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A Narrative of Moral Imagination: Collective Survivance in Indigenous Science Fictions

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Abstract | Science fiction troubles common assumptions about the nature of contemporary society by either imagining new, future worlds or offering a drastically altered depiction of the present world. Two recent indigenous efforts in this vein, Gerald Vizenor's novel *Treaty Shirts: October 2034 – A Familiar Treatise on White Earth Nation* and Ryan Griffen's television series *Cleverman* exemplify how the world-building characteristic of the SF genre, when placed in an indigenous context, can be used to question the narrative of progress on the frontier that colonialists use to de-value native presence and claim indigenous spaces. *Treaty Shirts* sets Native American treaty disputes in a future world in which a group of exiled natives create a new society rather than continue in the pseudo-democracy of the United States, while *Cleverman* imagines an altered present day world in which aboriginal mythological creatures, the Hairies, exist as an exiled population within Australia. This article in turn expands on the scholarship of John Reider, who traces the persistence of colonialist narratives in early Western SF works, and Grace Dillon, who sees the creativity of contemporary indigenous SF as a space of resistance, by considering the ways in which both *Treaty Shirts* and *Cleverman* re-imagine indigenous relationships to

colonized space in order to enact a type of collective survivance through storytelling, ultimately asserting cultural imagination as a more enduring connection to land than governmental legislation.
Keywords | Indigenous science fiction; survivance; Gerald Vizenor; *Treaty Shirts*; *Cleverman*.

Resumo | A Ficção Científica põe em causa suposições comuns sobre a natureza da sociedade contemporânea, por um lado, ao imaginar mundos novos e futuros e, por outro, ao oferecer uma representação drasticamente alterada do mundo actual. Nesta linha de ideias, dois esforços recentes de origem indígena, o romance de Gerald Vizenor *Treaty Shirts: October 2034 – A Familiar Treatise on White Earth Nation* e a série de televisão de Ryan Griffen, *Cleverman,* exemplificam como a criação de mundos característica da ficção científica, quando colocadas num contexto indígena, pode ser usada para questionar a narrativa do progresso na fronteira que colonialistas utilizam para desvalorizar a presença nativa e reivindicarem espaços indígenas. *Treaty Shirts* coloca disputas de tratados Nativos Americanos num mundo futuro no qual um grupo de nativos exilados cria uma nova sociedade em vez de continuar na pseudo-democracia dos Estados Unidos, enquanto que *Cleverman* imagina um mundo presente alterado no qual criaturas aborígenes mitológicas, os Hairies, existem como uma população exilada dentro da Austrália. Este artigo expande o estudo de John Reider, que traça a persistência de narrativas colonialistas nas primeiras obras de ficção científica ocidental, e de Grace Dillon, que vê a criatividade da ficção científica indígena contemporânea como um espaço de resistência, ao considerar os modos como *Treaty Shirts* e *Cleverman* reimaginam relações indígenas com o espaço colonizado de forma a pôr em prática um tipo de sobrevivência colectiva através do contar de histórias, em última medida afirmando a imaginação cultural como uma ligação mais duradoura à terra do que a legislação governamental.
Palavras-Chave | Ficção científica indígena; sobrevivência; Gerald Vizenor, *Treaty Shirts*; *Cleverman*.

Decolonizing Science Fiction

Colonists tell poor stories. The United States' story of Columbus' discovery, for example, erroneously frames pre-contact native land occupation as illegitimate. The governments of other settler states, such as Australia and New Zealand, have similarly relied on manifestly false, imperialist narratives to continue denying land

rights and reparations to indigenous populations (Foley n.pg.). Though indigenous peoples have faced such abuses for centuries, scholars have only recently started discussing Euro-American histories as fictions. In literary studies, postcolonial scholars point to the popularity of the Western in twentieth century North American literature and cinema as evidence of colonialist narratives' prevalence in early American culture (Churchill 175). Western narratives romanticize progress on the frontier and the rugged American cowboy out to kill "Indians" (Simmon 9). However, literary scholars generally fail to recognize early science fiction (SF) works as equally the result of colonialist ideologies, even though the discovery of a strange, new world central to many early SF narratives echoes European narratives of contact. Further, the available scholarship on the connections between SF and colonialism focuses primarily on mass-market Euro-American SF films, such as *Star Wars*, thereby ignoring the recent proliferation of SF works by indigenous writers (Wetmore 20). This essay seeks to fill the gap in indigenous SF scholarship by examining two recent texts: Gerald Vizenor's 2016 novel, *Treaty Shirts: October 2034 – A Familiar Treatise on White Earth Nation*, and Ryan Griffen's 2016 Australian-New Zealand-American television series, *Cleverman*. Both engage the SF genre in order to critique the historical displacement of their cultures, the Anishinaabe peoples of the White Earth Reservation and the Aboriginal peoples of New South Wales, respectively, from their original lands. Through science fictional premises, Vizenor and Griffen present sovereign first nations, whose collective cultural imaginings counteract the colonialist mythology of indigenous disappearance. Ultimately, they demonstrate that the act of storytelling is crucial to the fight for native land rights.

Much like the supposed discovery of North America, the roots of science fiction are inextricable from a colonialist mindset. John Rieder's groundbreaking study, *Early Classics of Science Fiction: Colonialism and the Emergence of Science Fiction* (2012), traces the presence of colonialist ideologies in early SF works and shows that, "the complex mixture of ideas about competition, adaptation, race, and destiny... forms a major part of the thematic material of early science fiction" (15). Pulp Euro-American SF, which dominated the early twentieth century literary market, relies on simplistic, action-driven narratives that frame cultural imperialism positively and non-Western cultures as uncivilized (Rieder 28). Narratives that emphasize the inferiority of other cultures, such as the glorified depiction of alien genocide in Joseph

Campbell's 1947 *The Mightiest Machine*, read as particularly harmful alongside the myth of the disappearing Indian prevalent in the North American imagination up until the late twentieth century. An Indian removal bill signed by Andrew Jackson on April 24, 1830, stated that Native Americans unable to assimilate should be transported to a designated sanctuary west of the Mississippi, effectively setting the disappearance of native peoples as an American goal (Stanciu 29). Subsequently, nineteenth- and twentieth-century anthropologists saw documenting the last living members of specific tribes as a point of pride and competed over who had found the last Indian (Stanciu 29). Further, the myth prevailed in the artistic realm; nineteenth-century audiences treasured Metamora, a Native American stock character represented as the "last of the Wampanoags", and, alternatively, "the Last of the Pollywogs", in different theatrical adaptations of his story, as he acted out the drama of the disappearing Indian on stage (28).

Similarly, in Australia, a policy emerged in the first decade of the twentieth century known as "Smooth the Dying Pillow", which assumed that the Aboriginal population would soon die off; the Australian government in turn established the Aborigines Protection Act of 1909, which effectively established concentration camps, where police would transport the last remaining Aborigines (Foley n.pg.). The politicians behind the policy saw mixed-race peoples as assimilable and full-blood Aborigines as doomed. As a later conference, called "Destiny of the Race", that took place on April 21, 1937, asserts, "this conference believes that the destiny of the natives of aboriginal origin, but not of the full blood, lies in their ultimate absorption by the people of the Commonwealth" (The Commonwealth of Australia, n.pg.). The narrative of doom surrounding Aboriginal culture also made its way to the stage; in Peter Scrivener's popular puppet musical, *Little Fella Bindi*, which toured in Australia as late as the 1970s, the young Bindi, the last of his tribe, frolics amongst animal friends until he realizes he must join 'human' society and marches off, in full uniform, to a Euro-American school as the show's finale (Tredinnick 60). The destruction of alien species by Euro-American protagonists in early twentieth-century SF thus mirrored a prevalent North American and Australian cultural belief in the disappearing native.

Yet, while many early SF works supported imperialist narratives, the genre also notably evolved from the desire for social critique. For example, SF writers of

color have used the imaginative nature of SF to critically comment on inequities in the contemporary world. Mary Bray argues that Samuel R. Delany's ironic treatment of his amnesic half-white half-Native American protagonist, Kid's struggle to establish an identity in the decaying planetary society of *Dhalgren* represents Delany's experience of double-consciousness as a black writer working in the predominantly white SF community of the sixties (Bray 58). Moreover, in a speech she gave at MIT on February 19, 1998, "'Devil Girl From Mars': Why I Write Science Fiction", Octavia Butler describes her motivations for writing *Parable of the Sower*, a novel about a young girl named Lauren and her journey establishing a new religious system for a crumbling world facing similar problems as contemporary North America, but magnified. Butler says that when she writes SF, "I kind of look around and see what's going on and take it a few steps further" (Butler, n.pg.). For Butler, and other SF writers troubled by contemporary politics, the process of re-imagining new worlds is inseparable from understanding the present one. Euro-American SF thus demonstrates two competing impulses: escape into unrealistic fantasies that evade the complexity of reality or reflection on current societal problems through re-imagined worlds.

As indigenous communities do not have the privilege of indulging fantasies that gloss over issues of land rights, environmentalism, and diversity, the purpose of indigenous SF often corresponds to Butler's goal of using new futures to shed light on old problems. In her introduction to the indigenous SF anthology *Walking the Clouds* (2012), Grace Dillon describes four prominent themes of indigenous SF: experiences of time that display the present moment as a mixture of past memories and current experience, the moment of contact between two cultural groups, indigenous forms of science and environmental sustainability, and narratives of healing from colonialism (3). Each challenges a specific colonialist narrative found in Euro-American SF; indigenous science and sustainability, for example, emphasizes the importance of environmental knowledge, rather than the technological knowledge glorified in Western SF that wreaks destruction on the environment. While Western SF often follows a colonialist logic to its harmful ends, such as the fractured and hopeless society that results from an obsessive reliance on surveillance technology in George Orwell's *1984* (1949), indigenous SF more often looks towards a healing world: a

refreshing reversal for a culture whose literary productions have necessarily but unfortunately been dominated by continual returns to historical traumas.

Moreover, outside of the more recent emergence of indigenous SF, the act of storytelling has been and remains integral to Aboriginal and Native community-building. Although oral storytelling traditions also persist in contemporary European cultures, indigenous scholars view oral storytelling as particularly crucial to their cultures, as it helps protect the community bonds that the governmental possession of indigenous lands threatens. In her book, *The Common Pot: The Recovery of Native Space in the Northeast* (2008), scholar Lisa Brooks employs the metaphor of a common pot to describe the role storytelling plays for Native Americans, as both are ways for, "whatever was given from the larger network of inhabitants […] to be shared within the human community" (3). For Native Americans oral and written stories are seen as a collective practice of sharing individual experiences of a specific environment with the larger community of its inhabitants. Storytelling is thus an active process of cultural contribution; the Anishinaabe term, "Awikhiganak", meaning "a tool for image-making, for writing, for transmitting an image or idea […] not only [emerges] from particular place-worlds but [engages] them as active participants" (Brooks xxii-xxiii). Native American stories are both community-driven and place-dependent. Oral stories passed down through generations thus critically serve as a way for new generations to understand cultural histories. As Lisa Smith argues, "*Coming to know the past* has been part of the critical pedagogy of decolonization" (34). For Natives living in contemporary North America, a country that denied the continuing existence of Native cultures up until the late twentieth century and continues to deny the extent of its past abuses, storytelling is crucial to retaining the histories of Native peoples and places.

Australian Aboriginal communities similarly use storytelling to maintain relationships to their land and ancestors. In their article on the relationship between Aboriginal stories and place-mapping, Milroy and Revell state that, "for Aboriginal children, to be born into place is to be born into the stories of that place" (5). To Aborigines, their land is Country; however, Country is more than a name for a physical space, Country encompasses one's relationship to a cultural past and current place in the community (Rose 106). The concept of Country is closely tied to the concept of Dreamtime, which posits a world beyond immediate human experience, in

which Aboriginal ancestors live alongside human beings and animate landscape structures, such as trees (Goodall 6). Dreamtime creatures are only perceptible to individuals in the community known as the Clevermen or Cleverwomen, who are able to communicate with them (Beckett). To the community at large, the knowledge of Dreamtime is relayed through storytelling, in which the "audience will follow the story's path across the land in their imagination […] drawing out its meaning for themselves" (Goodall 6). The knowledge relayed in Dreamtime is metaphorical; for instance, the Dreaming stories of Northern Aboriginal communities often feature a Captain Cook figure, despite the fact that the European settler James Cook did not visit Northern Australia (Goodall 8). To Northern Aboriginal communities, though, he embodies a history of oppressive colonialism. The metaphorical understanding of historical events through Dreamtime has resulted in governmental officials dismissing Aboriginal testimonies. Jeremy Beckett notes that, "the experts who wrote about Aborigines up to the 1970s largely ignored [talk of bureaucratic terror and daily oppression], due to […] the belief that people who situated all the formative events of their world in a mythological 'Dreamtime' must be without history" (n.pg.). Though not given authority by the Euro-American government, Dreamtime allows Aboriginal communities to maintain rich narratives of cultural histories and community relations.

Colonialism prioritizes one culture's story over another. The United States' claim to the land region of North America is a story, given power through legislative documents and imaginatively embellished through the fictional anecdote of Christopher Columbus, but a story nonetheless. The hegemony of largely inaccurate European narratives has, in turn, cost indigenous communities lives and histories. However, in the wake of governmental abuses and historical erasure, indigenous people in North America and Australia maintain their cultures through the act of storytelling. Their stories now reach a larger audience of both indigenous and Euro-American/Euro-Australian readers, whose turn it is to listen.

The Power of the Exiled Voice: Gerald Vizenor's *Treaty Shirts*

Gerald Vizenor's *Treaty Shirts: October 2034 – A Familiar Treatise on the White Earth Nation* follows the journey of seven exiles from White Earth Nation, who sail to New France to establish a new nation in response to the United States' 2034

abrogation of the White Earth treaty. Though set in the future, the novel borrows heavily from Vizenor's experience in the present. In 2009, Erma Vizenor, chief of the White Earth Nation in Minnesota, appointed Vizenor the principal writer of a new constitution for the White Earth Reservation, along with three advisors, Jill Doerfler, JoAnne Stately, and Anita Fineday, to assist with drafts (Vizenor et al. 51). The new constitution aimed to address problems caused by the original federally-imposed constitution, the Minnesota Chippewa Tribe Constitution (MCT), which lumped together the six reservations of Minnesota into one political body, despite the communities' differing needs (Vizenor et al. 51). In writing the new constitution, Vizenor and his fellow delegates prioritized cultural revitalization and Native sovereignty, meaning the right of Native communities to self-governance. Towards the goal of cultural revitalization, Vizenor removed the blood quantum rule, which required a person be at least one-fourth Native American to obtain tribal citizenship. Vizenor and his fellow opponents to blood-quantum argue that the United States government created the requirement with the aim of ensuring Native disappearance; the government's logic being that, as cross-racial marriages increased throughout subsequent generations, the number of people able to qualify would lessen and tribal numbers would accordingly sink (Vizenor et al. 82). The White Earth constitution in turn proposes a holistic attitude towards tribal membership based on kinship ties within the Anishinaabe community. Additionally, while the MCT constitution gives significant political power to the U.S. secretary of interior, the new White Earth constitution does not give the U.S. any power over the Anishinaabe community, ensuring tribal sovereignty (Vizenor et al. 82). Although voters approved the new White Earth constitution on November 19, 2013, the Minnesota Chippewa Tribal Executive Committee has faced significant difficulties with implementation, due to resistance to the constitution's more radical changes, such as the removal of blood quantum, which more conservative tribal members fear will make citizenship too inclusive (Glass-Moore n. pg.). Vizenor's 2016 publication of *Treaty Shirts,* whose primary themes are self-governance and cultural survivance, represents a SF treatment of the political issues currently dividing the Anishinaabe community.

In *Treaty Shirts*, Vizenor strategically chooses exiles, individuals banished from the nation-state, as his protagonists to act as symbols for the governing principles that would strengthen Native communities, but that U.S. government

interference has prevented. Each of the seven exiles bears an "earned" nickname, meaning a name that captures the spirit of their lives. Waassee, the exile who makes laser shows, means lightning, for example. By choosing personal names relevant to their own lives over the names assigned to them at birth, the exiles employ language as Vizenor strived to in his constitution: "in the spirit of resistance and independent governance" (Vizenor et al. 52). The act of naming is especially significant to the White Earth constitution, as the earlier MCT was a "dubious union of six treaty reservations" (Vizenor et al. 13), through which the federal government effectively named six tribes one, betraying their flippant attitude towards cultural differences between Native tribes. Further, in *Treaty Shirts*, each exile wears the same shirt day to day, known as their treaty shirts, that "[embody] our spirit, sweat, and loyalty to the constitution […] we wore the shirts unwashed at every convention and convocation in the past twenty years" (Vizenor 24). The treaty shirts, "a ceremonial vestment of continental liberty" (Vizenor 11), represent a steadfast commitment to personal autonomy. Both in name and clothing, the exiles embody the principles of Native sovereignty.

Moreover, the contrasts between the MCT and the White Earth constitution parallel those between the federally-appointed leader of the White Earth community, Godtwit Moon, and the leader of the exiles, Archive. Godwit Moon, appointed by the federal government upon the abrogation of the White Earth treaty, "could not wait to exile artists, writers, and the delegates to the constitution" (Vizenor 90) and accordingly banishes the seven exiles upon his appointment. Previous to his appointment, Godtwit was in federal prison for "larceny, extortion, possession of narcotics, and weapons violations", but was "secretly paroled to the reservation through a new and ironic rendition strategy of generous treatment" (20). On the reservation, he became corporate manager of the notorious White Foxy Casino. A corrupt individual with loose ties to the federal government, Godtwit represents the type of leader only a political body unfamiliar and unconcerned with the structure of the White Earth community would elect. Godtwit's election thus acts as a sharp critique of the power given to the U.S. secretary of interior by the MCT.

In opposition to Godtwit, Archive, the leader of the exiles, who "would rather walk the earth as an exile in the company of other worthy native exiles […] than parley for a minute any compromise with the tradition fascists" (Vizenor 65),

promotes dissent to corrupt governmental practices. Archive inherited his disdain of the government's involvement with the Native community from his great-uncle, who wrote the White Earth constitution, and, after its abrogation, "walked alone into the solitude of the red pine forest and vanished near the headwaters of the Mississippi River" (Vizenor 30). Furthermore, Archive's long-time lover, Henry Badge, "became a crony, confidante, and the executive assistant to Godtwit the same week he was named the sector governor" (43). Archive not only sees his great-uncle's bond with the Anishinaabe tribe break due to federal action, but his personal relationship with his partner also dissolves after she pursues Godtwit's federally-given power. Vizenor's portrays Archive as, in turn, troubled; though he puts on a front of deviance as he "[taunts] the toadies of the sector" (53), he often acts "moody and uncertain" (66) and, in contrast to the other exiles, rarely describes himself in his narrations. Archive, like his earned nickname suggests, bears the tragedy-ridden history of the Anishinaabe community within himself, but his knowledge also gives him the conviction to dismiss federal government and trust Native sovereignty, thus fulfilling the intentions of the White Earth constitution.

If Archive personifies the abstract motivations behind the White Earth constitution, Savage Love manifests their expression in words. An "innovative unpublished writer" (10), Savage Love begins her narrative with instructions to the reader to, "Name me a native exile, but not with ordinary words, not suicide similes… I am an exile and write to an absence, not to the cultural nostalgia of a presence" (Vizenor 49). In writing to "an absence" rather than the "cultural nostalgia of a presence", Savage Love gives precedence to overlooked Anishinaabe histories over stereotypical signifiers of Native culture, such as spirit-quests and shamans. Though a "savant with words, she teased but never trusted the masters of words, authors, teachers, and politicians, and never tied words to any sense or presence" (Vizenor 76). Savage Love reads widely in both the Euro-American and Native American literary canons, but upholds an ironic approach to serious literature, much like Vizenor, whose fiction often converses with Western works through an ironic lens.

Like Savage Love, though, *Treaty Shirts* blurs the line between art and politics. The majority of the exiles pursue art: Savage Love and Archive write, and Hole in the Storm paints; however, Waasese follows the untraditional creative pursuit of holograms. The conservative members of the White Earth Reservation "resisted the

very idea that a laser holoscene was the continuation of natural motion and trickster stories" (Vizenor 87), banishing Waasese's father for using them. Their stubborn opposition to holograms rather pointedly speaks to Vizenor's frustration with "tradition fascists" (4), who fear altering traditional Native ceremonies will diminish their cultural meaning. Vizenor, in contrast, considers a flexible approach to Native traditions necessary to cultural survivance. The exiles of *Treaty Shirts* accordingly use their art to tell stories in "natural motion" (Vizenor 87), meaning stories that retain the spirit both of Native culture and of the storyteller's contemporary presence. While traditionalists fear new stories may take away from the power of old ones, stories in natural motion celebrate the act of storytelling as a recognition of continued Native life. Subsequently, exile is the ideal position for a storyteller, as banishment from the governing body frees a person to see their culture underneath the veneer of a political structure. Banishment, "as most natives know, was not the end, never the end, but rather the start of native stories" (Vizenor 108). The government's continual disavowal of the exiles' artistic productions, in turn, mimics the traditionalists' fear of new blood taking away old power. As Vizenor's fictional commentary on his real-life struggle to establish the White Earth constitution, *Treaty Shirts* similarly embodies the political paradox of an indigenous artist fighting for cultural rights from the United States government, which allows art to be the most free form of political dissent only because the hegemony of governmental legislation leaves artistic expression the least authority.

Dreaming an Old Story for a New Audience: Ryan Griffen's *Cleverman*

Ryan Griffen's television show, *Cleverman*, centers around two Gumbaynggirr half-brothers, Waruu and Koen West, who live in a re-imagined version of contemporary New South Wales. In Waruu and Koen's world, Hairypeople, fictional creatures developed from several Aboriginal mythologies, exist as a cultural group within New South Wales alongside Aborigines and Euro-Australians. As their name suggests, fur coats the Hairypeople's bodies, causing the government to deem them less than human and exile them to an impoverished area known as the Zone. A small subset of progressives in turn fights for the Hairies' right to assimilation.

Though the Aboriginal characters are depicted as having basic human rights, the very premise of the exiled Hairies makes a straightforward political reference to the historical marginalization of Aboriginal communities. Both the exiled status of the Hairypeople and their attempted assimilation are grounded in the history of Aboriginal and Euro-Australian relations. Under Australia's assimilation policies, between 50,000 and 100,000 indigenous children, now referred to as the Stolen Generation, were taken from their homes to foster-care facilities between 1910 and 1970. Ron Smith, the 1997 commissioner into the human rights violations committed under Australia's assimilation policies, which included child removal, rape, and physical abuse, referred to the policies as genocide (Schaffer 7). The Commonwealth of Australia justified the forced removal of children from their families because they thought Aborigines inhuman; Gumbaynggirr activist Gary Foley explains that, in the early twentieth century, "Indigenous people in communities all over Australia were subject to inspection by 'scientists' interested in such things as similarities between Aborigines and Chimpanzees, brain capacity and cranium size" (n.pg.). The less than human rationale for exiling the Hairypeople of *Cleverman* thus replicates the racist ideologies that drove mass abuse of Aboriginal populations.

Cleverman in turn offers a nuanced portrayal of the Hairy characters that demonstrates the difficulty of political unification, due to a cultural group's differing attitudes towards resistance. For example, the most radical in his outrage towards the government, the Hairy Maliyan organizes violent boxing matches between Aboriginals and Hairies living in the Zone as an outlet for his political anger. He believes in a resistance of violence. Waruu's Hairy assistant, Harry, on the other hand, chooses to "shave down" and pass as an Aboriginal, so that he can assist Waruu in his public appearances promoting the assimilation movement, thus pursuing a gentle resistance of cooperation. Ultimately, though, Latini, a Hairy character similar in spirit to Archive, provides the clearest insight into the political reality of the Hairy community. As the only member of the turned over family Koen who escapes, she spends the first season in relative isolation, but in a few key scenes voices the truths her fellow Hairies evade. For instance, in the fourth episode, "Sun and Moon", Belinda, a white, female reporter, goes to the Zone to interview Hairies. Characteristically, Maliyan knocks her down and threatens to kill her for exploiting the Hairy community, but Latini reminds him that, "If you do kill her, get ready.

She's white. She's famous, and they'll come back for all of us". An outsider even in the Zone, Latini, like Archive, understands the danger posed by the government, due to the personal destruction wrought on her own family. In the season finale, after the government threatens to exterminate the Zone, Waruu's daughter, Alinta, promises to remain with Latini as an ally, but Latini screams at her to leave, because "This isn't some bullshit political rally. This is my life", thus also criticizing an idealized vision of successful resistance. As *Cleverman*'s Archive, Latini speaks the truth of political disenfranchisement. Her words are powerful in their conviction, but heavy in their implications for the speaker.

However, *Cleverman* bases the heart of its political critique in the West brothers' journey, establishing a unified political front between the Aborigine and Hairy inhabitants of the Zone. Waruu and Koen, as the descendants of the Gumbaynggirr community's former Cleverman, Uncle Jimmy, are at the focal point of the community's politics. At the beginning of the show, their dying uncle must choose which nephew to give his powers. Waruu, the more successful, older brother, who leads the Hairies assimilationist movement, initially seems the logical choice. However, Uncle Jimmy chooses Koen, who works in a shady bar and, in the first episode, "First Contact", turns over a Hairy family to the government for money. Koen's initial unpreparedness for the Cleverman role allows the arc of his character in the first season to center around his journey towards becoming more involved with Gumbaynggirr culture.

Koen's adaptation into the Cleverman role through a gradual understanding of Gumbaynggirr culture and his place in the community also typifies the learning process required to obtain Dreaming knowledge. Heather Goodall explains that, "a fundamental principle of the Aboriginal worldview is that land is seen to embody profound religious and philosophical knowledge. The 'Dreaming' is a widely used Aboriginal English term for this knowledge" (5). As the new Cleverman, with the potential to communicate with Dreaming figures, Koen must first understand the cultural history of the land he lives in. To help Koen, after Jimmy appoints him Cleverman, Kora, a Dreaming spirit appears in the body of a teenage girl. Kora initially frustrates Koen, as she remains mute to his attempts to speak to her. However, as Koen's new responsibilities drive him to spend more time with his stepmother, she explains that Kora contains a trapped spirit. Koen then learns to tune

into Kora's needs and allows her to take him on a journey to an ancient tree, where she is able to return to the Dreamworld. Koen's journey with Kora to an ancient site strengthens his connection to the Gumbaynggirr history, intrinsic to the Coffs Harbour landscape. Through physical exploration of the land, Koen strengthens his emotional bond to the Gumbaynggirr community, exemplifying how, "[Dreaming journeys] teach Aboriginal people to see an animate and enlivened landscape where landforms, watercourses, and trees convey not just their outward shapes but the excitement and power of the ancestral figures whose essence they embody" (Goodall 6). *Cleverman* uses Koen's basic misunderstanding of the Dreaming world in the early episodes of the show to emphasize the land-based nature of Dreaming knowledge.

Koen's subsequent usurpation of Waruu's leadership role in the Zone community acts, like Vizenor's Archive, to frame indigenous sovereignty as dependent on choosing leaders based on the wishes of the community. In the first episode of *Cleverman*, Waruu shines in relation to his half-brother: he is classically handsome, with two children, an intelligent and supportive wife, and a powerful media presence. However, subsequent episodes quickly highlight the flaws in Waruu's pristine image; though well-intentioned at times, he more often makes selfish decisions purely out of ambition. On a personal level, he cheats on his wife with a famous, white news reporter, yet chides Koen for being the mixed-blood son of their shared father's white mistress. On a political level, he fails to place the needs of his community over his own. In the fifth episode, "A Man of Vision", for example, he accepts thirty millions dollars from the white business mogul Jared Slade to ostensibly help the Zone community, on the condition that he delivers Koen to Slade. Slade, fascinated with the potential secrets of Dreaming knowledge and obsessed with immortality, had a vampiric relationship with Uncle Jimmy, giving him money in exchange for insights from the Dreamworld. He hopes to use Koen for the same gain. At this point, the viewer knows Slade is worse than Waruu suspects, as several earlier scenes show Slade running deadly eugenic experiments on Hairies in his billion dollar laboratory; Slade thus pays tribute to the decades of inhumane, scientific experiments performed on Aborigines seen as equivalent to guinea pigs. However, by the fifth episode, Waruu realizes Koen's new position as Cleverman threatens his power, and, hoping Slade's money will help him retain his leadership in the Zone, accepts the

money. In his attraction to power for its own sake, Waruu, like Godtwit Moon, exhibits a tendency towards corruption that is dangerous in a political leader.

Koen, in contrast, through his acquisition of Dreaming knowledge, comes to political power only through an understanding of the Gumbaynggirr community. The last episode of the first season, notably titled, "Terra Nullius", the British legal term for a land deemed unoccupied, and applied inaccurately to many Aboriginal lands to justify British colonialism, features the final showdown between the half brothers (Goodall 126). Though Waruu tricks Koen into accompanying him to Slade's lab and knocks him out, leaving him to Slade's devices, Koen escapes in time for the confrontation with the police, who have decided to exterminate the Zone. Waruu and Koen thus encounter a panicked, disorganized group of its remaining inhabitants. Waruu makes a desperate plea to act as their leader, but, unfortunately for Waruu, a malevolent creature from the Dreaming world appears and starts attacking. Though Waruu attempts to use a Dreaming spirit stick, known as a nulla nulla, to drive him out, he fails. Out of frustration, Waruu tries the equally futile gesture of shooting the creature with a gun. Koen then takes the nulla nulla from the defeated Waruu and successfully slays the creature only he can fully see. The ending of the episode features a unified political front ready to take a stand, with Koen at its head; the final shot tracks Koen upward as he stares defiantly outwards in the direction of the coming police forces. By ending with the Dreaming world's effective designation of Koen as the resistance leader, *Cleverman* asserts indigenous sovereignty as dependent on political leaders elected based on community support rather than manipulation of power.

Dreaming stories communicate information about the history of an Aboriginal community as an explanation for the current family relationships and political structure. Consequently, new story arcs are rarely added to Dreaming oral stories, as they recall only the aspects of the past most crucial to the community. Goodall asserts that, "Whether the initial expression of a new interpretation or story is one of individual or group creation, it will only become a part of the body of Dreaming oral tradition by a process of community endorsement" (8). *Cleverman* in turn replicates the communal tradition of Dreaming oral stories on screen as a form of cultural representation and revitalization for Aboriginal populations across New Zealand and Australia. The lack of diversity in contemporary television first motivated Griffen to

create the show: he wanted an Aboriginal superhero for his son, as a contrast to the overwhelmingly white Marvel superheroes (Griffen n.pg.). Moreover, he worked carefully to tell the *Cleverman* story in the tradition of Aboriginal storytelling; in an article he wrote for the Guardian, he explains that in bringing oral Aboriginal stories to the screen, he followed "protocols put in place by Aboriginal elders who passed the stories over to me for the show. They put their trust in me and the team, and that was one of the biggest breakthroughs that enabled us to go ahead with the series. The elders were trying to achieve something very special that would help to keep our culture growing" (Griffen n.pg.). The production team of *Cleverman*, and the Aboriginal elders who assisted them, offer a message similar to that of Vizenor's exiles: new approaches to cultural traditions, if conducted respectfully and in communication with the larger community, serve as both a celebration of the continuing vitality of indigenous culture and a rebuke to the false notion of indigenous populations as living forever in the past. *Cleverman*'s nuanced and politically charged SF portrayal of an Aboriginal Dreamworld living within contemporary New South Wales brings the reality of a growing, resilient Aboriginal presence to the TV screen.

Towards a Collective Survivance

In his recent essay on the evolution of SF, David M. Higgins pointed out that while recent Euro-American SF frames white protagonists, like Katniss of *The Hunger Games* (2012), as victims of authoritarian societies, indigenous SF refuses victimry (54). *The Hunger Games* glamorizes political marginalization because it is ultimately politically neutral. The ostensibly dangerous world Katniss navigates creates what is nothing less and nothing more than a two-hour entertainment targeted at the relatively secure, movie-going U.S. populace. Indigenous SF writers, on the other hand, must balance the political implications of cross-cultural indigenous representation with the desire to honor the communal storytelling traditions of indigenous cultures. It is important to note that both Vizenor and Griffen, like the majority of indigenous SF authors, are light-skinned and thus likely less subject to racial bias when navigating the white-dominated literary and mass media markets; however, their mixed-race backgrounds also provide them with personal insight into

the paradoxical position of wanting to honor indigenous heritage while facing the reality of whiteness cultural hegemony within artistic representation. Their SF works in turn approach the dilemma of indigenous representation through the lens of sovereignty. Both the White Earth exiles and the Aborigines and Hairies of the Zone use the act of storytelling to assert their right to governance based on the cultural history and current needs of their peoples, in turn delegitimizing manipulative, power-hungry figures, like Godtwit and Waruu, who play to the corrupt aims of the dominant government.

Furthermore, the cynical yet strong-willed characters, Archive and Latini, provide the voice of historical truth that counteracts misleading, dominant narratives. Archive and Latini's histories of personal traumas embody the largely erased history of governmental abuses suffered by indigenous communities; they in turn continually remind the other characters of the need to protect the autonomy of indigenous cultures and reject colonialist narratives that divide and weaken indigenous communities. Similarly, in his writings on survivance, Vizenor often returns to his concept of a fourth person, meaning "not a historical presence, and not hearsay theory, but a persuasive image in a scene created from a visual memory of a situation" (Vizenor 109). As an example of a fourth person narrative, in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, Vizenor relates the story of Charles Aubid, who, in a legislative battle with the U.S. government over the right to harvest rice on the Rice Lake National Wildlife Refuge in Minnesota, "testified through translators that he was present as a young man when the federal agents told Old John Squirrel that the Anishinaabe would always have control of the manoomin harvest" (2). The U.S. court saw Aubid's verbal testimony as unauthoritative and ruled it not admissible. However, Vizenor points to Aubid's reliance on the memory of Old John Squirrel as a fourth person imagining that stays true to the spirit of recalled event. Archive and Latini in turn represent the fourth person imaginings of Vizenor and Griffen; though not inspired by historical figures, they creatively personify the historical events their SF narratives relive: the controversy surrounding the White Earth constitution and Australia's backwards assimilationist policies.

Both *Treaty Shirts* and *Cleverman* frame the key to survivance as a collective and creative resistance. Vizenor and Griffen employ imaginative SF narratives to not only tell their individual stories as an Anishinaabe and a Gumbaynggirr person

respectively, but also to give voice to the complicated, cultural histories that span the hundreds of years before their births. The truth of their fictional stories works to take power away from the false authority of dominant historical narratives; moreover, the collectivity inherent to indigenous storytelling makes their narratives not a single story, but a resistance movement.

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