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Jacaranda Trees, Place and Affect: An Analysis of Australian Newspaper Articles, 1900–2023

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ABSTRACT

The jacaranda tree, native to South and Central America and the West Indies, yet planted ornamentally on all continents (except Antarctica), inspires colonial imaginaries and outpourings of poetic verse, exerting influence as a placemaker. One of the almost fifty jacaranda species, *Jacaranda mimosifolia*, commonly called 'blue jacaranda', is native to the Andes mountains of Bolivia and Argentina, though planted in Australia starting in 1865. With purple-ish mauve, trumpet-shaped blossoms that can last weeks to two months in springtime, jacaranda trees enact forms of vegetal (tree) influence on humans while also being objectified in colonial efforts to beautify and civilise; these complex relations exist in fields of place-making and unmaking processes. This paper tracks the discourses related to this jacaranda-blooming cyclical event in Australian newspapers across 123 years (1900–2023), exploring complex multi-directional relationships that build place across vegetal affective fields and remake place in settler colonial processes. Contributing to environmental humanities' discussions of place, power, affect and vegetal influence in Critical Plant Studies, this paper uncovers how placemaking is a multispecies and affective process, and how the vegetal is a powerful force that is also objectified in settler discourses and processes of unmaking. Journalism has prominent placemaking roles as well, transforming spaces discursively into places of meaning with social and cultural constructions; placemaking occurs both in human-plant relations and through the journalistic medium.

KEYWORDS

Affect theory, critical plant studies, news media, placemaking, settler colonialism

A tree stands in its own place. Its life is sedentary. It is a life in one place, a life without anxiety. Not only is a tree in its place; it actively contributes to its place, even though to move from its own place is to risk the death of the organism. 'With its adjacent surroundings', writes Hans Jonas, 'the plant forms one permanent context into which it is fully integrated, as the animal can never be in its environment'.[1]

INTRODUCTION

As I begin writing this paper, I visit a botanical garden in Denmark where I am living as a postdoctoral researcher. I sit down next to a *Jacaranda mimosifolia* tree in a section of the greenhouse with plants from the Americas. So many tiny, delicate, pointed leaves join together, almost fern-like, into one larger whole with

1 E, Casey, *Getting Back into Place: Toward a Renewed Understanding of Place-World* (Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. xii.

fractal patterns; the bark is smooth and grey; branches hang in awkward arm-like poses. The feathery leaves remind me of fans, feathers, arms, gusts of wind and fragmented light. Experiencing these trees in person is important to me – to have bodily, in-person contact. And yet, the setting, a botanic garden, which is so well attended and loved by the visitors I see around me, is a space of globalised, uprooted beings, collected, commodified, researched, gene edited and more. Hardly akin to the mountainous ecosystems of the Andes where this species of jacaranda originates. My sense is that this tree is fairly healthy but not thriving.

The jacaranda tree, native to South and Central America and the West Indies, yet planted ornamentally on all continents except Antarctica, inspires colonial imaginaries and outpourings of poetic verse, exerting influence as a placemaker. One of the almost fifty species, *Jacaranda mimosifolia*, commonly called 'blue jacaranda', is native to the Andes mountains of Bolivia and Argentina, though planted in Australia starting in 1865. With purple-ish mauve, trumpet-shaped blossoms that can last several weeks to two months in springtime, they enact forms of vegetal (tree) influence on humans while also being objectified in colonial efforts to beautify and civilise; these complex relations exist in fields of place-making and unmaking processes. This paper tracks the discourses related to this jacaranda-blooming cyclical event in Australian newspapers across 123 years (1900–2023), exploring complex, multi-directional relationships that build place across vegetal affective fields and remake place in settler colonial processes. Contributing to environmental humanities' discussions of place, power, affect and vegetal influence in Critical Plant Studies, this paper uncovers how placemaking is a multispecies and affective process, and how the vegetal is a powerful force that is also objectified in settler discourses and processes of unmaking. Journalism has prominent placemaking roles as well, transforming spaces discursively into places[2] of meaning with social and cultural constructions[3] – placemaking occurs both in human–plant relations and through the journalistic medium.

2 While space and place are complex concepts, this paper works with space as a more abstract concept, while place refers to a position that may have cultural and/or subjective meanings (see Casey, *Getting Back into Place*). A fuller distinction is drawn later in this paper.

3 R.E. Gutsche, Jr, 'News place-making: Applying "mental mapping" to explore the journalistic interpretive community', *Visual Communication* **13** (4) (2014): 487–510;

This paper engages with a broadened concept of discourse in recognising and speaking about plants and place. Discourse in the social sciences refers to meanings enacted through language and symbolic reference; yet with the relational turn, this definition has been enlarged to include meanings and communications from and with the living world,[4] such that trees can be said to engage with discourse within human–tree relational spaces. Discourse emerges from humans and other species, reflecting the nested arrangements in socio-ecological systems; to deny discourse to the living world is to erase this existential reality,[5] silencing other species' voices and responses to what industrial worlds are imposing on them. In this ecological crisis, how we speak about the living world is central to morality[6] as well as to behaviours of recognition or denial. Being in a relationship to plants in one's own surroundings is a form of placemaking and spatial orientation. 'The backgrounding of plants is dangerous because it severs opportunities for dialogical interaction between humans and the environments in which they live.'[7] 'We not only lose the ability to empathise and to see the non-human sphere in ethical terms, but also … get a false sense of our own character and location that includes an illusory sense of autonomy.'[8] A complexity of communicative modes surrounds the jacaranda in newspapers, with themes of urban and town beautifying projects, *terra nullius*, the effect of blue and purple flowers on humans, the globalisation of plants, how

R.E. Gutsche, Jr, and K. Hess, 'Placeification: The transformation of digital news spaces into "places" of meaning', *Digital Journalism* **8** (5) (2020): 586–595.

4 D. Abram, 'Storytelling and wonder: On the rejuvenation of oral culture as an ecological imperative', in O. Urbain and D. Temple (eds), *Ethical Transformations for a Sustainable Future* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2017), pp. 9–17; D. Abram, T. Milstein and J. Castro-Sotomayor, 'Interbreathing ecocultural identity in the Humilocene', in T. Milstein and J. Sotomayor (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2020), pp. 5–25.

5 T. Milstein and J. Castro-Sotomayor, 'Ecocultural identity', in T. Milstein and J. Castro-Sotomayor (eds), *Routledge Handbook of Ecocultural Identity* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2020).

6 E. Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars: A Philosophical Inquiry into the Moral Sense of Nature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984).

7 M. Hall, *Plants as Persons: A Philosophical Botany* (Albany, NY: SUNY Press, 2011), p. 14.

8 V. Plumwood, *Environmental Culture: The Ecological Crisis of Reason* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2002), p. 9.

certain grammatical constructions support more-than-human personhood and more.

Jacaranda trees pose a formidable ecocultural presence in settler and other nations. With their springtime blooming, the trees become a phenomenon, inspiring festivals, tourism, poetry and ceremonies. The cultural ties to jacaranda tree blooming echoes *hanami* (watching blossoms) in Japan, referring to cherry tree blooms, or *sakura*. For over a thousand years, the Japanese have engaged in *hanami* in daytime and *yozakura* in nighttime; both involving picnics and family parties to enjoy the flowers. In Mexico, Alberto Roy Sanchez's *Dicen las Jacarandas* (2019) is a poetry collection inspired by the experience of jacarandas, speaking of a collective utopia that he finds in trees' whispers. *Les Enfants de Jacaranda* by Sahara Delijani (2014) summons the jacaranda in another collective sense of belonging to a more just world, as a symbol and uniting force of those torn apart by political oppression in Iran. The Russian writer Vladimir Nabokov is known to have said he could live in Los Angeles for the jacarandas alone. While jacarandas have been planted in Australia, Mexico, United States, Asia and South Africa with similar dynamics, this paper focuses on their presence in Australian newspapers and the human–vegetal relations on that continent.

As stated in the epigraph, trees are themselves placemakers in their stability and structure, in how and what they offer to their surroundings. This is evident in Nabokov's statement about trees in Los Angeles. Trees tend to structure space for many; flowers are placemakers in their reproduction that involves insects and birds. Their scent and colour in flowering that lures pollinators are affective qualities that generate the qualities and experiences of place. Angiosperms emerged 120 million years ago in the Cretaceous period, and its pollinator relationship is what allowed for bounteous diversity.[9] 'I find it mysteriously compelling that so much of what plants put forth to seduce nonhuman pollinators is seductive to humans as well: the scents of flowers, their colours and shapes, their timing. As is the case with many other manifestations of life, ancestral power is beautiful.'[10] The shimmer that flowers give off is a lure, and is transformational, carrying ancestral powers, anthropologist

9 D.B. Rose, *Shimmer: Flying Fox Exuberance in Worlds of Peril* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2022).

10 Ibid., p. 140.

Deborah Bird Rose writes, explaining Aboriginal perspectives and worldviews. Shimmer can be understood, perhaps, as a form of vegetal discourse, communicating to humans, insects and others. Trees not only nourish the soil and other species but provide spatial orientation. In their lifeways, plants generate emplaced habitability for insects, animals and fungi in symbiotic relationships such that the vegetal is primary to place and to diverse lifeways. These relational placemaking qualities lead to vegetal uses in colonial and settler processes of un-making and remaking place. This paper explores these polarities of settler use of trees and trees' own affective qualities in creating place, which intermingle and lose their distinctive boundaries in news articles, especially in the interwar decades.

Place is a category of thought and a constructed reality, anthropologist Arturo Escobar argues, and he writes that place, body, and environment integrate with each other.[11] In a similar vein of dissolving divisions of body and mind, Anthropologist Tim Ingold argues that embodiment is coeval with enmindment. Place tells us 'who and what we are by telling us where we are (and where we are not)'.[12] Moreover, place has been described as space with cultural meaning;[13] it builds from deep experiences, feelings of familiarity, comfort and connection.[14] Place is not static, but is vulnerable, pliable, involves action and is where moral involvement matters.[15] 'Many definitions of placemaking emphasise both the belonging aspects, such as sense of place, place-attachment, rootedness, etc., and the becoming aspects of collective reimagining/reinventing.'[16] One benefit of place as a conceptual frame is the focus on multi-directional affect between human and more-than-human lives and activities within a region, offering a systemic lens. Place can be an

11 A. Escobar, 'Culture sits in places: Reflections on globalism and subaltern strategies of localization', *Political Geography* **20** (2) (2001): 139–174.

12 Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, p. xv.

13 T. Cresswell, *In Place/Out of Place: Geography, Ideology, Transgression* (Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press, 1996).

14 D. Massey, 'A global sense of place', *Marxism Today* **38** (1991): 24–29.

15 J. Forester, *How Spaces Become Places: Place Makers Tell Their Stories* (New York: New Village Press. 2021), p. 4.

16 J. Barry and J. Agyeman, 'On belonging and becoming in the settler-colonial city: Co-produced futurities, placemaking, and urban planning in the United States', *Journal of Race, Ethnicity and the City* **1** (1–2) (2020): 22–41, p. 24.

elusive concept in its relationality, yet it highlights local autonomies and collectivities[17] and is essential to localised resilience and community cohesion.[18] Aboriginal people in Australia use the term 'country' to refer to place and interdependent relations between beings and land. 'Making peace with place' is what Bird Rose calls for among settler-descended people in Australia as part of an ethics of care.[19]

And yet, 'in these late modern times, the world has become increasingly placeless, a matter of mere sites instead of lived places, of sudden displacements instead of enduring implacements'.[20] With place being so central to humans, the relations within place and placelessness or *atopos* are akin to relations between living and dying. Placelessness is a void, a desolation that begs one to dig in and begin placemaking, and that emerges from colonial, settler and modernist degradations of situated relationality. As Edward Casey writes, philosophers across the Western spectrum describe the urge to fill up space with Being as a defense against *atopos*.[21] Settler placemaking is first an unmaking, a blindness and undervaluing of emplaced relations, and attempts to eradicate human and more-than-human historical webs of relationships – an unraveling of country. For example, Grafton, Australia, sits on the territory of the Bunjalung Nation, comprised of fifteen tribal groups.

Settler processes of un-making and re-making place

Due to their centrality in human lives, lifeways and to place, vegetal lives have been primary agents used to exert colonial and imperial projects. The entanglements of botany, plant collection and empire have been well documented.[22] Colonised land is perceived and conceived as

17 A. Escobar, *Territories of Difference: Place, Movements, Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

18 N. Hamdi, *The Placemaker's Guide to Building Community* (London: Earthscan, 2010).

19 B. Rose, 'Dialogue with place: Toward an ecological body', *Journal of Narrative Theory* **32** (3) (2002): 311–325.

20 Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, p. xv.

21 Ibid., p. xi.

22 A. Crosby and D. Worster, 'Ecological imperialism: The overseas migration of western Europeans as a biological phenomenon, in P.C. Mancall and J.H. Merrell (eds), *American Encounters: Natives and Newcomers from European Contact to Removal, 1500–1800* (New York: Routledge, 1988), pp. 55–67.

empty space to be wielded for extraction, land is *terra nullius*,[23] which allows for new plant assemblages like plantations, botanic garden collections and non-native gardens to be placed in and fill the perceived emptiness. One potent analytical lens engaging human–vegetal relations that deracinate place emerges in the Plantationocene concept, which refines that of the Anthropocene, highlighting how enclosed and extractive monocultures in plantations and attendant land use changes along with enslaved labour have re-ordered the world.[24] Viewing biodiversity loss and the climate crisis as colonial legacies reveals that the novel ecosystems in which plants are moving, dying and re-organising due to rapid system change are also part of the threats of *terra nullius*. Land becomes generic sites and not places that orient us to the world, as in Casey's distinction. Many globalised plant species, sent around the world and grown in botanic gardens, colonise the land similarly to colonisers and settlers, becoming feral, which means they move outside the gardens and proliferate – without the situated relations to place within ecological and evolutionary alliances and relationships that maintain proportionality as part of habitability. One example is the garden plant *Lantana camera* introduced in South Asia, whose proliferation is a cause of increasing human–elephant conflict.[25] Lupines in Iceland, brought in from the USA, are another example, with vast expanses of blue across the island in summer, crowding out native species.

Plants have been part of the calculus of nationalism in Australia and elsewhere, in which they become signifiers of the nation-state,[26] aiding unwittingly in forms of reification of nationhood. Nationalistic

23 R. Moran and L.A. Berbary. 'Placemaking as unmaking: Settler colonialism, gentrification, and the myth of "revitalized" urban spaces', *Leisure Sciences* **43** (6) (2021): 644–660.

24 D. Haraway, 'Anthropocene, Capitalocene, Plantationocene, Chthulucene: Making kin', *Environmental Humanities* **6** (1) (2015): 159–165.

25 D. Jayantha and A. Dissanayaka. 'Plants are world makers: Spatial knowledge of how plants and human-plant relations mediate human-elephant relations in Sri Lanka', in R. Thakur, S. Brunn, B. Thakur and S. Thakur (eds), *Environment, Development, and Culture in South and East Asia: Local, Regional, and International Perspectives* (Berlin: Springer Nature, 2023).

26 J.C. Ryan, '"Dressed in native trees": Plants as figures of anti-national resistance in contemporary aboriginal Australian poetry', in D. Biswas, P. Eliopoulos and J. Ryan (eds), *Global Perspectives on Nationalism: Political and Literary Discourses* (Oxon, UK: Routledge, 2022), pp. 243–259.

rhetoric uses analogies of plants and the land.[27] Plants root into the soil, and this quality is drawn on to deliver nationalistic sentiment and sense of belonging, and in Australia, aided in justifying exclusions of Aboriginal inhabitants. The golden wattle tree became the national floral symbol in 1988,[28] solidifying settler identities with native plants and the Australian land base.

As a settler nation, Australian gardens and planted trees express colonial imperatives of domestication and Eurocentric ideals of beauty.[29] Settler gardens attempt to remake a place with an alien image and exert force on the land with deliberate feral species that need excessive amounts of chemicals to thrive, instead of collaborating with nature and place.[30] Planting jacarandas as street trees in Grafton has been an effort to civilise the city, and it is part of a larger movement to establish an Australian urban aesthetic.[31] Settlers arrived in a land of extensive grasses that was shaped by Aboriginal fire practices; tree planting in this setting by tapping into the globalised network of plant bodies, plant knowledge that Sydney Botanic Garden maintained was a form of settler un- and re-making of place through vegetal manipulations.[32]

Grafton is also the site of the Jacaranda festival that began in 1935, and Grafton's newspaper figures prominently in the data for this paper. Tree planting began in the 1870s with both native and non-native species, and in 1900 to the 1920s, planting switched to only one species: *Jacaranda mimosifolia*. Street tree planting was in vogue across Europe and North America in the same decades.[33] And yet, settler remaking processes intermingle with vegetal affect and influence, in twisting and overlapping branches of impact.

27 Ryan, "'Dressed in native trees'", drawing on Hogan, 2009.

28 Ryan, "'Dressed in native trees'", p. 245.

29 V. Plumwood, 'Decolonising Australian gardens: Gardening and the ethics of place', *Australian Humanities Review* **36** (2005): 1–9.

30 Ibid.

31 J. Frawley, 'Detouring to Grafton: The Sydney Botanic Gardens and the making of an Australian urban aesthetic', *Australian Humanities Review* **49** (2010): 119–39.

32 Frawley, 'Detouring to Grafton'.

33 Ibid.

Vegetal affect and affective fields

As discussed above, place is space embedded with meanings, experiences, connections. In fact, perceiving place or space as empty is a denial of the lives and stories of others. Any space is actually someone's place. Place, Van Doren and Bird Rose argue, is relationally co-constituted across beings, place, and stories in entangled modes of intra-action (citing Barad's work).[34] Co-generating place can be understood through the lens of affect theory, such that place is a continual becoming through and with affective fields. While affect is defined differently among scholars, this paper works with affect understood as the way bodies affect each other creating intensities,[35] shaping mood, atmosphere, feeling, habits, identities and lifeways. Bodies here are plant, human, water, discursive, political, among others. In terms of significance, the turn in the last decades to affectivity highlights how 'living beings become who they are through reciprocity with that which affects and moves them'.[36] Vegetal affect is apparent across history and culture in plant stories, medicines, associations and spiritual practices and realms. Plants are central to most culture's origin stories, for example, which contain affective traces across time.

This paper attends to how news articles express jacaranda trees' affective qualities that have to do with atmosphere, colour, cyclical repetitions, exotic imaginaries, dynamic influences and shimmers that leave meaning in their wake. This paper draws from Neera Singh's affective ecologies, as well as Kathleen Stewart and Marjolein Oele's affect work. To Singh, affect is 'a dynamic relationality between bodies of various kinds that enhances or diminishes the capacity of a body to affect or be affected' (this is Singh drawing on Deleuze 1988).[37] This affective

34 T. Van Dooren and D. Bird Rose, 'Storied-places in a multispecies city', *Humananimalia* **3** (2) (2012): 1–27, citing K. Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007).

35 K. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2020).

36 M. Oele, *E-Co-Affectivity: Exploring Pathos at Life's Material Interfaces* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2020), pp. 5–6.

37 N.M. Singh, 'Introduction: Affective ecologies and conservation', *Conservation and Society* **16** (1) (2018): 1–7, p. 1; Oele, *E-Co-Affectivity*; K. Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*; G. Deleuze, *Spinoza: Practical Philosophy* (San Francisco, CA: City Lights Books, 1988).

relationality is not purely active or passive but moves in various ways, as each receives the world and responds.

Applying affective worlds to human–plant relations, Oele situates affect not in Deleuze and Spinoza's approaches to embodiment but in Aristotle with an emphasis on experience and life-in-motion, among others.[38] Oele situates affect within place, in a milieu, as this paper does. For her, affect is a function of community co-emergence across beings and place, and ethics 'should be responsive to the co-affectivity at the heart of community'.[39] Vegetal affectivity is described by Oele as a middle voice, which is a verbal form; this participatory voice does not separate the actor from the action,[40] residing between the active and passive, and is present in Classical Greek and Sanskrit. The 'agency of each being is actively present in their doing'.[41] Oele emphasises that the middle voice shifts 'away from subjectivity and towards locality'.[42] This voice moves away from centralised selves as plants are not organised in centralised ways like animals are, towards states of acting and being acted upon. Plants contribute to structuring place and place structures animal lives, and in this sense, plants have a large role in shaping animal lives. One common thread in Critical Plant Studies is contending with how plants are conceived as inert, even though Darwin's *The Power of Movement of Plants* (1880) argues otherwise, and yet plant qualities have robust affective lines of movement that trace through place and imbue experiences with their affects; this is a real yet invisible form of movement.

To give some background of the tree in question, *Jacaranda mimosifolia* is in the Bignoniaceae family, and is native to and extant in the Piedmont forests in the Andes region of Bolivia and Argentina. They are declining in their native range, with an IUCN Vulnerable designation,[43] with agriculture, logging and wood harvesting as primary threats.

38 Oele, *E-Co-Affectivity*, pp. 5-6.

39 Ibid., p. 7.

40 T. Ingold, *Correspondences* (Cambridge: Polity, 2021).

41 Ibid., p. 13.

42 Oele, *E-Co-Affectivity*, p. 22, citing Eberhard.

43 R. Hills, '*Jacaranda mimosifolia*', *The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2020*: e.T32027A68135641. https://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2020-3.RLTS.T32027A68135641.en. Accessed on 3 July 2023.

Piedmont forests are the most threatened forest type in Argentina.[44] Local uses of the wood extend to fires, timber for carpentry and tool handles, while the bark is used as a medicine for venereal diseases,[45] and seeds and leaves treat liver and skin problems.[46] The tree is planted as a windbreak in agroforests, and cattle eat the leaves, leaf litter and branches. This species grows to 25–50 feet, with bi-pinnately compound leaves, and two-inch long flowers on twelve-inch panicles. Their bluish-purple colour derives from anthocyanins, a pigment also present in sweet potatoes and black beans. Blossoms are trumpet-shaped, and when they fall, they create a slippery goop on sidewalks from aphids feeding on flowers. The word 'jacaranda' means fragrant in Guarani language. Jacarandas are considered 'invasive' in parts of South Africa and in Queensland, Australia.

Methods

This enquiry tracks discourses related to how jacaranda trees and their blooming period contribute to placemaking across 123 years in Australian newspapers, documenting settler patterns and also vegetal influences. Working with qualitative methods, this project synergises discourse analysis with affective analysis. Australian newspaper articles were accessed through National Library of Australia archives online, while looking for articles on jacaranda trees, with special focus on the blooming period as this time period engages the most notice. Search terms included 'jacaranda blooming', 'flowering jacaranda', 'blooming jacaranda' and 'jacaranda tree'. The number of articles using these search terms from the 1920s to the 1960s are in the thousands, while other decades have much less, and some only 29 articles. Australia was chosen as the focal site because of the richness of news articles on jacarandas

44 A.D. Brown, S. Pacheco, T. Lomáscolo and L. Malizia, 'Situación ambiental en los bosques andinos yungueños', in A.D Brown, U. Martínez Ortiz, M. Acerbi and J. Corchera (eds), *La Situación Ambiental Argentina 2005*, (Buenos Aires: Fundación Vida Silvestre Argentina, 2006), pp. 53–71.

45 N.M. Mostafa, O.A. Eldahshan and A.N.B. Singab, 'The genus *Jacaranda* (Bignoniaceae): An updated review', *Pharmacognosy Communications* **4** (3) (2014): 31–39.

46 G. Torrico, L. Rea R. and S. Beck, *Estudio sobre los* árboles *y arbustos de uso múltiple en los departamentos de Cochabamba y Chuquisaca (Valles secos interandinos)* (La Paz: PROBONA, 1997).

and the settler relations to place. The sample size was eighty articles across the years 1900 to 2023, drawn from the online archive of newspapers held by the National Library of Australia. This time frame was chosen based on article accessibility in the archives and because jacaranda trees were first planted in Australia in 1865. Purposive sampling allowed for article selection with subjective decisions on how relevant the articles were to the study. Articles were chosen for content about jacarandas that included cultural content related to the trees, while articles were disregarded if the tree was mentioned in passing, unrelated to the rest of the text. Purposive sampling was suitable as it did provide representative sampling and the goals of the study were not statistical or probability focused, but were instead looking for trends in language and discourses.

Qualitative analysis involved coding the articles for themes, and then interpretations rooted in discourse analysis and affective analysis.[47] Affective methods are challenging as affect is bodily, fleeting and immaterial with a need for inventiveness and experimentation.[48] This called for analysing the texts for embodied qualities, felt experience, mood, networks and traces between them as well as bodily rhythms.[49] These analytical methods involve uncovering meanings in complex relations that constitute place that include settler processes of both unmaking and remaking place. The analytic section that follows presents newspaper excerpts divided into settler colonial imaginaries, discourses and practices and then vegetal affect and affective fields – and finally climate change. Excerpts often contain examples of different discourses and affects and not all are identified or discussed, and one sentence may contain multi-directional influences from plants and humans.

47 Y. Wu, 'Ecological discourse analysis', *2018 4th International Conference on Social Science and Higher Education (ICSSHE 2018)* (Paris: Atlantis Press, 2018).

48 B.T. Knudsen and C. Stage, 'Introduction', in B.T. Knudsen and C. Stage (eds), *Affective Methodologies*: *Developing Cultural Research Strategies for the Study of Affect* (London: Palgrave Macmillan London, 2015). pp. 1–22.

49 Ibid.

ANALYSIS: SETTLER COLONIAL IMAGINARIES, DISCOURSES AND PRACTICES

The analysis begins with newspaper excerpts that reveal discourses of settler imaginaries related to jacarandas as modes of relating to place in processes of unmaking and remaking.

> Even the small two trees in Jones Park are doing their bit, small as they are, to help bedeck our town … I would say that if you could see the town of Bourke bedecked as it is now by this glorious mauve blossom, your thoughts would at once go back to those days of which I just spoke and you would try to picture Bourke of that time, as I often do, sunburnt and glaring, dusty and hot to walk in, ugly and bare, and you would again recall that except for a few old Coolabahs, which, God forgive us, we tried our hardest to eradicate, except for these and one or two fine old Morton Bay Figs and of course, the fine old Jacaranda at the courthouse, there are no trees to looks at. And, if you could just pop in now and see this beautiful scene as the Jacaranda takes over from the Western Australian Gums, you would hope as I do that this blessing that has been brought to this town on the Darling will never be jeopardised for the sake of a few pennies.
>
> ('Happenings Around Our Town, Jacaranda Time', Western Herald, 8 November 1968)

This excerpt describes Bourke, New South Wales, located 800 kilometres from Sydney and considered to be the gateway to the outback. Sitting on the Darling river and home to the Ngemba people, Bourke was surveyed in 1869 to establish a township. Indigenous inhabitants fought settler land theft and established a local reserve in 1946. The above excerpt typifies the settler discourse around *terra nullius*, or empty space. The sentiment is of disgust for the way the land had been and of pride in re-doing the place, eradicating the local and native species, which reverberates with Aboriginal removal from some local territories. From this local Bourke newspaper, the settler re-making discourse has human overtones, as the town is 'bedecked' by two small jacaranda trees. This bedecking connotes discourses of pageantry and ornamentation as central to placemaking, is contrasted to the actual place as hot and dry, ugly and bare. The native species with long histories of co-evolution are *not* co-designers of place, and thus need to go. Meanwhile, re-designing the land with designations of which vegetal can stay or go, which exotic to replace natives with, is a process lacking attention to local conditions. The Morton Bay figs and the jacarandas are 'fine', while Coolabahs and Western Australian gums are not. Coolabahs are a dry zone riparian

species that germinates from flooding and provides significant riparian habitat with food, shelter and shade for many species.[50]

Bourke is a site of revision, as place is redefined and civilised[51] with jacarandas. This form of settler placemaking is 'influenced by the twin forces of colonisation and commodification, each of which selects in favour of exogenous ideals at odds with adaptation'.[52] Settlers set the aesthetic standards and clearly as expressed here, devalue native species and aesthetics in favour of one that matches images from media or other colonised centres.[53] 'The framing of particular plants as belonging or not in certain places is a culturally variable practice that pays only partial attention to the exuberance of planty life.'[54] This coincides with erasures of all local cultures, both human[55] and more-than-human and denies trees and other beings as knowledge holders.

> But the jacaranda tree I like best belongs to no home of ease and luxury. It grows in a sordid narrow street in Darlinghurst, in a backyard in the midst of a row of unpainted-depressed looking houses, all alike in dinginess and poverty. It is the only brave, beautiful note of color in the unlovely spot, and I think there are many who gain a message of hope and brightness as they look at the ethereal flowers which blossom so courageously in the ugly street. Many hearts will sorrow when the all-too-brief life is ended – til next November.
>
> ('Jacaranda', *Evening News*, 4 December 1922)

From a Sydney-based news outlet, here a jacaranda tree both generates and symbolises upper class luxuries and sensibilities, in contrast to poverty and squalor, asserting discourses of class difference that are legacies of colonial processes. Certain plants and animals in different cultures become symbols of wealth, luxury and status, and thus participate and even unwittingly assert class divisions. Beauty is a commodity

50 J.F. Costelloe, J. Leeder and M. Strang. 'Drivers of the distribution of a dominant riparian tree species (*Eucalyptus coolabah*) on a dryland river system, Diamantina River, Australia', in J. Webb, J. Costelloe, R. Casas-Mulet, J. Lyon and M. Stewardson (eds), *Proceedings of the 11th International Symposium on Ecohydraulics* (Melbourne: University of Melbourne, 2016).

51 Frawley, 'Detouring to Grafton'.

52 Plumwood, 'Decolonising Australian gardens'.

53 Ibid.

54 L. Head, J. Atchison, C. Phillips and K. Buckingham, 'Vegetal politics: Belonging, practices, and places', *Social and Cultural Geography* **15** (8) (2014): 861–870.

55 J.M. Bacon, 'Settler colonialism as eco-social structure and the production of colonial ecological violence', *Environmental Sociology* **5** (1) (2019): 59–69.

in class structures, with upper class urban spaces privileged with beautiful vegetation that lower income groups lack access to experience. This privileging is echoed in the Christian concepts of heaven as beautiful, clean and pure. The jacaranda becomes such a symbol in the discourse of settler place re-making, and is appropriated as a commodity to serve this distinction. Related to the processes and discourses of 'civilised' conqueror and 'uncivilised' indigenous inhabitants, this juxtaposition seems to interpret the tree's affect as privileged, as above the fray. The tree's beauty, one could argue, has the effect of making invisible the lack of equity or underbelly of capitalist society. Somehow the tree is called 'brave' and 'courageous' to be in a 'sordid' street, facing the realities of poverty. This correlation of jacarandas with wealth is echoed in other articles in the data set. Throughout both excerpts above, the tree – as a settler, as a non-native – stands in contrast to poverty as well as to the local conditions.

The single jacaranda is framed as a lone plant, without a community, which is a settler practice of de-centering community, removing and devaluing contextual factors for all beings in settled spaces. Research that works with plant agencies takes seriously not the individual plant alone, but the plant communities that each plant resides in and evolves with.[56]

> Harare's Jews, many of whom earn their living from manufacturing fabrics, clothing, and furniture, lead privileged lives. But there is a tenuous element to their lifestyles, since the political and economic future of the country is uncertain. Harare is a modern city, made beautiful by countless jacaranda trees covered with huge purple flowers that carpet its streets with purple. But outside the capital, people live in desperate conditions in mud huts, lacking proper housing, food, and medical care.
>
> ('Zimbabwe Jews' concern for the future', *Australian Jewish News*, 11 November 1994)

In this article from a Sydney-based Jewish newspaper, jacaranda trees in Zimbabwe are both beautifying, associated with privilege, and a discursive instrument for remaking place. This tree is cosmopolitan, circulating across continents in both material and discursive ways,[57] being

56 S. Elton, 'Growing methods: Developing a methodology for identifying plant agency and vegetal politics in the city', *Environmental Humanities* **13** (1) (2021): 93–112.

57 M. Barua, 'Circulating elephants: Unpacking the geographies of a cosmopolitan animal', *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* **39** (4) (2014): 559–573.

a symbol and structure of empire in places. In this former British colony, most Jewish settlers were refugees from war and genocidal conditions, and yet here jacarandas in the urban environment become associated with Jewish prosperity and privilege. The colonial and postcolonial demarcation line is clear, the beautiful purple-carpeted spaces and outside the line, where people live desperate lives.

> The Queen Mother looked magnificent in a classic dress of jacaranda blue and a matching hat with osprey feathers.
>
> ('Joyous 80th birthday thanksgiving for the beloved Queen Mother', *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 6 August 1980)

Here the bluish, purple colour of jacaranda blossoms are appropriated by the Queen Mother in the same way that the wattle tree became the Australian national symbol in 1988, becoming a discursive symbol of unity in nationhood within the Commonwealth, a body under foreign control. Clothing that mimics the local and beloved tree blossoms thereby becomes a practice of empire and colonial control. While the settler discourses are blatant, the vegetal affective influences are also distinct, which is discussed next.

Trees as affective beings and the qualities of plant recognition

Affect theory in general, and affective ecologies in particular, position diverse humans, other species (including plants) and forces (like the wind and weather), all transmitting and contributing to a localised affective field. As such, plants are *subjects*, not objects, and this appears in linguistic forms, in grammar and in content. Qualities are significant in this analysis, as they connect affect theory with conceptions of place. Casey describes place as having 'character' and, as described above, affect involves qualities in mood, feeling and atmosphere. Place, he writes, is also complementary with imagination and memory.[58] The affective qualities of trees in the news excerpts occur here in four modes: 1) in plants as subjects expressed in grammatical forms such as transitive clauses in which plants are the actors, being subjects of the sentence; 2) in tree qualities as perceived by humans; 3) in the powers or influences of trees and their qualities on human experience; and 4) finally, in how

58 Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, p. xvi.

the trees' qualities contribute to placemaking. The excerpts are listed chronologically to elucidate diachronic changes in discourses and trees affective qualities.

> A controversy has been carried on in Maryborough for some time as to whether the jacaranda tree is injurious to public health. It has been pointed out by some people that at the period of the year when the tree burst into bloom an epidemic occurs in the city, and this year there was a severe outbreak of influenza in Maryborough during the blossoming period of the trees. By a coincidence the jacaranda blooms during the dry period of the year, and the supporters of the jacaranda aver that the dry weather, dust, and bad drainage are the cause of the illness.
>
> ('Jacaranda bloom and influenza', *Kyogle Examiner*, 7 December 1918.)

Here, in the *Kyogle Examiner*, based in Kyogle, New South Wales, the grammar and sentence structure attribute no special subjectivity to the trees, but the jacaranda's influence is marked with the possibility of causing influenza. This article appears during the Great Influenza epidemic that claimed 40–50 million lives worldwide, though the article suggests this tree-illness correlation started before the epidemic. This excerpt reveals an affective power toward human bodies, related to the temporal co-emergence between blossoms and illness. The potency of the tree and blossoms is felt in this assertion, and many more articles cite this association from this time period.

> A Jacaranda Tree
>
> I sat within the house of prayer,
> Untouched by ecstasy,
> Though listing heaven's glories rare,
> The good man's discourse – planned
> with care!
> No message brought to me!
> he led me up no golden stair,
> Beauty's High Priest to see!
> When lo! Without, in summer glare,
> A jacaranda tree,
> A mystic thing – by angels kissed
> to strange unearthly bloom,
> Dreaming mid lovely lilac mist,
> Softer than softest amethyst,
> Frail blooms – too frail for earth I wist,
> Dropped to their scented tomb!.....
> I bowed in reverence – unaware,
> And worshipped in the street,

Thus beauty built the golden stair
That led me to God's feet.
(Emily Hemans Bulcock, 'A Jacaranda Tree', *Brisbane Courier,* 19 April 1923)

The jacaranda tree, here in the *Brisbane Courier*, exerts an affect of awe and mysticism, offering a genuine spiritual and mystical experience, contrasted with a lack thereof where it would normally be found – in church. The jacaranda is not an appropriated object but a divine subject, offering a physical experience within their purple amethyst bodies, both above in the branches and below on the sidewalks where blossoms gather. The jacaranda body is a place of experience, and, in this instance, of a mystical experience that is triggered from the trees' beauty, purple colours, along with something ineffable. Each of the four categories are present; although the tree is called a 'thing', a sense of personhood emerges in the tree's powers and influence. As a placemaker, jacarandas here provide access to an imminent vegetal form of divinity of greater power than institutional religion offers. Interconnections of place and the divine appear in the word *Makom*, which is a name for God in Hebrew, while also meaning place.[59]

The poem and affective power of jacaranda flowers is so potent and multi-dimensional that it correlates, as mentioned earlier, with the Aboriginal Yolŋu term, *bir'yun*, translated as 'shimmer', which Bird Rose described in her last book.[60] *Bir'yun* or shimmer is a manifestation of ancestral power, which can be found emanating from flowers, and it is transformative. She learned this from Aboriginal people in the Victoria River region in northern Australia, and also draws on Morphy, who describes shimmer for the Yolŋu people of Australia as an aesthetic, an affective power, a sensory experience that can capture someone so that they can participate in ancestral power.[61] Bird Rose speaks of shimmer in angiosperms, and specifically in flowers, as they entice and seduce non-humans and humans alike.[62] It arises in painting and ritual, dance and song, and it involves pulses of both dullness and brilliance. As a painter builds up the surface with paint that can be dull, this dullness is

59 Casey, *Getting Back into Place*, p. 17

60 Rose, *Shimmer*.

61 H. Morphy, 'From dull to brilliant: The aesthetics of spiritual power among the Yolngu.' *Man* **24** (1) (1989): pp. 21–40.

62 Rose, *Shimmer*, p. 140.

required for the next steps and for the potential transformative power of shimmer. All life carries this pulsing, which takes place in seasons, in new growth. Shimmer speaks to some of the affective power of jacarandas in bloom, and how the trees bloom before their leaves come out, from a dull appearance to a brilliant one. Affect theory has also been called an 'inventory of shimmers', a phrase from Roland Barthes, and carried forth by Seigworth and Gregg.[63] In this context, shimmers refer to the way affect in everyday encounters changes in intensities and, as Barthes says, can be noticeable in odours and luminosities.

To give a sense of the affective power of jacarandas, poets from other countries where jacarandas have been planted also wax poetic about their aesthetic and spiritual qualities. These are evident in the following poem by Mexican poet Alberto Roy Sanchez, from his *Dicen de Jacarandas* about jacaranda trees in Mexico City.

> Immortal and Fleeting
>
> They rush
> to the ground
> and at the same time
> they are reborn
> on the branch
> as if they lived
> beyond life.[64]

Written many years after the Bulcock poem, Sanchez expresses the tree again as outside of time, being 'beyond life', with powerful influences in the words 'reborn' and 'immortal'. Jacarandas opening up a mystical portal is a theme in the dataset, especially before 1970.

> Jacarandas! Jacarandas in every direction. They force themselves on your notice wherever you go; follow you into the office, chase through your mind all day, dispel your fatigue – if you will but dwell on their radiant glory – as they line your way home, and, at last, lull you to sleep by the memory of their swaying in the breeze, and pursue you in your dreams.
>
> ('Jacaranda', *Sunday Mail,* 31 October 1926)

63 G.J. Seigworth and M. Gregg, 'An inventory of shimmers', in M. Gregg and G.J. Seigworth (eds), *The Affect Theory Reader* (New York, USA: Duke University Press, 2010): pp. 1–26.

64 Sanchez, *Dicen las jacarandas*.

This passage from 1926 expresses all four of the above affective modes. Trees are subjects, actors who 'force themselves on your notice … dispel your fatigue'. In transitive clauses, the tree is the subject and the one who directs the action. The descriptive quality mentioned is their 'radiant glory'. Their influence comes as a power to 'lull you to sleep … and pursue you in your dreams.' These strong verbs and influencing movements speak to Oele and Ingold's work on the middle voice, in which the actor becomes their doing, or when being and doing synthesise. This article speaks of jacarandas as potent forces of character or qualities in place, as the trees' presence directs situated experience, actions and feeling states (dispelling fatigue), as well as more ephemeral nighttime activities such as sleep and dreams.

> … they are flaunting a blue-mauve glory against the sky. They lend a moment's colour to the drabness of the paling fence or the ugliness of the bottle-yard. From their position between the guarding figs and eucalyptus they wave one painted hand as if in invitation to rest beneath loveliness. They dare stand with their backs to the sea. Their colour puts the road signs to shame, and even makes the sky a little old and faded.
>
> ('Blue-Mauve', *Sydney Morning Herald,* 22 November 1930)

Again, the jacarandas are active and powerful, 'flaunting', 'waving one painted hand', and daring. Their influence here is in creating contrasts between the mundane, the drabness of the local place, 'ugliness of the bottle-yard' with the beautiful and glorious. As a placemaker, jacarandas inspire utopian visions, chances to escape from the mundane qualities of native Australian landscapes and the drudgery of economic distress. This passage thus synergises vegetal affect with settler re-making and denigration of local conditions that seem related to fears of and experiences of *atopos*.

> It is possible that in this year of 1942 with an enemy at the gates of Australia, we can appreciate beauty with an even keener tang, since a realisation of impermanency sharpens the edge of joy … Blue is the dominant note of Grafton now. It is adamant, boisterous in its demand for recognition. The trees are canopies of blue that in a very riot of prodigality shake a carrot of equal blue about their feet until the streets are inches deep in beauty.
>
> ('Jacaranda Time', *Daily Examiner*, 31 October 1942)

In 1942, jacarandas are placemakers (in a Grafton newspaper) that antidote the misery of a world war, and the discourse relates to beauty signifying acceptance of impermanence. The trees gain recognition as

subjects, not from grammatical construction, but the colour blue is the active one here, being adamant and boisterous, suggesting strong affective qualities and character. Influence is in the beauty of the brief blooming period and in the embodied physicality of the flowers that fall on the ground, so that human bodies and place become immersed in their affects. This excerpt, like others, contrasts the vegetal world against the human industrial one, suggesting the vegetal as an access point to better, more beautiful and more just possible worlds.

> First they speak in beauty. … They also speak of beauty. In an age dedicated to the ugly cult of atomic devastation, the message of beauty is of paramount importance. If we could transplant the beauty of the Jacarandas into every human heart the world would be nearer heaven in an instant, a poetic fancy. … Secondly, the jacarandas speak of power and purpose. They appear in their spring blossoms according to schedule. No meetings or reports or recommendations are necessary. They have a job to do and their power and glory appear each year on time. Just as well, or our Festival would never be held.
> From the jacarandas also comes a message of goodwill. The happiness of our famous festival is its chief appeal. For a few days the woes and worries of life are forgotten.
>
> ('Jacaranda Days', *Daily Examiner,* 5 November 1953)

In this excerpt from the following decade (1953), jacarandas are subjects that have voice, communicating beauty, power and purpose, which connotes personhood, while asserting these qualities as necessary and needed by humans. Their affective influence appears to run parallel to the industrial world, as jacaranda worlds exert a discursive kind of social philosophy, an ontology rooted in beauty and goodwill. As placemakers, this influence creates spaces that counter war and nuclear weapons. They evoke a quality of essentialness, the primordial, or what Marder describes as the vegetal providing an essential ground of being.[65]

> Each year in late spring, 3000 jacaranda trees in Grafton, NSW, burst into bloom and the whole city goes a little mad. For when the huge, glorious trees (allowed to grow taller than is usual in the capitals) spread their lavender-blue lace over Grafton and lay petalled carpet underfoot, the city celebrates the Jacaranda Festival. It erupts in jollity, as it has done annually for 41 years. This solid, dignified city on the Clarence River sees its steady citizens dress in shades of purple, place purple ribbons round the neck of dogs, while children ride on

65 M. Marder, *Through Vegetal Being: Two Philosophical Perspectives* (New York: Columbia University Press 2016).

> purple-painted bicycles which tone with the party hats, ice cream, streamers, and leis.
>
> ('Grafton's Glorious Jacaranda', *Australian Women's Weekly,* 3 December 1975)

In the mid-1970s, the jacaranda trees continue to shape collective and cultural events with the springtime festival as shapers of place. They burst, spread and lay – active verbal forms, connoting trees as subjects. The affective role of trees traces across to human experience of jollity, to comportment of a gay kind, and to mimicking blossom colour in clothing and all kinds of party accessories. The embodied experience of the trees as mystical, as communicating, is no longer highlighted in the 1970s which coincides with the neoliberal era, globally deracinating cultural relations to place. The next excerpt is from five years ago, and expresses a shift in an ethos towards vegetal lives.

> Jacarandas are an arboreal mirror that reflects the ugly state of our digital gratification-obsessed society. They're a short lived sugar hit of twigs and flowers that Instagram users inject directly into the social media main vein to live, laugh, love before the itch comes back and they move on to their next picture-perfect project.
>
> The trees themselves are all show and no go. The purple blooms that whip everyone into a frenzy last all of 30 seconds before the flowers fall off and sully the ground below with what can only be described as 'moist spots'. In a country built on hard work we openly celebrate a tree that spends most of the year doing nothing.
>
> ('The Jacaranda City', *Sydney Morning Herald,* 3 October 2018)

Here, in quite a strong contrast (2018), jacarandas are objects without their own subjectivity, but are mirrors, reflecting society's and specifically social media's evils. Most jacaranda articles from 2020–2023 mention social media and the frenzy of taking selfies with jacaranda blossoms, reflecting corporate mediation of vegetal experiences. The trees' active qualities and influences are negative again, circling back to the 1918 article, though not with acute illness but with a chronic malaise of modern society and by sullying the ground with their blossoms. They are loafers here, contrasted with humans who built the nation 'on hard work.' The blossoming time is no longer an access point to other realities, but is akin to a sugar rush, or a form of instant gratification that social media promulgates. The author portrays the jacaranda as an object that inspires frenzy, consistent with digital culture, in which seasons are commodified and objectified.

> As jacaranda trees begin to bloom, University of Queensland grounds manager Shane Biddell has warned students about a superstition on campus. 'My wife, who was a UQ student, told me the myth she heard was that if you were hit by a falling jacaranda [blossom], you would fail your exam', he said. 'I warn students now and tell them don't get hit, otherwise you'll fail your exam. But some tell me, no, it's the opposite – if you get hit, you'll ace it.'
>
> ('Blooming jacarandas set to cause havoc with UQ exam results'. *Brisbane Times,* 27 September 2020)

Jacarandas' perceived affective roles are evident in how they influence those touched by the blossoms, leading to either exam failure or success. This superstition emerges from and with the trees' spatial and temporal positions, growing on university campuses and blooming during exams in springtime. This superstition travels with jacarandas, occurring in South Africa as well, and is somehow resonant with Amazonian lore where the tree is connected with wisdom and the moon.

DISCUSSION

These newspaper excerpts and analysis offer a sense of the complexity and intensity of human–plant relations in the discursive domain of place, belonging and worldmaking. For all the decades up until the 1970s, qualities of vegetal recognition and influence coexist with qualities of community and place and with settler remaking. Jacaranda influence appears in realms of bodily experience of the tree's shape, colour and beauty that generates intimations of mysticism, creativity, beauty, pride of place and a vegetal temporal frame. These are phyto-situated discourses, with the human-nested inside the vegetal structure of the world. Jacaranda trees offer affective and placemaking qualities in senses of home and belonging, in the shared ritual of blossom festivals that echo through history of cultural meaning in springtime flowers and rituals. This speaks to plants as ancestral, as living on earth many eras before *Homo sapiens sapiens*' arrival, and recalls the Yolŋu term *bir'yun*, or shimmer, that runs through flowers as manifestations of ancestral powers.[66] The jacaranda tree in these articles is an affective agent that shapes the world, mirrors human conceptions, and rattles at the divide of nature-culture, especially before 1970. Yet processes of extraction,

66 Rose, *Shimmer*.

devaluing and removal of localised ecocultures coexist with these vegetal influences, with efforts to remove local beings and to fill up and ornament the 'empty', dusty landscape. One could argue that settler nations build their lifeworlds on top of the ground, often denying and attempting to discard embedded local histories and ecologies.

The nature/culture divide involves a depersonalisation of nature and of humans from the living world that has two strands according to Kohák; one conceptual and one experiential.[67] 'In our time, however, the phenomenon has become global and the sense of depersonalisation of nature and of humans within it reaches far deeper.'[68] 'Since the seventeenth century, Western thought – and popular thought in its wake – gradually substituted a theoretical nature-construct for the nature of lived experience in the role of 'reality'";[69] 'humans have to depersonalise their world in their imagination in order to be able to exploit it ruthlessly in their actions'.[70] A complex personalisation and also depersonalisation occurs across the data set in accessing vegetal qualities and influence, with a loss of the living world as communicative. This echoes Raymond Williams on the word 'nature', which he says holds the most complex meanings in the English language, containing contradictions of what is most essential and also what is separate from humans, among others.[71]

Journalism and the news media are significant sites for accessing news and information about the living world and other species, especially in this time of ecological crises. This paper asserts how both the colonial and postcolonial discourses around place, yet also the vegetal affective and discursive qualities, can be accessed in journalism, a combination that is not well studied or documented. Journalism shapes public consciousness and the potential for accessing vegetal subjectivities is substantial yet is likely unfavourable to corporate models of journalism.

A change is noticeable in the diachronic analysis, around the 1960s and 1970s, in language and conceptions of jacaranda trees. The transitive

67 Kohák, *The Embers and the Stars.*

68 Ibid., p. 11.

69 Ibid., p. 12.

70 Ibid., p. 11.

71 R. Williams, *Keywords: A Vocabulary of Culture and Society* (London: Fontana Press, 1976).

grammar that speaks of plants as persons is gone, as are the strong imaginaries, which have turned into weaker ones. The land and vegetal inhabitants become depersonalised, as strangers in a strange land. This time period is also the rise of neoliberalism, with Thatcher's haunting words, 'there is no such thing as society', with deregulating public commons and infrastructure, leaving individuals to fend for themselves. In my work in Sri Lanka, a change from cultural landscapes to extractive landscapes, in which nature and culture are treated as separate spheres, took place in this same time frame.[72] This new political economy extends to the vegetal who becomes increasingly commodified, depersonalised and perceived as mute objects.

Jacarandas and their blossoms in settler and neoliberal imaginaries are objects to imbue the landscape with colour, beauty and meaning in a land that was perceived as empty. These efforts call to mind the ancient Greek philosopher Plato, and his concept of the ideal that is perfect and eternal, in contrast to what is present and emplaced and real. Their beauty, as stated earlier, can be interpreted as a force of erasure for diverse beings[73] and yet also of genuine experience, in a meshwork of complexities that are human–vegetal relations. Trees, as part of the living world, become mirrors and agents of lived experience in place, and thus the influenza epidemic of 1918, World Wars I and II, the depression of the 1930s and the social media influencer all appear in human–jacaranda relations in newspapers across the years. Inhabitants of Grafton and other settler towns identify themselves and their meaningful experiences with the blooming of these trees, in such a way, that the blooming becomes entangled with humans in placemaking, both being relative newcomers. The colour, scent, shapes and atmospheres created by the trees in their blooming period shape human experience – the trees are affective in this regard. Jacarandas shimmer across the decades and shape human experience, culture, place and sense making as robust beings with much to say.

72 E. Oriel, A Field Guide to Human-Elephant Relations and Conflict in Sri Lanka: Patterns, Roles, and Rhythms of Multispecies Socialities within Conflict and Cohabitation. Ph.D. diss. University of London, 2022.

73 J. Carr, and T. Milstein, '"See nothing but beauty"': The shared work of making anthropogenic destruction invisible to the human eye', *Geoforum* **122** (2021): 183–192.

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