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THE DEAD LAND AS JURIDICAL WITNESS: GEOPOLITICS, GEONTOPOWER, AND SLOW VIOLENCE IN KIM SCOTT'S TABOO

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ABSTRACT

The Australian landscape is often portrayed in settler literature as a "silent" backdrop to human endeavor, a tabula rasa upon which the colonial project was written. However, in Kim Scott's Taboo (2017), the landscape is far from silent; it is an active, traumatized, and geopolitical force. This paper explores the geopolitics of the taboo, a term that encompasses the physical and spiritual contestation over a massacre site in Western Australia. By moving beyond a human-centric historical analysis, we can apply the lens of geopolitics, geontologies to understand how the land itself acts as a witness to, and a victim of, colonial violence. In Taboo (2017), Kim Scott reconfigures the Kukenarup massacre site—the "dead land"—not as backdrop but as a geopolitical actor that resists, witnesses, and mediates healing through its flora, topography, and remembered violence. Moving beyond conventional geopolitics as inter-state rivalry, this article reads the novel's central site as a zone where biopolitics (the governance of Indigenous bodies) and geontopower (the regulation of the distinction between "life" and "non-life") are exercised in a settler-colonial order. The massacre place functions as an earthly jurisprudence, a juridical witness that refuses incorporation into regimes of private property, development, and national forgetting. Treating the region as a palimpsestic geography, the analysis traces how Scott represents both the "fast violence" of massacre and the "slow violence" of ecological neglect and historical denial, and how the characters' ritualised return enacts a political and ecological "detoxification" of land and memory. Attention to fences, enclosures, and Indigenous concepts of Country reveals how Taboo exposes the limits of colonial geopolitics, as ecological processes and Indigenous law continually overflow cadastral lines. In a comparative coda, the article juxtaposes Taboo with Alexis Wright's The Swan Book to argue that both novels mount a literary-geopolitical critique in which damaged landscapes act as characters, witnesses, and agents of resistance in late liberalism.

KEYWORDS: Geopolitics, Geontopower, Slow Violence, Indigenous, Australian.

Introduction

Kim Scott's Taboo narrates a group of mostly Noongar people returning to ancestral country in South-West Western Australia, more than a century after the Kukenarup massacre rendered the land "taboo" for their forebears. Anchored in the real history of Cocanarup near Ravensthorpe, the novel follows Wirlomin descendants who travel by bus to the region, alongside the white Horton family whose property sits at the heart of the massacre site. Although the narrative unfolds in the twenty-first century, it is structured around a spatial and historical wound: a "massacre place" that continues to shape the lives of Noongar and settler descendants even as official histories minimise or euphemise the event.

The novel's opening lines immediately foreground this wound in the land itself:

"Our hometown was a massacre place. People called it taboo. They said it is haunted and you will get sick if you go there. Others just bragged: we shot you and poisoned the water holes so you never come back". (Scott, 1)This communal 'our' is voiced from the massacre place, and critics note that the statement rises "from the riverbed 'as if we were the undead'," situating the site as a speaking subject that frames the entire narrative. The syntax structures indigenous recollection of taboo and haunting to white boasts about past killing, so that the land becomes the medium through which antagonistic testimonies are forced into a single, unsettled sentence. Already, Taboo casts the massacre site as juridical witness rather than mute backdrop.

Existing criticism has highlighted Taboo's exploration of silence, trauma, and what Tony Hughes-d'Aeth calls the "extimacy" of massacre: the way massacre is at once external and intimate to the psyches of those who live with its legacy. Critics emphasise how massacre terrain in the novel is "quintessentially extimate", simultaneously public and interior, and how the opening chorus stages this extimacy by speaking from the ground of violence itself. Reviewers also note the novel's attention to contemporary white attempts at reconciliation, ranging from the Hortons' "good intentions" to local reluctance even to use the word "massacre".

Building on this work, I argue that Taboo can be read through what I call the geopolitics of the taboo site. In classical usage, geopolitics refers to how states project power through territory, borders and resources, but recent work has expanded the term to encompass struggles over land at sub-national and more-than-human scales. Here "geopolitics" does not refer to statecraft or interstate competition but to a literal and figurative contest over a specific piece of earth: a massacre site whose meaning is violently contested and whose status as Country unsettles the settler fantasy of land as inert property. The critical term "taboo" in the novel's title thus signals not only a topic that is unspeakable but also a place that is structurally excluded from official cartographies and from settler imaginaries of productive land.

My reading draws on three conceptual frames. First, biopolitics (after Foucault) directs attention to the regulation of Indigenous lives and deaths through missions, removals, incarceration, and welfare regimes that haunt Scott's characters. Foucault's formulation of power that "makes live and let's die" over populations is particularly resonant in a settler-colonial context. Second, geontopower, as theorised by Elizabeth Povinelli, illuminates how late liberal regimes govern the distinction between "life" and "non-life," managing land, water, and other so-called inert matter in ways that reproduce extractive and property-based logics. Third, Rob Nixon's concept of slow violence draws out how environmental degradation and historical denial constitute a dispersed, incremental harm that extends the temporality of the Kukenarup massacre into the present.

The article proceeds in six main sections and a coda. Section 2 outlines the theoretical framework of biopolitics, geontopower, and slow violence. Section 3 reads the massacre site as a juridical witness, an "earth court" that remembers and adjudicates colonial violence. Section 4 develops the notion of a palimpsestic geography in which colonial and Noongar inscriptions coexist and contend. Section 5 analyses the "dead land" as a toxic landscape of slow violence, while Section 6 focuses on fences and enclosures as instruments of colonial geopolitics that are continually undermined by ecological and Indigenous forces. Section 7 conceptualises the land as a character that both resists and invites healing. A comparative coda places Taboo in dialogue with Alexis Wright's The Swan Book to show how Indigenous Australian fiction more broadly reconfigures damaged environments as agents of geopolitical critique.

Biopolitics, Geontopower, and Slow Violence

Foucault's concept of biopolitics names a shift from sovereign power's right to take life toward a dispersed apparatus that manages the health, fertility, mobility and mortality of populations. Biopower as he puts it is a form of power that "makes live and lets die" operating through institutions such as schools, hospitals, prisons and welfare agencies.

In settler, colonial contexts, critics have shown how biopolitics underpins assimilation policies, child removal and carceral regimes that disproportionately target indigenous peoples. Taboo alludes to this background through references to mission histories, policing and welfare interventions that structure the lives of characters such as Tilly and Jim Coolman. The novel's representation of white memory around massacre also reflects a biopolitical calculus of acceptable loss. When Dan and Malcolm Horton recall childhood stories of Kukenarup, Scott writes:

"Of course it was a long time ago and- here Dan and Malcolm agreed- there was no real evidence of any more than a few Aborigines being killed. Undoubtedly, some were; they both remembered finding a skull wedged by the rock waterhole when they were still children…. On their own property". (Scott, 8)

The phrase 'no real evidence of any more than a few' shrinks mass reprisal into a manageable number within the horizon of pastoral productivity, even as the remembered skull functions as incontrovertible evidence lodged in the land itself. In biopolitical terms, the scene shows settler subjects naturalising a regime in which "a few" indigenous deaths are an acceptable by-product of maintaining the station.

Whereas biopolitics focuses on the optimisation and abandonment of life, geontopower, in Elizabeth Povinelli's terms, aggregates "discourses, affects, and tactics that configure the relation between life and Nonlife. Povinelli calls Nonlife—land, water, soil, and other entities that late liberal regimes treat as inert resources. Povinelli's notion of geontopower describes "a mode of power that operates over the distinction between Life and Nonlife," shaping how late liberal polities manage geological, climatic, and environmental processes. Rather than replacing biopolitics, geontopower extends it, revealing how the "biontological enclosure of existence" restricts meaningful existence to human and certain animal life while rendering land and stone as background matter. In Australia, such an enclosure is evident in the legal fiction of terra nullius and its afterlives in cadastral mapping, mining regimes and conservation logics that construe Country as a resource rather than a law-bearing presence.

Taboo repeatedly contests this separation of Life from Nonlife. The opening declaration that "our hometown was a massacre place" is followed immediately by the remark that "people called it taboo" and warned that visitors would "get sick if you go there", an epidemiological language attached to a specific terrain. Here Nonlife (the land) is not inert but pathogenic, capable of making human bodies ill if its history is ignored. The subsequent boast that "we shot you and poisoned the waterholes so you never come back" makes water itself as an agent in the geontopolitical struggle, as a life-support system turned weapon. Geontopower is thus visible in the colonial effort to weaponise and then forget waterholes, and in the counter-claim that these same waterholes retain and transmit memory.

Scott's massacre site directly contests such an enclosure. The "dead land" is officially classified as marginal agricultural country—overgrazed, rocky, unprofitable—and is treated by the town of Kukaculla as a remote, best-forgotten patch of scrub. In Noongar terms, however, this land is an ancestral Country that predates and exceeds the colonial transformation into "Kokanarup Station" and nearby freehold blocks. Through narrative voice and focalisation, Scott repeatedly attributes agency to landforms, waters, and more-than-human presences. The opening invocation from the riverbed, voiced by "undead" narrators, dramatises this non-human agency by having the land speak the story into being. Rob Nixon's formulation of slow violence as "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space" provides a temporal lens for reading the aftermath of the Kukenarup massacre. Nixon tresses that slow violence is often "not viewed as violence at all," especially when its ecological and social consequences unfold over generations. In Taboo, the initial slaughter—the fast violence of shooting, burning, and poisoning waterholes—gives way to a prolonged period in which the massacre is contested, euphemised ("we don't like the word massacre"), or displaced into narratives of "wrongdoings on both sides." At the same time, the massacre site experiences environmental degradation and social neglect, becoming a zone of psychic and ecological toxicity.

Biopolitics, geontopower, and slow violence thus converge in the novel's representation of the taboo land. Power over Indigenous lives and deaths intersects with power over the classification and use of land, and both forms of power obscure the ongoing harm that unfolds in the wake of atrocity. The following sections show how Scott gives this convergence a concrete, spatial form in the massacre site itself.

The Massacre Site as Juridical Witness: Jurisprudence of the Earth

The notion of the land as a juridical witness—a terrain that has standing in an ethical and political

sense—runs through Taboo's structure and imagery. The novel opens with a collective voice rising from the riverbed at the massacre site, speaking of a "massacre place" from a perspective that is at once ancestral, subterranean, and non-human. This chorus establishes the land as a first-person subject of history, an entity that remembers and speaks before any individual human character appears.

The Kukenarup/Kokanarup region, as critics have noted, is historically associated with the 1880s Dunn family killings and subsequent mass reprisals against Wirlomin Noongar people. In the novel, however, the massacre is not reconstructed in a detailed flashback. Instead, Scott foregrounds the present-day terrain: the caves, river, and "Gap" that anchor the site. Reviewers describe the setting as "messy, violent and vital," emphasising how the river and riverbed hold multiple "stories of reclamation and revival," including the story of the massacre place itself. The land is thus positioned as both archive and witness.

This stands in sharp contrast to Western legal treatments of crime scenes, which regard places as neutral containers for human evidence. In official history, Kukenarup can be marked with plaques or memorials, but the massacre becomes a past event that is symbolic rather than ongoing. Scott resists this closure by giving the land a continuous testimonial function: it remains the locus where unresolved violence is registered, a site that exerts pressure on characters' bodies and perceptions.

The "jurisprudence of the earth" in Taboo manifests in the way the massacre site seems to judge the characters who approach it. Noongar returnees experience bodily sensations—unease, nausea, sudden recognition—that signal the land's awareness of their presence. White characters such as the Hortons are drawn into uneasy relation with the site as they host the group and confront their own family's connection to the land's violent history. The land does not simply represent guilt; it actively organises encounters that force characters into ethical and political reflection.

By requiring that reconciliation efforts take place at the site itself—as a "six-day journey back to country to recreate the land and bring healing"—Scott implies that any reckoning with colonial violence must pass through this earthly court. The massacre is not fully adjudicated until its geography is faced, walked, and engaged with. In this sense, the land functions as a tribunal that will not be satisfied with plaques, distant apologies, or purely discursive recognition.

Palimpsestic Geography: Country, Station, and Town

The massacre site and its surrounds are best understood as a palimpsestic geography in which Indigenous and colonial inscriptions layer over one another without complete erasure. Scott signals this through shifts in naming (Noongar names vs "Kokanarup," "Kukaculla"), through references to old station buildings and new infrastructure, and through the narrative's oscillation between ancestral and contemporary temporalities. On one level, the Kukenarup region is marked by colonial property forms: fences, paddocks, farm tracks, and the Horton family's "Kocanarup Station," a fictionalised version of the historic Dunn property. The town of "Kukaculla" embodies what one reviewer calls the "normality of the white historical narrative," where the massacre is downplayed and absorbed into narratives of mutual wrongdoing or inevitable progress. In this layer, the massacre site is a marginal corner of a working property—a patch of scrub and rock at the edge of productive agriculture.

Simultaneously, the region exists as Wirlomin Noongar Country, tied to ancestral songlines, stories, and kin relations that predate colonisation by millennia. For Noongar characters, the land holds memories of hunting, ceremony, and everyday life alongside memories of massacre and displacement. Scott's earlier work on Wirlomin storytelling projects informs Taboo's representation of this deep-time connection. The return journey that structures the novel is a process of re-reading this palimpsest. Noongar characters such as Tilly, who has been separated from her community, must learn to see beyond the colonial layer and recognise older names, stories, and relations embedded in the landscape. Settler characters must confront the "ghosting" of Noongar histories beneath their own property narratives. Walking, naming, and storytelling perform a decolonial cartography that redraws the region as Country rather than merely land. This palimpsestic geography is geopolitically charged because it exposes a conflict between two spatial orders: one organised around private property, productivity, and national narratives; the other around kinship, responsibility, and ancestral law. Taboo does not resolve this conflict, but it insists that any genuine reconciliation must acknowledge and work within this layered, contested space.

Seeing Country as Someone: Characters' Encounters with a Living Land

Characters in Taboo repeatedly respond to the massacre place as if it were a living entity that pushes

back against denial and also hosts the work of healing. The unnamed 'we' of the opening chorus treats the land as a subject that remembers and resists:

"Our hometown was a massacre place. People called it taboo. They said it is haunted and you will get sick if you go there. Others just bragged: we shot you and poisoned the waterholes so you never come back".

The warning that you will "get sick" if you go there personifies the place as capable of inflicting illness in response to past violence, while the poisoned waterholes show flora and water turned into agents that hold a grudge against return. Tilly and the Noongar group came to see the land as mediating their own healing. The Sydney Review of Books emphasises that the novel's language "tell many stories of reclamation and revival, including the actual story of a six-day journey back to country to recreate the land and bring healing", where walking and camping on Kokanarup and at the coastal camp gradually transform both people and place. Elder Nita makes this explicit when she tells the younger group:

"Lot of us never been back to this area, not our parents and grandparents even, not since the killing. The old people been waiting for us I reckon",

casting Country as relatives who actively await and respond to their descendants' return.

The land also resists by refusing to stay buried, reviewers note that the dead "return, in countless ways, including as the 'undead' Noongar ancestors who rise from the riverbed to narrate the novel, and most movingly as a tumbling skeleton invoked in a key passage. This skeleton, shaken loose from the rocky riverbed, is the terrain giving up its own evidence, a remembered violence that interrupts the present and refuses to be folded into benign local history. At the camp and Peace Park, characters encounter flora and topography as part of this process. Jane Gleeson-White points out that the six-day trip back to Kokanarup and the coastal camp is organised around "this particular, active, living land and its complex relations with beings human and otherwise", where language, story, trees, river and coastline together "bring life and healing "to a traumatic past. Janet Horton's desire to plant trees and create a Peace Park on Kokanarup likewise treats the site's vegetation as integral to memory and reconciliation, using new plantings to mark and slowly re-green a place previously avoided as dead land.

Finally, the Right Now interview with Scott underscores how characters such as Tilly and Gerald experience healing specifically through being "returned to country" with Noongar language and knowledge. Their physical symptoms and hauntings ease as they camp on Country, hear stories, and move through familiar flora and topography; Scott himself describes this as the "possibility of being nourished or nurtured, through community", with land as the medium that balances vulnerability and strength.

Toxic Landscapes and Slow Violence: Dead Land After Massacre

As several commentators note, Taboo deals less with the spectacular violence of the massacre itself and more with the "messy, violent and vital present" in which its consequences continue to unfold. The site is repeatedly described as "taboo," not simply because of past killings but because of the ongoing refusal of both Indigenous and settler communities to inhabit it fully. For Wirlomin Noongar, the land has been too dangerous, too painful to visit for generations. For white farmers, it is unproductive and uncanny, best left on the margins of the property. This mutual avoidance turns the area into a toxic landscape—a place where environmental and psychological neglect mirror each other. The poisoning of waterholes during the massacre, mentioned in reviews and critical summaries, symbolises this toxicity: the very source of life becomes a weapon, and its contamination persists as a metaphor for poisoned relations. The degraded state of the land—its patchy vegetation, erosion, and apparent "deadness"—reflects both ecological damage and the deadening effect of prolonged denial.

Nixon's concept of slow violence helps articulate this extended temporality of harm. The massacre was a moment of fast violence, but its true force lies in how its effects are dispersed across time: in the generations of Noongar people who avoided their ancestral country; in the town's saturated but unspoken awareness of "something wrong"; in the environmental deterioration of a place that is neither fully cared for nor fully abandoned.

The group's six-day return to the site, then, is a form of slow counter-violence. It does not erase the harm but begins to reconfigure the land as a place of relation rather than avoidance. The six-day journey, as emphasised in the Sydney Review of Books, is a story of "recreating the land and bringing healing" and involves walking, camping, storytelling, and ceremony that gradually re-inscribe the land with different affects and meanings. The presence of bodies—especially those of younger Noongar people—signals a partial reversal of decades of absence.

By narrating this process, Scott suggests that healing from slow violence must itself be slow, embodied, and place-based. Policy gestures at a distance cannot substitute for the hard work of returning to damaged sites and rebuilding relationships with them. The "dead land" comes to life not through development or commodification but through careful attention and shared presence.

Fences and Enclosures: Limits of Colonial Geopolitics

In the colonial project of Western Australia, the fence is the primary geopolitical instrument. It is not merely a physical barrier of wire and wood; it is a legal and ontological claim that attempts to transform "Country"—a sentient, relational entity—into "Property"—a static, tradable commodity. In Taboo, the fence around Dan Horton's farm serves as the frontline of this conflict, creating a "void" where Noongar history has been forcibly emptied to make room for the settler-colonial pastoral dream. The settler-colonial state relies on Cartographic Silence—the deliberate act of leaving Indigenous landmarks, massacre sites, and sacred geographies off the official map. In Taboo, the town of Kepalup is defined by its "neat" boundaries and surveyed paddocks. For the white characters, the fence provides a sense of "ontological security." It suggests that the land has been tamed and that the past has been successfully fenced out. However, the massacre site exists as a "void" within this map. It is a space that cannot be farmed, a "dead zone" that resists the economic logic of the settler. Scott describes the area as rugged and "un-paddocked," signifying that the land itself refuses to submit to the geometry of the colonial surveyor.

Fences in Taboo condense the workings of colonial geopolitics. They materialise survey lines, titles, and the assertion that land is a commodity subject to ownership and exclusion. In reviews, the Horton property stands as a microcosm of "whites of good intentions" who struggle to recognise the depth of ongoing harm they are part of. Fences around the massacre site mark the boundary between Horton land and the taboo scrub. On one level, the fence is a barrier that polices who may access the site. Entering without permission constitutes trespass, legally enforceable by the state's police powers. For local whites, the fence also functions metaphorically to keep the past on "the other side," as something sealed off. For Wirlomin Noongar, the fence symbolises the expropriation of their country and the imposed separation from ancestral places. At the level of plot, a key moment occurs when the Noongar group arrives by bus and passes through the boundary into Horton land: they "rattle through the gate in the sagging fence and into Kokanarup Station". Even without the precise wording, reviews emphasise that the return journey traverses fences and property lines to access the taboo scrub. The "sagging fence" image is telling; it visually undermines the solidity of the cadastral line, suggesting that weather, time and animals have already begun to undo it. As the group rattles through, bodies legally constructed as potential trespassers enter as invited guests, exposing property as a contingent performance rather than a natural fact.

However, Scott's attention to ecological processes reveals how fences are constantly undermined. Weather, animals, and plant growth erode and cross these boundaries. Rust, sagging wires, and fallen posts mark the material limits of this attempt to fix space. The land's own dynamics slowly undo the fence even as humans repair it, illustrating geontopower's vulnerability to the very Nonlife it seeks to regulate. Moreover, memory and story cross the fence with ease. Noongar oral histories of the massacre circulate far beyond the property line; even settler families carry rumours and partial accounts. The fence cannot contain guilt, fear, or grief. When the Noongar group enters the property as invited guests, the symbolic order of the fence is inverted: the "trespassers" become honoured visitors, and the property owners must confront the fact that their title rests on a violent history. In this inversion, Taboo exposes the limits of colonial geopolitics. The fence's claim to separate private from public, inside from outside, legitimate from illegitimate, is shown to be contingent and fragile. Indigenous concepts of Country, in which land is relational and non-exclusive, present an alternative geopolitics that refuses enclosure. The massacre site, as Country, asserts demands that cannot be domesticated by the property boundary.

The Dead Land as Character: Resistance and Invitation

Taken together, the features discussed so far—juridical witness, palimpsestic layering, toxic slow violence, and contested fences—compose a portrait of the massacre site as a character with its own arc of resistance and invitation. Reviewers note that the novel "opens with a communal statement about a 'massacre place' from voices that rise from the riverbed 'as if we were the undead,'" establishing the place itself as a narrating presence. Throughout the novel, the landscape responds to characters'

movements, moods, and rituals in ways that resemble a complex subjectivity.

The land's resistance manifests in its refusal to be easily farmed, its reputation as taboo, and the discomfort it elicits in both Indigenous and settler visitors. It is a place where vehicles break down, where people get lost, where the weather can turn quickly. These narrative details reinforce the sense that the land is pushing back against attempts to treat it as ordinary terrain. At the same time, the land invites when approached with respect and care. The group's journey is marked by subtle signs—changes in birdsong, appearances of particular plants, atmospheric shifts—that characters interpret as acknowledgements or responses from Country. This is particularly evident in Scott's use of more-than-human perspectives, where the narrative focalisation briefly aligns with non-human entities. The land's invitations are not sentimental; they are conditional on an ethic of listening and responsibility. In conceptual terms, this double movement aligns with Indigenous formulations of Country as both a nurturing and demanding relation. The massacre site is not simply a victim of violence; it is an active participant in decisions about who may return and under what conditions. As a character, it undergoes a transformation: from an isolated, deadened zone to a place re-entered, spoken with, and partially re-animated by ceremony and story.

By characterising land in this way, Taboo advances a more-than-human geopolitics in which the central agents are not states or leaders but sites of damaged Country. The political question becomes: how will humans respond to the demands of such places? Will they continue to fence them off and deny their histories, or will they accept the obligations that arise from being on Country?

Comparative Coda: Taboo and The Swan Book

A brief comparison with Alexis Wright's The Swan Book helps situate Taboo within a broader Indigenous Australian literary geopolitics. Wright's novel, set in a near-future Australia transformed by climate change and ongoing colonial structures, centres on swampland and contaminated inland seas that shape the lives of Aboriginal communities. Like Scott's massacre site, Wright's landscapes are damaged yet agentive; they bear the marks of slow violence and geontopolitical manipulation.

Where Taboo operates at a local scale, focusing on one massacre site and its immediate social milieu, The Swan Book adopts a national and planetary scale, depicting an Australia where environmental catastrophe and carceral politics reconfigure borders and sovereignties. In both cases, however, land and water function as characters rather than mere settings: Wright's swamps and Scott's dead land articulate critiques of state power, racial hierarchies, and extractive economies through their altered forms and behaviours.

Bringing the two together underscores the central claim of this article: that Indigenous Australian fiction is leading a re-thinking of geopolitics as a field in which damaged environments—not only human actors—play decisive roles. Scott's focus on a massacre site and Wright's on swamplands exemplify different but complementary geontopolitical imaginaries, both of which challenge late liberal efforts to cordon "Nonlife" off from ethical and political consideration.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Taboo stages a geopolitics of the taboo site by rendering the Kukenarup massacre land as a juridical witness, a palimpsest of competing spatial orders, a toxic slow-violence landscape, and, ultimately, a character that resists and invites healing. Through biopolitics, we see the regulation of Indigenous lives that frames the return journey; through geontopower, we apprehend the colonial state's attempt to render land inert and ownable; through slow violence, we grasp the extended temporality of harm and the need for equally extended practices of repair.

By foregrounding the massacre site's agency, Scott displaces the conventional state-centric focus of geopolitics. The crucial contest is not between national governments but between two ontologies of land: one that treats earth as dead property, and one that recognises Country as a living, law-bearing presence. The fence, the poisoned waterholes, the dead land, and the slow re-entry of Noongar descendants into this space mark the fraught interface between these ontologies.

In comparative perspective, Taboo's focus on a single site complements Wright's The Swan Book's global-climatic vision, together suggesting that contemporary Indigenous fiction offers crucial resources for reimagining geopolitics under conditions of ecological crisis and ongoing colonisation. The jurisprudence of the earth, as imagined by Scott, reminds us that reconciliation and justice will remain incomplete as long as damaged places are fenced off, ignored, or relegated to memorial plaques. To respond adequately to the geopolitics of the taboo, we must learn to treat such lands not as mute backdrops but as interlocutors and co-authors of any possible future.

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