonialism? Have they left?" (quoted in Veracini 2017, p. 3). Aileen Moreton-Robinson accordingly talks about Australia as a "postcolonizing nation-state" in which "a sense of belonging [is] derived from ownership as understood within the logic of capital" (Moreton-Robinson 2003, pp. 23,30). This continuing reliance on dispossession and on homemaking as a denial of this original dispossession then creates the uneasy and "jealously guarded" belonging to a settler state like Australia, even in the present day (Moreton-Robinson 2003, p. 27). Klik accordingly argues that white Australia will not be able to deal with its sense of unsettlement as long as Indigenous Australians are not able to "re-settle both materially and

³ The claim to a general disinterest in Indigenous labor has been questioned, for example, by Curthoys and Mitchell who criticize Wolfe's notion of "an ideal type of settler colonialism" and his downplaying of counter-evidence as in the cattle stations of the Australian Northern Territories (see Curthoys and Mitchell 2018, pp. 14–5).

emotionally” (Klik 2020, p. 178). The sometimes angry reactions to Aboriginal claims to sovereignty and land like the Native Title Act of 1993 and the rejection of the “Uluru Statement from the Heart” of 2017 in which Indigenous Australians asked for the establishment of an Indigenous representative body in parliament, are a testament of many white Australians’ fear of losing home (see Slater 2019, pp. 133–34). This fear led (again) to a sense of white Australian victimhood and a rejection of gestures towards reconciliation such as Prime Minister Kevin Rudd’s speech in parliament on 13 February 2008 in which he apologized to Australia’s Indigenous peoples, specifically for the Stolen Generations (see Slater 2019, p. 15; see also Curthoys 1999, pp. 17–8). In the public debate around these issues, it becomes obvious that settler colonialism is still a mode of domination in Australia, even though Indigenous voices are getting louder.

In the context of my own concern with the ambivalences of white homemaking in Australia, two important qualifications have to be made for the definition of settler colonialism presented above. Firstly, Wolfe’s formulation that settlement is based on a ‘logic of extermination’ seems to decry the treatment of Indigenous peoples while, problematically, implying that settlers were indeed able to fully take possession of the land. Australia again seems to turn into ‘terra nullius’, albeit after the removal of the Indigenous population. Curthoys and Mitchell accordingly warn that we need to “give full recognition to the histories of survival and transformation that followed” and propose to talk about genocide instead of extermination. This gives recognition to Indigenous survival while acknowledging “the enormity of the human destruction that occurred in the wake of colonisation” (Curthoys and Mitchell 2018, p. 15; see also Edmonds and Carey 2017, pp. 372–76). This is an interesting proposition for the analysis of homemaking processes, because the original definition of genocide, first put forward by Polish Jewish jurist Raphaël Lemkin, already includes the “colonization of the area by the oppressor’s own nationals” and, therefore, violent settlement (quoted in Curthoys and Mitchell 2018, p. 15). In addition, the term genocide can be connected to Porteous and Smith’s important concept of domicide, “the deliberate destruction of home by human agency in pursuit of specified goals, which causes suffering to the victims” (Porteous and Smith 2001, p. 12). Australian history shows that the deliberate destruction of Indigenous peoples’ homes via child removal (most infamously in the policies resulting in the Stolen Generations), the dispersal of communities, the devastation of natural resources and homesteads, or the destruction of sacred places was a major aspect of genocide and settlement, and the consequences of such measures still reverberate in contemporary Australian society (see Edmonds and Carey 2017, pp. 378–80).

The second qualification I would like to add is that settler colonialism is not only a territorial and legal phenomenon, but equally works on the level of the individual psyche and thus shapes everyday practices and social relations. It is this combination of place, practices, and a sense of self that I want to call settler subjectivity. Here, I adapt Mark Rifkin’s notion of “settler common sense”, defined as “the ways the legal and political structures that enable non-Native access to Indigenous territories come to be lived as given, as simply the unmarked, generic conditions of possibility for occupancy, association, history, and personhood” (Rifkin 2013, pp. 322–3). Settlement as control over land via expropriation and genocide gives rise to kinds of affect that enable these violent processes “to be lived as quotidian forms of non-Native being and potential” (Rifkin 2013, p. 323). This, in turn, both enables and necessitates the effacement and constant deferral of the Indigenous element in often mundane everyday practices, such as putting up fences, grazing cattle, or constructing farms and stations. Nevertheless, the ‘Native’ always remains part of the everyday as a “non-relation”, a term that takes into account that relations did and do exist but that, at the same time, these relations are effaced in non-Native social structures (Rifkin 2013, p. 323). Veracini similarly talks about the “settler colonial non-encounter” that needs to disavow the presence of the Indigenous other (Veracini 2010, p. 86; quoted in Slater 2019, p. 20). Settlement turns into “a shifting assemblage of ordinary actions, occupancies, ethics, aspirations, dispositions, and sensations” (Rifkin 2013, p. 327), and its ordinariness and invisibility “reaffirm, normalize, and propel settlement as the ‘ready-made’ against which new information, sensation, experience affectively is managed” (Rifkin 2013, p. 330). In the following interpretation of *True History of the Kelly Gang*, I want to use this notion of settler subjectivity and its normalization and affirmation of settlement to show how the Kelly story as told by Carey

elucidates the blind spots of white Australia's homemaking myths, and I want to start with settler–Native encounters and non-encounters.

2. Absent Presence: Indigenous Australians in the Kelly Story

Although Indigenous Australians are nearly absent from the narrative, they appear at crucial points in the novel. They have two functions in Ned Kelly's world: they are either presented as part of the landscape or they are trackers employed by the police of Victoria. Both functions are well-established in colonial narratives and turn Indigenous people into objects or animals (see McClintock 1995, pp. 34–6). The first depiction of Aboriginal people in the novel is a story about an encounter between Ned's father and "a vicious Sydney black by the name of Warragul" who "had gotten a mob together made of the remnants of different tribes" (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 17). Here, Ned is obviously aware of the fact that these tribes are only remnants of their former communities, yet he is unable to acknowledge the role of white people in this process: "my father had done nothing against Warragul but when he arrived at the Murray River near Barnawatha a shower of spears sailed out of the bush and struck his donkey dead beneath him" (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 17). Ned claims individuality and innocence for his father, while at the same time seeing the Aboriginal group as a collective of "shouting savages" that attempts to burn his father alive (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 17). The narrative of his father's battle and escape accordingly stresses the stupidity and ignorance of the Indigenous people by claiming that his father could escape through the rear windows of the hut in which he was hiding with "the blacks keeping watch on one side of his funeral pyre" (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 17). The humanization of his father, deemed a dangerous criminal and sub-human by the convict system, is achieved via the dehumanization of Indigenous Australians.

When the Kelly Gang is later pursued by the police, the gang meets Aboriginal men who work as trackers for the police. These trackers are compared to weapons, dogs, or demons and are thus dehumanized and turned into mere objects that are used by white men against the Kellys: "those black trackers from Queensland was murderous demons they already butchered many men before they caught the scent of us" (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 385). Similar to the Indigenous group his father met, the trackers are again from a different region of Australia, stressing that Kelly's Victoria is considered as his home while Indigenous Australians are aliens imported from somewhere else (here, Sydney and Queensland), an ironic inversion of settler–Native relations. After the shooting of the policemen at Stringybark Creek, the police use trackers to hunt the Kellys for the first time. Joe Byrne, Steve Hart, and Dan Kelly monitor the police camp while Ned spends time with his lover Mary Hearn at the selection of his mother. When Steve sees the trackers, he says: "Niggers [...] I aint afraid of niggers", and Joe answers: "What you is calling niggers is black trackers that one old b—r is more dangerous than 20 effing Spencers" (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 321). The Spencer is a modern repeating rifle that the colonial police imports from North America to hunt down the Kellys. By comparing the trackers to these weapons, the Aboriginal men are turned into instruments in the hands of the white policemen, and the racial slur that both Steve and Joe use shows that the Irish Australian rebels partake in the derogatory stereotypes of white Australia that they seem to be fighting.

Nevertheless, there is the potential for the Kellys to use their own subaltern status in the colonial system to ally themselves with the trackers. Stories of such alliances were often used to "provide a fond and humane account of the Irish in Australia" and create what McGrath calls "agreeable narratives" (McGrath 2013, p. 117). Ned's description of the way the Indigenous men are treated by the police outlines this potential: "Soon there were a merry fire and much tucker were produced. Clearly the blackfellows received no invitation to this feast and soon they retreated into the bush beside the swamp" (Carey [2000] 2001, pp. 321–2). The trackers are not part of the party, and in line with colonialist images of them as part of the landscape, they retreat into the bush as long as their skills are not needed. However, the Kelly Gang does not side with the trackers. Instead, they act as they did when they heard of the police officers' Spencer rifles: they simply take the policemen's weapons. In this instance, Joe uses a combination of threat and patronizing instead of simply shooting the Indigenous men. He addresses the older tracker with "uncle" while he is addressed as "boss". Pointing the stolen Spencer rifle at the trackers, he orders them to lead the police away from the gang,

a request to which the older tracker answers: “Nothing here boss [...] I swear by Jesus them tracks all belong to cattle. [...] Them b—rs get by very good without me boss you watch them” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 323). A close reading of this passage shows an interesting slippage in settler–Native relations. Joe hates the police, but he also threatens the Aboriginal trackers instead of siding with them against their common enemy. He denigrates them by using the expression “uncle” and even uses the Spencer rifle to scare them away. This is ironic because the Indigenous men have before been compared to precisely this weapon. Joe thus uses one weapon of the colonizer against another one. Instead of acknowledging the humanity of the trackers, the Irish Australians consequently accept and perpetuate the thingified status of Indigenous people, condoning the colonial hierarchy they profess to fight at this exact moment. The encounter therefore remains a non-encounter in which the logic of settler colonialism prevails.

The tracker is not a passive victim of this logic, though. Although he complies with Joe’s request, he intelligently uses strategies of dehumanization and stereotyping to flout both the English police officers and the Irish ‘rebels’. By claiming that the Kelly Gang’s tracks “all belong to cattle”, he applies the settler logic he is a victim of to Joe and the others, turning them into animals as well. This is in tune with Ned’s earlier statement that the Protestant children of his school learned each day from their schoolmaster “that all micks was a notch beneath the cattle” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 32). However, the tracker also refuses to help the police apprehend the Kellys, thus rejecting his position as a passive instrument of state control. The outcome of this encounter consequently is an ambivalent one. Both the Irish Australians and the Aboriginal men have a flexible position in the colonial hierarchy: they are victims of binary thinking and are reduced to objects of colonial control, but they are also able to manipulate and use the rigidity of the system to their own benefit, keeping their sovereignty at least partly within settler society.

Apart from these two passages in the novel, Indigenous people are not a topic in Ned’s story. This absence has been noted and criticized, also with respect to other novels by Carey, for example, *Bliss* (see Jose 2005, pp. 145–6; see also Gaile 2001, p. 38). However, *True History of the Kelly Gang* is a good example of the critical function of this absence because it points the reader to the blind spots of Australian history and ideologies like ‘terra nullius’. The filling of this gap in Australian national memory with victimological narratives, in this case, of Irishness and its heroic conflict with the authorities, shows that there actually *is* a gap to be filled as long as the national homeland is seen as exclusively white. Australian sovereignty and homemaking indeed come at the price of the effacement of Indigenous peoples’ agency, and the novel narratively performs these settler–Native non-relations.

Thus, I would question Susan K. Martin’s interpretation of the missing story of Indigenous Australians in Carey’s novel. Martin sees this blind spot as an indication of the novel’s endorsement of a “white national identity” for Ned Kelly along the lines of Russel Ward’s *Australian Legend* (Martin 2005, p. 310). It is true that in Carey, “Aborigines feature, in victimological style, only as trackers, some sympathetic, mostly otherwise; the pursuers, not the pursued” (Martin 2005, p. 310). However, this is not a sign of the novel actually sharing racist images of Indigenous people as evil enemies or a doomed race. On the contrary: that Ned Kelly finally can construct himself as a ‘native’ of Australia is shown to be based on his inability to even acknowledge the presence of Aboriginal Australia. Therefore, his self-empowerment performs rather than conceals this central blind spot of Australian nation-making. This performance is encapsulated in the overall unreliability of Kelly’s narrative voice and his repeated yet failed attempts at telling ‘the’ true history of Australian identity, put into a nutshell in the novel’s strikingly fragmented title that calls into question the nature of history itself. In spite of feeling victimized by Anglo-Australia, it is impossible for Ned to escape the binary logic of racialized colonial discourses as long as he clings to exclusionary notions of identity, history, and belonging. As one reviewer of the novel remarked: “Carey recognizes a moral discrimination which is rarely made in accounts of the sufferings of the Irish peasantry, namely that, as Auden put it, ‘those to whom evil is done, do evil in return’” (Porter 2001, p. 19). The innocence and entitlement of Ned’s white indigeneity that he is so anxious to establish implodes when faced with its internal

contradictions. It is this problematic creation of a white Australian sense of home that I will now turn to.

3. “The Conquest of a Field Already Ours”: Constructing White Indigeneity⁴

In the course of his narrative, Ned’s sense of home undergoes a major change. While references to Ireland dominate the earlier part of his ‘true history’ as the source of his family’s traditions, origins, and his own sense of self (see Heinz 2013), the latter part of his story shows that Ned’s sense of belonging shifts towards Australia. This emerging Australianness is constructed as a biological, hereditary identity that, in spite of its anti-English, anti-authoritarian, and seemingly egalitarian impetus, perpetuates essentialism and exclusion. The novel thus not only broaches Ned’s ambivalent position as both colonizer and colonized, it also uses this ambivalence to point out the destructive effects of the white possessive logic that settler homemaking is based upon. The construction of a white indigeneity thus comes under intense scrutiny.

Right at the beginning of his narrative, Ned Kelly shows a close connection to the Australian landscape in which he grows up: “I once again imagined there were never a better place on earth than where I lived at Pleurisy Plains. I could not conceive a better soil or prettier view or trees that did not grow crooked in the winds” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 19). Throughout the novel, the main goal for his extended family is to buy land that no one can evict them from. They are “drunk with land” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 22), and Ned and his mother dream of “all the land beneath our feet [which] would be our own to walk on from dawn to dusk ours and ours alone” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 45; see also Carey [2000] 2001, pp. 54, 57–8, 268). An ideal of Ireland is still an implicit model for Ned when he imagines the family’s Australian property as overwhelmingly green, fertile, and a fairy land (see Carey [2000] 2001, pp. 116–7, 131, 133, 151), but it is obvious that the Kellys attach themselves to Australian land as their future. Buying and owning land expresses their wish to belong and have a home in the colony, much in line with the white possessive settler logic that Moreton-Robinson describes (see Moreton-Robinson 2015). Indigenous land rights are never a topic because the land is assessed as empty and open for ‘cultivation’. Australia as a potential home is therefore based upon “the making given of settlement” and the Kelly family’s approach to owning and buying land is part of settler common sense (Rifkin 2013, p. 333).

This homemaking in Australia also influences Ned’s attachment to Ireland. In the course of the novel, Ireland increasingly loses its ability to give meaning to Ned’s experiences and desires. In the last chapters of Ned’s narrative, Australia therefore takes on the motherly characteristics that Ireland has lost. The mountains “folded themselves around us like a mother” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 307) and the land is a “familiar bosom” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 311). This presentation of Australia as a mother ties in with masculinist imaginations of colonizing the new land in terms of racialized gender relations: white man battles against and possesses non-white feminized nature (see Schaffer 1988; Sheridan 1995; Dixon 1995). This desire to be part of and possess a maternal, Australian landscape is then connected to Ned Kelly’s desire to have a home in Australia, a goal that he shares with many of his male sympathizers: “He and I had wanted no more than land a hearth to sit by in the night but he seen us in possession of the police horses and knew that dream were gone to smash” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 293). Frank Molloy comments here: “Despite being responsive to instances of injustice [...] Peter Carey’s Ned Kelly is no Irish freedom fighter. [...] Decent toil and a white picket fence are his goals; it is almost suburban” (Molloy 2003, p. 109). This gendering of home within a motherly Australian landscape re-creates white, patriarchal ideals of family and nation-state and again stresses that Ned Kelly is far from rebelling against the power structures of paternalistic English colonialism.

Kelly’s ‘rebellion’ against colonial authority is connected to such gendered and racialized homemaking aspirations because he accuses the government, the police, and the courts of destroying the possibility of making his and all other (male) settlers’ dream of home come true. Kelly and the Irish Australian settlers here turn into true Australians because they are part of the land, while people

⁴ The quotation is taken from John West’s text “The League Tracts: The Gold Discovery and the League”, published in 1851 (quoted in Veracini 2016, p. 311).

like Anglo-Australian magistrate McBean can never belong: “He did not own that country he never could” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 234). Ned and his growing gang with its hundreds of sympathizers and supporters are presented as the kernel of a new Australian nation: “We was building a world where we would be left alone” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 234).

Ned Kelly’s creation of a common Australianness culminates in his speech at Faithfull’s Creek in which he justifies his actions in front of the workmen that the gang holds hostage. He calls these men “a jury of our peers” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 356). This ‘jury’ is presented as a glimpse of the future of Australia as an egalitarian society that transcends the oppositions that have structured Kelly’s history and the colonies so far. In spite of differences in terms of class, religion, or country of origin, the men share what Kelly calls “the historic memory of UNFAIRNESS”:

And here is the thing about them men they was Australians they knew full well the terror of the unyielding law the historic memory of UNFAIRNESS were in their blood and a man might be a bank clerk or an overseer he might never have been lagged for nothing but still he knew in his heart what it were to be forced to wear the white hood in prison he knew what it were to be lashed for looking a warder in the eye and even a posh fellow like the Moth had breathed that air so the knowledge of unfairness were deep in his bone and marrow. In the hut at Faithfull’s Creek I seen proof that if a man could tell his true history to Australians he might be believed it is the clearest sight I ever seen and soon Joe seen it too. (Carey [2000] 2001, pp. 359–60)

When the gang departs, its hostages applaud its “display of flashy riding”: “And lo they did applaud us with their eyes bright their faces red bank managers & overseers & ex policemen they stood in the scorching sun and cheered us that were a development we never hoped before” (Carey [2000] 2001, p. 361). What is obvious in these descriptions of an alleged Australian national character is not only its masculinist basis in a jury that consists only of men. It is also obvious that Ned again applies essentialist discourse to explain *why* these men from different backgrounds share a common history. They have “breathed that air” and a genetic knowledge of Australian history, specifically of convictism, is “deep in [their] bone and marrow”, even if their individual experience is an entirely different one. Ned supplants motherly Irish foundational myths with a new masculinist Australian one, all the while claiming to be inclusive and egalitarian.

However, his essentialist logic creates yet another ‘race’, presented as entirely different from (and better than) the English colonizer. Hierarchies are kept while evaluations are inverted. By claiming that he, his gang, and the “jury of his peers” are ‘natives’, Ned perpetuates racialized and gendered essentialisms in order to cast himself as part of a new white, manly race and legitimize their claim to a patriarchal, homely home. This “capacity to project images of regenerated settler colonial ‘manhood’ onto Australian realities” is typical for the settler rhetoric that dominated public discourse in the 19th century (Veracini 2016, p. 306). He therefore not only excludes women in a typical gesture towards mateship, he also excludes non-white immigrants and Indigenous Australians who do not even figure in his imaginary of the new nation. In Ned’s speech and vision, Australian sovereignty indeed comes at the cost of exclusion, effacement, and dispossession and is based on an inherently violent claim to belonging and home: “[...] the spaces of home, homeland and nation inscribe gendered and racialized geographies of inclusion and exclusion” (Blunt and Dowling 2006, p. 159). As in his dreams of owning land, Ned’s anti-authoritarian Australianness again “relies on the making given of settlement” (Rifkin 2013, p. 333) and articulates a seemingly independent settler subjectivity that, in truth, heavily depends on the exertion of control over other populations and their rights. The paradoxes within his formation of a new Australian ‘race’ therefore effectively uncover the paradoxes so central to settler subjectivity: “So the incubating myth of the anti-authoritarian Kelly Gang, as it enters popular consciousness, begins to enable and authorize the simplistic nationalism that Kelly’s fight against the established order in Australia was meant to challenge” (Bliss 2005, p. 297). The reader is thus able to see the inherent danger of a sense of home and belonging that can only work if it excludes others: “Carey’s purpose is to raise the question of whether Australian independence has not simply resulted in ‘the rape of the land, the marginalization of the Native Australians, and the denial of the feminine’” (Fletcher 1992; quote in Callahan 1990, p. 26). In effect, Ned Kelly

partakes in a problematic double supercessionism, first by claiming the right to replace Indigenous Australians by simply ignoring their presence, and, secondly, by claiming the right to replace the English colonizers due to the moral superiority of the new 'race' of Australian 'natives'. Such claims enable settler homemaking, which in itself is an unsettling and disturbing process that facilitates the conversion of the unfamiliar Antipodes into a homely mother country.

4. Conclusion: The Lies and Silences of Settler Homemaking

Carey's rewriting of the Kelly legend uncovers the dangers of constructing a possessive, male, white indigeneity based on effacement and exclusion. Ned's construction of Australia as a home for a new class of 'natives' reveals the effects of applying the ordering patterns and evaluations of a system that he wants to resist but is bound to replicate due to its invisibility and givenness within a system of settler common sense. This central ambivalence of the Kelly myth underlines Carey's notion that Australian history is based on two lies: that the country was empty when the white people came, and that Australians are "proud and free and anti-authoritarian" (quoted in Fletcher 1992). In another interview, Carey has stated that in Australia, the past "has been the subject of denial and memory-loss" and that it is essential to "untangle all the lies we've told and been told. [...] Ned Kelly is a really good example" (Gaile 2005, p. 3). Indeed, Ned Kelly is a good example, because he repeats colonial denials and lies in his own unreliable creation of an Australianness that comes into being in the heroic story of embattled settlement, independence, mateship, and the Bush.

Ned becomes a national hero, but what that national homeland actually is remains as unclear as the truth of Ned's 'true' history. Carolyn Bliss proposes that this lack at the center of Carey's novel hints at an insecurity at the heart of national identity narratives: "[...] the implication remains that Ned Kelly cannot write directly about 'Ned Kelly' because he does not yet know who that person is; the process of telling his story [...] is meant to locate and convey the meaning Ned seeks" (Bliss 2005, p. 291). In this interpretation, Ned again becomes an icon of his nation, but this time it is not the indomitable, egalitarian 'Australia Felix', but a nation that is unsettled and disturbed because the violent exclusions and effacements of settlement come to haunt the settlers' homes. The outcome of the novel is an acknowledgment of the human desire to belong, to have a home, and feel at home. However, Carey also makes clear that, if unreflected, this desire can lead to a repetition of the violent and exclusionary structures that one rejects.

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