

# Next in Colour

**Creating spaces, practices and processes  
towards self-determined futures**



**Authors:** Rama Agung-Igusti  
Christopher Sonn  
Ella Du Ve

**Acknowledgments:**

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**Report Design:** Rama Putu Agung-Igusti

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Mandela Komba



**We acknowledge the Traditional Owners of the lands on which this project has taken place, the Woiwurrung and Boonwurrung peoples of the Kulin nation and pay our respects to their elders past, present and emerging.**

**We acknowledge that these are stolen lands  
and that**

***sovereignty was never ceded.***



# CONTENTS

## **Report Overview**

10

## **Report Structure**

11

## **Evaluation Approach**

13

## **Data Collection**

15

## **Data Analysis**

17

## **Events and Outputs**

20

## **Spotlight: BLVCK GOLD**

26

**Part 1: Next in Colour: A self-determined  
alternative setting**

34

**Part 2: The Colouring Book Case-study**

59

**Part 3: Organisational Relationships and  
the Enabling and Constraining Factors  
to Self-Determination**

83

**Glossary**

113

**References**

119

**FORE**

**WORD**

I acknowledge the labour of resistance; of aesthetic, cultural and procedural hegemony, where conforming to the 'ways things are done' delivers financial, social and cultural incentives that advance careers and opportunities in the arts. By resisting and naming the challenging and oppressive elements of cultural hegemony, the Colour Between the Lines collective has forged new possibilities and ways of working that enable multiplicity and transformation.

I acknowledge the labour of care in the creation of safe and nurturing spaces, for each other as individuals and members of communities who are experiencing unprecedented challenges in social, wellbeing and economic domains, of the labour of solidarity, friendship and community building that enable old and new ways of creation to find relevance in contemporary creative practice.

I acknowledge the labour of education of funders, partners and supporters – allies, perhaps, but still needing to learn much about how inequity manifests in the arts, and how we can be unwitting perpetrators of inequity through our unconscious bias and participation in systemic racism. This labour is perhaps the most difficult, with the highest price, as education can be met with defensiveness and conflict. I acknowledge the courage to persevere in the face of these costs.

As a sector, we have a long way to go to achieve cultural equity. It is in the work of creatives of colour through projects such as Next in Colour that we learn to re-imagine a cultural sector that is for all, free of barriers, where the rich plurality of society is experienced by everyone through the stories we tell each other. Let us make sure that their work continues to flourish.

**Veronica Pardo**

**Chief Executive Officer, Multicultural Arts Victoria**



# REPORT OVERVIEW

This report presents the findings of an evaluation of the Next in Colour (NiC) initiative run by the creative collective Colour Between the Lines (CBTL) and funded through the Creative Victoria Future Makers for Change Grant. The evaluation project has been undertaken by researchers from Community Identity and Displacement Research Network based at Victoria University and has been guided by the following key questions:

## **Key Questions**

**How is community arts and cultural practice mobilised by Next in Colour for self-determination, deracialisation, and well-being?**

**What meanings of African diaspora and self-determination do people share within the Next in Colour initiative, and how do they shape understandings of self, community and racial equity?**

**How is self-determination evident as a process and outcome in the relationships between the Next in Colour initiative and the organisations it partners and collaborates with?**

# REPORT STRUCTURE

In order to address each of the three guiding questions the report is structured in three parts preceded by a discussion of the evaluation approach, and an overview of the various activities and outputs of the NiC initiative.

Part 1 examines the NiC initiative as an alternative setting and self-determined initiative, mapping the forms of structural exclusion that the initiative is responding to, and the practices and approaches that the collective are mobilising for self-determination, deracialisation and wellbeing.

Part 2 of the report presents a case-study of The Colouring Book zine, as a key creative output of the NiC initiative. This case study brings together an understanding of zine-making as creative life writing and the importance of counter-storytelling for healing and justice orientated futures; to explore how zine-making serves as a liberation arts practice.

Part 3 of the report draws on a settings framework to examine the organisational relationships and contexts that CBTL must engage in as part of the NiC initiative. The focus is to clarify ways these relationships both enable and constrain efforts towards self-determination within NiC, and the ways that CBTL exercise agency to respond to constraints.

**PORTRAITS BY AÏSHA TRAMBAS.**



# EVALUATION APPROACH

The authors of this report are part of the Community Identity and Displacement Research Network (CIDRN) in the Institute for Health and Sport (IHeS) based at Victoria University, a multi-disciplinary research network concerned with collaborative and community-engaged work. One research focus has been the examination of arts practice as a modality for health promotion and community mobilising. This formed the basis of an ongoing partnership between CIDRN and cohealth Arts Generator, leading to a body of work encompassing student theses and evaluations of a number of projects developed through the space.

One author (Sonn) was key in forming these collaborative relationships, but also served as a critical friend "...to both white and black colleagues, sometimes to provide advice on research/evaluation and other times to witness and help make sense of racism, whiteness in the intentional work of decolonisation" (Sonn, 2019). Another author (Agung-Igusti) first connected with CBTL collective through a minor thesis project, and the evaluation of a theatre piece entitled "AMKA: Narratives from the African Diaspora" (Sonn, Agung-Igusti & Komba, 2019). Whilst the last author (Du Ve) completed a minor thesis project engaging in a case-study of The Colouring Book, a digital zine produced through the NiC initiative.

This relationship has taken both formal and informal shapes, from which material supports and critical friendships have emerged. As university-based researchers, this has also meant shaping our ways of working to reflect the alternative settings that members of this community have created. Values, reflexive practice, and ways of working that support self-



determination are central to the CBTL project and must underpin the work of documenting the project and the research context.

Through our long-term collaboration we have created a community of praxis with the CBTL collective, carving out meaningful and respectful ways to gather information to inform action. This collaboration has involved engaging in deep, meaningful and respectful relationship building with the group to ensure that we were able to design data collection strategies that are sensitive, appropriate and reflect the values of the collective. Ongoing discussions with the collective from the beginning of the project were held to conceptualise what they saw as important to be documented in the project: processes of self-determined knowledge and community-making, and how intersecting structures of racism, sexism, ableism are navigated.

Some examples of these processes of collaborative decision-making are captured in how data collection tools were developed and also how information was analysed and thematised. Drafting schedules and questionnaires to capture reflections on people engaging with the outputs of their project occurred with the collective who drew on shared epistemic resources which provide important knowledge to guide what questions should be asked, and how. For example, some members of the collective raised that discussion of accessibility in the creative industries was often framed solely by disability, prompting a discussion around accessibility of racialised communities into white spaces, and the intersections of both. These were ongoing conversations, and these spaces further enabled a dialogical process that informed our analysis. Together we have devised methods to document the ways CBTL have navigated various settings and institutions and the ideologies of race and whiteness that circulate in these that inform everyday interactions, relationships, subjectivities, and possibilities for action.

# DATA COLLECTION

The data for this report was collected over the multi-year period of the allocated funding for the NiC initiative, beginning in early 2019 and commencing until mid-2021.

## Observations

- Planning meetings
- Events and the NiC space

During the evaluation period at least one author (Agung-Igusti) spent time attending CBTL planning and organisational partner meetings, events, and working from the NiC space.

## Semi-structured interviews

- The CBTL collective
- Persons affiliated with cohealth
- Artist collaborators

Semi-structured interviews were conducted eliciting reflections on the progress of the initiative, challenges, learnings and the different relationships that had emerged from the initiative. These interviews were with the CBTL members at the beginning and the middle of the evaluation period, as well as with key informants who were affiliated with cohealth and the Arts Generator at different times and in different capacities. Additionally, artist collaborators involved with the production of The Colouring Book zine were interviewed specifically about their experiences collaborating on the creation of the zine.

## **Group Discussions**

- Multiple discussions with the CBTL collective

Throughout the evaluation period the authors engaged in ongoing discussion and reflection with the collective, around their experiences within the initiative, as well as the evaluation process. These discussions happened within the Arts Generator studio, the NiC space on Barkly St Footscray and remotely through the Zoom platform.

## **Facilitator Reflections**

- Individual reflections from CBTL collective

Short written reflections provided by CBTL collective members who facilitated or organised different workshops and events.

## **Surveys**

- Audience surveys for NiC events

Online surveys were used to capture audience reflections for a number of events that were run as part of the NiC initiative. The surveys elicited responses about how audience members experienced the events, and what the kinds of events that CBTL hosted through NiC meant for them. However, it must be noted that response rates for the surveys were low, thus survey data has been used to provide further brief insights alongside other data sources.

## **Archival Data**

- Organisational documents
- Creative outputs
- Social media posts, Website and social media metrics

Varied forms of archival data were also collected. These included organisational documents relevant to cohealth, as well the formation of the NiC initiative. Creative outputs, such as The Colouring Book zine were also collected as archival data. Lastly, social media posts shared across the NiC platforms, including interviews with collaborators, were collected alongside viewing metrics for the NiC website and Instagram platforms.

# DATA ANALYSIS

A range of analytic methods for qualitative data were used across the myriad forms of data. As the overall report consists of multiple parts, which in turn draw on multiple forms of data, and engage multiple approaches to data analysis, these approaches will be discussed in more detail within each part.



**Drop the Mic 2018.**

# 2018

**Website Launched**  
May

**Drop the Mic**  
November

**Medida and Chill**  
**Second Session**  
August

**Medida and Chill**  
**First Session**  
July

**COLOUR.CUT.PIC.**  
October-February

**The Colouring Book**  
**First Edition**  
October

**Cypher Conversation**  
August

**Virtual Spotlights**  
May-August

**The Colouring Book**  
**Second Edition**  
November

**Q+A with Ruath**  
**Nyaruo Ruach**  
September/  
November

# 2019

# 2020

# 2021

Poetry Night  
May

Forty Days Exhibition  
May

BLVCK GOLD Film  
Premiere  
September

## Cancelled/Postponed Outputs

A number of planned events had to be cancelled or postponed due to multiple COVID-19 lockdowns across Victoria.

- 3 Sessions of COLOUR. CUT. PIC. workshops
- Drop the Mic 2020 salon performance and workshops
- Artist in Residence program
- Our Gissar live performance, publication and video installations
- The Odyssey of Black Existence exhibition

## Future Outputs

Many outputs were also in production to be released across 2021 and beyond.

Including a venue launch, a third edition of The Colouring Book and a range of events to be held in the space.

**\*Website and Social Media Analytics as at time of writing**

# **EVENTS AND OUTPUTS**



# DROP THE MIC

Learn how to write and perform your own stories in spoken word and rap and enjoy a live set from African artists in a chilled local setting.

## Drop the Mic

Drop the mic is a creative writing session lead by young African writers, poets and musician exploring the elements of storytelling. Young people aged 12 - 25 will learn how to write and perform their own stories and enjoy having the chance to perform along some established Melbourne based artists.

NEXT IN COLOUR

## nextincolour.com

The website is a digital space which houses events, information about the initiative and outputs such as The Colouring Book zine and the Digital Showcases.

**Visits: 3000**

**Unique Visitors: 2100**

# MEDIA AND CHILL

## Medida and Chill (2 sessions)

Medida and chill is a series of wholesome conversations and shared learning experiences, through solution based games and group activities. These sessions are created by and for young south sudanese people with the intention to build more meaningful relationships and understanding.

**Total Attendees: 86**





**The Colouring Book Edition One: And so the Story Goes...**

This zine is community collaboration featuring artists of different backgrounds, lands and cultures however all of our these stories tie in together as we have all similar, joined experiences of being bla(c)k. These stories carry a sense of longing for home, freedom, family, love and understanding the many complexities of our blackness.

And so the story goes.....

**Website Views: 569**



**Colour. Cut. Pic. (15 sessions)**

Colour.Cut.Pic were a series of workshops that was developed by Next In Colour creative Anyuop and co-designed with a female participant as part of the L.A.B sessions held at the Bowery Theatre at St Albans Community Centre. The workshops were tailored around fashion, photography and makeup but with the use of face and body paints.

**Attendees: 5-10 each session**



**Virtual Spotlight**

A series showcasing creative works and projects from the CBTl collective and collaborators. The showcase covered spoken word and poetry, film, dance, pottery, and documentary projects.

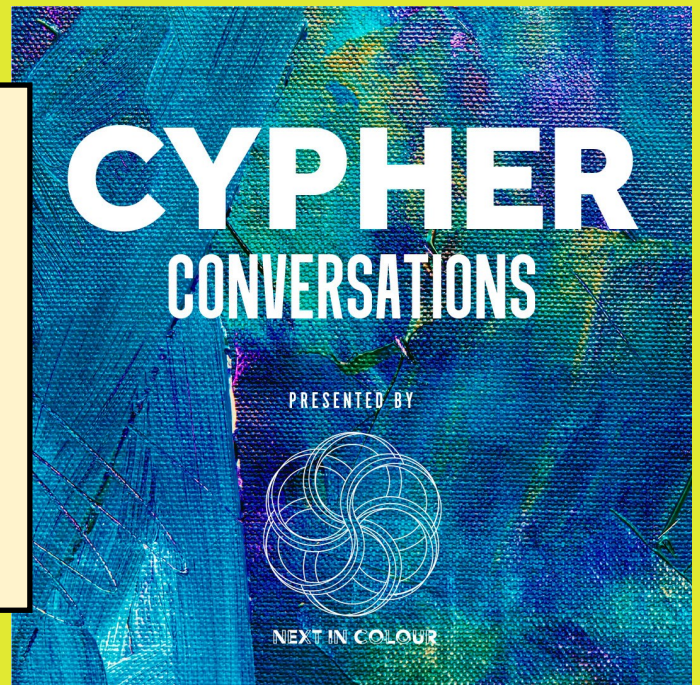
**Website Views: 862**

**Instagram Views: 427**

### Cypher Conversations

Cypher Conversations is about creating an informal open space for creatives to network, share perspectives and unify their voices in the arts for social, cultural and community wellbeing. It is styled to honour and preserve the essence of cypher culture and the nature of how such an informal gathering can contribute to place-making as well as celebrate form and thought through dialogue.

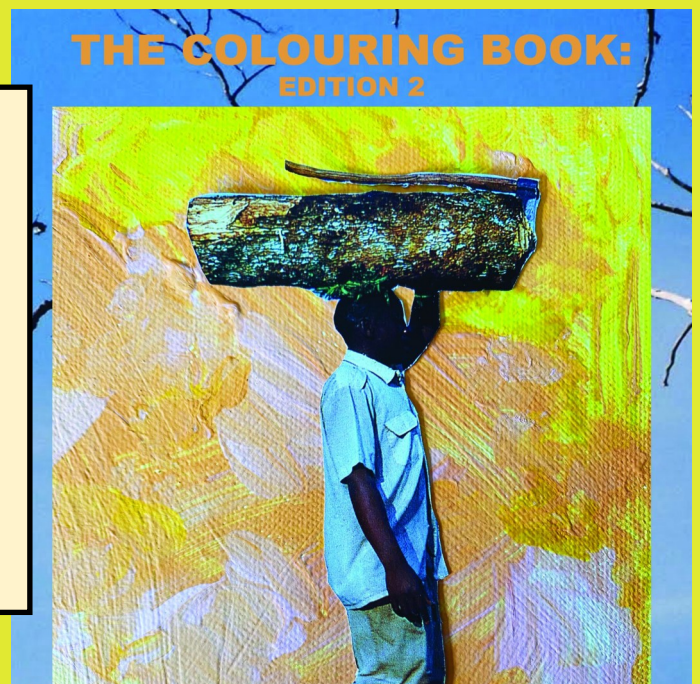
Attendees: Approx. 25



### Q&A with Ruth Nyaruot Ruach

A series of Instagram Live Q&As hosted by CBTL member Ruth Nyaruot Ruach. Interviews were with different creatives from the African diaspora, including Mariam Koslay, and the Editor of the Second Edition of The Colouring Book Aïsha Trambas.

Instagram Views: 461



### The Colouring Book Edition Two: Support

This project honours and celebrates BLA(C)K stories. The theme explored throughout the zine lingers around what SUPPORT means, feels like, looks like, sounds like and how we can create more sustainable ways to support our communities.

Website Views: 412

INSTAGRAM LIVE  
Q&A WITH RUTH  
RUACH AND MARIAM  
KOSLAY

Friday 11th September  
4pm

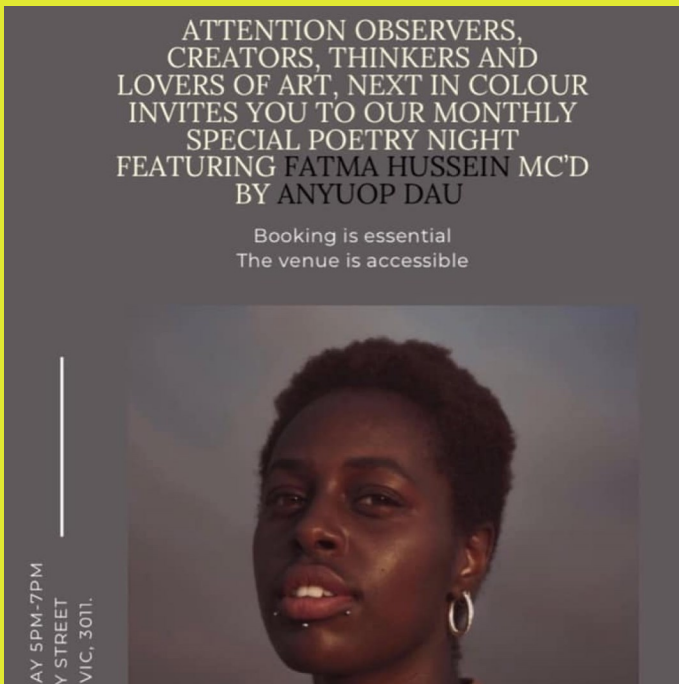




### 40 Days Exhibition

**40 Days** explores the tension that exists for traditional belief systems that exist within Western culture. This tension plays out for young Sudanese people all over the world. It causes anxiety and stress but also great resilience as they battle through it. Ez Eldin Deng's works are built from his culture and beliefs that have been shaped by his history, family and experience of living in Australia. He explores feelings of nostalgia which invite the audience to come close to both his sadness and happiness.

**Launch Attendees: Approx. 40**



### Poetry Night

A poetry night held in the Next in Colour space. Each night features guest poets and creates space for "observers, creators, thinkers & lovers of art" to share "written work hidden deep in your notes, or a rant in your quarantine journal, or a favourite read, or...new/old work just chilling on your phone".

**Attendees: Approx. 28**



### BLVCK GOLD Film

A film collaboration between Sami Obama studios and Next in Colour.

**BLVCK GOLD** tells the story of amateur athlete Tino who uses running as a way to escape old wounds. His attempts are foiled when a childhood friend – Frederick, who is fresh out of prison – re-connects with him and, seeking to redeem himself, presents Tino with a plan and a mysterious object wrapped in a paper bag.



# SPOTLIGHT: BLVCK GOLD

## **BLVCK GOLD (2020) - 19 minutes**

**Director:** Ez Eldin Deng

**Producer:** Geskeva Komba

**Cinematographer:** Victor Ng

**Production Design:** Monica Kabissios

**Editor:** Sean Lewis

**Composition and Sound:** Alex Olijnk

**Synopsis:** Tormented by his past through ongoing nightmares, amateur athlete, Tino, uses running as a way to escape from old wounds. However, childhood friend, Frederick who is fresh out of prison seeks to reconnect with him by trying to redeem himself and offers Tino a plan, and a mystery object wrapped in a paper bag.

After being rejected, a determined Frederick continues on his pursuit and comes across Tino's younger sister Rahwa who accepts the paper bag. An aggrieved Tino confronts Frederick at his home in front of his partner and son.

As his thoughts and mind begin to unravel through his actions and unresolved past, a restless Tino starts to find it difficult to sleep and stay focused in the present. He decides to go for a run, and as he struggles to distinguish between reality and his nightmares he is stopped by two police officers. They question him about his movements, beat him up and then abandon him on the street. This becomes the catalyst for Tino to accept Frederick's offer and put to action the plan he once refused.

Finally, the mystery object is revealed to us and Tino learns that in order to succeed, he and Frederick need to work together for their own liberation and that they cannot get it without each other.



**BLVCK GOLD SHOOT. PHOTOS BY SIRAJ MUSTAPHA.**



# SPOTLIGHT: BLVCK GOLD

## **Artist Statement (originally produced for Multicultural Arts Victoria):**

Black Gold is a short film and fictional story of amateur athlete, Tino, who uses running as a way to escape from old wounds but they come back and haunt him after a childhood friend gives him a mystery object. The film is a young adult, coming of age drama that explores the themes of access, discrimination, self-determination, self-empowerment and resilience. The choice of visuals is stylistically portrayed in an experimental way throughout the film to demonstrate the complexity of the themes, and for those subjected to them on a daily basis it reflects on the struggle of being torn and not knowing how to call out or name such experiences, especially for young people.

Filmmaker Ez Eldin Deng brings together a poetic visual exploration of a story written by Ras-Samuel Welda'abzgi and produced by Geskeva Komba, in a provocative film that focuses on the journey of self-determination and education. Deng's telling of story is always equally focused on the process as much as the outcome and this film has enabled him to create a strong response, and deliver a product that speaks to self-determination in a multitude of ways.

For Ez Eldin "Black Gold is a story allowing us to present different faces of African Australians, young men, old, as well as women, and children. Black Gold as a production was developed during major global issues such as COVID-19, the Black Lives Matter protests and followed by the hard lockdown in the North Melbourne and Flemington flats in 2020. "Through the film, I want to challenge perceptions and how the rest of the wider

community look at African Australians due to lack of cultural knowledge. For me *Black Gold* is a small window of hope to see change. Throughout the production of the film I was living in the moment because the story was so close to my heart and I had to focus and get it right. Everybody did such amazing work by taking direction that was needed from me, and it was beautiful to see all the cast and crew members working tirelessly, as well as seeing elders, children, women, and young people come together. We were the most multicultural cast and crew that I have seen since working in Film, and I feel like I've done justice to the film regardless of what happens next." Says Ez Eldin.

As an independent filmmaker, Ez Eldin is known for the short film *Road.Dogs* and his significant contributions as a creative to the mini-TV drama series *Sunshine*, as well as the feature film *Hearts and Bones*. The directorial talent and creativity by Deng is also matched with an exceptional ensemble of creatives that consists of Cinematographer Victor Ng, Production Designer Monica Kabissios, Editor Sean Lewis as well as Hyperdynamic for composition and sound design.

Set in the high-rise buildings at the Flemington Public Housing Estates, the desire for the project was to work with and support community in a self-determined way. The choice of setting was inspired by the work that Ez Eldin, Geskeva and Ras-Samuel do and the communities they come from, all growing up and/or living within public housing high-rises. "I wanted to represent the Black African experience in Australia and bring some tradition, culture and beauty to the screen and within Australian cinema. There's power in creating work that matters, and it takes on a life of its own. I hope *Back Gold* becomes a template for many up-and-coming filmmakers to be inspired and create their own stories." Ras-Samuel says.

The Flemington Public Housing Estates as a physical space, has a strong sense of connection and community for residents as well as it being a home, a place of refuge, and place of intergenerational celebration. However, it is also a trigger-induced breeding ground comprised of discrimination, structural violence, intergenerational trauma and police profiling. In July 2020, residents of the Flemington Estates were subjected to a 14 day hard lockdown with minimal warning and over policing due to the current global pandemic, and only community organisations and groups being the first on the



# SPOTLIGHT: BLVCK GOLD

ground to provide support. The buildings alone and its infrastructure serves as a strong metaphor to the themes and social issues weaved throughout the film and that impact the character's lives, which demonstrates and connects to the stories and experiences of the residents who live within the estate.

Black Gold as a film speaks directly to its audience and most importantly the community that the creatives come from and serve. At its core, it addresses real and common issues that have happened and continue to happen in places like the Flemington and North Melbourne Estates. "As a team we worked hard, and we were all learning, reimagining and creating a different way of working that represents who we are and where we want to go being creatives within Australia. As the producer, my role was to bring all the resources and people together to support the creative vision of this film. I hope that it is able to demonstrate one of the many aspects of authentic representation, as well as the creativity and beauty of our community." Geskeva says.

**Ez Eldin, Geskeva and Ras-Samuel hope that making this film within the African community will mean something and that others will recognize themselves in it.**







# SPOTLIGHT: BLVCK GOLD

## Distribution

The film premiered on MIFFPlay, the digital platform of the Melbourne International Film Festival, as part of the premiere screening of films for the Victorian College of the Arts Film and Television Graduating Class of 2020.

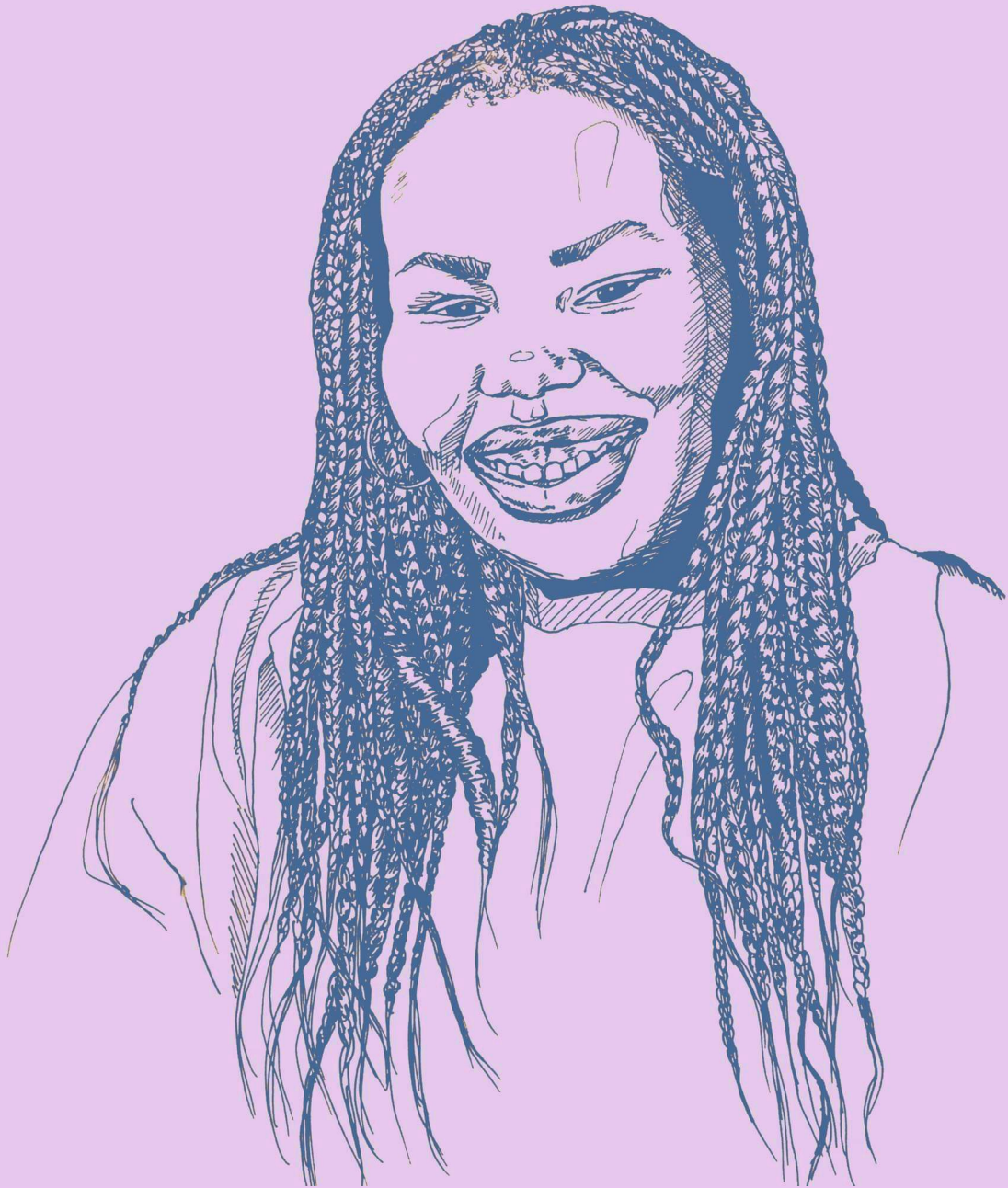
Further plans for distribution include entering the film in a range of film festivals in Asia (Goa Short Film Festival, Tagore International Film Festival), Australia (MSFF, Flickerfest, MIFF, St Kilda Film Festival), Europe (Barcelona Planet Film Festival, Roma Cinema Doc), and the Americas (Montreal International Black Film Festival, Toronto Black Film Festival, Studio City Film Festival, African Diaspora International Film Festival).

Further screenings are planned across a range of online streaming platforms and theatrical and community-based screenings across Melbourne, Sydney and Adelaide.

## Instagram Engagement

In the period of promotion for the films launch, promotional material for the film on the NiC Instagram platform:

- Grew followers by 89
- Content reached 2,418 accounts (2,204 being non-followers) with 595 interactions (496 likes, 34 comments, 36 saves, 24 shares)
- The top story had 66 impressions, the top post had 840 impressions, the top reel had 1,503 impressions (impressions are the total number of times seen)
- The content audience consisted of:
  - People from Melbourne (77.2%), Adelaide (3.6%), Perth (2%), Sydney (2%)
  - Aged 25-34 (59.4%), 18-24 (15.7%), 35-44 (14.2%)



**\*Part 1 has been published:**

**Sonn, C., Agung-Igusti, R., Dau, A., Deng, E. E., Ruach, R. N., Komba, G., & Akoul, N. (2021). Colour Between the Lines: Self-determination and the Creation of Settings as Resistance to Structural Violence. *Global Journal of Community Psychology Practice*, 12(2), 1-19.**

# **PART 1**

**Next in Colour:**

**A self-determined alternative setting**

## **Naming Structural Violence**

- **Stereotyping and everyday racialization**
- **Devaluation of cultural, intellectual or creative identities, practices and products**
- **Commodification of blackness**



- **Alternative settings for criticality, healing, fostering relationships and cultural safety**
- **Free from overdetermining and racialising gaze of whiteness**
- **Community connection and collective care**
- **Autonomous and self-determined space**

**Creating home-places and healing spaces**

- **Deconstruct ways of working and being together and commitment to reflection and learning**
- **Non-hierarchical ways of organising**
- **Importance of shared values and relationality**
- **Important of lived experience and community embeddedness**

**Radical reimagining of relationships and ways of working**



**Counter-storytelling, authentic visibility, building solidarities**

- **Self-representation**
- **Responds to harmful dominant narratives**
- **Resource to construct identities and understand social world**
- **Build solidarity with other racialised communities through shared experiences**

# KEY INSIGHTS

- For people of African heritage in Australia, whether first generation migrants, or those who are second, third or more generations there are distinct experiences of structural violence.
- Structural violence is expressed through stereotyping and forms of everyday racialisation; the devaluation of cultural, intellectual or creative products and identities; and the commodification of “blackness” by dominant white culture, constraining self-determination over stories, histories and identities. A product of these expressions of structural violence is emotional labour, which continues to structure the experiences and relationships of individuals within racialised communities.
- The Next in Colour initiative seeks to respond to these forms of structural violence through the creation of alternative settings. These settings are healing spaces and “homeplaces” that emerged through the activation of a physical space from which projects and the collective can be based, but also that is both for and shaped by community. They respond to violence through fostering self-determination, different ways of organising, working and creating that are dependent on values-based relationships.
- From these nurturing and relational spaces, and through these ways of working, CBTL can form solidarities within and across communities and create and surface authentic forms of visibility and powerful counter-stories to the damaging and harmful narratives that denigrate Africans in Australia.

- Within the Next in Colour initiative, the CBTL collective also seek to radically reimagine relationships and ways of working through deconstructing taken for granted ways of being and doing, and ultimately creating a framework through which future generations can self-determine and access important resources and opportunities.



## Introduction

This section will begin with background to provide context to the dynamics of race and racialisation within Australia, as well as an overview of diversity and equity within the creative industries. The section will then provide findings drawn from the analysis of narratives that were identified within interviews with the CBTL collective, these findings illustrate the intentions of NiC initiative to embody an alternative setting and self-determined initiative. Further, the findings will map the forms of structural exclusion that the initiative is responding to, and the practices and approaches that the collective are mobilising for self-determination, deracialisation and wellbeing.

## Background

For many people from communities of the African diaspora in Australia, raced-based discrimination through mechanisms of structural violence, frames day to day lived experiences. Race-based discrimination encompasses the inequitable treatment of groups due to racialised forms of difference, and manifests at interpersonal, intergroup, institutional and cultural levels (VicHealth, n.d.). While structural violence refers to

**...the production, maintenance, and reproduction of social inequalities and oppressions. The concept refers to social systems as well as the mechanisms through which they produce and normalize marginalization, exclusion, and exploitation (Dutta, Sonn & Lykes, 2016, p. 1-2).**

Yet, while racialised and other forms of structural violence pervade the lives of black people and other marginalised groups, individuals and communities also resist and survive every day. Resistance and struggles for survival are evident in the creation of alternative settings that are important for affirming culture and histories, and for providing opportunities for a sense of community, consciousness raising, and constructing new and alternative narratives to those that pervade dominant cultural contexts (Rappaport, 1995; Sarason, 1972; Sonn & Fisher, 1998). Alternative settings are “radically different ways of perceiving, enacting, and experiencing...basic relationships and life activities...it is a protest, a reaction, an attempt to find a better way, a rejection” (Cherniss & Deegan, 2000, p. 360), and in some ways, sites for in-frapolitics, a politics from below (Scott, 1990). The Next in Colour initiative constitutes an important alternative setting through which the Colour Between the Lines collective have worked towards creating spaces for self-determination over their selves,

their stories, and the structures and resources available to racialised communities of the African diaspora.

### **Whiteness, Racialisation and Violence in Australia**

Raced-based discrimination is an enduring facet of day-to-day life for many groups in Australia. For these groups race is applied as a meaningful marker of social difference that informs inequitable relations of power and systematic forms of violence (Stevens, 2014), this is a process of racialisation that both constrains subjectivity and constructs new racialised subjects (Stevens et al., 2017).

Racialisation can occur through harmful dominant group narratives propagated through news media as well as in political rhetoric that perpetuates misrecognition and legitimates forms of structural exclusion that deny people access to opportunities and resources required to construct healthy selves and communities (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018; Han & Budarick, 2018; Windle, 2008). The link between the impact of these stigmatising and pervasive dominant narratives and adverse outcomes for the communities targeted have been well documented (see e.g., Mansouri, Elias & Sweid, 2017; Markus, 2016) with deleterious effects on individual well-being and the opportunities available for both individuals and communities (Paradies et

al., 2015; Priest et al., 2013). This is further compounded by what some have described as hegemonic and normative “whiteness” that preserves ways of knowing, being and doing (Green, Sonn & Matsebula, 2007). In the Australian context racism rooted in Eurocentrism normalizes and privileges traits associated with whiteness (Hage, 1998). Hence whiteness refers to the dominance and normativity of Eurocentric ways of being, doing and knowing the world – in short, the ideology of white supremacy (Moreton-Robinson, 2015). However, many people from the African diaspora, as well as other communities who bear the brunt of racialised structural violence do resist and survive everyday through the active creation of settings.

These settings are safe family and community spaces, and also arise through the construction of self-determined culturally anchored activities through which they can affirm histories and cultural heritage and also challenge misrecognition and claim the right to belonging, and fair and just treatment (Sonn, Baker, & Agung-Igusti, 2021). Racism and its concomitant racialising forces are shrouded in complexities and continues to change across time and place (Stevens, 2018). The language and discourses of racism, its supporting ideologies, have all proven transitory as it takes different shapes and attaches itself to different shared understandings of the world

(Bonilla-Silva, 2014).

Yet, this does not foreclose on our capacity to seek and enact change, and racism in its complexity, must be addressed at multiple levels and in multiple ways.

Scholar activists have argued, social change requires the involvement from and needs to be rooted in the experiences of those affected by oppressive systems in pursuit of liberation, community and wellbeing (Lykes, 2013; Watts & Serrano-Garcia, 2003). In pursuing approaches that desire to build change we must then seek to foster and sustain the creation of alternative spaces and support the mobilisation of communities facing racialisation and violence in deeply meaningful ways. The development of Next in Colour we argue is an example of a grass roots initiative that seeks to produce racial justice through the creation of self-determined alternative settings. In these settings people develop strategies to tackle racism and create and affirm cultural and community narratives that provide positive resources for identity, belonging and wellbeing.

### **Diversity and Equity within the Creative Industries**

The Next in Colour initiative is also a response to forms of racialised structural inequity of resources and opportunities present in the creative and other industries. Within Australia there

have been continued calls to increase cultural diversity across organisations and industries. Whilst Australia's population continues to diversify, these changes are not reflected across various spheres and institutions of society. Despite the growth of diversity and inclusion initiatives and policies within public and private sectors, and a push for greater representation within media and other forms of cultural production, changes in who we see in boardrooms, in parliament or on our screens has been slow, if at all (AHRC, 2018). The recent Leading for Change (2018) report commissioned by the AHRC revealed the deep incongruency between the cultural backgrounds of those in executive leadership positions across Australia's companies and institutions and the wider population.

**The report found that 96% of ASX200 CEO's, 96.7% of federal ministry, 99% of government department heads and 97.4% of university vice-chancellors have Anglo-Celtic or European backgrounds, in comparison, the 2016 census estimates that approximately 24% of Australians have a non-European or Indigenous background.**

This is important, as often there is a tendency to measure the success of diversity and inclusion initiatives through workforce representation within other tiers of organisational and institutional hierarchies, whilst membership to positions of power such as ex-

ecutive leadership can often be understood through discourses of meritocracy (Bonilla-Silva, 2014; Wetherell & Potter, 1992). Meritocratic discourses place successes as the outcome of individual capabilities and aptitude, obscuring histories of oppression and the unequal distribution of social and material resources that privilege some and not others. These discourses also normalise and justify inequities through cultural (mis)representation of who is deserving and who is not, often blaming some groups for their own circumstances.

Discursive strategies, such as the call on discourses of merit, are sustained through powerful narratives and symbols that are circulated through cultural means in everyday contexts and draw on (often concealed) histories and ideologies (Green et al., 2007). Consequently, not only are similar incongruences in representation found within various forms of mainstream media, for example a report by Screen Australia (2016) found that Asian, African and Middle-Eastern communities were largely under-represented within TV dramas when compared to representation within the population and that culturally diverse characters were often presented in conflict with white characters, but racialised communities are often represented in damaging ways. Emblematic of this is the portrayal of various racialised communities across news media platforms. One

study found that over 35% of mainstream news coverage related to events and issues pertaining to multicultural Australia were seen as negative by audiences from culturally diverse background (Rodrigues, Niemann & Paradies, 2019). This has been particularly impactful for Australians from various African backgrounds with multiple analyses indicating Australian media perpetrates marginalising and vilifying discourses aimed at these communities (Han & Budarick, 2018; Horyniak, Lim & Higgs, 2016; Nolan, Farquharson, Politoff & Marjoribanks, 2011).

Similar patterns can be found within the creative industries. Certainly, there has been similar pushes towards diversity and inclusion, within institutions and organisations, as well as within programming and representation. This can be seen in a Victorian state government policy directions which has funded initiatives such as the Talent Matters program to boost diversity and inclusion within the creative industries (Creative Victoria, 2018); or through the funding of programs which address issues such as discrimination and its resulting health inequities through increasing diversity in the arts (VicHealth, 2009). Victoria's 2016-2020 Creative Industries Strategy (Creative Victoria, 2015) includes creative industries diversity and inclusion as a key action, outlining support for government funded organisations to imple-

ment diversity and inclusion plans and provide training with the aims of improving diversity across the workforce, as well as programming and participation. Yet, the experience for many people from racialised communities working within the creative industries have shown to be framed by inequities. The report *Making Art Work: An Economic Study of Professional Artists in Australia* (Throsby & Petetskaya, 2017) found that the number of non-English speaking background (NESB) artists who have felt their background has had a negative impact on their arts practice has increased from 15% in 2009 to 19% in 2017, 18% of NESB artists compared to 9% of others reported that the lack of access to funding is the biggest limit to their professional development, that while the same proportion of NESB artists apply for funding as ESB artists only 60% compared to 68% report receiving it. However, the report also found that applications from culturally and linguistically diverse artists had increased by 3% to 23% in 2017, and that over the same period successful applications had increased from 19% to 29%. Within organisational and institutional workplaces of the creative industries, further inequities can be mapped. Many of NSW's arts institutions have reported to have failed workplace diversity targets in 2014 (Taylor, 2015), and similar observations about representation across institutional leadership can be mapped. For example, one

need only look to the executive management and boards of some of Victoria's key public arts institutions to see a significant lack of culturally diverse representation.

A recent report by Diversity Arts Australia (Nahlous et al., 2019), *Shifting the Balance: Cultural Diversity in Leadership within the Australian Arts, Screen and Creative Sectors*, provides a closer look showing that in the creative sector:

**Culturally and linguistically diverse (CALD) Australians only comprised 10% of CEOs, 14% of creative directors, 12% of senior executives, 6% of chairs and deputy-chairs, 9% of board members and 10% of awards judges.**

The report further found that CALD Australians were under-represented across every leadership role in every cultural sector, organisational type and jurisdiction examined within the study. For major cultural organisations, this meant approximately half had no CALD representation at the leadership level, and only 9% of leaders of major cultural institutions were CALD Australians.

Yet whilst there have been efforts to advocate for greater diversity and inclusion within the creative industries, there are still important questions about whether creating more diverse institutions and organisations, measured by the quantifiable presence of



cultural diversity is the antidote or indeed the change that is required. Such approaches, Cañas (2017) argues, does little to address the deeply systemic power imbalances that currently exist, and the very language of diversity perpetuates forms of normative whiteness. The presence of racialised individuals within organisations and institutions does not negate systemic racism, even when occupying positions of relative power. Without meaningful and significant structural change, organisations and institutions can continue to reproduce wider systems of power and oppression whilst simultaneously holding the visible presence of diversity as testament to principles of progressiveness.

## **The Next in Colour Initiative**

### **The Arts and Social Change**

The arts has long been intertwined with social change and increasingly this has been reflected in government and organisational policies. Much like approaches taken by cohealth and Arts Generator, arts and creative practices are seen as important avenues for building social inclusion and cohesion, as well as reducing the social determinants of inequitable health outcomes (Putland, 2012; Sonn, Drew & Kasat, 2002). Creative Victoria's Creative Industry Strategy 2016-2020 (2015) also outlines social impact projects as a key

action. It states that “cultural and creative services and products deliver a range of social benefits. This action will significantly increase the number of projects that apply the services and expertise of creative industries towards social goals” (p. 24). An example of this key action is a partnership between Creative Victoria and VicHealth, amongst other agencies, to develop the Future Makers for Change program aimed at investigating the social impact of the creative industries through supporting projects that “offer a creative approach to building mental well-being of young Victorians enhancing their sense of belonging, connection to communities, empowerment, and resilience (VicHealth, 2020). Next in Colour presented by Colour Between the Lines (CBTL) has been the confluence of these various strands: of creative practices and social change, of the need to democratise arts and cultural production, of the need for self-determined spaces as part-antidote to the inequitable power relations that exists within the institutions and organisations of the creative industries.

### **The emergence of CBTL:**

#### **Self-determination and Racial Justice**

The Next in Colour initiative is a proactive response to interconnected forms of racialised structural violence and is grounded in the lived experiences of

the Colour Between the Lines collective members and broader racialised communities of the African diaspora in Melbourne. The initiative was an outcome of strategic planning that drew on community engagement approaches through a framework focused on social determinants of health, within a public health context. The initiative had emerged through years of work that had mobilised community arts for racial justice, through the Arts Generator, a participatory arts space that seeks to build connections within and across communities, supporting the development of positive social identities and increasing wellbeing and agency through participatory arts practice. At the heart of Arts Generator's approach is a focus on relationality and community building that brings diverse young people together through creative practices and a desire for equity and social justice (cohealth, n.d.). The Arts Generator is situated within cohealth, a community health organisation that focuses on reducing health inequities for those who experience marginalisation and stigma. cohealth's approach is premised on working in partnership with communities and is underpinned by a model that envisions the interlinkages between caring for individuals, communities and society more broadly (cohealth, 2018). This entails awareness and capacity building projects to support community members in civic participation and advocacy efforts, as

well as supporting efforts to influence policy change at the level of government and various service design and delivery organisations. Thus, the Arts Generator was an important avenue through which cohealth could address social determinants of health, such as race based discrimination.

### **CBTL Presents: Next in Colour**

The genesis of CBTL can be traced back through relationships emerging through many of the projects that developed out of the Arts Generator. The initiative is situated within the collective knowledges that each of the creative practitioners involved have brought to the project: from their communities; from the work they have done and continue to do, whether within the creative arts, community development or elsewhere; from their experiences of being of African heritage in Australia; from their engagement with decolonial understandings and approaches to inform what they do. Many of its members had facilitated or developed projects and programs through Arts Generator and had been brought together by the organisation's former Program Coordinator to extend this work but in a more self-determining way.

Through close analysis of interviews with the collective, important personal stories and collective narratives were identified, which show the many ways of how the work of CBTL is grounded

in individual and community experiences. Narratives create meaning and make sense of our complex social worlds (Bruner, 1990), shaping social identities and understandings, and thus constituting powerful cultural resources (Rappaport, 1995). Narratives are also an important site for examining the workings of power and resistance and various ways race and other structures are reproduced through discursive, symbolic, and material means (Ladson-Billings, 2002). The narratives shared by CBTL members clarifies how the initiative is a response to structural violence such as racism and racialisation as well as the enactment of hope and desire for safe and healing spaces for community making.

### **Analysing Stories: Forms of violence, resistance, and liberation**

Through the analysis of narrative, individual and community experiences are contextualised through the cultural resources which are drawn on. In documenting the narratives shared by the collective members, the setting they have created can be situated within the lived realities of structural violence faced by themselves and their communities within the Australian context, as well as the forms of knowledge they have collected navigating previous settings. Further, it is from these experiences that powerful forms of counter-storytelling can emerge. Thus through

these narratives the collective name racism as structural violence, detailing the specific ways this is experienced and manifesting culturally and materially with psychosocial consequences. It is this meaning-making that necessitates the need to respond to violence and allows resistance strategies to cohere. For CBTL these resistance strategies entail the creation of alternative settings, home-places and healing spaces, for themselves and their communities to 'declutter'. It is from these settings, that CBTL are able to engage the decolonial actions of counter storytelling, authentic visibility and building solidarities, and together to radically reimagine relationships and ways of working. The next section draws from interview data to illustrate the interconnected processes and practices of structural violence and politics of resistance.

**Naming structural violence: "... They feel like they're going to be judged"**

For the collective structural violence was acutely felt by both them and their communities through particular expressions of racism that worked to vilify, inferiorise and commodify black people. Firstly, stereotyping and forms of everyday racialisation work to vilify through the construction of people of

African descent as, criminal or deficit:

**...cause a lot of the times, what I see is the youth, they feel uncomfortable to reach out to white spaces because they don't feel like they're wanted or they feel like they're going to be judged before they approach. It's like there's all this talent in the community but they don't know what to do with it because, they've been already looked at like, "You're criminal. You do this and you do that. (Anyuop Dau)**

The devaluation of cultural, intellectual or creative products and identities, inferiorise as particular ways of being in the world are constructed as lesser than or signal deficit:

**...when it comes to being around people who aren't from your community, you have to change yourself.... you've got to speak a certain way. If you speak and people don't understand you, you're automatically seen as unknowledgeable. Having to ensure that you are educated and you know what you're doing around the people you're with so that you're not categorized as something you're not. (Nyakeer Akuol)**

Such devaluation of social identities places a burden of labour on racialised individuals and communities as these representations are navigated and challenged (Kwansah-Aidoo &

Mapedzahama, 2018).

“Blackness” can also become commodification as individuals of African descent are rendered objects, and their “Blackness” consumed. In doing so White norms are upheld through “the othering of constructed Black culture and identities” and applications of white ideals to Black bodies” (Nguyen & Anthony, 2014, p. 771). Through the lens of Whiteness, Black cultural products and identity are defined and assigned value. In the context of the creative industries, this can manifest in how creative works are made niche, or constrained to particular content that serves to construct “Blackness” in particular ways:

**There's a lot of space that exists for people of colour to just be. However, those spaces are so poisoned nowadays because you go to an art gallery or you go to an event where people can overly consume you as an artist or overly consume me as a person because they have their own connotations of who you are or they have their own ideologies of who you are. Sometimes that imagery does not fit you. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)**

This often occurs in a context of “white” organisations that seek to maintain control of spaces and filter diverse ethnic and cultural identities and experiences through the lens of whiteness:

**There's not a lot of places that cater to black bodies and black people. It's always, we're under the ice grip of whiteness, and to be able to have a space where [people in our community] feel comfortable and that no one's looking down on them or they're being controlled by an organization or an individual in order for them to do what they need. (Anyuop Dau)**

This form of racist structural violence, whilst different to the vilifying discourses of criminality and deficit, depicts the experience of being black under a controlling gaze, “looking through ... a lens of you”. The controlling gaze works towards limiting the ways individuals can identify or represent themselves. Often such forms of structural violence can be seen as celebratory or employed within discourses of diversity and multiculturalism. These discourses reduce “Blackness” or “Africanness” to overdetermined categories that still maintain “otherness” and constrain people within dominant group narratives (Kwansah-Aidoo & Mapedzahama, 2018).

Structural violence works to exclude racialised people from equitable access to important resources and opportunities through acts of interpersonal and institutional racism, both overt and covert:

**A lot of the times when we wanted to go use a space, they would kind**

**of agree and it would be great over the phone, it would be great over email, and it's a totally different story in person. That's just kind of like, well, the only thing that's different now is that you've got a chance to see me, and you're just like, "It's a bunch of Black kids. I don't know if we can really count on having you." (Tiyami Amum)**

There also is an added cost for racialised individuals and communities who must navigate structural violence conveyed in narratives and stories about the capacity of racialised people. This cost is the emotional labour involved in resisting misrecognition and misrepresentation and asserting complex identities and telling complex stories (Evans & Moore, 2015). This is an everyday form of labour that is produced by an everyday form of racism. Emotional labour, like “burn out” as an example, takes a deep psychosocial toll as individuals navigate racism:

**There's also a lot of stolen time in having to explain my blackness and having to explain why that's the thing that I have to explain, and then having to explain why that's the thing that you should stop doing to me. That's a lot of stolen time, a lot of stolen energy when I could be expressing something so much more. (Tiyami Amum)**

This product of structural violence frames interactions and relationships



and is often unseen and unaccounted for. Thus, it is important that it is recognised and understood when examining how racialised individuals and communities both respond to structural violence, but also form relationships and interact with individuals and organisations across contexts.

**Home places, healing spaces: "Our own space is like you can just declutter there"**

For CBTL, an important way to respond to structural violence is the creation of alternative settings through the activation of a physical space from which projects and the collective can be based, but also that is both for and shaped by community. Whilst many of the events and workshops CBTL have undertaken, can and have been located within other spaces both physical and digital, having a physical space is an integral part of self-determination and the creation of home-places that allow criticality, healing, the fostering of relationships and cultural safety. Such a space allows for the maximisation of resources. It connects communities. It is imbued in its own symbolic meaning, of home place, of autonomy.

**If you don't have a home, you're considered homeless. We need a space to call a home for us to be free. Get up, have breakfast, and al-**

**so we have family without a judgement. You could do what you needed to do, as long as you've got respect and you've got a vision. Then in that home, you can go anywhere, but you're going to come back and share your stories with the family. You're not generating any negative impact. You're just building a relation. (Ez Eldin Deng)**

Importantly, such a space would be self-determined, free from the overdetermining and racialising gaze of whiteness, manifest through individuals and organisations. Such a gaze constrains agency and seeks to shape representation within the parameters of dominant narratives, thus enacting specific forms of epistemic violence that creates unsafe spaces. On the one hand, for many creative artists from racialised communities, systemic inequities have constrained their ability to find spaces at all within which they can create and produce. On the other hand, when there are spaces made available it is often on the terms of others which can discourage collective and community forms of working and wrests away control over the creative and subjective representations of artists.

Such a space would also serve an important role beyond moves towards structural inclusion within the creative industries, or simply gaining autonomy over representation. Watkins and Shulman (2008) speak of building communities of resistance, and extending on the

writing of bell hooks (1990), fostering public homeplaces through cultural work. Such spaces are counterspaces that engender humane relationships and networks that seek to enact collective care and healing, form a sense of community, as well as engage in positive meaning-making relating to self, community, and imagined futures beyond the frames of dominant systems. It allows for processes of collective remembering, across communities, and across generations (Case & Hunter, 2012). As noted by one of the participants, such spaces make it possible to create the conditions to be vulnerable, to be reflective and to decolonise one's own "psychic space", a space within individual's minds that enables "creativity, play, symbolisation and meaning-making, as well as the on the growth processes that rely on these functions to take place" (Rapoport, 2014, p. 1533). This psychic space can be subject to colonisation as racialised bodies and minds absorb the meanings and products of a society shaped by racism (Oliver, 2004).

**Creating a space or allowing a space to be created collectively by community is so important because it's not only operated and run by a collective of people that understand the language of being marginalised and the importance of having a space to just be, it's like we're creating a sense of home. We're creating a space where you**

**can be vulnerable and where you can deconstruct stuff for yourself. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)**

Whilst there are many opportunities to develop projects, whether workshops or performances, that access and utilise existing spaces, these spaces are both temporary and dependent on other organisations and institutions. It is not to say that important meaning making does not occur in such spaces, or that it prevents collective forms of healing, or the flourishing of networks. It is an impermanence that is linked to wider patterns of structural inequity and devaluing of social identities. It is an impermanence that solidifies the power of white institutions as arbiters of control and access and upholds this arrangement through ongoing processes of misrecognition. Thus, the possibility of self-determined space, shows the cracks in this logic and reasserts a control over self and communities.

**To be able to have this space and then allow people to really thrive and create how they feel like they should be creating ... for us to be able to support that, foster that, empower and encourage that, and then see what comes out of that. It would then speak for itself. (Tiyami Amum)**

## The Next in Colour Space

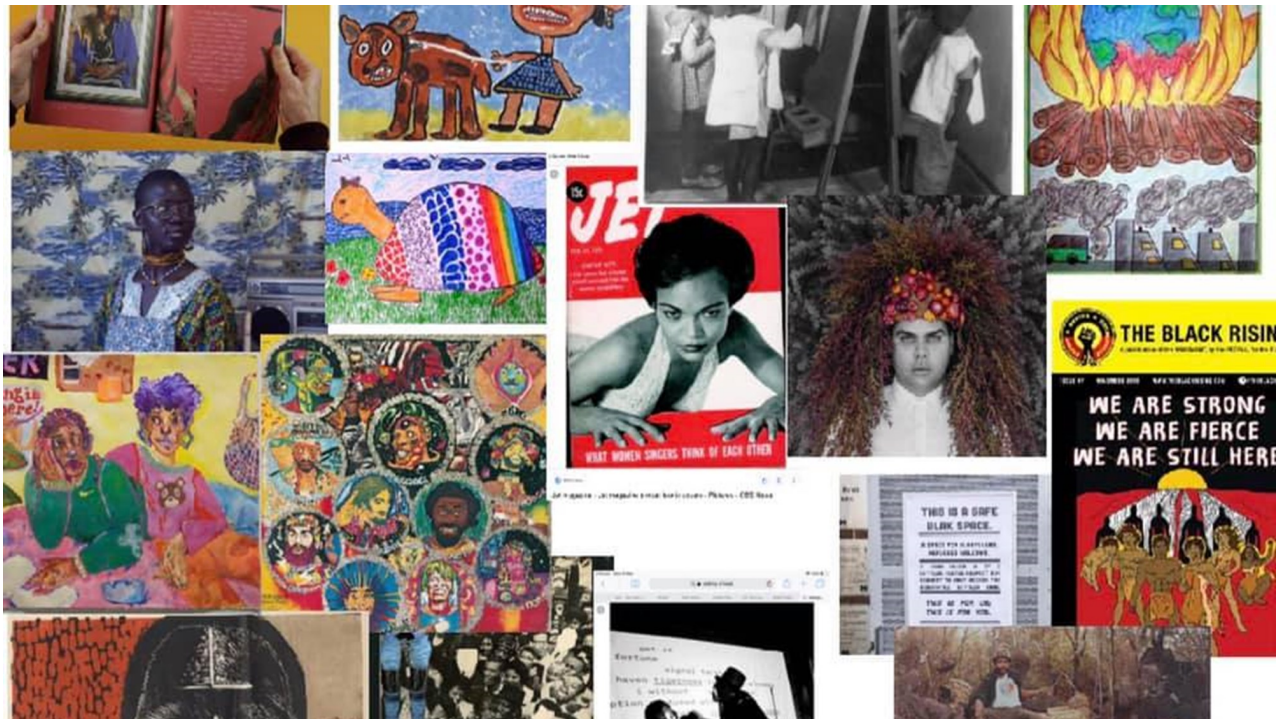


Image from The Colouring Book First Edition



**Counter-storytelling,  
authentic visibility and  
building solidarities:  
“We’re not these kind of  
people that you see on  
the news all the time”**

From these nurturing and relational spaces, and through these ways of working, CBTL can create and surface powerful counter-stories to the damaging and harmful narratives that denigrate Africans in Australia. Counter-stories are the obscured stories that emerge from those people and communities who experience oppression and marginalisation, they are challenges and responses to damaging dominant modes of understanding circulated within a society (Delgado, 1989). Counter-stories as a form of self-representation are an important way for racialised communities to resist structural violence. They can be thought of as resistance stories that fight the negative representations of the dominant society and the inequitable systems they uphold (Bell, 2010). It also creates resources for people within those communities to construct identities and understandings of the world, drawing on their own experience and knowledge grounded in community and cultural histories.

**For me, they can be able to learn what we do and not just see us from**

**a lens of negativity or what the media shows them and being like, “These people are actually like grinding out here.” They want spaces, they want to do better and we're just, we're not these kind of people that you see on the news all the time, but we're trying to create change for our community and trying to better ourselves for the next generation... (Anyuop Dau)**

Self-determination is central to efforts of self-representation, and the project itself, is:

**It was an important thing because it was about our representation, but also visibility, authentic visibility. Also, it's about having autonomy and self-determination over the work that we do and how we deliver it. (Geskeva Komba)**

To be autonomous and able to self-determine, enables communities to develop their own resources and opportunities, to develop projects and programs that actually meet their needs, and to privilege knowledges and ways of being and doing grounded in community histories and experiences (Rappaport, 1995).

Whilst a project such as CBTL may realise autonomy and self-determination, it still exists within the context of the creative industries or social delivery sectors, and the various organisations within these spaces. There are various interactions and relationships that

must be navigated, and for CBTL, this means conceptualising how partnerships and collaborations can occur, and providing opportunities for organisations to reflect on and learn from their interactions with various communities.

**Within organizations, the changes that would definitely be made is the way that the African diaspora, the Indigenous community and people of colour are being seen. There'll definitely be a conversation on the ways that we work together or the ways that we have delivered a project or ways that these organizations could work better in being aware, being culturally aware in their platforms or in their organizations. (Nyakeer Akuol)**

Counter-stories are deployed within these important settings where structural violence is experienced, seeking to transform relationships and ways of working in these contexts.

The project also seeks to build solidarities with other racialised and marginalised communities. Structural exclusion for marginalised communities translates to a scarcity of resources and opportunities, creating an environment of competition. For many of these communities there are similar sets of racialised experiences perpetrated by the same structural mechanisms.

**All of us, Indigenous community, Pasifika communities, we are all**

**looked at from the same lens, from the white perspective. To be able to have that connection with them and being like, "Hey, you're doing this and we're doing that, let's collab." Cause if we don't help each other, no one else is going to help us. We have to work through these spaces so that we can give our own communities the same benefits. (Anyuop Dau)**

In fostering these solidarities, engaging in cultural sharing and understanding, and connecting shared experiences within the Australian settler colonial context, exclusionary structures can be better challenged and shifted, and new narratives created.

**Radical reimagining of relationships and ways of working: "It's understanding our identity first, collectively"**

A key aspect of the CBTL project is deconstructing taken for granted ways of being and doing, and ultimately creating a framework through which future generations can self-determine and access important resources and opportunities. To work towards these goals, internal and external relationships and processes are equally important. The collective has had to conceptualise ways of relating with each other, other organisations, partners and collaborators, and various communities. The col-



lective has also had to consider how the organisational practices and processes they develop, define these relationships, reflect their values and form a basis for their broader goals. For this the collective engage a radical imagination from which they are working and imagining from a different set of ethics and principles to the settings they are responding to.

With the CBTL project, the collective members have had an opportunity to draw on their experiences with and within various organisations and projects to deconstruct their approaches to the work they are doing. This includes structure, how they've constructed their roles within the project, and particularly a commitment to non-hierarchical ways of organising. It also includes their internal practices and processes, how they make decisions, how they communicate, take and hold accountability, learn and grow, and share successes and failures. This praxis emerges from radical decolonial reimaginings that asserts humanity and recentres relationality,

**We all agreed that to move forward and to develop community, we have to use a practice that is so healing and is so connected to ourselves, and connected to our souls. I think that change is not changing the exterior, but also changing the internal... I feel like CBTL we have our intentions, we have our values, we have the structure, how we want it**

**to look like but it's always changing because we're individually growing. We'll bring in different things and different perspectives. (Ruth Nyaruot Ruach)**

For the collective, this change needs to be grounded in a core set of shared values that guide and frame the intention behind these important decisions. However, importantly, there is also an ongoing commitment to reflection and learning. As the members of CBTL grow individually and collectively, there is an openness to draw on new experiences to re-think and re-imagine their approaches to doing this work. Yet, whilst the collective has much agency in shaping these aspects of the project, there are some important contexts which also impact decisions around structure, process and practices. CBTL, are not apart from, but rather are a part of the communities of the African diaspora. Thus, the histories and knowledge from these communities have also played a part in shaping the project. A central goal of CBTL is to, as one collective member tells, “[build] a constructive map that we will leave to our young generation to follow”. The project aims to create a foundation, and resources that younger generations can then access, and not having to face many of the challenges that are experienced currently. This goal is also dependent on the sustainability of the project beyond the lifespan of a single grant, or within cycles of grant applica-

tions.

**At this point, it's just a learning process and creating events and workshops that will have people come in and offer their opportunities and to learn more things so that those people can take what they've learned and build something for themselves or within their own community or within their own space. (Anyuop Dau)**

This goal is also premised on building capacities of young people to become part of CBTL, taking it further, or extending opportunities to other areas and communities. In this way CBTL, is less about the collective which currently constitutes it but rather how this collective can create a framework and praxes for communities of the African diaspora to self-determine.

The practices and processes CBTL develop also shape the relationships and interactions they have with various communities and organisations,

**For myself, I think that being true to the values of self-determination, transparency, intersectionality. Then communicating those values to people or an organization that we would be collaborating with that they believe that they... share those values. (Geskeva Komba)**

By ensuring that partnerships and collaborations are grounded in shared values, and centring this within relationship building, there are opportunities

for organisations and individuals to reflect on their own practices and processes. This focus on values, works towards creating culturally safe spaces and collaborations, but also raises broader questions and considerations about working alongside and within various communities. Within building these relationships with various organisations, there are also opportunities for more structured learning and change processes.

The collective members position CBTL as embedded within communities of the African diaspora but also as a point of contact between different groups and organisations. The project has been envisioned as building networks and facilitating new and stronger relationships, recognising and supporting the resources and opportunities that currently exist. This creates an important condition of dialogue between the collective and communities of the African diaspora, in shaping the project's outputs and approaches. However, this community-based relationship building seeks to enhance how resources and opportunities are made accessible. This collaborative approach can also maximise resources and lead to new opportunities being created.

## Discussion

We have described the emergence of the Next in Colour initiative as an enactment of racial justice through the

self-determined activity that has emerged from a group of people who individually and collectively continue to be subjected to structural violence. We suggested that Next in Colour can be understood as an alternative setting that further engenders important forms of resistance and community making, and that is shaped and constrained by social power relations. The work alongside the initiative to date has further provided new insights about the delicate task of crafting research practice at the university-community interface. While we have taken guidance from the long tradition of community based and participatory action research, our activity has further blurred the boundaries between research and practice and researcher and researched opening up a dialogue that makes possible mutual and co-constructed processes of meaning making.

Through various methods we have documented the stories of struggle for racial justice by this group within and across settings. Many settings which racialised communities and individuals encounter replicate structures and symbols of white supremacy. The creation of new and alternative settings creates a safe and healing space for these communities and individuals, but also fosters radical approaches that work towards racial justice and creates powerful counter-stories. Sarason (1972), noted two key insights for the success of a setting. That what pre-

cedes the creation of a setting, the contexts from which it emerged from, those who supported and constrained it, and the sparks which gave the very idea of the setting life, play an immense role in the success of the setting. Secondly, that setting success is further dependent on external relations with other settings it engages with (Cherniss, 2012). Whilst alternative settings offer some reprieve from oppressive structures, they must still engage with those same structures and exist within a broader oppressive social context. Thus, documenting the formation of CBTL as a setting, the values they hold, their ways of working and relating, and the narratives which sit at the centre of their initiative, provides us important insights into the dynamics of oppression and resistance.

By using the notion of structural violence, we were able to explicate how racialisation was enacted in everyday language to maintain privilege while marginalising people with emotional and psychological cost. Structural violence is expressed and manifests through the vilification, inferiorisation and commodification of “blackness” and black people constraining self-determination over stories, histories and identities. A product of these expressions of structural violence is emotional labour, which continues to structure the experiences and relationships of individuals within racialised communities.

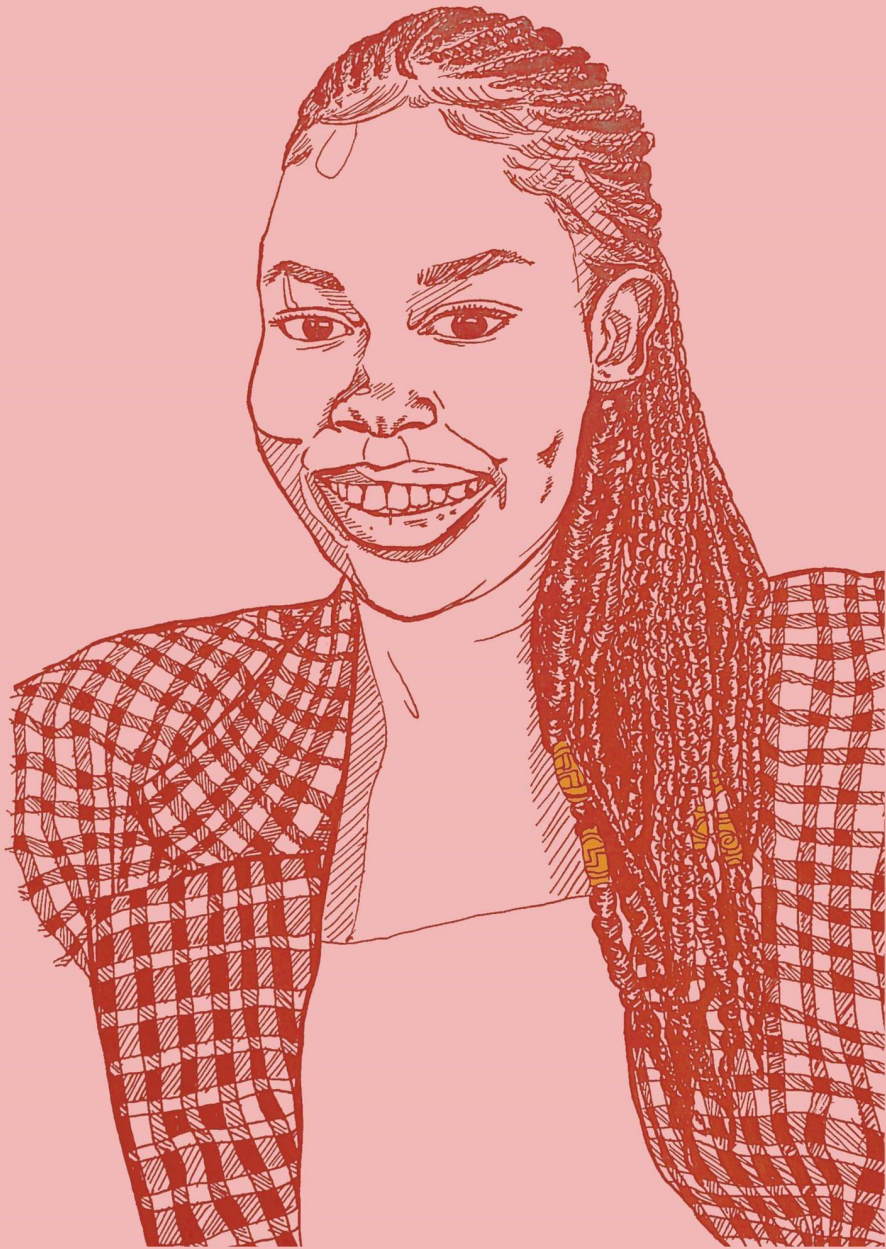
Structural violence is also met with resistance and desire. The formation of CBTL is resistant and emancipatory action. Critical scholars have long shown the benefits and functions of homeplaces (hooks, 1990) and alternative settings in the lives of oppressed communities. It is in these settings that people are able to come together to imagine alternative ways, affirm community cultures and histories, provide mutual support, and craft alternative visions. These alternative settings can be conceived as relational healing spaces grounded in collectively held

values of care, recognition, and reciprocity. Importantly, both CBTL and the spaces they create continue to exist within contexts of race and coloniality, and so the products of re-imagining and pre-figuration reach back out through counter-stories and authentic forms of visibility, that seek to form solidarities and broader practices and ways of relating within the creative industries.



**Drop the Mic 2018.**







# **PART 2**

**The Colouring Book  
Case-study**

# KEY INSIGHTS

- The narrative themes and supporting sub themes derived from interviews with creatives involved with production of The Colouring Book (TCB), describe TCB's zine-making processes and aims. These foundational themes were understood as guiding the methods of TCB which then, in turn, facilitated the construction of (counter) narratives identified in the cultural product of the zine.
- TCB project demonstrates how the intentional construction of alternate spaces, spaces that sit on the periphery of mainstream discourse of power, (in this case, autonomous African diaspora led community arts space), makes available the resources and structures which invite and enable the construction of self-determined narratives of African diaspora identity which are exhibited in the cultural product of the first edition of TCB zine.
- TCB zine project constitutes a liberatory arts practice in the features of the project being process-orientated and methodology focused, involving collaborative participation, de-centering of oppressive ideologies, rupturing of common narratives, sowing the seeds and resources for constructive social change.

## Introduction

Part 2 of the report presents a case-study of The Colouring Book zine, as a key creative output of the NiC initiative. This case study brings together an understanding of zine-making as creative life writing and the importance of counter-storytelling for healing and justice orientated futures; to explore how zine-making serves as a liberation arts practice. This section will provide some background context to zines and zine-making as a modality and practice, an understanding of the relationship between storytelling and liberation arts, before presenting an analysis of interviews with key individuals involved in the production of TCB and creative outputs within the zine itself to identify the narratives evident within the spaces, and how TCB embodies liberatory counter-storytelling.

## What is The Colouring Book

The Colouring Book (TCB) is a three-edition digital zine project, established within the broader Next in Colour initiative. TCB seeks to centre the stories and creative work of African diaspora and First Nations artists. Initially accepting contributions from artists living in 'Australia' for the first edition, the second edition of the zine has since expanded to include submissions from African diaspora and First Nations artists living in other countries.

The creation of TCB project arose from

the personal experiences of TCB co-designers participating in zine-making as a space for nurturing and strengthening friendships within their African diaspora community and as a vehicle for sharing stories and creating art that centred African diaspora narratives and understandings.

TCB project was designed by the CBTL collective as a platform through which young African diaspora artists can critically discuss and challenge racialisation, create opportunities to uplift self-determined narratives and build an archive for future generations to look to for guidance and support. TCB provides African diaspora and First Nations artists with an opportunity not afforded within the constraints of the mainstream arts industry; to determine and shape collective knowledge and narration of identities, reclaiming community ownership over narratives as cultural resources (Agung-Igusti & Sonn, 2019; Rappaport, 1995).

## Zines: Self-determined, Counter-Cultural Resources

Zines are small, self-published and self-distributed media that feature a myriad of creative modalities, spanning cut-and-paste collage, creative and non-fiction writing and often strong personal or political messaging (Kempson, 2015; Poletti, 2005). Originating as a paper medium, zines were

distributed as small magazines, pamphlets or flipbooks. However, with the rise of the internet, the publication of zines online has led to an increase in audience reach and expanded the possibilities of form for zines (Chidgey, 2012). The previously ephemeral nature of a short release, printed object has been transformed with the establishment of the longevity of zines as accessible, grass-roots, archival digital spaces through online publication (Chidgey, 2012).

**“Zines are frankenstein, miss mash, beautiful chaos. A coming together of many parts, words, stories, poems, pictures, all telling a story. Bound together by nothing but pasted ideas and an attempt to transmit collective subconscious material and information.” Sha-Gaze, TCB ed 1**

Historically, zines and zine-making have been used as tools for political organising and social change, engaging readers in social action via the publication of critiques of social conditions and outlining pathways towards radical political and social transformation (Chidgey, 2014; Houpt et al., 2015; Poletti, 2005). Zines hold a history as counter-culture media, often functioning as educational resources for self-determined representation for under/misrepresented groups and identities (Chu, 1997; Kempson, 2015; Poletti, 2005). Chu (1997) suggests that the self-publishing aspect of zines redefines

the dynamics of the mainstream media environment and public discourse by providing marginalised communities with the opportunity to seize agency over representations of themselves in collective discourse and to produce self-determined bodies of knowledge (Chu, 1997). Furthermore, zine platforms that centre people of colour zine makers are considered to be of benefit in that those readers can experience a sense of affirmation in the elevation of culturally nuanced representations (Chidgey, 2014; Ramdarshan Bold, 2017)

**Because essentially what we’re doing is creating privilege, we’re creating a platform where they’re represented, we’re creating a platform where they can read stories and resonate with them because... it’s talking about the environment that they come from, you know what I mean. (Ruth)**

Over the years, there has been an increased emphasis on elevating zine-making projects that centre BIPOC narratives and carve out community-driven spaces for self-publishing (Chidgey, 2014; Zobl, 2009). Digital archives of zine projects have been identified as accessible platforms that can facilitate community engagement with zines/zine-making as creative cultural resources that can inspire critical social critique and provide leadership in the aspiration of readers/makers towards justice-oriented, deracialised futures (Chidgey, 2014; Ramdarshan

Bold, 2017).

### **Zine-Making as a Creative Writing and Counter-Storytelling Practice Towards Liberation**

Liberation arts have been described as process orientated and methodology focused creative practices which invite collaborative community participation (Watkins, 2008). Within liberation arts practices, collaborators work to de-center oppressive ideologies, disrupt common oppressive narratives and build transformative bodies of knowledge that are aligned with the art-makers liberation goals (Watkins, 2008).

Creative life-writing is the process of people entering into a creative relationship with the narration of their life stories, with a focus on transforming oppressive personal and collective narratives of identity (Gordon, 2017). Defined as such, zine-making can be considered a form of life writing, where the stories told are not only verbal, but visual, or even auditory, and presented in dialogue with each other across the collaborative product of the zine. Creative writing provides writers with the opportunity to critically engage with memory (personal and inter-generational) and lived experiences of oppression and resistance. Therefore, offering up deeper understandings of how dominant discourses and social conditions shape understandings of

self and community. The process of creative life writing serves as a liberatory tool that can transform how the self and the broader world is understood, by assisting writers to interrogate and move beyond mainstream frameworks of whiteness and coloniality within their art-making. For Gordon (2017), the value of creative writing practices (which zine-making can be understood as) is in the healing process that writing and telling these stories initiates. As well as the alternate space the writing practice provides, from which imagined futures and different realities of just social conditions can be envisioned and enacted.

Gordon (2017) emphasises that creative life writing occurs when storytellers feel an urgent need to share their story, but that these stories are often only shared when a safe and comfortable space is first provided. This concept of counter-storytelling requiring the existence of culturally safe spaces, or alternate spaces, is broadly shared across research into counter storytelling (Bell, 2010).

The manner in which creative writing through zine-making facilitates storytelling and narrative construction as a form of creative writing is unique in the way that zines:

- Fuse verbal and visual materials to present “contesting stories and interpretations of autobiographical memory and meaning and overlapping layers of self-



representation” (Whitlock, 2006, p. 965) that encourage complexity in storytelling and narrative construction that is not restricted to verbal language.

- Reject linear traditional forms of story structure, reinforcing self-determined authorial agency and deviation from reconfirming established dominant patterns of doing or storytelling, instead offering new and expansive ways of counter-storytelling (Chandler, 1990)
- Serve as a community-orientated practice by way of being a collaborative medium that brings together the stories of multiple artists, perspectives and histories.

These general features of zine-making align with liberation art philosophies, where art-making serves the goal of emancipation from oppressive structures by generating spaces for multiple narratives and silenced perspectives to exist.

## **What is being asked in this case study?**

This case study brings together an understanding of zine-making as creative life writing and the importance of counter-storytelling for healing and justice orientated futures; to explore how zine-making serves as a liberation arts practice in TCB project.

The questions that guide this case study are:

- 1. What are the features of The Colouring Book’s zine-making process that facilitate a liberatory practice of counter-storytelling for artists of the African diaspora in Naarm/Melbourne?**
- 2. What are the narratives in The Colouring Book that are enabled by The Colouring Book’s zine-making process?**

## Approach

This case study understands the making of TCB and the final product of each edition as interconnected. The case study locates these understandings in dialogue with the social and environmental conditions within which TCB (and CBTL) is embedded (Merriam, 2009; Yin, 2014).

Data sources included:

- **Interviews with TCB zine editors/curators**
- **Edition 1 of TCB Zine.**

## Interviews

Two artists working as co-designers on TCB project were interviewed for this case study. Both participants chose to have their first names included in the research.

**Ruth** is one of the founding members of CBTL and founded TCB. Ruth is a key informant on this case having co-designed, edited and produced the first edition of the zine. She continues to work as an editor on subsequent zine editions.

**Aïsha's** role in TCB project has been curating and designing the second edition of the zine. Her pre-existing relationship with CBTL, her role as second edition curator and her knowledge of the zine-making process make her a key informant on the case.

## The Zine

The first and second editions of TCB project are published on the Next in Colour website (Next in Colour, 2020:<https://www.nextincolour.com/and-so-the-story-goes>). Across the two editions' contributions span collage, illustration, photography, audio, poetry, prose, interviews, video and more.

In the first edition, artists submitted work that responded to story prompts including war, ageing, family, love, language, food, authority, accessibility, art and dreams. In the second edition, submissions called for artists to respond to the prompt 'Support'.

The first edition contains work by nine different artists, the majority of these artists are African diaspora contributors, with some contributions by First Nations Aboriginal and Maori artists. For the second edition, submissions were again opened to artists of the African diaspora and First Nations artists, as well as artists of the African diaspora living outside of 'Australia'.

## Data Analysis

A thematic analysis of the interview transcripts was completed to identify narrative themes. During this process, systematically recurring codes were identified and organised into major narrative themes (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Following this, a secondary analysis revealed several sub-themes to be identified within the broader narrative themes (Hiles & Cermak, 2009).

Simultaneously, a polytextual thematic analysis (Gleeson, 2011) of both textual and visual elements of the first edition of TCB was undertaken. Preliminary visual and textual codes were cross-referenced and organised into broader narrative themes which ran through the zine as a whole, and sub-themes were identified as supporting broader major narrative themes.



**Identifying social-cultural barriers and challenges to self-love**

**Self-determination through representation**

**Maintaining connection to culture and memory**

**Love for the body**

**Dreaming as a space for self-determination**

**Expanding notions of ancestors**

**Healing as a process towards self-love**

**Self-determination**

**Ancestors**

**Self-love**

## **THE COLOURING BOOK ZINE**

### **PARTICIPANT INTERVIEWS**

**Zine-making as Relationship based**

**Creating alternate spaces and structures**

**Zines as a resource**

**Relational values and understandings of community**

**Creating alternate spaces**

**Documenting narratives for future generations**

**Relational process of zine-making**

**Zine-making as a space for critique**

**Zines as building community language and understandings of justice**

**Developing alternate structures to support alternate spaces**

## Findings

Three major narrative themes, each supported by sub-themes, were developed from both participant interviews and the analysis of TCB zine.

Three narrative themes that came out of TCB zine interviews that align with liberation arts practice include:

1. TCB as placing an emphasis on collaborative community participation; zine-making as a relationship based practice where community relationships are strengthened and prioritised.
2. TCB as decentering oppressive ideologies of whiteness and coloniality in the Australian arts industry and developing justice orientated transformative bodies of knowledge and ways of working . TCB zine-making processes as carving out alternate spaces and structures/methods of working which centre the African diaspora and broader Bla(c)k community the zine serves.
3. TCB project as building shared understandings of local contexts and desired alternate worlds which serve as tools for social change by sharing these bodies of knowledge through the publication of TCB zine as a resource for future generations.

Together these three themes complement each other, and reveal the holistic, interconnected, and justice orient-

tated action of zine-making as a liberatory cultural practice.

### Zine making as relationship-based practice

Shared understandings of community as membership to a collective group, within which one actively participates in furthering the collective's wellbeing, are core to TCB project. TCB zine-making processes are described as an avenue through which community relationships in the African diaspora community and across the Bla(c)k community are strengthened and nurtured.

**What I'm seeing is, we're all connected through CBTL, all the folk's part of this project and who have yet to even contribute to actual projects we've done. The connections precede the work, and that's part of it, that's the community element of it I guess. (Aïsha)**

**It's not just about family in a sense of like blood line connection, but it's also like creating relationships and allyships with other people and inviting them into your community. Community to me, is an ecosystem... a self-operating system...It's made up of individuals that are... Adding in or taking in something. So that's how I see community as, it's a... it's an ongoing ecosystem that keeps building. (Ruth)**



Because personal and community connections are understood as inextricable from TCB project, the zine is also considered an opportunity to serve and create more for this broader collective of African diaspora and Bla(c)k community in Naarm. Interviewees stated that the zine being rooted in relationships which are guided by values of responsibility and accountability to community members, has driven the development of methods of operating that best create supportive/safe structures and spaces for African diaspora artists to work within. Spaces and structures which require the decentering of white colonial frameworks in the mainstream arts industry.

**...we're asking questions that I haven't heard, necessarily asked in other organisations where there's an assumption and a blueprint of how these projects and activities are administered. It just becomes a default, and because the aims of other spaces are not necessarily to provide the level of like nurturance and support that I believe CBTL wants to provide and is aiming to provide, they [other organisations] don't have a sense of responsibility to offer more or to push for how we could create more for artists. (Aïsha)**

## Alternate spaces and structures

These shared meanings of community and intimate understandings of what is required to support the African diaspora and broader Bla(c)k community, directly inform TCB project's understanding that current colonial systems, structures, and industries are not going to serve black artists. Therefore, influencing zine-makers drive to create spaces and methods of working that will centre Bla(c)k artists.

**I don't know anybody who goes into this work because of the financial security and opportunities that are here. Which is really important when we think about who has access to these spaces to begin with, and access to career progression, and opportunities to even consider creativity and art-making as a viable career option. And so that's key I think for CBTL as well... (Aïsha)**

bell hooks (1989) describes the need for alternate spaces for the liberation of marginalised communities, stating “[w]e are transformed, individually, collectively, as we make radical creative space which affirms and sustains our subjectivity, which gives us a new location from which to articulate our sense of the world” (hooks, 1989, p.23).

**...think there's something to be said about the way that the arts spaces**

**that I've mentioned in this interview, that CBTL is an example of... there's something to be said about how those spaces, for and by, in this case, African and other Black artists, invite this dialogue and this experience of self and collective or community...that focus is inherent to the art making process. (Aïsha)**

TCB zine provides a platform for self-representation, both physical and digital, through which alternate narratives of identity and community are amplified. However, the process of developing these counter-stories is equally as important as the outcomes in the zine. The zine-making process is viewed as a tool for constructing and sharing narratives of the African diaspora in ways that do not centre colonial framings of these experiences.

**...the intention behind The Colouring Book is for us to have space where...we can...combine this collective consciousness, and this community together, and these stories together, and... kind of put out the bigger picture, and be like, not all of our narratives is about trauma...Most of our narratives are about celebrating joy, most of our narratives is about us exploring how our communities, you know, support, you know, people like myself. (Ruth).**

TCB achieves important work in representing self-determined narratives for

the African diaspora readers. Both interviewees view TCB and similar alternate spaces that centre African diaspora and First Nations perspectives, as essential sites where these communities can engage in critique of the socio-political environment and powers that shape their lives, outside of the white gaze.

**...representation is an element, we are representing ourselves and for other people who resonate with the representations of art that we create... but we're not doing so for the sake of representation. We're doing so because it is vitally life changing for people to experience, um, being mirrored, being validated, being given access to spaces where they can just do whatever they would like to do with their time and energy and talent. (Aïsha).**

Part of sustaining the alternate space of the zine is the development of structures and methods of working which sustain and support this self-determination. Both interviewees identified the constraints on autonomy and agency that working within the mainstream white colonial arts industry imposes upon African diaspora artists, where African diaspora artists are required to work within structures, culture and power hierarchies that systematically oppress and marginalise their community. TCB zine-makers described the making of the zine as an avenue through which they and the

broader CBTL collective are developing methods of working which uniquely centre and serve African diaspora artists, in solidarity with First Nations contributors, in ways that the mainstream arts industry cannot and will not.

**...to assimilate into something that is not fully you because it's not created for you, does not represent you...it's a mold that you can't fit, and when you try to fit in it's really hard, because as much as you can try to fit in, you're always going to be othered. So what's the point of me trying to fit in? If I'm always going to be viewed in this perspective...or be seen in this perspective which doesn't really reflect necessarily who I am. (Ruth)**

**I think there's a lot of people becoming very invested in, not just ending the gatekeeping but creating completely different spaces altogether. And being like, well if these are the dynamics that exist in these institutional spaces, then we will literally create our own. (Aïsha)**

One such example has involved developing methods of working in the creation of the zine that addresses the unique 'socio-economic barriers' experienced by African diaspora artists in accessing art-making, and therefore providing ongoing paid opportunities to ensure art-making is sustainable

and creating culturally safe spaces for artists to create in. Aïsha describes the social and economic barriers to art-making experienced by African diaspora artists navigating an art industry built to serve privileged white communities.

**...it's those material differences in people's lives and economic standing, [which] is real. And I think CBTL takes that into account in a way that other arts organisations don't because they are serving and relying on like much more of a middle class, um, white, uni/tertiary educated, in the creative scene, demographic, where it's also assumed that, in those spaces, and in a lot of mainstream youth arts organisations, it's assumed that you will work for free. (Aïsha)**

The development of alternative structures and methods of working are described as informed by centring of African diaspora perspectives and so are built to address the racialised challenges and barriers these artists face. For example, ensuring all artists are paid in order to address the socio-economic barriers to their production of artistic works.

**...It gives you these opportunities to kind of like create that financial ecosystem too, where you're giving back and creating opportunities for... artists that are emerging..to kind of [be] validate[d], to be like,**

**keep going. Even though, 200 may not be enough...it's something. (Ruth)**

## Zine as a Resource

The term “archiving” was used to describe how TCB preserves the narratives and experiences of African Diaspora people in Naarm/Melbourne. Ruth states that archiving stories in the zine provides future African diaspora generations with a valuable historical context of African diaspora people in “Australia”, through which future generations can situate, understand and affirm their current realities and experience.

**Not a lot of my history is really archived, because of war, because of displacement, because of colonialism, there's not much information that I know about my people. So I think that the importance of archiving something, is to look back in 50 years, and be like this is what the narrative is. And also for the future generations to compare the realities and the themes that we're experiencing and exploring. (Ruth)**

Similarly, interviewees discussed the power of accessing documentation of artists navigating Bla(c)kness and First Nations histories in “Australia”. The zine is described as an important resource for the development of under-

standings of Blackness, Settler positionalities, identity and history in “Australia”, which are not available in mainstream spaces.

**...we're creating a platform where they can read stories and resonate with them because it's talking about the environment that they come from...There's not a lot of spaces where you hear a lot of voices of... of Indigenous people and [Black] settlers stories too...we don't have space to really deconstruct what it means to be on stolen land as a settler and have all these privileges and even how that looks like...So to have a space to kind of deconstruct that...I think that was really helpful, because there are certain things in our community that we need to deconstruct, we need to really like, pull apart and understand why it exists and why it emerges. (Ruth)**

As an online publication, TCB zine carries out important work in increasing the accessibility of Bla(c)k narratives, histories and stories for young Bla(c)k people in Settler Australia. Aisha highlights how zines are resources from which communities can build understandings of justice-orientated concepts, and therefore increase shared understandings of social and political forces which shape oppressive social conditions.

**...I've found zines have been my en-**

try point into so many really important and transformative ideas. Such as decolonisation, transformative justice...Yeah, it's an entry point. It's so accessible, and then from discovering zines and sharing them with your friends, it's very easy to build language and build understanding and reference points and then, you know, go onto more thorough, more expansive texts and stuff. (Aïsha)

In TCB, zine-making encourages critical community engagement. Through the archiving of past lives, histories and experiences of the African diaspora and First Nations community readers are invited to dialogue with stories personal and collective stories in Australia, and question the validity of mainstream white settler histories. The publication of TCB zine provides a much-needed resource that makes visible the racialised ideologies of power that shape African diaspora and First Nations realities in Australia.

**But I think it existing in a digital form, it's kind of like leaving a digital footprint...like archiving stories and stuff online. And also, it allows it to not just be accessible to people in Naarm, and people in Australia, but for it to be a global space. Where you know, anybody that... wants to read about the experience of... African Diasporian, First Nation[s] people, POC people in Australia. That's the space for them to**

tap into, and really see, what is happening in Australia...because we don't really have much representation of our existence here, so it's like, representing that voice, in the larger scale, outside of you know, it existing just for us... (Ruth)

While the increased visibility of these alternate narratives alone will not alter the racial hierarchies of power in Australia, the publication offers unique and creative methods for widely communicating and sharing visions for a different world. Understanding of the zine as a resource that maps the possibilities for expansive self-determined narratives for the future African diaspora and Bla(c)k generations resonates with this utilisation of the zine as a liberatory cultural practice.

### **Cut n' Paste Counter-Stories: The Alternative Narratives Presented in TCB Edition One**

The identified narrative themes of self-determination, ancestors and self-love resonate with the liberation philosophies of TCB zine-making by consequence of de-centering mainstream national narratives of African diaspora communities and Blackness.

These narrative themes within the zine can be considered the product of counter-storytelling in that the narratives across the artworks disrupt mainstream 'stock' narratives of African diaspora and Bla(c)k communities



through the centering of alternate self-determined stories of artists' realities and experiences. However while the term counter provides a framework for understanding the discursive implications of these narratives that defy mainstream ideologies, it would be reductive to try to understand the narratives within the zine as primarily constructed to contradict mainstream narratives (Ahmed, 2006). This would be to re-centre the ideologies of whiteness and coloniality as the focal forces resisted within a body of work that seeks to unsettle these powers. Instead, these narratives of self-determination, self-love and ancestors observed in TCB are constructed as a by-product of a turning away and a dismantling of whiteness. The narratives/stories in TCB can be called alternate narratives in that within them and through the telling of them there is movement towards an alternate world where normative narratives centre African diaspora perspectives and epistemologies, reflecting the aims of TCB not to simply rearrange oppressive structures, but to dismantle them entirely and build their own.

## Narratives of Self Determination

The narrative theme of self-determination recurs throughout the zine. Self-determination is understood

here as the “right of recognition, self-governance and decision-making on issues that affect the collective group” (see glossary). Numerous stories share the valuing of autonomous decision making and construction of identity beyond colonial understandings on topics of Blackness, gender and family.

Previous literature in liberation arts and psychology has referred to the presence of imagination and dreaming beyond current social realities, across alternate narratives of marginalised communities (Bell, 2019; Hammock, 2008; hooks, 1989). The necessity of imagining for transforming current social realities and creating self-determined futures is evident in zine narratives of self-determination.

**“...I was a born self taught dreamer, when I began to choose who I wanted to become I learnt the meaning of words without its terms. I closed my eyes, and changed the way I heard my blackness, changed the way I was being seen into a care-less world...”**

In these narratives,

**“...dreams are nowhere as fake as everyone likes to delude, they are the foundation reality of our goals, remember this when they try to silence your type of living. “**

**SASKIA SASSEN**



**SHA-GAZE WHOMANIFESTATIONS**

## Narratives of Self-Love

Across narratives of self-love within the zine, self-love is represented as ongoing actions and processes that honour an individual and their collective sovereignty, which is informed by the racialised social context within which the self is situated. In one poem, mainstream discourses of beauty as proximate to whiteness are identified as catalysing the internalisation of oppression and self-loathing.

**“Are you tired of making me feel like a goddam fool?**

**For letting you undress me, for allowing you to strip away my self-esteem, my self-worth and my self-love to the point that I can barely look myself in the mirror long enough to stand what I see,**

**Tell me are you tired yet,**

**Are you tired of lying to me? (Return what is mine).”**

In other artworks, imagery of self-love that celebrates imagery of fluid gender expression, bodies and self-worth de-centre colonial binaries of gender and white gendered constructs of bodies. Instead, depicting alternate ways of expressing and understanding the self that centre BIPOC and LGBTQI+ perspectives.

Across TCB, counter-narratives reject and resist racialised power relations,

while envisioning better futures, akin to Bell’s (2019) transforming/emerging counter-narratives which are generated to oppose stock stories, to elevate resistance stories and to create momentum for social change (Bell, 2019).

## Narratives of Ancestors

Throughout the zine, stories are shared of the power and the impact of connections between ancestors, present selves and future generations. The zine traces intergenerational dialogues on cultural memory. In various contributed artworks, connections to ancestors weave through non-linear time and cross borders of place to support the continuity of artists’ connections to culture, self and community and to sustain the growth of these together. The influence of the past is not locked in ‘history’ but informs current lives, and is reflected in the tracing of ancestral connections alongside the simultaneous mapping of current selves/lives for future generations.

**“I was a vision, claimed memories, learned them the ways it streams through me, my existence is the art of many seasoned generations, you cannot fake this identity, you can not imply fake how my mother cracked her voices every time she cared to my 4c”**





**SHA-GAZE WHOMANIFESTATIONS**

The conversation with intergenerational cultural memories within TCB project echoes across other Naarm based community arts projects which have explored the narrative constructions of African diaspora artists and First Nations artists (Agung-Igusti & Sonn, 2019; Sonn et al, 2015). Sonn et al. (2015) state that the sharing of familial and cultural memories across generations within counter-narratives, serves as a recovery of memory, that re-centres and makes available cultural knowledge, while disrupting the colonial erasure of narratives that deviate from mainstream understandings of identity in “Australia”.

## Summary

Literature in counter-narrative construction outlines that the availability of culturally safe alternate spaces is a prerequisite for the construction of counter-narratives (hooks, 1989; Sonn et al., 2013; Zavala, 2006). In TCB, features of zine-making as relationship-based practice, and as a process through which self-determined spaces and African-diaspora centred methodologies, provides the necessary, sustainable, alternate spaces in which counter-narrative construction is invited to occur through the zine.

Facilitated by the alternate spaces (and supporting structures) TCB project creates through their zine-making process, TCB zine makes available nar-

ratives of African diaspora and First Nations identities that disrupt mainstream narratives of African diaspora identity in “Australian” stock stories (Bell, 2019; Hage, 1998; Majvu, 2018; Windle, 2008).

TCB zine is developing a grass-roots community arts project that demonstrates liberation arts philosophies and decolonial strategies in seeking to serve the diaspora and broader Bla(c)k community within the unique context of settler Australia. The project provides an example of how liberation philosophies and decolonial strategies can be thoughtfully enacted through a collaborative community practice and introduces zine-making as a multifaceted arts medium through which counter-storytelling and narrative construction is occurring within Naarm/Melbourne. TCB zine project breaks new ground in demonstrating the value and importance of zines and zine-making as a tool for community arts/self-determination.

The publication of the zine serves as a vehicle for the material archiving of both the generative practice of zine-making and the stories this practice invites, to be accessed by the broader members of their community and intersecting communities - and the value of this tangible cultural product is both symbolic and literal as an access point to alternate knowledges. In the current system and cultural landscape, where





**SASKIA SASSEN**

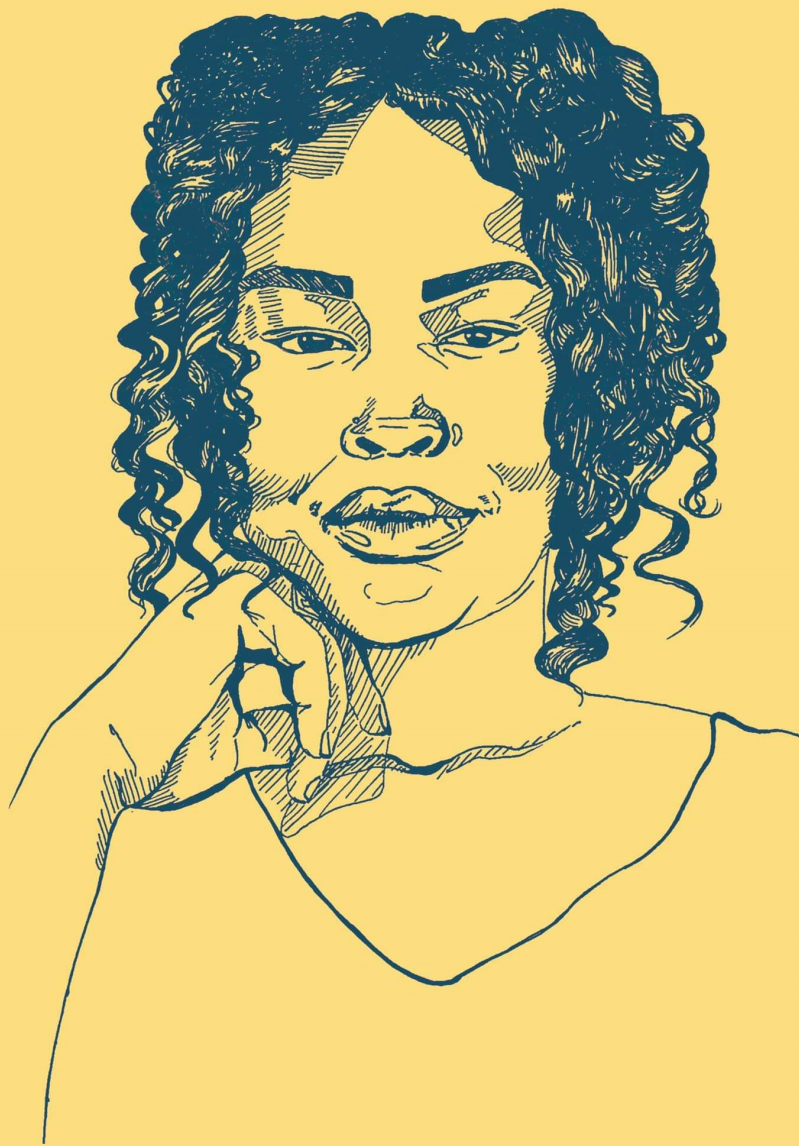


ideologies of white supremacy are manifest throughout cultural institutions, practices and systems, the creative arts industry is no exception. Artistic projects and initiatives created by and for African diaspora artists, which must navigate and work within these contexts, battle against the constraints of white colonial systems and methods which are not designed to

serve or privilege Bla(c)k perspectives or agency. TCB project takes radical and meaningful action towards dismantling these systems and reimagining creative futures and beyond, by providing the autonomy, agency and access for young Bla(c)k artists to determine their own opportunities, methods of working and ways of being.



**SHA-GAZE WHOMANIFESTATIONS**



# **PART 3**

**Organisational Relationships  
and the Enabling and  
Constraining Factors to Self-  
determination**



**Across the course of the NiC initiative CBTL have developed relationships with various organisations, through partnerships, collaborations or in seeking forms of support. These relationships have been pivotal in the trajectory of the initiative.**

**CREATIVE VICTORIA**

**auspicious  
arts  
projects<sup>pt</sup>**

**ma.**

**VICTORIA  
UNIVERSITY**

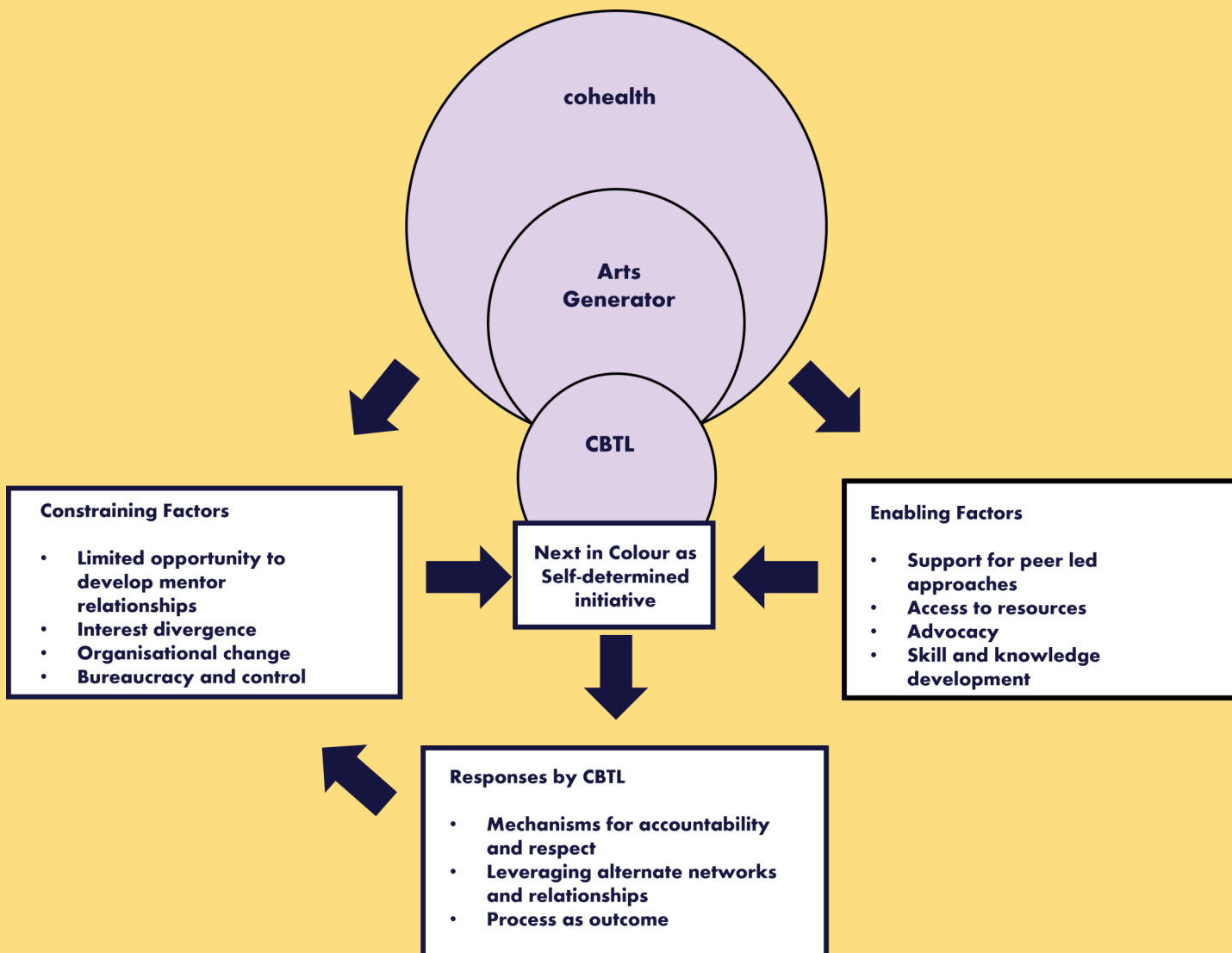
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# KEY INSIGHTS

- The organisational relationships of NiC both enabled and constrained self-determining practices and processes of the initiative.
- Enabling factors were organisational support for peer lead approaches, creating access to resources, strong advocacy on behalf of the initiative, and support in the development of skills and knowledge of the CBTL collective.
- Constraining factors were the limited opportunities to develop the mentoring relationships for the CBTL collective as envisioned as part of the initiative, interest divergence between NiC and the organisational partners, impacts from organisational change of the initiative's auspice partner, and encountering bureaucratic processes and forms of control.
- The CBTL collective responded to these constraining factors through seeking mechanisms that would ensure accountability and respect in their organisational partnerships, leveraging alternate networks and relationships to resist forms of dependence, and valuing the development of strong processes as a key outcome of the initiative.
- For NiC self-determination means moving from dependent relationships characterised by low power and control over decision-making, towards a model of interdependence that is characterised by a shared goal of self-determination. Such a model recognises the supportive roles and reflexive capacities needed to achieve this.

- Importantly, thought must be given to ways that organisational control can be given up, and to further think critically about ways support might evoke mechanisms of control and the reproduction of paternalistic relations of dependence.



## Introduction

The previous sections of this report provided insight into some of the contexts that the CBTL collective were responding to, the intentions the collective hold for the initiative, and a case-study of 'The Colouring Book zine'. The case study is an example of how a zine was used for counter-storytelling. The next section is guided by the third question:

### **How is self-determination evident as a process and outcome in the relationship between the Next in Colour initiative and the organisations it partners and collaborates with?**

For Next in Colour, self-determination is a collective right to recognition, self-governance and decision-making on issues that affect the collective group. Alongside creative outputs and the creation of settings for and by the collective, Next in Colour (NiC), as a self-determined initiative, is a key outcome of the initiative. Part 1 of this report detailed some of the forms of structural and symbolic violence, which the CBTL collective and communities of the African diaspora in Australia encounter: These include:

- Stereotyping and everyday racialisation
- Devaluation of cultural, intellectual and creative identities, practices and products
- Commodification of blackness

These forms of violence limit people's access to material resources and opportunities, constrain capacities to thrive on their own terms, and have profound social and psychological implications. The challenge of eliminating oppression and achieving structural inclusion for racialised groups entails both gaining access to resources and recognition of social and cultural resources and identities (Fraser, 1998).

Guided by an ecological perspective that allows us to explore people in contexts, self-determination entails a meeting of both recognition and access to material resources to create opportunities and settings for people to thrive. Self-determination has been a driving goal for CBTL as the collective has sought partnerships and support from larger organisations in order to secure grant funding and develop the NiC initiative. These relationships with other organisations and settings are important sites through which to examine the possibilities and tensions of fostering capacity to enact self-determination.

### **Creating settings for self-determination**

Previously we have described the CBTL collective and NiC initiative as alternative settings, and we turn to the other settings that the collective have encountered and navigated. We draw on the concept of social settings as a

useful framework to better understand the different enabling and constraining factors towards self-determination that occur across these encounters and relationships (Sarason, 1972). Social settings constitute small groups or organisations that are dynamic social systems that can be understood through: their social processes, encompassing norms, beliefs and attitudes, the interactional practices that shape relationships, and different levels of participation; the kinds of resources that exist within the setting (e.g., human, physical, economic, temporal); and how those resources are organised (Seidman & Tseng, 2011). It is important to note that each of these aspects are interdependent, and must be understood together. This framework offers a way of examining both the social and structural/material elements that are crucial to the transformation or creation of settings.

Forming the CBTL collective, and conceptualising the Next in Colour (NiC) initiative was the product of a long history of participatory community arts practice and peer-led approaches had informed the engagement approaches of cohealth Arts Generator (cAG). An important setting nested within the broader context of cohealth, a large community health organisation. These are both important contexts to understand NiC, as these played important, and varied, roles in supporting the development of the initiative. These set-

tings are important mediating settings that the CBTL collective needed to navigate in their effort to build a self-determined collective. Mediating settings are the organisations that link between individuals and communities and the larger institutions of our public and social lives (Berger & Neuhaus, 1980). The following section will provide an overview of cohealth, the auspice partner responsible for receiving and administering the Creative Victoria grant on behalf of the CBTL collective as a broader organisational context. This will then be followed by a description of the Arts Generator, an important context for the emergence of the NiC initiative and a key setting that mediates between the initiative and the broader cohealth organisation. The final section draws on the data that we gathered to discern factors within the network of relationships that both enabled and constrained CBTL to develop NiC as a self-determined initiative, and how the collective responded to some of these constraints.

## **Context for CBTL and NiC:**

### **cohealth and the Arts Generator**

cohealth is a not-for-profit community health service based in the northern and western suburbs of Naarm/Birraranga (Melbourne). cohealth maintains a focus on reducing health inequities for those who experience marginalisation and stigma, and is



premised on working in partnership with communities, underpinned by a model that envisions the interlinkages between caring for individuals, communities and society more broadly. As part of this approach, the organisation provides a range of health and support services in areas of physical, mental and child and family health; but also community health and connection and diversity and inclusion programs, which aim to strengthen communities and prevent root causes or the social determinants of health inequities (cohealth, n.d.). The World Health Organisation defines social determinants of health as “the circumstances in which people grow, live, work, and age, and the systems put in place to deal with illness. The conditions in which people live and die are in turn, shaped by political, social, and economic forces” (WHO, 2008, p. i). Key social determinants of health include socio-economic position, early life and development, social exclusion, social capital, employment and work, housing, and residential environment (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare, 2016), thus developing programs and services that support individuals and communities across these domains takes a more preventative approach than simply addressing health issues once developed.

cohealth as a large community health organisation, constitutes a complex organisational ecology. Within an ap-

proach to health and wellbeing that also encompasses the social determinants of health, it necessitates various parts of the organisation that focus on different services and programs, as well as governance structures that enable the operation of these services and programs, and the organisation as a whole. The Prevention Team is one part of cohealth which aims to improve health, well-being and social inclusion through various organisational and community collaborations and partnerships, with a focus on community development and mobilisation (cohealth, 2018). This entails awareness and capacity building projects to support community members in civic participation and advocacy efforts, as well supporting efforts to influence policy change at the level of government and various service design and delivery organisations. The team’s integrated health promotion strategy builds on cohealth’s broader social determinants of health approach to focus on key principles of:

- Redressing economic and social power imbalances
- Equity through self-determination
- Harnessing community strengths and assets, together
- Sustaining connections through authentic relationships and communication
- Inspiring creativity and innovation

The Prevention Team's 2017-2021 Integrated Health Promotion Strategic Plan sought to address two health priority areas of the Victorian Government's 2015-2019 Public Health and Wellbeing Plan, mental health and the prevention of violence and injury (prevention of violence against women), by addressing social determinants of gender equity, race based discrimination and vocation; also recognising the interrelated nature of these determinants and their outcomes. Their approach includes collaboration and partnering with traditional and non-traditional stakeholders, systems thinking informed work that entails working at individual, organisational, community and sometimes policy levels to contribute to systems change, place-based projects, and generating sustainable change through increasing a sense of self-control and self-determination for individuals and communities through co-design approaches.

It is from this part of the organisational context that the Arts Generator extended. The Arts Generator (formerly Barkly Arts Centre) seeks to build connections within and across communities, supporting the development of positive social identities and increasing wellbeing and agency through participatory arts practice. Working with young people and emerging artists from a range of culturally diverse communities, people experiencing mental

illness and homelessness, refugees, Indigenous Australians, and people living in public housing, Arts Generator has been able to provide opportunities for participation, material outcomes in terms of employment and skill development for young artists and facilitators, and the creation of important symbolic resources through creative practice (Sonn, Agung-Igusti & Komba, 2018). In particular, Arts Generator aims to train, mentor and employ young artists and arts workers from many of these communities, meaning often individuals who have become involved through one project, will go on to facilitate or develop other projects. At the heart of Arts Generator's approach is a focus on relationality and community building that brings diverse young people together through creative practices and a desire for equity and social justice. The Next in Colour Initiative emerged from the Arts Generator, with many of the CBTL collective members working within that setting across artist/facilitator and community development officer roles. It was the former program director of the Arts Generator that brought together the collective members and supported them to apply for the grant which would fund the Next in Colour initiative and negotiated the organisational support of cohealth to auspice the grant money, as well as provide key support to build capacities. These organisational relationships are important to contextualise the emer-

gence of the CBTL collective and NiC initiative, and are also essential to understand their ongoing evolution. As these relationships are navigated and negotiated, the collective's efforts towards self-determining processes and practices within the NiC initiative is invariably enabled and constrained in different ways. We engaged in an inductive analysis to identify various aspects of the relationships with other settings that enables and constrained the CBTL collective's capacity to self-determine, these factors are understood through a settings framework that locates setting outcomes as contingent on interdependent relationships between social processes, resources and the organisation of those resources. The figure on page 85 depicts the relationships between cohealth as an organisational context which the Arts Generator is embedded within, and the place the CBTL and the NiC initiative holds as both inside and outside of this context, it's relationship mediated by the Arts Generator setting. The figure also depicts the enabling factors and constraining factors to realising NiC as a self-determined initiative, and the ways the collective have responded to the constraining factors. Each will be described in turn in the following section.

### **Enabling Factors Towards Self-determination**

Whilst self-determination for the col-

lective is an exercise of agency in regards to decision-making and governance, as well as asserting ownership of stories, identities and the symbolic products they create, this does not entail a removal of support and guidance in the pursuit of independence. For example, there were some crucial factors that worked to enable the collective to develop self-determining processes and ways of organising through the NiC initiative in equitable ways that seek to support individuals and groups proportionately to their circumstance.

### **Support for Peer-led Approaches**

Support for the peer-led approaches which underpin NiC were important norms that were long evident within the Arts Generator, and had begun to be adopted more broadly in cohealth. These norms were essential for enabling the initiative to hold self-determining processes as a key outcome. Such approaches had been an integral part of the Arts Generator and its various projects and programs, as one cohealth affiliated person reflected:

**There's still so much about service delivery, particularly health service delivery, which is a very patriarchal model and very much about someone with the power, someone receiving the service, and the person with the power makes all the deci-**

sions and decides whether or not that community member needs this particular service, and how that service will be delivered. Whereas, [Arts Generator] was very much about what do these young people need and how can they be directly involved in exactly what they need. I guess too, it was also happening at a time, where it still just wasn't very common to believe or understand that communities have the solutions. They just don't have the resources or the power.

The NiC initiative was very much an evolution of this approach, offering the opportunity to create spaces and structures of support that sat outside of what can be experienced as a large white non-profit organisation, and was led by young creatives from the African diaspora. This model, and the language of self-determination was supported in many ways by cohealth. At the time of NiC's conception, the Prevention Team had recruited someone to develop a bottom-up, peer-led framework for community mobilisation which the organisation could work within, as well as pilot new initiatives through the framework, and identify existing initiatives drawing on these practices (both inside and outside of cohealth) that could be further supported. As shared by a cohealth affiliated person:

**Partly, it was setting out a framework and partly it was piloting a couple of initiatives or trying to**

**identify existing practice that was already happening either within cohealth or kind of local partners or other organizations that have had similar values to make the case for an approach that was much more about peer-led so-called interventions.**

Reflecting on the importance that such a role was created, they further shared:

**...it was more that the role was created, and there was a degree of endorsement, and there was an ongoing conversations with Arts Generator about how you make their work sustainable. Certainly, one-off and ad-hoc things like that won't make it sustainable, but it was about trying to create opportunities for people that tell their stories, which was actually an explicit part of the theory of change**

The Arts Generator was one such existing initiative that was developing programs in a way that aligned with this framework, and NiC was an extension of this as a self-determined initiative that could sit outside of the organisation, but still be supported by it. Thus, cohealth had sought to develop policy and organisational structures which would support the approaches engaged by the Arts Generator, and in turn support the NiC grant application as an auspice organisation and partner.

## Access to Resources

Both cohealth and the Arts Generator have been important relationships that have made accessible valuable resources encompassing space, knowledge, infrastructure and finances, and networks that have created more opportunities for the collective. Primarily, cohealth's role as an auspice organisation created some of the conditions through which CBTL were successful in obtaining the Creative Victoria grant – which was pivotal for the success of the initiative. This came through specific support from the former coordinator of the Arts Generator, here Tiyami reflects on how CBTL came to connect together:

**...we started looking at the common denominator which was like we want to create this space. We want to continue doing the work that we're doing but right now, it's really challenging because of the lack of the space, because of lack of funding, because of all those issues. We all had different roadblocks and we just figured if we got together, it might be easier to tackle that than trying to do it yourself, especially if we're all doing very similar things. It just was a conversation that we had through [the former cohealth coordinator], especially. She really encouraged us to explore applying for the grant. We had several con-**

**versations before really even starting to apply for the grant, but I think she was kind of the glue for us all in that space at the time. (Tiyami)**

Through the Arts Generator the collective were able to come together, but also leverage cohealth as a large organisation, to provide important infrastructure through their finance team, as well as administrative support through the Arts Generator which CBTL as an emerging collective were not able to easily develop.

This infrastructural support also extended to the provision of space prior to the collective finding the physical space from which they planned to house NiC, and during the subsequent difficulties they faced in securing the space. This temporary space consisted of the Arts Generator studio located in the basement of the Footscray Community Arts Centre, which provided a place for the collective to meet, work, and plan and use equipment such as computers and printers. The proximity to the Arts Generator coordinators and staff (one of which for a time held a dual role as a CBTL collective member) also enabled incidental and informal forms of support through access to the knowledge and experience within this setting. Having this temporary base allowed the collective to continue to develop NiC and its various outputs, despite not being able to yet obtain the physical space which they had imagined for the initiative.



Access to networks through both the Arts Generator and cohealth's Prevention Team also proved invaluable towards developing further resources and opportunities. Here Anyuop talks about the importance of such support in extending networks:

**A lot of projects that we've done in the past that cater to the African Community, cohealth has always been supportive of that. Some of the people who work in the offices sometimes come in the field with us and see from our perspective what we do. It allows them to be more open minded and to better give us more opportunities through other organizations. Cause sometimes it's already hard enough for us to connect with other white organizations if we're just reaching out to them. I think if we have that support from like say cohealth and for them to say okay, these people are really doing good. They're trying to create change for their community and then they can pass that message onto another organization. I think that's where that connect comes from as well. (Anyuop)**

One key example is the physical space that CBTL would eventually secure to house NiC. This space was the former Barkly Arts (what would later become the Arts Generator) studio located on Barkly St in Footscray. It was through cohealth's existing relationship with a community housing organisation

(CHO) that owned the property, that the opportunity to lease this space could arise. Further, the reputation of cohealth as a community health organisation plays a legitimating role as the collective sought to negotiate access to this space. However, this would also have significant limitations as will be discussed later. Access to the networks of the Arts Generator, and its various program coordinators, also led to further opportunities and resources. For example, these networks enabled the development of partnerships with local government settings which supported some of the NiC outputs, access to creative directors involved with programming for festivals held in Melbourne's Inner West, and the further development of relationships with the Community, Identity and Displacement Research Network at Victoria University which were engaged as a research and evaluation partner.

## Advocacy

Advocacy was a crucial enabling factor that saw forms of organisational power as a resource leveraged in support of the collective's goals, this occurred both inter-organisationally and intra-organisationally. An example of inter-organisational advocacy is the role that cohealth, through key members of the Prevention Team, played in negotiating with a property managing organisation issues that had arisen in securing the

lease for a physical space:

**I'd like to acknowledge that [cohealth] did something about that after that and wrote an email to [CHO] and basically let them know how we were feeling, how we didn't like what they did. Everything was sorted from there and then we didn't hear from them for a while. I think it was a couple of weeks ago they wrote us back an email, apologizing and basically saying that the space is still there. "If you want it, you could still have it." (Anyuop)**

Here cohealth was able to draw on its existing relationships and its status and reputation to support the collective in these negotiations, eventually reaching an outcome that was sufficient for both parties, and attentive to the concerns the collective had. However, this advocacy can be complicated through the complex and varied relationships an advocating organisation may have, thus it may be cautious and strategic in its approach to advocacy.

An example of intra-organisational advocacy, is the important role that the Arts Generator played as an intermediary within cohealth as a broader organisation. Here the Arts Generator becomes a mediating structure writ small within the bounded context of cohealth. Here a cohealth affiliated person shares how the Arts Generator coordinator role functioned:

**...it was a project management role,**

**but very much in the space of dialoguing between organization and the project space.**

The Arts Generator also engaged in various forms of advocacy with external organisations, particularly those connected with the creative industries, but one of its key roles was as a point of communication between the collective and different points within the cohealth organisational structure. At various times these points have included the Prevention Team which held responsibility for the relationship with the collective and NiC, areas such as the Finance Team which were responsible for administering the grant funding, and even members of the executive team. Here members of the Arts Generator team were able to leverage their institutional and organisational knowledge to navigate and negotiate on the collective's behalf. Important outcomes of this intra-organisational advocacy was to build wider support and knowledge of the NiC initiative and its goals, and to lessen the time and resource consuming work that would be required of the collective to navigate these contexts.

## **Skill and Knowledge Development**

Skill development serves to build specific knowledge and skills for individuals within a setting. Developing the skills of the CBTL collective was a key

enabling factor that would build their capacity as a collective and create the conditions to move to less dependent relationships in the running and management of the NiC initiative. Whilst advocacy provides much needed support, it can also not transfer into self-determining processes if a relationship of dependence is maintained. Relationships can be both beneficent and disempowering if efforts aren't made to build key skills and support individuals and groups to develop the knowledge and tools to navigate and negotiate within institutional and organisational systems. Here a cohealth affiliated person reflects on the tensions evident in their role as a support to the initiative:

**I guess it was a constant dance to work out what my role was and how to usefully contribute without overstepping, but also think about... because part of what they wanted to do too was develop skills in all these different areas so that they could be self-managing into the future and also could pass on those skills to other African creatives and so forth. I guess I was constantly trying to work out, "Well, what particular skills do I have that I can try to open up and what networks do I have," etcetera, but also, "What can I learn from these guys?"**

Importantly, skill and knowledge development did also occur within the Arts Generator space, before the collective

formed, as many of the collective members were able to develop important skills and engage opportunities for leadership in their roles as artist facilitators and community development officers, a key goal of the Arts Generator.

Informal skill and knowledge development was further manifest within the ongoing working relationships between the collective and the Arts Generator as both worked together to achieve project outcomes and navigate issues that arose. It is important to also note that a formal skill and knowledge development component was also envisaged as a core part of the relationship between CBTL and cohealth within the NiC initiative. This component would entail mentoring relationships between the collective members and cohealth staff who held expertise across a number of areas such as marketing and finance, to develop the specific skills needed to develop NiC as a sustainable and self-determining organisation of its own. However, despite being a key form of organisational support these mentoring relationships were unable to eventuate.

### **Constraining Factors Towards Self-determination**

There were factors evident within the collective's organisational relationships that constrained its goals of self-determination. Kernot and McNeill (2011) distil several learnings within

their collection of case-studies of Australian social enterprises, in particular they recognise mission conflict as a key tension point for social enterprises that exist within a larger organisation. This can be embodied a number of ways: through incongruencies between a large organisation's goals and needs across governance, risk compliance and profitability, and the social purpose of small enterprise; and through a small enterprise's need to be flexible and responsive, contrasting with the slower bureaucratic and hierarchical decision-making processes of a larger organisation. NiC embodied ways of working that intentionally contrasted with the hierarchical structures of cohealth, and were grounded in decolonial thinking and a desire to resist forms of structural exclusion perpetrated by white supremacy and eurocentrism. Some of these tensions became evident as the collective navigated mentoring relationships, different interests and goals, organisational change and the bureaucratic processes that maintained high levels of organisational control and dependence. This had further symbolic importance, as one reason for the desire of a self-determined initiative, was that it responded to ongoing dynamics in which racialised communities, such as communities from the African diaspora, are "beneficiaries" of support and are not trusted to have control over spaces and resources that they are

"beneficiaries" of.

## Limited Opportunity to Develop Mentor Relationships

Skill and knowledge development was envisioned as a key organisational support that cohealth would provide in its role as an auspice organisation. Whilst informal forms of skill and knowledge development did occur, an intended plan for formal mentoring relations between members of CBTL and cohealth staff with expertise in areas relative to the needs of the NiC initiative did not eventuate. This can be understood through the way temporal and social resources were organised within the cohealth setting. For example, some of the reasons this may not have occurred were lack of time available and support available for the mentoring staff and disruption from broad organisational change, both exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. However, for mentoring relationships to be successful, there was more needed than expertise across specific skill sets. As Geskeva shared,

**Finding the right people who have the right knowledge around supporting startups for specific community needs, or with a specific lens, or being able to work with a black collective because you can work with a consultant to build a**

**business model, or a plan, and things like that. But if they don't have a particular lens of looking at restructuring in a way that's not hierarchical, restructuring a way that looks at how resources and accessibility is looked at in terms of particular models or frameworks, then there's going to be the same type of structure being built, and that's not what we want. (Geskeva)**

It was also essential that mentoring relationships that were supported to develop were grounded in a shared understanding of the NiC initiative, its goals and the experiences and values of the collective. Further, mentors would need to be able to support the collective in developing individual and collective literacies of the white organisational and institutional contexts that they were navigating. This would further require an understanding and reflexivity towards the experience of navigating these contexts. Without these shared understandings there is a risk, at best, that productive learning relationships might not eventuate, or that racialised individuals would need take on labour to educate around their experiences within white organisations and institutions – at worst, the very same dynamics grounded in structural exclusion that are being challenged can be reproduced within these mentoring relationships. In addition, as a public health sector organisation, cohealth whilst holding knowledge highly rele-

vant for this context, did not completely hold knowledge needed to navigate the administration of an organisation within the creative industries. Whilst the Arts Generator team brought much expertise in this area, there were also limits to this knowledge. Perhaps required were more specialised knowledges and skillsets that aligned better with the goals and planned directions of NiC. Thus, it is not enough to simply provide resources to develop skills and knowledge, but these resources must also be organised in a way to make them viable and accessible, and most importantly reflect shared norms, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes within the social processes involved in developing those resources.

## Interest Divergence

Enabling transformation or meaningful outcomes in a social setting cannot be done through the proliferation of resources alone. Any change in resources must also be accompanied by changes in the social processes of a setting. If necessary norms, beliefs, perceptions and attitudes aren't evident, then resources may not be utilised in meaningful ways, or conflict can occur in how resources should be utilised (Seidman & Tseng, 2011). Divergences between the interests of CBTL and cohealth, as separate settings holding separate goals and responsibilities, represent an example of



such incongruences. One example is a complication that arose as CBTL later would undertake negotiations pertaining to how the relationship with cohealth would be structured. This included the complex tasks of drafting various legal documents such as an auspice agreement. As a large organisation, cohealth holds expertise in navigating such agreements, an expertise that ostensibly they were to support the collective in developing, yet instead each were separate parties within the negotiating relationship. The interests and ways of working of a large partner or host organisation may not always align with a smaller organisation, but smaller organisations may not be able to leverage their resources or capacities to the same extent to represent their interests (Kernot & McNeill, 2011).

A further example was initial difficulties in securing a lease for space. Whilst ultimately a good resolution was reached, it serves as an example of how cohealth's broader relationships and interests could complicate efforts to advocate, as someone affiliated with cohealth shared:

**...it was tricky for cohealth 'cause then they work with that organization in lots of different other ways. So it really took... I say tricky, it just took the time for senior management to get on board to sort of have conversations and make them go full circle.**

Or another example lies in applying for

grant funding. When a larger partner or host organisation is both tasked with building capacities of a smaller organisation to navigate a grant application, but is also a competing interest for the same funding (Hiruy & Eversole, 2015), this was experienced by CBTL as they were supported through a grant application by an applicant for the same funding.

For one member of the CBTL collective, these examples are a case of the need for equitable rather than equal organisational relationships:

**...when you want such structures or resources to be accessible, they have to work for you, not the person who it's already benefiting. If they continue to benefit the other person, that hasn't really moved toward benefiting you the way that you needed it to. You're just being, "No, this is not going to work if you don't do this for me, at all." I know it's also the people are giving up their power, and it's like everybody has got to meet in the middle. We've got to meet in the middle, but we're not meeting in the middle because the lack of equity that's already at play for underrepresented communities, for African community, Indigenous communities, and things like that, are already at a deficit. Instead of being 50/50 halfway, they have to move 70, and we move 30. That's the lack of understanding that comes with negotiating or go-**

**ing through processes dealing with such big organizations. (Geskeva)**

## Organisational Change

Significant organisational change for cohealth would also prove to be a key constraint for the NiC initiative providing many material challenges, but also upheaval as social processes were in flux. This had serious implications for continuity within the relationships between CBTL and the Arts Generator and Prevention Team. The organisational change within this period included some significant changes within cohealth's ecology, amongst the structure of teams and where different projects sat. But the most acutely felt change would be the changes in staff across the organisation. This meant that managers and coordinators which the collective had built key relationships with, and who had deep understandings of the rationale and contexts for the NiC initiative, including early difficulties for the collective in obtaining a physical space to lease, would move on from cohealth. As Anyuop comments:

**I think because they weren't there for the process of CBTL coming to where it is, they never [saw] our struggle and how long it took us to get to where we were, which I really can't blame them for that because they weren't there at the start. (Anyuop)**

This meant the collective had to re-engage in important self-advocacy within cohealth, and work to build new relationships and shared understandings of the initiative and its goals. This was compounded by new and old staff within cohealth navigating and responding to an altered organisational context, which was then exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic that eventuated in 2019.

## Bureaucracy and Control

Norms and interactional patterns that reflected the hierarchical bureaucratic context of large non-profit community health organisation posed another tension for the CBTL collective which desired to engage in more horizontal and collective ways of organizing. This was manifest in the vertical forms of communication required of the collective when engaging with cohealth, how power manifests across relationships, and the way resources such as finances and time were organised. As one person affiliated with cohealth commented:

**I think mostly it is about control and ensuring that the decision-making processes still come back to a central point of control. I think the relinquishing of power in terms of decision-making was much, much harder for cohealth than it**

**was for CBTL to step up and be able to make decisions. They were a young group of people doing this for the first time, but I think their readiness to do that was not matched by their readiness to relinquish. I don't think cohealth understood that they had to relinquish. I think they still thought they could support self-determination on cohealth terms.**

This control manifests not only in bureaucratic systems that make it difficult access to resources, but the kinds of managerial hierarchies that also had to be navigated. As another cohealth affiliated person commented:

**...there was a bit of a managerial kind of culture that was quite hierarchical. For one it meant that some things that really needed to change in terms of organizational processes was very difficult to actually get people to commit to that because you had to go through so many layers.**

Beyond constraining the ability for small organisations and enterprises like NiC to engage in decision-making of their own and the work of developing their own processes, there are profound impacts that are evoked by familiar histories of white-controlled organisations exercising control over racialized and marginalised communities. An evaluation of a previous project developed through the Arts Generator,

the “Be a Brother” program, found similar tensions for the African-background peer mentors involved in the program. The report found that perceptions by the peer mentors that power was ultimately held by cohealth as the dominant group in the partnership, undermined the co-design model that centred community knowledge and experience (Clark & Gabb, 2017).

### **Impacts of Constraining Factors on the NiC Initiative**

These tensions and constraints impacted the collective and the NiC initiative in significant ways. A crucial part of developing the NiC initiative is having the time and resources to set up important structures and processes from which the collective could then create and deliver outputs from. Initial problems with securing the lease of the Barkly St space, meant the need to re-conceptualise many of the outputs they had proposed as part of obtaining the Creative Victoria funding, many of which were dependent on having a physical location. Ironically, this pivot served useful when the COVID-19 lockdowns in Victoria were instated in 2020, as the collective moved to develop a range of outputs across digital platforms. Negotiation with cohealth around the nature of their relationship as an auspice organisation further stalled the initiative as time and resources were allocated to this process:

**I don't really understand what's holding in such huge organization that are respected within the West, and is holding the [auspice] agreement so tight, and doesn't wanna just kind of like sign so we can go free and actually create. (Ez Eldin)**

For the collective this was experienced as not being fully supported in the initiative:

**For me, if you have somebody who's supposed to be your auspice, I think they're supposed to work with you and alongside you to fight for your rights and what you deserve as a group. (Anyuop)**

But also as not being taken seriously:

**The level of respect from the organization to community groups and collectives, and how they are treated when they work with a non-profit organization or community services. It's almost being treated as something mediocre. But no, we want to be treated as exactly the same way that you would treat if they had to go in an agreement with either another organization or the bank, or the government, when you're putting in a tender, or even when you had to get into an agreement with Creative Victoria for the funding. We want to be treated like that and we want to have that level of responsibility to be able to grow. (Geskeva)**

In being able to self-determine, it was

also a matter of demanding respect, of being recognised as capable and able to be the impact within their communities they wanted to be. It meant rejecting organisational dynamics, whether with cohealth as an auspice or CHO as a landlord, that constructed them as beneficiaries. As a cohealth affiliated person shared:

**The fact that they were going to set up their own space in the heart of gentrifying Footscray and that that they had explicitly chosen that spot, and that they were prepared to fight battles with [CHO] to actually get them to acknowledge what having them there entailed in terms of it wasn't just business as usual. You're not just beneficiaries of your benevolence, like this is a space that's going to be yours to manage as you see fit.**

For the collective there were strong concerns that these setbacks due to an inability to reach an agreement with cohealth would impact their ability to acquit the Creative Victoria funding:

**For me, it seems like they don't care about CBTL. The money is going to come to an expiry date, and then Creative Victoria are gonna be like, "What have you guys done?" Then because we haven't written any agreement with cohealth and there's no evidence that we've been spending or creating projects, then we have to explain why. By explain-**

**ing that, we'll create some problems that will be all about blaming. (Ez Eldin)**

But this had implications beyond the collective's responsibility to the funder. The stakes were higher for CBTL, as failure to achieve their goals could feed narratives that self-determined community-led projects like theirs can't be successful. There was a real worry that the kinds of spaces and projects that they had been fighting for, would ultimately be set-up to fail.

Perhaps one of the biggest impacts was the emotional and psychological toll from various constraints experienced by the collective itself. Difficulties that arose from trying to secure a physical space – that at one point led to the availability of the desired space being rescinded – represented a serious setback for the NiC initiative. Collective members variously described this experience as having **“their confidence broken”** and their **“hopes and dreams crushed”**. This was exacerbated by their not feeling fully supported by cohealth and that their relationship was differently valued. There were many inequities felt by the collective in comparison to the large organisations with which they had key relationships with. Inequitable access to various material resources such as money and space. Inequitable access to knowledge holders to support in key activities related to governance and the navigation of specific institutional

settings. And inequitable stakes across various outcomes which were acutely felt by the collective members:

**Then when [the opportunity to lease the space] was taken away, we all were just aloof, we were all just a mess. Basically, it allows an institution like that dragging things with you and giving you this sense of hope, but then later on being like, "We're not interested anymore." It's like, had we been a white institution, that wouldn't be the language. Just understanding these are going to be the blockage that are going to happen and going to keep reoccurring. (Ruth)**

The loss of opportunity not only threatened to impact the viability of the whole initiative, but evoked broader recurring experiences of racialised structural exclusion. This strains the affective resources the collective had available to navigate the emotional labour involved in navigating these contexts and situations.

Such emotional and psychological impacts has broader implications for how cultural safety might be experienced in an organisational setting. Cultural safety can be defined as:

**[A]n environment that is safe for people: where there is no assault, challenge or denial of their identity, of who they are and what they need. It is about shared respect, shared meaning, shared knowledge and ex-**



perience of learning, living and working together with dignity and truly listening. (Williams, 1999, p. 213)

For Geskeva, support has to be attendant to the experiences, contexts and histories of different groups:

**[There was a] lack of understanding or even empathy towards understanding what support looks like and differently for different people of different backgrounds, and which leads into cultural safety as well. I mean if your values don't align, and especially if you're from a different background, how does that impose on or impact someone's cultural safety in an organization? (Geskeva)**

Some forms of support can reproduce relationships of dependence familiar to racialised and marginalised groups. Lack of support can have harmful psychological and emotional impacts, as well as contribute to ongoing structural exclusion.

Yet for the collective, despite the impacts experienced from the constraints to self-determination they encountered, the emotional labour costs, and feelings of diminished cultural safety there was a drive to persevere and respond to these constraints in order to realise their vision:

**That made us feel like we have to even try harder now. We got to put our foot 10 times forward now and**

**actually do this for ourselves 'cause we didn't get the help that we wanted or that we should've got (Anyuop)**

### Responses by the CBTL Collective

Meaningful outcomes across settings require a change in both the resources available and the social processes that exist within that setting. Whilst many enabling factors were evident, supporting the CBTL collective to develop the NiC as a self-determined initiative, there were also many constraining factors which they had to navigate. The CBTL collective responded to these constraining factors in various ways, targeting social processes, resources, and the organisation of those resources.

### Mechanisms for Accountability and Respect

Whilst many of the tension points faced by the collective constrained their ability to shape the NiC initiative and develop creative outputs and projects, the collective were able to exercise agency within their organisational relationship with cohealth through a number of responses seeking to shift norms and the interactional patterns and practices that defined their relationships with other settings. The col-

lective drafted various agreements and documents as a way to seek respect, transparency and accountability. Initially this took the form of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) which would outline the responsibilities of both parties. CBTL in terms of the outputs they would deliver throughout the relationship, and cohealth in terms of what supports they would provide and how finances would be accessed. The negotiation of an MOU was initiated at the beginning of the NiC initiative, but was later halted by staff changes within cohealth due to organisational restructures. Subsequently, when the prospect of an MOU was raised again questions were raised by cohealth about whether such a document was necessary. The MOU evolved into a binding auspice agreement, for the collective such a document would respect their autonomy as a serious self-determined organisation. By having a binding agreement in place, an extra level of accountability was ensured, and the document would need to be ratified through cohealth's management hierarchy, ensuring further organisational accountability.

The collective also drafted a Terms of Reference which would guide the relationships they had with future partners and collaborators. Through this document, the collective were able to articulate the ways of working they engaged in, as well as the values which the collective held. It was a mechanism to en-

sure clarity, alignment of vision, and equity within working relationships, as one collective member commented:

**...by working with cohealth and finding a core value or an understanding so we can come and work under those terms and conditions that we agree upon. (Ez Eldin)**

Alignment of values was an extremely important process for the collective. Values not only underpinned the work that NiC initiative sought to do, but the processes through which that work would be achieved. The collective held a number of workshops where they were able to develop a shared understanding of the values that were important to them as a collective, but also engage in those conversations with both members of the Arts Generator and the VU evaluation team. Across these sessions many values were both discussed and deconstructed, with the collective finally arriving at a core set of four values encompassing respect, wellbeing, communication and passion, as well as broader shared understandings of how they wanted to approach their internal and external relationships. These values and approaches were formed through their broader experiences within their communities, as creatives, as artist-facilitators, or as community development workers, but also the direct experiences they had had whilst forming the NiC initiative. The forming of these values and approaches, and the intent of capturing

them in a document such as a terms of reference, was an important move to ensure productive and culturally safe relationships internally and externally. Specific aspects of these values which recurred in conversations with CBTL were: accountability, to each-other as a collective, and within the relationships held with the collective's partners and collaborators; and transparency:

**...we're very transparent with the people that we work with. When we sit down with an organization, or another collective group, or organization, or whatever it is, we're usually just like, "This is who we are, this is what we do. These are our expectations. This is the way that we work." If that aligns with your morals and your values, or who you are, then we're happy to work with that, and also just being able to understand that if we can meet someone halfway then we can meet somewhere halfway. (Anyuop)**

## **Leveraging Alternate Networks and Relationships**

The CBTL collective also leveraged their own existing relationships and networks as important social resources to navigate the tension points, constraints, and their impacts on the NiC initiative. The initiative was already envisaged as a hub, a point of connection:

between different communities and members of the African diaspora in Melbourne; between creatives; between the West and South East; between other racialised and migrant communities; between generations; between communities of the African diaspora and the wider community; between organisations and councils. Each project connected to the NiC initiative brought in a range of partners, such as Brimbank council or Bunjil Place the Arts and Entertainment precinct in the City of Casey, or other creatives such as Sha Gaze Who Manifestations and Aïsha Trambas who co-produced The Colouring Book zine. These relationships allowed the collective to shift and reimagine outputs as the terrain changed, whether due to inability to secure a physical space, or from multiple COVID-19 lockdowns, and also support the work of other creatives and deepen important networks and relationships. But the collective also drew on important networks to provide support in the creation of documents such as an MOU, an Auspice Agreement and Terms of Reference. This included drawing on individuals with legal knowledge to provide important perspectives in drafting a legally binding agreements or seeking support from Auspicious Arts Projects, a "not-for-profit creative community management organisation who assists artists and arts organisations", in how best to navigate the relationship.

One pivotal relationship that the collective drew on was through Multicultural Arts Victoria (MAV). The challenges of COVID-19, difficulties in securing a physical space, and the challenges presented by navigating the auspice relationship with cohealth led the collective to seek a pause to the NiC initiative whilst MAV provided important support in conducting a review of the initiative's achievements, "progress and account for any changes that may need to be made to the project plan in order to achieve the project outcomes". MAV acted as an independent third party, hosting facilitated conversations and surveys with stakeholders, to specifically:

- Identify achievements against project objectives
- Examine the impact of external changes on project deliverables
- Examine the impact of internal changes on project deliverables
- Revision and plan as necessary accounting for the changes that have occurred

The review allowed the collective to take stock and celebrate the many outcomes they had achieved over the course of the initiative so far, but was also importantly, a circuit breaker to the stalled negotiations concerning the auspice agreement. MAV represented a support, that had deep industry knowledge, insight and relationships within the creative industries, but also

had a fundamental understanding of the experiences of racialised artists and creatives whom were navigating the sector. The review was an important medium for the collective to rearticulate their desires in a way that would reach beneficial outcomes for all stakeholders, and to provide guidance to the collective in establishing some important mechanisms and structures (such as the establishment of a board to provide key knowledge and networks) to ensure the success of the initiative going forward. Whether having mentors to support in capacity building, a board to provide key advice in directing the initiative, or networks of individuals and organisations to draw on when needed, relationships were an important resource for the collective. When asked what advice they would give another collective embarking on a similar initiative, Geskeva answered:

**Come with an army. No, no, I'm serious. I swear to God, and really just being connected with those people who have a lens in different industries, and in different roles and positions. That's one of the things that cohealth was supposed to be responsible for in terms of providing us mentors, in terms of communication, governance, finance. That still hasn't been something that's been done. If we added those things in place, we'd probably feel a bit more empowered to do the roles that we were doing. I would definitely look**

**at it in a different way, and be like, "These are particular mentors that will ride with me the whole way through." (Geskeva)**

These relationships, importantly would need to be deep and lasting, and relationships that are characterised by shared values, a shared vision, and a shared understanding of the particular contexts creatives from racialised communities experience.

## Process as Outcome

Fundamentally, the collective agitated towards rethinking the kinds of outcomes that would be valued within the NiC initiative. The processes they were developing needed to be recognised as a valid and valued outcome, encompassing the social processes, and the approaches to the organisation of resources engaged by CBTL in the setting of the NiC initiative. The MAV review helped rearticulate how the work that CBTL had been doing was seen by the key funder of the NiC initiative, Creative Victoria. Like many funding arrangements, the collective had to outline a vision for the initiative that connected into a set of specific focus areas or key outcomes. For the Creative Victoria funding, the NiC initiative would have to address impact goals of increased social cohesion in Victorian society and increased gender equality in Victorian society. As part of the funding agreement, the recipients were

also required to attend a theory of change mapping workshop to outline through a logic model the discrete and linear pathways through which these impact goals were to be attained. As one cohealth affiliate reflected:

**...there's this idea that you can apply a linear theory of change to really complex social problems and issues that are often much more the making of others. I guess they wanted this neat theory of change of how Colour Between the Lines was going to achieve outcomes around social cohesion and gender equity. That basically would also have limited their understanding of all the amazing outcomes that we're going to get, because things ...the importance of just the space and having a space. And that just didn't seem to compute. They were also like, "Okay, you got a space and then what?" It's like well... Then all of these things happen in that space for people who are often denied spaces where they can be an explorer and connect all these things. I think they couldn't even understand how important all this mentoring and acquisition of skills and social capital to pass on to others was a really key outcome in and of itself.**

Fixing the initiative to a theory of change logic model and sets of specific impact goals acted to firstly constrain the possibilities of the initiative, but al-



so was incongruent with the responsive, reflexive and community-led ways of working that the CBTL collective engaged in. Importantly, fixing the initiative to a set of specific outcomes also fixes the initiative to a set of specific deliverables and measures for the evaluation of success. However, many of the key outcomes of the initiative lay in the processes that the collective were developing:

**That's what we want to.... It's also one of the things that we want to change is how people look at process. It's not just the product, we want to change the processes. The structure that we want to build is about process because the process is what defines how things are accessible. How language and certain tools, and things like that, how they've been built, and in what way that certain things have been built because somewhere along the way, that process of things went left. (Geskeva)**

For the collective it was important to not only think about how they got to the products, how they could reimagine ways of working or deconstruct exclusionary systems and structures, but also it was important that this was recognised as how an initiative such as NiC ultimately works to create impact. One cohealth affiliate shared how they understood the goals of the initiative

as:

**...working as a collaborative group to create, to produce incredible work and to have a space to unpack. So I saw it as a, a space to come together as much as it was to do what we see in the public realm... it's zine making, it's creating the different ways of public programming, but it was really around the core of the conversation of collective making, thinking and creating.**

Whilst the spaces the initiative created led to important and impactful outputs which the broader public were able to engage with, these works were necessitated and preceded by important acts of collective making and deconstructing of ideas.

### **Key Learnings**

The NiC initiative exemplifies the needs for both the redistribution of resources in support of the self-determined activities of marginalised and racialised groups, but also the reimagining of the kinds of relationships these groups hold with non-profit community-based organisations. Essential to processes of reimagining is the need for recognition, through the valuing of culture, social identities, and support for representation, translating to equitable social and intercultural relationships and dynamics. Conversely, marginalised and racialised groups

need material resources and forms of support in order to engage in self-determined activities of social change. These forms of material support include specific institutional knowledge, funding, access to networks and organisational power, and space. Limiting one domain or the other, constrains self-determination as an enactment of justice. At the level of individual settings, this aligns with the understanding that meaningful setting outcomes require changes in resources and their organisation, as well as important social processes such as the norms and interactional patterns and practices that are represented in a setting.

For the CBTL collective and NiC, self-determination ultimately means moving from dependent relationships characterised by low power and control over decision-making, however, it also doesn't mean moving towards a model of independence that removes all support. Instead, what is required is a model of equitable interdependence that is characterised by a shared goal of self-determination, but recognises the supportive roles needed to achieve

this, and the reflexive capacities needed to do this in a way that doesn't reproduce relations of dependence. Such reflexive capacities are grounded in open dialogue and reflection, but also a recognition of the bi-directional learning that this accompaniment entails. Furthermore, the supports and enabling factors must be oriented towards transformative change to create sustainable forms of self-determination. For example, capacity building by itself is not enough if there is not willingness to advocate and form meaningful solidarities, advocacy is limited when it eschews transformative and lasting structural change for ameliorative resolutions that do little to imagine new ways of doing things. Importantly, thought must be given to ways that organisational control can be given up, and to further think critically about ways support might evoke mechanisms of control and the reproduction of paternalistic relations of dependence.

# **GLOSSARY**

**Autonomy:** Can be understood across two levels, “autonomy of agency, the ability to initiate actions, and critical autonomy, the opportunity for participation in political processes” (Doyal & Gough in Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010, p. 320 ).

**Change, first-order:** First-order, or ameliorative change, is change that occurs within a system but does not seek to change the system itself, nor challenge its values or assumptions (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). See second-order change.

**Change, second-order:** Second-order change, or transformative change, is radical change that seeks to change a system. It may challenge values, assumptions and how power operates within a system (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010). See first-order change.

**Coloniality of power:** A matrix of power that, through powerful institutions, governs dimensions of social existence such as labour, sexuality, authority and subjectivity, in accordance to race and racial hierarchies as a governing principle of coloniality (Quijano, 2000). “Coloniality survives colonialism. It is maintained alive in books, in the criteria for academic performance, in cultural patterns, in common sense, in the self-image of peoples, in aspirations of self, and so many other aspects of our modern experience. In a way, as modern subjects we breathe coloniality all the time and every day. (Maldonado-Torres, 2007, p. 243).

**Commodified Blackness:** Where forms of Black cultural production and identity are transformed into a product to be exchanged within the market. In doing so White norms are upheld through “the othering of constructed Black culture and identities” and applications of white ideals to Black bodies” (Nguyen & Anthony, 2014, p. 771). Through Whiteness, Black cultural products and identity are defined, assigned value, and eventually consumed.

**Communities of resistance:** “Communities where justice and peace on a small scale are possible. Such communities resist the dehumanizing forces present in the dominant culture...communities of resistance attempt to birth locally more humane ways of being together. From this base it becomes possible to network with others and to slowly address the larger societal structures that create violence and injustice.” (Watkins & Shulman, 2008, p. 209).

**Counter-stories:** “Broad narratives that echo through the experiences, hopes and desires of those who are left out of mainstream stories that bolster the status quo. These counter-stories...speak to broader truths about social conditions, contribute to a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of racism today, and suggest ways to counter racism and act toward justice.” (Bell, 2010, p. 2)

**Decoloniality:** “Means first to de-link (to detach) from...” the overall structure of knowledge that supports modernity and coloniality “...in order to engage in epistemic reconstitution...of ways of thinking, languages, ways of life and being in the world that the rhetoric of modernity disavowed and the logic of coloniality implement.” (Mignolo in Hoffman, 2017)

**Deracialisation/Racialisation:** Racialisation ...is the process whereby 'race' becomes salient as a marker of social difference and integral to relations of power between socially constructed racial categories or groups. Deracialisation...extends beyond an understanding of how 'race' comes to be socially salient and is an active attempt to eradicate its use as a signifier that hierarchically orders certain social relations." (Stevens, 2014, p. 1637)

**Discourse:** "Sets of statements that construct objects and an array of subject positions" (Parker, 1994, p. 245). These constructions in turn make available certain ways-of-seeing the world and certain ways-of-being in the world...Dominant discourses privilege those versions of social reality that legitimate existing power relations and social structures." (Willig, 2013, p. 130)

**Emotional labour:** The management of feeling to "create a publicly observable facial and bodily display" (Hochschild, 1983, p.7). For example, where racialised people within white institutional spaces engage in emotional labour, where attempts to "identify, acknowledge, or reject racist tropes and racialised institutional structure and practices are set up to be constructed as overly emotional and/or problematic." (Evans & Moore, 2015, p. 441).

**Epistemic injustice:** A "wrong done to someone specifically in their capacity as a knower" and can consist of testimonial injustice: which "occurs when prejudice causes a hearer to give a deflated level of credibility to a speaker's word"; and hermeneutical injustice: which "occurs at a prior stage, when a gap in collective interpretive resources puts someone at an unfair disadvantage when it comes to making sense of their social experiences (Fricker, 2007, p. 1 ).

**Epistemologies of ignorance:** The active not knowing regarding particular phenomena, the maintenance of this lack of knowledge, and in some cases unlearning of knowledge that are connected and sustain practices of exclusion and oppression (Tuana, 2004). For example, Charles Mills (1997), in the *Racial Contract* argues that epistemologies of ignorance work so that "whites will in general be unable to understand the world they themselves have made". That is whiteness and our racialised social realities, continue to be unseen by those whom sustain and benefit from it.

**Equity:** Where equality refers to equal access and opportunity for individuals and groups (e.g. race, gender, ability), equity entails supporting individuals and groups in ways proportionate to their own circumstances. However, its important that we recognise the difference in circumstances for social categories such as gender, race and ability are attributable to unfair systems rather than individual deficits. Thus equity seeks to create fairness in these systems. A further goal is to seek justice or liberation by dismantling the systems that create inequity in the first place (Culturalorganizing.org, 2016).

**Eurocentrism:** "A cultural phenomenon that views the histories and cultures of non-Western societies from a European or Western perspective. Europe, more specifically Western Europe or "the West," functions as a universal signifier in that it assumes the superiority of European cultural values over those of non-European societies." (Pokhrel, 2011)

**Exclusion, social:** "A state in which individuals are unable to participate fully in economic, social, political and cultural life, as well as the process leading to and sustaining such a state." (United Nations, 2019)



**Exclusion, structural:** Exclusion from societal structures preventing equal participation across different groups. Exclusion can occur in a variety of forms, such as exclusion from political and economic structures denying economic resources, exclusion rooted in status order which creates a hierarchical pattern of cultural value, and exclusion across both political and cultural economy where class and status differentials map onto each-other (Fraser, 2007).

**Hegemony:** The processes and structures that maintain and legitimate domination by one social group over others, whether politically, economically or culturally (Gramsci, 1992).

**Home-places:** "safe places where black people could affirm one another and by doing so heal many of the wounds inflicted by racist domination" (p. 42). They are places of resistance and relational spaces premised on caring and support (hooks, 1990).

**Ideology:** "Refers to a system of ideas and practices that sustain social relations of domination and oppression" (Nelson & Prilleltensky, 2010, p. 134). They are a system of belief, that are socially shared by members of a collectivity of social actors, which serve to control and organise over socially shared beliefs and are gradually acquired or change over the life period (van Dijk, 2006).

**Normativity:** "Conventional forms of association, belonging, and identification" (Halberstram, 2005, p. 4). For example, white normativity is "the cultural norms and practices that make whiteness appear natural, normal and right (Ward, 2008, p. 564).

**Objectification:** To treat another as an object in a way that: treats the objectified other as a tool to be used for the objectifiers purpose; that denies the other autonomy and self-determination; that treats the objectified other as lacking in agency; that treats the objectified other as interchangeable; treats the objectified other as having boundaries that are permissible to be violated; that treats the objectified other as something that can be owned; treats the objectified other as something whose subjectivity can be denied, whose experiences and feelings can be ignored (Nussbaum, 1995).

**Psychic space:** A space within individual's minds that enables "creativity, play, symbolisation and meaning-making, as well as the growth processes that rely on these functions to take place" (Rapoport, 2014, p. 1533). This psychic space can be subject to colonisation, as racialised bodies and minds absorb the meanings and products of a society shaped by racism (Oliver, 2004).

**Race-based or racial discrimination:** Occurs when a person is treated less favourably, or not given the same opportunities, as others in a similar situation, because of their race, the country they were born, their ethnic origin or their skin colour.

**Racism:** "A global hierarchy of superiority and inferiority...that have been politically, culturally and economically produced and reproduced for centuries by the institutions of the 'capitalist/patriarchal western-centric/Christian-centric modern/colonial world system'" (Grosfoguel, p. 10). Beyond simply being beliefs about certain races, which then leads to prejudices attitudes and discriminatory actions, racism entails "actors in superordinate positions (dominant race) develop a set of social practic-

es... and an ideology to maintain the advantages they receive based on their racial classification...they develop a structure to reproduce their systemic advantages" (Bonilla-Silva, 2001, p. 22).

**Racism, Levels of:** Racism can be experienced at different levels: Individual or interpersonal, refers to an individual's racist assumptions, beliefs or behaviours and how these occur in interpersonal interactions; internalised, refers to the acceptance and internalisation of racist and supremacist understandings circulating within society, both valuing the dominant culture and devaluing ones own culture; Organisational and institutional, refers to institutional and organisational policies and practices which creates advantages and disadvantages for different groups based on race; Systemic/structural: refers to the system and structure of white supremacy and domination in its entirety as an overarching organising framework in society. (Multicultural Resource Centre, n.d.)

**Representation:** systems of representation produce cultural meaning through language, discourse and image. These cultural meanings organise and regulate social practices (Hall, 1997).

**Resources, material:** tangible resources that have practical use and value such as money, equipment or other assets.

**Resources, symbolic:** "Symbolic resources, sometimes called cultural resources, are cultural elements (i.e., created by people and loaded with meaning) that become resources in the process of being used by people to act upon the world, another person or themselves" (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2013)

**Self-determination:** a collective right to recognition, self-governance and decision-making on issues that affect the collective group. Different to individual self-determination and broader than Indigenous self-determination or political/legal understandings of self-determination.

**Social cohesion:** "positive social relationships...or the glue that binds people" (Australian Human Rights Commission, 2015, p. 1) that can be understood across five domains: belonging, a sense of belonging and pride in the Australian way of life and culture; worth, happiness and financial satisfaction; social justice and equity, the prevalence of income inequality, low income support, trust in government and economic opportunity; political participation, whether through voting, protest, or signing a petition; and acceptance and rejection, which measures experiences of discrimination, negative views on immigration and disagreement of government support for ethnic minorities. (Scanlon Foundation, n.d.).

**Violence, structural:** "The production, maintenance, and reproduction of social inequalities and oppressions. The concept refers to social systems as well as the mechanisms through which they produce and normalize marginalization, exclusion, and exploitation along lines of "race", class, gender, ethnicity, nationality, and other invidious categories." (Dutta, Sonn & Lykes, 2016, p. 1-2)

**Violence, symbolic:** "...systematic assaults on the human dignity and self-worth of individuals and communities (Scheper-Hughes, 2004). Cultural violence operates through aspects of the symbolic sphere including culture, language, ideology, and knowledge production in academic disciplines and in scientific canons (Bourdieu, 1991; Galtung, 1990; Scheper-Hughes, 2004). Cultural violence serves to justi-

fy, legitimize, mask and naturalize both direct assaults on human beings and social hierarchies that regulate proper behaviors, language or "talk", codes of conduct, and ways of developing and carrying out relationships. Symbolic and structural inequities which can constrain people's agency and capacity for self-definition, construction of positive social identities and opportunities for belonging." (Dutta et al., 2016, p. 2)

**Whiteness:** "Whiteness" is "first...a location of structural advantage, of race privilege. Second, it is a 'standpoint,' a place from which white people look at ourselves, at others, and at society. Third, 'whiteness' refers to a set of cultural practices that are usually unmarked and unnamed" (Frankenberg, 1993, p. 1), "whiteness" is thus not simply correlated to skin colour but is a set of

particular social processes and practice, linked to a social location marked by assumed superiority and normativity; and reproducing itself through the production of knowledge and histories, national identity and belonging and anti-racism practice (Green et al., 2007).

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