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POWER IN THE VIRTUAL HANDS OF THE LONGEST-LIVING CULTURE IN THE WORLD: DECOLONIZING INDIGENOUS HERITAGE TOURISM IN AUSTRALIA

Radboud University

2025

Power in the virtual hands of the longest-living culture in the world: decolonizing indigenous heritage tourism in Australia

A thesis for the Degree of Bachelor in Arts and Culture Studies

by

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Date of Submission: 15 June 2025

Abstract

This thesis examines how *Indijiverse,* an Indigenous-led virtual reality platform, resists colonial frameworks in Indigenous heritage tourism in Australia. Using critical discourse analysis, the study investigates three key elements: performativity, 3D mapping, and Indigenous knowledge. Conventional heritage tourism often reinforces colonial narratives by presenting Indigenous culture as static, ancient, consumable, and performed. In contrast, *Indijiverse* reclaims Indigenous storytelling, space, and knowledge by using 3D mapping, gamification, and immersive design to engage users with pre-colonial landscapes and living cultural practices. Grounded in a theoretical framework of performativity, decoloniality, and heritage, this research argues that *Indijiverse* shifts power in the heritage tourism sector by resisting performative expectations, reconstructing access to sacred sites, and centering relational Indigenous knowledge systems. At last, this study emphasizes the importance of Indigenous-led heritage representation and challenges Western norms of cultural consumption in tourism.

Keywords: Australia, decolonization, digital storytelling, *Indijiverse,* Indigenous heritage tourism, Indigenous knowledge, performativity, virtual reality.

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Introduction

The intersection of cultural heritage tourism and emerging digital technologies presents an opportunity to challenge traditional power dynamics in the representation and consumption of Indigenous heritage. Indigenous Nations of Australia "have the longest-living culture in the world" (Neale and Kelly, viii), presenting a benefit and a good ground to research how colonialism affects Indigenous heritage tourism, and how Indigenous Peoples reclaim the representation in the aforementioned sector. To analyze such phenomenon, a digital platform *Virtual Songlines: Indijiverse* (*Indijiverse* for short) was taken as a case study since it is, apart from Indigenous Archives, one of the clearest examples of a digital platform that is fully Indigenous owned and creates a clear representation of Indigenous culture adding 3D mapping and virtual interface of a game. Furthermore, the project created by Brett Leavy's Bilbie XR Labs exemplifies the ways of decolonization of Indigenous heritage by offering a First Nations-led virtual tourism experience of Australia. Brett Leavy is "a descendant of apical ancestor, Kitty of Bollon, who, along with a few other Kooma, were survivors of the Frontier Wars of south west Queensland" (Indijiverse). This personal but also important nationwide project can shed light on the ways colonial narratives around Indigenous heritage in Australia can be challenged. The platform is not simply named Indigenous Archives or Indigenous heritage, but the meaning is far deeper and spiritual. Songlines are "the system of knowledge that goes beyond land itself into the heart and minds of [Indigenous] people and their culture" (Neale and Kelly, ix).[1] *Indijiverse* restores Indigenous narratives, sacred sites, designs of weapons and baskets, and

[1] Indigenous authors use terms Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to refer to Indigenous Nations of Australia (Neale and Kelly; Graham and Dadd; Indijiverse). However, to avoid any misinterpretations the terms Indigenous Nations or Native Peoples will be used.

landscapes, hence creating “Virtual Songlines” as an interactive space where users can engage with the stories and cultural heritage of Australia’s First Nations peoples. Through virtual reality and gamification, *Indijiverse* reconstructs Australian pre-colonial landscapes, calling it a “digital bridge to the past” (Indijiverse). Virtual Songlines are presented through a map of the Australian continent, with native names of places (see fig. 1) and while zooming in search of Songlines the visitors see stone-painting-like emblems that indicate different types of knowledge or story (see fig. 2) whether it is an animal footprint or a drawing of the Songlines. This research studies how *Indijiverse*, as a First Nations-constructed VR experience, reshapes power dynamics in Indigenous heritage tourism.

Fig. 1 - *Indijiverse*, Bilbie XR Labs, accessed 19 March 2025

Fig. 2 - *Indijiverse*, Bilbie XR Labs, accessed 17 March 2025

Although "Indigenous heritage in Australia spans at least 60,000 years and is subtle, complex, and contemporary" (Buckley and Sullivan 36), it has long been entangled with colonial narratives that frame First Nations and their histories within Eurocentric paradigms. While intangible heritage holds equal importance to tangible heritage, it has often been undervalued within Western epistemologies, which historically privilege material artifacts over oral traditions and other non-physical cultural expressions such as dance and songs. *Indijiverse* aligns with this perspective by emphasizing Indigenous knowledge systems and storytelling traditions. This research contributes to the ongoing discourse on Indigenous heritage tourism by exploring *Indijiverse*'s ways of sharing and reshaping the "conventional" views of their cultural heritage. As noted in the *Handbook on Tourism and Heritage Conservation* (Jamal and Robinson 316),

ownership plays a significant role in cultural heritage preservation. In many postcolonial societies, colonial-built heritage is either erased or reinterpreted to foreground precolonial cultural identities. *Indijiverse* exemplifies this approach by creating "digital twins" of historically significant Indigenous sites, offering an alternative to physical conservation practices dominated by colonial heritage frameworks.

Literature review

Examining the scholarly discourse on Indigenous heritage tourism reveals a tension between conventional Indigenous tourism models and decolonial narratives. The fragments that are found of Anglo-Saxon narratives in the literature are researched and analyzed to understand how they affect Indigenous heritage tourism in Australia and to carefully trace practices that let Indigenous voices regain the power over their own stories in *Indijiverse*. The selected sources provide critical frameworks for understanding these dynamics, yet each presents limitations in fully addressing the digital and Indigenous-led intervention represented by the case study. Jamal and Robinson's *Tourism and Heritage Conservation* provides a foundational analysis of cultural heritage, emphasizing its material and aesthetic values. While Tazim Jamal is an American professor researching tourism studies and cultural heritage management, Mike Robinson, a British researcher, focuses on the study of how tourism works with heritage to create identity. Both argue that cultural heritage is often assessed based on its historical and architectural significance rather than its contemporary cultural relevance (Jamal and Robinson 2). This approach reflects a broader Western conservation philosophy that prioritizes tangible heritage over the lived experiences and evolving traditions of Indigenous communities. Such a framework, while useful in understanding how heritage has been conventionally defined, lacks

an engagement with Indigenous epistemologies that view heritage as dynamic and participatory. Buckley and Sullivan, both non-Indigenous Australia-based heritage researchers, critique this limitation in their discussion of heritage management in Australia, where institutional structures have historically categorized Indigenous heritage as a "relic of the past" rather than a "living tradition" (36). Their analysis is beneficial in highlighting the ways conservation efforts have systematically marginalized Indigenous perspectives, but it does not sufficiently explore how digital platforms might challenge these limitations by offering alternative modes of heritage preservation and representation. Jamal and Robinson's *Tourism as Postcolonialism*, on the other hand, provides a critical lens through which to examine the role of tourism in perpetuating colonial relationships. Their discussion of tourism as a "medium for offering postcolonial counter-narratives of resistance" (1) is particularly relevant to understanding how *Indijiverse* functions as a tool for Indigenous self-representation. However, their analysis focuses heavily on neocolonial economic structures and less on how Indigenous communities actively reshape tourism narratives through emerging technologies. Similarly, the paper by Waitt et al. highlights the persistence of colonial frameworks in the management of Uluru, or Ayers Rock, demonstrating how settler narratives continue to dominate despite efforts toward Indigenous-centered heritage co-management (253). The authors underscores the challenges of decolonization within existing tourism infrastructures but do not fully consider how Indigenous-led virtual spaces, such as *Indijiverse*, might offer an alternative by removing tourism from its physical and settler-controlled contexts.

Bunten's examination of Indigenous tourism critically assesses how Western stereotypes and consumer expectations, which align with conventional Anglo-Saxon tourism discourse, shape the presentation of Indigenous heritage. She describes how the "model culture"

framework, a mediated representation of Indigenous Peoples' traditions in Australia, for example, promotes choreographed authenticity to satisfy Western tourist expectations (290). This perspective is invaluable for analyzing how *Indijiverse* subverts these expectations by offering Indigenous communities control over their narratives. Furthermore, Tonnaer's discussion of Australian Indigenous tourism similarly highlights the role of intermediaries in shaping cultural narratives, emphasizing how certain aspects of "traditional" culture are selectively highlighted to align with tourist expectations (26). While this analysis is useful for understanding how authenticity is constructed within the tourism industry, it lacks a discussion of Indigenous agencies in defining authenticity on their own terms, a gap that this paper seeks to fill. Furthermore, Aplin critiques Australian heritage policies for coupling Indigenous cultural heritage with natural heritage, arguing that this classification "reinforces the perception that Indigenous people are part of the landscape rather than part of the national cultural environment" (20). This structural issue is critical to understanding the broader exclusion of Indigenous perspectives from heritage management frameworks. However, Aplin's analysis is limited in its discussion of Indigenous-led heritage initiatives, leaving room for an exploration of how digital platforms like *Indijiverse* offer alternative avenues for recognition and representation.

In conclusion, each source contributes valuable insights into the colonial structures embedded in Indigenous heritage tourism and the ways these structures can be challenged. However, they often lack a discussion of how digital platforms can serve as a means of Indigenous self-representation and resistance. Indijiverse, by existing outside traditional tourism infrastructures, provides a unique case study that builds upon these postcolonial and heritage management critiques while addressing their limitations. Future research should consider how

Indigenous-led digital initiatives challenge existing power dynamics in Indigenous heritage tourism, offering new pathways for decolonial engagement.

Research Question and Sub-questions

The research question this paper investigates is: How does *Indijiverse* serve as a decolonial narrative to conventional Indigenous heritage tourism models? The sub-questions are as follows:

1. How does *Indijiverse* challenge performativity in Indigenous heritage tourism?
2. How does *Indijiverse* usage of modern technology resist colonial frameworks surrounding Indigenous heritage?
3. How does *Indijiverse* mediate Indigenous knowledge as a tool for decolonization?

Theoretical Framework

This study is grounded in an integrated theoretical framework that brings together heritage and conservation theory, decolonial theory, and performativity theory to critically analyze the representation and reimagining of Indigenous cultural heritage in tourism contexts. Together, these perspectives form a cohesive lens that interrogates power, representation, and agency in Indigenous heritage tourism. Firstly, heritage and conservation theory (Buckley and Sullivan) critiques Western approaches that emphasize material culture and architectural aesthetics, often reducing Indigenous heritage to relics of the past. This theory underscores the need to recognize heritage as dynamic, living, and tied to community identity and land-based traditions. Secondly, decolonial theory (Akena; Jamal and Robinson) challenges the lingering colonial power structures embedded in knowledge production, tourism, and cultural representation. It calls for Indigenous-led alternatives that emphasize sovereignty, relationality,

and epistemic justice. In this study, decolonial theory provides a lens to understand how *Indijiverse* functions as a resistance to dominant colonial narratives. Thirdly, performativity theory (Tonnaer) explores how Indigenous culture is often curated for settler consumption through performative acts shaped by tourist expectations. Drawing from this, the study considers how the case study disrupts staged authenticity and reframes Indigenous culture not as a performance, but as an ongoing lived experience. These theories are selected because they center questions of power, representation, and agency, which are critical to understanding how *Indijiverse* reclaims the space within Indigenous heritage tourism.

For the purposes of this study, several key concepts are defined to frame the theoretical lens through which *Indijiverse* is analyzed. Indigenous Knowledge (IK) refers to localized, relational, and experiential systems of knowing, transmitted through oral tradition and lived experience (Akena; Kennedy et al.), distinct from Western epistemologies. Decolonization in this context involves reclaiming narrative authority and dismantling colonial structures in cultural representation (Wallis and Ross). Performativity describes the expectation that Indigenous cultures be performed for settler consumption, often leading to commodification (Tonnaer; Bunten). Finally, gamification and virtual reality (VR) are understood as interactive, immersive tools that *Indijiverse* uses to engage users with Indigenous heritage in non-consumer ways (Ryan; Wallis and Ross). These concepts together support a critical investigation into how *Indijiverse* challenges colonial narratives and offers a decolonial model for Indigenous heritage tourism. These concepts will be explored in more depth in the chapters that follow.

Methodology

To examine how Indijiverse reshapes power dynamics in Indigenous heritage tourism, this research employs critical discourse analysis as its primary methodological approach. It is an interdisciplinary framework that investigates how discourse constructs and challenges power relations. Given that tourism and cultural heritage are deeply embedded in discursive practices, the method allows for an in-depth analysis of how Indijiverse positions Indigenous agency within cultural heritage tourism. This research will analyze various textual and visual materials from Indijiverse, including website content and multimedia storytelling. It will also examine external discourse, such as Indigenous tourism industry narratives and modern visitor expectations, to understand how Indijiverse diverges from conventional tourism models. By critically evaluating language, visual representations, and Indigenous-led storytelling, critical discourse analysis will help illuminate the platform's role in resisting colonial narratives and asserting Indigenous epistemologies.

Thesis Structure

The thesis is organized into three chapters, each addressing one of the sub-questions to systematically explore *Indijiverse*'s role in reshaping Indigenous heritage tourism. The first chapter examines how *Indijiverse* subverts the performative expectations of Indigenous heritage imposed by settler tourism frameworks. It will analyze how the platform enables Indigenous communities to present their culture on their own terms, disrupting the performative expectations placed on them by traditional tourism models. The following chapter explores how modern technology enables *Indijiverse* to disrupt colonial narratives surrounding Indigenous culture and heritage in tourism. It will investigate how the platform resists conventional "model culture"

frameworks by using virtual reality, gamification, and 3D mapping. Finally, the last chapter focuses on how *Indijiverse* presents Indigenous knowledge as a tool for decolonization by analyzing how the platform navigates the balance between Indigenous epistemologies and external expectations.

Virtual Songlines: Indijiverse

Chapter 1: Performativity

To begin unpacking this, the chapter will focus on answering the question of how *Indijiverse* challenges performativity in Indigenous heritage tourism. It will first engage with settler tourism frameworks and the role of performativity in them within the context of Indigenous heritage tourism, and then analyze how *Indijiverse* disrupts the performative expectations rooted in these structures. A critical concept within this analysis is performativity, particularly because it significantly shapes how Indigenous culture is perceived and experienced by tourists. Performativity can be understood as a mode of cultural interaction between host and visitor, becoming the final product of heritage tourism. By analyzing how performativity is enacted, or resisted, within *Indijiverse*, this chapter will trace traces of decolonization in a field of Indigenous heritage tourism.

The paradox of performativity lies in its dual structure: the performer simultaneously becomes both the audience and the entertainer (Tonnaer 26). In the context of Indigenous heritage tourism, performances of culture are often mediated through interactions with non-Indigenous tourists. Tonnaer argues that these performances emerge from the necessity of shaping cultural expression to align with the expectations of the receiver. Consequently, even early Indigenous-owned tourism enterprises conformed to what Bunten refers to as a "model culture" (294). This model typically includes a standard set of components expected from Indigenous "hosts," such as a formal greeting, a guided tour, demonstrations of traditional languages and crafts, performances and feasts, and even a gift shop (Bunten 294). While not every component is included in every tourism experience, most contain a combination of these elements. This curated experience, often presented as spontaneous or "authentic," is best

understood as performance on a carefully constructed stage. This exemplifies staged performativity: cultural expression is not only performed, but curated, timed, and designed to appear 'authentic' to outsiders. The "stage" here is both literal and symbolic, with Indigenous Peoples performing within frameworks of settler-defined authenticity. These features are deliberately mediated and controlled to satisfy tourist expectations and, as such, become part of a commodified performance. In this context, performativity often reinforces the subaltern positioning of Native Nations (Huarcaya). The necessity of performing in a particular way to communicate specific meanings to an audience, even when the content is based on Indigenous traditions and knowledge, can result in Indigenous performers becoming trapped within colonial frameworks of presentation and tourism consumerism. For example, cultural dances performed at tourist sites are often mediated in timing and setting to fit into the schedule of a tour, stripping the dances of their ceremonial or communal significance. Consequently, it can be argued that performativity – or its strategic absence – can be used as a form of resistance and a tool for renegotiating power dynamics.

Drawing from theatrical theory, Bunten notes several impression-management techniques used by performers to adjust based on audience reaction and maintain control over the performance (310). With the need to meet industry standards set by global industries, policy makers, and tourist expectations of the time (Bunten 294), and much like in theatre, Indigenous "hosts" are often guided by a "ghostwritten" (Bunten 290) script. But the question remains: *Who* is writing that script? Who is guiding the tourists and shaping these expectations? As Buckley and Sullivan argue, "rights issues dominate Indigenous cultural-heritage practice in Australia," particularly because decisions about representation are often made by non-Indigenous stakeholders (40). While the audience itself is guided through a structured path, making each

experience constructed and controlled. This pre-planned performance reduces spontaneity and self-representation, reinforcing colonial frameworks. In most cases, the visitor's experience is mediated by a guide or visitor handbook, which typically contains maps with marked starting and ending points, and lists of facilities at the site. This externally constructed itinerary limits the opportunity for Indigenous voices to guide their heritage narratives. This external curation of experience becomes even more problematic when we consider how specific sites are framed within broader settler narratives. For instance, in their analysis of First Nations heritage representation within Anglo-Saxon tourism discourse, Waitt et al. use Uluru and the domes of Kata Tjuta as case studies. They argue that such sites are where "Indigenous performances of personhood collide with those performances of colonial nationhood" (252). This suggests that the presence of a script or guidebook already assumes a colonial relationship, in which the Indigenous Peoples can only represent themselves through the lens of colonial expressions of nationhood. Simply put, what is yours is ours mindset. This representation often leads to generalizations, with one of them being a colonial narrative of an outback mythology. The latter entails in itself an untamed, beautiful, yet dangerous land open for exploration. This narrative is grounded in a colonial ideology that erases Indigenous sovereignty and portrays the land as empty and available for discovery. The aesthetic of vastness and wildness invites tourists while simultaneously denying Indigenous agency and belonging. Against this backdrop of structured, performative, and often exploitative heritage tourism, Indijiverse introduces a markedly different approach.

Within this conventional framework of Indigenous heritage tourism, *Indijiverse* emerges as a radical departure. As a First Nations-led digital platform, I argue that *Indijiverse* embodies a non-performative mode of engagement. Firstly, the site does not prioritize iconic locations such

as Uluru. These landmarks are not prominently highlighted unless the user knows where to look, which contrasts with traditional tourism platforms that emphasize such locations as focal points of Indigenous or more of the Australian Nation's cultural consumption. When first visiting the website, there is no linear guidebook or checklist guiding the user's path on the platform. By comparison, physical guidebooks for sites like Uluru feature detailed maps with clearly demarcated roads and facilities (see fig. 3), often placing infrastructural convenience above cultural nuance. *Indijiverse*, by contrast, disrupts this logic through its deliberate

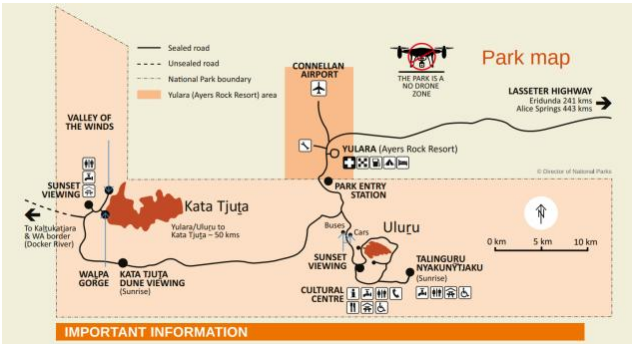

Fig. 3 – A map of Uluṟu–Kata Tjuṯa National Park from a visitor guide, https://uluru.gov.au/static/826dd70acf1f5cced91175988b65d786/visitor-guide.pdf

opacity where the network of emblems has no obvious instructions or connections, compelling the viewer to construct their own understanding rather than follow a mediated and pre-planned route. This absence of guided performance marks a significant departure from traditional Indigenous tourism narratives. Instead, *Indijiverse* functions more like a game without explicit rules, inviting visitors to follow their curiosity and respect, engaging with the content at their own pace. This absence of structured direction demands a form of audience agency that mirrors Indigenous ways of knowing: based on "nurturing a connection" (Lilly Brown 17) with the subject of the object that can teach something rather than extraction and consumption. Like

Indigenous-led tours, *Indijiverse* provides a "safe space for conversation, connection, and rethinking" (Graham and Uncle Lex Dadd 452). It further opposes the dominant perspective of Indigenous heritage as a consumable product and repositions it as a living culture (Graham and Uncle Lex Dadd 452). For example, the visitors should make a note of emblems and signs, learning through time and attention rather than instruction. This design approach fosters attentiveness and patience, especially when certain images are slow to load or zoom. Once zoomed in, the visitor encounters a complex web of emblems, each signifying different aspects of Indigenous culture and heritage (see fig. 4). However, there are no textual explanations or legends provided. Rather, the meaning emerges through time and interaction with the platform.

Fig. 4 – Emblems and signs in *Indijiverse*, Bilbie XR Labs, accessed 17 April 2025

Secondly, the physical performance of climbing Uluru or Kata Tjuṯa, despite their sacred significance, is an example of how settler colonial frameworks reinforced dominance. These climbs are framed as tourist experiences, whereas by doing so, the visitors assert control over sacred Indigenous sites. The climbing of Uluru was banned only in 2019 (Uluṟu-Kata Tjuṯa National Park). Therefore, the persistence of this activity illustrates a broader and very recent colonial attitude toward entitlement over Indigenous spaces. In *Indijiverse*, however, the visitor cannot "climb" Uluru, and even though the visitor can view it from above they cannot come too

close and “explore” the mountain itself (see fig. 5). It challenges the aforementioned practice, using digital tools to appear to offer overview of the landmark, yet denying control or mastery reminding that the visitors’ overview comes with a cost. In addition, this digital inaccessibility contrasts greatly with the colonial logic of physical access and conquest, therefore resisting the commodification of sacred space.

Fig. 5 – The closest the visitor of the website *Indijiverse* can get to the mountain Uluru, taken April 16 2025

The resistance continues in more subtle ways, too. When a visitor of *Indijiverse* website clicks on an emblem near the rock Uluru, they encounter a pop-up featuring a short moving image accompanied by an informal, text-based narrative. There is a tendency for the moving images to maintain a fourth wall: the characters (whether humans or animals) do not acknowledge the viewer, often appearing with their backs turned or engaged in everyday tasks (see fig. 6). This renders the viewer an observer rather than a participant, included only through

the textual narrative. The text sounds inviting to learn and notice. This overall distancing mechanism can be interpreted as a reclaiming of Indigenous privacy and autonomy, preventing the tourist from entering a space that is not meant for their consumption. It is an invitation to acknowledge, learn, and observe but not interrupt. The lack of direct effect

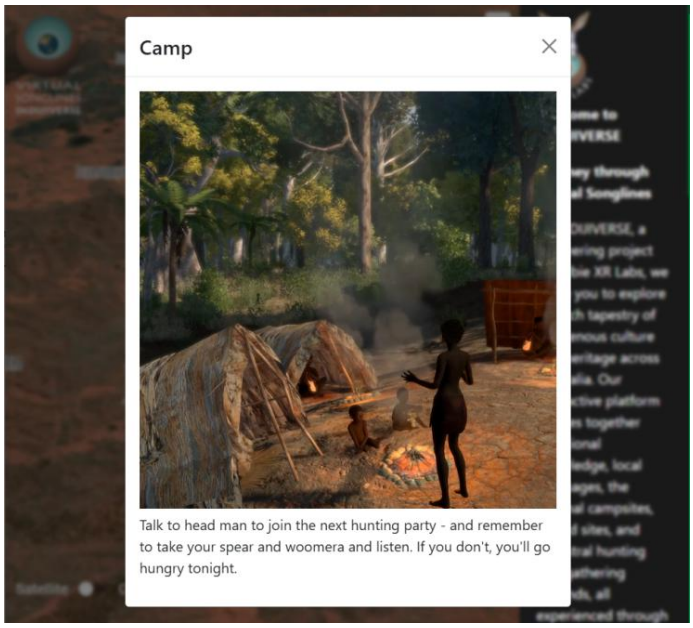

Fig. 6 – A pop-up "Camp" nearby Uluru in *Indijiverse*, Bilbie XR Labs, accessed 16 April 2025

from the presence or interaction of the visitors suggests a refusal to perform for the viewer's entertainment. However, not all elements of the platform are equally distant; certain moments complicate this logic. In a pop-up featuring a ceremonial hunting scene, the moving image is accompanied by the text: "Unloading a heavy kangaroo, the Elder insists the young warriors, wielding sharp axes, to prepare the meat for the upcoming ceremony" (Indijiverse). This moment is not only descriptive but invitational, subtly indicating that a significant communal event is about to take place. The figures in the scene, while caught in motion, remain visually static, observant, and composed almost as if they are waiting for you to arrive. This subtle shift in gaze

breaks the fourth wall (see fig. 7), but rather than leaving the viewer to be entertained by their performance, the pop-up suggests engagement and presence of all in the ritual. The viewers are invited to participate and share Indigenous ways of believing and doing – the process is all about interconnected performativity, which leads to various interpretations and responses (Tonnaer). This concept also aligns with Bunten's assertion that "all parties participate in producing 'Aboriginal culture' as the touristic object of interest," reinforcing the idea that performativity is not one-directional, but relational and negotiated (28).

Fig. 7 – A pop-up "Bora" near Dyungungoo (Gubbi Gubbi), *Indijiverse*, Bilbie XR Labs, accessed 18 April 2025

Indijiverse also complicates expectations about Indigenous heritage being geographically or culturally fixed. Instead of reinforcing regional or stereotypical divisions, the platform foregrounds cultural continuity – connecting past, present, and future – without conforming to non-Indigenous frameworks. This digital representation resists the outback mythology and disrupts binaries such as "remote" versus "accessible" or "authentic" versus "commodified." One clear example of this is the repetition of visual motifs, such as bush medicine and camp emblems, across different regions, from Uluru to the south coast (Wirangu). These recurring

elements create cross-regional connections that defy settler-imposed geographic boundaries. Whether the viewer navigates through central, western, or eastern parts of the platform, they encounter shared signs of knowledge and continuity, reinforcing a pan-Indigenous worldview that transcends colonial mapping. In addition to geographic fluidity, *Indijiverse* resists conventional expectations of performative entertainment often found in Indigenous tourism. As Bunten notes, Indigenous tourism, in its conventional context, often relies on the performance of song and dance to satisfy tourist expectations. *Indijiverse* resists this tradition entirely. The platform omits audio recordings, songs, and dance rituals from its representations. This silence is powerful: it is not a gap to be filled but a deliberate rejection of the visitor's expectation for cultural performance. It asserts that Indigenous presence does not require translation into entertainment to be valid or valuable. It is a deliberate omission that reframes what counts as "heritage" and who gets to define it. The only representation of a "conventional" performance *Indijiverse* included is a ceremonial tournament designed to test an individual's readiness for clan responsibilities, depicting silhouettes engaged in combat. The accompanying moving image shows silhouettes engaged in combat presenting the environment and nature of the tournament, not as a spectacle, but as an expression of lived experience by not focusing and zooming in to people but rather a whole picture (see fig. 8). The same approach is applied to scenes of hunting (see fig. 9), emphasizing functionality over performativity. Overall, these examples demonstrate how *Indijiverse* redefines the digital tourism experience through deliberate acts of cultural framing, omission, and presence.

Fig. 8 – A pop-up “Tournament” featuring silhouettes of participants in *Indijiverse*, red circles are added for visibility of people, Bilbie XR Labs, accessed 18 April 2025

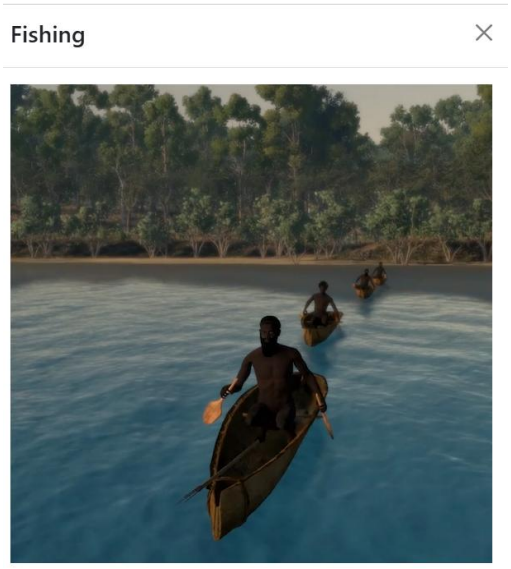

Fig. 9 – A pop-up “Fishing” near Dyungungoo (Gubbi Gubbi) in Indijiverse, April 18 2025

In conclusion, *Indijiverse*, as explored in this chapter, subverts these performative expectations through its refusal to conform to linear, audience-centered structures. While the

content is still mediated by the platform's designers and authors, the absence of guided paths, over-explanations, and interactive elements intended to optimize visitor satisfaction demonstrates a major shift away from "conventional" tourism models in the Indigenous heritage and culture context. Through the absence of a user guide, the non-linear exploration of cultural spaces, and the lack of audio or interactive dramatizations shift the visitor's role shifts from consumer to observer. Additionally, *Indijiverse*'s emphasis on opacity, refusal of spectacle, and its use of visual storytelling that maintains a "fourth wall" serve as acts of resistance against colonial tourism logic. There is no summit to climb, no scheduled performance to witness. The visitor has to learn through observation, intuition, and interaction with signs and emblems that reveal themselves slowly over time. In all these ways, Indijiverse radically departs from the dominant structures of Indigenous heritage tourism and carves out a space for decolonial possibility within digital heritage practices. This exploration sets the stage for the next chapter, which will investigate how virtual reality further expands these possibilities and deepens the platform's challenge to colonial representations.

Chapter 2: Modern technology

Virtual reality has many meanings. It can be associated with negative connotations of illusion, disconnection from reality, but it can also act as a medium of reconstruction, the means to imagine different ways of seeing and relating to the world (Ryan 35). In this chapter, I argue that *Indijiverse*, an Indigenous-led digital heritage platform, employs VR not as a form of escapism but as a mode of resistance: it challenges colonial frameworks of absence and erasure by making Indigenous presence felt, present, and alive. The platform also incorporates gamification, a method recognized for its ability to capture attention, engage users in specific activities, and influence experience. Gamification involves applying game dynamics and mechanics to real-life situations to stimulate the users and enhance their motivation (Kim 26). In *Indijiverse*, this is evident in the interactive emblems representing Songlines. Clicking these emblems zooms the visitors into areas of Indigenous heritage, activating pop-ups with 3D videos. Building on this foundation, the chapter examines how *Indijiverse* challenges dominant colonial narratives that portray Indigenous peoples as "ancient" or "vanished." Instead, it emphasizes the continuity and futurity of Indigenous presence through digital storytelling. This chapter contends that modern technology offers a valuable way to reflect on and communicate Indigenous cultural heritage, especially the intangible aspects. To answer how Indijiverse usage of modern technology resists colonial frameworks, the chapter, firstly, considers the role of technology in decolonial contexts. Secondly, focuses on the *Indijiverse* representation of three urban Indigenous cities: Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra, respectively, through immersive digital storytelling.

Where Indigenous heritage tours use physical presence to reshape and reclaim space, *Indijiverse* leverages virtual space. As a digital platform designed by and with the collaboration of Indigenous communities, *Indijiverse* challenges the colonial framework that positions Indigenous cultures as "past" by placing them at the forefront of digital and technological innovation. VR and gamification allow *Indijiverse* to communicate cultural knowledge interactively. This not only resists the colonial gaze, which seeks to categorize and contain Indigenous identity, but also empowers Indigenous creators to tell their own stories, on their own terms. As Jamal and Robinson note, heritage is never just "the past," but always mediated through the tools and narratives of the present (24–25). This digital mode of storytelling is particularly significant because it encompasses not only material culture but also stories, practices, and sacred, often intangible, knowledge deeply connected to the land (Buckley and Sullivan 36). In this way, *Indijiverse* becomes a tool of decolonization. For example, pop-ups recount the gathering of food or medicinal plants before a ceremony – representations of Indigenous intangible heritage rarely acknowledged in mainstream media. Moreover, the use of VR becomes especially significant when viewed through the lens of Indigenous futurism. Wallis and Ross argue that using high-tech tools like VR to explore Indigenous pasts is not contradictory but essential: it allows Indigenous creators to "invigorate new means of visual sovereignty and revitalize and strengthen their own communities through Indigenous-centered storytelling" (316). The authors argue that looking at the past while using such a futuristic technology is the essential "application of Indigenous futurism to VR" (Wallis and Ross 317). *Indijiverse* is a prime example of such practice. The platform usage of interactive technology represents pre-colonial Indigenous life while reshaping the dominant national narrative. It portrays Indigenous Peoples not as relics of a distant past but as integral to both the present and

the future of the nation. In doing so, it reconnects those who have long been excluded by myths of disappearance or non-modernity.

This commitment to presence and agency is reflected in the platform's interface. When visitors first open *Indijiverse*, they see a flat 2D map of Australia. It is only through zooming in and interacting that the land reveals its textures in immersive 3D mapping, showcasing not only technological depth but cultural depth as well. This design is symbolically important. The idea of mapping itself is Western. It serves to domesticate. Aerial views are historically colonial, associated with surveillance, ownership, and control. Such a "lofty perspective" asserts dominance and superiority (Bruner 15). Yet *Indijiverse* reclaims this view: instead of asserting dominance, the bird's-eye perspective becomes a prompt for curiosity and respectful interaction. Access is not simply granted. Sacred sites like Uluru have restrictions, indicating that even in digital spaces, not everything is freely available. This contrasts with mainstream tourism or VR projects that flatten cultural meaning for mass consumption. As Wallis and Ross note, land in Indigenous epistemology is not a "passive landmass" but an active agent – a living presence that cannot be owned but must be related to (321). *Indijiverse* invites users not to dominate the land, but to listen to it, navigate it slowly, and recognize its agency. The interactive design reinforces those values. Rather than guiding users through a fixed narrative, the map invites to the freedom of respectful engagement. By doing so, it shifts the power of storytelling and invites users to adopt new ways of seeing and understanding.

This alternative mode of representation is particularly important in urban contexts, where dominant narratives often erase or marginalize Indigenous presence. Dominant Indigenous heritage narratives in Australia frequently portray Indigenous people as relics of a distant past, ancient civilization, and disconnected from modern life. In addition, mainstream portrayals often

stereotype Indigenous communities as problematic or dysfunctional (Graham and Unlce Lex Dadd 448). This is especially visible in urban spaces like Sydney, where colonial development has actively erased traces of Indigenous heritage. The paper by Marnie Graham, a non-Indigenous researcher working for Stockholm University, and Uncle Lex Dadd, an Indigenous researcher from Sydney, argues that despite being one of Australia's largest and most famous cities, Sydney is rarely acknowledged as Indigenous, despite being located on Indigenous land (445-447). Such narratives frame Native Nations of Australia as outsiders to urban life or as historical footnotes. *Indijiverse* offers a powerful contradiction. Through VR and the use of modern technology, it repositions Sydney and other current urban spaces not as blank canvases of colonial modernity, but as ongoing Indigenous places, rooted in Indigenous knowledge, living traditions, and land-based relationships. When I first searched for Sydney on *Indijiverse,* I had to reference Google Maps to locate it.[2] This shows how accustomed I am to colonial names and cartographies, but it also indicates Indigenous views on reclaiming the digital interface of the map. Sydney appears between the lands of the Eora and Tharawal peoples. The city emerges on the *Indijiverse* map as both familiar and transformed. The area visually resembles standard maps, yet upon closer inspection, it subverts expectations. For instance, skyscrapers in The Rocks district appear melted into natural rock formations (see fig. 10). From afar, they resemble geological structures rather than buildings – a subtle but profound reimagining of urban space

[2] I acknowledge that my analysis is shaped by my own positionality and cannot claim complete objectivity. I was born and raised in Ukraine, which informs an Eastern cultural framework, and I have since pursued academic training in the Netherlands, where I have been educated largely through Western epistemological approaches. This dual background makes me particularly conscious of the cultural lenses through which I engage with and interpret Indijiverse. Throughout this research, I remain attentive to the limitations of my perspective and approach the material with reflexivity and respect.

through Indigenous eyes. Despite the aforementioned practice, pop-ups located throughout the Sydney area avoid modern buildings in their visual design. Instead, they depict pre-colonial practices, such as traditional fishing strategies (see fig. 11), without the backdrop of colonial architecture. These choices actively resist the marginalization of Indigenous life in urban settings. It visually promotes that Indigenous presence is not only historical but ongoing, even in heavily colonized spaces. As Graham and Uncle Lex Dadd emphasize, government narratives often deny Indigenous peoples' existence in urban areas (459). *Indijiverse* resists this marginalization not through confrontation but through careful design and immersive storytelling, all facilitated by digital tools.

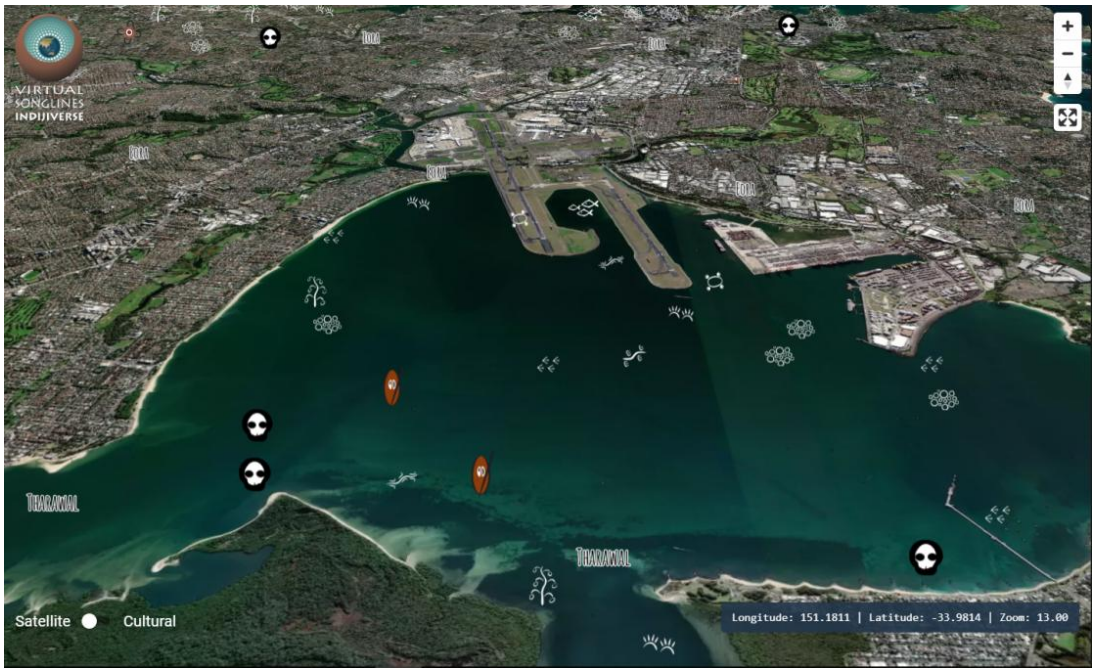

Fig. 10 – Zooming in on Sydney, between Eora and Tharawal lands, *Indijiverse*, accessed on 18 May 2025

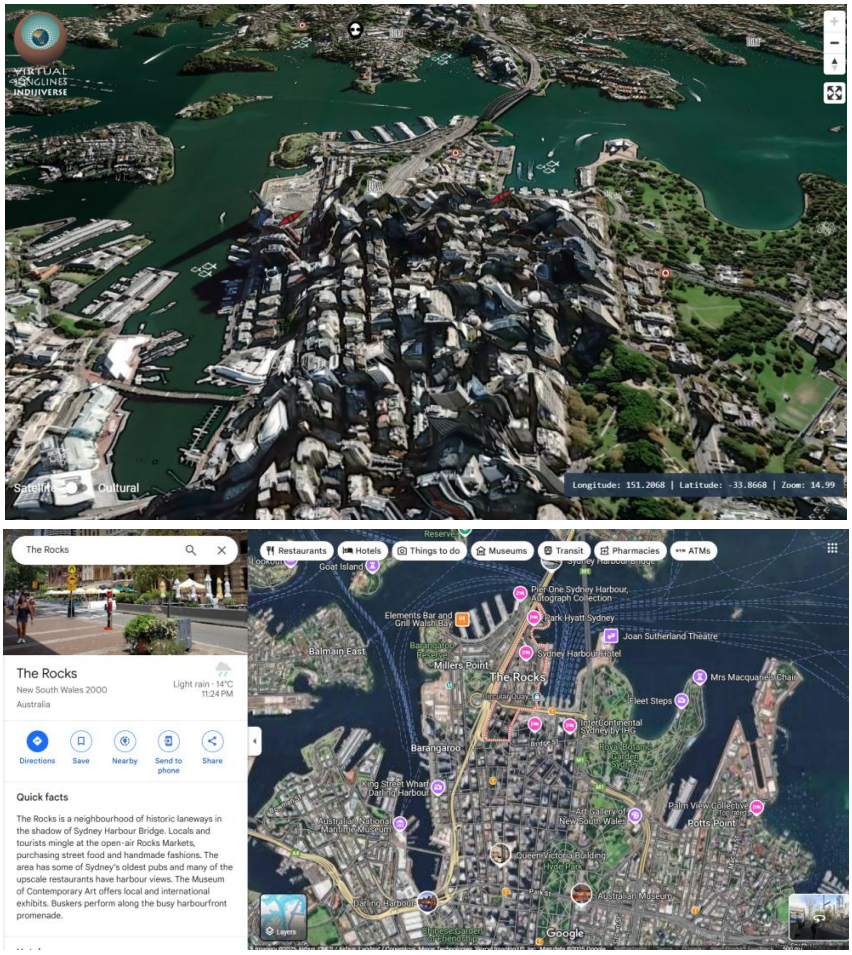

Fig. 11 – From top to bottom: Traces of Indigenous heritage in now Sydney, *Indijiverse*, Bilbie XR Labs, accessed 18 May 2025; the view of the same area in Sydney called The Rocks, *Google Maps*, accessed 18 May 2025

A similar approach is evident in *Indijiverse*'s representation of Melbourne. Here, the visitors can also observe that all the modern buildings are lowered or reoriented toward geological and cultural significance (see fig. 12). This design foregrounds the land's teaching and nourishing capacities. A pop-up on Wurundjeri land, now known as Melbourne, states: "Rocky waterholes were important sources of fresh water near ceremonial sites that supported

big mobs meeting and camping closeby" (Indijiverse). The visuals highlight rocky terrain and water sources, generating a sense of depth and intimacy between the land and the viewer. As users become more familiar with the platform, navigating its landscapes becomes intuitive. Interaction deepens immersion, particularly when opening pop-ups with looping videos that engage users through storytelling and a visual point of view. Unlike platforms such as Google Maps, *Indijiverse* does not allow users to manipulate objects or enter street view. This limited access may feel unusual to some, but it reflects a deliberate choice: to shift control back to Indigenous curators and prevent unrestricted virtual consumption of sacred knowledge.

Fig. 12 – Wurundjeri land, now Melbourne area, *Indijiverse*, accessed on 19 May 2025

This decolonial practice of reclaiming Indigenous cultural heritage is also visible in the representation of Canberra. When zooming in the area where currently the capital of Australia positions itself, the visitors already see an area culturally rich and Indigenous (see fig. 13). Here, some pop-ups only contain text, but the majority immerses the viewer with visual storytelling of

VR, like “Crossing” pop-up (see fig. 14), which depicts Native Nations crossing the Maiwar river in a canoe. The user’s point of view places them in the canoe itself, creating a direct sense

Fig. 13 - Now Canberra area, Ngunawal land, *Indijiverse*, Bilbie XR Labs, accessed on 19 May 2025

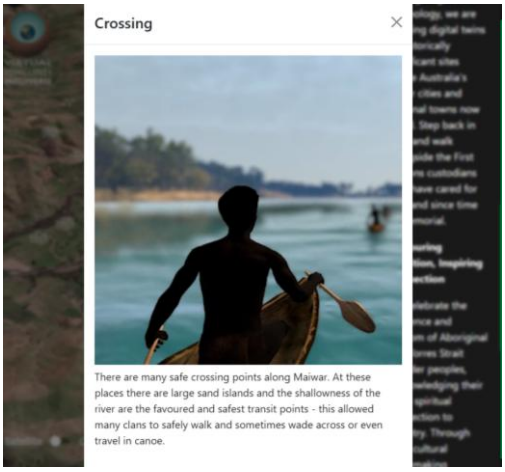

Fig. 14 – Pop-up “Crossing” on Ngunawal land, now Canberra, *Indijiverse*, Bilbie XR Labs, accessed on 21 May 2025

of presence and movement. In another pop-up representing hunting on wallabies the platform immerses the viewer in the perspective of the wallaby, placing them at same level as the creature

among mossy sandstone and forest (see fig. 15). The pop-up described as "Under a canopy of eucalypt forest, mossy sandstone, and thick rainforest, First Nations hunters pursue wallaby for meat" immerses the visitors of the *Indijiverse* in the textures of land and bushes, making them observe and notice. The absence of sound heightens the emotional experience, emphasizing observation, empathy, and gratitude for the land and its offerings. These carefully constructed moments demonstrate how *Indijiverse* uses VR to invite both Indigenous and non-Indigenous users to view the world through Indigenous ways of knowing.

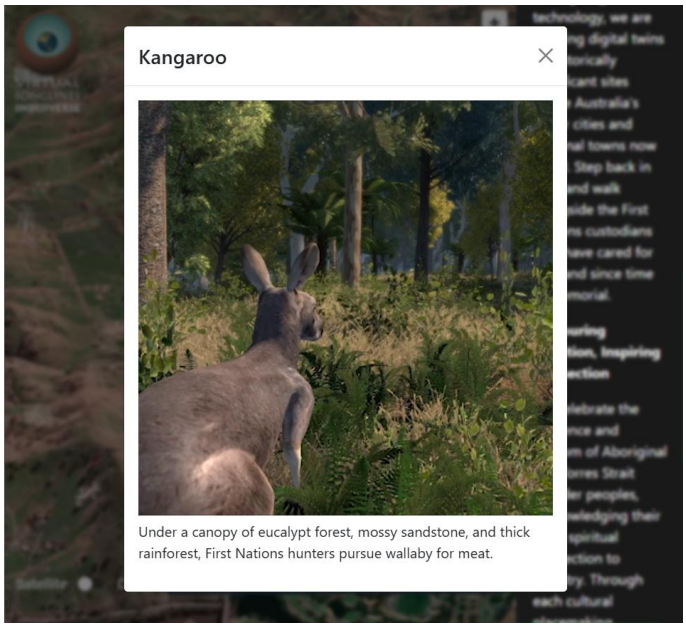

Fig. 15 – Pop-up "Kangaroo" on Ngunawal land, now Canberra, accessed on 21 May 2025, *Indijiverse*

In conclusion, *Indijiverse* demonstrates how technology can be utilized to resist colonial frameworks that erase and marginalize Indigenous heritage. By using VR and immersive 3D mapping, the platform retells Indigenous stories. The platform's immersive design and gamification techniques engage users interactively, offering a dynamic experience that challenges static, museum-like portrayals of Indigenous cultures as relics of the past. The

analysis of urban sites such as Sydney, Melbourne, and Canberra reveals how *Indijiverse* reclaims space in cities that have long obscured their Indigenous roots. While the usage of 3D mapping shows how the platform reclaims the practice of mapping and presents these urban landscapes, highlighting the value of the land over modern buildings. Even its interface resists colonial logics of control: the absence of standard navigation tools like street view asserts a different mode of engagement, one that requires patience and respect. Furthermore, through the VR, the platform not only informs but transforms, reshaping viewers' understanding of land, presence, and history in a decolonial way. More than just a digital platform, *Indijiverse* represents a tool of resistance, a way to re-represent and share their stories – one where heritage is not frozen in the past, but extended into the future. At last, in a world where digital spaces are often dominated by settler-colonial narratives, platforms like *Indijiverse* are crucial. They show how Indigenous creators are not only participating in technological futures but actively reshaping how they can guide and educate us. The next chapter will further the research by investigating how storytelling *Indijiverse* shares Indigenous knowledge to deepen the platform's challenge to colonial narratives.

Chapter 3: Indigenous knowledge

There is no single, universal truth. For every nation, the truth is shaped by cultural, historical, and geographical contexts. Therefore, it becomes problematic when Western worldviews are treated as universally valid, marginalizing other perspectives and discrediting the locality of knowledge production (Akena 600). This chapter investigates how *Indijiverse*, a digital storytelling platform, mediates Indigenous Knowledge (IK) to serve as a decolonizing tool. The aim is to understand not only *what* knowledge conveys but *how* it is presented in a way that challenges colonial frameworks, avoids stereotyping, and respects Indigenous epistemologies. Moreover, IK should not be viewed as the binary opposite of Western knowledge but as a distinct system grounded in diversity rather than hierarchy. It offers alternative ways of seeing the world, rooted in community, land, and tradition, which do not completely align with dominant Western institutional logics (Buckley and Sullivan 38). This misalignment makes it crucial to explore how digital platforms like *Indijiverse* can reframe Indigenous ways of knowing and work against deeply embedded colonial narratives. Through a close reading of the texts accompanying the pop-ups this chapter will analyze the ways IK is preserved and represented. It begins by examining the conceptual differences between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems. Then it explores how *Indijiverse* represents IK in its design and content.

In Northern Australia, a region often stereotyped as the heartland of Indigenous culture, there remains no clarity in the definition of IK. This contributes to its perception as static or unchanging (Wohling 4). However, more broadly, IK can be understood as a “lived world” that helps to support the daily practices and view of the world relations of Indigenous communities

within specific locales (Akena 601). It is deeply contextual, derived from experience, and embedded in cultural practices. However, the perception of IK depending on the point of view differs. From the Western perspective, especially since the Industrial Revolution in Europe, IK is viewed as "inferior, superstitious, and primitive" (Akena 601). Influenced by ethnocentrism and settler colonialism, Western knowledge viewed the monolithic world views as legitimate, which helped gain the power and dominant position in the world, while invalidating other ways of knowing, including Indigenous, as "savage and primitive" (Akena 600). IK challenges this dominance not by asserting itself as a superior or "truer" system, but by undermining the claim of Western epistemologies to universal truth. It is essential to avoid framing IK as simply the *opposite* of Western knowledge, since doing so risks simplifying its complexity and framing it as non-scientific or romantic (Kennedy et al. 1933). Instead, IK should be recognized for its specificity, locality, and embedded cultural meaning.

A critical distinction between Indigenous and Western knowledge systems lies in the modes of communication and knowledge transmission. WK is valued when preserved and shared in the written text and tangible form, while IK focuses on oral storytelling and intangible cultural heritage. However, according to Davis, scholarship often overlooks the complex intersections and mutual influences between both (32). For instance, stories shared via pop-ups in *Indijiverse* would traditionally be shared orally, not through written text. Due to the change in the world and the influence of colonialism, the viewers observe how the platform carefully adapts and transforms its representation of IK via written and visual formats. This allows *Indijiverse* to reach a wider audience, and for this research to have data to work with. Additionally, when it comes to the significant differences in sharing the knowledge, a few patterns could be observed. Firstly, Indigenous narratives do not follow linear chronology, and they assume a shared cultural

knowledge base (Walsh 198). In contrast, Anglo culture often expects explicit guidance and may lack the patience or familiarity to interpret deeper meanings revealed over multiple retellings (Walsh 198). In *Indijiverse*, the visitors can notice such circular and repetitive practices in the ways the images and emblems are repeated, and the storytelling has tendency to focus on a few important themes with just a sentence or two to accompany it. Each theme, such as Camp, Medicine, Bushfood, Bora, and others, features a series of representative pop-ups, each offering a small piece of a larger story. Scattered across different areas, these pop-ups function like pieces of a puzzle, inviting viewers to actively explore and engage with the landscape in order to grasp the full narrative. As the viewer connects the elements of each theme, they also begin to see how these stories intersect and intertwine, forming a rich, interconnected web of digital Songlines. Secondly, knowledge access itself differs: Western systems often value openness, while traditional IK is relational, requiring respectful progression and earned access (Walsh 200). This principle underlines the importance of respect, responsibility, and reciprocity – the "three Rs" central to Indigenous epistemologies (Kennedy et al. 1932). In *Indijiverse*, digital accessibility is deliberately shaped to reflect cultural protocols around knowledge sharing. Much like the restricted access to sacred sites such as Uluru, or pop-ups that offer only text without further visual explanation, the design of the experience introduces a respectful distance between the viewer and the knowledge being shared. This limited access is not a barrier, but an invitation to learn, to listen, and to understand that deeper knowledge must be earned and relationships must be honored. The platform challenges extractive ways of knowing and replaces them with a model grounded in respect, responsibility, and reciprocity. In doing so, it repositions Indigenous sovereignty at the center of digital storytelling and knowledge transmission.

This respectful structure of access and narrative complexity sets the stage for analyzing specific examples of how *Indijiverse* uses storytelling and design as active tools for decolonization. The platform presents Indigenous knowledge through interactive, symbol-based pop-ups located in culturally significant urban areas like Sydney, Adelaide, or Bundaberg etc. These symbols act not merely as information points but as cultural emblems, resonating with traditional rock art and embedding storytelling within place-based meaning. For instance, a Sydney pop-up reads: "Sit quiet and listen – there are obligations when hunting – you can't hunt everything and you must share first with the old people. What you do affects the health and well-being of everyone else in the clan" (Indijiverse). This statement conveys more than instruction; it embeds ethical, communal, and ecological knowledge, reinforcing the idea that individual actions have collective consequences (Wallis and Ross 325). Another entry emphasizes fire management: "We don't just use fire to warm ourselves in winter or to simply cook our food. We use fire to manage the landscape and encourage the bush to grow and to help feed ourselves." Here, the narrative demonstrates cyclical sustainability, where fire supports ecological growth, which in turn sustains the people. Additional pop-ups on "medicine" reinforce this interconnection: "In this circle you need to listen to learn all about bush food and medicine. You learn about what plants yield the best tubers and roots and which foods are the best to eat and which foods are poisonous if not prepared correctly" (Indijiverse). IK is shared through a story of how the visitor or directly "you" can learn from the community. It, however, does not explicitly state which plants yield tubers, which are edible, and which are poisonous. This is for the visitors to learn by participating in and a respectful engagement with the community. *Indijiverse* tells stories through a blend of first-person plural ("we") and second-person ("you") points of view, fostering a sense of intimacy and connection between the platform's Indigenous creators and its

visitors. By speaking as "we," the narration reflects the collective voice of the community, rooted in shared experience and cultural continuity. Simultaneously, addressing the viewer as "you" draws the audience directly into the narrative, creating a participatory experience that "can be both engaging and entertaining" (Al-Alami 912). This narrative strategy not only deepens emotional connection but also dissolves boundaries between past and present, modern and ancient. It brings Indigenous traditions, carried and lived for hundreds of years, into direct conversation with contemporary audiences. In doing so, *Indijiverse* challenges static, outdated perceptions of Indigenous Nations as purely historical, instead offering a living, relational space for understanding, engagement, and decolonial storytelling. One of the many pop-ups, "Medicine," further opens up a story: "Speak to aunty to make twine. We use this rope to set traps" (Indijiverse). These narratives reflect a decolonial mode of knowledge-sharing, centered on listening, observation, and personal engagement. Ungunmerr-Baumann et al. (94) highlight that IK promotes healing and learning through storytelling, not through the collection of facts. The circular structure in these pop-ups mirrors traditional yarning circles, where knowledge emerges communally and over time. Lastly, the Indigenous worldview is fundamentally systemic and relational, contrasting with the extractive and objectifying lens often found in Western science. Indigenous people engage deeply with the natural world, but their relationship is not utilitarian. They see plants, animals, and humans as interconnected, not as separate entities (Davis 32–33). Species are valued not merely for their usefulness, but also for their symbolic roles and spiritual relationships. Visitors to *Indijiverse* can see this storytelling approach in action, particularly within the recurring theme of the animal world, explored through pop-ups like "Goanna," "Possum," and "Kangaroo." While these stories center on traditional hunting practices, the visual and narrative focus often shifts to the animals themselves, emphasizing their

perspective and presence. This framing highlights the deep connection and respect held for these creatures, even when they are part of the food system. Rather than reducing animals to resources, the platform presents them as beings with agency and significance within the broader web of life. What's especially striking is how some of these animal-themed pop-ups directly address the reader, creating a sense of immediacy and relevance, even though the map represents a pre-colonial time. For instance, in the "Goanna" pop-up near Tharawal Country, the message reads: "Whenever you travel remember to recognize and respect our traditional hunting and gathering sites and special practices" (Indijiverse). This direct address brings ancient knowledge into the present moment, positioning the reader not as a passive observer but as an active participant with responsibilities. This reveals a powerful decolonial gesture. By blending traditional knowledge with present-day ethical imperatives, *Indijiverse* resists the notion that Indigenous practices belong solely to the past. Instead, it affirms that these traditions are living, evolving, and deserving of respect in today's world.

In conclusion, *Indijiverse* mediates Indigenous knowledge as a tool for decolonization by centering relationality, community voice, and respectful practices within a digital framework. Through its interactive pop-ups, non-linear storytelling, and ethical design, it challenges Western epistemologies that prioritize objectivity, access, and linear narratives. Rather than offering knowledge for extraction, *Indijiverse* encourages respectful engagement, listening, and co-presence. It decolonizes not by reversing colonial logic, but by affirming Indigenous sovereignty over knowledge production and transmission. Moreover, the platform offers a living, evolving archive of cultural practices that disrupts static views of Indigenous peoples and instead asserts IK as active, contemporary, and rooted in place.

Conclusion

Across all three chapters, the central insight has been that *Indijiverse* challenges Western-centric models of Indigenous heritage, tourism, and engagement, while simultaneously offering an Indigenous-centered alternative grounded in respect, relationship, and place. The first chapter revealed how *Indijiverse* redefines performance – not through spectacle or entertainment, but through inclusion, responsibility, and controlled access. By omitting audio and explicit ceremonial content, the platform resists the tourist gaze and instead invites visitors to engage respectfully with Indigenous heritage and cultural practices. The second chapter focused on the digital landscape as a space for reasserting Indigenous presence and influence. Through immersive design elements like 3D mapping and VR, *Indijiverse* offers a non-linear, experiential engagement with Country that connects past, present, and future. It destabilizes representations of Indigenous cultures as frozen in time and instead visualizes Indigenous relationships with land as ethical and evolving. This challenges dominant colonial cartographies and affirms Indigenous knowledge as spatial, relational, and ongoing. The third chapter examined narrative structures, emphasizing how *Indijiverse* uses cyclical storytelling, limited access, and first and second-person point of view in the narrative to create a space for relational learning. Rather than offering immediate answers, it mediates Indigenous storytelling practices that center community, listening, and the gradual unfolding of knowledge. This approach not only protects sacred cultural information but also challenges extractive modes of Western knowledge possession by emphasizing that understanding must be earned and locally situated.

Together, these findings demonstrate how *Indijiverse* resists colonial frameworks of hierarchy, objectification, and cultural commodification. By centering Indigenous knowledge

systems and ways of being, the study challenges dominant Western paradigms of heritage and representation. However, this research also acknowledges its limitations. In positioning Indigenous knowledge in contrast to Western frameworks, there is a risk of reinforcing a binary that overlooks the complexity, hybridity, and ongoing dialogue between these systems. Indigenous and Western epistemologies are not fixed or mutually exclusive; neither offers a universal truth. Interpretation must always be grounded in context, locality, and specificity. This reflection extends to the researcher's own positionality. As a Ukrainian scholar engaging with Indigenous Australian heritage, my cultural background is shaped by a different, yet resonant, history of cultural marginalization. Although I have never been to Australia, I recognize in my own people's struggles – the suppression of language, the loss of land, and the fight to preserve memory – echoes of the oppression faced by Indigenous communities. These parallels, while not equivalent, have shaped my commitment to approaching this work with care and respect for Indigenous knowledge and sovereignty. At the same time, I acknowledge the limitations of this perspective. As a non-Indigenous researcher interpreting an Indigenous-led project, I risk unintentionally replicating colonial logics by speaking about rather than with Indigenous communities. Future research should prioritize collaborative, community-engaged approaches such as interviews, co-authorship, or participatory methods involving Indigenous scholars and creators to ensure that analysis aligns with the values and intentions of those it seeks to represent.

Notes

Despite efforts to contact *Indijiverse* through their platform, the year of its initial release could not be confirmed. Consequently, this research does not include a verified launch date of the platform.

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