

61.1

New Writing from
Western Australia
Fiction
Poetry
Essays
Reviews

In this Issue
Kim Scott
Tara June Winch
Melissa Lucashenko
Bruce Pascoe &
Wayne Barker

Westerly



'Remembering Artists'
Paul Collis

'I sometimes imagine them old fullas with me when I see something clever or funny, nudging me in the side and whispering, "See that?"'

Westerly acknowledges all Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as First Australians, celebrating their culture, history, diversity and deep connection to the land. We celebrate the continuous living cultures of Indigenous people and their vital contributions within Australian society.

Westerly's office, at the University of Western Australia, is located on Whadjak Noongar land. We would like to recognize the Noongar people as the spiritual and cultural custodians of this land and dedicate this issue to their elders past and present as a gesture of our respect.

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**Guest edited by
Stephen Kinnane**

Poetry

Edwin Lee Mulligan
Weather Patterns, Jimadilung 10
Alison Whittaker
The Sapling Barricades
Of Trugernanner 12
Jannali Jones
Past Tense 126
Stuart Cooke
Convergence 162
Phillip Hall
Dawn Song 164
Brendan Ryan
Lajamanu 223
Marian De Saxe
Yam Country: for Emily Kame
Kngwarreye 226
In Gondwanaland 227
Amy Hilhorst
Rottnest, 1997 262
Kevin Gillam
Feeding Lake
Disappointment 264

Fiction

Tara June Winch
The Yield 27
Melissa Lucashenko
My Dear Child 127
Michalia Arathimos
The Conservation of
the Stars 195
Katinka Smit
Behind the Line 215
Warwick Newnham
'Jabbin Jabbin Kirroo Ka' 235

Creative Non-Fiction

Kevin Brophy
Introduction to Mulan 39
Stevie Michael Hill-Kopp Junior
My Life in Mulan 40
Dermott Neach
My First Game on Mulan Oval 42
Doris Eaton, Lekkie Hopkins and
Ann Ingamells
Giveaway 118
Dr Cheryl Kickett-Tucker
Wind Spirit: Nanna's Legacy 129
Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik
Truth and Consequence 142
Tom Stephens
Naming Rights 151
Caitlin Prince
Tomorrow, another
will come 158
Kim Scott
Both Hands Full 166
Graham Akhurst
Clutching the Void 228
Paul Collis
Walking in Old Shoes 242
Remembering Artists 244

Essays

Rachael Swain and
Dalisa Pigram
Calling a Warning 14
Cheryl Narkle,
Caroline Narkle and
Annette Davis
Bella Kelly 45
Lily Bennion
Threaded Djon figures
from Goulburn Island 60
Moira De Angelis
A Story About Two Feather
Baskets 62
Natalie Hewlett
Pwoja Jilamara 64
Margaret Nadebaum
Dilly Bag and Bark Paintings
from Arnhem Land 66
Vanessa Wiggins
Bike and Rider 69

Reviews

Danielle Binks
A Review of *The Intervention: An Anthology* 269
Phillip Hall
A Review of *Timothy Cook: Dancing With the Moon* 273
Phillip Hall
A Review of Olive Knight,
The Bauhinia Tree: The Life of Kankawa Nagarra
Olive Knight 276

Eve Chaloupka
Empty Vessels 71

Sandy Toussaint
A Mix of Emotion 73
Brenda L Croft
Retrac(k)ing country and (s)kin:
walking the Wave Hill Walk Off
Track (and other sites of cultural
contestation) 76

Elfie Shiosaki
Writing from the Heart 83
Clint Bracknell
Singing Back to the Archive 92

Sandra Phillips and
Alison Ravenscroft
From the Earth Out: word, image,
sound, object, body, country 105
Steve Kinnane in conversation
with Melissa Lucashenko, Bruce
Pascoe and Wayne Barker
Stories from the Front 178
Jacqueline Wright
Unburdening the World: Breaking
the Cycle of the Perpetual Single
Story 203
Karen Atkinson
Threshold: Reconfiguring the Past
in *That Deadman Dance* 247
Pat Lowe
Two Sisters revisited 265

Submissions 282
Subscriptions 283

This issue is at heart a celebration. It set out with the theme of renewal, looking to embrace growth and dynamic evolution of culture as a way of speaking to the myriad changes and challenges contemporary Indigenous societies have faced. The contributions received surprised us, in a few ways. They varied, as we had hoped, in approaching ideas of community and identity, history and heritage, language and country, amongst other topics. We also received submission across a whole range of art forms, and we have done our best to represent visual art and theatre in response. But overwhelmingly, the work submitted and collected here sought to witness—some the past, some the present, many their hopes for the future. This act of telling as testimonial is not something fragile. It is a robust and vibrant energy, charging each unique voice, and demanding a space in which it can be felt.

The decision to include both Indigenous and non-Indigenous authors in this issue was made in this spirit. We wanted this issue of *Westerly* to speak from the growing front of innovative collaborative creative practice underway in this country. Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers, artists, choreographers, academics, documentarians and holders of cultural authority within this issue have given voice to the influences of Indigenous experience, history, governance, cultural knowledge, creativity and country through in their works.

Subtle themes emerged in the pieces selected, in particular a question of the archive and its potential as a body of texts both in a strange way fixed, representative, and dynamic, capable of exposing and exploding. Essays from Clint Bracknell and Elfie Shiosaki take different yet complementary approaches in reading archival material, while Kim Scott's beautiful work of creative non-fiction enacts this delicate tension through fragmented moments and memories. Alternately, Sandra Phillips and Alison Ravenscroft look to reinvent the archive in examining the

possibilities for Indigenous stories online, while interviews with Wayne Barker, Melissa Lucashenko and Bruce Pascoe offer their voices in contribution to the contemporary collection of testimonials.

Several groups have supported this issue, spreading the word and connecting us with authors. Our thanks to black&write!, FNAWN, Karungkarni Art & Culture, Tjanpi Desert Weavers, Buka-Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, Aboriginal Artists Agency, Kevin Brophy and Magabala Books. Indirectly, as well: two of the authors within have been past fellows of the wonderful black&write! Essays from Cheryl Kickett-Tucker and MaryAnn Bin Sallik have come to us via Magabala Books—both will be published in the forthcoming collection *Us Women, Our Ways* (2017). For this support, and for the general enthusiasm this issue has been met with, we are very grateful. And finally, the Australia Council for the Arts have provided funding in support of this publication, and to allow for our next initiative: the *Westerly* Editor for Indigenous Writing.

Our new Editor will come on board as a point of contact for Indigenous authors, soliciting and supporting writing, and be responsible for producing at least 5% of the content in each issue. We are hoping this will make and actively maintain a space for Indigenous representation in the literary culture of our Magazine—one which can meet with the richness and beauty of the intertextual space opened by the work collected here.

Stephen Kinnane and Catherine Noske, 2016

PATRICIA HACKETT PRIZE

The editors have pleasure in announcing the winners of the annual Patricia Hackett Prize for the best contributions to *Westerly* in 2015, to

DONNA MAZZA

For her story,
'The Exhibit'

Published in *Westerly* 60:1, 2015

and

SIOBHAN HODGE

For her poem,
'Pay it Forward'

Published in *Westerly* 60:2, 2015



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**Weather Patterns,
Jimadilung**
Edwin Lee Mulligan

Edwin Lee Mulligan grew up in Yakanarra and now resides in Noonkanbah. His grandfather Jimmy Pike is the reason Edwin started his career in the arts. He has won numerous art awards for his paintings and has exhibited at the NGV in Melbourne.

It's been years and it's never been raining as sign of wealth patterns at work in the creamy blue sky. An elder looked up and noticed a single cloud formation appeared it was going to a significant place. The cloud was very small and very dark and yet it still didn't rain. We walk on the grassy plains with sun bleached sensitive skin sucked up by the heat and one day we too will weather away like a single significant blade of the grass in the field. Since the coming of time the spirits of the skies had been painting their picture telling the stories of changing season and as our generation still walk on the grassy plains left a long wondering what this weather patterns means?



Photo from 'Cut the Sky', Edwin Lee Mulligan.
Photo by Jon Green, ©Jon Green Photographer



Photo from 'Cut the Sky', Edwin Lee Mulligan.
Photo by Jon Green, ©Jon Green Photographer

The Sapling Barricades Of Trugernanner

Alison Whittaker

Alison Whittaker is a Gomeroi poet and essayist from the floodplain fringe of north-western New South Wales. Her debut poetry collection *Lemons in the Chicken Wire* was the winner of the State Library of Queensland's 2015 black&write! Fellowship.

Sap clot

Tender! Horror!

Thrice upon the shore comes the violence;
Upon it too come the corpses, lukewarm by the fern
Tossed by the sea, fat and soaping
they churn.

Where will you turn, survivor, for guidance?
Kick the slag, mourn the sea,
heave bile at the silence!

Your parts archived in other places,
mothballed and stern.
Yet, we too are violent women—and violent we learn.

Yes! Tender we strike and shrewdly we yearn.
Til either vengeance or we are wrung out
our words'll tender the violence
while they
tender violets in drought.
And us women seeds
both sewn and unseamed by the fray.

The grey saltbush

'Full-blooded?'
Your other fullness is round
and stretching—a belly
whose fullness was hellish.
We
and others speak your fullness sans sound.

'Full blooded?'
Half of you's by the ground while
the other half's in books:
'The last hope, the last, the Machiavelli!'

Your fullness was more than blood.
And no, no blood could make we black women full.

So it wove through us, unsevered by the flag
Unscathed by its promise of our inevitable fade.

'The last?'
Did black girls merely play
While all hope sank further still? No.
With panicked strength
Fullness came through like sapling life from the slag.

We mutt bastards grown
This fragile reserve 'round your legacy's length.

Calling a Warning

Rachael Swain and
Dalisa Pigram

Rachael Swain and Dalisa Pigram are founding members and co-artistic directors of intercultural dance theatre company Marrugeku based in Broome, Western Australia. Rachael is a director, dramaturg and performance researcher. Yawuru/Bardi woman Dalisa Pigram was born and raised in Broome and is a choreographer, dancer and Yawuru language teacher.

This article introduces Marrugeku, an intercultural-Indigenous dance theatre company based in Broome, Western Australia, and discusses one of our recent dance theatre and video works: *Gudirr Gudirr* (2013). Through statements about creation of the work by the projects conceiver and performer Dalisa Pigram, and my descriptions and contextualisation of the performance, I hope to propose how contemporary dance can articulate a productive, if unsettled dynamic between the past and the present in the Kimberley, while activating innovative approaches to cultural renewal through dance.

Marrugeku has worked with processes of cultural and disciplinary exchange between Indigenous artists from a range of nations and with immigrant and settler artists since its inception in 1993. Initially based in Kunbarllanjnja, Western Arnhem Land, on the land of the Kunwinjku people, the company has been based in Broome on the traditional homelands of the Yawuru since 2003. Marrugeku is co-directed by two of its founding company members: choreographer and dancer Dalisa Pigram (of Yawuru, Bardi, Malaysian, Filipino, English and Irish descent) and myself, a director and researcher and an Australian-based Pākehā (New Zealander of Scottish, Irish and English descent)¹.

Marrugeku fosters intercultural as well as trans-Indigenous exchange to stimulate the development of contemporary dance. I choose to use the sometimes contested term 'intercultural', conscious of its multiple past uses and abuses². I do so to continually be reminded that intercultural practice always takes place on the unstable and shifting ground of cultural interaction, invoking histories of contact and providing scope for remapping future exchanges in contested sites. Intercultural performance

is always negotiated. Its ways and means can never be taken for granted. In Marrugeku's work we maintain an overarching intercultural ethos and methodology, and within this, create specific spaces for trans-Indigenous exchange and dialogue.

Contemporary Indigenous dance is currently undergoing a period of expansion and redefinition worldwide. Indigenous choreographers and dancers are employing a diverse range of strategies to negotiate their cultural responsibilities along with their own artistic vision and developments in international contemporary dance, itself a global conversation.

Our Canadian friend and colleague, Plains Cree actor, director and choreographer Michael Greyeyes puts it this way: '...there is no First Nations Dance. The category does not exist. The only category is dance by First Nations artists; whereby, we move in and out of traditional forms and staging, searching for new audiences and dance languages.' (np)

He asks 'Is the public ready to go there with us? Will the audiences for "Indian" dance want to see us re-inscribe the form ruthlessly—re-invent ourselves and re-write the narrative?' (np).

This search to re-inscribe the form is exemplified for us in our current production *Gudirr Gudirr*, a solo dance theatre work, conceived, co-choreographed and performed by Dalisa together on stage with the video art of Vernon Ah Kee.

For several years Dalisa and I had been in discussion about the development of a solo work for her to be created in collaboration with Belgian choreographer Koen Augustijnen, with whom I had previously co-directed *Incognita* (2003). Dalisa had been one of five co-devising performers on *Incognita* and together with Koen she created a short solo scene which offered much potential for further collaboration. In the early days of the project in Broome in 2011, Dalisa spoke to Patrick Dodson, who is one of her grandfathers, about a concept for the piece. Patrick, who is also Marrugeku's cultural advisor, reminded Dalisa of gudirr gudirr, a wader bird, also known as guwayi, in Yawuru, which calls out a warning when the tide is about to change. He proposed that through her co-creation of Marrugeku's productions in Broome, as well as her work as a Yawuru language teacher, Dalisa was akin to the wader bird, calling a warning to the community that the tide is turning and it is time to change position, it is time for action. During rehearsals, Patrick said:

That bird goes right to the heart of it, not just that the tide is coming in, but that there is a danger here and you have to move to a new place of safety. To a place you can deal with

it. It's a bringing people to an alertness. If you don't hear the warning you will be in trouble. (np)

The Broome community was then, and is still, facing issues of massive industrialisation on nearby traditional lands, loss of language and major gaps between Indigenous and non-Indigenous wellbeing. At the same time the Yawuru people of Broome are mapping new paths to the future through their native title achieved in 2006 and their cultural management plan.

As is perhaps widely known in Western Australia, Broome was made exempt from the 1901 Australian Immigration Restriction Act (The White Australia Policy) in order to allow indentured Asian workers to carry out the hard labour of the pearling industry. This led to relations between the immigrant Japanese, Chinese, Malaysian, Indonesian and Filipino workers and local Indigenous women, despite being illegal under the Western Australian government's strict co-habitation laws put in place to control Aboriginal people's lives. The legacy of this period, for young people who come from multiethnic Indigenous backgrounds, and specifically for Dalisa's family, is explored in *Gudirr Gudirr*.

In conceiving the show, we took *gudirr gudirr*, the migratory wader as a starting point. Utilising our methodology of generating contemporary dance through a 'task based'¹³ improvisational process, Dalisa went on to explore a series of animals which function as omens or warnings to the community. Discussing the creation of the work Dalisa explains:

My movement influences include the Malaysian martial art form Silat, memories of traditional dance forms, animal movements and behaviour, gymnastics and traces of all the collaborators whom I've had the privilege of learning dance and physical movement from. All this inspires and affect how I tackle any movement task given to me. At the same time my family and peoples' history and the current issues in this country that weigh down our hearts, or lift them up, is carried in my body and mind throughout any process of artistic development and dance I work on. (np)

Drawing on the physicality born of her Asian-Indigenous identity, and her abilities to observe animals in dance, Dalisa created a series of portraits to channel the 'alertness' and intensity required to find a new way forwards amidst the legacy of her family's history. Dalisa weaves a portrait of then and now, of the frustration, responsibility and complexity of the present, of facing change and of leaving some things behind. As Patrick has said during rehearsal:

(As an Aboriginal person) you have to be comfortable with change and uncertainty as if they are normal factors of life, rather than safety and security being normal factors of life. Rather than change as an option it is a reality. You have to be able to find a ground of being in that—rather than belonging in one culture or another. There is richness about it. The capacity to be resilient in surviving is now a value globally. (np)

The choreographic work of embodying resilience on stage is enabled through our process of asking questions of dancers. In *Marrugeku* we have been drawn to work in the space opened up by the personal stories of our company members, acknowledging the pain of loss of practices caused by the rupture of families and the break down in the handing on of forms of dance through forced removals and other atrocities. We have applied a task based methodology in a negotiated intercultural process enabling the dancers to work from their own story, their fantasy, their 'blood memory' and in response to the community they live in. Dalisa outlines this process:

The creation of *Gudirr Gudirr* required a series of movement tasks to develop a quality of resilience that you may see in our work. For me it also means to carry my heavy history through that choreographic process. Working with (choreographer and director) Koen Augustijnen and the tasks he set to develop my movement language involved some pretty hard looking in the mirror on my behalf, both physically and mentally. To commit to choreographic tasks like 'restlessness' or 'you can't find a place to put your body' is challenging. But once I committed to the improvisational journey I found myself pushing past my usual vocabulary into territory that surprised myself as a dancer. I found myself exploring the instruction by changing from position to position, from sitting to slumping, from standing to crouching, from left to right shifting my body into a range of physical positions in a fluid but uncomfortable rhythm, trying not to rest in any one position. This sometimes included passing through or travelling using animal crawls and stances. While searching for the physical positions of sitting, crouching, laying, standing, walking et cetera, I was also instructing myself to think about different human emotional qualities. This included feeling lost, searching for someone with urgency, exhaustion, being caught between differing thoughts,

nervousness and helplessness, to mention a few. I guess dancing in contemporary forms with all this in mind shows in itself the underlying resilience and strength that comes naturally to Indigenous artists. (np)

Gudirr Gudirr begins on a dark stage with a looming black wall built of roofing iron and with a black aerial net suspended in the space. In the opening moments a text scrolls up the screen, an excerpt of a report by Travelling Inspector Ernest Mitchell to Chief Protector AO Neville on 21 October 1928:

...I do not advocate encouragement to Asiatics to marry h/castes but it should not be absolutely forbidden. The aborigines now working in Broome have become used to their work and environment and possibly would be useless at anything else. The industry of Broome is economically built on this accepted position... Therefore the natives have become a necessity...

The children of these unions could be absorbed by the industry as they mature... but under the conditions here, unless marriage is allowed—there must be more prostitution, promiscuous indulgence... In domestic service these quadroons from Asiatic h/c unions should replace the abo. Gradually as a more effective & economical house servant. (np).

Dalisa's flicking form on the edge of the light is just visible to the audience as the text scrolls. The lights lift gradually and Dalisa enters the space backing towards the audience, deftly moving in lyrical movements derived from Silat, the Malaysian martial art form she learnt from Ahmat Bin Fadal, who she calls grandfather. Defiant, taut, urgent, her small but muscular figure and Asian Indigenous features appear. Dropping into low lunges, flicking through silat hand gestures, revealing control and the edge of danger, her live presence is ghosted by Ahmat Bin Fadal projected on the black tin wall behind her. Interspersed with the Silat-inspired animal forms and precise bird like quality, we hear the warning call of *guwayi*, the tiny bird that calls to say the tide is turning. To not move is to drown.

During the scene Dalisa speaks out in Yawuru:

Yor Yor!
Waligarra ngayu
Waligarra nyamba gudirr gudirr

Nyamba wubardu bandalmarda guwayi
Gala wanggabula jayida wangal jarrangu
marlu buru, marlu ngarrugnunil,
wirdu wangal wirdu nagula
Yor, Yor!

Look out!
Listen to me
Listen to this warning bird
This little bird 'guwayi'
Big cyclone going to come for us
No country, no people
Big wind
Big tides
You better watch out!
(*Marrugeku, Gudirr Gudirr*)

Her opening warning lays the ground for the emotional journey in the work to come. Two reviews from 2015 highlighted Dalisa's ability to capture the emotional and political implications of her community's history. Martha Schabas in Toronto's *Globe and Mail* responded:

I can't overstate the impact and importance of this piece. In one sense, it's an urgent invective on how systemic oppression has left Australian Aboriginal communities grappling with social and economic injustice. There are sequences of pure rage when, for example, Pigram considers teen suicide rates and how the wait for change feels never-ending. But the piece is also a celebration of the strange phenomenon of "identity" itself, framed through the lens of multiculturalism. (np)

While Perth reviewer David Zampatti said:

Her humor, as gentle as a story about a girl and her father losing their catch of fish and crabs to a turning tide they mistimed, as fierce as a beat poem revolving around the many things one word can say, is captivating. Her response to the tragedies of life in the Kimberley—youth suicide, violence and casual cruelty—is brave and unblinking. (np)

Suffering in an Indigenous Australian context is at once personal and political and frequently concerns the individual's position in community. *Gudirr Gudirr* explores the nature of decolonisation of the mind for Aboriginal people, looking at unlocking doors and facing cultural change.

In particular the production highlights the terrible epidemic of youth suicide in the Kimberley region of Australia.

Along with the harsh presence of the dark corrugated iron video wall, the set contains a single vertical black net, rigged to a swivel; Dalisa's ever present silent partner on stage. The net is a simple prop for a coming-of-age fishing story with her father, or the understated means for an early death. As Dalisa climbs, soars with, or drops suddenly down its length the net functions equally as entrapment and the means to climb out of entrapment.

In between two scenes carried out on the net, a video triptych presents three frames of footage of young men in Broome fighting violently in a car park while kids look on, some of them filming the action on phones. The sequence is hard to watch for Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience members alike, but reaches out to us through Dalisa's live presence, softly lit in the foreground. Wringing her hands and pulling at her clothes, she internally witnesses the events in her community.

Dancers dance for us, their agile, expressive movements ignite our mirror neurons and our own muscle memory. We innately understand the use of weight, force, duration and space and, in Indigenous contexts, that this all happens in Country. Perhaps our embodied response to the sensation of dance also extends to grief, despair and solidarity? In allowing herself to feel and dance the grief, frustration and anger in the public/private space of the stage, Dalisa offers the viewers a moment to bare witness with her. To feel, for a moment, the seeming endless spirals of dislocation and violence inflicted between community members, and also, perhaps, to find and feel the weight and force of their own hope for change.

The video described above is part of section we call Suicide Phrases where Dalisa worked with tasks of finding trauma positions. The suffering is apparent in a gut wrenching moment where Dalisa flails, enacting a gesture of repeatedly hitting her head with rocks, as in the funeral practice of Aboriginal women, and in the restlessness evident throughout the choreography. Together the movements are indicators of work created by the negotiated and experimental task based processes within a community context. Discussing the scene after a recent tour into remote communities, Dalisa suggested:

Performing in communities in the Kimberley where the issues and concerns explored in *Gudirr Gudirr* are unfortunately a part of many peoples everyday life, I felt I had to make some adjustments out of respect for my people. When someone

passes away in some Aboriginal communities, women beat their heads with stones to release their sadness and mourn their loss. In my choreography I pass through a section called Suicide Phrases in which I echo this movement. In the Kimberley I felt it would be too strong a physical image to actually hit my head as it would hold so much sadness for those who have witnessed, or who have done this with memories still fresh. So by taking the feeling of that action and the emotion that comes with it I step in a slow walking motion holding one arm out and the other hitting my body on the shoulder, arm, torso as a way to express and grieve for those we lose to suicide each year and their families and the desperation and hurt I feel not knowing how to help. It's also a way of taking the blows for those who suffer in darkness. I progress to a smaller echo of this movement while kneeling and rocking in a position of trauma, but change it to represent youth dealing with helplessness and disconnection. (np)

Here Dalisa describes working directly with culturally encoded movement born of an act of suffering. In working in response to the task of showing movements of trauma and adjusting them for a community context, she 'releases' the movement into a rhythm and an echo through her body. In no longer symbolically representing the actual act of grieving, the movement can take on wider implications as she suggests.

In Rustom Bharucha's recent book *Terror and Performance*, he discusses the work of nations processing shame at past atrocities: 'This "elemental shame" cutting across nationalities, which is ultimately what remains of "our international solidarity", has not yet found a political expression...' He goes on to explain:

In both Adorno and Arendt, survivors of the barbarism of the Second World War, there is an expansion of the concept of suffering beyond the pain of exile towards the larger task of defining human responsibility. At one level, this suffering is inexpressible, but, at the same time, it is embedded in a deep obligation to articulate the aporias of living, both within the nation and beyond. The comforting oblivion of silence is not an option. (134–135)

Dalisa, in collaboration with Koen, has built a dance language which I believe 'articulates the aporias of living' (Bharucha 134–135) specific to her people in the Kimberley, and finds a political expression to address



Photographs ©Heidrun Lohr



our national shame. Dalisa's embodiment of their joint choreography and our dramaturgical investigations inspired by Patrick Dodson's cultural guidance resulted in an unsettled choreographic language which is at turns hesitant, restless, resilient and angry. In watching Dalisa perform almost every one of *Gudirr Gudirr*'s sixty public performance to date, I have come to think that in the work we are also seeking to identify forms and processes which, as Bharucha states, 'expand the concept of suffering' towards the larger task of 'defining human responsibility', through the process of creating contemporary dance. The choreography itself lights a path to the future while highlighting an uneasy cosmopolitanism which is at once at home and not at home in its own country.

In their book *Performance and Cosmopolitics: cross-cultural transactions in Australasia* (2007), Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo point out that cross-cultural performance making can be a site which abandons cosmopolitanism's idealised and abstract notions of global citizenship and moves onto new ideas of cosmopolitanism where intersubjective exchanges exist in cultural transactions within the borders of one nation. Such exchanges are processed in both immigrant and national minoritarian voices which, to quote Etienne Balibar, speak to a 'right to difference in equality' (56).

Cultural cosmopolitanism in Broome is dynamic and responsive. Attempts to position Broome in simplistic terms as a 'melting pot' of cultural identity and an 'early utopia' fail to recognise the complexity of cultural relations that developed between the local Yawuru tribe and the transient clans from the Dampier peninsula and further east into the Kimberley and the immigrant Chinese, Philippine, Japanese, Malaysian and Anglo communities and the hierarchies between them. They also fail to consider the context of the government policies of the time, both the White Australia policy and the co-habitation laws and the effect these have had on cross-cultural relations in Broome. Stuart Hall suggests that 'cultural cosmopolitanism' means '...the ability to stand outside of having ones life written and scripted by any one community... and to draw selectively on a variety of discursive meanings' (26).

Biographical contemporary dance has this ability to 'stand outside' and to 'draw selectively'. It offers a unique possibility to road test new nuanced cosmopolitanisms, trailed, if it were, in the thick interrogation of a rehearsal process, in our case seeped deeply in the culturally 'radicalised' nature of the Broome community.

In an Indigenous context today, the nature of these connections to 'multiple cultural affiliations', as well as associated dislocations, have specific attributes and hierarchies which inform the overall 'patina' of

its new cosmopolitanism. These intercultural connections are often underscored by deeply felt yet dormant or lost connections to other places and peoples, due to forced removals and breakdowns in the handing on of Indigenous cultural knowledge and practices. These losses have their own texture and weight, their own intuitions and visions and, their own 'ways of listening to country'. This particular kind of knowing informs the development of new dramaturgies and how they function in Indigenous theatre and dance.

In *Gudirr Gudirr*, Dalisa embodies a state that is at once resilient, restless and receptive. Her performance presents a fluid cosmopolitanism which can be both culturally distinct, at times clearly drawing on her Yawuru and Bardi roots, and at other times referencing her Malaysian background, but also moves freely in an empowered way between loyalties, richnesses and pain. Watching her perform recently, I was struck by the thought that this is a cosmopolitanism which is porous, that breathes.

Gudirr Gudirr culminates in the final scene with a set of portraits by the project's designer, Vernon Ah Kee. In keeping with his renowned portraiture work of his own Chinese, Malaysian, Aboriginal family members, Kee created a series of video portraits of Dalisa's family, whose very survival and resilience speak back to the report of the travelling inspector in the opening moments. As Dalisa notes, whilst they are young and old, teenagers, children, elders and bushmen who refused to take off their hats, they all carry the same sense of pride and unflinching certainty as they gaze back at the camera.

In between the prologue with Ernest Mitchell's quote and the epilogue with Vernon's video portraits, Dalisa takes us on a searing emotional journey unpacking the legacy of the pearling days for her people. From her great grandmother's imprisonment for so-called prostitution (because her partner, whom she was legally unable to marry, was Malaysian), to the young people today who, as she says, 'bash each other up for fun and put it on Facebook', we feel the legacy of past events and the work of facing cultural change from inside Indigenous communities. The generosity of Dalisa's performance is that she offers this experiential understanding to Indigenous and non-Indigenous audience alike, to local and non-local audiences. And always this offering is both researched and performed through dance.

One of the final tasks Koen proposed to Dalisa was asking her what would it mean to her to 'break with the past' in the form of dance? Her response was to find gestures which spoke to the impossibility/possibility of the statement for herself and her people:

In the final scene there are beautiful projected moving portraits of my mixed race family members' faces, almost leaning out of the screen, displaying a quiet resilience, pride and strength in both young and old faces while I dance a scene we call *Break with the Past*. The choreography, inspired by a task where I had to explore breaking with the past also shows the resilience, strength and pride carried within my body. In working with this task I realised it is impossible for me as an Aboriginal woman with 'plural loyalties to multiple cultural backgrounds' to mentally break from the past, in the sense that I am asked to forget my past or put to the side my history.

My movements I arrived at for this scene are grounded, like the cultures that make up my heritage, deeply connected to the earth. At the same time, they also gently lift off the floor, yet never quite disconnect from it. This created an opposing quality between the grounded movements which include echoes of traditional movements from both my Aboriginal and Malay heritage, to the freedom of finding flight, extension and release in the body as I twist and turn in and out of strong stances and rhythms. (np)

Dalisa's response to this task reveals the mastering of a form of dance that can articulate a dialectic for her culture and community. An empowered stance of being at once attached and removed, located and dislocated, holding on to the past yet facing change.

In the final moments of the performance Dalisa hovers, her hand flickers above her head, signaling a warning and functioning as a receptor, processing new information in the moment and synthesizing an active response to a globalised world. This particular cosmopolitan formation emerges from a negotiation across national and immigrant minorities and as such 'offers a bridge' into what Homi Bhabha would call a voice from the 'beyond', on the border lines of the present, which is '...neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past' (1-2).

Through the choreographic collaboration between Koen and Dalisa and together with visual artist Vernon Ah Kee, composer Sam Serruys, singer Stephen Pigram and myself as dramaturge, and ultimately through Dalisa's virtuosic embodiment of her family and community stories, we have been able to produce a new work which has crystallised and matured Marrugeku's dance language. Our task now is to apply this process more widely as we continue our intercultural investigations to embody, articulate and achieve contemporary artistic expression of the Kimberley.

Notes

- 1 Marrugeku was formed for the project *Mimi*. *Mimi* told the stories of Kunwinjku storyman Thompson Yulidjirri and was co-created by a large group of artists. It was based on an original idea by choreographer Michael Leslie and directed by Rachael Swain.
- 2 See Rustom Bharucha, *The Politics of Cultural Practice: Thinking Through Theatre in an Age of Globalization*. Hanover: Wesleyan University Press, 2000; Ric Knowles, *Theatre and Interculturalism*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010; and Erika Fischer-Lichte, Torsten Jost, and Saskya Iris Jain, eds., *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism*. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- 3 A 'task based process' in dance is widely attributed to the German choreographer Pina Bausch and has been introduced to us in Marrugeku through our collaborations with artists from the Flemish Wave.

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The Yield

Tara June Winch

Tara June Winch is a Wiradjuri writer based in France. She is the author of *After the Carnage* and *Swallow the Air*, which won numerous literary awards and has been on the tertiary education and HSC curriculum since 2009. She was previously named *Sydney Morning Herald* Best Young Australian Novelist. This excerpt is from her forthcoming novel *The Yield*.

I hung up the phone. Poppy Albert is dead. Something dark and three dimensional, something as solid as me falls out of my body then, it's as if I have become less suddenly. I taste the blood then. I haven't told the therapist about the things I can taste and smell that one shouldn't be able to taste and smell. A while ago she'd asked about my school lunches, I told her: when I lived with my grandparents it was always good food, always leftovers from the night before, I was the only student to use the microwave in the teachers lounge. Before that, the lunches my mother packed were just kooky. *Kooky?* I wound an invisible turbine at my ear. She nodded, had understood and closed her eyes with the serene indication to go on. One day a conventional jam sandwich, cut crusts, a tin of Christmas ginger bread in July, sometimes a bread roll smeared with something incomplete, like ketchup, and then a few distinct times I remembered opening the lunch box and there just being imitation play-food, a little plastic lamb chop, plastic-cast apple with no stem—it was my mother's sense of humour. I hadn't laughed about it at the time, but I laughed about it in the office then. I didn't tell her how I was baptized by the sun, and as far, far away as I go from my country, from my home I still can't remove the scent and taste of dirt and diesel and blood from that grey hemisphere of my mind. How the worst thing that could ever happen to me already happened. Times up though.

After the phone call I took the newspaper from the mail tray. Took the crate of almost kindling and knelt in the corner of the kitchen. I spread the newspaper out, smoothing the pages with the side of my fist. I held the hatchet and the cypress in each hand. Printed in the newspaper was a small photograph of a rhino. Above the picture it read in big ink block letters: GONE FOREVER—BLACK RHINO EXTINCT. An animal zip! *Gone!* I never went to the zoo, so I never saw one in real life—it might as well have been a dinosaur. The paper listed other, recent extinctions. And just

like that I thought, *zip! Gone!* Poppy: Albert Gondiwindi was extinct. No more Albert Gondiwindi roamed the entire face of the earth, and no more black rhino. With a bundle of kindling I fed the iron stove, close enough to redder my face in the eager first flames. Poppy Albert used to say that the land needed to burn more, a wild and contained fire, a contradiction of nature. Poppy Albert used to say that there is a lot to remembering the past, to having stories, to knowing your history, even remembering your childhood, but there is something to forgetting it too. There exists a sort of torture of memory if you let it come, if you invite the past to huddle beside you, comforting and leeching equally. He used to say there are a thousand battles being fought every day somewhere because people couldn't forget something that happened before they were born. There are few worse things than memory, yet few things better; he'd say, be careful.

During the flight I watched the GPS, the numbers rising and steadyng, the plane skittering over the cartoon sea. At the other end, having reached a certain altitude, crossed the time lines, descended into new coordinates, I'd hoped it would be enough to erase the voyage. Erase the facts of the matter; erase the burials rites due reciting, erase all the erasures of us, and *that* family we once were in the stories could exist. Not us, as we were now, godless and government housed and spread all over the place.

I disembarked into the heat wall, thirty-seven degrees—bathwater temperature, I was born in this temperature, but I'm not accustomed to it anymore. Here, Summer isn't a season, it's an Eternity. I took the train for five hours west of Sydney to arrive at Dubba Dubba, there I overdrew my account when I hired the sedan and took the Broken Highway to Massacre Plains outskirts.

The Highway slices right through the yellow budding canola fields, scrubs dotted with sheep newly shorn, the desert oak trees that have begun to grow in abundance into the drier clay earth. I know this place better than any. Eventually one reaches Massacre Plains, a town that was, from as far back as I remember, home to roughly two thousand farmers, shopkeepers and their children. Massacre Plains is a lot like a sausage, both the content—no-one wants to look too closely into what goes into making the town what it is—and the color scheme; of the faded burgundy-ish buildings, the dyed and poured pavements, the trimmings of the town's lampposts, bus benches, historic plaques—all painted an almost color—pink past its used-by date. Through Massacre Plains runs a river, the Murrumby, which Poppy Albert used to call the *Big Water* and which has ceased flowing since I was a girl, not just because of the Dam Built,

but because of the Rain Gone, and that because they say enough people cry water in this whole region, Murrumby thinks she's not needed at all.

I stopped for supplies before the turnoff. The outside of the convenience shop was wrapped in green mesh like an art installation. More green mesh was for sale, huge rolls leant against each other just as fabric bolts do, or people would starboard as a ship were sinking. Beside the bolts of green were crates of plastic rip ties that policemen sometimes carried on weekend nights. Locals were carrying rolls to their own shop fronts; a couple of men were crouched at their cars by the petrol bowsers attaching rectangles of mesh onto the engine vents. I scanned the severe blue clear sky, the locusts were yet to arrive.

A lot of things have happened since I left, I missed all the births, deaths and marriages of most everyone, enough time had passed to almost forget the town, though I'd kept an interest in the place that swallowed my sister up, I'd rung Nana and Poppy mostly once a month, emailed the missing persons database, read the online council newsletters with their news of progress that never arrived—the train line that never came, the rural university that was almost built, the delayed library expansion. Even if I turned my back on the place, I still wanted it to own me, I think. As much as I searched for the news of Jedd's safe return, I hoped for the appeal for mine. Neither came.

I pulled up beside the tin letterboxes, the yellow box gum trees had grown higher and broader along the vast shoulder where the rural school bus once threw up gravel behind us kids. Thirsty looking roses divided at the fork of the property's entrance that split into one narrow dirt drive to Prosperous House, and the other cement stenciled drive that lead up a cinch of hill to the Southerly House. Beyond the entrance a vast field of almost ripe wheat spread out to the horizon of trees that gathered at the creek. I turned to Prosperous and scanned, for Jedd. Jedd missing forever. *In my mind Jedd is backlit; we've run through the fields before the cutting. The tractors approach the June as if the year were a song, harvest the chorus. Afterward we run through the field again, the wheat cut to stumps, the boar haired field of our childhood.*

Poppy Albert said we were platypus. He used to tell us that our story goes all the way back to the banks of the Murrumby river and further. He said that my great, great Nana Augustine, who was given a good Lutheran name, fell in love with my great, great grandfather Abdullah, who was a camel handler, brought over with the camel trade to build the railroads. The problem was that Abdullah wasn't accepted by the Lutheran minister

and his wife at Southerly house, or by the Gondiwindi camping at the mission church, so my mother Augustine was given the nickname *duck*, not *brolga* like the other women, and she went like a duck off with the *river rat* who was Abdullah downstream to have her babies, and afterward those babies weren't Wiradjuri babies anymore, they were platypus babies, 'half duck, half river rat'. The babies were Poppy and his sister Aisha, which was the name that Abdullah liked most when Augustine was pregnant with her. Not long after there was a big problem for Abdullah, because some other camel traders, angry about the war in Turkey, had gotten hold of a gun and had shot a bunch of people on a picnic train in Broken Hill. After that happened all the camel traders were rounded up from around the Broken region and even other parts of the country and were sent back to Asia, from wherever they came from, India or somewhere. After that happened Poppy Albert's mother took him and her growing stomach back to the mission that had a name now, Prosperous House—and after that they stayed there safe at Prosperous. And he'd say *that's the beginning of our story, us little platypus.*

Now bottlebrush combs, in red and orange hung stoic in the still afternoon. Willy wagtails shook their tail feathers above the native peppercorn and Lilly Pilly plant and sleepers of rotting wood. Everything was yellow green. It was hard to distinguish where Prosperous House began and the garden ended, unlike the plants; the house was a lesser version of its self. The house boards paint had been shaved by time, dust and mildew coated the windows in an even permanence, tiles slid from where they'd meant to be. The house looked as if it'd been pushed and pulled by vines and trees that had tentacles and the soundtrack played, of cicada friction and bird whip.

I cooed into the back veranda, took my bag from the car and set it in the living room, placed the keys on the sideboards that were lathed and dust stuck, overdue for stain. I called out to Nana in intervals, twenty steps *Nana*, twenty steps *Nana*. I pushed open the old prayer room filled with boxes, looked through the bedrooms, the bathroom, the empty annex for workers. I looked into the garden shed, and as I called her name and cooed, ready to head down to search the river flats, I heard someone call out.

'Jedda?'

'It's me Nan, it's August.'

'I'm sorry about Pop, Nana,' I said. She didn't say anything. Nana, is ethereally the same, elders are like that to children's eyes, they stay precisely in the predestined, fractured bodies as if they always had been elder.

When Jедda disappeared for too long we drew inside, our sadness was like a still life, but that was maybe because I was a kid and Nana had reason not to lose herself, she had needed to be strong. Now, though, there were no little children around that might be frightened of the great grief that possesses a person. I wasn't a child anymore though I had felt like one in the act of arriving at Prosperous. I helped her onto the day bed, she had awoken a little, put her hand at my cheek and looked at me for the first time 'Oh, August!' she said, as if suddenly aware it was me. I stood over her.

'Something to eat Nana?' I asked. With her hands she pulled me in by my arms like a hand reeled catch, kissed my cheek, my ear. Then she ran her arthritic fingers into the creases of my collarbone, quickly down the length of my arms, before I pull away from her measuring me. She steadied herself upright, leading me and leaning on me by the waist, thumbing at her tears. I don't know if it's disappointment or sorrow she's feeling.

Together we cooked. I pulled a settee into the center of the kitchen for her.

'May I help, Nana?'

'Fetch me the things I need as I go, yes? First the beans need shelling, they're in the fridge, and you fix the potatoes.'

I passed her the bowl of beans and peered under the sink to find the potatoes still where they'd always been. Nana sat and slowly sorted string beans from their shells, she tried to hold me with a silent gaze, pursed her lips at what I've become, forcing me to speak to her. Why should she speak after all, she'd been here waiting during all the years I was too young to runaway and then during all the years I was old and capable enough to visit but didn't. Now she was a widow. Now she was aged as if gone to seed. Once, she was devastating in her beauty. Once, she was full of love.

'Nana, the memorial, do we know when that will be?'

'The remains are coming Friday, dear, we could do something after then, do you think?'

'Yes, what about Sunday?'

'Sunday is no good, I think Saturday.'

'Sure, do I need to ring people to tell them?'

'I think every folk knows what happened but yes, just ring the family will you dear, I'm not up to it I suppose.'

'Will we have it here?'

'Yes dear, they can come anytime.'

'I'll ring around this afternoon then.'

'Get the butter ready.'

I open the fridge and take the butter to the sink while I shave the peels.

‘Council folk are taking the house, Augie.’

‘What’s that?’

‘Council reckons there is nothing much really, well nothing to do about it—town hall meeting the other week said there isn’t one way around it.’ Huffs, ‘It’s not our land they say. It’s pastoral land or something. Sage, from the garden, dear.’

I came back into the kitchen with a fistful of sage. ‘How?’

‘I don’t know August. We just have to wait and see where we get sent is what they told us,’ Nana corrected herself, ‘—what they are telling *me*.’ She slung a handful of unshelled beans against the floor, hung her head. Angry at her own singularity, I took her to lie down on the daybed again.

‘I’ll finish dinner later,’ I said. I grabbed my car keys.

‘Where should I stay, Nana?’ I asked.

‘You stay here August, your old bedroom still has a bed in it, if you like? Go freshen up and we’ll try again for dinner, yes?’ Even in her state Nana couldn’t help but be accommodating.

I brought my pack and groceries into my bedroom in the attic, half the room was divided into an office, Poppy’s papers and books were spread out on the glass top of the big wicker desk. Over the desk there was a missing shard from the stained glass window, a petal from the Lutheran rose. What would God think of me now, what would Poppy Albert think of me up or down there with God? But I knew they were questions without answers, they were roads without destinations that I was thinking about. Religion left Poppy and this place a long time ago now. I thought about ringing around to organize the memorial. I thought about how people would descend on the house soon, how everyone I knew before would be here. I take in the room, I know this place, it was we then though.

Jedda and me.

I lifted the chocolate from the grocery bag, ripped it open. Once, when we first arrived, for Easter, Aunt Missy had gifted us two large eggs, I ate mine immediately, easily, but Jedda didn’t want to, she kept hers in its colored foil for the first week or so, nestled in the deep freeze. Then she took a lick, another day a little rabbit bite, another day a shard. This went on for months. I became obsessed with her egg lying there and would lift the freezer lid and check on it almost everyday.

Then one day I’d had enough, we were coming in from the fields trying to trip each other up. ‘Race!’ I screamed when she was bending down placing

a piece of quartz in a bucket. I could hear her running, but way behind me. I’d hatched a plan, I put on my best actress voice as she neared behind me at the veranda steps.

‘Snake, snake!’ I yelled.

‘Where? Where?’ and she halted, tiptoed to come closer to the back deck.

‘It slid right over my foot I swear, right under the steps there,’ I pointed and she crouched down looking.

‘I reckon it put poison or something on my foot, I’m washing it,’ I said, taking the stairs slowly. ‘You know I heard we are getting brown snakes down this way now, they migrate and stuff, did you know that, Jedda?’

And then I entered the back door, slid the glass across as quick as I could and snipped the lock shut. When Jedda heard the snip of the lock she looked up.

I cackled and ran over to the freezer, taking out her Easter egg.

I could hear her threatening me through the glass door.

‘Don’t you dare touch it, August!’

I unfilmed the top of the 1/8th consumed egg and started to eat it.

‘August, I’ll kill you, I promise you I’ll kill you.’

I did what I couldn’t help myself doing. I took hunk after hunk into my mouth, the frozen chocolate cracking on my tongue, difficult to swallow. She became enraged like I’d never seen her enraged before. She began to smack her whole little body against the glass. I laughed and ate as fast as I could. Then she ran for speed and slapped herself against the glass, she’d hit her nose and lip and then I saw blood on her face, smudging the door. I said, *okay okay*, and shoved the last small piece of egg back into the freezer. I readied myself at the back door lock and flipped it up and ran as fast as I could to my room in the divided attic and jammed my bed against it. She kicked and kicked my door and I was genuinely afraid then, not of her actually hitting me, but of how she could hurt herself and carry on trying just to get her point across. That to me was more frightening than anything.

This thing with food happened well before I came to Nana Ginny and Poppy Albert’s place. Nothing edible to a child was ever in the house, only fruit that was too old and needed throwing away, goods that needed to be worked into something else. Every now and then though, perhaps once every few weeks, cheese would appear. A large block of cheddar wrapped in thin aluminum and soft blue cardboard. I would wait out until my parents had settled in front of the TV and slip myself along the floor

to the fridge. I'd jimmy the electrical plug first from the wall. Slide around to the door, gently pop the seal open without the fear of the light coming on. Then I would take hunks and hunks of cheese into my mouth until it had all gone.

When my parents found the fridge bare they'd scream, bang things, never hit me. Rinse my mouth with black soap and water or apple cider vinegar. They'd say: 'Where'd you bloody come from! Were you born in the gutter?' I knew I wasn't, but I knew they weren't exactly asking me. I knew where I'd been born. I had my birth certificate in a plastic sheet beside the bottom bed of our bunks. I knew it was April Fools Day, Massacre Maternity when I, August Gondiwindi was born (feet first Nana later told me). Parents: Jolene Gondiwindi, unemployed. Mark Shawn, unemployed. Siblings: Jedda, 12 months.

Our family had moved from Massacre six hours south to Noble Park for our first years, in the huddled, long rows of terraced suburbs where some of the Shaws lived too. We had visitors all the time and I just remember always trying to hear what they said. Everything was strange at home, not just the food and the disorder of days, it felt like life was muffled by some great secret. We just went along with it though and made do. We would hold out our hands and ask visitors for twenty cents or a piece of gum if they really wanted us to go away, we'd run into the courtyard, make cubbies from dishcloths, play teachers. Inside the house if I held my tongue out, I could taste cigarette smoke and fly spray in the air. I wanted to taste everything, even the acrid air.

We had to be reminded a million times by the teachers to have my parents bring us on time to school, or to sign this and that, or to pick us up because the school guardian couldn't just wait at the gates for no-one all afternoon. Nits needed dousing with two parts white vinegar and one part kerosene when they came, clothes needed washing eventually, lunches needed making unless they didn't get made. Sometimes though, they were more like proper parents, our mother mostly, sometimes we were the cygnets and she was our swan. She would play with us, run around the house below the wet walls that gave us asthma and the mold that grew like a rude birthmark in the folds of peeled wallpaper and across the ceilings.

Once, she gave us a swan for a gift out of nowhere. We had to share but we didn't care. The swan was actually a goose toy, her name was Mother Goose, and she read along to the stories once we placed the cassette in its holder under her fluffy wing. Her orange plastic beak would move silent,

faux reciting the story. I can't remember if Mother Goose's eyes moved or not. She had a peach and blue patterned bonnet, a peach patterned bow attached with Velcro around her neck. When we were playing like that everything is quiet. Everything is perfect. Our mum leaves the room. Then I can hear nothing but Rolling Stones music through the house until she forgets to feed us dinner, and we go and remind her. Then it takes a long time because she's always doing everything from scratch and half way through she forgets and falls asleep. So Jedda and I finish cooking while she sleeps, and when she wakes up we've done the dishes, we've brushed our teeth, and we are tucked, Jedda tucks me and then herself. Our mum comes in and kisses us on our forehead, unravels the hair from across our faces. I pretend to be asleep. I love her the most at exactly that moment. I thought they were never mean and bad parents, just distracted, too young, and too silly. Rookies.

Then, one winter an unusual cold engulfed the town and it snowed for the first time in years, especially where we lived. Every house's tiled rooftops were frozen white except for ours. The police noticed this when they drove by one morning. Inside our house they found fifty-five marijuana plants beyond the manhole, kept vibrant with seventeen long fluorescent warming lights. Our parents were handcuffed and marched off to holding and then gaol all before breakfast time. The following day our house was in the newspaper and the social worker drove Jedda and I out of town then to Nana and Poppy's. From the age of eight and Jedda nine, we lived with my grandparents back in Massacre at Prosperous House, the mission church turned farm collective community center that had a new coat of lemon paint and that had an extension built for field workers.

To our birthplace we'd been returned, our lives became best-case scenarios. At Nana Ginny's and Poppy Albert's place and we got lots of hair washing and our grandparents talked to us, watched over our homework from school and we were fed *Every. Single. Meal.* But then they couldn't always protect us from everything, not the bull ants, or the rock snakes, or the sun without sunscreen, or a sore tooth if we didn't remember ourselves to brush twice a day. Just like they couldn't protect us from our parents who never came back for us ever, or Mrs Maine the school teacher who shoved my head in the classroom when the answers weren't forthcoming, or Ashley from Jedda's class who was mean and nasty and spat on her school shoes for no reason at all and I thought nothing could change as much as it did as when I was eight years old.

But I'd been wrong, when I was nine, the whole world flipped inside out. After nine I could see all the bones of things, the negatives, all the roots of the plants, inside of the sky and all the black holes and burning stars, after nine I could see the little pulleys and gears inside peoples brains, I could see their skeletons, and veins and their blood and their hearts and the whole of the world's air coursing in their lungs.

As soon as we first arrived at Prosperous our devastation was distracted in the chaotic comings and goings at the house—on Mondays and Tuesdays: mothers groups; on Wednesday afternoons: karate instruction classes; on Thursdays: language classes; on Fridays: bible study; on Saturdays: bush tucker tours; and on Sundays it was free day, church in the morning for Nana and Poppy and us, and then before lunch Nana would prepare afternoon tea incase anyone would drop around, which they nearly always did, she'd make a large pineapple turnover cake, lamingtons with coconut she shaved herself or scones with cream that she beat in the chilled metal bowl for what seemed like forever.

Nana was the cook and Poppy, the storyteller, but between their lives together and every person who stayed or worked in and around the house—food was everything. Nana taught Jeddha and me how to cook, how to greet people at the front of Prosperous and lead them into the prayer room for bible reading and highlighting passages, or bush-tucker tours, or karate lessons that our Aunt Missy would come and teach and which Jeddha and I were allowed to participate in. We didn't have a special outfit like Aunt Missy, but we'd wear leggings and a long-sleeved t-shirt so no-one's fingernail ever scraped us or so we wouldn't get carpet burn on the floor.

There was also a language class that Poppy Albert taught and the new-mothers group where Nana would show the young girls with babies how to stew apples with no sugar for baby or mash up any vegetables with no salt for baby. *Baby never needs salt or sugar okay girls*, my Nana would say. *Salt and sugar are no good for the babies*.

When Jeddha vanished the whole region searched the countryside with eyes and dogs and I went down to the flats of the Poisoned Waterhole Creek and ate roots for the first weeks without a sister. I took slices of stringy bark gum and let the paper melt on my tongue. I sucked at the bull rush reeds, I wanted to eat the earth then, become immune to it so it didn't hurt, be of the earth then, eat up the whole place where Jeddha was lost now, forever? If I could eat the entire earth I could consume her too, she would live inside me I'd thought.

The next month Poppy Albert baptized me himself in the field under the hot cracked sun while I cried. He said it was to protect me, and everyone was talking about the *sanctity of childhood*, the *children* they kept saying and then Poppy Albert poured water on me and recited the absolution of the dead.

'Suffer the little children to come unto me, for such is the kingdom of heaven. For unto Thee are due all glory, honor and worship, with the Father and the Holy Spirit, now, and ever, and unto ages of ages. Amen.'

After Jeddha disappeared for too long no workers came and stayed anymore either and Nana Ginny and Poppy turned the big preaching and karate room in the front of the house into nothing, they just closed up the door. All the photos of Jeddha were taken down and wrapped in muslin cloth and put away. And just like that we never really talked about Jeddha Gondiwindi again. After that all the kids weren't allowed to walk home alone, and playing on the road was totally forbidden. After that, childhood wasn't so wild, it was outright dangerous, kids got picked up from school then, wardens crossed names off lists as they entered and left the school buses, and in spring there were no more kids selling bunches of the purple weed Patterson's Curse to tourists by the road shoulder. People shook their heads in the street, and mothers wept and at afternoon tea the few people came by wondered how something so bad could happen. Almost every woman's hair in our family took a journey into silver then, and by the next year, all my aunts looked old and grey on the tops of their heads. All the religion and the festivity of a full house faded out to white noise. Over the comatose towns, my heart stretched like bubblegum string and snapped. And it stayed snapped forever.

When someone ever asked me if I have siblings, I'd tell them I have a sister; that she never went missing and I furnish a space in the universe where I imagine she would have been; at twenty she was at a far away university, at thirty she was expecting her first child in the city. Or sometimes I'd just say she was dead. Life or death have finality, limbo doesn't, no-one wants to hear about someone lost.

I walked into the field. Saturday we'll have the memorial, I looked over at the workers annex and thought about digging up some of the never used linen. About if some folks might want to stay a while. I thought about what Nana said, of all the Gondiwindi leaving here forever and it doesn't seem right to me. Not if we go all the way back to the banks here of the river and more, like Poppy always said.

The air changes, a breeze pulls at the trees and I look up from the old field. The sky is being clouded in relief from the sun, someone's prayers somewhere is a rogue summer storm. I slip off my shoes; the dirt that stretches out around me is covered in pitted scars from the heavy rain. I thought about what Poppy Albert used to say, that rainfall after a dry spell is the exact perfect condition for good wheat yields and the exact perfect conditions also for locust outbreaks. Simply put: *sometimes there isn't a silver lining at all.*

Introduction to Mulan

Kevin Brophy

Kevin Brophy is author of fourteen books of fiction, poetry and essays. He is currently sharing his time between teaching Creative Writing at the University of Melbourne and living in Mulan, WA.

Mulan is a small desert community established in 1979 near a former homestead, four hours drive south of Halls Creek in the Tanami Desert, on the edge of the Great Sandy Desert. About 120 people live here. The local Walmajarri people gained their land rights to this area in a 'hand over' ceremony in 2001 on the shore of the nearby extensive salt water lake, Paruku (Lake Gregory on most maps of Australia). The community is well known for its artists, both painters and basket weavers. It is one of the most remote localities in Australia, often cut off from communication with the world during the wet season. The children here have a Kinder to Year Eight Catholic school, and some go on to board in Broome or Perth for secondary schooling.

The Mulan football team played its first home game for sixteen years on Saturday the 16th of March 2016. They played a practice game against Halls Creek on the red sand oval beside the community. Most of the small community attended. The game began in near forty-degree heat around 3:30pm, finishing as the sun came down on the desert beyond the oval. Dermott Neach was a member of the Mulan team. Dermott is thirteen years old. He is a gifted footballer, and hopes to go to boarding school in Perth. This is the first time he has written of his life in Mulan.

There are many traditional stories centred on the nearby lake, and one of these is the story of the two dingoes who still remain in the local landscape. This community has many dogs living around, alongside and with the people. Some of these dogs have dingo in them. Stevie Hill-Kopp Junior is thirteen years old. His father is a local Indigenous Protected Area Ranger in the community. Stevie wants to work as a ranger or play football for the Western Bulldogs. He is a junior river ranger cadet. As well as being a close observer of the town dogs he has an interest in the wild horses that are sometimes common in this area. This is also the first time Stevie has written of his life in Mulan.

My Life in Mulan

Stevie Michael Hill-Kopp
Junior

Stevie Hill-Kopp Junior resides in Mulan and is thirteen years old. His father is a local Indigenous Protected Area Ranger in the community. Stevie hopes to work as a ranger or play football for the Western Bulldogs.

I listen to my elders tell stories of the lake, the dreamtime stories. The lake here is big and blue. It has a white sand clay pan around it. There are swans in the lake and little fishes. I have seen the swans. They are black ones. I have caught fish there, and they taste pretty nice. I go to the lake when it is hot. It takes an hour to get there in a Toyota. I go with my family, and we swim and fish, or kick the football around. You cannot swim until you have been muddled, so the snake in the lake smells you and it will know you then and let you swim. Bessie Doonday, my kupia (great grandmother), muddled me when I was a newborn baby. It is the old people who mud you. I like hearing their stories so I know what happened and I know about the country. I want to learn to speak Walmajarri language. I am thirteen years old. I will be a ranger, or a footballer for the Western Bulldogs when I am older, maybe. My dad works for the rangers.

I can tell you the story of the two dingoes and one emu. A long time ago there were two dogs, a black one and a white one, and they chased an emu all the way to Lake Paruku, and they ate the emu there. They cooked it and many people joined them for a meal, a feast. They got full. The white dingo, the lady dingo, said 'Get up, let's go old man', and the black dingo, the male one, said, 'From now on I'll call you old woman, not young girl.' But they still travelled to a place called Pungabilli Creek, and there they saw an old man babysitting children. They stayed there for a while and then they walked for a while to a place called Mulan. This is where I live. While they were travelling it started raining. They went into the wet ground, into caves. They have not come out. These caves are called Two-Hill. Those two dingoes are still there today. I visit Two-Hill sometimes at nighttime with my two uncles and my dad. In fact I call them all my dad, and my aunties, I call them my mother. When we are up there we sit down on top of the hill and look around the place. They show me some of the places, which way they are. And then we come down.

Those dogs look after that part of the land. I have a dog, he's a guard dog, he's smart, and he follows me around. He is not really my dog but he follows me around. He was Jaymin's dog, but Jaymin has another dog now, Buddy, a pig dog and Buddy fights with Jake. My dog's name is Jake and his mother, Tahni, stays with us too. I give Jake food when I can, chicken or bones sometimes. If you try to sneak past him with food he'll smell you, you can't do it. He sleeps under the car at home during the day, and at night he watches out for us and barks if anyone comes near. Junior's dog is Buddy's son, it's black, and it barks at me, it doesn't like me. When I walk past Junior's house I carry a stick. Jake doesn't go hunting with me, he just stays at home. Sometimes a dog follows someone and then that dog belongs to that person. Arle is like this, dogs follow him, they know he likes animals. He has two dogs and two more that follow him. For a while I had a dog called Rough Head. He liked fighting other dogs too much. He would run straight at you and try to knock you over. We kept the gate locked but he just pushed it open. When he was taken away to be shot, I was sad. But I knew he was fighting too much.

There are about a hundred and twenty people in the community of Mulan, and we have maybe thirty dogs or fifty dogs in the community, plus those two dingoes in the bush out there.



©Kevin Brophy, 2016.

My First Game on Mulan Oval

Dermott Neach

Dermott Neach resides in Mulan and is thirteen years old. He is a talented footballer and attends the John Pujangka-Piyirn Catholic School.

My guts felt tickly and nervous when we had a huddle and lined up facing the Halls Creek mob. My legs were shaking a bit too. Some of them were family.

I felt happy for this first game in a long time, and that was my first time playing on our home ground. I like playing in the sandy ground. The dust comes up when we run and jump, or fall down. When I think of the ground I think of running. Us Aboriginal people don't need boots because we know how to grip with our feet. Only on grass do we need boots, and only sometimes on dirt. Half the players wore boots. My nephew, Deswan, took off his boots in the third quarter. He could run faster without them. He wanted to kick goals.

Lawrence is our coach, I think. He's a good coach. He teaches us the best way to play footy. He's a good role model for the young fellas. Lawrence is the trade teacher at Balgo, forty-five minutes drive away. He is the father of Arle, my cousin, who goes to school with me. Our captain is Clifton. He's also my brother. He's tall and he doesn't mark very much. But he can be a good mark too. He has good skills on the ground. Footy for me means having fun and being with friends. In Mulan it's only us black fellas who play in the team. There aren't any white fellas who play.

I like playing with family. My cousin, Junior, was playing. He's one of those blokes in the backline. He does big marks and is a good runner too. He came home from Perth to play the game and to be at a funeral here.

Wayney Johns was the umpire. He is a ranger. He has taken me hunting. We caught three big goannas once. They taste a little bit like bush turkey. When we go hunting we go in a group of about eight or nine for a long day, enough to fit in a tray back. We get back in the dark. We light a fire out there. Sometimes we chase down cows for meat on the lake side. We chase them in the Toyota till we bump them down. We feel ok about this because it's meat, you know. It's usually only boys and men who go hunting like this, but sometimes we take the girls.



©Kevin Brophy, 2016.

In the first quarter I lead out at centre half forward and took a chest mark. I tried to kick it to Joshwin, but he dropped it, so I ran to help him. Then I accidentally bumped a Halls Creek bloke. I said, 'You're right?'

'Yeah, I'm right,' he said, and got back up.

The boys were all in the centre and full forward. But me and my cousin from Balgo, I don't know his English name, only his Aboriginal name, we were in the backline with my brother-in-law. I ran fast to the boundary line and tapped it to him. He got it and hand passed back to me. I did a big run and sent the ball to the boys in the forward line.

At three quarter time, Junior started vomiting because some of the boys aren't that fit you know. We work hard at training... But we could always train harder and run more.

Dustin had a collision and landed on his head. Joshwin hurt his knee. He fell down and that hurt his back. The teams started gathering around

them to make sure everything was ok. It was bad, but they were ok, then some of the players started giggling.

The Halls Creek boys won by, I think, five or ten goals to maybe three or four goals. But Halls Creek mob kicked the most goals and us mob lost. It's ok, because half our mob were playing for Halls Creek you know, helping out.

I felt all right after the game. We took photos of each other and shook hands all around. And the game was over.

It was crowded by the way. My family, parents, some school friends. It was a happy day. Now we gotta go to Halls Creek to play football there. When we go to Halls Creek I will buy a pair of footy boots for playing on the grass.



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Bella Kelly

Cheryl Narkle, Caroline Narkle and Annette Davis

Cheryl Narkle, artist, is Bella Kelly's eldest daughter. Cheryl has lived in central Australia, the Top End and the North-West and now lives in Albany, where she exhibits her paintings regularly.

Caroline Narkle is Bella Kelly's youngest daughter. An award winning artist, Caroline featured in the 2015 Revealed exhibition of Emerging Aboriginal Artists from Western Australia.

Annette Davis is an independent curator who has contributed to several Noongar history projects, including the Gnowangerup Cultural and Heritage Centre (2012), Ripples in the Pond exhibition (2014) and the Bella Kelly Retrospective (2016).

It brought my memories back ...this is the farm where my mum was born, this land. It made me really happy you know inside me to know that I was on the spot where my mother used to sit and paint. Looking at those trees, what we see in the paintings, she was telling the story of it. It made me so happy to look across at the Stirling Ranges, the Sleeping Beauty.

Cheryl Narkle

The view that Cheryl Narkle is speaking of is the classic view of the Great Southern landscape as depicted by her mother, the Noongar artist Bella Kelly (1915–1994). Wherever Bella Kelly lived, the Stirling Ranges were an anchor to her identity. She painted hundreds of scenes of her Country. Her story is one of creative passion, resourcefulness and resilience through an era of immense hardship and change. Painting views of 'the hills' provided emotional solace during years of turbulence and heartache.¹ Her paintings also became an important source of income for her and her family, and she sold her paintings wherever she lived.

Her birthplace is now part of a farm located north of Mt Barker in the Great Southern region of Western Australia. Driving along the dirt farm road past the birthing place and up a small rise, the Stirling Ranges suddenly appear, framed by tall trees.

We were wondering all along where these trees came into it. Going back there, it was very sacred to see, it reminded us, when we see the paintings, her trees were in each picture, we could see the trees right there.

Caroline Narkle

The first five decades of Bella Kelly's life were subject to the harsh policies of the Aborigines Act 1905, which progressively became more restrictive during the 1930s–50s. The lifestyle into which she was born, in which her family were farm workers and could move to follow seasonal work and camp at places of significance, changed to a life of living on Aboriginal reserves, on the outskirts of towns. Her two sets of four children, born in the 1930s and 1950s, were both taken away from her. In the late 1960s and 1970s, as policies turned to integration rather than exclusion, Bella was able to re-establish relationships with her children and lived with them in Narrogin, Tambellup, Mt Barker and Albany.

Bella grew up around Mt Barker, where her parents Billy Colbung and Nina Bayla Brockman worked for the Edgerton-Warburton family.

Mum used to ride wild horses, out through the bush there on the farm, she used to ride through the hills, where the vineyards are now. She and Minnie used to go riding through the bushes and trees and race one another through the hills. They reckon they used to go real fast, no saddle or anything.

Cheryl Narkle

Bella formed a close bond with the unmarried daughter Kitty Edgerton-Warburton, who fostered Bella's interest in drawing. Referring to Kitty's influence, Bella said 'Kitty showed me'.² This friendship continued to be important throughout Bella's life.

Kitty was a great friend of mum and the girls who were there at the time. Mum and Aunty Minnie were the main two, they were the best friends.

Cheryl Narkle

She lived around Mt Barker most of her life and that's where she started her work from—painting—but she didn't know what paints were at that time, she was only using charcoal and painting in the sand... She was about 14 or 15, in them days that was when they go away and at that age is when they used to get married. She went away and stayed with her eldest brother in Kojonup, stayed around for a while and then moved up to Narrogin.

Caroline Narkle

Working as a housemaid gave Bella access to different images as well as pencils and crayons. Bella remembered 'I used to look at coloured books and papers before I started with different colours'.³

In Narrogin she met Henry Kelly, who became her husband and father of Bella's first four sons, Simpson, Gregory, Fleming and Goldie. Even before she had paints and paper, Bella drew with whatever materials were at hand. Sitting around the campfire, Bella would draw in the sand and with charcoal on paper.⁴ 'When we were sitting around the campfire, Bella would use a stick to draw into the blackened base of the long handled frying pan, then next time the pan was put on the fire, the drawing would disappear,' said Maude Bonshore (nee Eades) remembering when she, Bella and Bella's four sons, and other family, were camped at Frankland in the 1940s.⁵ 'She also used to strip the paperbark tree to get a surface for charcoal drawings.'⁶ Her artistic talent and skill were no doubt observed by her four sons and other families with whom they camped.

Bella remembered being given her first set of paints by her employer Mrs Edwards⁷ in the mid 1940s, and she quickly filled a small book with paintings.⁸ This suggests not only that Bella was enthusiastic about art, but also that she was already well practised in creating pictures. She was encouraged by the Narrogin Native Welfare Committee, of which Mrs Edwards was a member, and her talent received publicity when her paintings featured in the local newspaper.⁹

In the 1940s Bella experienced the trauma of her sons being taken away from her, and sent to live at Carrolup Native Settlement near Katanning in south west Western Australia. Mr Noel White, who was the teacher at the Carrolup School from 1946 to 1951, gave the students drawing materials and encouraged them to draw what they had seen on their walks through the bush. Without any instruction from Noel White or his wife Lily, many of the students showed an innate artistic talent. These were the 'child artists of the Australian bush',¹⁰ whose drawings were exhibited overseas and received much acclaim, creating the distinctive style that became known as the *Carrolup School*.

Mum did speak about her being at Carrolup with her boys. It was a settlement at that time. They were camped at the Settlement, on the other side of the creek. She most probably had a lot to do with those younger boys at the time because in their art you can see a lot of her work, what resembles her work, the colours. In one of her articles she did say that she was showing the young lads at the time, when they had an interview with her in Mt Barker, so I think there was a lot of knowledge there for the younger boys to learn.

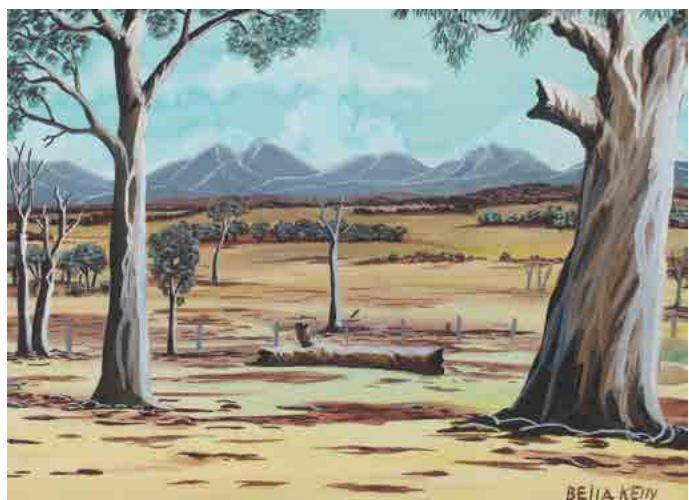
Caroline Narkle



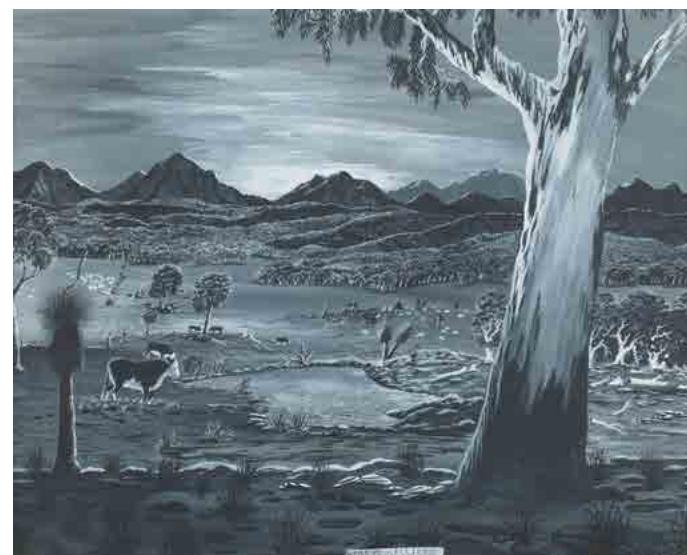
Untitled (early view), c. mid 1950s. Watercolour (23.8 x 35.8cm). Collection of Trevor Garland.



Untitled (Christmas Trees), c. mid 1960s. Watercolour and gouache on paper (33.5 x 44cm). Collection of Jean Burges, purchased from the artist in Cranbrook.



Landscape (with mountains), c. 1960. Watercolour and gouache on paper (27.3 x 37.5cm). City of Albany Collection.



Land of West Australia, 1971. Watercolour and gouache (39.5 x 62 cm). Private Collection, purchased from the artist in Tambellup.

When the kids were at Carrollup, it was a settlement at that time, that's where all this business about the Carrollup art come into it. As a matter of fact we know that Mum was helping those young boys. Because her two boys... we had two brothers, Simpson and Greg, who had paintings in the Carrollup lot.
Cheryl Narkle

The similarities between Bella Kelly's style and that of the *Carrollup School* relate not only to the similar subject matter of the Great Southern landscape, and choice of colours, but to conventions in tone and perspective which underpin traditional Western landscape painting. Perhaps Bella had learnt from looking at pictures in the farmhouses in which she had worked? Is this what her friend Kitty Edgerton-Warburton had shown her? Bella's sons and other youngsters from the extended family were familiar with her approach to depicting the landscape. Having observed how their mother drew, Simpson and Gregory, the elder of the four boys, were able to effectively create a naïve representational view of the country around them. Others in Noel White's class would also have observed their Aunty Bella drawing with charcoal and possibly paints around the shared campfire. Rather than being influenced by Carrollup Art, as Bella Kelly has been described,¹¹ it is not unreasonable to suggest that Bella Kelly could have been the starting point for this distinctive Noongar art style.¹²

In the mid 1940s Bella partnered Largy Narkle and they had four children—Geoffrey, Cheryl, Lorrice and Caroline. Living in Narrogin, Bella gave birth to her three younger children at the Vallima Hospital. When Bella was in hospital in early 1954, to give birth to Cheryl, a midwife remembers Bella being taught to put her name on the bottom of each of her watercolour paintings.¹³

Sadly, Bella again suffered the trauma of having her four children taken from her when they were removed from her in 1962 and sent to the Wandering Mission. Cheryl was eight years old and Caroline was five.

Cheryl left the mission when she was 15 years old.

I had run away from the place, I didn't like it. I got a job at the Mt Barker Post Office. Mum used to go to work on farms. From the old Reserve, some people from out of Barker, they had a farm next to the Stirlings, they came in looking for workers and no one would go with them. Mum said I'll go, me and my children, root picking, we went out there, stayed on the farm. We had a tent, the farmer brought a big drum with fresh water for us to drink. Mum used to have us up at daybreak to go stoking the fires, we used to go with her picking roots, early, we finished the job, we stayed there a while. Mum got paid for it. She would be doing painting there.
Cheryl Narkle

Travelling from Mt Barker to Cranbrook, Tambellup and Gnowangerup, places where she regularly stayed, Bella had the ongoing inspiration of the Stirling Ranges, and in particular the view of the 'Sleeping Lady' profile within the hills. The country she depicted was often farmland, with fence lines bordering the cleared ground of paddocks. Fallen branches and a hole in the trunk of a tree, for birds to nest in, are hallmarks of her images. She painted most of her scenes from memory, drawing on her close observation of her country.

I remember sitting on the bed with her while she was doing the paintings.
Caroline Narkle

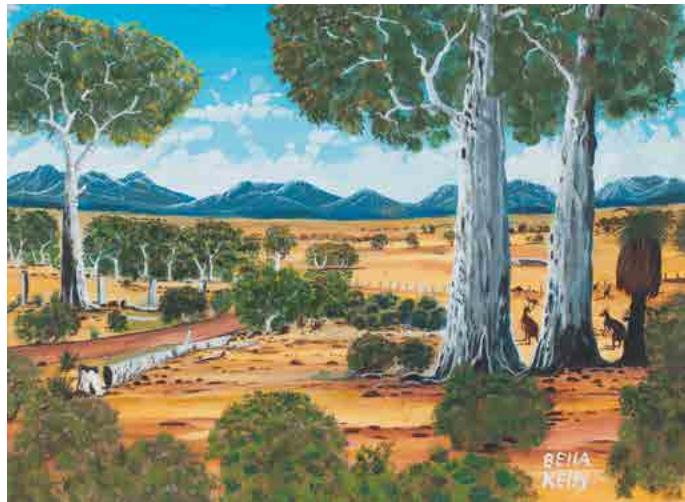
The small paintings from the 1950s and 1960s are simple landscape compositions, with sometimes only a single tree in the foreground, often a fence line, and the blue hills of the Stirling Ranges in the distance. In 1960, two of these early paintings were included in an exhibition in Perth, along with paintings by seven other Aboriginal artists including three from the *Carrollup School*.¹⁴ In the same year, Bella won an award for 'the best painting by a coloured person' at the Narrogin Art Festival.¹⁵

From the early 1970s, more art materials became available to Bella, often through the support of local doctors Dr Bourke and his wife Dr Owens.¹⁶ Bella's technique expanded by painting with gouache on larger sheets of paper, and with acrylic paint on canvas boards and on masonite.

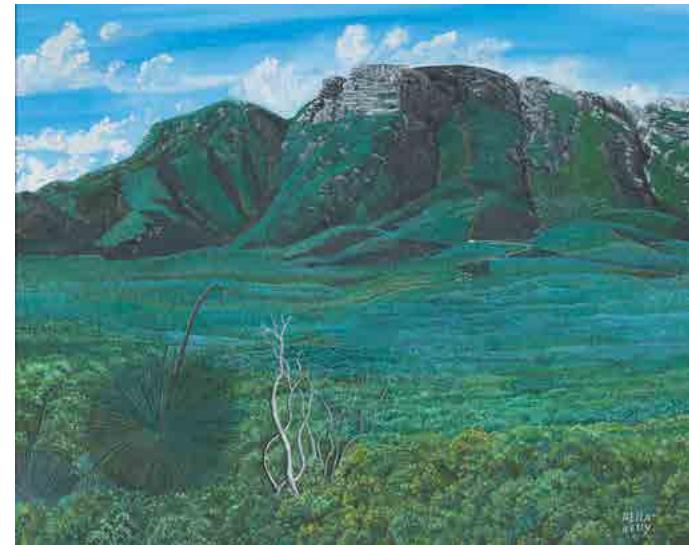
I remember Goldie, my brother, teaching Mum to paint with acrylic, he had learnt when he was in Fremantle Prison, and then he showed Mum.
Caroline Narkle

Working in a larger format, Bella was able to bring more elements into her compositions, and paint with more detail. Kangaroos became a regular presence, standing in the foreground or bounding across the paddocks. While Bella's palette became more vivid with the availability of opaque paints, she also painted many grey-scale tonal paintings, which are interesting for their limited palette and eerie mood. These beautifully detailed paintings very clearly show the artist's skill in mastering tonal variation.

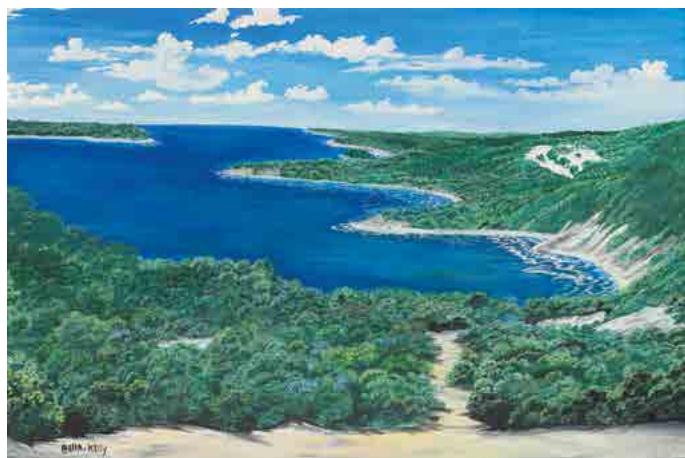
She used to sit down there with her brush and paper and do her paintings there. She used to sit underneath the tree, with her old sisters and the families used to be all around her, and her son Simpson, and sit down there and do her paintings, lovely and cool under the big shady tree at the Tambellup Reserve.
Cheryl Narkle



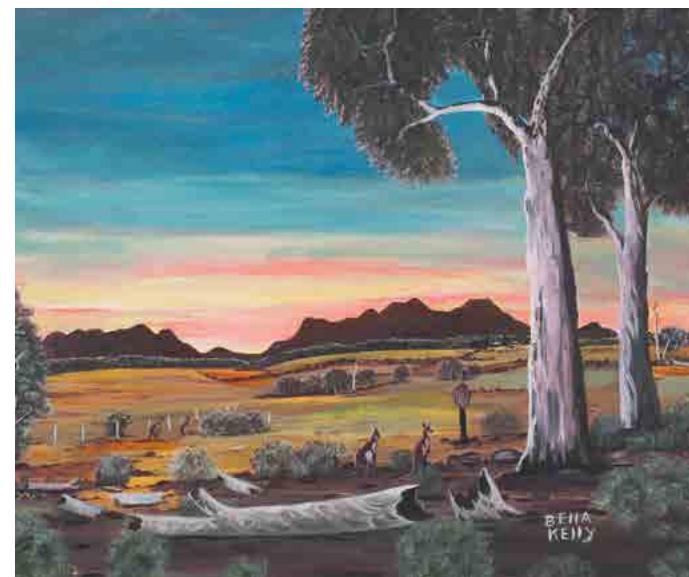
Untitled (late summer landscape), c. 1980s.
Gouache (36 x 48.5 cm). Collection of Helen
Kitching, purchased from the artist in Albany.



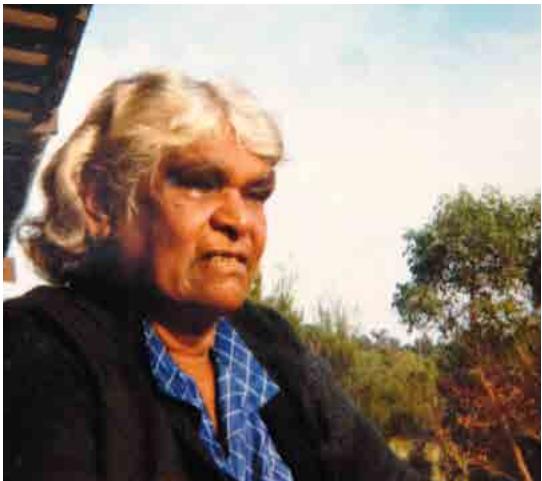
Bluff Knoll, c. 1980s. Acrylic on canvas board
(39.2 x 49 cm). Collection of John Morrison,
acquired in Albany.



View of Eleven Mile Beach, Esperance, c. 1970s.
Acrylic on canvas board (69 x 98 cm). Private
Collection, purchased from the artist in Kendenup.



Untitled (early morning), c. 1980s. Acrylic on
canvas (49.5 x 59.5 cm). Private Collection,
acquired from the artist in Mt Barker.



Photograph of Bella Kelly,
undated, photographer unknown.



Cheryl and Caroline Narkle, at the farm where Bella Kelly was born, Mt Barker, 2015. Photo ©Annette Davis.

Bella's ability to create opportunities to sell her paintings is testament to her own resilience, courage and talents. The money she received not only supplemented her rations, but was an important source of income for her extended family. Many residents of the small towns through the Great Southern remember Bella knocking on their door, seeking to sell one or more of the paintings under her arm. She bartered with her paintings at the stores and hotels and, in the early 1970s, sold many paintings through the butcher shop in Tambellup.

I used to watch her go into the butcher, Mr Jones used to sit there yarning with her for a while. He was a very nice gentleman. She used to ask him if he wanted to buy paintings. He used to pull money out of the cash register and give her a fair bob. It was a bit strange for me, coming out of the mission I didn't know anything about selling work and that.

Caroline Narkle

Although the vast majority of her paintings were of the Stirling Ranges, Bella Kelly painted a few paintings of coastal scenes. One of these is of the Eleven Mile Beach, east of Esperance.

We were staying with my brother Flynn and his wife Lynette, we were down there (in Esperance) for a couple of months. Mum wanted to go out and do paintings. This is known as Heart Beach.

Cheryl Narkle

The owner of a general store in one of the Great Southern's small towns remembers that Bella used to regularly come to the store to barter with her paintings. Having already acquired several of the 'classic views', the owner indicated that they would like something different, perhaps something from the coast. After her visit to Esperance, Bella returned inland with this painting of Eleven Mile Beach, which they duly bought.¹⁷

She had a lot of art exhibitions in Perth and back down in Mt Barker. She travelled around a lot and everywhere she went she sold her paintings for just a little or nothing, I know that a lot of people bought a lot.

Caroline Narkle

In 1972 Bella and her son Goldie Kelly had an exhibition together at the Gallery of Aboriginal Art, run by Mary Macha, in Wellington Street Perth, and Macha continued to promote Bella's paintings in her gallery. To build on this opportunity, Bella moved her family to the city in 1973.

We were living in Fremantle. Kenny Colbung, he was her nephew, he took her around the place and introduced her to many people, she wanted to sell more of her art.

Cheryl Narkle

Her stay in the city was short lived. Back in Mt Barker from 1974 onwards, Bella continued to sell her work wherever she could, including at the Chinese restaurant, in the street and bartering with them at local stores. She joined the Baptist Church, in which her son Geoff was very involved. When Geoff and his wife Glenys moved to Albany, Bella would often visit and stay for a while. She is remembered as always having a small painting in her bag, ready to sell.¹⁸

Out from Mt Barker, there was a stop there where she could see the Stirlings, we used to stop, get her painting gear out and sit down and paint, take a little chair out for her, a fold up one, she used to sit down on that, and we'd wait for her until she'd finish painting. Then we'd go for a ride around the Stirlings.

Cheryl Narkle

During the 1970s and 1980s, Bella sold her paintings through general stores and art and craft outlets in the Great Southern. In the 1980s, the Southern Aboriginal Corporation set up a gallery in central Albany, where Bella and other Noongar artists sold artworks.

Our brother Geoff, he set that up, he was working for SAC.

Caroline Narkle

In the early 1980s, Bella lived in Albany at the newly built Aboriginal Centre units.

She was painting all the time there, she used to sit out on the verandah and do her paintings, and if it was cold, then she'd go inside, make a fire, sit down there and do the painting.

Cheryl Narkle

Bella often entered art prizes and received strong acclaim, including receiving the popular vote prize at the Albany Art Competition in the 1980s. In 1988 Bella was named NAIDOC Aboriginal Artist of the Year and, in 1991, she exhibited at the Fremantle Arts Centre. Her art can be found in several major public collections in Western Australia.

Her art and stories continued to inspire her sons Goldie, Simpson and Gregory who, as adults, created many paintings of their Country. Their younger siblings, Geoffrey, Cheryl and Caroline, also became artists. In

their paintings, Cheryl and Caroline reflect their mother's influence in subject matter and style. Simpson Kelly's daughter Lynette is continuing the tradition, as is Cheryl's son Thomas Dimer, and other grandchildren show artistic talent. Other artists including Athol Farmer (Moordippa) remember watching and learning from Bella, while Lance Chadd (Tjillyungoo) remembers her influence.

We remember our mother as a great inspiration. She was a role model for us and for other Noongars. She was always painting—she'd sit down, with her family around her and paint her pictures. She loved painting the Stirling Ranges and she'd talk to us as she painted—there was always a story to tell. She travelled around a lot and wherever she went she sold her paintings. She got a lot of respect from people. In those days Noongars used to be shamed, but our mum used to talk to them all. She was always kind to people.

We are really proud of her art. We are both artists, and we hope that our children and grandchildren will do the same thing and keep the painting going in our families.

Cheryl and Caroline Narkle

All works are by Bella Kelly. Photography of artworks, ©Bo Wong. All works reproduced with the permission of Caroline Narkle and Cheryl Narkle, ©Bella Kelly.

Notes

- 1 Geoff Narkle, quoted in Croft, Brenda with Gooding, Janda. *South West Central, Indigenous Art from South Western Australia 1833–2002*. Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 2003, p. 43.
- 2 Conversation between Bella Kelly and Tony Davis, as stated by Tony Davis on 14 June 2014, 'Ripples in the Pond' talks, Vancouver Arts Centre, Albany. Tony Davis is a farmer in Albany who knew Bella Kelly and is currently writing a book about Bella Kelly and Great Southern Noongar history.
- 3 Bella Kelly quoted by Pat Fraser, *Albany Advertiser*, 1993.
- 4 Caroline Narkle on 14 June 2014, 'Ripples in the Pond' talks, Vancouver Arts Centre, Albany.
- 5 Interview between Annette Davis and Maude Bonshore, 20 Nov. 2015.
- 6 Interview between Annette Davis and Maude Bonshore, 28 Feb. 2016.
- 7 'Self-taught artist finds inspiration in a raw landscape', Pat Fraser, *Albany Advertiser*, 1993.
- 8 Research undertaken by Tony Davis, 2015.
- 9 *Narrogin Observer*, 19 April 1947 and 23 April 1948.
- 10 Referring to the book Durack Miller, Mary with Rutter, Florence. *Child Artists of the Australian Bush*. Sydney: Australasian Publishing; London: Harrap, 1952.

¹¹ Such as in Croft, Brenda with Gooding, Janda. *South West Central, Indigenous Art from South Western Australia 1833 – 2002*. Perth: Art Gallery of Western Australia, 2003. p. 27; and in Pushman, Tracie and Smith Walley, Robyn. *Koorah Coolingah (Children Long Ago)*. Perth: University of Western Australia, 2006, p. 69.

¹² Bella Kelly's place in the Noongar art story is receiving renewed focus through the Bella Kelly Retrospective exhibition, a cultural history project initiated by the City of Albany and presented during 2016 at the Vancouver Arts Centre, Albany, the John Curtin Gallery, Perth and NEXIS Exhibition Space, Narrogin. The exhibition explores the proposal that Bella Kelly was the starting point for the style of art which became known as the *Carrolup School* or *Carrolup Art*. Bella Kelly's surviving daughters Cheryl and Caroline Narkle contributed to the research for the exhibition, curated by Annette Davis, which brings together, for the first time, paintings by Bella Kelly that span five decades. <http://www.bellakelly.com.au>

¹³ Kathleen Catton talking to Annette Davis, 17 Nov. 2015.

¹⁴ 'Exhibition of Paintings by a Selection of Aboriginal Artists', 28 Nov. – 9 Dec. 1960, Dulux Colour Centre, Perth.

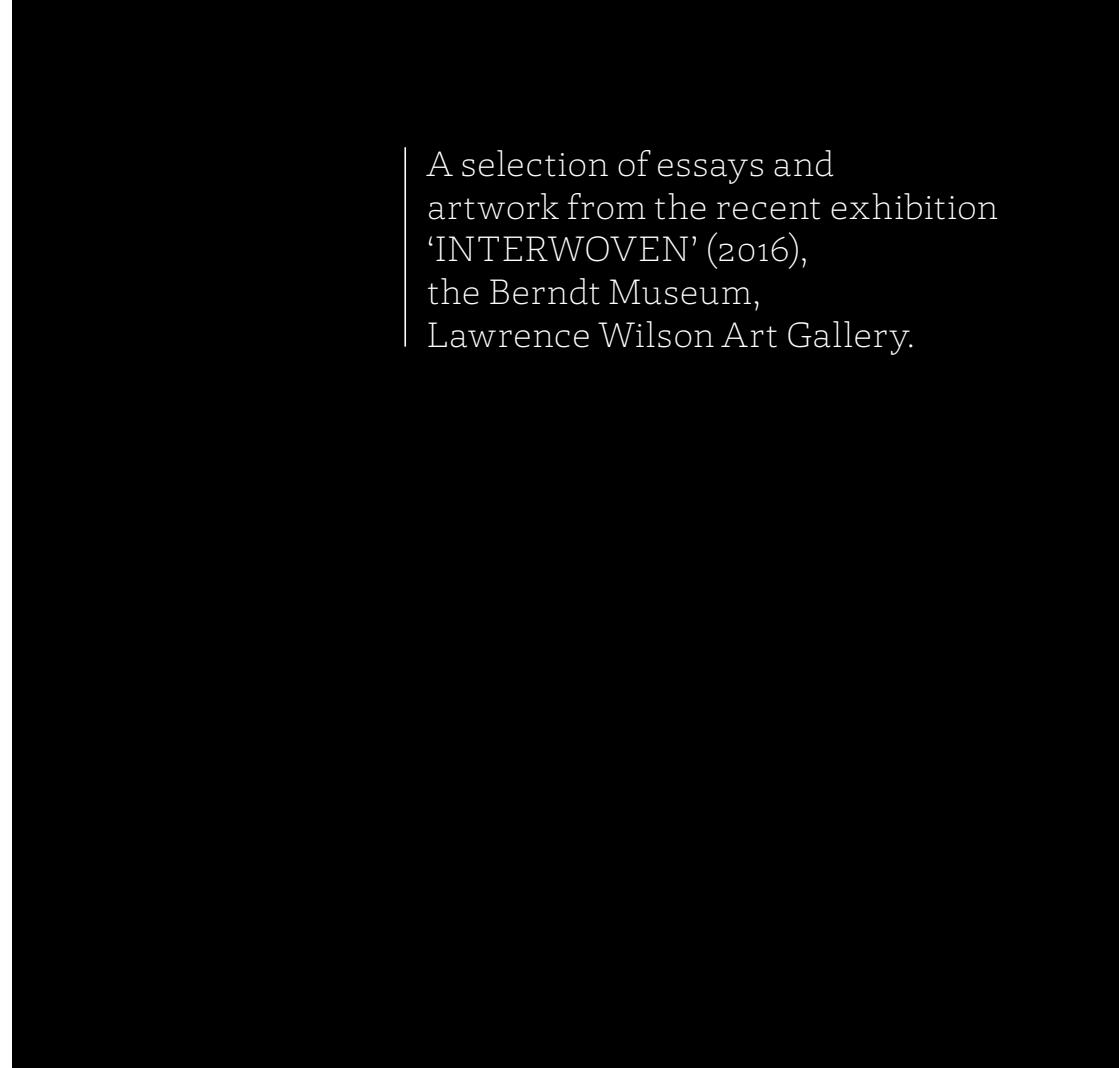
¹⁵ 'Narrogin's Five Day Art Festival', Winifred Bisset, *The Australian Women's Weekly*, 30 Nov 1960, p. 19.

¹⁶ Personal communication between Annette Davis and Maude Bonshore; and Annette Davis and Tony Davis.

¹⁷ Interview between Annette Davis and the owner of painting, October 2014.

¹⁸ Interview between Annette Davis and Antonio De Meis, October 2015.

INTERWOVEN



A selection of essays and artwork from the recent exhibition 'INTERWOVEN' (2016), the Berndt Museum, Lawrence Wilson Art Gallery.

Threaded Djon Djon figures from Goulburn Island

Lily Bennion

Lily Bennion is a student of Art History and a volunteer at the Berndt Museum.

The threaded Djon Djon figures from Goulburn Island and Oenpelli embody the spiritual poignancy and resonance of secret, sacred rituals within the Gunwinggu language group. These figures represent a sense of community that is particularly evident in their respect for the dead, and the complex cultural practices conducted during periods of mourning. When a member of the community passes away, the camp is often moved and Djon Djons are placed outside camp boundaries. Their long arm points in the direction where people have moved to; the short arm points toward the direction of the mortuary platform on which the body decays. A ritual that reflects a series of grieving practices illuminates the depth of emotion felt by family for the deceased.

The reason I was drawn to Djon Djon figures for inclusion in INTERWOVEN is the emphasis Aboriginal people placed, and continue to place, on the continuity of life, rather than on, or as well as, its cessation. Such a cyclical philosophy has universal resonance, as most religious beliefs orientate around the respect for the dead. I both admire and value this perspective, one that the figurines symbolise. Understanding and empathizing with these qualities has provided a considerable transition point in my life and helped to place everyday challenges in perspective. The mystery and solemnity of such mourning rituals drew my attention to the Djon Djon figures: the layers of fibre are embedded with meaning, alluding to the persistence of the memory of those who have passed, alongside hope and aspirations for future communities.



Samuel Manggudja, Kunwinjku, *Djondjon*, fibre wound over stick supports. R.M. & C.H. Berndt Collection, Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 00907], estate of the artist, licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd.

A Story About Two Feather Baskets

Moira De Angelis

Moira de Angelis is an administrative assistant at the Berndt Museum.

When asked to choose an artwork for the INTERWOVEN exhibition from the unique Collection held at the Berndt Museum, I immediately turned to one of my colleagues and asked if there were any items in the Collection made with feathers.

You see, I have a passion for feathers. All feathers. I am endlessly drawn to their colour, structure, delicacy, and strength. I collect feathers; they are all through my house. I gift feathers whenever possible and enjoy the pleasure of combining them with other materials such as grasses, twine, and silk fabric. So extensive is my enthusiasm, my children and all who know me well will pick up a feather and give it to me with pride.

Many years ago, I attended a women's weaving workshop in Balingup. There, I learned about entwining emu feathers with collected grasses to produce spiritually inhabited baskets. A lovely senior Noongar woman taught the class. I will always remember those three days spent wandering the forest collecting materials, respecting country, and sitting on the floor with other women making and connecting.

The two sublime baskets I have chosen, by Ivy Hopkins and Jean Riley, were made from the sharing of knowledge, the teaching of skills, the telling of stories about family, laughter, passion, and the practising of cultural life over time. Such qualities are akin to my own Italian background where a coming together with other women to share and pass on traditional practices and methods regularly revolves around food and laughter.

These baskets are not only in this exhibition because of my love of feathers: they also symbolise tangible human connections and unity throughout time and place.



Ivy Hopkins, Pitjantjatjara, 1998, woven emu feathers and red/brown seeds. Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 09535], ©Ivy Hopkins, licensed by Tjanpi Desert Weavers.

Pwoja Jilamara

Natalie Hewlett

Natalie Hewlett is the collection manager at the Berndt Museum.

Cornelia Tipuamantumirri employs designs that signify who she is and where she is from as a Tiwi women artist.

I chose this artwork for the INTERWOVEN exhibition because I had been preparing Cornelia's painting for formal accession into the Berndt Museum Collection. I examined the painting to thoroughly document the condition, making note of any changes to the materials through aging or incident. The artwork only required a new stretcher and the back of it needed to be protected with a backing board.

Museum staff had been discussing a weaving theme for the exhibition, which immediately made me think of Cornelia's painting. It reminded me of woven grass fibres from the circular mats that the Berndt Museum has in its collection. The hatched paint actually conveys dappled light reflecting off waves on the Arafura sea—a theme Cornelia writes about when describing her artwork.

The painting is a beautiful representation of the mark making that typifies Tiwi design. Cornelia applies the paint using a Pwoja, a wooden comb that is dipped into ground ochre paste then pressed on the canvas to make the dotted lines. This technique is also used for making designs on bodies in preparation for ceremonies. *Pwoja Jilamara* represents a wonderful expansion of Tiwi art in the Berndt Museum's Collection.



Cornelia Tipuamantumirri, Tiwi, *Pwoja Jilamara*, 2007, acrylic and ochres on canvas. Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 032/2015], ©Cornelia Tipuamantumirri, licensed by Viscopy, 2016.

Dilly Bag and Bark Paintings from Arnhem Land

Margaret Nadebaum

Margaret Nadebaum is a volunteer at both the Berndt Museum and Kings Park Education. Her career in the WA Education Department culminated in her appointment as CEO of the Ministry, and she has been inducted into WA's Women's Hall of Fame.

These pieces centre on the pandanus-woven dilly bag and its ubiquity and significance in the everyday and the spiritual lives of Aboriginal communities of Arnhem Land. Its particular appeal lies not only in its aesthetics and functionality, but also in its nature as an exemplar of the extent to which the everyday and the spiritual are inextricably linked in Australian Aboriginal cultural life.

More than 50 years ago, I was in the first cohort of students (numbering only fifteen) to graduate from The University of Western Australia with a major in Anthropology through the newly created Department of Anthropology. Professor Ronald Berndt headed the Department.



Unknown Artist, Yolgnu, twined pandanus with ochres. R.M. & C.H. Berndt Collection, Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 05810], ©Buka Larrnggay Mulka Art Centre, Yirrkala

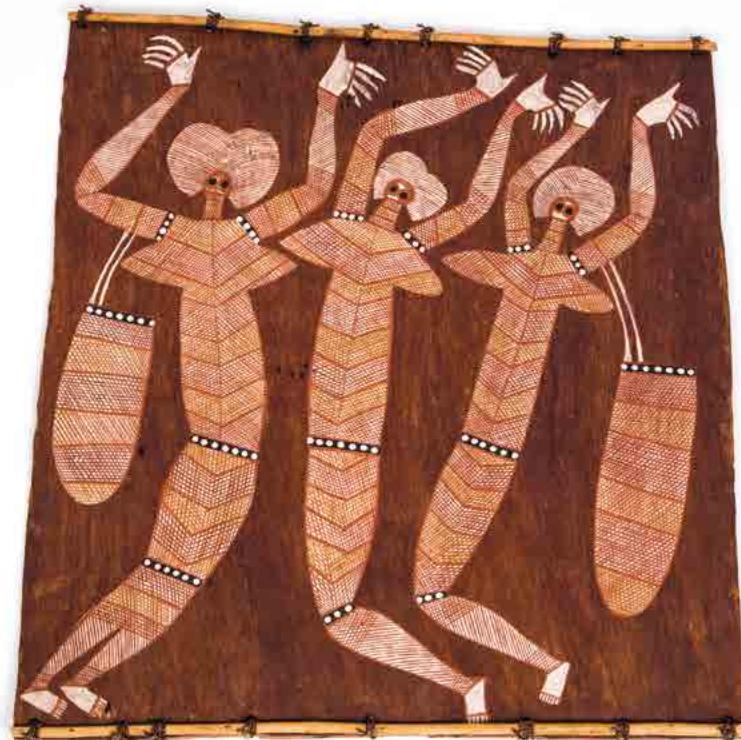


Thompson Narangolgi, Maung and Kunwinjku, ochre on bark. R.M. & C.H. Berndt Collection, Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 01252], ©estate of the artist, licensed by Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd.

His lectures and tutorials on Australian Aboriginal culture derived directly from his and Catherine Berndt's internationally renowned fieldwork. Together, they kindled in me a deep and sustained interest in Aboriginal culture.

Dilly bags were used by women and by men, not only for mundane purposes, but also in ceremonial domains and rituals. I have also chosen two bark paintings to illustrate this feature. One depicts domestic activities, whereas the other depicts three Mimi spirits as a dynamic dancing group.

It can be contextually and aesthetically discerned that the dilly bag is integral to the spiritual significance of the painting, and that the Mimi spirits draw their power from the Dreaming.



Namaredge Guymala, Kunwinjku,
ochre on bark. R.M. & C.H. Berndt
Collection, Berndt Museum [Acc. No.
00747], ©estate of the artist, licensed
by Aboriginal Artists Agency Ltd.

Bike and Rider

Vanessa Wiggin

Vanessa Wiggin is
Associate Registrar
of the Berndt Museum.

I love the extra dimension of fibreworks—their scent.

Much of my work takes place in the confines of windowless museum stores. The scent of a fibrework is a reminder of the natural world outside. The bike form is appropriate, as the smell of dried grass takes me on a journey to other times and places.

It is the smell of the much-envied woven pandanus mat in my Director's office at the National Museum in Palau: a delight to walk on, as we wore no shoes. It is the smell of opening a box to discover 'Baby', one of my favourite artworks (a grass fibre sculpture by Joyce Winsley at the Art Gallery of Western Australia), and a reminder of my early days in Perth. Or perhaps, much earlier, building forts from the drying mown grass on my primary school oval.

The bike is also evocative of the colour and fearlessness of childhood. The child is completely in the moment—literally one with the bike. I am reminded of my son as a toddler, running into the ocean without a moment of hesitation. No thought of the cold or danger that would inevitably slow an adult. That night I dreamt that it was me running into the glassy water. I did not stop. A delicious moment of freedom.



Dallas Smyth. Ngaanyatjara, *Bike and Rider*, 2013, mixed media. Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 12946], ©Dallas Smyth, licensed by Tjanpi Desert Weavers.

Empty Vessels

Eve Chaloupka

Eve Chaloupka is an archivist and curator at the Berndt Museum.

Sharyn Egan's deeply personal and poignant artwork *Empty Vessels* was created for inclusion in Mundaring Art Centre's annual exhibition of self-portraiture, *Mine Own Executioner*, curated by Nalda Searles. The exhibition was titled 'An Unthemed Anthem' (2010).

This triptych, in the form of three woven baskets using card, photocopied Western Australia Native Welfare reports, Guildford grass, gum resin and stitching, is a statement about the artist's removal from her mother at the age of three to become the third generation of stolen children in her family. Using copies of her own welfare records bound



Sharyn Egan, Nyungar, *Empty Vessels*, 2010, mixed media triptych. Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 11513], ©Sharyn Egan, 2016.

together with Guildford grass, Sharyn created three vessels: the largest representing herself, the smaller vessel representing her mother, and the smallest vessel representing her grandmother.

The gum Sharyn applied to the baskets of her mother and grandmother is from the Balga plant (*Xanthorrhoea preissii*) and significant to the Nyungar people of the South West; a people whose languages and cultural practices were denied to them for generations. 'The gum gets less ... sterile even ... as we have less access to our culture' (Egan np).

In her artist's statement, Sharyn recalls the hunger she and other young children experienced living at the mission, and 'puddings' from the Guildford grass they would eat whenever they could find a patch:

Many of us grew without ever having been hugged or encouraged in anything. We became empty vessels, out of touch with our feelings. Just surviving and getting thorough life the best we could manage. We smile, we say yes and no, please and thank you in the right places. (np)

An artist, curator, teacher, mentor and singer, Sharyn Egan is also a friend and former Berndt Museum work colleague. I chose this particular work of Sharyn's because it is one that encapsulates what it is about her grace and artistic practice that inspires me so much, and I believe it enables a greater understanding of the deeply embedded roots, enduring strength, and dignity of our people.

A Mix of Emotion

Sandy Toussaint

Sandy Toussaint is a Professor of Anthropology and an adjunct Professor in Arts and Science at the University of Western Australia. She has authored/edited five books, including *Kimberley Stories* and *Ngurntakura Wangki—Amy's Story*, (co-authored with Annette Puruta Kogolo and Marminjiya Joy Nuggett). Sandy co-curated the collectively developed Berndt Museum INTERWOVEN exhibition.

It is 1960s Melbourne. I am having dinner with my parents and young brother. The Wave Hill Cattle Station in the Northern Territory is a long way from where my family and I share food. We have a strong sense of empathy and an inherited interest in the complexity and universal value of the human condition. The Gurindji people's actions enter our conversation. News of their courageous and considered walk off from Wave Hill has hit the media: the Gurindji are no longer prepared to work in the pastoral industry for less pay and in poorer circumstances than their non-Indigenous counterparts. Gurindji actions stay in my mind, as does the equitable nurturing and compassion of my parents.

Many years later in what seems like a lifetime of working for and with Indigenous families, communities and organizations, I am at the Berndt Museum fielding inquiries about Collection access from a Berndt Foundation Postgraduate Research Award Recipient, Brenda L. Croft. Ancestral connections tie Brenda to Gurindji Country and family: she is keenly interested to discover what objects, archives, audio-visual, maps or other materials the Berndt Collection might hold for loved ones and the local community, as well as for her doctoral research.

Dedicated Museum staff search the Collection's database while undertaking a myriad of other tasks. A series of Gurindji-inspired, crayon drawings on paper are eventually identified. Collected by Catherine and Ronald Berndt in the 1940s at Wave Hill, copies of the drawings are in the process of being repatriated to families. This process can only be

completed once cultural protocols have been followed: the possible sensitive content of the drawings signals the need for caution and care via consultation with colleagues and senior community members.

Six hand-made, fibre dilly bags are also found. Beautifully woven by Gurindji women, and part of the same Berndt-collected 1940s materials, the delicacy and colour, the boldness and the texture of these bags generates a mix of emotion: the 1960s creativity and resilience of the Gurindji, alongside the remembered generosity and wisdom of my parents.

All of those involved in the revelation of the drawings are also profoundly moved to learn of the bags' existence. Colourful images are returned but the bags remain in the care of the Museum, as these require

conservation and documentation.

When it comes time to choose a work or series of works for the Berndt Museum's collectively developed and co-curated INTERWOVEN exhibition, I immediately turn to the Wave Hill dilly bags. My choice expands when we learn about a recent series of etchings by Brenda L. Croft, who is also an artist. Based on Brenda's practice-led doctoral research with her family and community, the etchings reference objects associated with Jinparrak (Old Wave Hill Station). The continuity and connectedness of timing is perfect. Through a mix of conversations and of artworks—dilly bags, weaving, drawings, and etchings—cultural beliefs and practices over time and place are given new life, without ever letting go of the old.



Unknown artist, Gurindji, macrame string. C.H. Berndt Collection, Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 05903], © licensed by Karungkarni Art and Culture Aboriginal Corporation



Unknown artist, Gurindji, knitted wool with gauze handle. C.H. Berndt Collection, Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 05906], © licensed by Karungkarni Art and Culture Aboriginal Corporation



Unknown artist, Gurindji, macrame string. C.H. Berndt Collection, Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 05904], © licensed by Karungkarni Art and Culture Aboriginal Corporation



Unknown artist, Gurindji, crochet wool. C.H. Berndt Collection, Berndt Museum [Acc. No. 05910], © licensed by Karungkarni Art and Culture Aboriginal Corporation

Retrac(k)ing country and (s)kin: walking the Wave Hill Walk Off Track (and other sites of cultural contestation)

Brenda L. Croft

Brenda L. Croft is from the Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra peoples of the Northern Territory and Anglo-Australian/German/Irish (and recently discovered Chinese) heritage. She has an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Sydney. In 2015, Brenda received the Berndt Foundation Postgraduate Award, and a National Indigenous Art Award Fellowship from the Australia Council for the Arts.

In early 2012, I commenced my PhD with the National Institute of Experimental Arts, UNSW Art & Design. I was privileged to secure an Australian Research Council Discovery Indigenous Award, enabling me to focus on my practice-led research project, *Still in my mind: Gurindji location, experience and visuality*.

My research project addresses the personal and political capabilities of Indigenous Performative Autoethnography, encompassing multiple theoretical standpoints, while I work closely with members of my patrilineal family and community at diverse sites across the country.

My existence as person of mixed heritage is a contested site of engagement. I am in(di)visible, a paradox that challenges while also purporting the notion of a single nation-state—Australian or Indigenous. Can I represent any/one or self, other than through my own reflexive narrative? Whose country and (s)kin am I retrac(k)ing?

My research position radiates from neither-of-here-nor-of-there; perhaps more aptly situated as being positioned everywhere/when, spaces and territories that I occupy as neither insider nor outsider, but as an in-betweener, working from within literal and metaphorical dispossessed memory-scapes that query concepts of home/land, body/soul and identity.

Practice-led research is a combination of experimental creative work incorporating action (walking on/through/in country), visual media (photography, moving image, print-making, installation multi-media work), aural (sound, spoken word) and written (a shortened thesis, which nevertheless requires the same amount of theoretical analysis as a standard thesis).

Embodied performative autoethnography is rendered through and by (re)trac(k)ing journeys and kinship bloodlines of family and community members through and across a metaphorical and literal landscape of terrain. Mapping corporeal, metaphysical and cosmological pilgrimages—in/under/on/through/within lived/imagined experience.

I am utilising this multi-faceted toolkit consisting of experimental still and moving images as well as sound to explore and reference 19th century technologies and representation (collodian, wet-plate processing and performativity as both subject and documenter), interwoven with material drawn from extensive public and personal archives, all reworked into a 21st century contextualisation and conceptualisation of Gurindji-specific, multi-dimensional, cultural identity/ies.¹

Representational and identity politics shape-shift through cultural ambiguities and slippages, and I often feel unsure of my footing, as if I am stumbling rather than walking. With these visual, aural and performative methods of memorialisation, *memento mori* and re/collection, I am proposing to create a new form of archive which is simultaneously public and personal, with media, content and context as multivalent messages.

I am attempting to engage in a truly collaborative, cross-generational, multi-dimensional representation of Gurindji-specific knowledge that may be shared with other Gurindji family and community members—whether they live ‘on country’, or are part of an extensive dispossessed community.

Autoethnography is a qualitative research method and approach to writing oneself into research melding elements of *autobiography* and *ethnography* from a reflexive positionality (Pace 2012). It can also be understood as description and analysis (*graphy*) of one’s personal experience (*auto*), and also as a means of understanding one’s cultural experience (*ethno*) (Ellis, Adams & Bochner 2011).

Performative autoethnography is a critical reflexive methodology, whereby a researcher’s lived experience is an essential element of the area of study. As a person associated with a specific Indigenous community, my heritage as a member of the Gurindji dispossessed² positions me within in-between spaces.

This liminal, heterogeneous, yet inter-connected space is in continual flux. I have an infinite obligation to critically assess whether my research is ethical since it is being conducted from a site of privilege as someone who is accepted as part of these communities. I am not only analysing my methods and ways of *being* and *doing* my Gurindji heritage, but by extension that of my family, community and other dispossessed members.

I am central but at the same time peripheral, shifting between *here* and *there*, yet never capable of completely inhabiting one place or another. Am I Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra, or *kardiya* (whitefella)³, both, or neither? Does my lack of language and proficiency in cultural praxes lessen my agency and representation in the provision of critique from an insider/outsider/in-between perspective? From a Gurindji-specific ontology, the critically reflective methodology of Indigenous Performative Autoethnography intrinsically interweaves the *personal* with the *political* as I am both embodied and immersed within my research subject.

The actions conducted throughout my research are an extension of my ongoing lived experiences, which arguably commenced prior to my conception or birth, possibly at the moment my mother and father first met, some five years before my corporeal existence, or when my paternal grandfather (*kardiya*) met my paternal grandmother (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra/Chinese), or the disparate journeys of all my ancestors.

While this action of cultural collision could arguably be considered significant only to and for my immediate family, I argue that its manifestations and representation through multiple sites, (embodiment, creative and theoretical texts, visual, aural and performative modes), I am strategically engaging in ongoing complex 'politics of resistance' (Denzin, in Spry 2011).

This critical/indigenous (as opposed to capital/indigenous) autoethnography has been referenced through performative photographic processes, incorporated into critical and dialogic textualities, and (re)enacted, (re)imagined through the act of walking on, in and within sites of engagement.

Within the Performative Autoethnography boundaries of my present research project *Still in my mind*, I am engaged with diverse forms of and approaches to



©Brenda L. Croft

autoethnography. As an Indigenous ethnographer I am concerned with addressing and disrupting existing power structures in my chosen field of research.

I am cognisant that as one of the (as yet) few Gurindji-specific researchers working with family and community members on Gurindji lived experience that I have multiple responsibilities in relation to ethics due to mutable researcher positionality. Agency and representation requires cultural responsibility and obligation to be continually reflective and transparent as to the purpose and outcome of my research.

It has been suggested that use of the term 'mixed heritage' is problematic⁴, as is the generalising benefits of having the status of 'insider' (direct community connections) as opposed to that of an 'outsider' (non-Indigenous researcher). But my critically reflective narrative is equally problematic, in that the position I inhabit is dependent on specific intangible moments. I am neither *insider* nor *outsider*, inhabiting a bit of both in that shifting, liminal space of in-between-ness.

At times I have found myself considered to be *Ngumpin/Ngumpit*⁵, connected through my father's family with this connection strongly acknowledged, much to the confusion of some non-Indigenous residents at Kalkaringi.⁶

Although not proficient in Gurindji⁷ I know key terms and laughed on hearing someone announce my arrival, 'Kardiya at the door!' It is



©Brenda L. Croft

also apparent that ethnic codifying is occasionally enacted on long-term community members at Wave Hill, who have *Ngumpin* and other heritage (including Afghan and Asian), possibly for hierarchical purposes of exclusion, depending on the associated specificities/privileges—for example, exclusion from royalties and housing.

When I travel to other places with strong Gurindji dispossessed connections (Darwin), I inhabit a different *outsider* rank. This is because my father was taken away from our community in the early 1930s, thereby fracturing my family's connection to an extensive community. This situation continually shifts from *internal* to *peripheral*, depending on the specificities of a given moment. Arguably, I could consider myself to be comprised of 'mixed-up-heritage'.

My research project is also engaging with a form of narrative ethnography, although the position of ethnographer is fraught when one is working with(in) one's own communities.

I find myself negotiating and navigating multiple sites of self-centeredness, self-awareness, and critical self-reflexivity.

The act of walking country, *planting* one foot in front of the other, breathing in, breathing out, rhythm and rhyme, walking memoryscapes, back through the timelines of the archives, through and on sites of contested cultural and physical territory(ies) is painful yet soothing, revelatory while concealing, truthful yet unstable, reflecting the ground that I have covered over the past quarter-century as I find myself continually back-tracking, circling. Every now and then events happen which underscore how I am always watched over and guided by my ancestors.

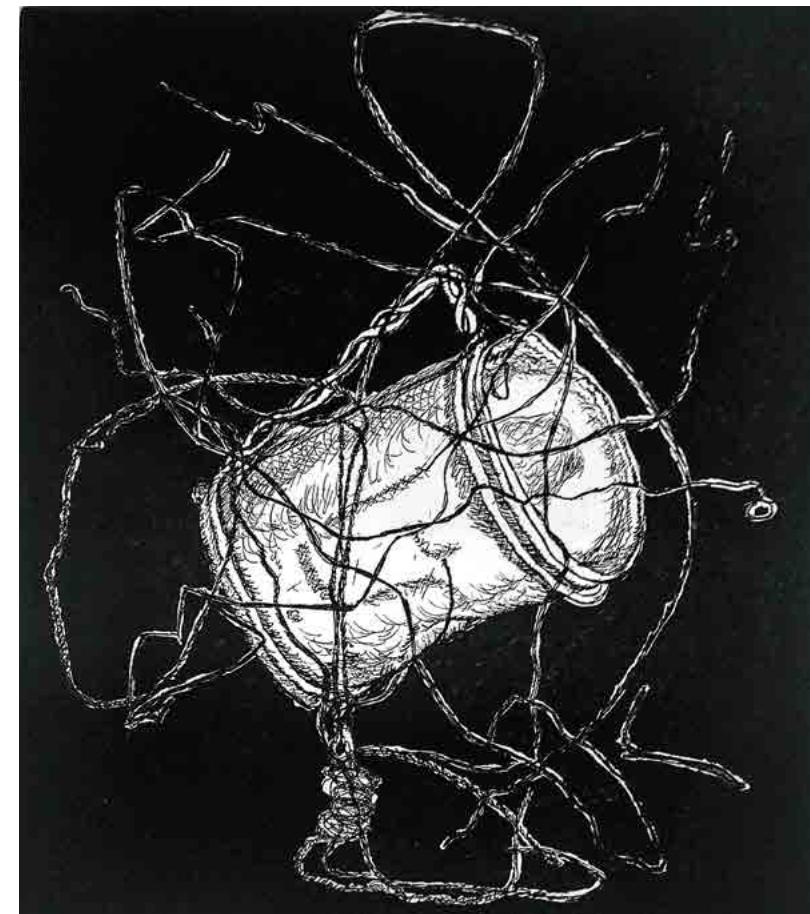
In June 2014, on a journey with senior custodians while documenting cultural sites, we stopped at a distant bore. Stepping out of the Troop carrier I had been driving, my eyes were drawn to the rocky ground beneath my feet. A cultural talisman caught my eye and bending down, I picked up the most stunning stone axe. My aunt, Violet Nanaku Wadrill, called out to me from another vehicle in our cultural convoy, so I walked over and handed the axe to her through the window.

That axe has become my version of a Venn diagram. Whenever I feel I am losing my way, in the archives, in my research, in creating work, I return to the object/artifact and the images I took that day—the stone was shaped and hewn by unknown hands at an unknown time, but I can feel their hands when I turn the axe over in my palm.

I experience the same impact when I hold the handmade pannikin I found at the old dump at *Jinparrak* (*Old Wave Hill Station*). Discarded long ago, it has been fashioned from an old food tin and twisted fencing wire. The solidity of the rusted vessel provides comfort, in the same manner as

the stone axe—both make me feel *grounded*, while at the same time their aesthetic presence is sublime. One created in the same manner since time immemorial; the other, from necessity and available means.

We, those dispossessed from place, ceremony and kin, are like the fragments flaked from that ancient stone tool, quarried from our homelands. We are all chipped from that same solid piece of rock, with some of us still making the long journey home, wherever and whatever that may be.



Brenda L. Croft, Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra; Anglo-Australian/Irish/German heritage, *Jinparrak* #3, ink on paper. Berndt Museum, [Acc. No. 007/2016], ©Brenda L. Croft

Notes

- 1 This research is also framed within the critical modalities of Indigenous-specific (Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra/Anglo-Australian heritage) Woman Standpoint Theory, informed by Indigenous Knowledges scholars (Denzin, 2008, Foley, 2003, 2006, Moreton-Robinson 2013, Nakata, 2007, 2012, Rigney 1999, Tuwhai Smith 1999).
- 2 Initially I used the term 'diaspora', but that indicates being part of a community searching for a homeland; as a Gurindji/Malngin/Mudpurra woman I know where my homeland lies. I am guided by invaluable feedback from Indigenous academic Dr Tracy Bunda: *'Diaspora...I am wondering if this too is a reductive term to explain our located-ness...diasporic as dispersed...is there not a passivity in this concept that denies that our 'dispersion' was forceful, intended, violent, systemic, built from eugenicist knowledges...it is a term that is derived in the post-colonial but determined for the privileged and the white who 'travel' to places, the new 'explorers' who transfer their white supremacist lives into these spaces whilst looking back into a 'place of belonging' that in itself denies how those senses of belonging render invisible dispossessed lives. Dispossession has rendered the inside/outside/in-between located-ness of a lived life rather than a diasporic condition.'* Pers. Corr. 4 June 2015
- 3 *Kardiya*—Gurindji word for whitefella/white person, see the Gurindji to English Dictionary (Batchelor Press, 2013) <http://batchelorpress.com/node/256>
- 4 Feedback from 'Assessor E', ARC DI 2011 application, feedback received in December 2010, when my first ARC DI application was fairly declined as research areas requiring further clarification. However, rather than considering the term 'problematic', I embrace it, as my cultural background is a result of colonisation.
- 5 *Ngumpit/Ngumpin*—Gurindji word for *man/Aboriginal*, see the *Gurindji to English Dictionary* (Batchelor Press, 2013), <http://batchelorpress.com/node/256>
- 6 On one occasion I was amused when my cousin, Judith Nimarra Donald proudly introduced me to the *kardiya* Store Manager as, 'Brenda is my *full* blood cousin'. From the Store Manager's quizzical, non-verbalised reaction, I realised that Judith's statement of familial claiming was heard as, 'Brenda is my *full-blood* cousin'.
- 7 To paraphrase Waanyi artist/activist Gordon Hookey, 'English is my second language, I just don't have access to my first language' (yet).

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Writing from the Heart

Elfie Shiosaki

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Paul Keating, 1992

It was we who did the dispossessing...We took the traditional lands and smashed the traditional way of life. We brought the diseases. The alcohol. We committed the murders. We took the children from their mothers. We practised discrimination and exclusion...We failed to ask—how would I feel if this were done to me?

In his historic speech at Redfern Park in Sydney (1992), Paul Keating became the first Australian prime minister to recognise and account for seemingly silent histories of dispossession experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. His speech seemed to break momentarily what Australian anthropologist WEH Stanner described as 'the great Australian silence' (np). Collective remembering, forgetting and imagining had silenced Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander voices in accounts of Australian history. These silences were deafening.

These histories of dispossession and their recurring trauma for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people are astonishing. Yet within these histories, there are also astonishing histories of strength, courage, resilience and persistence. In *Letters from Berlin* (2012), Margarete Dos, a young German woman working as a nurse for the Red Cross in East Berlin during Soviet occupation, reminds us that 'what is astonishing though, is the human will, which regardless of the fight, continues to hold its head high' (298-299). The resilience of the human spirit is as astonishing as the fight. Recognising and accounting for these histories of resilience, almost 25 years after the Redfern Park speech, revitalises enduring dominant colonial narratives of European settlement and

Indigenous dispossession. This restorative histography honours the resilience of the human spirit. A spirit which remains within us.

The archive: ghosted authors, contents and contexts

Archival traces of discursive activism by many Noongar people from the south-west region of Western Australia contribute to new histories of resilience. The archive in Western Australia produces more knowledge about how the State exercised power over Noongar people, than it does knowledge about Noongar people and families. The archive is not a record of fact, or even truth. It is a record of balances of power and hegemony within the State. As Verne Harris argues, the archive '...is a crucible of human experience, a battleground for meaning and significance, a babel of stories, a place and a space of complex and ever-shifting power-plays' (2002: 85). In his dystopian novel *1984*, George Orwell reflects that 'he who controls the past controls the future. He who controls the present controls the past' (39).

In a political context, states strategically employ national history as a constitutive act—to write themselves into being as a single nation and a unitary state—and the record of this history in the archive underpins their legitimacy and authority. As Jaques Derrida suggests, 'there is no political power without control of the archive' (1995: 4). Accounts of national history tend to be reduced to something which is seemingly natural, objective and singular. They are reduced to something which is static, not evolving or dynamic.

Yet, sometimes we hear the voices of Noongar people speaking from the archive, some loudly, some quietly, others a whisper. These voices speak from the many letters written by Noongar people preserved in the archive. These letters trace how many people have adapted writing to protest and subvert State power since the second half of the nineteenth century.

The archive is spectral, haunted by ghosted voices, contents and contexts (Harris, 2015). In the archive, we encounter an always coming realisation that what seems to be over and done with, is not. In 2011, British artist Paul Cocksedge created the installation *Gust* for the Festival of Lights in Lyon, France. The installation represents a ream of paper escaping from the Town Hall archives, as if it had been caught by a gust of wind. The papers, bright and shining in the darkness, illuminate the Town Hall as they transcend into the night's sky.

The installation symbolises the ghosted voices, contents and contexts within the archive being released. It has come to symbolise my hope for the archive in Western Australia. As Harris argues, there are many

ghosted voices within the archive who 'have left an exterior trace which can speak for them when they are unable to speak for themselves; which will speak for them when they are dead' (2015: 20). Recognising and accounting for these voices, as well as restoring contextual integrity to their archival traces, transforms the archive from a record of the past, into a living, evolving and dynamic 'condition of a liberatory future *that wants to be made*' (V. Harris, 2015: 19; emphasis mine).

What does the 'liberatory future' of the archive hold for Indigenous people? The making of national histories in post-conflict societies is a contested space. This space is occupied by over-heated, unreconciled relationships between individuals and groups in the present and unreconciled narratives and counter-narratives of the past. Some voices are amplified, and others are silenced. Avery Gordon argues that 'perceiving the lost subjects of history—missing and lost ones and the blind fields they inhabit—makes all the difference to any project trying to find the address of the present' (195). Would seeing these lost subjects of history contest and negotiate borders of belonging in accounts of national histories?

The archive is a site of justice. Breaking silences by amplifying ghosted voices within the archive, relocates marginalised groups from the periphery of history to its centre. Derrida writes that:

If he loves justice ... the 'scholar' of the future, the 'intellectual' of tomorrow should learn it ... from the ghost. He should learn to live by learning not how to make conversation with the ghost but how to talk with him, with her, how to let them speak or how to give them back speech... (1994: 176)

Releasing ghosted voices from the archive, which Harris describes as 'archive banditry', creates new spaces for ghosted voices in 'oppressive societal contexts' (V. Harris, 2013: 13).

Discursive activism in the archive in Western Australia

Restoring letters written by Noongar people to their families realises Indigenous peoples' rights to culture and knowledge by transforming the archive in Western Australia into a dynamic site of Indigenous cultural heritage. One of the many histories of discursive activism in the archive is that of my grandmother's grandfather, Edward Harris. Edward Harris campaigned for more than a decade between 1915 and 1926 for the return of his four children, Lyndon, Grace, Connie and my great-grandmother Olive, who were institutionalised at Carrolup River Native Settlement, and later at Moore River Native Settlement.¹

Edward Harris corresponded with the Chief Protector of Aborigines, AO Neville, during this period, pleading for his children back. He wrote these letters from the heart, a place where he held his children close to him. Sometimes this emotion lingers in his words, or in his handwriting and other marks on the page. Edward Harris's writing is not only a treasured record of his love for his children and his unrelenting campaign for their return, but also an historical record of his discursive activism.

Taking up pen and paper, Edward Harris, and many other Indigenous activists of his generation in Australia and internationally, were involved in fundamental normative work to construct a new discourse of Indigenous human rights. In a letter to Chief Protector Neville dated 1 February 1918, he wrote:

And now before bringing this letter to a close I again appeal to you to have my children placed in my care, *and to remind you that I am their father* [emphasis mine], and if you cannot do that, I'll have to try some other means to have my children restored to me, either through the press or else a court of justice.²

In another letter to Neville, dated 21 August 1920, he wrote:

...it would be a hard matter for you or anyone else to convince me that it is in the interests of the children that you are keeping them shut up at Carrolup. Your past actions show that you are malicious, you have never missed an opportunity of hurting me. Not once. Also you have used your position as Protector and the Aboriginal Act to gratify your malice.

You speak of doing the best in the interests of my children. I cannot see it...³

Edward Harris, with his brother William Harris, went on to establish the first Aboriginal political organisation in Western Australia, the Native Union, in 1926. The Native Union emerged at a time when Indigenous human rights were severely restricted under the discriminatory Aborigines Act 1905 (WA) and the administration of the Chief Protector Neville between 1915 and 1940. William Harris described the organisation as a 'protective union' for all Aboriginal people. In a letter to the editor announcing the establishment of the Native Union, published in the *Sunday Times* on 14 November 1926, he wrote:

Ever since the whites settled in Western Australia the aborigines have not lived in a more cruel and lawless

state than they are living today. Since the inauguration of Responsible Government their condition has gone from bad to worse, and has now become unbearable.

For hundreds of years, in song and story, it has been Britain's boast that under her flag was found justice and fair dealing for all. But in dealing with the aborigines it has been reserved for Western Australia to overturn British law and justice and consideration for the weak and helpless... (np)

Indigenous political organisations first emerged in Australia in the 1920s, within a dynamic international economic, political and social context. (See: Attwood; Attwood and Markus; Goodall; Horner; Maynard, 2007; Tucker). These movements, however, were often formed by courageous individuals who had campaigned for the rights of their families or community since the turn of the 20th century. Regional and international networks were being extended to enable people, ideas and movements to circulate more quickly around the world.

These organisations were connected with each other as well as with this international circulation of people, ideas and movements. In addition to the Native Union, the Australian Aboriginal Progress Association (AAPA) was established in Sydney in 1924 under the leadership of Fred Maynard. The AAPA is considered to be the first Aboriginal political organisation to create formal networks between Aboriginal communities over a wide region. The AAPA was influenced by Black Nationalism in the United States. (See Maynard, 2015; Maynard 2014). The Australian Aborigines League (AAL) was established in Melbourne in 1932 under the leadership of William Cooper, who petitioned King George V about the treatment and conditions of Aboriginal people. Cooper famously protested against the persecution of Jewish people during the Second World War. He led a protest march to the German Honorary Consulate in Melbourne a few weeks after Kristallnacht in Germany. Cooper became the first Indigenous person in Australia to be honoured with his own memorial and garden at the Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum in Jerusalem in 2010. The Euralian Association was established in Port Hedland in 1934. The Aborigines Progress Association (APA) was established by William Ferguson in Dubbo, New South Wales, in 1937. The following year William Ferguson and another leader of the APA, John Patten, organised a 'Day of Mourning' on 26 January 1938, to mark the 150th anniversary of the arrival of the First Fleet.

The Native Union gained national prominence when William Harris led a deputation of Aboriginal people to meet with the Western Australian premier, Philip Collier, in 1928. The group of seven men included the

Harris brothers, their nephew Norman Harris, Wilfred Morrison, Edward Jacobs, Arthur Kickett and William Bodney. All of the members of the deputation have a shared history of campaigning for the rights of their families or communities since the turn of the century (Haebich 444). Some of these men went to school together at the Swan Native and Half Caste (SNHC) mission in Perth.

The 1928 deputation demanded the repeal of the Aborigines Act 1905, in particular the power of the State to forcibly remove Aboriginal children from their families. It also held Chief Protector Neville's administration to account for its systematic violation of Indigenous human rights. The *Western Mail* reported that during the meeting with the premier:

Mr Harris said 'The department established to protect us, is cleaning us up. We were far better off under administration from England. Under the present Act, Mr Neville owns us body and soul...the laws should be drafted by someone who knows something about the blackfellow...' ('Black Man's Burden' np)

Powerful technologies of writing and printing maintained and extended the discursive forces of colonisation. Yet many Indigenous people strategically adapted these technologies to protest and subvert these forces. In his study of Indigenous petitions, Ravi de Costa argues that such writing was evidence of Indigenous people:

...trying to imagine and create new sources of authority. In so doing, this normative work is trying to make possible and real a world that will accommodate the claims of marginalized groups. The episodes of petitionary representation by indigenous people give us some sense of what it is to represent oneself and one's community in the face of great power that denies your claims and even your existence. (694)

Marginalised groups around the world continue this kind of normative work today.

Edward and William Harris' writing articulates Indigenous human rights in a broader framework of civil and political rights. William Harris in particular constructs a new autonomous political identity for Noongar people—as subjects of the British Commonwealth. He also constructs a new, transcendent moral order—of British law and justice—which recognises justice for Noongar people. Others as well. Fred Maynard articulates Indigenous human rights in a broader framework of rights for marginalised groups around the world, and William Cooper does so in a broader framework of rights for persecuted groups in Europe during

the Second World War. They each had their own way. Collectively the writing of these activists—which began around a century before rights for Indigenous peoples were recognised in the United Nations Declaration on the Rights for Indigenous peoples (2007)—represents the transnational and transcultural history of an idea and movement.

'Deafening silences': new histories of resilience

Recognising and accounting for these histories of resilience revitalises accounts of Australian history. These histories contest and negotiate colonial boundaries between so-called White Australia and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. These boundaries reduce knowledge and understanding of Australian history to relationships between European settlers, in particular settlers with British heritage, and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. Australian history cuts across spatial as well as cultural boundaries between the local, national and international. John Maynard argues that 'the interaction and connection between Aboriginal people and other cultures has a very long history that needs to be explored in greater detail and recognised' (2005: 201). Negotiating these boundaries uncovers new knowledge and understanding about Indigenous peoples' dynamic engagement with an international circulation of movements and ideologies and their active role as global agents of change. It deepens our understanding of Indigenous peoples' transnational agency, networks and mobilities.

These histories of resilience also contest and negotiate enduring dominant colonial narratives of European settlement and Indigenous dispossession. Archival traces of discursive activism by many Noongar people contribute to these histories by amplifying significant Western Australian voices. Like the bright and shining ream of paper in *Gust* illuminating the Town Hall in Lyon, these letters illuminate brightly a dark period in Western Australian history and contribute to luminous accounts of Australian history. Some letters are acts of pleading. Some are acts of subversion or protest. Some are strong assertions of Indigenous human rights. All honour Noongar peoples' political autonomy and their strength, courage and resilience. This writing is not only an archival trace of how many Noongar people subverted the State, its institutions and its policies. It is also a trace of how they constructed a new discourse of Indigenous human rights by renegotiating the language of human rights.

These histories of resilience do not deny histories of dispossession. We feel great sorrow when we read these letters. The writing on the page is no longer strokes of a pen, or letters of the alphabet, or even words,

but tears of great sorrow, pain and suffering. We need to recognise and account for this sorrow, to hold onto it even. Yet we also need to recognise the strength, courage, resilience and persistence in these acts of writing. Nobel laureate for literature William Faulkner said in his Nobel Banquet speech in 1950 that story tellers have a duty to 'help man endure by lifting his heart, by reminding him of the courage and honour and hope and pride and compassion and pity and sacrifice which have been the glory of his past' (np).

The past reverberates inside our bodies like a second heartbeat. We feel the reverberation of histories of dispossession beating inside our chests. Yet, we might also feel the reverberation of these histories of resilience and will move in time to its beat. Moving to this beat, we embrace an inheritance of resilience. I find a redemptive hope in this inheritance, that I too am not a victim of astonishing histories of dispossession. I too have their courage within me to survive.

Recognising and accounting for what Gordon describes as the 'lost subjects of history' (195) contests and negotiates enduring dominant colonial narratives of European settlement and Indigenous dispossession. Archival traces of early discursive activism by many Noongar people in the southwest region of Western Australia contribute to new histories of resilience. These traces demonstrate how many Noongar people dynamically engaged with an international circulation of ideas and movements to contribute to a new discourse of Indigenous rights. These narratives of political autonomy relocate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people from the periphery of Australian history to its centre. They tell new histories of survival, strength, courage and resilience and contribute to overcoming the legacy of colonial narratives so tightly woven into the fabric of the Australian nation-state and the making of its history.

Notes

1 Excerpts of Edward Harris' letters have been reproduced with permission.

2 Excerpt from Harris family personal documents.

3 Excerpt from Harris family personal documents.

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Singing Back to the Archive

Clint Bracknell

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Nyungar (also spelled Noongar, Nyoongar) is the endangered Aboriginal language of the South-West of Western Australia, constituting perhaps Australia's largest Indigenous cultural and linguistic bloc (Thieberger). Research and analysis of Nyungar song traditions undertaken in cooperation with the Wirloomin Noongar Language and Stories Project (Wirloomin Project), a Nyungar language organisation with over eighty members, led to a series of workshops in the Albany region of Western Australia from 2013 to 2015 involving the repatriation of archival songs. These 'song workshops', occurring as an extension of story and language consolidation workshops coordinated by the Wirloomin Project since 2007, yielded significant findings relating to Nyungar song and demonstrated a new model for Aboriginal music revival (after Livingston; Bithell and Hill). They provided a forum for the sharing of previously unrecorded Nyungar songs and enabled archival songs to be reconnected to their cultural context, with workshop participants providing additional information, or 'metadata' (Toner 2), not found in the archival records alone. Incorporating critical reflections on these community workshops, this paper will examine the complexities Aboriginal people encounter in reconnecting with songs in an endangered ancestral language. Furthermore, it will suggest strategies to support music sustainability, including a process of learning from and 'singing back' to the archive as a means of community empowerment.

'Learning to perform' has been cited as an important ethnomusicological research methodology (Baily 1). Utilised in the context of a critically endangered musical tradition, this paper will expand upon theoretical concepts associated with learning music 'by ear' (Lilliestam 195) in order to highlight the need to connect Aboriginal songs to contextual 'packages' of meaning (Turpin), consolidating links to geography, story, individuals and families. The opportunity to listen to performances of Nyungar song,

even if not necessarily learning to sing, also emerges as an important factor in the maintenance of Nyungar language and cultural identity. Facilitation of such opportunities requires that certain willing and capable individuals participate in ongoing 'stewardship' (Titon 137) of ancestral Nyungar language song texts, as well as undertake complementary musical activities including the composition of new songs relevant to community interests. The re-establishment and circulation of a repertoire of Nyungar songs may help sustain a regional tradition, and provide a means to demonstrate and learn more about Nyungar song.

As a large and diverse cultural group, including over 30,000 members dispersed across the South-West of Western Australia, the Nyungar stakeholders of such research are dissimilar to the revivalist groups often described in music sustainability literature, either living in reasonably segregated remote regions or as diaspora attempting to strengthen links back to a common point of origin (Bendrups, Barney and Grant; Bithell and Hill). Nyungar are not in control of their vast homelands, and remain significantly outnumbered by the dominant colonial or migrant group, constituting less than 3.5% of the total population of the South-West of Western Australia (Australian Bureau of Statistics). As is the case with many colonised countries, such as Wales (Llewellyn), Nyungar are recognised by Australian law as Australian citizens, and can only currently assert distinct Nyungar 'citizenship' via communicative practices, including media, language and song. In relation to Welsh cultural heritage, Evans (295) states, 'the way to annihilate a nation is to destroy its culture. The way to delete a culture is to destroy its language'. With the inherent difficulties associated with maintaining an endangered Aboriginal language (Bell), the persistence and performance of a distinct Nyungar musical tradition may be of significant value in years to come.

Workshopping Songs

After archival research and analysis of Nyungar songs undertaken on the request of the Wirloomin Project, I presented initial findings in five workshops and acted as a participant-facilitator, presenting audio and text, whilst prompting discussion of the songs, language and contextual information. Efforts were made to learn some of the most relevant and accessible archival songs, but due to my junior status within the Wirloomin clan, senior participants largely determined the agenda. Members of the Wirloomin Project participated in these workshops in groups fluctuating between fifteen to thirty people, along with representatives of the Wirloomin reference group and executive committee leading each session.

This reference group and committee are formally acknowledged by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) and function to facilitate the consolidation and development of relevant archival material (Henderson et al) and the oral history and language held by senior people in the group (Scott and Roberts). Updated due to bereavements, in 2015 the reference group included Hazel Brown, Albert Knapp, Helen Nelly, Russell Nelly and Henry Dabb, and executive committee members Iris Woods, Roma Winmar, Kim Scott, Ezzard Flowers and Connie Moses.

There was a general consensus among workshop participants that traditional Nyungar songs are important vestiges of Nyungar cultural identity and part of asserting a common Aboriginal group identity in the South-West of Western Australia. A clear link between music and identity is commonly articulated in music sustainability projects around the world (Seeger). Bithell and Hill (3–4) describe the issues common to such revival efforts, including:

1. 'Activist' agendas of revivalists to affect socio-political change;
2. Selection, reinterpretation and reinvention;
3. De-contextualisation and re-contextualisation;
4. Legitimisation and authenticity; and
5. Methods and infrastructure required to support revived music.

The notion that song could strengthen Nyungar 'citizenship' is certainly reflective of an agenda to improve Nyungar socio-political standing (Koch), but the motivation around the revival of Nyungar song traditions also speaks to a broader purpose associated with Aboriginal ideas of the importance of song in a metaphysical sense (Ellis). The fragmented nature of many records of Nyungar song and the endangered state of the language necessitates interpretation, notwithstanding the effects of cultural change over time, within the original geographical and cultural context of the song tradition. Existing community recollections of song traditions, and even of whole song texts, provide evidence not only of their diminished status, but also suggestions as to how to promote the ultimate survival of Nyungar song. Thus, workshops with the Wirlomin Project have allowed for the re-contextualisation of songs, the authenticity of which has mostly been judged on the basis of the intelligibility of Nyungar language in song texts, the identity of the performer of the song text, and the degree of connection between the song and existing Nyungar stories, knowledge and understandings.

The archival collection of Nyungar song is relatively sparse compared to the documentation of Aboriginal song traditions from other regions in Australia (Moyle). However, the volume of Nyungar song recordings and transcribed lyrics has often been overwhelming for participants. Kim Scott, Iris Woods and Roma Winmar agreed that the number of songs collected in the archival study would take a long time to discuss and recirculate. Furthermore, the 'different' language used in some of the audio recordings prompted Albert Knapp and Ezzard Flowers to discuss the merging of Nyungar and neighbouring languages in song, and possible differences between spoken and sung language (Bracknell). The enthusiasm of participants such as Russell Nelly to become familiar with and perform the archival songs was tempered by the emotional toll he and other participants discussed in relation to the loss of language and song traditions. These factors necessitated a slower, more deliberate process of engagement with the songs.

As has been the case in similar projects involving the repatriation of recorded songs to endangered language communities (Gummow; Lancefield), participants have responded to repatriated song recordings with quiet contemplation approaching reverence. Sometimes, this is because the performers are deceased family members, and, at other times, listening to the songs has reminded participants of hearing senior relatives sing in the past and provoked feelings of regret about having not recorded them for posterity. The extent of language loss in the Nyungar community today significantly limits the revival of Nyungar song traditions, and the trauma and dislocation associated with language loss and the loss of Aboriginal song traditions in Australia carry serious emotional weight (for example, see Grant; Bell). Even highly regarded Nyungar singer Charlie Dabb, who provided a recorded repertoire of Nyungar songs to C. G. von Brandenstein in the 1970s, conveys sadness in relation to the difficulties of song transmission and critical of his own language abilities. In relation to a song he inherited, he states:

Ngany yueng nidjiny kwab djinang – Birdiya
It is good to share this [song], see? Boss!
Ngany warra – Daaliny warra – Ngany yueng nidj djinang
I am bad. My tongue is no good. [Still,] I share this [song], see?
Boordawan boordu ngan kwerl kwab – Kaadidjiny boordal nyundukan
Sooner or later my name will be well regarded. You will all understand later.¹
(von Brandenstein)

Presumably, the dwindling number of Nyungar speakers with whom to converse in 1970 at Esperance, and the lack of regular opportunities to perform songs, left Dabb a little out of practice, and unsure of his own abilities. Such insecurity was present in the workshops, especially when we attempted to sing Nyungar songs, but the attempt also sparked memories of song traditions and associated information, and provided a means for the transmission of additional, previously unrecorded songs.

Charlie Dabb states that he was given songs from his father, but senior Nyungar man Albert Knapp sang songs at workshops with the Wirloomin Project he had not been necessarily taught, but that he remembered listening to when he was very young. Hearing some of the recorded archival performances played in the workshops inspired Knapp to share and record two songs, stating that:

Here are a couple of songs grandad used to sing. I'll give them to you. I've never given them to anybody else. I'm getting old now and I probably won't... If I don't give them to you, because you're interested, I might take them to my grave. I don't want to do that.

In the late 1940s, Knapp's grandfather used to stay in a *kornd*, or hut, always a little way from the rest of the camp, distancing himself from the younger people, but Knapp would hear him singing at night in the days before he was sent to the Aboriginal children's home at Gnowangerup. His curiosity as a child about what his grandfather was singing resulted in the transmission and survival of two short Nyungar songs. Knapp's performance is highly significant in that it embodies the idea of 'singing back' to the archive, disproving the idea of the archive as a finite source for information and truth on the topic of Nyungar song traditions.

As a key component to the approach of 'singing back', workshop participants offered significant contextual information to accompany the repatriated archival songs. When playing Lomas Roberts' (Miniter) recorded performance of a song about the *kurli*, or bush turkey, I displayed a picture of the bird. Upon seeing the picture, Roberts' eldest sister Hazel Brown proceeded to tell the group of its habitat, regulations around killing and consuming the *kurli*, and her own experiences of seeing and hunting it. Some other participants revealed that this was the first time they had heard Roberts sing, an indication of the few opportunities for the performance and transmission of Nyungar song. It was in fact Roberts' nephew Jason Miniter who had recorded his uncle singing as part of an oral history project in 2001 when studying at Curtin University with the assistance of Nyungar language teacher Dr Tim McCabe. Miniter

provided the recording to me for digitisation and use in this project, the audio recording itself functioning to support the transmission of song amongst Nyungar.

The song features a repeated motif and a complex, seemingly improvised, section. In the first workshop, the group focused on translating the lyrics in the motif, accounting for differences between spoken and sung language. The song's regular rhythmic pulse and the reasonably narrow pitch range of its melody enabled everyone to begin singing the motif as a group with relative ease. The group looped and repeated this motif, with some participants keeping time clapping, and at subsequent workshops, sung it as an item of shared performance repertoire. This conscious decision to start a process of musical revival with more accessible song texts and, in this case, via a process of simplifying a song, is consistent with choices made by many Aboriginal people striving to sustain musical traditions amid tumultuous socio-cultural situations (Wild; Payne; Dussart). Such adaptability is symptomatic of a living tradition, rather than a fossilised one (Baily). Interestingly, as a threatened species, the *kurli* is rarely sighted along the south coast of Western Australia, but in the months following this motif being sung for perhaps the first time in more than a decade, participants reported hearing of increased sightings in the region. Learning and performing this motif within a community and family context resulted in the sharing of relevant geographical and cultural information, has created a fresh impetus and had lasting effects on singers and Country.

Learning through Performance

In workshops with the Wirloomin Project, songs were learned 'by ear' and by listening to audio recordings and those amongst us who 'carry' songs. Lilliestam (201) explains that musicians who do not rely on notation as a mnemonic aid use four different types of memory, all working 'in combination with each other' in order to learn a piece of music:

1. 'Auditive' memory refers to when music is heard, remembered and reproduced;
2. 'Verbal' memory remembering is the verbal descriptions of different sections of songs or musical elements;
3. 'Visual' memory is about remembering what the instrument looks like when playing a certain chord or melody; and
4. 'Tactile' memory is remembering what it feels like to make the music, and is often referred to as muscle memory.

Lillestam (202) also refers to the use of 'mental maps' for recalling music, stating that:

[W]hen we hear music, we make our own mental pictures of it in our brains. These mental maps, which may be very personal, can be produced when we play and, together with the other four types of memory, work as a mnemonic aid.

This line of thinking is especially relevant to informing a process for learning to perform Nyungar songs. Connerton (28) states that, '[c]ognitive psychologists can indeed acknowledge, without prejudice to their premises, that the memories of people in different cultures will vary because their mental maps are different'. This suggests that the very process of remembering Nyungar songs may depend on distinctly Nyungar 'maps'.

Using 'auditive' memory is key to learning Nyungar songs, but notions of 'verbal', 'visual' and 'tactile' memory take on new importance in the context of endangered Aboriginal vocal music. It is easy to simply imitate songs on old recordings, but the performance of such songs also requires that they be situated within a particular linguistic and cultural context. In the case of learning Nyungar songs, 'verbal' memory must also encompass a degree of fluency in Nyungar language. If one is unaware of the language in the song, even if it is altered 'song language' (Bracknell), there is a danger of incorrectly applying stress, tone and rhythmic patterns of the language, and consequently diminishing meaning. 'Verbal' memory can also relate to the expansions on meaning a performer may provide, or the 'story behind the song'. 'Visual' memory seems unnecessary in the context of learning vocal music, but could be widened to encompass important cultural specificities such as memory of who one saw singing the song, the location of the performance and who else was present. It can also include memories of landmarks or animals referred to in the song, plus the visual designs or dance patterns which accompany a song, as evidenced by Charlie Traveller's clear memory of 'pretty girls dancing' informing his recorded archival performance of a Nyungar song (Hercus). 'Tactile' memory may refer to not just the muscle memory of singing certain pitches and rhythms, or reproducing particular vocal timbres, but could also embrace the emotional and spiritual 'feeling' invoked by singing in one's ancestral language. Additionally, it may encompass physical memory of participating in dance or movement accompanying a song text. Thus, the four kinds of memory may combine to capture elements that constitute a song 'package' (Turpin), and construct a mnemonic map.

Music scholars have argued that one can only acquire 'a certain essential kind of knowledge about music' through performance (Baily 86). Ethnomusicology, for example, considers learning to perform 'good method' (Myers 31). Ethnomusicologist performers such as Baily have usually learned to play from exponents of various musical traditions, and have used audio recordings as a backup or practice tool. Unlike the kind of learning by ear from recordings Baily (90) describes, learning to perform from archival recordings of Nyungar songs is not so straightforward because the music requires intense re-contextualisation. Learning songs from archives, especially when they are relatively inaccessible to many people in the home community in which the music originated, can also imbue the singer with significant responsibilities to sustain the song tradition and share songs with others 'back home'.

Describing the post-fieldwork period sometimes experienced by researchers who learn to perform the traditions they study, Baily writes of the tendency for researchers to become living fossils, continuing to perform music in the manner they learned it during past fieldwork in a distant community, oblivious to 'processes of musical change' (96). Reflecting on his position as a performance-based researcher knowledgeable in the traditional music of Afghanistan, Baily explains that '[w]hen the Afghans want "traditional Afghan music" ... they send for us' (96). As musical cultures are by their very nature in constant state of flux, the performing music researcher can function as a reference point on past musical practices. At a point such as this, Baily considers the entire paradigm of research to have flipped, stating that:

[T]he researcher becomes a resource, the archive of field recordings invaluable remnants of a cultural heritage, the fieldwork part of the informants' own music history ... At the end of the day, the researcher becomes the researched (96).

I mention these points in order to emphasise the danger of expertise on Aboriginal song being restricted to researchers who may be disconnected from the communities from which the music they study emanated. Günther (74) has characterised learning to perform music from a culture other than one's own as part of the wider acculturative process of intercultural 'transfer and retransfer' of music. However, scholars who perform can function in a similar manner to archives, by exercising authority over the 'authenticity' of specific cultural traditions of colonised and disempowered minorities, and mediating perceived ownership of such traditions (for example, see Hill).

This kind of 'ownership' can distance the researcher from the community, and function to cast them as an 'outsider' (Herndon). Awareness of such dynamics, especially in regard to Indigenous Australian music, has led many ethnomusicologists to undertake collaborative research, which is 'increasingly acknowledged as key to meeting community needs' (Bendrups, Barney and Grant 156). Indigenous and non-Indigenous co-authorship of papers and conference presentations has become more common in recent years (for example, see Corn and Gumbula) and constructive engagement with issues of music sustainability is increasingly viewed as fundamental to good music research (Corn). As a further response to issues of cultural appropriation, the term 'stewardship', has come to be increasingly used in ethnomusicology (Titon). Implying that people are caretakers rather than owners of cultural resources, Titon characterises musical 'stewardship' as understanding that musical traditions are 'best maintained by managing the cultural soil surrounding them' (124). By implication, a strong Nyungar community means that Nyungar song will thrive. The converse could also be true, considering the links between cultural strength and positive social outcomes in Aboriginal communities (Palmer).

Recirculating a Repertoire

Wirlomin song workshop participants refer to the 'harsh history' of colonisation and Nyungar cultural suppression in Western Australia (Haebich), but as Kim Scott remarked in one of the workshops, 'there are lots of individuals around that are carrying precious stuff and trying to bring all that material together and hand it on'. The following excerpt of a workshop discussion serves to further illustrate the link between song and cultural resilience:

Albert Knapp: It was harsh, you know, and you see me now...

Russell Nelly: And you've got songs...

Albert Knapp: But that's how we got through that, those periods, those very harsh periods.

Unfortunately, many in the Nyungar community are dealing with complex issues of poverty, dislocation and trauma shared by most Indigenous peoples in various global contexts (United Nations), which impact upon the time and resources community members are able to devote to cultural maintenance activities. In this situation individuals must take steps to consolidate and sustain repertoires of traditional song with the support of relevant cultural authorities.

The ultimate outcome of the repatriation activities and song workshops undertaken with the Wirlomin Project over the course of this investigation of the aesthetics and sustainability of Nyungar song traditions has been the resolution amongst the Wirlomin Project reference group and executive committee that, due to the degree of difficulty in learning the songs, the difficulty of access and the variable quality of archival recordings, more work must be done to effectively facilitate a gradual process of learning, performing and recirculating Nyungar songs. Additionally, as a large portion of the total number of Nyungar songs recorded have been documented in written records, with no accompanying musical notation (Bracknell), it is impossible to definitively know and reproduce the musical sounds of these songs. It may be possible to graft melodies based on existing audio recordings of songs onto the written lyrics that lack a melody, but for this to be an empowering process it would be best attempted by a group of Nyungar people familiar with and connected to the songs concerned.

Conclusion

Workshops undertaken over the course of an investigation pertaining to the aesthetics and sustainability of Nyungar song have enabled participants to listen to, reflect on and perform Nyungar songs heard on archival recordings or 'carried' by individual participants. In re-establishing the connections between Nyungar songs texts and their geographical and cultural context, workshop participants have provided 'metadata' (Toner 2), inclusive of memories of the singers and Nyungar song traditions, more generally, as well as the contemporary relevance of such songs in an era of language endangerment. Opportunities to listen to and reconnect with Nyungar songs become sites for healing and the maintenance of cultural strength. Such workshops have also informed a gradual process of consolidating and enhancing Nyungar song whilst learning from and 'singing back' to the archive.

Nurturing links between Nyungar songs and geography, story, individuals and families is of key importance in any process of learning Nyungar songs. Notions of 'auditive', 'verbal', 'visual', and 'tactile' memory employed to learn songs 'by ear' (Lilliestam 195) may be expanded to include these contextual factors. Especially in this instance, by learning to perform Nyungar song, we learn more about Nyungar musical traditions, and Nyungar culture more generally. Having spent a great deal of time listening to archival records of Nyungar song as a researcher and a member of the Nyungar community concerned to maintain their

vitality, I therefore carry a responsibility to avoid the 'fossilisation' of Nyungar song by seeking out opportunities to recirculate song texts and reinvigorate musical practices in the region. It is with the guidance of the Wirlomin reference group and committee that I continue to endeavour to achieve this aim.

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Note

1 The English is my rough translation of Nyungar language on the audio recording.

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From the Earth Out: word, image, sound, object, body, country.

Sandra Phillips and Alison Ravenscroft

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In this essay we speak to the significance of Indigenous story, and for textual practices that enable Indigenous story its distinctive and multiple enunciations. We approach these questions through a discussion of our work on a new digital *Indigenous Story* project, which aims to make its own contribution to the wider project of developing places for the publication of Indigenous story that are shaped by the standards and practices of Indigenous storytelling rather than by those of European-centred editing, publishing and critical practices.¹ What follows are our first efforts to document the ways in which we are currently thinking about story and the ethics of textual production and publication. This aims to be an ethics that does not impose itself on contributors to the site but arises in a dynamic relation with these men's and women's textual practices as they themselves enquire into the nature of story and its generative processes. In this way, the project is potentially one in which all its contributors are in fact participants who keep pushing the project along new lines.

We have a long interest in these questions, and in what Indigenous story is, why it matters, and what the conditions of its publication, exhibition and broadcast might need to be if its multiplicities are to be sustained. We are interested in the cultural work that Indigenous stories do, and how to ensure that they can keep doing this work, recognising the importance for Indigenous men and women's sense of agency and standing in the world, of we/they having power and authority over the ways our/their stories are told and circulated. These are stories that hold truths or knowledges other than the ones that this nation tells itself

again and again. How to preserve and expand those stories that are under threat because of the differences they mark from the prevailing accounts this nation gives of itself, those accounts that circulate widely in Australian culture, gathering authority, gathering the status of truth, silencing others?

We approach this urgent question from two distinct yet intertwined positions. We both have scholarly interests in the politics of textual practices, examining the politics of editing, authorship and other issues around the material presentation of, access to, and circulation of Indigenous-signed texts within print culture, and we both have hands-on experience of these same practices, editors of texts by Indigenous (and non-Indigenous) authors: one as an Indigenous woman and the other as a non-Indigenous woman, with the complex differences that these two positions imply.

As an editor trained inside Indigenous and mainstream Australian publishing, Sandra Phillips experiences the tension between colonially imported normative textual production and the new modes of textual relation and outcome that Indigenous writing continues to generate from *earth out*, or from the ground up. The desire to resist while being required to fully know dominant normative constructions of textual production continue into her curriculum leadership in mainstream editing and publishing studies with undergraduate creative and professional writing students in Creative Industries at Queensland University of Technology. Sandra maintains some balance through these opposed positions by staying close to Indigenous story in all its forms. Indigenous story is more real to her than the dominant constructions of industrial editorial labour and higher education prescription, and Indigenous story is what allows her to stand outside these dominant spaces while being tethered to them. A duality of professional practice that mirrors the complexity of life as an indigenous woman in a settler colonial patriarchal society.

Alison Ravenscroft approaches these questions from the perspective of a non-Indigenous woman who sees Australian whiteness and its ideals as being formed inextricably in relation to Indigeneity—a relation that is nevertheless disavowed in colonial and neo-colonial discourses. In her view, encounters with Indigenous story—in the widest sense of that word—are centrally important in any decolonising practices that non-Indigenous Australians might undertake because these encounters bring us into proximity with knowledges and subject positions that dispel ideas we might still hold of our own centrality in the story this country writes. Given this, it appears essential that this textuality is met without having been mediated, censored, cut and pasted by editorial and other textual

practices that carry all the marks of the same colonising impulses which the authors of these texts are countering.

Story

By 'story', we don't mean only story in the sense of fictional narratives, although it can mean this too. We see story as that which holds knowledge and assists in its production, dissemination and understanding. This is an approach to storytelling as a practice through which knowledge is both generated and carried. In this, we take our lead from contemporary writers—from Alexis Wright for instance and how she figures Indigenous story. In *Carpentaria*, Alexis Wright doesn't only write story; she writes about story. Story is figured as that which carries knowledge of country, of the stories the country writes and the stories that are told to it (Wright 2007). Story includes knowledge of the seasons and tides, the weather and how it changes over millennia. Story is knowledge of the past and present but it is also sometimes speculative, as we see in *The Swan Book* which shows how the devastating reach of Eurocentric and colonising logic could extend into the future. Seen in this way, Indigenous story holds knowledge about contemporary Australian racialised discourses, colonialism and neo-colonialism; it holds knowledge about the bodies of humans and other living things, and the relations between them. Indeed, stories make and hold these relations one with another. 'We use stories all the time', Wright has said to Arnold Zable in interview. 'Telling stories is a very big thing about who we are, and it is often the way that we do business with each other' (28).

We see story as word, as song, as a basket woven from native grasses (McKinnon 372). It is spoken and written and can't be assimilated to an orality and literacy binary that refuses the oral its textuality and the written text its voice. Story is alphabetic, and it is marks on sand, skin and canvas (Muecke). It includes that which is articulated in the visual arts and music. As Crystal McKinnon puts it, 'Aboriginal text is everywhere':

Aboriginal people have marked the landscape for tens of thousands of years. Our textual productions cover outback deserts and country towns, and remain throughout urban cities and suburban sprawl...The scar trees that dot the sides of the road, the shell middens that are along the coastlines, the graffiti that declares 'I am Aboriginal' with a Koori flag sketched beneath, and the sounds of the didgeridoo busker are all textual productions of ours. Aboriginal text is everywhere (371).

This is Indigenous story, then, that is narrative and counter narrative, discourse and discourse analysis. It speaks of what this country is now, what it has been, and what it could be. It is carried in and made by words, images, sounds, objects, bodies, country. It is across aesthetic forms, styles, and genres, in music, the visual arts, in the spoken word, and the word carried by the alphabetic script.

Where do such stories begin, where do they end? As one of the contributors to the project, the Gomeroi poet and essayist Alison Whittaker says: 'It's how all knowledge worth having was passed down to me, and how all the relationships I have were built. Its presence in my life is never salient, but is constant...it's hard to tell when its impact ends and begins'.

Such ideas about the reach of story, with its enigmatic beginnings and its as yet unseen ending, bring us to the question of our own digital *Indigenous Story* site's form, which, as a digital project, allows the transfiguring of conventional orderings of time and space. How these possibilities will be taken up remains to be fully discovered, experimented with, invented, and the digital space will of course usher in its own problematics. We are not romanticising the digital form and we have a great love for print and for other story practices whose materiality can be touched and which touches us. For now, though, we are approaching the powers of digital media with interest and optimism because they offer some possibilities that are not easily available through print production.

For instance, can a digital form invite stories to be re-told, to keep on opening; to keep changing if need be, be added to, begin and end in different places? The story is still unfolding: how do these technologies enable its fresh inscription? As Kim Scott has said of *That Deadman Dance*: 'the fact that you can write a novel as a Noongar person, is in itself expressive of continuity, in that the resolution of that novel—the end, the last page—is not the end. There are possibilities still.' (Brewster and Scott 506) Here we take Scott to be commenting on the fact that the story of Noongar culture and the people made within it are not finished: even the stories of defeat and resurgence that his novels tell are not the end. The novel might have reached its end, but the story hasn't. And so we find ourselves tantalised by the question: what if Kim Scott could keep writing *That Deadman Dance*, or *Berang: From the Heart* as the stories they tell continue to be lived, and as their living retrospectively changes the stories that came before?

We are not suggesting a kind of technological determinism, we don't claim that the digital form is necessarily more inventive, or that

the physical form of the printed book prevents an open approach to narrative. Instead, we are enquiring into the work that the digital media might be pressed to do by Indigenous storytellers and storytelling. For against those who see the advent of European technologies of writing and print as determining of narrative form and expectation, there are other arguments that see this development as highly contextual with respect to the uses to which writing and print technologies have been put (Finnegan, Grossman, Ong, Street). The latter critics point to the ways in which the prevailing Western idea of the book, with its set and orderly pages and perfect binding, with its fixed attribution of authorship, and its notions of what a readership is, is only one possible outcome of the book's material form. This prevailing western form of the printed medium has been countered and disrupted in various moves, including in the Australian colonial and neo-colonial context by Indigenous men and women who have engaged in textual practices that introduce new ideas of print and its powers.

However, most publishing in printed form does persist in reproducing conventional printed forms and binding the story into a certain order. In Indigenous hands, the relative agility of digital media might be used to revisit stories and to rewrite, re-order, making new beginnings, deferring endings, perhaps reminiscent of what Djon Mundine, in his essay on our *Indigenous Story* site, describes as jingle-jangle, zig-zagging. As Sonia Smallacombe has commented, the form of the stories themselves 'provid[e] important insight into cultural forms of knowledge' (67). While it is true that the printed book need not determine a linearity of form, it is also true that digital media might open up new moments for its disruption and discontinuity.

This digital project also allows a story told in spoken word and another one in moving image, or paint, or animation, or in the written word, to be encountered together across these different media, and allows visitors to their own mutable pathways through these. It allows the old and the new forms, the traditional and the newly formed, the written, the aural and the visual, to sit side by side, showing the scope and depth of Indigenous textuality and intertextuality. This intertextuality reveals itself across the art forms, one artist referencing another, one tradition referencing another. This is not new, or peculiar to the digital age of course, but this media does allow for fresh links and associations to be made.

So, a visitor to the *Indigenous Story* site might read Declan Furber Gillick's poem 'motherless child (nanna emily's poem)' and hear echoes of Bob Randall's 'Brown skin baby they take him away', the 1970s anthem to the Stolen Generations, in the following lines:

He learnt to read and write
Forgot his tribal tongue
Forgot his mother's touch
...
my father and all the other brown-skinned babies.

The same visitor might then move to another part of the *Indigenous Story* site and find Furber-Gillick practising his art in spoken form, at a rally held in Melbourne against the forced closures of Aboriginal communities in regional Western Australia, April 10, 2015. The power and the rhythm of Furber Gillick's voice, now made audible, marks its difference to our memories of the delicacy and pathos of Bob Randall's lyrics. Declan Furber Gillick and Bob Randall—two men, in different times, each singing of a shared grief, yet with the distinct timbres of their separate voices.

The interconnectedness that is found in stories passed between individuals and across communities doesn't only flow along local pathways; it is not parochial. Indigenous story also speaks to and of a world whose coordinates are increasingly international: while often grounded in place and ways, Indigenous story is not sealed. Its openness and capacities for engagement are expressed widely in Indigenous arts scenes, and this is immediately evident on the *Indigenous Story* site. For instance, in Jonathan Jones's sculptural constructions made of fluorescent lights (*revolution* 2010/11), salt-encrusted landscapes refer to Gandhi's historic Salt March from Ahmedabad to Dandi, and the political ecology of the Murray-Darling Basin. Ceduna-born artist and Hip Hop and Jazz storyteller, Lady Lash, in discussing her work with Lily Sawenko from the *Indigenous Story* project, speaks of being inspired by Nina Simone and Billy Holiday. Relating to their lyrics and their music, she says: 'there is something hypnotic about the way music sounded back then and the suffering and soul builds itself into a slumber of magnificent, beautiful struggle.'

One appeal of the digital form is its relative freedom from some of the economic pressures of print. The pressures to meet print and other production costs, including the physical circulation of writing in the market place, have meant that even the most careful and inspired publishers can find themselves facing the paradox of needing to find a non-Indigenous readership for Indigenous texts in order to cover costs, with the risk of responding to this fiscal necessity by shaping the texts for a non-Indigenous readership. This has meant that these texts might be subjected to editorial interventions, shaping the text for consumption in the wider marketplace: for instance, pushing a text into

European-centred genres; shaping the narrative content itself; and then a remaking of the sentences themselves—their grammar, their lexicon, spelling and punctuation.

Indigenous publishers historically and into the present have carried a significant load in building lists that include important Indigenous literature, histories, visual arts, and language dictionaries. These publishers have often worked towards different priorities than addressing market demand but as Rachel Bin Salleh from Magabala Books has said on this question:

It has been difficult over the years to get Indigenous texts into the mainstream, more so with the contraction of funding. Whilst the obstacles before publishers of Indigenous texts are numerous, the depth and breadth of talent within our communities at all levels is astounding. This imperative for Magabala Books (and others I hope) drives us to continue chronicling stories and narratives as broadly as possible. It is about knowing that as Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples we can continue to achieve in the face of adversity and to celebrate our diversity and cultures with those who might not know how rich, vibrant and alive our cultures still are. (Personal communication.)

Indigenous publishing activities have depended on government funding that protects them to some degree from the imperative of selling titles in commercially viable quantities. The importance of this work cannot be overestimated. It has enabled the circulation of story within Aboriginal communities, it has sustained the generation and regeneration of culture, including languages. It has also enabled Indigenous knowledges to enter the wider public domain, where for instance Indigenous literary fiction has gained commercial success as well as critical acclaim. But the contractions of publishing and of government arts funding in Australia are applying new pressures both to the individual creators and the publishers who have sought to support them.

That the predominant structures through which the arts are produced, curated, exhibited and circulated are fundamentally shaped by the economies of the market is a powerful fact for anyone who aims to speak outside of, or counter to, the interests and desires of this faceless, impersonal but ubiquitous thing—'the market'. What kind of art the market can bear, on what subjects and in what forms, are questions that exercise many creative practitioners and their supporters. Indigenous stories in their many forms are among those most profoundly affected

by the logic of the market, often in particularly far-reaching and even violent ways. This is not to say that they are *captured* by the market—the Empire has always written back—and there are always knowledges and practices that live outside the view of the market. (Anderson) It is to say, though, that the market can and does extend its reach into Indigenous arts and other textual practices. A virtual site, such as *Indigenous Story*, offers a chance for other priorities to emerge, without the crushing weight of the production and distribution costs associated with print and other traditional media models.

Style

One of the ways that the market can exercise its powers is in the matter of style, from aesthetic style through to the level of the sentence. Certain rules of spelling, punctuation and grammar will be insisted on, one lexicon is preferred over another, the paragraphing will be changed and so too the rhythm of a line of type. The excision of words in language or their translation into English might be demanded to ensure that the reader, assumed to be non-Indigenous, need not be disoriented by the text. This has been the subject of critiques of the ethics of editing, especially but not exclusively editing that takes place across cultures (Heiss, Grossman). Style emerges not as a peripheral concern in cross-cultural textual production but as highly significant: it is style as well as content through which different knowledges are conveyed.

We have written elsewhere of the ways in which colonial encounters between Indigenous and non-Indigenous takes place via textual relations, in reading and writing and editorial interventions (Phillips, Ravenscroft). These interventions, we have argued, are as old as colonialism itself: indeed, very often, textual practices are moments of colonialism. The progress of Australian colonialist discourses and practices have been made through them. And, as Biney points out, “coloniality” remains in reconfigured forms of domination, control and exploitation’ (np). Its logic prevails.

Something of this logic can be seen in the doubling that is evident between Western textual practices, on one hand, and, on the other, colonial discourses: in both there is an imposition of order, cleanliness and correction, and ownership. This is in the lexicon of editorial practice. An editor will speak of ‘tidying up a manuscript’ and ‘clean copy’. Good editors leave no mark: they erase those marks in the text that are seen as imperfections, making the text clean, perfect, unsullied (Ravenscroft 2016). If all authors are subjected to these impulses in Western book culture, then might the Aboriginal author be particularly so?

The formation of styles, standards and genres are among the textual

practices through which the advancement of these discourses has been made. As Franco Moretti has argued of literary genres, but which apply equally to other textual practices, ‘literary genres do not just perpetuate literary conventions; they also consolidate future texts, by establishing literary conventions and worldviews that forge a nexus between rhetorical forms and future mentalities’ (6). These practices shape the conventions through which we tell a story, which is to say how we tell ourselves, and in that telling is a making too. Stories don’t only tell of what is already there, waiting representation, but form the humans who read and write them, too.

So we can say then that nothing is ‘merely’ style. Indeed, style can be the very vehicle through which the uniqueness of a creator’s voice might be carried. This recalls the claims made by Roland Barthes that style is deeply personal, it can be thought of as coming involuntarily from the body. We might say then that punctuation marks the authors’ breath, in grammar is sounded the rhythm and emphases of their voices, the urgency or the calm of the authors’ relationship to the significance of their story is carried in the length of the phrasing, the brevity or convolution of a sentence, the punctured paragraphing.

This is to say that style is always one’s own. Roland Barthes speaks of the bodiliness of style—style is as individual as one’s own embodiment. More, it arises from the body and its history. This takes a particular significance when the style we are speaking of emerges in the context of ongoing colonialism, which marks *all* our bodies, even if this is harder for non-Indigenous Australians to see and feel because of the ways that the ‘white’ position is naturalised in (neo)colonialism. To speak of bodies in the context of colonialism is politically sensitive, open as it is to charges of essentialism. But we are speaking instead of bodies as we all live in them, our bodies made and marked by culture, that move and speak and breathe in ways that mark our own histories, personal and shared.

The *Indigenous Story* project aims to contribute to the unsettlement of those normative ideals of style, content, form imposed on Indigenous writers, artists and musicians, by allowing contributors the freedom to invent new standards, where the multiplicity and the distinctiveness of Indigenous voice and vision can be expressed, honouring the many styles and forms that Indigenous textuality takes. Sometimes this is as simple as not requiring a consistency of style across the site. If a contributor prefers American spelling, when the punctuation diverges from the conventions of *Fowler’s English Usage* or of the *ASA Style Manual*, we don’t ‘correct’. When a writer uses smiley faces or the abbreviations suggested by the techniques of texting, they remain.

Story as a collective act

To emphasise inventiveness and originality and the distinctiveness of an individual creator's voice and vision is not to claim that the individual emerges in isolation, or that story is not always at the same time a collective act. Story and style are at once individual *and* made among and from other stories. This draws on Mary Graham's Kom-bumerri philosophy that Indigenous peoples become individual within the group, we want full space to be held open for individuality and intra-Indigenous diversity to flourish while curating for a model that allows the connections between individuals, communities, and other collectivities to sit side-by-side in extended kinship.

'Reflective thought', Graham contends, 'is always associated with the other':

The activity of philosophical speculation should not be engaged in alone, nor in a competitive, adversarial debate, but with others in a sharing environment, so that reflective thought is always associated with the other'

Story too informs relationships, story is a currency for exchange and deep shared reflection, story enlightens, confirms, challenges, contests, comforts, and is at heart a figuring of a way of being in the world.

In Djon Mundine's essay on the late Mirdidilingkathi Juwarnda Sally Gabori, published on the *Indigenous Story* site, Mundine performs in his writing practice just such a movement between one's own story and a story that is collectively held. With subtlety and dexterity, he moves from the abstractions of art criticism, through to political realities of the everyday, to the most intimate, delicate personal sphere of love, love for another, love for country. 'Something so beautiful', he writes, 'it can't be expressed in words but that makes the heart ache; the longing for your country.' Later speaking of Gabori's mourning for her husband he asks: 'Surely it's not a sickness to love?'

Mundine is certain of the textuality of life itself: 'An Aboriginal life', he says, 'could be described as a song; in Sally's case this would be a threnody, a lament for her country, and it follows, in step with a song, as a dance.' If life is a song, a 'jingle', it takes 'its sound, beat or rhythm from someone's (or an animal's) walk...Each jingle is personal, is idiosyncratically tied or formed by your body shape and the swing step as you walk.' Later he goes on to say: 'There is no more uniquely personal action than the choreography of the painter's particular posture, pace, and action back and forth, as they apply the paint to the canvas'. These creative processes perform the walking to which their art refers. Here in Mundine's style, in

his lexicon, grammar and paragraphing, in the freely associative writing, in his generative mixing of the vocabulary of dance, and song, and swing and step, he writes his very own walk too, his step into a life that is at once his own and not his only—a collective act.

In important ways, in such insistence on the individuality of creativity and at the same time an orientation to the stories lived and gathered by others, are figured some of the emerging aesthetics that drive this *Indigenous Story* project.

At the heart of Said's theory of Orientalism is the concept of the 'complex dialectic of reinforcement' (94) where the experiences of readers are shaped by their reading, which in turn shapes what writers are moved to write about, and which is itself shaped by the imagined experiences of an imagined reader. This could be applied equally well to any human act of creativity and not only reading and writing: it applies to the act of speaking and listening, to making art and viewing it, to singing and being sung to, and more. The *Indigenous Story* project aims to be an intervention in this complex dialectic that constrains Indigenous creative expression, Indigenous text, within standards and conventions surveilled and monitored by the Western episteme. Style and form matter—we aim to let Indigenous styles and forms matter in their own powerful ways.

Note

- 1 The Working Party of the *Indigenous Story* project has been led by Jacqui Katona. Lily Sawenko has coordinated the site as well as undertaking original research. Sandra Phillips is chair of the Advisory Board. Alison Ravenscroft is a member of the Working Party. All the works from the *Indigenous Story* project cited within this essay can be found at: <http://indigenousstory.com.au>

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Giveaway

Doris Eaton, Lekkie Hopkins and Ann Ingamells

Doris Eaton is a Nyamal elder whose story of straddling two cultures is told here. Lekkie Hopkins (Edith Cowan University) and Ann Ingamells (Griffith University) have been invited into Doris Eaton's life to reflect with her and to find ways to share her stories with a wider audience.

Doris Eaton is an elder and respected law woman of the Nyamal people of the Pilbara. She has lived for long periods on the remote Aboriginal community of Yandeyarra, and now lives in Port Hedland, Yandeyarra and Perth. Her father was a Nyamal law man and a leading figure in the 1946 Pilbara Aboriginal Pastoral Workers' Strike, and her mother was a respected law woman of the Western Desert Martu people.

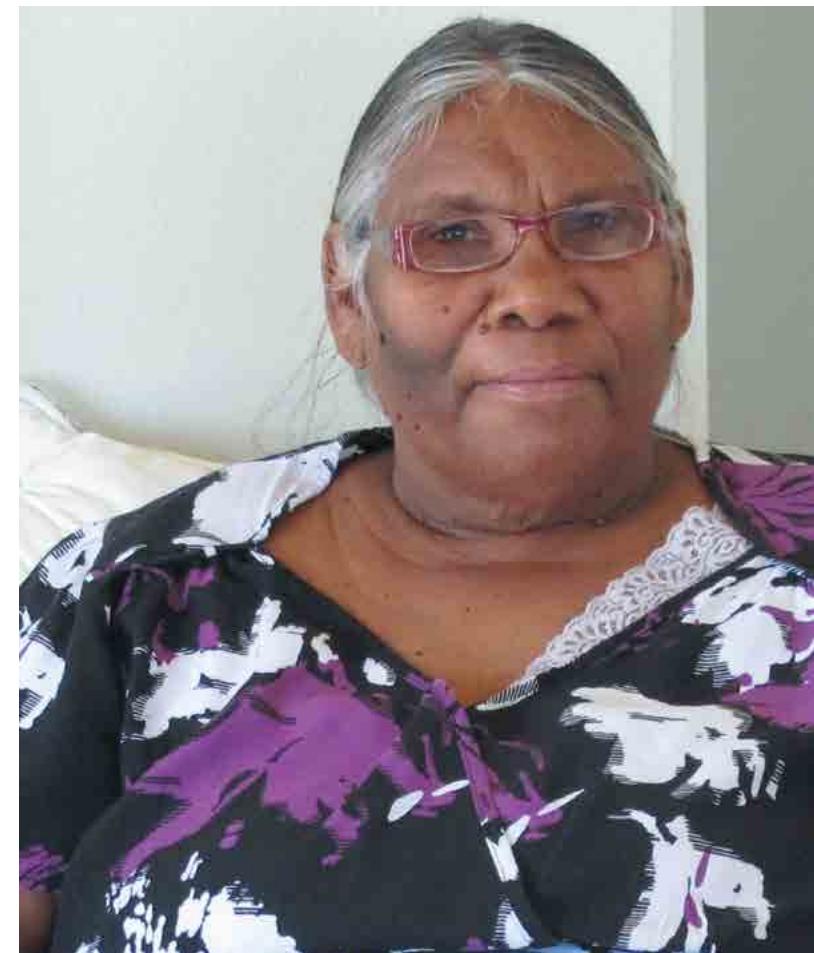
Doris Eaton has spent much of her life consciously straddling two cultures. She is a leader in her own community, providing inspiration and practical care and support to all generations from the elderly to young mothers and children. She is the matriarch for four generations and actively mentors her 23 grandchildren. Her response to the crises experienced by her people during her lifetime has been to work in very practical ways to preserve culture, to keep traditions strong and to make sure the next generation has a strong sense of identity. At the same time she insists that the young participate fully in 21st century life.

In 2009, she was named NAIDOC female elder of the year. Her citation reads that she is 'an inspirational example of a traditional Aboriginal leader who has developed the skills required to advocate for her people in the mainstream political arena.' In 2011, as part of the celebrations to mark the 100th anniversary of International Women's Day, Doris Eaton was named by the National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Women's Alliance (NATISWA) as one of 100 women of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander descent to have shown leadership and achieved change for their communities over the past 100 years.

In the wider political arena, Doris Eaton is the first woman to be elected as co-chair of the Yamatji Marpa Corporation's board of directors, and is Chair of the Pilbara Native Title Service. She has been Chair of the Pilbara Indigenous Women's Aboriginal Corporation and the ministerially appointed representative for the Pilbara on the EA Indigenous Women's

Congress, where she represented the views of Pilbara women at state government level on a bi-monthly basis.

Several years ago, out of a desire to make sense of her own experiences of straddling two cultures and to share her insights with a wider audience, Doris Eaton invited academics Lekkie Hopkins and Ann Ingamells into her life to record some of her stories. On Wednesday 16 May 2012 at Pretty Pool, Port Hedland, she told what she called her giveaway story for the first time. Here is that story.



Doris Eaton. Photograph provided by Lekkie Hopkins.

Giveaway child

OK, firstly I'd like to say in my cultural way, I was a giveaway child. I was a giveaway to one of the old mans. And that didn't work out. I think I was a child that liked to run around a bit: silly little teenager. And I think my parents wanted me to have a good husband and settle down. They gave me away to my older man and I found it wasn't my suit.

I wanted the love of my life.

When I got to 14 found myself in love with a boy. First he was my friend. Fantasy... I don't know what was going through my mind. I didn't know what love was, but I had that feeling. I wanted to have a friend. But Mum and Dad didn't let me to have that friend.

And they found an old man for me to have...

I think I was about 16 then. They took me away bush and gave me away and some of my families come stayed with me. But... At the back of my mind was that friend, y'know. And it's hard when they... I don't know how to describe it.

But, y'know, it's hard when you've got somebody of your own you want and you can't have that person because you've gotta be giveaway.

And my actual giveaway, y'know, he said I was too young for him and he was old, and he said: *She can go free*. That's my first giveaway. Tribal one.

Then when I was running around now and Mum, specially Mum, said: *We got to keep her in order*. Oh... I don't know what they were thinking, maybe to protect me from running around, and so gave me away to an older man.

And then I taking a long time to settle with the old man... I was forced into that... I couldn't run away because they took me away bush... They find some other young people to stay with me too, to accompany me... And when I did try to come back they'd take me back there... I tried to run away but I'm in the bush, nowhere to run away. I was a young girl and bit scared, y'know...

I dunno how you'd describe it, like... I didn't want to be touched by him... He was this old man! People force you to, to have love, to make love... Like for me I got hurt. I didn't want that. I thought you gotta be with someone you love... I felt bad, I wanted to kill myself. I wanted to do lot of things to myself. And I hated my parents, I hated the people around me. Oh I hated them people.

When you have giveaway to old people it's not good feeling. I think Mum and Dad trying to do the right thing, keep me in order, in line. They think something better for me. But not better for me, y'know?

Yeah, you don't have that love from somebody you don't... y'know? I didn't find my love. Somehow y'know you get forced into this...

I used to close my eyes, bite my teeth tongue y'know... Sleeping with an old man, it was frightening to me.

Now I don't hate any more, just that hurt I was going through. I'm even more empowered now. I can stand up for myself. Through my experience, what I went through I like to teach the young ones, better that they understand what we went through.

Them days we not allowed to talk about anything. When I was giveaway, they force that on you and it's not a good feeling. You're crying and what can you do?

First love

When I got to 14 I found myself in love with a guy. First he was my friend. Fantasy... I don't know what was going through my mind. My grandmother used to tell me: *You watch out for that, Bibby, you get that feeling, when man tingle you up. You get that feeling...*

I didn't know what love was, but I had that feeling. I wanted to have a friend. I found my love but I lost my love. Yeah I found my love too young. Even today, I wonder where that guy is.

He was like a good friend. He didn't force me to make love. Cos some people say when you got a friend, boyfriend, straight away they think about that. But this bloke, he was a white bloke, he was my friend. He was my good friend. We talked, talked about things, and I came close to him. For a while... then when he said *Are you ready?* I didn't know what he was talking about!!! *Ready for what???*

And sad, just happened that way, we made love, somehow when we made love it was like a touching love. It was nice, and I wanted more of it y'know. But then in the end I couldn't have that more...

Like you get catch in this giveaway thing... But the pain and ache, I'm gonna die with it. Nobody take that away. Sometime I go on my own, I have a big cry y'know. It's still there.

After that boyfriend I lost, taken away, I had no love.

Love got lost...

Marriage

He was very old. And at first I hated it all. Lucky he was a well-mannered man. He wasn't from my tribe, and he was more like a white person, his father was white, his mother Aboriginal... So you don't get love, cuddle kiss, with that old fella. But he looked after me, garden, I thank him for that. He never hit me, never said a bad thing about me. But for me I wanted this boy. Where he is?

But sleeping with an old man, it was frightening to me.

Like for me now I got pregnant with my first child, and I was 17 I think. Then Dad said: *Oh you've got to marry him.* They forced me to marry. I was married then and after a while you get that feeling again, and I had my nother child. By then I found love with this old man. He was kind to me. Then when I had my last one, before that last one I said, *I gotta go fix myself up.* I was young still and he couldn't make love any more... What should I do? I spoke to one of my lady friends... When I went to see doctor he said, *You can have tubal ligation* and I said, *No, take everything out!* I wanted everything out. After my last baby was born I didn't want to have any more kids from anybody else. Cos he couldn't make love any more y'know so if I was running around I didn't want to have more babies. He used to tell me, *You go off...* Being young and liked to make love, he told me... But...

I got in trouble with my parents... They said: *Come back to the meeting, get a hiding...* Hit me with a stick...

When you in shock you don't feel it.

Then I start running around with white boys... I get in trouble... Then with black boys... I didn't know who I was supposed to run around with! I got punished for this, punished for that... And Mum said you're running around behind his back... But he said, *Go and find your friend.*

I don't know if I should have stayed with him. And they say *Look at her, she running around with another mans when she's married.* Hello! Look who she's married to! And they don't know if it's good relationship or bad one. He was good to me and he let me go. But for me I wanted this boy. Where he is...?

People used to say negative things about people like me: *She running around!* But they didn't understand what was going on. Some times I wonder with these young people what they thinking. They have babies so young, then they leave...

And I had to leave my kids looking for love. And Mum said, *Don't take the kids, just yourself.* So I said OK. And then one day my husband was sick, he died of cancer. I stayed with him till he died.

And my mum kept my kids when my husband died... And I used to go running around then back... Port Hedland to Yandeyarra... One thing, I was careful. I don't know why, I was looking for that love, I wanted to find that love again.

And I stole my kids away from my mum

I was there at Yandeyarra for 2 years... School holiday I was going to de Gray camping. They didn't know I was going to HomesWest looking for a house. And this mail they didn't open it.

I didn't tell the kids.

Shopping in South Hedland, I went to HomesWest to pay for the key. We pulled up in 12 Mile to visit my auntie there. Oh we go and see auntie, we take the other kids with us. OK. We camp here one night. Yes that's a good idea. And I had everything packed and when I went shopping I took all my stuff, put it in a taxi—I gave the kids money to buy sweets and fishing lines... put it in a taxi... Oh these kids want to go fishing.

This is my only chance to escape... I said, *Come on, we go now, Mum got a house for us.* We walked from 12 Mile. I carried one on my back and Ronnie carried the other one. *Where's our clothes Mum? Clothes in the house.*

And after a while my daughter went to high school in Perth and we went too. We used to live in Embleton... One went to the Embleton school and my daughter went to Saint Joseph's and the two boys went to Perth Mod. And then to John Forrest.

And then I sat down as it is my duty in my culture: I got to take my son back to Yandeyarra.

At Yandeyarra

Oh I got into trouble again... like a jury, they just tell you, *That's a bad thing you do, you running away.* I was a bad person. Running away with other men.

But they didn't know exactly the story. They telling me off. When you come back with these kids. They had control. Then they stayed there. When you running off you still get into trouble...

To say now to them people that hurt me, I don't hate them. Cos they made me who I am now. They gave me the power. I always used to wonder why me all the time? Why they punishing me? And when I got more older I think maybe they did me good.

I learned what was right or wrong.

That culture was very strong

You're not allowed to talk. Them days that culture was very strong. You're not allowed to talk to step out of that culture. For me what I went through, I don't want my grandkids to go through that.

My other grandson he got married to the wrong skin group... I'm there to support my grandson, I'll step up there to protect him...

When you lose somebody you've gotta hide the photos, you not allowed to talk the names... In our culture you don't have photos.

But when my daughter died we put up her photo so her kids could say hello. I didn't call her name. The kids do. I had to look away cos even today I'm still hurting... But I can talk about it... I say to these kids, *Turn around and say good morning to Mum and Dad. Tell them you're going to school...* they get up and talk to the photos.

And we did things amongst ourselves y'know. When we moved to town from Yandeyarra, it was different, like I was in a nightmare again, I'm taking them from that environment to a different one... in town... drugs... and I said with them do this do that... soon as sun go down one of them not there I go look for them make sure they safe.

I mentor them, they mentor me.

Still today we go bush... most of the time we out bush. Tell them the story, even they married now we still go out as a family. Like mothers day we took Mum. Went fishing went hunting.

You gotta be united with family. It's sad what I see... we a lot closer than other families. People don't do them sort of things.

Growing up everyone had a say about me. I had lots of mums and dads. They trying to correct me... I was feeling I didn't want that... that journey.

I'm gonna make sure my grandkids don't get abused... they gotta be strong within themselves, especially the girls, I tell them *Your body's your body. That thing is yours. Don't let anyone touch if you don't want them to touch.* They say *You're rude, Nanna...* But no, that's the truth.

It's like a forgotten thing, love

And then I went from hating the person to accepting things...

My Mum had a hard time too y'know. They had to do their duties as well. She was doing her business, Dad was doing his business. Well if it wasn't for Mum I wouldn't be sitting here. She is my birth mother. So maybe she was trying to keep me safe. Maybe they help me to be who I am now. I am more wiser, I don't judge people because of my experience. Because nobody's better... we gotta jump that hoop someways down the track.

But even today now I haven't got love. I don't know what love is. Even if I find somebody, friend, I don't know what I'll do.

It's like a forgotten thing, love.

I got my grandkids

I got my grandkids, they are the love of my life. Being with my family, helping people, being around people, that's my love. That's why I said, Oh no use finding a friend and finding that journey, again, love.

I tease my grandkids, I say, I'm bringing someone home, a grandfather... they say yes, soon as he steps through that door, he be out again. I tell my kids you cherish that love, you hold that love, don't throw it away, you'll never get a second chance. Although you playing with fire you don't know what happen down the track. I'd got a lot of good thing and bad thing.

But I learnt to handle stress... Talk about a lot of things. Dead people. They say, *You know what, you the maddest woman.* I say, *I found a way to heal, talking about the loved ones.* I found that I'm healing myself.

But the pain and ache, I'm gonna die with it. Nobody take that away.

This is the first time I tell my giveaway story

I want to cry, because in my culture nobody will talk... If you start to want to say somethings, they say oh why you bring that up for? That's in the past.

But I think if it's so in the past still you gotta talk about it. If it's forced up there you get angry and angry... but I think by doing this I'm gonna be free. I told that little story... Oh I'm gonna be free... That's why I decide I want to tell some stories. Us Aboriginal people giveaway you can't defend yourself you can't say nothing, it's in our culture. Even now I say to Mum, You know we gotta abide by our culture, but sometime we gotta move it around.

When I had my own loss I was a mess. Then one old lady she took me to mental health, a psychiatrist. We went to this meeting and they talk about they own journey, and for me the one thing they say is you didn't lose your daughter, you got her in front of you through her kids. And they the love of my life. And I said, Oh well, I'm not hurting them for anybody.

For my grandkids I want them to speak about their parents, to have a different life. Even for my mother I feel sorry for her, she's grieving for her other two daughters. She's grieving but she never talked about it, she never seen the photos.

Us Aboriginal people, we going through stress but we don't know... now I feel lighter, that story comin out of me and that's made me like walkin on a feather, just like that burden, going away.

And maybe in our culture these womens don't speak out because our culture say we don't talk. But in my little family we understand dead people gone and it's important that we remember them, that's why my mum, sometime she get angry, she's hurting, but she doesn't tell anybody.

Left me with that emptiness feeling. And then when my kids come along it left me with that love...

Us Aboriginal people we gotta learn to talk to people, get it out. We lost our sister from drinking, this one who passed away. It's just like a nightmare... Do you want to go that way?

Tell your story to somebody. We still gotta keep our secret stuff. But some we gotta promote it. Like some cultural things I gotta get permission so I don't get into trouble. If they give me permission, that's OK.

We live in two worlds now.

Past Tense
Jannali Jones

Jannali Jones was a 2015 black&write! fellowship winner. Her work has appeared in publications such as *Overland*, *Southerly* and the *Review of Australian Fiction*. She is currently studying a research degree in Indigenous literature and the fantasy genre.

We knew without words
when the moment had come.
Our last with you
and our last without you
before your transition into Was;
into past tense.
Lived, Liked, Loved.

I said 'I love you',
clinging to present tense,
and you looked at me,
skin stretched thin
over bones,
your eyes a cryptogram:
animal incomprehension
or the mask you hid behind?

I fashioned my own mask:
a blindfold
cut with scalpel
from burial shroud
and stood afar,
refusing to watch
your descent into Was.

Past tense is too raw.
Why is there no middle tense?
I need to say
Is, Likes, Loves,
while my chest is yet gaping.

My Dear Child
Melissa Lucashenko

Melissa Lucashenko is an award-winning Aboriginal writer who lives between Brisbane and the Bundjalung nation. Her latest novel, *Mullumbimby* was published by UQP in 2013.

My lovely girl,

Here at river camp we is all heavy in our minds as we remember you, our little brave one. The others are still here, your brothers, your sister. We do cry out in the dark of night, and at times such as Friday when the moon was big, the warrigal answer us with howling of their own. By day all the jarjams run and climb and swim as they ever did. We hear them laughing most days and we are glad. For your father and me though, there is never no laughter.

My dear firstborn, at first I tried to forget you, fearing that I would go out of my head. I was told I must, but my heart would not allow it; and nor would the scars on the little ones faces. The petticoats that Father Ryan brung cover the worst of the pox marks now but there is a hole under Ivy's right eye that I sometimes think could swallow me up entirely. God forgive me sometimes I wish it would.

When I came to understand that there would never be no forgetting, I prayed. And then I decided. I have seed death before, you know, child. You was not old enough to hear me tell it but I have seed death before—and worse than death.

Your second fathers and mothers, like the rest of us, go empty more days than not. I know though, they will take good mind of the jarjams and it is better I go for I am afraid of what I might do if I stay to bring the Protector down on all their necks. There is no forgetting. Tonight I will walk beneath the half-moon to town. I have the matches from Father Ryan's altar and I go in the knowledge that a child's place is with its mother there can be no question. Let the dogs howl as they may my step will be true and child we will meet one day in the better place, for I know god will show me mercy. They say I am disordered in my mind. I tell you I am sane as Lord Jesus himself and consoled if only a little by the words of the good book for it says—and it says truly—by their deeds shall you know

them and yes they will know me and the love I did always bear for you from the very day you was took. And so until we meet again let this fire be my holy witness.

Your loving mother,
Christina

Wind Spirit: Nanna's Legacy

Dr Cheryl Kickett-Tucker

Professor Cheryl Kickett-Tucker is a traditional owner of Wadjuk boodja and has family connections to the Ballardong and Yued peoples in Western Australia. Cheryl is the Founding Executive Director of Pindi Pindi Pty Ltd Centre of Research Excellence in Aboriginal Wellbeing.

Ever since I can remember, my Mother, Shirley Harris, has been painting. Her art depicts her passion, thoughts and attitudes of Nyoongah stories as well as her own personal ideas. For most of my adult life, Mum has always painted me a story for my birthday, but in the last couple of years, the story has been the same theme and the artwork has been colourful, vibrant, moving and strong. This latest series of works I have been fortunate to receive, are called Wind Spirits. For me, these pieces represent and tell about the strength and spirit of Aboriginal women and how we must remain strong, reliable and responsible despite being challenged with life's hardships we face each and every day. As portrayed in the paintings, we guard our home (nest) and the children who occupy it, but as we carry out this role, the wind (life's circumstances) is constantly at our door. The wind moves and shapes us each and every day. Sometimes the wind is hard and fast and comes from all directions, and in other times, it is soft and sweet like a cool breeze on a hot summer night. Despite even knowing the force of the wind and the challenges it brings, we remain focussed, stable, reliable and responsible for the sake of our home and all the children, grandchildren, nieces, nephews, fostered children, adopted children and extended kin who may come and go over our life time. In some circumstances, however, the wind may push us where we haven't been before, but we always have our spirit to guide us along the challenging and unpredictable corridors of life. Our spirit keeps us determined, focussed, solid—moorditj (Nyoongar word for solid, strong, healthy). As Aboriginal women and Mothers, we pass on our spirit to younger women. We share our skills, knowledge and history of who we are, what we stand for, what is important, our morals, integrity and of course, the meaning of love. We pass on a legacy. I often reflect and wonder about the lives of the strong, moorditj Mothers, of which I am a descendent and the path set before me as a young Mother. I ponder

the potential influence of my moorditj Mothers' legacies for me in raising my daughter. For instance, how did my Grandmother's legacy affect my Mother? How has my Mother's legacy affected me? I am writing this story from the perspective of a yorga (woman) and ngangk (Mother), but guided by the lived experiences, wisdom, and integrity of my Mother as she shares her Mother's story with me.

I am from the South-West of Western Australia and I have lived all of my life between the Derbal Yerrigan (Swan River) and the Darling Scarp which are in my traditional Wadjuk country. My family are also from the wheatbelt areas near Perth and I am a very proud Wadjuk, Balladong and Yued yorga. I have been married for fifteen years to a Wongi man of the Goldfields of Western Australia. We have been blessed with two wonderful children. My Mother is Shirley Harris and my father is Alan Kickett and I have been fortunate to come from a large family of three brothers and four sisters. I interviewed my Mother to develop this story and I begin with the Aboriginal custom associated with naming a child, because the names we give our children are a step towards forging a moorditj ngangk's legacy.

After my husband and I named our first child Jaylon, we were faced with the rules of Aboriginal naming customs and the cultural obligation that we are expected to uphold. Aboriginal naming customs are passed from family to family and from Mother to Mother. Although acknowledging and respecting the naming customs, my husband and I wanted to give our first born son a unique and distinctive name. We named him Jaylon, which means 'victorious' and 'swift bird, like an eagle'. Jaylon made us proud parents the day he breathed life on Mother earth and like the eagle, he was born strong, healthy and extremely alert. Some of my kin were not happy with his name. Being a first time Mother, my post-natal hormones went crazy and so I was easily distressed by their dissatisfaction. After much tears and frustration my husband and I remained determined. I couldn't be happier because today my son is a tall, handsome, strong and compassionate 13 year old with a unique character that is befitting of distinctive name. So when my second child was born, my husband and I (particularly me) were well aware of the naming customs, given our experiences with our first-born. Our second child is Sarah, a beautiful, kind and compassionate eight year old. She was named after six Grandmothers. Sarah means princess and is so named after her great, great, great, great, Grandmother Sarah Ryder, whose Nyoongah name was Bunderan and her great, great, great, great Grandmother Sarah Jane Kickett. My Mother often calls my Sarah, Sarah Jane, yet her middle name is Katelyn. Her middle name is a compilation of four Grandmothers where

'Kate' refers to Sarah's great, great Grandmother Catherine Ryder (nee Egan), her great Grandmother, Kathleen Harris (nee Ryder) and her Grandmother, Kathleen Tucker (nee Barnes). 'Lyn' refers to Linda Barnes (nee Smith), who is Sarah's great Grandmother. The reason we named our girl after our Grandmothers was because Sarah's name is befitting of her and because of our obligation to the naming customs. Sarah is a strong-willed child who is extremely determined to be herself and to get her own way. On her softer side, she is a social character who loves to interact and 'yarn' with everyone. She has an extremely affectionate nature and is very considerate of others. A name has great importance. In Sarah's case, we named her so because of the little spark we saw when she was born, but she is also named out of respect for her grandmothers and the legacy they have forged. This is my story of the legacy of my moorditj Mothers... my Nanna, Kathleen Harris (nee Ryder), my Mother, Shirley Harris, myself and my daughter, Sarah.

I didn't meet my Grandmother Kathleen Harris because she passed away in 1960, eight years before I was born. In fact, none of my seven siblings met Nan. Being an extremely sentimental person, I often take things to heart and family are closest to my heart than anything else in this world. I've always wondered about my grandparents, our family history and have felt a strong desire to know more about my family, especially my Mother's Mother. I never knew much about my Nanna but I have always felt a strong connection to her. Therefore, when the time was appropriate and I felt strong emotionally. I engaged in a series of very long yarns with my Mother to learn more. Mum told me many things, sad things but mostly happy things about her life as a child and about her Mother. I found that I have a very strong connection to my Nanna, despite not meeting her. This is what I learned...

My Nanna, Kathleen Rosina Ryder was born 23 March, 1910, a birth date we share. Rosina was her baptised name, but not her registered middle name. She was born at Koojong Station, near Moora, in Western Australia's mid-west, wheatbelt region. Koojong was owned by the Padbury family. In fact, they owned vast amounts of land around Moora and Guildford. Nan's parents were William Ryder (son of Walter Padbury, former mayor of Guildford) and Catherine Egan. They had nine children and Nan was the youngest. My great grandparents lived in a mud house. It was number four at New Norcia Mission near Moora. The 1905 Aborigines Act¹ ensured my Nan was placed in care of Spanish missionaries in New Norcia and she grew up there at 'Girls Town', a three-storey dormitory for Aboriginal girls. Nan stood five foot and one inch tall. She had beautiful, smooth dark skin and had matching dark brown eyes. Nan wore her

straight, black hair just above her shoulders, with a right side part that was pinned into a curl behind her small ears. She possessed an easy-going nature, but was straight to the point and made her true thoughts and feelings known. Nan would, however, say what was needed and then leave it at that. She never held grudges with anyone. Nan was a good person who loved music and dancing. Blue was her favourite colour and each day she would try to wear something blue. She loved to wear a dust jacket which covered her whole body and Lyle stockings. Nan and I share many similarities besides our birth date and star sign Aries, because my favourite colour is also blue and I love to wear blue more than any other colour. We both love the same perfume, Lily of the Valley and as well as the smell of roses. Nan loved wearing Ashes of Roses body powder and I often buy rose perfumed talc powder at Christmas time. Above all, there was one characteristic about my Nanna that every body was familiar with... her love for her children. Nan may have been short in stature but the care she gave her children was larger than life itself. She loved her children so much and dedicated her whole self to them, a loving part of her being which I definitely have adopted.

When Nan was a teenager, she was working as a domestic house servant at Padbury's House in Guildford. She was upstairs dusting the curtains and looked out the window to see a strapping young Aboriginal man tending to horses. He was her future husband and my Pop, Lyndon Charles Harris. He was born in 1907 at Onslow to parents Edward William Harris and Alice Wilkes. Pop was the only son of four children. At the time he met Kathleen Ryder, he was working for the Padbury family in Guildford and according to Mum, they didn't really like each other on their first meeting, but with time, love conquered all and they were married at New Norcia Mission in 1931. Nan was 21 years of age. The wedding ceremony was performed entirely in Spanish. Her wedding bonnet and bouquet consisted of beautiful, spectacular orange blossoms with waxed leaves. She looked radiant and Pop was handsome in his smart looking suit. Together, they had ten children, of which my mother, Shirley Harris is the fifth-born, just as I am the fifth-born in my family. Coincidentally, I married Quinton, whose name means the fifth-born also!

Nan and Pop shared a few homes in my traditional Wadjuk country. They lived on the reserve in Success Hill (an eastern suburb of Perth, Western Australia). Success Hill was a place of significance to the Wadjuk people because of the Dreaming stories of the Waugal, the importance of the Bennet Brook spring, Derbal Yerrigan and because of the traditional ceremonies that took place. Today, on the same site where my Nan lived are my mother's Nyoongah stories and paintings standing immortalised

for all to see in a cultural themed recreation park in Success Hill. Pop and Nan then moved to a farm-house near the infamous Charlie's Shops² (on Walter Road) in Beechboro. From there, they moved to another Padbury property in Bayswater (another eastern suburb of Perth), in about 1939, where they had five children. Soon after moving there, tragedy struck the family because Nan's sister, Martha Ryder passed away at a young age and left behind five children. Nan took them in and cared for them as part of the family. She grew up all children together as one. There were no distinctions about who cousins were and who siblings were. According to Mum, 'We were all brothers and sisters.' However, Aunty Martha's older three children left Nan's home in less than a year, and Nan looked after the two younger children, Uncle Stanley and Uncle Charlie until they were taken away to Clontarf Aboriginal Boys' Home. They both ran away from the Boys' Home and eventually found their way back to their family.

Nan and Pop lived on a farming property called Allan Brown's Dairy in Bayswater where there were two workers' houses on the dairy property. The Harris family lived in the first house, which was a weatherboard home with a tin roof. The second house accommodated a Nyoongah family, the Parfitts. The front of Nan's house used to face the western horizon (on the site of what is now Chisholm Catholic College in Bayswater) and the highest point that could be seen from the diary was St Mary's Cathedral (near Royal Perth Hospital). Consequently, all of Nan's children were baptized there. The house had one bedroom at the front, a kitchen, lounge and another bedroom. It accommodated two adults and up to ten children.

The other families living at Allan Brown's property were the Mippys, Bodneys and Brophos and all the children used to play together. Mum was about three at the time and she still remembered playing with the other children. Her eldest sister Freda was ten years older and one day she made Mum a roller. It was made from a sunshine powder milk tin and filled with sand. On each side of the tin was a hole where a wire passed through and joined outside the tin to form a handle. Attached to the handle is a piece of string used to pull the roller along. One day, Nancy Parfitt (who was also about the same age as Mum) saw the roller and cried for it and eventually was given the roller by adults. The roller belonged to Mum and so she started to cry to have it back. So, thirteen-year-old Aunty Freda conjured up a plan to get the roller back from Nancy. Aunty Freda had to get Nancy's mind off the roller so she kept her occupied by talking to her. After a short while, Aunty Freda told her sister, Aunty Joan (then aged nine) to keep talking to Nancy, which she did and Aunty Freda went around the back of the house so that Nancy couldn't see her. She went

up behind Nancy with a pair of scissors and cut the rope from the roller. Unbeknown to Nancy, the roller was quietly taken away and given back to its rightful owner, my Mum. Big sisters to the rescue! Nancy still had hold of the string and she thought she still had the roller! Mum told me she had to keep the roller out of sight for a couple of days until Nancy forgot about it. The legacy of Nan's care was set and although her daughters were young, they were living the legacy already... caring for each other, particularly looking after the young ones.

It was a hard life in Bayswater for Kathleen Harris and her young, growing family because my Pop spent large amounts of time away from them seeking his fortune in the Goldfields of Western Australia. There wasn't much work around the Bayswater area so he went panning for gold. Mum said 'he always had these ideas about striking it rich.' He prospected some eleven hundred kilometres north-east of Perth between Menzies, Pigwell and Leonora. During his prospecting days, Pop met mate and fellow prospector Sydney 'Snowy' Barnes, a wongi man who just happens to be my children's great grandfather. Snowy found gold at the infamous 'rabbit warren' north of Leonora. My Pop found a gold vein, but he never went back to the Goldfields to work it. According to Mum, he had everything prepared including the dry blower³, but couldn't go back because he fell ill.

Nan didn't say much about life when Pop was absent from the young family, but rather she got on with what she had to do and rarely fussed. It was during this time between 1937 and 1940 that Nan lost two of her own children to sickness... a boy aged 6 months and a girl aged approximately 3 years. Mum recalled: 'brother died from cot death in Bassendean and sister died at Princess Margaret Hospital [PMH] in Subiaco from gastroenteritis. When sister got sick, Mum and Dennis Anderson [Mum's relative] pushed her in a pram from Beechboro to Subiaco, some twelve kilometres by foot. She passed away in the little wooden house at the front of PMH. She was just three years old.'

Despite the grieving times that fell upon the family, Nan stood strong and her children gained their strength and compassion from the way in which Nan handled challenging incidences. She had ageless wisdom and was a pillar of support. Nan maintained her spirit in times of great sorrow, but unbeknown to her children, she silently mourned the loss of her beloved little ones. Nan's strong spirit was called upon again when Pop arrived home at the family residence in Bayswater after a three-year absence. Nan broke the sad news to Pop about the loss of his beloved son and daughter. Mum said Pop was a very loving father towards his children and was devastated to lose his only son and young daughter.

Years later, hard times were upon Nan once again, because Pop suffered a stroke. Nan helped Pop overcome his stroke and nursed him back to health. She looked after the children's daily needs, but was again comforting their spirit because of the health scare of their father. She looked after Pop and kept the children safe, secure and maintained a stable home with a strong and caring nature despite her own suffering. Mum reflected upon Nan and her source of strength during times of sorrow, grief, hardship, racism and other troubles and said that, 'Nan had a huge family support from the Ryders and I think that gave her the strength. She was one of these women who didn't complain about anything, but took everything on the chin and just did things. She was a strong person because she had to be strong... and take on all the things that happened in those days. And sometimes, we didn't have tucker but she'd always go out to find things to feed her family.'

Nan was a stable person who cherished her children so much and regularly took them out on activities and events. According to my Mother, Pop never had much to do with the children's daily upbringing, but he was always there for the family at night. During the day, he followed his pursuits, but Nan never had any pursuits because her life and passion were dedicated to the wellbeing of her family and children. Mum said, 'Nan was just always home looking after us and always had time to be with us.' For instance, Nan treated the children to regular, special outings to the theatres. She always made sure that she saved money to take the children out to the movies and the Civic Theatre in Inglewood was a favourite every Wednesday fortnight. Nan and the children walked about three miles to get there and three miles back. On Saturday occasions however, they would catch the tram into Perth city to the Grand Theatre on Murray Street. There were ten of them during the trip to the city and the conductor would say to Nan, 'You should get a tram for yourselves!' This was because the whole family (except Pop) would take up the entire seats on a single carriage. The Grand was famous for western movies and the likes of Gene Autry, Roy Rogers, Hop-a-long Cassidy and Randolph Scott graced the golden screen. Mum remembers, 'We'd come out of there about half past seven, and we'd see all these women going up to the Unity Hall with all their big ball gowns on. We used to love that because of all the pretty dresses they used to have and I'd say, 'That's my dress!' and my sister would say 'No, that's my dress!!' We would have a competition about which dress was the prettiest.' After the movies, Nan would treat the children to roll mops (roll mop is a piece of raw fish dipped in vinegar with a skewer through it), green olives, fresh Italian bread and rabbit from the local shop. When they arrived home, a feast of delicacies was

prepared, which everyone thoroughly enjoyed. After the treat, Nan would make a pan damper or bannick (as it is sometimes referred to) and these were often ladled with loads and loads of thick, sweet treacle or honey... another delicacy!

Nan faced some difficult experiences with strangers in the street. During these times, the 1905 Aborigines Act enforced a curfew which prohibited Aboriginal people to be in town after 6pm at night. Mum says that Nan was very dark skinned and it was because of her dark skin that she consistently experienced racism. When Nan got on the tram, she was frequently questioned by the conductor. If she was in town late, wedjulas (non-Aboriginal people) would tell her, 'You have to be out... the curfew is on at six! You have to be out of this town area.' Mum recalled she was in town after curfew with Nan, 'I was about seven we had to quickly rush to the bus and get on and get out of town before we were seen by the police. We were always pushed around. We did a lot of walking because the buses didn't go near our house, so we had to walk for miles when we got off the tram.'

Nan didn't have equal access to services like Pop. He wasn't as scrutinised by the wider public to the same extent as his wife. Pop was light skinned and according to Mum, he seemed to escape some of the racism. But one day, an incident occurred with one of Pop's wedjula co-workers. They worked at Cresco in Bayswater and his co-worker kept racially abusing Pop for weeks on end calling him names such as 'nigger'. Pop let him go, tolerating this, day after day, until one day, he put a stop to the abuse once and for all. Pop challenged and fought the wedjula bloke, and beat him thoroughly, putting an end to the matter.

My Mother Shirley reminded me that there were sad stories, but many happy stories and memories in our family history. She recalled a time when she and her sister Joanie had a pet chook (chicken). It was white, fat, old and extremely tame. The pet chook used to follow them everywhere, just like a dog. Mum and Aunty Joan used to wrap it up in a small blanket and tuck it into a doll's pram. It would stay put and Mum placed a baby's bonnet on its head but it used to shake its head to get it off. The bonnet however, was firmly placed. The pet chook even used to sleep with Mum and Aunty Joan. One day it was walking around the garden and just keeled over dead. Mum said the chook became too fat, but I reckon it was spoiled with so much love from two little girls who knew first hand how to care for something smaller than themselves. The best teacher they could have had was my Nan, Kathleen Ryder. They placed the pet chook in small wooden box and buried it at the back of the goona mia (toilet) near their tin house.

Nan's influence upon Mum was strong and obvious because Mum was just like Nan and looked after the younger ones. For example, Uncle Kevin was a younger sibling who was extremely close to Mum. He was the only living son of Nan and Pop. One day, Uncle Kevin was given a little red truck to play with and every time he got mad, he would 'smash it up and bust it open'. The very next day, Mum would put it back together because Uncle Kevin would be looking to play with it again and she didn't want him to be sad. Mum cared very much for her younger brother... just like her Mother wanted her to do.

Nan was brought up as a Catholic and her religion influenced the way she lived her life. She held extremely strong morals and lived her life strictly adhering to these morals which she passed onto her children. Mum said that she never slept past seven in the morning because Nan always had the children up early to clean and tidy the house immediately after breakfast. Nothing was out of place. Cleanliness and hygiene were important learnings for the children. Nan was a persistent teacher who taught her children to live by morals, always be respectful to elders and display appropriate behaviours.

Nan also taught her children Nyoongah ways with values which were respected and rules which were followed. She said that sweeping was not allowed at camp after sundown because the tracks of animals and people who visited the camp at night could be seen. Poking the coals in the main camp fire and making it spit⁴ was not allowed because it meant that a wirn (spirit of a person from the past) could be evoked to visit. Playing with firesticks at night was not permitted otherwise the child would wet the bed. Also forbidden was laughter at night because it brought winarch (bad luck). Whistling was especially not allowed at night-fall. This rule caused the children much fright because whistling invited the woordatji to the camp. The woordatji were described as little hairy men that could coax the children away from the camp and they would never been seen by their family again. The woordatji used sugar bags to take the children away and so any spare bags had to be folded at night and hidden out of sight. Mum recalled one night when she was being a little cheeky to Nan and asked, 'How they going to put me in there?' Nan retorted, 'Don't you worry, they are magic people and when they touch you they make you shrink [to put you in the sugar bag] and then they touch you again to make you big [when you are out]'. Consequently, the woordatj was a feared being and the story kept the children close to the camp at night. The children were not allowed to break the balga (grass tree) spears because it meant that rain would come the next day, but Mum said this rule was really about protecting the environment, because the balga spears contained seed ready for the next

season. Nan showed Mum how to find water in the balga, look for food and catch and prepare meat for consumption including yonga (kangaroo), waitch (emu), ninyarn (echidna), yoorn (bobtail), doornart (twenty-eight parrot), jilgies (marron), yerderap (duck) and rabbit. Nan taught Mum many things about the bush and the Nyoongah way of life. She passed much of her knowledge and skill to her children about the land, seasons, culture, animals and people. Mum recalls however that, 'We were brought up with a mixture of Nyoongah culture, white Australian culture, some English and Spanish, Irish... even the food was of Spanish, Irish and Italian influences.' And so, my Mum also passes on her knowledge through her oral stories and her paintings to enrich the lives of her children.

Nan was an educated person who wanted her children to read and write. When the family were living in the tin house in Bayswater, she enrolled Mum and Aunty Joan in St Peter's Catholic School in Inglewood. Mum was about six at the time. She and her sister Joan had to walk a couple of miles to reach the school, so Nan would give Mum five pennies to buy a half loaf of bread and a penny worth of polony for their lunch. Mum said, 'On the way to school I would eat the centre out of the bread and then on the way home, I would eat the crust.' Nan was always thinking of her children's education and welfare at all times, and this was evident when the family moved to the bush along Albany Highway. Nan organised correspondence lessons for Mum, Uncle Kevin and Aunty Joan. Their 'formal education' continued in the bush and consequently lessons were sent out in a paper roll. Lessons comprised of English and maths as well as story writing activities and Mum had two weeks to complete the tasks and send her work back. Consequently, my mother continued her education at Curtin University with two units remaining for a Bachelor of Arts, majoring in English and Australian studies.

Sadly, in 1960, Kathleen Harris passed away from a treatable ailment. She was fifty years of age. Mum revealed that when Nan passed on, she lost her best friend. Mum was only 19 at the time. Nan's passing was a huge loss for our family and particularly for my Mother. I couldn't contain my emotion when Mum shared her story and together we broke down in tears. I think it was the first time Mum had the opportunity to disclose this story and express her feelings with anyone. It was extremely powerful and took great courage and for that I am grateful, because I can now share Nan's story with my own daughter, Sarah, whom she is named after. After listening to Nan's story, I know that I am just like Kathleen Harris and that we don't only share the same birth date but the same spirit as well. She left a legacy that showed me how to love my children and take care of my family. Kathleen Harris was patient, kind, compassionate and cared

deeply, not only with her children but with others as well. Nan embraced all her learnings as a young person and shared it all with her children. She was an active and patient teacher who valued every moment with her children. Mum says that Nan was a good friend who was always there, never looked down on anyone, never said no to anyone and would 'give someone the coat off her back and the food off her plate'. Nan led her life by her morals and taught her children within a strict upbringing and in return, her children never disappointed her. This was her legacy to us.

My moorditj ngangk's legacy had journeyed from Mother to Mother. My Mum worked all her life for Aboriginal people in the Western Australian Department of Health and the former federal Department of Aboriginal Affairs (DAA). She juggled her home duties with full time work and university studies. Mum was one of a small team of Aboriginal females at DAA who worked at a mid management level. In fact, Mum started her employment at DAA as a clerical assistant and made her way to management level, a feat that we are all proud of. Mum cared for us with the same intensity and love as Nan had cared for her. I can clearly see that Mum is a mirror image of her mother and just as Nan had been there for her children, so too was my Mum there for all of us. Mum always made sure we had food in our belly, a warm bed and someone to talk to. Mum has always given to others, even the food off her plate. When I was about seven years of age my parents and seven siblings lived in Lockridge. We had a five bedroom house with two bathrooms and two toilets. The house may have been a lot different to Nan's tin home in Bayswater, but my Mother still carried on the love for children as her mother did. At any one time, Mum cared for the entire family and up to fifteen children resided with us. Just like her Mother, my Mum, Shirley Harris valued education and always ensured we went to school; cousins and all. We had to share our beds and I remember sleeping in a small bunk bed with my sister Jocelyn. We slept head to toe so we could fit, but that meant smelling her toes all night!

There is no limit to helping others. Mum has raised her children with the same kindness, compassion and love as her mother, and she has brought us up with strong morals and respect. Each of us are better people because of her love and the legacy she has taken up and passed on. Shirley Harris is a kind, compassionate and loving person who has done her Mother, Kathleen Harris, proud.

After reflecting upon my own life as a young, working Mother of two, I know that when things get tough, I can remember my Nanna, Kathleen Harris. I am assured of her strength, love, kindness, humility and compassion to get me through. If my memory fails me and I need

reminding of her wonderful qualities, then I can look at my Mother, Shirley Harris for living proof. Mum has raised her eight children in very tough times. Just like her Mother, my Mum looked after many others in our extended family, like my cousins, my uncles and aunts. Mum respected Nan's last wishes to look after her younger siblings and Uncle Stanley and Uncle Kevin were always lived with us.

My success as a person, woman, Mother, friend, aunt and wife is only possible because of the struggles and experiences my Mother and Grandmother have endured. I know that there is no way I would be here without the legacy forged by Nan and left for my Mum, who in turn has passed to me. I have a young daughter and son and I love them with every part of my being. I have taught them strong morals and respect for themselves, for others and for their Nyoongah and Wongi identities. I listen and we talk together. We share a very close bond as parent and child and I told my children that even as they get old and hairy, that I expect them to always give me and their Dad, a cuddle and kiss... no matter what age! I love to be with them each and every day and share as many experiences I can with them. Both my children are my delight, pride and joy and I feel overwhelming blessed to be their Mother. The legacy of love towards a child and being there for them is what I have learned from both my Nan and my Mother. Consequently, I live each day by ensuring my children are loved and I am there for them always, especially when the wind blows and challenges us as a family.

What's a legacy? It begins with the name we give our children. My mother named me after her because as she said, 'I wanted one of my children to be like me.' Her name, Shirley Dawn means 'from the meadow' and 'awakening of the dawn' and according to Mum, my name, Cheryl Susanne is a French version of her name 'meaning dear one' and 'graceful lily'. When I was researching other family names, I found that my daughter's name Sarah Katelyn means 'princess' and 'pure'. Her middle name is a shorter version of my Nanna's Christian name. In fact, Mum's baptised name is Catherine, also meaning 'pure' and is a variation of Nan's Christian name as well. So, we are all tangled up together and linked by name which is given to us upon birth. Our legacy and spirit are intertwined with our names. I was overwhelmingly satisfied and proud to find that my Nanna's name, Kathleen Rosina was so befitting of her. I now know she was named with purpose because her names mean 'pure, innocent' (meaning of Kathleen) and a 'noted protector' (meaning of Rosina). Now when I look at my Mother's paintings, I see my Nanna who is encapsulated at the Wind Spirit, the strong person who may be tossed by winds of challenge and change, but remains strong, reliable and

responsible... she truly was a 'noted protector' and has set the journey for us to follow.

If, as Aboriginal Mothers and women, we find ourselves being challenged by daily winds and strong gales, then we need to search out our legacy. As portrayed in my mother's paintings, let your wind spirits (from your mothers) guide you through the challenges the wind may bring over your lifetime. A key source of your legacy lies within the stories of your grandmothers, mothers, aunts, sisters, grandmothers' sisters, cousins and elders. Talk to your family and extended kin, know your history, appreciate their life. Find your story because knowing it is a key to your legacy and when the gales of pain and trouble blow your way, you can count on your legacy to give you spirit and strength. If, for various reasons you cannot locate your family or there are other roadblocks in your way, then speak with your paternal family, like your father's mother, sisters and aunts. There is always a way to explore and uncover your legacy. Let your desire and passion drive you. Sometimes you may not see it at first, but stay focussed, listen intently to your family's stories, close your eyes and *your story... your legacy will eventually reveal itself*. When you find it, ask yourself how can your legacy help you in your life's journey as a person, woman, mother and friend? I can start you off by sharing my legacy... my Nanna's Wind Spirit with you. Show your children your love, goodness and strength. Keep them close and take time to really be with them. Love your children like my Nan did, like my Mother does and like I am doing now. Be kind and be patient and you won't be disappointed.

Notes

- 1 1905 Aborigines Act ensured that Chief Protector AO Neville was appointed as the legal guardian of all Aboriginal people. See http://asseto.aiatsis.gov.au:1801/webclient/StreamGate?folder_id=o&dvs=1223902147326-378
- 2 'Charlie's Shops' has been operating on the same site in Beechboro for over 40 years. It is a very popular shopping place and is well known amongst the locals for its European continental foods, cakes and drinks.
- 3 A dry blower is a miniature gold plant which finds alluvial gold. The operator shovels dirt into the dry blower which then pumps dry air to separate gold from the soil (Tucker, Q, personal communication, 3 February 2009).
- 4 A spitting fire sounds like a small firecracker after it has been lit.

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Truth and Consequence

Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik

Emeritus Professor MaryAnn Bin-Sallik is a member of the East Kimberley Djaru Nation. She was the first Indigenous Australian to work in the Higher Education Sector, and the first to obtain a Doctorate from Harvard University. She was appointed the inaugural Pro-Vice Chancellor Indigenous Leadership at Western Sydney University in 2015.

Never in my wildest dreams did I ever imagine that I could, or would, study at university. If, as a young child growing up in Broome, someone had said to me, 'MaryAnn, you are going to be the first Aborigine to graduate as a trained nurse from the Darwin Hospital', I would have looked at them blankly because from my worldview, at that time, it was only people from the wider Australian community who became nurses. As well as being too shy to respond, I would have been puzzled by this place called Darwin, as I had not heard of it.

Twenty-six years later in Darwin, had someone asked me the year before I gave up nursing in 1974, 'Do you know that you will leave Darwin to live in Adelaide, you will give up nursing and you will come back to Darwin in 2001 as a university professor, and dean of a faculty based on Aboriginal cultures, heritage and histories?' I would have thought that they were out of their mind because Darwin did not have a university then, nor were there any Aboriginal professors in Australia, and the Aboriginal cultures, heritage and histories discipline did not exist.

So, I will be taking you on a journey starting from my early childhood to where I am now, from a standpoint of truth and consequence; that is, my truth, and the consequences of my truth that shaped and moulded my life as a strong proud Aboriginal woman. I know when to call upon my ancestors for guidance, and when to beckon my spirit.

A good listener and a keen observer

I was born into the Aboriginal community of Broome, in Western Australia's Kimberley region, on the land of the Yaru Nation on November 2 1940, to an Aboriginal mother and a Malay pearl diver father. I identify as an Aborigine. I believe that I was born under a lucky star in spite of, or maybe because of, it not only being the Feast of All Souls in purgatory

according to my mother's Catholic religion but also the year of the Golden Dragon which comes once in every sixty years in the Chinese calendar. Anyway, for whatever reason, I believe I was lucky because I was not removed from my family, unlike my mother and her mother before her and like many of my peers.

I was an only child until around the age of six when my brother Albert, aged five, appeared as a surprise one day. I was so excited and just loved him at first sight. He was my mother's orphaned first cousin. My parents took him in and raised him as their own to prevent him being placed in an institution. They could not adopt him, as Dad was an alien. We were raised in a stable family surrounded by a large, loving extended family. Before Albert came to live with us I had regular sleepovers at the Catholic girls' orphanage for Aboriginal girls; those children were my cousins and friends. At that time I did not realise that they were part of the stolen generations from the Kimberley.

I have great memories of growing up in Broome, where my identity was forged. Mum ensured that Albert and I were grounded in our kinship structures, obligations and relationships. Though being born into and having lived through and been affected by Australia's pernicious policies of segregation and assimilation, like most young children I was not fully aware of them so could not understand their full implications. This was also an era when it was said that 'children should be seen and not heard', and when corporal punishment was the order of the day. My mother was never hesitant to exercise corporal punishment, which always ended with her asking, 'What! Haven't you learned your lesson yet?' This resulted in my brother and I being very obedient children.

I went on to be a good listener to adult conversations and a keen observer of my environment. I knew that many of my relatives could not travel from one place to another without formal permission from some 'white-man' in the Department of Native Affairs. I knew that we had to get permission to visit family in Beagle Bay Mission but could not stay overnight. I knew that some members of our community were given what was called 'citizenship' and had to carry around a piece of paper to say that they were free persons, which meant that they could not be imprisoned by the police.

These government policies also influenced the employment opportunities afforded our adults. I would frequently overhear the adults of our community saying, 'Oh, so and so has got a very good job'. These good jobs were from the bottom of the barrel. They were working in the cattle industry, the pearling industry and labouring jobs within local government, driving trucks or working as manual labourers for the men, and for the

women, the jobs were cooking, taking in laundry or entering into domestic service. From my earliest memories I understood that we were different from the non-Indigenous community, and that our lives were bound by restrictions and theirs were not. But I also knew that they did not have as much fun as we did. How did I know? That I don't know—I just knew. It was probably because I was happy, I had observed that some members of the wider community preferred to be with us and I had not observed any of the Aborigines being on the other side of the fence, so to speak.

Australia was the world leader in a deep-sea pearl industry that lasted from the 1850s to the mid-1950s and comprised three pearl ports—Broome in the Kimberley region of Western Australia, Darwin in the Northern Territory and Thursday Island in Queensland. Hundreds of Asian men were brought to Australia to work in the pearl industry under the indentured labour scheme. This permitted them to work only within the industry, in one of the three pearl ports. If they went anywhere else in the country they were deported back to their country of origin. These men came from China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Malaya, Japan, Singapore and the Philippines.

Because of the pearl industry, Broome was a predominantly Asian town. Its official trade language was Malay, which was spoken by many Aboriginal men who worked in the pearl industry. Many of the Asian men took Aboriginal brides, who also learned to speak Malay. My mother was a very fluent speaker of Malay. My brother and I were only allowed to learn some words, a few phrases and to count in Malay as it was my parents' secret language, so I missed out on a lot of information when the adults talked in Malay. Many of the Asian men integrated into the Aboriginal community and many of their cultural influences, words from their languages and features of their cooking are still evident today. Aboriginal identity in those former pearl towns, though based on classical Aboriginal cultures, was influenced by the classical Asian and classical European cultures, whereas in most other parts of Australia, the Asian influence is absent. Many Aboriginal descendants of Asian deep-sea pearlers, including myself, prefer to holiday in Asia where we have an understanding of the cultures and languages, where we can fit into the crowd and not subjected to racism. We also go to Asia to visit our relatives and in turn they visit us.

Through my Asian connection I learned about the White Australia Policy, to which my Asian father and maternal grandfather were subjected. I listened to adult conversations about Australia being scared of Asians, of 'The Yellow Peril' taking over our country and turning it into an Asian continent. Of course, at the same time, Australia's colonisers were in the

process of trying to turn our black continent into a white one through the policies of segregation and then assimilation, and to rid Australia of what it had perceived to be 'the black problem'. To us these policies were genocidal.

At first I did not realise that the policies of segregation and assimilation and the White Australia Policy were also responsible for not allowing the Asian and Aboriginal communities to socialise with or participate in activities within the non-Indigenous community. I clearly remember my parents hosting regular dances in our home for members of the Aboriginal and Asian communities. However, it was not until much later that I could make sense of the implications. As my knowledge base broadened, I learnt that the Spanish had colonised the Philippines, my maternal grandfather's country of origin; that the British had colonised Singapore, my father's birthplace; that the Dutch had colonised Indonesia, the country of origin of my father's parents and older siblings; and that Australia was colonised by 'Mother England'. So from a fairly early age I had a child's understanding of how the 'white-man' (using the language of that era, which also meant the colonisers or the system of control) also colonised other Indigenous people to whom I was bound through affinal, consanguine and classificatory kinship ties. Importantly, many non-Indigenous (white) men and women had been integrated into our communities through marriage and were not viewed as the proverbial 'white-man' because they were our kin. So from an early age I had a worldview that had horizons outside Australia, and the seeds of colonisation had already coloured my worldview. I believe this to be the reason why I am a big picture person, and am global in my thinking, and why I am very much a humanitarian.

It was common to hear such things as, 'Oh, 'white-man' did this or that because he thinks he is smarter than us. But we know he is not smarter than us.' Mum was always saying that she was either smarter than or as smart as 'white-man'. It was one of her constant mantras. Consequently I grew up knowing that the 'white-man' was not smarter than us.

I was also exposed to the various religions from Asia as well as Catholicism, because we were colonised by the Catholics. One day, when I was about five or six years of age, I asked my Muslim father to tell me about Mohammedanism, as that was what it was called then. Dad very casually told me that there was only one God and that we all worshipped that same God in our different ways. Dad's response made absolute sense to me because the Catholic nuns had taught us there was only one God. The truth of the matter, however, was that Dad was my hero—I hung on to and believed every word he uttered. So from then

on I have been open to all religions and have never questioned other people's religious beliefs.

I was not able to clearly understand or articulate everything I had heard or seen during my childhood in Broome, nor could I remember various things, probably because I did not place any great importance on them at the time. They were stored in my subconscious, however, and surfaced when I was mature enough to fully understand their messages and implications. I realise now that I learned to appreciate the differences in my community, within my extended family and, most importantly, within my immediate family. I believe it is this gift from my early life that has enabled me to enjoy cultural and religious diversity, making me a tolerant person with a strong sense of who I am.

The cruel awakening

In 1950, my family relocated to Darwin the land of the Larrakia Nation, where my father had obtained work in the pearling industry. Our family's transition was relatively easy due to Darwin's proximity to the Kimberley region, where kinship ties had been forged from heroic times during the Dreaming. The other big plus was that the Aboriginal community in Darwin was very similar to that of Broome, due to the pearling industry and associated Asian influences and connections.

I was about twelve years old when the impact of the policies of segregation and assimilation became clear to me. For instance, in Broome I thought that the adults chose not to socialise with people from the wider community, but in Darwin I soon understood that they were not allowed to do so by law, that they could be prosecuted and even sent to prison. The Darwin Aboriginal community had its own social club, The Sunshine Club, and my parents were members. This club was also politically motivated and had an alliance with the Federal Council for the Advancement Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders (FCAATSI), the body responsible for not only bringing about, but also ensuring the overwhelming success of, the 1967 Referendum that resulted in the Federal Government taking overall responsibility for Indigenous Australians, and Indigenous Australians being included in the Australian census. I discovered that the children I had befriended and played with from the Retta Dixon Aboriginal Children's Home, like the girls from the orphanage in Broome, were not orphans. They were removed from their families and placed in religious institutions through government policies. I realised that my mother and grandmother had also been removed, for the same reason as these children, because they were 'mixed race' children. The things I had taken for granted in Broome all started to make sense as they were acted

out in Darwin, especially as I now understood the impact and unfairness of it all. This was a profound experience for me, a cruel awakening that wiped out my childhood innocence.

My brother and I attended the local Catholic school and I finished primary school in 1954. The system in operation at that time was that non-Indigenous children were given the opportunity to sit exams for scholarships that enabled them to go interstate and obtain a better secondary education than was offered in Darwin. The Indigenous boys undertook exams to gain apprenticeships and Indigenous girls' only option was domestic service. I was fourteen years of age and, for the past couple of years, had been visualising myself as a nurse in a crisp blue uniform. I got the message loud and clear that 'white-man' had determined that, as a black female, I was not even entitled to the option our males were given. I thought, 'What happened to Mum's mantra that we are as clever as 'white-man'?' I announced to Mum that I was not going to be a domestic and she casually said, 'No, that's right MaryAnn. You are going to boarding school and you will become a secretary'. That was her dream for me as she saw secretarial work as one of those new 'good jobs' to which I should aspire. I just looked at Mum, dumbstruck. I knew better than to contradict her, and I also knew that I was safe and was not going anywhere because my parents did not have the money to send me anywhere. This was well before the availability of Commonwealth scholarships to boarding school for Indigenous youth. My mother was determined that her children were going to have the opportunities she had never had, and she wasn't afraid of the hard work or risk-taking that might be required in capitalising on those opportunities. In time, thanks to my mother, I became a very determined and ambitious person, always ready to create or capitalise on opportunities, not afraid of taking risks. I believe that what stops us most in life is our fear.

In Broome, Mum had been a small businesswoman. She owned and managed a milk bar and managed the family's small fish business whilst Dad was at sea. In Darwin, at the time Mum was contemplating sending me to boarding school, we were living at a place called Winnellie, which was in the sticks. It was a long way out of town with no corner store and a very poor bus service. Within no time, Mum had turned a part of our house into a corner store and our family car into a taxi. She was the first Aboriginal woman owner-taxi-driver in Darwin. By this time Dad was no longer diving. He was driving trucks and he would come home from work and drive the taxi. He also ran illegal gambling games. This gave my parents the means to send me to boarding school in Adelaide in 1955, and my brother the following year. I spent three years at boarding school and

my parents could only afford to bring me home for Christmas breaks. By insulating me from the realities of my life, boarding school gave me the space and confidence to determine the choices that I wanted in life. On returning home to Darwin at the end of boarding school, I had already made up my mind that no one was ever going to tell me what to do with my life. Not 'white-man' or even my own mother. I was determined to be my own person.

Career choices

I commenced my four-year nursing training in February 1958, and became the first Aboriginal student nurse at the Darwin Hospital. And was I in for a big shock, for I was about to learn of and experience racism at all levels. On a personal level, I was the only nurse there who ever had to do all early morning shifts, 6.00am to 3.30pm, for six months straight. In my first two years of nursing I was mostly rotated between what were called the native wards, which only catered to traditional Aboriginal people, and the children's wards. I had a couple of very short stints in the wards for the wider community and the Aboriginal people who were to be assimilated. I found the medical staff and student nurses were great to work with, but a lot of the trained nurses, or sisters as they were called back then, were overtly racist towards me and were forever giving me bad reports, as did a small number of patients who protested that my nursing procedures were substandard. I was, however, lucky because some senior nursing staff with whom I worked knew that I was a hard worker and was eager to learn. They soon realised that the negative reports against me were always from the same few staff members so they set in place procedures to curtail the negativity against me.

Nursing was where I witnessed the full impact of the official policies of assimilation and segregation and I learned all about institutional racism and genocide whilst working in the native wards. For instance, after delivering their babies, Aboriginal women were often sterilised without their permission. Very few of these women could speak English and therefore they did not understand what was happening to them. I witnessed that in most instances when Aboriginal children died in the middle of the night the doctors would not get out of bed to examine them and certify their death. The children would be placed in grey army blankets and left on the cement floor in a corner of the ward until the doctor came on duty at 8.00am.

Despite all the negativity and racism I enjoyed nursing, especially amongst my own people where I felt safe. Furthermore, most of the domestics, gardeners and grounds persons working at the hospital were

Aborigines or Torres Strait Islanders who also gave me a lot of support. There were times when the racism got the better of me and I wanted to leave nursing but thanks to the love, support and encouragement I got from my own people, I knew I needed to stay the distance. They would tell me over and over again that I had to stay and become our first trained nurse. This is what being Aboriginal means to me. This is when I learnt how much love there is in our community.

Nursing was the making of me. Though I had the support of my family and community, I had to walk every step of the way by myself in the regimented and hierarchical world of nursing, making decisions for myself. Through it all I was able to discipline myself to stay focused on my goal. To do this I celebrated the small victories and milestones along the way. Despite the morbid nature of the work, I trained myself to only dwell on the positive aspects of my life. I was able to achieve despite racism. I graduated from nursing in February 1962, becoming the first Aborigine to graduate from the Darwin Hospital. My first nursing appointment was at Hooker Creek Aboriginal Reserve in the desert country of the Northern Territory. I spent thirteen years working as a trained nurse, mainly in Darwin Hospital's casualty unit. I had two stints on cattle stations and my final nursing job was with a neurosurgeon.

In 1974, I left Darwin with my two daughters, aged eleven and nine years, to make a new life in Adelaide on the land of the Kaurna people. I was expecting to get a nursing position real quick, but I could not break through the racial barriers in Adelaide at that time. I spent nine months on the supporting mother's pension and I spent most of that time seeking employment. My children and I shared a dilapidated house with a friend and her two children, and sat on the floor to have our meals.

This all became too much for me. I knew that I would have to give up nursing, but only temporarily, until my girls and I got on our feet. In February 1975, I commenced work at the South Australian Institute of Technology, now the University of South Australia, as the student counsellor to its Aboriginal Task Force (ATF) program, which was the first Indigenous higher education program in Australia. I became the first of our people to work within the higher education sector in Australia. I worked full-time, studied social work part-time and raised my children full-time on my own. For the first time ever, Aborigines were afforded the opportunity to study within the hallowed halls of academia. I was so inspired by the students who came from all over the country, so energised with hope and aspiration. Within no time I knew that I would never return to nursing and that I had found a new passion and a new career.

The ATF provided the blueprint for the Indigenous higher education sector. Every university in Australia now has an Indigenous program and there are some 10,000 of our people studying at universities. There are now many Indigenous academics ranging from associate professors, professors, deans, pro vice-chancellors, deputy vice-chancellors. It is important to note that there are more Indigenous females than males working within the sector, more females in the student population, and more females graduates and female post-graduates as opposed to male. To date, no one has attempted to fully research this phenomenon.

My life has been a bountiful tapestry of Aboriginal experiences and lessons in learning. I have always worked as a professional and made my own career choices, because many people believed in me. My mother taught me to believe in myself. She showed me, by her own actions, the importance of taking risks to achieve one's goals and how to create and capitalise on opportunities. The Aboriginal community in Broome gave me my earliest memories of community love and nurturing and my Asian connection provided me with a wider view of the world, one that introduced me to Indigenous peoples of Asia to whom I am connected, and in later years gave me the knowledge to expand my horizons and to think globally. The Aboriginal community of Darwin gave the support I needed to complete my nursing training and the Nunga community in Adelaide gave me a job and supported me for the twenty-seven years that I lived on their country. The love and support I received from Aboriginal people throughout my life has given me the strength to achieve my dreams and aspirations. This is my truth and the consequences of my truth that has shaped my life giving me the strength to push boundaries, capitalize on opportunities and advocate along with my Indigenous brothers and sisters for a better Australia for us, the original inhabitants, of this Black Continent

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Naming Rights

Memories of some of the personal and family names from the Station and Mission times of the Kimberley and beyond
Tom Stephens

Tom Stephens retired in 2013 after more than 30 years as a WA state labor parliamentarian, having represented the regional and remote area of WA, with a particular focus on the Kimberley and Pilbara. Tom took a key role in the formation of the Kimberley Land Council in 1978.

Whatever were the namers thinking? Personal names are such an important aspect of anyone's life. To gift a name lays claim to some powerful relationship with the named. In some cultures and in some religions even to say a person's name is a powerful act. Personal and family names can be sensitive discussion territory. So it is with apprehensive caution that I write down my memories and recollections of some of the people I came to know in the Kimberley and beyond in the late 1970s.

From when I arrived in WA's North-West in 1977, I was struck by so many of the names either still in use or of recent memory. It seemed unlikely that many, if any, of these memorable names were bestowed by parents.

As I scroll through with my mind's eye this catalogue of names, they evoke a range of mixed emotion and memory. So many of these are or were close friends; some are still alive; others still frequently populate my nighttime dreams and my day-time reverie.

Grasshopper (Doug Dougald), Tiger (Moore and Jermandi), Hitler, Darkie, Rommel, Rusty, Billycan, Snowy, Sandy, Churchill, Packer, Demon, Roosevelt, Cocky, Kinerven, Chocolate, Daylight, Mussolini, Mulligan, Bungledoon Palmyr, Mandrake, Itcha, Rover, Hector, Dodger, Monty, Friday, Monday, Tuesday, Brandy and Bandy, Helicopter, Whiskey, Mosquito, Sunfly, Pompey, Ulysses, Boxer, Nipper, Banjo, Barney, Major, Sambo, Nosepeg, Monkey, Tinpot, Pintpot, Quartpot, Jam Tin, Frying Pan, Pumpkin, Lectric, Radiator, Lightning, Pudden, Ginger, Nugget, Pannikin, Jumbo, Button, Pincher, Left-hand George, Noddie and Ned.

Then there were the diminutives: Dickie, Freddie, Teddy, Timmy, Tommy, Charlie, Willy, Jimmy, Paddy, Alfie (Deakin, no less)... I don't know anyone who was actually called 'Jackie'. However, Johnny Walker was living on the Reserve at Kununurra when I arrived; and there was another man with this name down in Roebourne—he had brothers who included Cider and Guinness Gilbey; I am told their other siblings all had names

drawn from the drink-cabinet. Cherry Brandy, however, was not part of this family.

In Broome, I met the distinguished artist Butcher Joe (Nangan); and Rudolph Neumann was the baker at Beagle Bay Mission. Jack Dodo was a key leader at La Grange Mission; and there was Bing Crosby at Fossil Downs. Willy Cann at Warmun, Billy King on Mount House, Rammy Ramsay and Timmy Timms out on the Bow. In Halls Creek there were three brothers: Tom, Dick and Harry. While down in the Pilbara I met Crow at Strelley and Baker Lane at Jigalong. I also heard local people speak of Old Whalebone and I met many people in the Gascoyne with his surname. Back across in the Territory there was a guy called Umbrella. Out on the Gurrindji lands there was a man whose given surname was Motor, whose first name was Diesel, and he had a son called Petrol.

A tiny number of these names were very rough approximations of Aboriginal bush-names that were considered too difficult for the white-fellas to have to pronounce. One such was 'Marnay', who became 'Monday'.

When I arrived in the Kimberley many of the men who carried these names were viewed by the wider white community as 'their station-boys', although, with equal pay in place, the stations were shedding their 'boys', and their families, fast. Back then Aboriginal people in the Kimberley did not have ready access to their own transport. Relatively few had motor vehicle driver licenses. It was a time when Aboriginal people coming in from the stations with the station managers would find that as they got closer to the towns their front cabin seats were no longer available to them: the vehicles stopped and the managers saw to it that the Aboriginal station workers—the Jimmys, Johnnys, Freddies and Timmys, men no longer carrying the names given to them by their parents, but with boys' names and status—moved back and out onto the station tray-tops and into the open ute-backs, along with the cattle dogs, and bugger the weather.

Meanwhile, in neat juxtaposition, I recall one local Aboriginal family had an almost complete set of the first names of the station manager's own family: Eric and Marjorie; Ruth and Josephine; Alec and Peter. Perhaps it was done in a spirit of genuine warmth and affection and mutual respect. I like to hope so.

I was with an Aboriginal friend from the Kimberley at Dame Mary Durack's Perth home in 1978 where her cousin Eric—by then the long-retired former Argyle station manager—inquired of my mate (who was the son of one of his 'station-boys'):

Eric Durack: 'How do you spell your first name?'

B: (in quick reply): 'B E N!'

Eric Durack: 'But I named you 'B E H N' after the river beside which you were born when your mother was caught-short on her way to the native hospital in Wyndham.'

B: 'Well I spell it BEN!' came the firm and final word.

Amongst the women, I recall: Buttercup, Pansy, Daisy, Daffodil, Topsy, Dolly, Fannie, Minnie, Tossie, Tootsie, Bye-Bye, Peggy; Pearlie, Sheba, Biddie, Mabel, Liddy, Ruby, Gypsy, Ginnie, Dulcie, Nellie, Winnie, Maggie, Flying Fox, Bland, Casey, Lizzie... and Dorothy Larmour. Included amongst the women who went on to become renowned as distinguished artists were Queenie McKenzie at Warmun, Budgee Honeychild and Stumpy Brown at Fitzroy Crossing and Jan Billycan from La Grange.

Clearly not every name was bestowed to inflict lasting insult, injury and pain; but many were and did. Some name-bearers were belittled and diminished. Others, however, were giants who, unbroken by the European nomenclature, stepped into these names and gave them large resonance and powerful meaning.

At this same time in the Kimberley there was another whole set of Biblical names that revealed a family connection with the missions, mostly the Catholic missions: Abraham, Gabriel and Raphael quickly come to mind. There was a visitor from Port Keats whose name was John Baptist. There were also the names of the Catholic saints, freely sprinkled about with the mission baptismal-font water: Ambrose, Benedict and Bernadette; Sebastian, Clement, Sylvester and Alphonse; John Bosco too. The mission baptismal registers read like a litany of the saints. Most of these mission names seem to me to stand in aspirational contrast to many of the names bestowed by the stations, reflecting the different set of values that prevailed in these different contexts. By one reading of Kimberley mission history their whole reason for being was to protect and support the Aboriginal community; and the first names chosen seem to reflect that—aspiring to make archangels and saints. Although I heard of a Mary Magdalene, I never knew her; one can only guess at what was implied in the chosen name.

Names from other parts of Aboriginal Australia reflect a different set of missionaries as the people of first or lasting contact: Wesley and Gerhardt are two such names that come to mind resonating with links to different wings of the Christian movement.

Over the years I discovered that very few of the births or deaths of Aboriginal people—especially on the Kimberley stations—were ever officially registered, and there was no real filter to constrain the enthusiasm of the station authorities for unusual names during these 'station-times'. On my arrival in the Kimberley in 1977, I came across a copy of what had by

then become the infamous Northern Territory Government Gazette dated 13th May 1957, known as 'The Stud Book'.¹ It listed the names of all the Aboriginal people of the Northern Territory as a register of Wards. It was a fascinating and educative read that first alerted me to the strange dynamic that had taken hold in station and mission times not only in the NT but across northern and remote Australia. Grouped into Districts, alphabetic under European name with some Tribal/Personal names recorded, were all of the NT Aboriginal population who were considered to be wards. The only Aboriginal people who were excluded from the 'stud book' were those who had been awarded the 'dog-tag', or citizenship. One such 'full-blood' whose name was not included was Albert Namatjirra, who had been awarded citizenship, presumably in recognition of his outstanding skills as a young landscape painter. For those who were included, sometimes their language connection was also listed, along with their year of birth. No similar record exists in WA. Indeed, registering Aboriginal births—or deaths—was not a widespread practice, and certainly not uniform, in WA in the 1970s. This was made painfully clear to Aboriginal people when they increasingly came in search of birth certificates to obtain passports or otherwise provide proof of identity: they found constantly that their births had never been registered. The statutory requirements issuing forth from the Perth-based Parliament took a while before they took hold on the birth and death practices of the bush. People could be born, live long lives, die and be buried without ever making it onto the official records of WA. The NT stud-book looks almost benign when compared with the completely blind eye on display in WA.

In the late 1970s, when asking people for their names, so I could be of assistance in registering them for social security or for their electoral enrolment or postal votes or some other official purpose, quite often the response was momentary silence as people tried to recall their own names. These pauses made me realise that very frequently white-fella names were not in regular domestic or community use. Back in the 70s, for many Aboriginal people the task of bringing to mind a 'white-fella' name for interface with the white-fella world often required reaching into the furthest recesses of the mind or having to ask family or friends: 'What is my white-fella name, again? What do white-fellas call me?' More than a few were scarcely conscious of their 'white-fella' names; these names were, after all, mostly just in use for the interface with the white-world, which for many was largely (and somewhat fortunately) tangential to their very real world where they spent their lives and times, with family and friends and communities, remote from the self-important non-Aboriginal world of these namers.

Bush-names, or skin-names or relationship names or nicknames were the more constant feature of day-to-day exchange. I remember Alfie Deakin was just as often called Djabidja or 'Broken-leg'.

In my own case, I was always referred to by the skin name, Djabada, allocated to me on arrival by Miriuwung matriarch Bullawulloo (Lizzie Ward). By virtue of her gift I became her son; and brother to her four beautiful daughters and her sons; they and their families have stayed as close family for me across the years and distances. My skin name was quickly translated by the Gidja at Warmun to 'Djagara' and by the Walmatjarri as 'Djakamarra' and these were the names by which people most often referred to me across the Aboriginal world of the Kimberley. The gift created for me unexpected and happy links across a vast landscape, to family after family, community after community. At the risk of sounding conceited, I confess that I have always enjoyed the sound of my own Christian name: Tom. However, my new Aboriginal skin-name always felt good too, and still does.

Frank Chulung was just as frequently called by his nickname, Wongaloo—which meant 'crazy-brave one', a useful reputation and an appropriate name and characteristic for a man who went from being a boxer to working as an Aboriginal rights activist in the Kimberley. In 1978, not long after he became the first chairman of the Kimberley Land Council, Frank Chulung sought and obtained a passport to undertake his first-ever overseas trip for a study tour to the USA and Canada to meet there with first-nation peoples. Upon his return he told me of the fresh experience of that trip: right from the first moment of getting onboard the international aircraft he was greeted by crew who called him 'Sir' and 'Mr Chulung'. In the Kimberley, the white community most often called him by the diminutive 'Frankie'. He said it was his first-ever experience of being treated universally as an equal, with respect, with no overlay of racism. Frank said it made him sad that it required his first trip out of Australia to experience being treated as a human being. I remember the next Chairman of the KLC—who the airport ground crew knew simply as 'Jimmy'—having to regularly spell out to them his surname: B I E U N D U R R Y. With the frequent air travel requirements of his job as KLC chair in the busy early 1980s they quickly learnt to spell his name and very soon he was being greeted on arrival by the same ground-crew as 'Mr Bieundurry'. Social change was afoot.

I can recall now only some of the many beautiful Aboriginal ('bush') given-names: Bingiari; Lungmayeri; Rungmaeri; Lingiarri; Kipnayeri; Tjamangee; Bulawulloo; Yarabi; Ngirramoi; Munay; Cockburran; Gunditj; Gulmirr; Ngulmirr; Quanbun; Yallagi; Yalunga; Nyalcas; Majjoo; Bulla;

Cardoo; Birribi; Boombi; Bilmunga; Ingindalli; Wunmi; Lumai; Nabidj and Jundun; Aldook; Ningali; Toopalung; Wingmaria; Nyawanday...

My good friend, the anthropologist Peter Willis, who was then a priest in the Kimberley, discussed surnames with the Miriuwung mob at Moongoong Darwung. At this time it was very common for surnames to be very random: siblings would often have different surnames, despite having the same mother and father. Peter canvassed whether they would like to try to formalise and standardise their surnames; he suggested that one possible response would be to use the Aboriginal name of a family's country for the family surname. However, the suggestion was somewhat ahead of its time and nothing came of it. Some local families and individuals were already making good use of the names of the pastoral stations for their surnames: Newry, Carlton, Ivanhoe, Speewah; although frequently the station's name was put first, as in 'Ivanhoe Peter' or 'Argyle Joe'. However, the Aboriginal names for country do not appear to have entered into the surname system of the region. Any naming system or name-change proposal would always be fraught with strong emotion. One Aboriginal visitor from down south issued scathing criticism of Peter Willis's proposal, suggesting in no uncertain terms that it would be 'paternalistic to consider such surname changes'. I could not quite see it. If the Packsaddle family wanted to adopt the surname 'Yarralalam', the Aboriginal name for Packsaddle Plains, why would that be a paternalistic development? There are now large families with unusual surnames derived from the station and mission times: the Balgo-connected Mosquito and Sunfly families come to mind; and there is a small clan of Brandys.

From time to time non-Aboriginal people were given Aboriginal names: in Fitzroy Crossing the late Peter Ross was called 'Mangkurla', a name he shared with the local tata lizard; a name he earned because of his own, ever-present friendly wave that reminded people of the waving lizard. The name has in turn been passed on to the approach road to the main cemetery for Fitzroy Crossing, Mangkurla Road, named after Peter Ross, who became the local undertaker in his later years and is buried not far from there. Meanwhile in Kununurra in the late 1970s old Dave Richardson, a retiree who worked as a volunteer patient-support officer at the local Kununurra hospital, was always known by the locals as 'Mungungee', a name which referred to his habit of trailing his arm out the car window and waving in a constantly friendly manner to all; I think the name was the Miriuwung word for the tata lizard, the image of which was brought to mind by Dave's own wave. Our mate Rod Dixon was named 'kungkala' or 'firestick', a name which he always hoped was meant in a positive way, but could just have easily been a reference to

flatulence. At Warmun the mob used to call one of the old white-fellas who lived amongst them, Jimmy Klein, 'Kungyaliny'; this was Kija for 'claypan', a reference to his ruddy bald pate. This could have been a rare example of the local Aboriginal people 'getting even': Jimmy had been a tough head stockman in the neighbouring station hierarchy and would have been associated with the strange naming practices of his time.

By way of dramatic contrast, at birth my own son Ben was given by the Gidja mob the prestigious name 'Lingiari', and my daughters were named after Vincent Lingiari's sisters, Warripi and Warbyee. The Miriuwung mob gave the son of one of my mates the first name 'Birribi', a name which was officially registered and which he has proudly used throughout his life; he practises as an international lawyer in Sydney under the name 'Birribi'. When he was growing up I asked how his name was received amongst his contemporaries at school. I was told in a matter of fact manner: 'All of my mates have crazy names, it's no big deal!' His younger brother was named Patrick, as by that time his parents had moved to urban Australia. There was a government officer who the mob called 'wallawagang', the same word used for the wireless radio; literally it translated as 'talks too bloody much'!

Looking to Facebook, I can see that a different phenomenon with unique, original, one-off, first names is spreading across the Aboriginal world of the Kimberley and beyond—Nivek; Sharelle, ShianShay; Neri; Cyantha; Pollena; Lucielle... and so many more. Aboriginal people are creatively coming up with highly individual names where there appears to be minimal risk of duplication; where the name will most likely live and die with just one holder of it. Perhaps this is a response to the indigenous practice requiring the name of a deceased person to drop out of use, replaced by the appellation 'kumenjay' (which means 'no name').

These days in modern Australia these names join in with those of the most recently arrived communities, including those names out of Africa. In relatively recent times I have come across January, February, November and December; I have met Sunday, Monday and Tuesday; and I took delight in hearing of the arrival of Jumane, which is the Swahili word for the third day of the week. Even more recently Blessing and Baby Moses have appeared on the landscape. Along with an Akuna ('no worries'). This palette is increasingly rich, varied and textured.

Note

- 1 Northern Territory of Australia. Welfare Ordinance 1953-1955: Schedule, Welfare Ordinance, Register of Wards online through the Department of Arts and Museums website: <http://www.territorystories.nt.gov.au/handle/10070/229900>

Tomorrow, another will come

Caitlin Prince

Caitlin Prince works part of the year as an occupational therapist in remote Aboriginal communities. The rest of the year she's based in Asia, writing, blogging and completing a masters in writing and literature with Deakin University.

Mulga's¹ brow folded forward casting shadow over brilliant eyes. 'But we can talk to you, we know you,' she said, evoking hours spent sitting in the sun, filling my ears with her story. Mulga was born on a station in the remote stretches of the Kimberley, Western Australia. Taken away to school in a distant town she ran away and never returned. In her stories she's a young girl all lanky black limbs, beating trees out of her way, making her way back to country. Now a woman in her eighties her knees are rusted away with osteoarthritis. She sits long hours in her chair outside, spying on community life rolling past. When inspiration strikes, she hoists herself across the road on an elbow crutch, lowering down to the dirt for a game of cards. She doesn't ask for much, and has been generous over the months with her stories and laughs. She withholds her tongue in conflict, but glares out past her brow, everything said in the angle she holds her face. A change of staffing in a government department has me confronting her now, telling her everything I don't want to. That this Kartiya she trusted is, after all, another one just passing through. She reaches out to touch my hand. I hope our skin communicates everything our shared language is inadequate to say: *I am also frustrated by this system. It is letting both of us down.*

Twelve months ago I moved to the Kimberley. I unpacked boxes, hung pictures on the wall, scavenged garage sales and transformed my government issue housing into a home. As a new worker walking into a remote community, the scepticism was palpable. 'How long are you here for?' was the first, and often only question asked. I always answered honestly. *I have a twelve-month contract but I hope to stay.* The Northwest is plagued by a transient workforce. Agencies plead the difficulty of recruiting and retaining an appropriately skilled workforce to work in isolated places, extreme temperatures and seemingly hopeless scenarios. These remote corners of the country end up being the training ground

for new graduates and the tour ground for 'locum' travellers seeing the world. An experienced health professional wanting to work in remote communities, I am an odd rarity. I came to the Kimberley without parameters, without a timeframe, just open hands and an open heart.

I waded out into the ancient places of our country, tangling myself into its complex story. Sitting down in the dirt, eyeing the snuffling cheeky dogs, I listened to twenty languages stirring around me. Slowly, eventually, some of the Aboriginal women asked me who I was. I explained my job, but also my people: the places I'd lived in, the husband I have, the babies I hope for. Quietly, and then more boisterously, they began to tell me their story. Spreading arms wide they explained this country to me. Explained how the people came from over that river, behind that mountain, from that desert. Babies born in the bush, lives lived in deserts, stolen to missions, roamed through cattle stations. They whisper of spirits and initiations, generations who missed out on Law, now fighting to give their children what they themselves lacked. They speak of family members lost, through disease, death, and incarceration. They hint at the burden of grief in a community where trauma is more common than mosquito bites during 'the wet'. They speak and sing, laugh and cry, but still so much is left unsaid, caught behind barriers of language, culture and power. My heart resting in my eyes, I trusted to the silence, and listened with my spirit. Dark hands opened wide, eyes connected with mine, and the earth reached up to grip me, alive and palpable.

It's not in my job description, defined by a government department, to undergo this education. The hours I spend listening to the stories of Aboriginal men and women I work with will not be captured in statistical reporting data. It will not succinctly fit into the 'cultural orientation' workshop provided to ensure 'culturally secure' services. I will not be able to adequately explain to my governing bodies just what it is that I do, and why the learning of these stories helps me to hear my clients.

When I told Maggie I had to leave, she said 'No.' Like it was fact that could be disputed. 'You were this one person who listened to me, about my feelings you know, and I told my daughter, you wait 'til that Caitlin comes down, we can talk to her.' I held her words closely, like a carefully won prize, cracked inside my heart. I could ask for no better reference than this. That Maggie, an elderly Aboriginal woman living 300 kilometres out into the Kimberley wilderness, knows my name, and felt heard by a government worker.

Maggie is a large lady, whose heart and shoulders are even bigger than her belly, spreading further over her legs each day. Her life has so many tragedies buried into it that they jut out at every awkward angle. Her

husband is a cantankerous man, whose constant teeth grinding provides an ever-present rattling soundtrack. His life of alcohol abuse and rough living has left him frail, immobile and incontinent. Maggie cares for him single-handed, and for a large brood of 'grannies' that are frequently left on her doorstep. It's not that their parents are off drinking and partying. Some are, but others are spreading out around the country to care for other limbs of a sprawling family- attending funerals, court cases or medical appointments in the nearest capital city, some two thousand kilometres away. During the community's Christmas binge, a drunk driver ran over Maggie and her brother, killing him, and fracturing her legs in four places. Now, she's enduring flashbacks to that moment, whilst still grieving the loss of her brother. In communities this small, everyone is related, so when the driver is sent to prison for manslaughter, it is not a comfortable justice. During a visit amidst this aftermath, she told me another grandson has been released into her custody awaiting a court date: stealing and setting alight a motorcycle whilst high. Maggie told me she was so tired, and needed time to be Maggie again, that it was all 'too much.' I held her hand, and we watched the shade pass a leafy pattern through the dirt. There was nothing to be said, nothing to deny that unbelievable truth. It is too much. Too much that anyone should be carrying so many. And her neighbour in that dusty community has a story just the same.

Our governments talk endlessly about 'closing the gap' and money gets poured in. Yet morbidity and mortality rates are only escalating; more children than ever are being removed and Aboriginal communities have the highest youth suicide rate in the world. The generations are slipping through the gap of our collective misunderstanding. Do we truly not know how to address the traumas present or are we not bringing our imagination? Is Aboriginal culture actually so inscrutable or does dominant culture blind us from valuing another? Is Aboriginal leadership really lacking or are programs too focused on outcomes that fit within an electoral cycle, failing to persevere in the long bumpy process of healing?

There is one thing we know. To work with Aboriginal people, one needs to take time to develop trusting, honest, transparent relationships. The 'evidence-base' repeats over and over: personal relationships between Aboriginal community members and individual staff members are the most significant enabler of successful partnership. Projects and programmes flail and fail, when organisations experience high staff turn-over. Yet systems, designed in far-away metropolitan centres, create and fund programs that fail to place these relationships at the forefront of service delivery. Funding ceases, contracts expire, staff are shuffled around.

Artie has dementia, and his eyes are cloudy with cataracts. In the time I've known him, I've watched his mind closing down. Like a train approaching a dark tunnel. The darkness is closely packed in, but the light becomes more focused and brilliant. This man's existence has converged now to single point: his country. His face was once rolls of wrinkles, his eyes sparkling out of dark folds. He'd hold my hand and tell me again of how he built the community I'm now visiting. He lives in a home just barely a shed, but when I visit, his grandson puts on his best clothes and leads him to his hospital issue high-back chair and we talk some more. His face has lost its flesh, an undiagnosed bowel cancer slowly stealing his body from within. He won't know when I stop visiting. I will simply no longer be here to repeat loudly, assertively, to a white-man's system that before this man slipped stunningly into silence, he had asked to die at home. To state emphatically that this tin shed, this complicated community, collectively and perpetually recovering from trauma, is his home. His place. His story. Arthur, his grandson speaks softly, and thinks slowly. When I wait, longer than I think possible, he asks quiet and loving questions. He calls me when people speak too quickly, and he doesn't understand. He calls me. It's taken a year.

Now, after twelve months, my agency is relocating me. They mean to shuffle me out of this community, and into another, neatly like an interchangeable playing card. When Mulga first cracked her smile, when Maggie asked for me by name, when Arthur phoned for help, they wove their story directly into mine with threads so vibrant and weighted it altered the fabric I once was. They brought their many thousand-year-old *Wandjinjas* and difficult colonial truths. They brought silence, and ancient languages, and a certain way of using eyes and lips to say everything that isn't spoken.

I can't hand back what has been shared with me, these stories, fears, and dreams trusted to me. An accidental thief, caught with their trust in my hands, an indecent lifting of this community's wealth. I will now walk away, out of their country, out of their lives. I will be replaced tomorrow by a new Kartiya. They will sniff her suspiciously and ask her how long she is staying.

Note

¹ Names and details have been changed to protect individuals.

We were office-bound, stressed by loads and demands, looking pale in the fluorescent flak.

(How are you? I asked)

(Alright. You?)

(Stressed, I said.

It came out like breathing.)

But a change was brewing: you were off to a launch, your story in an anthology –you grew bigger, bolder, shed that crust—it was a story built on another story, a story spanning the continent, tracking the 7 Sisters across the top of Australia, that female country, counterpoint to your own country, land of Biamee.

You drew lines on my little whiteboard.

You mapped out a wobbling island, drew right over my dried-out scribbles from a moment lost months back

(I had 'John Anderson', 'Jennifer Rankin', 'Olsen' and 'Wolseley' and a worn idea, 'Australia as *land*'); your map was a grand enclosure around the lot, you fused the Territory with the Kimberley, ran a line from the south-east to the coast of Arnhem Land.

A thought became an image: language as irresolvable as landscape, ripples of black and green ridges racing across shining space.

But Mundine gave both of us the shits and Abbott was appalling and I didn't know what to do about life. 'At least there's still *purpose!*' you said of all those stories that remained to be told. It was true, and another tunnel emerged in which time was nothing but story-telling, a future stitched with our estranged memories.

I had work to do; we said hurried seeyoulaters and you left.

Still, I kept staring at my whiteboard, wishing the drawings could come to life, those gestures of Country messing with the gleaming blades of my office—place of trapped time, where stories get cut up and scattered as they converge through the door.

Dawn Song
for gangu, William Miller
Phillip Hall

Phillip Hall is a poet and essayist. In 2014 he published *Sweetened in Coals* and in 2015 *Diwurruwurru*, a book of his collaborations with the Borroloola Poetry Club. He is currently working on a collection of place-based poetry called *Fume*.

I strode through bush in the Gulf's full-moon half-dark.
Somnambulant air, an ambush predator's stillness,
not a bullocky, not a brumby, but all thirsty
and cast in fear. From our campsite I followed a dry
creek line where my footprints faltered
on fractured iron, eroded rusted
rubble, piled to the ridge lines that I perceived
as a pair of conjoint arcs, an earth artist's
reflexive refuse. And looking away I saw the Gudanji's Devil-
Devil Dreaming: megalithic in grievous grey, a breakaway
exile, a slyboots bereft of his ancestor-wife.
I passed by this iron-capped mesa with those vehemently
remembered howls of a ngabaya's bony choking reach. Grey
ghostly fragments of an ashen lore-fed world.
I shuddered in starkness above scarps and knick points.
The worry-bird's drawn out wailing *weeer-eearr* turned

and it was dawn. The wind picking up, leaves
rustling and ashes blowing
across the ground, familial chatter, turtles cooking
and gangu cupping his hands in percussion and quietly singing
lifting his Country: making it good, making it listen.

Gangu: is Gudanji for 'pop' or grandfather, on your father's side.
Gudanji: one of four surviving language groups in the Northern Territory's Gulf of Carpentaria.
Ngabaya: is Yanyuwa for 'ghost' or 'spirit' and has been adopted by many members of the Gudanji language group.
Yanyuwa: one of four surviving language groups in the Northern Territory's Gulf of Carpentaria.

Both Hands Full

Kim Scott

Kim Scott's ancestral Noongar country is the south-east coast of Western Australia between Gairdner River and Cape Arid. He is the author of numerous pieces of short fiction and the novels *Benang: from the heart* and *That Deadman Dance*, both of which won the Miles Franklin award. He works at Curtin University.

1.

My adult son saw a movie, and he was the star. Only a 'home movie', but he was the one in-focus and centre-frame even before he was born. The 'narrative' began nearly twenty-five years ago, continued in fragile episodes for a few years before faltering to no satisfying conclusion. I was a schoolteacher, enthusiastically familiarising myself with the latest audio-visual equipment to use with my students and, as a new father, my immediate family were the subjects of—were subject to—my experiments. Recently, I dusted off the video-cassette—a technology that had withered as my son's life bloomed—and digitised it to take a look.

My son took it casually from me, watched it alone. He's still young enough to be ambushed by a retrospective view and at first, he said, it made him laugh: his older brother a toddler, patting his pregnant mother's stomach. Then, the impossibly young parents and brother so eagerly awaiting his birth brought tears to his eyes; the world, pregnant with the possibility of him.

Speak Memory, Vladimir Nabakov's autobiography also opens with a home movie and a child not-yet born, but its emphasis is different:

The cradle rocks above an abyss, and common sense tells us that our existence is but a brief crack of light between two eternities of darkness. (19)

But, my son and I wondered, isn't each birth a renewal of the flame of who and what has gone before?

At least, that's how I remember the conversation.

2.

I know an old man who likes to sit beside a little fire in his suburban backyard, little flames flickering brightly and tendrils of smoke almost invisible in the shade.

It's a small fire and strong winds flatten its tongues close to the earth, insisting they lie down. Of course they spring up again the instant the wind abates.

I've many times found that old man asleep, alone beside his campfire. These days, I wake up and I'm an old man myself.

3.

Once upon a time my phone rang a little before dawn. Someone had died—it was expected, he'd come home from the hospital with his wife in order to die in his own home with loved ones around him. When she rang, his wife told me he'd passed away, and invited me to say goodbye. So was I honoured.

At peace, tucked into his bed, his cheek cold when I kissed him.

People were calmly moving through doorways, hugging one another, smiling gently. I remember the house was warm. Full of love, I thought at the time. The dawn sky was suffused pink and apricot and as I drove home the traffic lights, which had glowed so brightly on the drive there, seemed coloured cellophane.

The deceased man and his wife had married late in life, had spouses previous to one another and been in relationships that were not so happy as this, their last. 'He helped me heal,' his widow said. 'Encouraged me. He let me be me.'

4.

Not so long ago or far away a different older woman—I use no names today—recalled a Noongar story she'd heard when she was a child. It was a halting recall, brought to mind by some other conversation we were having, a tangent taken from talk about organising and formalising the Noongar language and stories she carried. First time I recorded this story it was on cassette. Last time was an iPad. In the story, someone has been killed and burnt:

... bones lying there, covered in ash, and ash blowing around a bit. You can sorta see the body, the skeleton I mean. It looks a bit like a little grave, bones just covered.

There! Near the mouth. Just like the tongue was alive, moving, lifting ash into the air, just a few ashes above his mouth, where the lips would be. Like a little willy-willy there, the ashes spinning round and round.

Ashes spinning.

Bool wool nyin.

Then his head's sitting right there, just above the ground, like balanced in the willy-willy.

Kaat

Head, and then his neck too.

Keeps going like that, the willy-willy, building him up.

Bool wool nyin.

Until there's all of him, just standing there, alive!

Bool wool nyin.

'Magically' come into being. (Brown 235)

She named each body-part as the man appeared in the process of reforming; starting tongue, language, bringing him back to life.

Before beginning this piece of writing, I asked a young Noongar man—a second son—what he might say to the word, 'renewal'. 'Ashes,' he said, and I was thrilled, because the story above. 'Phoenix,' he continued. Which is of course and grand tale and the answer true and good, but I was saddened that the Phoenix came to mind, not the story of a body reforming and rising from a cold fire-bed in the ashy whirlpool an ancient tongue created.

I would have made the same reply at his age. The story of a body reforming is one I heard in middle adulthood, and had not succeeded in passing on.

5.

Northern Lights, a fantasy novel by Philip Pullman, features something called a 'daimon'—a living entity each person is paired with for life. In childhood this companion is mercurial and shape-shifting; always an animal of some kind. It orbits its 'owner', shape-shifting according to its environment, and some combination of both it and its 'owner's' response to that environment. In adolescence it begins to settle and stabilise before, in adulthood becoming a single living form expressive of the temperament of its owner. It is impossible for an adult individual and their daimon to be parted, other than in death.

Reading Pullman's novel, I thought it an arresting image and metaphor, and wondered if it might be a way—in fiction—of not only of exploring the interplay between interior life and the world, but also of offering a perspective on moieties and totems, and the arguably classical Aboriginal perspective that each of us is a unique manifestation of the possibilities of the place we inhabit (Swain 13-51). In my ignorance, I did not know the term came from ancient Greece and Plato's belief that:

...the soul of each of us is given a unique daimon before we are born, and it has selected an image or pattern that we live on earth. This soul companion, the daimon, guides us here. In the process of arrival, however, we forget all that took place ... So the things that 'happen' to us, beyond nature and nurture, beyond our genetics and our social conditioning, may be the 'call' of the daimon, the soul-companion, call us to our own character and our own destiny. (Hoff 4-5)

This riff from an interview with James Hillman, an unorthodox psychologist, was among examples sent to me by an old friend—a rather anxious individual—whose reading is influenced by his own considerations of his heritage, and how he has equipped his children. 'Daimon' piqued my attention, but this seized me:

It isn't enough for a man to put all his love and his attention on his son or his children and try to be everything, father, mentor child unless you've rectified the culture. He has a job to make the culture, the world, a place where the child's daimon can grow. Even if he put everything he has into the child, the child is still left facing a world which will not receive the soul. (Hoff 6)

Soul, spirit, daimon... You get the idea. But what of those—I assume readers can think of examples—who are alienated from the dominant culture within which they move, or marginalised in some way? What of those who carry a heritage, even the inarticulate sense of a heritage, incompatible with the wider society? Is it possible—is there any reason—to nurture a familial and contrary inner life?

Rectify the culture? How? By stories, Hillman would answer: old, archetypal stories; stories with a centre to which the alienated and marginalized might also belong.

Bolivian Eduardo Galeano, 'In Defence of the Word':

Our authentic collective identity is born out of the past and is nourished by it—our feet tread where others trod before us; the steps we take were prefigured—but this identity is not frozen into nostalgia. We are not, to be sure, going to discover our hidden countenance in the artificial perpetuation of customs, clothing, and curios which tourists demand of conquered peoples. *We are what we do, especially what we do to change what we are.* (121)

Galeano's essay amounts to a defence of writing fiction, that solitary pastime which he claims can contribute to 'social transformation' and to justice. At times, says Galeano, the written work:

...radiates an influence much greater than is apparent; at times, it answers—years in advance—the questions and needs of the collectivity, if the writer has known how to experience them first, through inner doubts and agonies. Writing springs from the wounded consciousness of the writer and is projected onto the world. (122)

Sounds like a terrible job description, and someone who'd be awful company.

In the lingering zone of what we might call First Contact, Noongar people demonstrated a fondness for The Ship, that trope of the Literature of Empire.

Phillip Parker King's journal describes a group of Noongar men enthusiastically accepting an invitation to come aboard. King had moored in a narrow channel, with a group of curious Noongar men on each sandy bank. He only let one group aboard: an early example of wedge politics, I guess. Almost immediately a Noongar had to be moved away from the ship's canon; he'd worked out how to fire it.

Edward John Eyre's 18th century journal of his trek across the Nullabor reeks of deprivation and suffering. Surprisingly then, several members of the home community of Wylie, his guide, were 'clamouring' to join Eyre when he sailed back to Adelaide. They wanted to try the trip for themselves. (Dutton 144)

A few years earlier, in 1833, three Noongars in Albany voluntarily boarded a ship bound for the infant Swan River Colony to, among other things, talk to Noongar people there. They were, Tiffany Shellam reminds us, exploiting this new technology to 'extend kin and geographic networks' (249).

Henry Lawson met a Noongar clad in Kangaroo skin cloak and speaking fluent French. A cosmopolitan, Indigenous man who'd spent a year working on a French whaling ship (191).

Such events can be awkward in narratives of conquest and military-style conflict, which don't readily accommodate Aboriginal protagonists 'clamouring' to get aboard ships. Other global products were also attractive; guns for one. One of the men on that trip to the Colony's capital left a pen-and-ink drawing at a local tavern. You probably know of the grog, but not of the interest in the other cultural product he was sampling.

In *Writing Never Arrives Naked*, Penny van Toorn tells of '...how the cultures of reading and writing introduced to Australia by the British in 1788 became entangled with the oldest living Indigenous cultures in the world.' (3) Praising Noongar woman Bessie Flower as 'the most 'literary' Indigenous reader and writer of the 19th century, she continues:

Bessie's reading doubtless played a major role in structuring her social and moral awareness, and in her writing we can see over time her transformation from a deferential, submissive girl to an assertive, self-authorizing women who wanted to live outside the judgemental gaze of white male authority figures. Her writing not only reflected this change it facilitated it. (193)

Can writing be an agent of social change? Perhaps, but not writing on its own. Change is most likely if the writing helps and enables a new or even neglected narrative.

At the heart of my ancestral Noongar country, Cocanarup is the origin of an infamous spate of late nineteenth-century killings (Brown 64-73; Forrest). A few years ago, with twenty or thirty other Noongar people and at the invitation of the owners, I visited the farming property associated with the incident. The two old brothers who welcomed us had spent all their lives on the farm, their father having brought it about forty years after the beginning of what we might call the 'killing time'. Most of us on the bus had Noongar family connected to the area and our two senior

elders' ancestors were Noongar protagonists in the altercation that began the killing.

Only one or two in the group had visited the place before. Hazel Brown said it was taboo, and was still not sure it was wise to visit. Our two hosts told us they were working with their community to establish a memorial to the place's sad history in the spirit of Reconciliation, and there had been disagreement. 'That word, "massacre", one of the brothers said. 'It hurts me to hear it.'

The elders—by which I mostly mean the two brothers and one of our female elders in particular—shared their differing views of the history. It was at times an acrimonious discussion.

The two old men had killed a lamb, and chilled it overnight. Now we would have a barbecue.

We ate. After, one of the men formally presented us with a number of grinding stones the family had collected further upstream, in the 1960s and 1970s.

One of our elders suggested we give a couple of the stones to the local history museum to look after for us; an astute way to begin building relationships with the town, if nothing else. As you will see, it never happened.

The old brothers led us to places on their property they thought may be significant to Noongar people with ancestral links to the area: a spring in the river around which their father had built a small wall, and an oozing water source with a crumbling brick wall surrounding it, neglected and overgrown with rushes. Still further from the homestead there was a small rock water hole—*ngaama*—with a thin, stone slab covering it. We lifted the stone lid and sipped the water beneath.

On another visit we went further along the river, to where the stone artefacts had been collected. It was—it is—a distinctive place, with a number of large fresh water springs held in the rocky bed of a river which is often not much more than a saline trickle linking a series of pools. An enormous number of lizard traps stood on the rocky sheets, along with another particularly large *ngaama*. If is not surprising that a lot of artefacts had been collected here.

The brothers told us about a clearing among the trees, further up the riverbank. 'Don't know why no trees grow there,' one said. 'When we bought the property there was a fence around it; they must've kept the sheep there. Maybe that's why nothing grows,' he said. 'No trees I mean.'

We walked up the riverbank, in among an old forest of sheoak, jam, york gum, here and there some sandalwood. We had to keep brushing away spider webs as we weaved our way through tree trunks.

A Noongar word—*woolalan*—came to mind as I entered that clearing. The word means something like 'light rising', and is said to describe the experience of dawn, or of entering a clearing in the forest.

The clearing was wide and roughly circular, the level surface disturbed only by a few weedy shrubs. Old sandalwood trees stood around its perimeter, most covered in lichen and many dying. At an edge of the clearing a shallow hollow in the earth held a few small boulders to mark a grave

A dance ground, the wisest in our little group said. In massacre country and on freehold land: no one would have danced here since the late nineteenth century. And the thousands of years preceding that—the repeated removal of seedlings, feet stamping the earth over and over again—is that why it remained clear? Standing at its centre, we turn around and around, scanning the space.

Later we went to the *ngaama* I mentioned we'd visited a couple of years previously, with the stone slab covering its mouth. The elder that had recommended a partnership with the historical society on that occasion said, 'Reach in. Might be something there.' I pulled grinding stone from the water; it glistened in the ancient sun. Laid it on the warm granite sheet.

'Should stay here,' he said. 'No good taking them away.'

Several months later I went there with my sons, told them to reach into the *ngaama*. The artefacts glistening on the warm sheet of rock seemed like ancient things, newly made.

Is this a ceremony, a ritual of some kind being created, renewed?

I have some photographs, a few minutes of film and some scribbled notes about these journeys. I think these 'Reconciliation Yarns' I offer are sweet stories, and are a lot about healing; but it's a fact that we have to get permission from those two old gentlemen to get through their farm gate.

9.

One of the Noongar men with whom I visited Cocanarup tells me he should be long dead. As a child, he fell from the speeding school bus, bounced *through* a wire fence, landed among the cows in the paddock. Got to his feet, unharmed (the cows stampeding away). As a young man, greedy for drugs and grog and that, the doctors gave him two years to live. Middle-aged, he was so obese the kids had to jump on the mattress, bounce him to his feet. He says the trouble of his life originates from twentieth century policy and legislation aimed at Aboriginal people. He went into a mission as a baby, never really met any of his close family until he was adult, never knew where he belonged or who he really was. He only knew he was a black man in a racist land.

In the early twenty-first century he got hold of some stories his father had told a linguist eighty years before. His father told them in Noongar language, and although that language was taken from the son, he has since been getting to know the stories from the paper, bringing them alive again. One Creation Story, almost lost but for the linguist's record, has been reunited with its landscape (Scott, 'Not-so-Barren'). *Dwoortbaalkaat* is a story of transformation; and to return language, story and song to ancestral country, through a forest of hostile history, is to also take part in transformation and renewal.

After a few days spent presenting language and songs and stories at primary schools with a small group of his clan the man I have been referring to said: '...what we lost, we are resurrecting... So my people, we go with our head up high, proudly'. (Scott 212)

10.

Language, story, song; a people, their country.

I have been approaching—and shying away from—themes of recovery, of revitalisation and—for want of a better word—renewal of a heritage; language, story and song in particular. Lesley Jolly reckons that the very process of attempting such ambitious tasks provides a significant narrative, because:

Language loss, language retention, and the possibility of language revitalisation, then, can be emblematic of the whole history of colonial dispossession, Aboriginal persistence and a self-assertive and self-determined Aboriginal future. (4)

A narrative of resurgence, then, albeit cloaked in political discourse. But it is not just revitalisation of language.

A Noongar scholar, writing of his own and others' experience of song 'revitalisation' claims:

Opportunities to listen to and reconnect with Nyungar songs become sites for healing and the maintenance of cultural strength. (Bracknell, 'Singing Back')

And, elsewhere, that song in particular:

... can be used to 'negotiate a fabric of relationships' between living and deceased composers, performers, ancestors... (Bracknell, 'Maya Waab')

Sharing the story of a body reforming in a whirlpool of ash, reuniting a Creation Story with its landscape, visiting an ancient dance-ground in a massacre region, even tending backyard campfires and going on school tours are all part of such 'negotiations'. Learning an ancestral language—the business of mastering sounds and vocabulary, the meaningful linkages between components that makes up grammar—is to make oneself an instrument for that language and, at least in learning to make the sounds and to have them moving through one's body, to reshape oneself from the inside out and begin to resonate with the sounds of a language inextricably linked to this corner of the oldest continent on the planet.

This is more than preservation since in the sharing of it with other, albeit stumbling, speakers in the world-as-it-is, language must change and constantly renew itself. Language, like story and song, withers away if not connected to the world and shared between people.

The European Renaissance arguably began with broken statues and almost-forgotten artwork being retrieved and circulated. Attempts at resuscitation of, and reconnection to, that prior civilisation caused a rebirth of a high culture that was similar but not quite the same.

Here, in south-west Australia, Noongar language is embedded in the landscape (study a map and look for Noongar place-names to find examples) and further influences the south-west Australian vernacular through the names of plants (jarrah, tuart, marri...) and animals (quokka, chuditch, dugite...) and is carried by people descended from those who first created human society in this part of the world (Diamond 321).

Thus, Noongar language is a major denomination in the currency of identity and belonging.

Negotiating its continuing exchange, and the necessary relationships to do so, is more than a handful.

11.

I have, as they say, skin in the game. Much of the musing in this essay is derived from The Wirloomin Noongar Language and Stories Project (www.wirloomin.com.au), the objectives of which include the consolidation a particular heritage in its home community and the empowerment of members of that community through sharing aspects of that heritage with ever-widening audiences. Its process proceeds from relatively intimate workshops to organised activity to develop some of the material originating from the primary workshops into forms that can be shared in

schools, at festivals and by publication. Those initial, 'intimate' workshops where individuals reconnect to their heritage of language and place, its stories and songs, are crucial to consolidation of their classical heritage. And a community of descendants enhancing and shaping can renew its spirit.

We rely on workshops, performance and books. Books alone are inadequate, and the importance of image and sound to language activities has moved the project toward digital and on-line media. Sound is obviously important to language transmission, and sound is very important in a classical Noongar worldview too:

In Aboriginal languages, it is hearing, not vision, which is extended to denote *know*, *think*, or *remember*, while *see* is more likely to be used for specific forms of social interaction (*flirt with, love, supervise/oversee*) (Lydon 25).

Books can be like campfires, for some of us at least: a comforting ambience, a reputation as a site for transmission of stories and wisdom, and conducive to sleep.

Digital technologies allow both sound and image, along with demonstration, participation and the exchange and engagement vital to keeping a language alive and supple. Researchers at Curtin University and the University of Western Australia are even trialling a Noongar Wikipedia! Of course, there will be problems of compatibility, and it has been cogently argued that the meeting of Aboriginal culture and digital technology is in itself another 'contact zone' (van der Velden 253).

If so, the intense interest in exploiting new cultural products displayed in the 19th century Noongar examples I offered earlier might provide inspiration; unless, of course, those individuals were mistaken? Similarly, do we seek a stronger connection to our pre-colonial heritage because it is a source of inspiration and renewal, or because it allows a retreat from contemporary realities?

On the one hand this, on the other hand that.

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Stories from the Front

Steve Kinnane in conversation with Melissa Lucashenko, Bruce Pascoe and Wayne Barker

Steve Kinnane has been an active researcher and writer for more than 20 years as well as lecturing and working on community cultural heritage and development projects. Steve is a Marda Marda from Mirrwoong country in the East Kimberley. His book *Shadow Lines* has won numerous awards.

When the opportunity to co-edit this issue was first suggested by *Westerly*'s General Editor, Catherine Noske, three ground breaking creative artists immediately came to mind: Melissa Lucashenko, Bruce Pascoe and Wayne Barker. Each is known for their works of fiction, non-fiction and their social/political commentary surrounding a range of issues affecting their own communities and the national scene. Their award winning works include novels, essays, chapters, documentaries, dramas, short stories, musical compositions and music videos. These are infused with lifetimes of working at the community level dealing with issues of identity, belonging, cultural transmission, history, racism, social trauma, internalised violence, social reconstruction, community development, connection with country, ownership of country, and yes, even love.

I chose to include these three creative artists side by side as each have very diverse experiences, coming from different regions and communities. Each has been courageous in their work, exploring tensions and conflicts without and within their communities, as well as drawing upon community and cultural foundations to develop new narratives of importance to themselves, their communities and the country.

I asked each author to speak about their current works, what narratives they believe need to be explored at this time in this country, and the power of story to change dominant narratives that impact on our communities with a focus on future generations. Each spoke from their particular experiences of community, country, identity and belonging, and of their own explorations of these landscapes. Each responded very differently to these questions, yet shared a common central approach to their art-forms; questioning what we are leaving for future generations,

what it means to be Aboriginal in the 21st century, and how best to apply their creative craft as part of the diverse 'front' of Indigenous voices in this country.

**Melissa
Lucashenko**

At the time of this interview, Melissa was in the library working on her next novel.

What are you currently working on?

I'm working on a book about generational violence, and what you could loosely call 'post-colonial trauma'. I'm looking at how the adult children of a violent black marriage allow the violence to play out, or not, in their adult life. It's the responsibility of an artist that we look at the society we're living in and reflect it. I just think it's ridiculous that we live with the levels of violence we do, and for me not to write about it, or to at least try. It's hard on a technical level to pull it off, I think, and still make it a readable story and it's hard on the political level, because it's so fraught with the racism that interprets the violence and our internalised conflicts that says, 'No. Don't talk about it.' So it's complicated, and it's difficult, but it's also something that I felt I had to tackle.

What particular focus are you taking in this latest novel? And in writing about the issue of intergenerational trauma, or social trauma, who are you writing for?

I'm interrogating the tension between us saying the violence was done to us, and therefore when we reproduce it, it's not specifically the fault of Aboriginal men; the tension between that, and the truth that violence is killing us, and killing our young people. It's killing our women; it's killing our men. Indirectly, it might be colonial violence, but at the pointy end it's violence in our families, and we can't keep deflecting it and just talking about sovereignty, or just talking about a treaty, or about native title, and not talking enough about uncles who rape and mothers who bash and grandfathers who kill. I'm also interrogating the idea of elders; who gets to be called an elder, and what is an elder, and in what ways elders can fail—at what point do you stop calling someone an elder and start calling them an abuser. We're all working towards recovery and resilience, and a beautiful life, I suppose. That's what my work is about, in a sense.

I'm always aware of multiple audiences, and I think I need to try and write for myself a bit more, and when I get stuck, I think I need to follow

the good advice of Jane Smiley, who I admire a lot, and she says, 'Nobody, absolutely nobody wants to read your work so you may as well write it to yourself.' But to answer your question more logically, I am writing for Aboriginal people who read the kind of books that I write, and probably Aboriginal women as much as anyone. But beyond that I'm writing for the literary community in Australia, and beyond that, people beyond Australia who read my work. I've got a small American audience. But, I mainly write for blackfellas who are readers and then beyond that to the white Australian literary community. I hope that the ideas permeate from there.

When we first spoke of the theme of renewal, what were your thoughts about what we need to renew?

Well there's a new imperative coming from the dominant society almost every election cycle, I think, and a profound failure to grasp that everything is connected; that you can't talk about deaths in custody in the 1980s, and then Reconciliation and the Stolen Generations and native title in the 1990s, and then Close the Gap in the 2000s—and you hop from issue to issue to issue, and not realise that everything is connected. So renewal; what do I think about renewal? I suppose, if we have to renew, it's about looking at traditional values and asking how do they work in the 21st century, and how do they not work in the 21st century—examining our values. What makes a good life for blackfellas in 2016? Is it the same things that made a good life for us in the past? I think in a lot of instances it is, and in some instances, maybe not.

I was thinking a couple of days ago about the suicides, and thinking about suicides of young people, and I was actually thinking about the Kimberley, maybe because of this interview, and because I've got distant relations where there's been violent deaths in the Kimberley. And I was thinking it's about cultural safety, and just plain physical safety. You go into the white world and you're assailed by the racism there, and if you're living in poverty, all that poverty means, and then you go back to the black world, and very likely the violence that visit upon each other, and if there's nowhere in the world where you can escape either psychic or physical violence then, of course you're going to think about internalising that and acting violently on yourself just to take the pressure off.

We've seen a rise in youth suicide across regions, and certainly we've experienced it in the Kimberley. Social trauma is a significant part of this, but I wonder too what tensions we are creating for our young people. Are we putting too much expectation of them? What are we expecting of them? As a writer who has written for young people as well, what narratives do you feel we need to be developing for our young people?

It's hard to be any kid, any young person, let alone an Aboriginal young person, let alone an Aboriginal young person in poverty, or in a remote area, or struggling with their sexuality, or living with violence. Part of the inspiration for the book I'm currently writing is to ask: what does the next generation do to overcome these issues of social trauma? When we've had six, or eight, or ten generations of colonial and family abuse, where does the next generation go? How do you break that cycle and do you? Because it won't always be broken, of course. There's a reason why family violence doesn't go away in a hurry, and the different characters in my book, they'll be coping and transforming the violence, and transmitting it, or eliminating it in different ways.

Alice Walker came out to Australia a couple of years ago and I interviewed her for the Sydney Writer's Festival. I read her current work, but also went back and read her very first novel, because I believe that the saying about literature is true, that most people keep writing the same book over and over again in different guises. Her first novel is called *The Third Life of Grange Copeland* and there's a lot of themes and material in there that are very similar to *The Color Purple*, which is her famous book of course, and I was just blown away by the searing honesty of *Grange Copeland* and the lives she was portraying in there, over three generations how the slavery had warped and damaged this family and what became of them. And I took that as inspiration from this because at the same time violence has been in the forefront of the conversation about our communities for, I don't know, a decade maybe now.

When you're at the page, when you are writing, what sort of toll does that take on you, dealing with those issues as an author?

I think it helps. I think it's better to put it out there than to just have it sitting around in your life, and in your unconscious. At least when you're writing you feel like you're processing it, and you might, at some level eventually be making a difference. I love writing. I feel so lucky to be able to have this as my work at the moment, and even though you want to pull your hair out half the time as well when it's not going right, but once you get some sort of a flow going, it's just a gift. It's a joy. I've had people come up to me decades after speaking to them at a festival, or just somewhere, and telling me that they still remember something I said in a talk, or something I said to them talking one-on-one, and of course I don't usually remember them, but you never know what impact you can have. You've just got to sit down at your desk every day, and do the writing, and be as honest as you can, and as brave as you can, and just hope, I suppose. Just hope.

In your work you take a complex view of Aboriginal community, Aboriginal existence in your characters, and also through your own personal story. You look at those multiple layers of identity and you break open stereotypical ideas that Aboriginal women, or men, are only interested in what's going on in our communities. Your characters have travelled and they give their perspectives about the world, and you relate it back to your own experiences, or community experience. What sort of impact do you think that has against the sort of mainstream narratives about Aboriginality, being Aboriginal, Aboriginal life?

A big part of why I write is to problematise those very simplistic ways of thinking. This is—what Aboriginal people do; what Aboriginal people are. When my work gets distributed through a newspaper, as it occasionally does, I might reach several thousand people. A novel might reach several thousand people over the course of its life, getting up towards 10,000 if you're lucky. We're all chipping away, I guess, is the thing. Uncle Bruce Pascoe is chipping away in Victoria, and so is Alexis Wright, and there's Kim Scott over in Western Australia, and people all around the country are all chipping away, trying to shift the mainstream. So you've just got to see yourself as part of a mosaic and try and be staunch and hold your little piece of the line.

You've written previously that culture is the porous space between land, people and country. To what extent do you think country plays a role in dealing with social trauma and intergenerational violence and do you think it does have a role in terms of what we're trying to do for future generations? I think country is very important, but I think there's a kind of danger of fetishising it at the same time as it is critically important. I think the fact of country is important, and I think the idea of country is important, but I think the myth of country can be dangerous, especially for a population like ours in Australia, where we are so disconnected a lot of the time, and I'd include myself in that. To say to a people who are sometimes floundering about that the answers lie in country, I think, is a partial truth. It can be, but the part of it that isn't true can sometimes be very dangerous. If you're talking about people who are more rooted on country, who haven't been removed, who grew up on their traditional lands, whether that's in an urban setting or a rural setting, or regional setting, country will impact differently in their life. The fact of country, the way that river shines and the way those waves break on that shore, and the way that mountain is there, and your great grandmother looked at that mountain, and her great grandmother looked at the mountain, if you know those things to be true then I think there's salvation there, sometimes.

But if you're disconnected from all that, (and so many of us are), then you might be setting people up to fail.

You use small stories, stories of characters, stories of people you witness, people who are family members, but there are big issues at the heart of those struggles. Do you, as a writer, find a power in telling such personal stories through characters as a means of getting to the heart of these larger issues? We're story-telling people. We're a story-telling species, and without narrative I think we have very little. The American nature writer, Barry Lopez, wrote in his prize-winning children's book called, *Crow and Weasel*, (which I'd really recommend), that sometimes stories and compassion are the only things holding us together. If we don't identify with the story then it's not going to touch us, and so I try to write characters that Aboriginal readers can identify with, but also the mainstream can get close to as well. And that's the craft. I saw uncle Bruce Pascoe talk in Adelaide, almost 20 years ago now, and I didn't know him at the time, and so this Aboriginal writer, an older bloke, was going to get up, and I thought, 'Oh well, this will be interesting. I wonder what uncle's got to say here?' And someone asked him, 'What's your central concern? What do you want to be writing about?' And he just paused, he's a very thoughtful man of course, and he said, 'the main thing I want to write about is love.' And I just about fell off my chair with surprise and admiration, and I thought, 'bugger me dead', an Aboriginal man, talking at that time about love being his central preoccupation, and it was just one of those revolutionary moments. It changed my life in terms of what we should be focussing on, and what we could be focussing on. So that's the answer, to just put love at the centre of our lives instead of trauma and conflict. Love and justice.

Bruce Pascoe

When I interviewed Bruce, his book *Dark Emu* (Magabala Books), had just been awarded the NSW Premier's Award Prize for Book of the Year, as well as being a joint winner of the inaugural Indigenous Prize with Ellen van Neerven (for her book, *Heat and Light*).

*You've stated that your work is about attempting to change the narrative. Could talk a bit about what you've attempted to do in works such as *Dark Emu* and *Convincing Ground* and the kind of narratives that you're writing, as opposed to the common narratives that we find ourselves confronting?*

I was and am a fiction writer, but I became really disappointed that the histories being told about the country didn't reflect Aboriginal experience. And so, I started writing a few essays but, in the end, because of the incredulity with which Australia greeted some of those early attempts to redress the historical myth, I thought I would start working on the contact period and really talking about the experience of Aboriginal people during that war—because that's what it was.

It's interesting that you've gone that step further and tried to get to those deeper cultural governance foundations as well, of how people managed country.

I think that's the most important story in Australia. We have to wonder about the incredible intelligence and perception of those early people who decided that, in the creation of their society, that the principles would be that everybody was fed, everybody would have shelter, everybody would be able to participate in the culture artistically and spiritually. And, those principles were so strong and so convincing that young people throughout the 70,000 years or 80,000 years or however long you decide that civilisation is—I was going to say 'lasted' but it's still continuing. If you consider that generation after generation, over thousands and thousands—tens of thousands of years, the young people adopted that culture, it is an incredible example of the resilience of the culture.

Why do you think this nation fails to recognise and own this history, this story? In part, do you think it could be about guilt or is it a fear to engage with that narrative for what it causes people to have to think about—their own longer histories elsewhere not tied to this continent?

I think it's really hard to avoid the idea that Australians don't want to examine those things too closely because it does call into question the right of people to hold the soil. But, I think there's also, as time goes by, a real embarrassment and discomfort when people are engaging with Aboriginal people. Most people today still say, 'I haven't met an Aboriginal person', and yet, people in Sydney or Melbourne, if they spend half an hour in either Pitt Street or Bourke Street, three hundred people will go past them and ten of those people would have been Aboriginal, and so there is really no excuse for not engaging with the Aboriginal population. Most Aboriginal people can recognise other Aboriginal people no matter what colour they are, simply because of their facial features and mannerisms a lot of the time. So, Australia can learn this and they can learn to be sensitive to their countrymen and countrywomen because we're all in this together.

What do you think we could be doing for our young people that would help to change that narrative for them?

It's a thrill for me to get letters from people about *Dark Emu* and *Convincing Ground*, and even some of my novels. I'm really a story-teller, a novelist, and short story teller but I've been forced into this situation of having to write history. Not that I don't like it, but I'm really a story-teller and that's what I want to do. But, there's been a great response to both *Convincing Ground* and *Dark Emu* from young Australians and thankfully a third of the people who respond are Aboriginal, but two-thirds of course are non-Aboriginal and many of them are university students and they want to understand these things. They say, 'what can I do next?' Many of them say, 'what can I do?' And, I say, 'well, first of all you need to know Aboriginal people. You need to go to the local community.' And, they say, 'I don't know the local community' and I say, 'well, look around. It'll be there. It doesn't matter whether it's Fitzroy or Fitzroy Crossing. It'll be there and you have to engage with that community.' And, that takes people aback because that's the hard bit.

The easy bit is to go and look at rock art. The easy bit is to go and buy a book about Aboriginal people. The hard bit is knowing Aboriginal people. So, I say, 'go and meet Aboriginal people. Go and have a cup of tea.' And, the really sad thing is that sometimes Aboriginal people have come up to me after one of these things and said, 'that is the first white person I've ever had in my house', and that's a disgrace for the country to be like that. And that's what we've got to do. We've got to have a relationship with each other.

What advice would you have for non-indigenous authors who are keen to engage with those narratives which exist within our communities, our culture and our history?

Well, nothing is forbidden a writer except intellectual tact, and I've spoken with a number of non-Aboriginal writers in the country—probably three or four of the most famous—about some elements in their work. These are all writers I love, otherwise I wouldn't have read their books, but their attitude to Aboriginal people is sometimes very uninformed and they come back with arguments about why it was like that because they didn't know—'I don't know any Aboriginal people. I spoke to a Beryl and she gave me permission.' You can't go to just one Aboriginal person and say, 'Is it okay if I publish this book?' You've got to go to the community and the only way you can do that is to be a part of that community, be friends of that community.

Aboriginal people have been inviting people to do that for 220 years and that invitation has generally been refused. So, that's the way for

non-Aboriginal people to become involved. Not just buying a painting here or a book there, but genuinely taking part in a culture. I've seen it become a transformative experience, not because people suddenly see the light; become wise members of the human race—but because they know Aboriginal people, and those relationships and those cups of tea and those remembrances of birthdays and things like that are the stuff of human life and that becomes quite a profound change in people's attitude even though it doesn't sound like rocket science. It's that relationship which is important. The reason for the failure of Australian attempts to so-called 'close the gap,' are because there's been no friendship, there's been no relationship with Aboriginal Australians.

Within our own communities, in our own regions, we have these different narratives, examples of collaboration, respect, and genuine cultural shifts that we can speak to. Yet, the national conversation is constantly shifting and often divisive. Your work is grounded in place, the people and stories of that place, but do you also hope to influence the national narrative too? I think the national conversation is changing but it always starts locally; that conversation begins locally between two people, but it has to do that before it becomes national—before it becomes part of the fabric of our national life. But, a lot has changed. I work in recovery and maintenance of Aboriginal languages and, like virtually everyone in that system, we do it voluntarily because we're supporting our culture. That's why we do it. But, often at meetings people say they're worried that not enough has happened and all that sort of stuff. And, my answer to that is—particularly in Victoria, I've been on a board there for twenty-two years on language recovery—and, I'll say, 'Think back just ten years ago. How many schools were teaching Aboriginal languages in Victoria?' The answer is none. And, I'll say, 'Think back two years. How many languages were being taught in Aboriginal schools?' The answer is two. And, now in Victoria, that answer is five or six. In New South Wales, it's nine or ten. There's been change. People ask me why I'm so optimistic and I say, 'Well, I've got three grandkids and I'm not going to tell them that their world is ruined. I'm going to try and support my culture but, most of all, I'm going to try and look after country.'

What we see happening in our communities isn't all woe and doom and gloom, and what I love about what you've written in Dark Emu is that you have tried to change that narrative through story. It's about very complex stories: stories of outright discrimination, destruction and killing, but also stories of possibility. Do you, as a writer, feel that there is great power

in the works that you produce, in helping to change that story and those relationships?

We were always story-tellers, and we were always telling stories which had huge impact. I can only speak for Victoria and Tasmania and the south coast—that's where my heritage is from. On the south coast, culture is being practised today. It's never stopped being practised and in fact, there are some—some of the lore, even in the worst days of our lives, it was still practised and it is stronger now than it was twenty years ago, but it never stopped. And, people up north and over in the west might find it surprising that so much cultural activity has survived in the south, but that's the fact of the matter. And, it's a great lesson for the country that this continues because the stories that are told are stories about society and they're stories about the earth and they're going to be very, very useful.

Only very recently, I was taken back through a cultural site which has seven chapters in it—and I'd done it maybe three or four times before—and I went through that again recently with some elders and some young Aboriginal people, and I was absolutely stunned at what I'd missed the first few times. And, what I'd missed was the gentleness of our people. What I thought, intellectually, was the way to go, I've had re-shaped in an instant by some of the old people down here who have very, very gently just pulled me into line. Just told me a story which, when you reflect on it—what I was trying to do was intellectualise something which really has to come from your guts; from your heart; from your response to country. And, you can't over-intellectualise your response to country. You've got to listen to country. This is what the elders say down here, 'Watch the country. She is trying to talk to you.'

The cultural and spiritual story of that site, it's all about loving children. It's all about caring for women. It's all about learning—ongoing learning. It's all about health. And, I'm just stunned at having seen the cultural artefacts of other countries, to go through that site and realise there's no weapon in evidence. Not one. No talk of weapons. No talk of retribution. No talk of punishment. It's all about love. Everyone is asked to rub the belly of the pregnant woman on that site, and it's stunningly gentle. Young men who are having trouble in their relationships because they've been told that an Australian man acts like this; an Australian man does that; an Australian man treats his woman like this—to be taken to that site and told, 'Now, here you are. Rub the belly of that pregnant woman.' You can see the hesitation in some of those young men because gentleness has been absent from their life, and it's transformative. And, I see myself as an intelligent man, but every time I go there I learn something

different because it's not about book learning, it's not about the finesse of intelligence.

And, to see people like Ellen van Neerven, Ali Cobby Eckermann, Tony Birch and people like that telling these great yarns now, it's just a natural thing to happen to a culture of story-tellers; to be writing books. But, as one of the elders said to me a couple of nights ago, 'I could take you to a site where there's a story written in the rock but it's in pictures.' Well, that's what the Egyptian language was—just pictograms, and our language was like that, too. It's part of that old way. And, I go to a lot of literary meetings, sometimes with no other Aboriginal people there, but when I go to those where Aboriginal people are invited and not just as one person but as a group, then I marvel at the young people and what they're writing about and the forms they use. And this is our future.

Wayne Barker

I interviewed Wayne during a break in one of his many trips on country for the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre (KALACC), working with Traditional Owners carrying out law and culture and transmitting knowledge to younger generations of cultural leaders.

As a filmmaker, a composer and an author—someone who engages in the cultural space so fully—what role do you see for the place of belonging, community and culture in that material that you produce?

Well, firstly I think it's my understanding of the things that percolate inside Indigenous Australia, particularly in the Kimberley—understanding that there is a massive cultural diversity across the regions of the Kimberley. My travels over the years growing up on missions and travelling throughout the Kimberley region with my Mum and my uncles have allowed me to touch and be exposed to different languages, different people, different ideas, both from our mission lives right through to pastoralist-cattlemen, to pearlers, to people living in fringe camps. We learned from the ground up—how to galvanise community, how to formulate your alliances, to be able to stand your ground culturally. As a filmmaker, as a composer, as an observer and someone who tries to work in the various forms that I have I've always reached down into this vessel that swirls around us, of swirling colour and content and then I

draw from it. It gives me a certain understanding—what I call my moral fibre or my moral perspective which is my *liyarn* (the coming together of spirit, family and country). If I feel it's right, if I feel that the knowledge is correct for what I'm hearing, these instincts are the way I measure myself in my work. So when I make films, when I write stories and I perform, it's about this whole thing.

Can you talk about taking young people out to learn stories for country and the elements of country that come into play, which then add strength to that telling?

It is critical to go out on country. Cultural knowledge isn't a song with a lyric, a verse, it has enormous connections right across generations, right back into the creation of being, right to now, right into the future. When you go out on country it triggers all of this supplementary knowledge that puts things in context and is a chance to reinforce and empower; to bring spiritual and physical power to that individual. And that is not lost on the recipient because that is culture. Culture is not just a song, it is more. It is beyond that. It is beyond all things. It is you, the individual, the recipient—that boy that's receiving that knowledge when he goes through law, it is culture. He is literally bound and embedded in tradition. Tradition, heritage, custodianship, these are very unique words that don't require capture; what you see in front of you—this indescribable power, this indescribable majesty that occurs in front of you as this old fella is teaching this young fella something that has been passed on for generation to generation to generation. You see the tangible connection, that fabric between these two individuals in the context of the global landscape around them, knowing that their ancestors, these very same people were walking this country for thousands and thousands and thousands of years doing exactly the same thing.

The word 'authentic' is sometimes used by countrymen to describe this experience, but that same word is often used in a Western sense as a kind of wedge, something that can be very narrow in scope to decide what is or what is not 'authentic.' In your work you've talked about these issues of guardianship, ownership, continuance, and about culture as not being static. When you talk about liyarn and sensing what's right and what isn't, is this a different kind of authenticity?

This whole question about authenticity, who has the authority and can that authority be tested independently, is a Western concept because Western society is based on litigation and it's all about challenge, it's all about property right, it's about a definable set of rules; this is the rule, if you bend the rules, you're wrong, you're not authentic, not real. In the

cultural construct of Indigenous Australia those rules were embedded in our DNA, if you like, and those ignorant comments of the law that we talk about is a totally different concept.

Recently, we were out on country, and when we were standing beside the road and these two old gentlemen were debating about the cultural correctness or the knowledge, correctness about a particular site and the younger recipient, watching this in the middle, is making a judgement. These old men were sharing their knowledge, debating and discussing, and what it does is it opens up the possibilities of variations of that traditional knowledge. That person then goes back to the past and goes: 'well what do I know about this place? What have I been told other than from what I'm hearing right now?' And as that person then goes on to explore, in the role of custodianship, in the role of accepting that he has to be able to articulate this knowledge to his own self, whatever the version is that he determines is the truth based on his experience, based on his exploration and as he grows and experiences life those things become the lump sum of traditional knowledge. I would say that those two gentlemen that were arguing the difference embarked on the same journey when they were learning from their elders as this young fella did—and is about to do now. In the Western style you would have one guy against the other guy. Westerners don't credit people whose whole existence is based on mythology, it's in stories because it's not tangible in their concept. It's in the experience of learning on country and learning from country, over and over and over again.

Why does KALACC have these festivals every year? Why do we perform? Why do we dance? As you well know, the height of activity is during the lead up to it—you have these conversations with neighbours—'see that Brolga Dance, see what that story's about.' So that knowledge, that debate, that story, that correctness is debated and people might say, 'that old man sang that song backwards or he missed out that one, he missed out that one.' People hear that. So this collective listening—it's critical because it corrects, adds, evaluates what has been seen, performed in the context of that event on country.

So there you have it. You have culture energised, you have culture being viewed, renewed, tested, re-evaluated, presented. And in this mixture, this pot of cultural dynamics, personalities, individuals, politics, society, challenges; the whole gamut of community is living in and around this function. The only link to that central core of course is cultural strength of their ancestry and that is a key principle that I am always in awe of. I see that and it pains me when I come to towns, townships where it's not as active, it's not this vibrant. Not to say that there is a loss of culture,

but there is an obvious vacuum in terms of what that individual or those collective individuals are doing on their day-by-day basis to be custodians of their tradition.

What does the term 'cultural authority' constitute for you? What is its power? Is it respected by the mainstream? How can cultural authority be harnessed to engage our young people more clearly in terms of thinking about their own futures?

Culture by itself is a power. Knowledge is power, irrespective of which culture you come from. The more you know, the more influence you have. Young people in our communities are in awe of the capacity of these elder individuals who stand on their behalf to articulate and represent who they are, where they've come from in defiance to all others. Cultural authority for me emanates from that. That power comes from knowledge and you see it. There are younger men and women across the Kimberley that are younger than forty, that in the past wouldn't be seen as being elders. But today, their cultural knowledge and their cultural prowess speaks for itself. The young people look up to these people.

You can name on two hands the senior bosses of the Kimberley and they have respect and the respect is granted to them justifiably. But, then there are younger men and women who walk in their shadow if you like, and those younger, again, below them, look up to them because they're the ones that are out there and defining and carving their future for them on their behalf. So, culture in a sense is not only a badge, so to speak, that is clearly identifiable as dance and ceremony, to put paint on and stand in front of media cameras and say all sorts of things. Cultural power translates to not only engaging with their communities, their family members and their neighbours, but all of those that are coming to the region, blacks—other black fellas, white fellas, government, all of these people. And you see it. You see this interplay between Indigenous people and young people engaging with non-Indigenous people. And our young people hold these black fellas in awe, and rightly so. But, there's a downside of it of course, and that is that a lot of the young Aboriginal people themselves have fallen—they're being seduced by the other attractions of modern society; drugs, alcohol. And what's happening in our community is that despair has crept in and dysfunction has crept in and disempowerment. Not only from our own making but also from society as we exist in Western society and the demands that are required of us.

This is the social trauma that June Oscar has so clearly articulates with respect to Kimberley, and Melissa Lucashenko writes about with respect to impacts on the Murri community. Government responses to this trauma

have invariably been clinical and programmatic, yet KALACC's whole reason for being is to support law and culture to transform that situation. I can see solutions in cultural based programs to deal with these fallout issues because fundamentally it is geared towards building identity and that identity has to be defined by us. What makes you different to all others? Not what makes you Australian. Not what makes you Kimberley. But, what makes you *Djaberadjabera*, what makes you *Yawuru*, what makes you *Nyulnyu*? What makes you special? What builds your fibre? What builds you as an individual? There are wonderful things about the big wide world, but the tragedy of assimilation and the tragedy about being a member of the global village is that you lose that anchor that has come up from the very ground, that defines who you are, your whole body, goes into your heart, into your mind, into your *liyarn* and connects you. Without that connection, you become floating and you see it in cultures and people, particularly in Australia, where people have lost that link, lost that anchor and they have to reinvent themselves. To survive the trauma; they have to re-anchor themselves. In the Kimberley we've got thirty-three language groups. Our anchors are through cultural based programs like what KALACC is trying to do. These are critical, absolutely critical to allow Aboriginal people to survive the future. Because without it we're adrift.

It's within all of those different drivers and pressures that traditional owners are having to think about what it means to be an Aboriginal person in the 21st century on country, in a town or close to, but off country. Could you tell me about the work that you're doing for KALACC and what that work seeks to achieve for future generations?

Culture camps as we call them, are based on the premise that if we can combine an opportunity for a very select focused group of people—elders and participants, teachers and learners—to go out on country and identify their core cultural asset and use it as a foundation for developing young leaders. One example is the *Bunuba* group, the *Yirrimbiri Junba*, the story, out on country. KALACC provides the opportunity through the resources that we have to promote and articulate this cultural knowledge transfer between one individual to another. The idea is to contribute to the process of handing knowledge back from one senior elder to the new up-and-coming elders.

The *Bunuba Milany muway* focused on the *Yirrimbiri Junba* because it was the core cultural asset that they had the most knowledge about. So you've got the *Yirrimbiri Junba*, but then you've got all of the other elements that contribute to the story and song. There's stories about the

floods, the way in which people occupied country in the past and in the timing of that, both in the song and the dance and the artefacts and the site locations. There's people learning on country to be able to have a broad understanding and a realisation of global cultural context. So taking a cultural icon, the *Yirrimbiri Junba*, taking it out on country with participants allowed us to be able to explore all aspects of community and culture. The process has triggered, not only a learning of the *Junba*, but also a lifting of the whole group in terms of its importance—its self-importance but also its integrity. People feel the power of knowledge—empowered—and they talked about building self-esteem of those young people around them. Because they took on this challenge, and because of the knowledge that they have acquired, they are now taking on statesman type roles, and that's the power of cultural authority given to them through this process.

It's important because it goes right back to the anchor we discussed. It's about being representative of the cultural diversity of the Kimberley and in that way we build respect. In that way we've built recognition. In that way we build pride. In that way we build a cultural resilience that speaks volumes to young Indigenous people right across this nation. I've always said, 'culture is never static, it lives and breathes in the descendants of the original inhabitants and only when the last song is sung, the last dance performed, the last word spoken and when no-one raises their hand to identify themselves as Indigenous—and only then—will we surely be forgotten.'

Melissa Lucashenko is an award-winning novelist who currently lives in Brisbane, but who has traveled widely and also lived in her Ygambeh/Bundjalung home country. Her novel *Mullumbimby* was awarded the 2013 Deloitte Queensland Literary Award for Fiction, won the 2014 Victorian Premier's Prize for Indigenous Writing, and was longlisted for both the Stella and Miles Franklin awards, and the Dublin IMPAC Literary Prize (2015). Her first book *Steam Pigs* won the 1998 Dobbie Award for Women's Fiction and was shortlisted for the 1999 New South Wales Premier's fiction award and the Commonwealth Writer's Prize, First Published Book. *Killing Darcy* won the Children's Book Council Award and the Royal Blind Society's Talking Book Award for young readers.

Bruce Pascoe is from the Bunurong clan of the Kulin nation. He has worked as a teacher, farmer, a fisherman and an Aboriginal language researcher, edited *Australian Short Stories* for sixteen years and has worked in Indigenous language retrieval for decades. Bruce's books include the short story collections *Night Animals* (1986) and *Nightjar* (2000); the novels *Fox* (1988), *Ruby Eyed Coucal* (1996), *Ribcage* (1999), *Shark* (1999), *Earth* (2001), and *Ocean* (2002); historical works *Cape Otway: Coast of secrets* (1997), *Convincing Ground* (2007), and *Dark Emu* (2015); and the

childrens' books *Foxies in a Firehose* (2006) and *Dog a Fox* (2013). His works have won numerous awards including the Prime Minister's Literary Award for Fiction. *Dark Emu* (Magabala Books) was awarded the NSW Premier's Award Prize for Book of the Year, as well as being a joint winner of the inaugural Indigenous Prize with Ellen van Neerven.

Wayne Barker is a Yawuru/Djabirjabirr man. Wayne has been an activist since the 1970s Aboriginal Tent Embassy days. He trained in ethnomusicology and ethnographic film at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies in Canberra in the early 1980s, and as a radio broadcaster with the Australian Broadcasting Commission. He is a recording artist and singer songwriter as well as a national and international performance artist, and a founding member of Broome's iconic Gunada Band. Wayne has completed numerous film works include *Cass—No Saucepan Diver* (1983), *Giving it a Go* (1983), *Balgo Art* (1991), *Milli Milli* (1992), *Strike Your Heart* (1997), *Ardiyaloon* (1998) and *Spirit of Anchor* (2002), a number of which received international awards. Wayne currently works for the Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre, traversing the Kimberley supporting Traditional Owners and cultural bosses to uphold foundations of law and culture as a means of creating sustainable futures for young Aboriginal people based on country.

Author's Note

These interviews were all recorded in May 2016. They were edited from hour-long conversations and approval was obtained by the authors before publication to ensure accuracy of the material and intent of their authorial voice.

The Conservation of the Stars

Michalia Arathimos

Michalia Arathimos is a writer currently residing in Melbourne. She has published work in publications including *Lost in Translation: New Zealand Short Stories, Sport, JAAM and Turbine*. Her first novel, *Aukati/Boundary Line*, will be released by Mākaro Press in 2016.

The thing rose from the structure. At first he could not make out anything but a blank form, the outline of its head and eyes against the sky. It was reptilian, simian, oddly royal. His boots were melted into the sand, his feet sweating but forgotten, his body immobilised. The head turned and he got the child behind him. He would be proud of this, later. It wasn't something he would speak of; he wasn't that kind of person. But you never knew how you would react in a crisis. You never knew what your body would do, whether it would freeze or make itself useful, whether it would be courageous or try to run.

He didn't know it then but he would return to this moment again and again.

In dreams; the hot sun, Illuwantji's quick glance at him as they saw it, direct, frank, amazed, and for once, unreserved. It was a lizard, a dragon, a dinosaur. It moved and shifted and perceived them, pinning them with eyes he could now see were a pale, alien green. It had a razor sharp hook for a beak. As it moved, he clutched the boy firmly behind him with both hands. They were directly underneath it.

It studied them, casually. It must have heard them coming but had made no move to leave. Its wings began to unfurl, jet black against the light and massive, its wingspan metres wide. He wasn't sure if he gasped or not. He thought afterwards that Illuwantji would have been silent, and the boy too. Its opening wings shifted the world around it so that his concept of space and size changed. Its shape burned into his retina, the colours of the land going lurid and hyper-real.

It was as if the air contracted. Red, ochre, orange, bright translucent blue, the colours too vivid and saturated, all somehow pulled into this too symmetrical shape.

It rose in the nest and stood, wings fully extended, adjusting itself slightly in the breeze, looking down at them coolly, as if in consideration.

He stepped back. As though he had tripped a switch the thing began moving, gracefully, but with an unquestionable power, towards them.

The desert was as different from Rua's home as Mars was different from the Earth. There was the dryness, the broadness of the large expanse, its inconceivable distance from the land's edge.

'Welcome to paradise.'

The man who picked him up at the airport was weathered and creased. He wore a hat with an actual flynet; something Rua assumed was decorative until they walked out of the air-conditioned airport and into the fly-ridden heat. The man was with a teenage boy who he introduced as Kumana. Rua tried to shake his hand but the boy did not look at him or speak.

'I'm Simon,' the man said as he loaded Rua's bags into the four-wheel drive. 'Don't mind him, he's just being respectful. You tired?'

Rua had travelled for twenty hours, on three different flights, to get here from New Zealand.

'Nah,' he said. 'I'm alright.' He was high on adrenaline and coffee and the land itself. So, he thought, the colours weren't Photo-shopped after all. The heat was heavy and his clothes stuck to his body. He moved it as if through a tangible smoke. Looking at Simon's desert boots and khaki shorts, his loose white shirt, he felt inappropriately dressed, his city shoes awkward on the gravel.

'Can you drive a troopy?'

Rua realised the man was talking about their vehicle. He shook his head.

Simon sighed despairingly, but not without humour. 'I can see we have our work cut out for us.'

Rua grinned. 'You mean you fellas actually work out here? Thought I'd signed up for a year-long holiday.'

He got a smile, rather than a laugh, but it was something.

They stopped for water and supplies. Rua tried to memorise everything for when he would do the airport run in the future. Check the water, air pressure, tyres. Twenty litres of water for each person. GPS and Sat phone check, in case the car broke down. Spare food and provisions. Tools. Check the first aid kit. While Simon loaded the car, Kumana looked at him and then cast his eyes quickly down again.

'Simon's a good driver,' he said, as if answering a question Rua had asked. His voice was so soft Rua had to lean back to hear him. 'He'll get us there quickways. No worries.'

The journey took five hours down an unsealed track. Simon drove off the sides of the track to avoid the ruts. A dingo flashed in front of them. The land passed, and passed, without a house or a shop or a person or a building, as far as they could see. The scenery was uniform; desert grass, the red track ahead, the low-lying brush. The light began to fail. Simon drove faster, the dust buffeting the windows and the speedometer needle creeping up. He seemed to be looking for something.

Rua heard a sound from the back seat, a brief aspiration. Kumana's eyes were fixed on a spot on the horizon, the whites glowing. He stared at the point, his head following it as if magnetised.

'That's it,' Simon said, glancing at Kumana and then back at the track. 'The top of the radio tower.'

Rua squinted. Far away was a tiny point of light, the only one visible in the widening dark, like a lighthouse.

'That's Kumana's homelands, up ahead,' Simon went on. 'Bet you're glad to see those after a week in Melbourne, aren't ya, son?'

Kumana made no comment.

'Kumana's been spinning tunes at a city festival. I went with him.' He made a sound in the back of his throat like he was going to spit. 'All that traffic! Wouldn't live in a place like that if you paid me a million a year. The tower's attached to the media centre,' Simon said. 'Welcome home.'

Rua couldn't decide if the man meant to sound sarcastic or not.

The thing rose. It was reptilian, simian, oddly royal. He got the child behind him. It was a lizard, a dragon, a dinosaur. Its shape burned, the colours of the land going lurid and hyper-real beyond it.

Nanarkjitu was a town of about a hundred people. He had expected it to be built on ancestral lands, like the settlement around his own marae, but the people were settled in prefabricated houses in an old mining village. When he asked about the mines the people looked away. When he tried to visit his neighbours' houses the people seemed embarrassed for him. When he spoke to the older women, though they were friendly, like his aunties. They would hassle and joke. But the younger women passed him as though he didn't exist.

'Missionaries, misfits, and miscreants,' the office lady told him on his first morning. 'Those are the three kinds of people you'll find out here. Are you Christian?'

'Not particularly.'

'Then you must be a misfit,' she said. 'Or a miscreant. I'll let you know when I figure out which one you are.' She slid a ragged folder across the table. 'Your induction info. Happy reading.'

Inside was an anthropological style report on this part of the Western Desert. It was dated 1975.

Illuwantji was the first person to greet him when he arrived at the donga beside the centre. Inside were couple of rough rooms attached to a shipping container kitchen, the whole made of corrugated iron and cheap boards. There were bars on all the windows and wire mesh, so rocks wouldn't smash the plexiglass. Illuwantji came over, a toddler bundled under her arm. She had long, curly hair, pink at the ends where it was dyed, and a boyish frame. Her eyes were surprisingly light in her smooth-skinned face. The toddler's arm shot out to stroke his arm, the tribal tattoo he had there.

He got the child behind him. He would be proud of this, later, but he would not speak of it.

'We're in the red house,' Illuwantji said. 'You on your own in there?' she jerked her head at his donga.

'Just me,' he said. 'We might get another radio producer mid year.'

Rua had worked his way through student radio and up, to Maori Radio. His old people had told him that he was to be an orator. But he liked to be the one holding the microphone, he'd told Simon in the Skype interview.

Illuwantji nodded.

'You might want to get yourself a dog'

He told her he'd think about it.

Illuwantji worked at the office, often bringing a niece or nephew with her. She wore loose clothing, hoodies and jeans, but she would paint her nails. She wore plain t-shirts, but plaited her hair intricately. She was a lighter colour than the locals. The office lady said she was a half-caste, that her dad was a white, and that she had grown up in the city.

"Half-caste" would be an insult in my country.'

'You're not in your country now,' said the office lady. She winked, and offered him a biscuit.

One night the kids threw rocks at his house. He lay listening to the scattered hail, wondering whether to venture outside. Then he heard Illuwantji's voice cutting the air, hurling words he didn't understand. The rocks ceased flying.

The next day he thanked her.

'It's not their fault,' she said. 'They got nothing else to do.'

'Want to go for a walk?' he asked.

Most of the time, in Nanarkjitu, nothing happened. But this was just a lie the heat told, the shimmering, blinding heat.

Always he goes back to it. It was Simian, not something he would speak of. You never knew what your body would do. The hot killing sun, Illuwantji's quick glance at him as they saw it. He clutched the boy firmly behind him with both hands. The colours of the land went lurid and hyper-real.

'I don't know what I'm doing wrong,' he told Simon, after half a year.

'You're too eager,' Simon said. 'Just slow down. Give it a while longer. When they've got used to you, they'll start sharing their stories. You're just another whitey to them.'

'But I'm not white.'

Simon looked at him sharply. 'You're not local. Anyone who's not local is white. Wouldn't make a difference if you were bloody Nelson Mandela.'

'I came here to give the people a voice.'

'Honourable of you,' Simon said. He spoke quietly, almost kindly.

Rua left without answering.

The office lady shifted her glasses on her nose as he passed. She had been listening.

'Got you figured out, finally!' she said. 'You're the missionary type, after all. Here to save them. Even if you're not Christian, even if you're not white.'

Simon sent him to Yulara for supplies. He told him he had to bring someone, for safety, and that the only other person in town allowed to drive the troopy was Illuwantji.

'Don't say I never did anything for ya,' Simon said, as Rua prepared the gear. He waggled his eyebrows up and down. 'Have a drink or two for me.'

Rua couldn't help smiling.

Six hours later they were on a hill overlooking the rock. The sun had gone down, and Rua was drinking a beer. There were few tourists, and they were hidden in a tussock. Illuwantji had said she didn't drink, not anymore.

'I come from a place on the coast,' he said. 'Tangimoana. It's a small place. You can catch crayfish there with your bare hands, collect paua. They taught me everything, about the tides, how to fish, how to dive. Tangimoana means "the sea is crying." Though it was late the heat glued the backs of his knees to his jeans and he batted flies away from his face. Illuwantji did not seem bothered by them. The dry tussock stretched before them, and the stars swung above. 'You can always hear the sea, from anywhere in Tangimoana,' he said. 'You can never not hear it.'

'Some people in Nanarkjitu haven't seen the sea,' Illuwantji said. 'Some people will never see it.'

'Why'd you come back from the city?'

She paused for a long time.

'Didn't know that part of myself,' she said. 'By the time I came back, it was almost too late.'

He looked at her in surprise. 'For what?'

'My mother spoke it to me. Came back because if I have some kids, I gotta bring them up right. They gotta know where they're from, from the start.' She looked up at the sky. There they were, Minyma Kutjara, the Seven Sisters, wheeling in their quest across the sky. Even Rua recognised them now.

'You'd be a good mum.'

She gave him a special look, and smiled. She didn't often smile.

They went to bed early, in their separate rooms.

The day she suggested they go bush he agreed straight away. They drove straight out of town for a couple of hours—he, Illuwantji, and a little boy of four or five. The boy was Illuwantji's 'little son', which he understood in this case meant her nephew. She was looking after him for the day. The boy went on ahead of them, but Illuwantji told him to walk in her footsteps. It was snake time, and the sun could kill you if you got lost. They walked carefully, avoiding the long grass in favour of the sand. Rua strolled, humming, his shoulders held back. Illuwantji followed behind him, smoking her roll-your-owns.

'Better wear your sunhat, whitey,' she said, though they were almost the same colour.

'What is it, do you think?' he pointed ahead at the dark mass visible on the rise. She shrugged. It was black against the sky.

'Simon said you're leaving when your contract is up,' she said. The silence stretched out between them.

'Isn't that what all the whiteys do?' he said. 'Leave after a year?'

'Dunno.' He heard her sigh out the smoke, a long, calm exhale. 'Thought maybe you were different.'

Rua had thought he was, too.

The structure in the tree was at least two metres across, wide and densely woven. It was a blot, a dark puzzle in the landscape. Illuwantji said she had never seen anything like it before. The weaving was sophisticated, complex. Up close he grew confused, and when Illuwantji began to approach it a slick nervousness started up in his stomach.

'Are you sure it's OK?'

'What do you think's going to happen? You scared of the spirits?' She liked to tease him, to hold her knowledge over him. He usually didn't mind.

'It might not be a good idea, with the boy.'

'What's going to hurt him, in his own lands?' She turned away, towards the thing that blocked part of the sun. And it rose.

His feet were melted into the sand. The small boy's shoulders were clasped in his hands, his own breathing loud in the silence. Its wings opening shifted the world. Its shape burned into his retina, the colours of the land lurid and hyper-real. The air contracted. Red, ochre, orange, bright translucent blue.

It rose in the nest, until it stood, wings fully extended, in consideration.

He stepped back. The thing began moving gracefully towards them. Then it leapt into the air, a heaving visual scream of feather and bone, and dived.

Rua hit the sand, the boy beneath him. Illuwantji ducked away. Then she was laughing wildly, as it soared up, wheeling once, twice, close above them, and then away.

'This is its land, see?' she said. 'It's not scared of anything!'

Rua was shaking. He got up, dusted off his shorts.

'It could have killed him.'

The boy ignored him, looking up at Illuwantji. Rua understood he wasn't the expert here.

'Walawuru. That's its name. A star eagle!' Her voice was awed. 'A guardian!' Illuwantji picked up the boy and spun him. She turned to Rua. 'It's true, it can pick up goats, hunts kangaroo. Would only take a kid though if the child was far from its people, and weak.' She looked at him closely. 'You're freaking out. Here.' It was the water bottle.

She took them higher, built a fire, boiled tea. The little boy went off to play in the sand, calm and unconcerned. In the distance they could see the bird ascending over its domain. He was shaking, but he hoped she wouldn't notice. If there would ever be a time, it would be now. She looked at him and her eyes shone out so brightly he could hardly look. He was so close to her. He could reach out and touch her arm. She would look at him, really see him. He moved, just slightly, one hand reaching for hers, but at that moment she shaded her eyes, following the bird's flight.

'We'll have to come back and film it,' Rua said. 'Tape your stories about it. What do your people think it means?'

Illuwantji turned to him. Her eyes went cold.

'Always wanting to put it all down,' she said. 'Like if it's not recorded it's not real. That's a sacred eagle,' she said. 'Have to ask the old people if it's

OK to film it. Might not even be alright to tell people where it is.' She shook her head. 'When you going to learn you're only a ghost here?' she asked. 'You got your stories, we got ours. You can fish for our stories all you like. But they ain't got nothing to do with yours. Not in the end.'

When they came down off the hill it was getting dark. They passed the eagle rustling, back in its nest, and he felt his heart beat harder. It took all his willpower not to think of the great, blank space its wings had made in the sky, divinely balanced, oddly disturbing against the wide land.

He swore to himself he would come back here, without her. He would get permission from someone. He knew the bird was important. He knew there were stories about it that were meaningful to the people, stories that were being lost. He would film it, photograph it, record its cries, capture the fine arc of its flight.

Unburdening the World: Breaking the Cycle of the Perpetual Single Story

Jacqueline Wright

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Many years ago, I wrote a novel. *Red Dirt Talking* was based on my experiences working as a teacher linguist on a bi-lingual Aboriginal language program in the remote north-west of Western Australia. The novel afforded me the freedom to explore the problematic relations of cultural translation/interpretation that had been at the heart of my linguistic work.

The linguist sitting on my author's shoulder was always piping up asking me about issues relating to privacy, ownership, identity, appropriation and representation. But around about the second draft of the novel, two significant things happened. The first was listening to Barry Lopez talking about his book, *Arctic Dreams*, and the second was the Broome launch of the controversial book, *Broometime*. Lopez said something that resonated, it was a question he claimed he constantly asked during the writing process—why does he need to burden a world that is already burdened with too much of the same thing? Not long after, I attended the *Broometime* launch at the Kimberley Bookshop and watched as Broome residents spoke passionately and angrily about how they were represented. Someone even threw the book at one of the authors, Anne Coombes. It was at once startling and thrilling. When the authors moved to the northwest town of Broome in the late 90s to begin documenting the town's contemporary history, they envisaged a book that would tell the story of Broome through the people they encountered during their nine-month stay. When the book was finally published, the authors were largely accused of transgressing peoples' trust by publishing private conversations and off-the-cuff comments out of context. They insisted that they had conducted themselves appropriately, denied they had selectively presented particular constructions that were offensive, and defended the book saying it successfully captured the subtleties and contradictions of Indigenous people. Some months after the launch of

Broometime, the book was recalled due to a complaint from the Western Australian Director of Public Prosecutions saying it might have breached the Juries and Evidence Act by naming a child and a juror involved in a sexual-abuse case. Eventually, the book was amended, reprinted and re-released as a revised edition with the relevant names omitted but, on the whole, unaltered.

As I sat down to write, a different sense of unease proliferated. I'd always found it disconcerting, playing around with people's language, memories, lives and experiences, using fiction as my stirring spoon. What was different about this unease? It was based on what this novel was going to contribute. How could I share my own unique personal experiences and relationships born of working with community and living in the Kimberley creatively, and more importantly, meaningfully? Was I simply adding to the rotting landfill of stories already out there when white people write about black Australia? Stories all pretty much saying the same thing.

These questions initiated an extraordinary journey for me as a writer. It was a journey that took me down highways of ethics, politics and storytelling and straight into a spaghetti junction that tangled with the larger domain of cultures. It took me back to a place I was trying to avoid when I embarked on my novel—academia. I embarked on a Doctorate in Creative Arts and it consisted of two parts; a novel and what I often referred to as 'the dark side', an exegesis. It's not always true that behind every good novel is an exegesis, but in my case it was. The exegesis revealed to me how the standpoint of the speaker/author/narrator impacts on those being spoken for and spoken about. It helped me to properly examine the documentation of Indigenous knowledges and subjectivities by non-Indigenous researchers and writers with a view to providing ethical insight into the current climate of writer accountability. It shone a light on the nature of the problematic engagement between the Australian Indigenous community and non-Indigenous writers and researchers involved in the representation of Indigeneity. The exegesis didn't aim for big resolutions, but rather a glimmer of insight into age-old dilemmas. Most importantly, it gave me the chance to start a dialogue with Indigenous writers by commissioning two Indigenous readers to read and reflect on my novel.

This is a story about how Indigenous writing, research methodologies, protest and dialogue didn't censor my writing but, rather, shaped and enriched it. And if we are to understand how these dominant narratives inform our present, we need to understand their foundations.

Knowing what's gone on before

The representation of Indigenous Australian people in the literature by non-Indigenous writers has a history characterised by patronising, derogatory, negative and inaccurate depictions. Initially, however, in the struggling literary community of colonial Australia, Indigenous Australians were rarely included in any literature. The wave of nationalism preceding Federation generated a polemic corroborating this tendency. Accounts did trickle in during this period mainly in the form of diaries, letters, journals and works of an autobiographical nature, documenting the nature of contact Indigenous people had with pearlers, whalers, sealers, pastoralists, property owners and missionaries.

Nationalism, Social Darwinism and Modernism shaped the representation of Indigenous people in literature emerging from Federation. Yet, these early works spoke a great deal more about the settler society than they did of Indigenous people depicting them as objects of curiosity or, alternatively, reconstructing complex Indigenous cultures within the simplistic projection of the 'noble savage'. During this period, an emphasis was placed on settlers battling courageously against a backdrop of natural hazards, 'the Aboriginal' being one of these hazards. Look no further than Ion Indriess' *Outlaws of the Leopolds* focusing on European ambitions in an alien landscape, detailing the exploits of an Aboriginal man defying legitimate laws of settler society. Then there came the fiction of ridicule mocking Indigenous Australians. Indigenous characters were also used tokenistically and depicted as a homogenous group of 'blacks' or 'natives'. They were rarely portrayed as distinct characters, and if they were, non-Indigenous writers placed them in subordinate positions. The stockman, for example, was little more than a domestic servant rather than the mainstay of the cattle industry.

There were attempts to understand the complexities of Indigenous Australian life. These were initially made by female authors who challenged the conventional modes of Australian writing by emphasising the individual as a social being and the interior life of a character. Aeneas Gunn and Mary Durack depict Aboriginal people with what they genuinely believed to be compassion and understanding. Their pastoralist backgrounds enabled prolonged contact with Aboriginal people transforming the usual shallow portraits of Indigenous people to identifiable entities with positive human traits. Today, however, their representations are mostly perceived as reflecting attitudes of benign paternalism and their Aboriginal characters can be read as a cross between a cheeky child and a faithful pet.

In his critical study of oral and written Indigenous Australian literature, *The Indigenous Literature of Australia: Milli Milli Wangka*, Mudrooroo, also known as Colin Johnson, classified the narratives of Gunn, Durack and Katharine Susannah Prichard as belonging to a romantic genre of writing in which history is trivialised into a bygone era of nostalgic recollections. Mudrooroo highlighted that a history of invasion and oppression is essential to our understanding of these texts. Not only do we need to situate these texts within historical contexts, but we also need to deal with the ideas and beliefs that shape our thoughts about other cultures in the same way. The recognition of the role of history in the construction of literary texts is a necessary adjunct to the renegotiation of ideas about Indigenous people.

The late '50s through to the '70s represented a period in Australian literature where black and white relations were written about at length. Ideals of integration, the rise of feminism and protests against racial discrimination influenced Australian literature at the time. As Healy stated, 'The Aborigine [sic] as theme moved from the status of soliloquy to that of public debate.' (291) Once largely ignored, Indigenous people were firmly placed in a literature of social protest and this was reflected in literature under the guise of Indigenous-as-dilemma/problem arising from non-Indigenous authors' concern for the plight of the underprivileged minority and/or the need to validate their own particular social or political cause. In *The Chant of Jimmie Blacksmith*, for example, Keneally satirised the conventional, evangelising rhetoric to illustrate cross-cultural misunderstandings between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Keneally sought to resolve issues of difference by translating them into the realm of universal values making use of the Aboriginal as a ready-made device to validate his own political cause—class politics. Similarly, Lynn Andrew's *The Crystal Woman* attempted to break through the boundaries of 'us' and 'them' by portraying all women as sisters. These works formed part of a progression of non-Indigenous culture and beliefs of that time, yet also raised even more questions. Are all women sisters? Does Aboriginal resistance so easily translate into European hierarchies of class and race?

In the '70s, Indigenous Australian writing began deconstructing the subjective colonial viewpoint confronting non-Indigenous writers with issues concerning black/white social and political relations. Thea Astley's *A Kindness Cup* addressed a major skeleton in the Colonial closet—acts of genocide and white men's sexual abuse of Indigenous women.

While facing-up to the shames of the past, non-Indigenous writers began to reflect on Indigenous issues of the day often documenting

the role colonisers played in the oppression of Indigenous Australians and the hypocrisy involved in concealing past wrongs. Having survived nation-wide, state-based racist laws and systems of overt state controls, variously identified by phases of invasion, segregation, assimilation and integration, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians began to break through the strangle hold of being spoken to, or for, by speaking out. These narratives, well known within Indigenous community experience, began changing the frame of what it meant to be Aboriginal and, for those willing to listen, what it meant to be Australian.

The role of early Indigenous Literature

The emergence and popularity of Identity politics during the 80s was taken up by Indigenous Australian writers and remains a crucial political strategy for Indigenous writers today. Identity politics provided Indigenous writers with a valuable form of resistance. The wave of independent Indigenous publishing houses, which began in the 70s and took root in the 80s, meant that, for the first time in Australian literary history, non-Indigenous writers had to compete with Indigenous writers for footholds in a publishing industry. After a long period of restraint, Indigenous writers were finally able to speak for themselves. While some authors used fiction as a vehicle to voice critical judgments of past attitudes and situations, others wrote autobiographies which starkly revealed atrocities committed against Indigenous Australian people.

Writings from Indigenous perspectives, which until recently were excluded from the scholarly debate, opened up a discursive space in fields usually constituted by non-Indigenous perspectives. The anthology, *Blacklines: Contemporary Critical Writing by Indigenous Australians* provided a critical space for Indigenous Australians to be active agents in the conceptualisation and analysis of Indigenous history and culture rather than merely supporting 'the enthusiastic interventions of non-Indigenous critique' (7). Many of the critiques highlight the contentious nature of representation. In his article 'Better', Martin Nakata criticised Western experts who 'discovered' and 'conveyed' the truth of Indigenous culture, and applauded efforts which constantly questioned and challenged western notions of Indigeneity. It is this contentiousness which often prompted non-Indigenous authors to distance themselves from 'the Indigenous' by simply acknowledging Indigenous people in their work, presenting diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as a backdrop, or leaving Indigenous people out of their work completely.

The 90s heralded extraordinary and unique partnerships between Indigenous and non-Indigenous people. Collaborative partnerships

between Indigenous and non-indigenous people inverted past methodologies whereby Indigenous people were used as invisible informants communicating history and experience of their world through the non-Indigenous writer's hand. Rather than being objectified and treated as passive sources of information, Indigenous people became active participants in the exchange of ideas. Both Paddy Roe and Stephen Muecke's *Gularabulu: Stories from the West Kimberley* and Howard Pederson and Banjo Woorunmurra's *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance* were heralded as new histories (Konishi & Nugent) not only because they presented an Indigenous side to past events but also because they were accounts which recognised the problematic nature of integrating 'stories' of Indigenous spiritual significance into standard, recognised western genres. In his introduction, Muecke stated that, 'The simple act of writing down stories (as well as phrasing them in 'good' English) inevitably involves departures from Aboriginal narrative style' (vi).

These ventures initiated robust re-definitions of the author's role: extending it from the traditional solitary figure to a collective authorship when working with an Indigenous community. Collaborative fiction emphasised connection rather than separation and it was this aspect that initiated a critical response from some members of the Indigenous community. This 'feel-good' literature, was (and still is) argued by some (Lukashenko), as extolling messages of tolerance and understanding, hampering Indigenous efforts to strike out alone and make Indigenous connections between past and present societies.

The last two decades has seen an increase in critical writings by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous scholars prompting critiques about representation of Indigeneity. In their deconstruction of post colonialism, *Darkside of the Dream: Australian Literature and the Postcolonial Mind*, Bob Hodge and Vijay Mishra advocated a reading strategy which moves away from historical, colonial and nationalistic reading practises and is orientated to criticism and change. In her publication *Well, I Heard it on the Radio and Saw it on the Television...*, Aboriginal activist and academic Marcia Langton scrutinised dominant attempts to understand 'the other' through notions of Aboriginality as a colonial construct. This construct, Langton maintained, supports the notion of Indigenous people as a homogenous group rather than a nation comprised of many heritages. Langton's work speaks to an intersubjective approach whereby Indigenous and non-Indigenous subjectivity is in dialogue and ideally overrides objective simplification through interaction and testing of assumptions and boundaries. In her Herbert Blaiklock Memorial Lecture

(2006), Anita Heiss does just that by asking: If non-Aboriginal people are able to have one identity which includes many heritages, why can't Aboriginal people? This concept of 'one Aboriginal identity with many heritages' avoids collapsing local and national Indigenous communities.

Beyond the work of publishing of Indigenous works of fiction, non-fiction and collaborative works, Indigenous writers, academics and cultural theorists challenged the assumed dominant position and unquestioned 'whiteness' of non-Aboriginal Australians. Aileen Moreton-Robinson states that non-Indigenous authors' intentions are often attached to the dominant colonial discourse, which 'is both the measure and marker of normality in Australian society' (66), yet remains invisible for the settler/invader community who do not associate it with dominance and privilege.

Understanding complex multiple narratives of identity, race, gender, class and colonialism through the lived experience sets a new agenda for Indigenous relations. Indigenous authors have not only challenged the dominant narrative, but provided the means by which non-Indigenous narratives existing in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Countries can be transformed in meaningful, considered and creative ways.

Where it gets mixed up and why it's important to take this on-board

The overwriting of colonial and post-colonial narratives of Indigenous Australia through memoir, reportage, ethnography, testimony, fiction, historical literature and critique reveals the entangled nature of the Australian national literary landscape. Yet this complex relationship is not always recognised. The split between the coloniser and the colonised, the invader and the invaded is not always straight forward. The altercations that occur with the publication of ambiguous texts are often presented in the public debate as a homogenous Indigenous collective pitted against a homogenous non-Indigenous collective. This 'us versus them' scenario does little to help understand the diversity and power relations both within and between Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultures. It does not, for example, show us how modernity and traditionalism are entangled through the images of the bushman or the literacising of Indigenous languages. It also does not portray identity as dynamic.

Michael Dodson in his Wentworth lecture (1994) urged Indigenous people to directly address what is being said about them through the strategy of speaking-back. Dodson pointed out that speaking-back is a highly political act. These acts '...are assertions of our right to be different and to practice our difference. They refuse the reduction of Aboriginality to an object, they resist translation into language and categories of

the dominant culture.' (Dodson 10) In a discussion paper, Anita Heiss acknowledged there is no law against writing about Indigenous issues, but informed non-Indigenous writers to expect to be asked to justify themselves by those they write about, just as Indigenous authors are held accountable by Aboriginal communities.

Speaking-back is often understood by those who do not understand these nuances of respect, position and standpoint, as a repressive control over meaning rather than the right of all constituents living in a democracy. Lionel Shriver stated the belief that the freedom of fiction writers is fast eroding in this new 'era of super-sensitivity.' (8) She lamented how, in her view, the 'nuisance' (8) of political correctness essentially promotes self-censorship. In a letter to the editor in the national newspaper, Perpetua Durack Clancy, the daughter of artist Elizabeth Durack, stated that Indigenous people were setting an impossibly high bar for those wishing to explore or discuss Indigenous issues. Elizabeth Durack, you may remember, assumed the pseudonym, Eddie Burrup, an Aboriginal artist, who'd been contributing to Indigenous exhibitions for a number of years and was twice selected for Indigenous awards. *Broometime* authors, Coombs and Varga, claimed after the Broome residents' protest against their book, the 'sacred ground,' they'd 'stumbled into' was 'a no-go area of discourse in Australia' (27). The act of speaking-back is often framed by the view that freedom of speech is under siege, despite Indigenous claims to the contrary.

Speaking-back is too readily interpreted as an attempt to gag non-Indigenous writers, rather than the right to contribute to a national discussion. Nowhere is this demonstrated more poignantly than the way the *Broometime* debate was covered in the national press. The questions raised by Broome's population, Indigenous and non-Indigenous alike, reflected concern at the ways in which Coombs and Varga managed their constructions in the service of particular individual, social and cultural ends. Yet, at no stage in the debate did the authors acknowledge that members of the Indigenous community were engaged in a critical dialogue with them. Instead they used words like 'offended', 'outraged' and 'hysterical' to describe the reactions of their critics.

Colonised cultures demanding their colonisers be answerable for their actions subverts the position of privilege that colonisers have enjoyed for so long. This 'no-go area of discourse' identified by Coombs and Varga extends further than the rhetoric of 'sacred ground', 'impossibly high bars' and the 'politically correct' would have us believe. Essentially, this response is an attempt to censor the subversive act of speaking-back, a way of silencing or dumbing down the protest of the other. Artists who

indulge in acts of cultural appropriation, writers who uphold their right to offend or 'to tell the truth as they see it' do so, it seems, while dismissing others' right of reply. Speaking-back is characterised as uncontrolled, carping, obstructive and flying in the face of democratic principles, which suggests that freedom of speech is very much a one-way street, still reserved for a privileged and dominant culture.

Traps and how to spring them

Nigerian writer, Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie's TED talk, 'The danger of a single story' highlights how our lives and our cultures are composed of many overlapping stories. Ngozi tells the story of how she found her authentic cultural voice through the discovery of African literature—and warns that if we hear only a single story about another person or country, we risk a critical misunderstanding. She believes we are all to some extent or another, guilty of perpetuating single stories. 'How are they created?' she asks. 'To show people as only one thing over and over and over again, it doesn't matter what the genre is; fiction, non-fiction, screen or playwriting.' (Adichie np)

Indigenous publishing houses have helped to erode the single story. Just as stories have been used to disposes, malign and perpetuate stereotypes, they've also been used to empower and humanise. Stories can break the dignity of people but they can also repair that broken dignity. Engaging in stories, as Adichie says, connects people. It breaks the monopoly of the single story told by a certain group of people: How they are told. Who tells them. How many stories are told. When they are told... The single story stops being the definitive story.

Tim Parks writes in his article 'A novel kind of conformity' that only well-established, popular writers are afforded the luxury of writing something that deviates widely from the norm. He cites activist/editor Philip Langeskov who pitched a new novel to a sales team at a literary conference in Oxford. The team asked what other book was the novel like and it was only accepted when the sales team was assured that it resembled something already commercially successful. Parks maintains that popularity breeds conformity. When I worked in the publishing industry for Magabala Books, an independent Aboriginal publishing house in Broome created by the Aboriginal community in 1987, the editorial and marketing team asked, 'How is it different to what was already out there?' If the manuscript was doing something different it was (along with a whole lot of other factors) kicking goals.

What if we were to swap the single stories of colonisation with resistance? Let's start with one important story, first published by

Magabala Books in 1990, *Jandamarra and the Bunuba Resistance* by Howard Pedersen and Banjo Woorunmurra. It's a story about a young Bunuba warrior; a man called Jandamarra who taught his people, men and women, to fight and evade the police and pastoralists using a clever combination of psychological and fighting strategies. This combined with a knowledge of his country enabled the Bunuba to retain their cultural stories, traditional and language to the 21st century. If we begin history classes with Jandamarra's story we can set the scene for an entirely different story.

Not brave but necessary for my growth as a writer

After emerging from the dark side of my exegesis, where I'd wrestled with the insidious demons of neat paradigms and convenient binaries that flattened complex issues, I found the chink in the Western freedom-of-speech armour. I began writing the fourth draft of my novel, armed with a sharp and pointy plan. The plan was to give this draft to Indigenous writers, living in different regional contexts and contract them to read and comment on my novel. These readers formed part of an Indigenous Reference Group: Rose Murray, who lived and worked in the area where the novel is set, and Melissa Lucashenko, a Murri woman of European and Yugambeh/Bundjaling decent. The instruction given to Lucashenko and Murray was minimal. Keeping in mind the central research question, I asked them to address the representation of Indigenous culture, people and communities as well as providing any other general feedback.

When I told people about my plan—academics, friends, family, colleagues, other writers—they said things along the lines of 'you're brave', and this surprised me. It didn't feel brave, it felt necessary. I wanted to contribute to a constructive dialogue by recognising the privileged position I occupied in a dominant culture, interrogating the cultural biases affecting those being spoken for and spoken about, and using that interrogation as a basis from which to listen to the contribution Indigenous people make to the issues that arise from representation. The exegesis helped me to shift my gaze from 'the other' to myself-as-author in the next draft of the novel. So I did and, in doing so, I suddenly stopped baby-stepping and leapt.

My dialogue with Lucashenko and Murray was not about endorsement. It was about helping me to remain alert to the introduced narratives of colonial and modern Australia and revealed how not to 'play along' with them. The dialogue provided strategies that allowed me to acknowledge my position, question my own definitions and motivations and recognise the impact that what I write can have on those being spoken for or spoken

about. And the novel is all the better for it. Not perfect, but I feel I can now look Barry Lopez in the eye and tell him I hadn't burdened the world with this one.

When people ask me what *Red Dirt Talking* is about, I tell them it's a story about stories, the stories we tell ourselves, the stories we tell each other, as well as the stories our community and our government tells us. But most of all, most importantly, it's about listening.

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Behind the Line

Katinka Smit

Katinka Smit writes mostly poetry and short stories. Her writing has been published in *Notherly Magazine* and *Behind the Wattle* (Stringy Bark Press), with works pending in *Coastlines* and *100 Love Letters*. This is her first story publication in a magazine.

The boy inched forward on his haunches.

The man's hand floated to his mouth, fingered a silent warning. His gaze burrowed into the shallows. The boy leaned slightly forward and saw something fine and delicate waving under the dark surface of the water. The man's eyes didn't move.

The boy sat stone still, his eyes looking to the man's face and then to the man's hand. The man's fingers reached for the long stick that sat on the bank beside him. His breath rose and fell, his eyes fixed on the enormous yabbie. He raised his arm slowly, minutely.

The boy could see the yabbie clearly now. It was white with mottled grey markings.

The man's hand was even with his knee now. He levered the stick up so that the front point stayed level with his knee and the back-end rose in the air, gracefully gliding higher as though lifted by a breeze.

The yabbie's head appeared a little out of the water. Its back was broad and flat at the neck, fattening into a large chunky body longer than the man's hand.

The boy held his breath. He saw the slight jerk in his father's shoulder, and unconsciously echoed the languid whip of his father's wrist with his own. The stick flew straight and true.

He felt the splash against his shins as the stick split the water.

'Nathan! You're up!'

Mr Everingham is trying to engage me again. He's convinced I should be a brilliant athlete.

'Check out how the Abo chucks the spear,' whispers that sneak Dickson as I walk past him, soft enough to avoid Everingham's verbal clop around the ear.

I ignore him and step up the front.

Everingham hands me the javelin, point facing down to the earth. It's lighter than I expect and dusty smooth. My fingers curl around the shaft and for a second I admire the way my hand looks against the silver. I've been watching the others so when he starts telling me where to stand behind the line I just nod and mark my spot then pace myself backwards to where I'll start my take off.

I start running. It's like footy, only it's better. There's no one relying on me or bagging me out or ramming my nose into the ground. There's just me and my feet and this cold metal rod sliding out from under my fingers, my toes hooked into the dirt and this glorious thing flying high, higher, up and away in a long clean arc and

the boy watches his spear flying through the heavens; it pierces the little pademelon through his star heart and stays there, until the man reaches up and plucks his spear out of the sky, and throws it down hard into the dust, the shaft quivering in the furry body, the blood spreading on the patch of dry earth, turning it into mud; the mud thins to red water and soon the whole land is filling and

it lands a full six metres ahead of anyone else's.

The whistles start as soon as I head out across the oval.

'Hey black boy, nice spear!' yells Danny Digby.

He and the usual deadbeats are gassing themselves in the 'grandstand', the paint peeling rows of benches that run along the west side of the field. Just a few hunched over silhouettes, but it's him and two of the usual three mindless goons, smoking durries and chugging tinnies, talking about all the great shit they're gonna do as soon as they get out of this dump. The tape deck with no door dribbles out 'Back in Black'.

Not that he can talk, but he thinks he's white enough that everyone will forget who his mum was. Besides, it's a mop stick, dickhead.

Uncle Les'll have a fit when he sees I've taken it. Tight old bastard fixes everything. It broke when it got stuck under the end of the aisle near the dog food when I was mopping the last bit of the shop. I tried jiggling it out and it snapped right along the screw join. Just a swift crack and she was cactus. Les was stacking tins of fruit at the end of the next aisle. He bent his head around the corner and said, 'What have you done now?'

I yanked the mop and it jerked free.

'Nothing.'

I held it up. The head dangled limply by a wooden thread.

'It just broke.'

He sighed and pushed himself up, then walked over and tried to take the mop from me. I hung on. He wrenched it from my grip and the mop head broke off completely and slopped onto the floor. He sighed again and picked it up.

'You made a right job out of that' he said, looking at the pieces.

He looked at me sideways, up and down.

'You're becoming more like your father everyday.'

That's when I cracked it. I mean I really had enough of his shit. Stupid white old bastard.

'Yeah? Well I wish I was with him instead of stuck in this stupid hole with you.'

He straightened up and glared at me. His face was red and puffy.

'That's impossible.'

I grabbed the bucket and shoved past him through the swing door into the back room. The door caught on its hinge and stuck open.

'You know nothing about it son. Your father—'

I swung back round towards him, banging the bucket with my leg.

'Don't you call me 'son'! I'm not your son and I never will be! You don't know nothing about being a father to me!'

Warm water dribbled down into my shoe.

'No, you're not my son. You're my—'

'Mum wasn't any better than him! Where's she?'

'Your mother—'

'Didn't want a black kid and left me!'

He stared at the broken pieces of mop in his hands. I waited for him to speak. He walked over to the sink and stood the mop handle in the corner next to it, the broken point facing downwards. He hung the stringy head over the wide rack that sits over the sink, then gestured towards it and the stack of boxes next to the cool room.

'Clean up all of this and pack those boxes away. Tea will be on the table at seven.'

He pushed the stuck door a bit further on its hinges and went back out into the shop. The door whooshed shut behind him.

I dumped the bucket upside down over the basin. It clanked against the enamel and the filthy water splashed all over the sink. I could see him stiffen through the window. I waited for it. *Don't bang the bucket on the sink!* But he didn't say it he just shuffled up the aisle past the fly spray and the garbage bags.

I rinsed and squeezed the mop head out and hung it back over the rails, then wiped the inside of the basin down with the old red towel like he's

always harping on at me to do, and hung the towel back over the sink. The cold boxes I stacked in the cool room. I didn't unpack them. Stuff him.

The sun was still hot when I stepped outside. I sat down on the step and took off my shoes, slapped my wet sock down on the concrete. I thought about the javelin sliding out of my hand today, that smooth glide as it cut the air and landed so perfect. I picked up my shoes and socks and stood up. The house waited across the yard. The dark airless hallway would swallow me up, into my hot, west-facing bedroom filled with nothingness. Nothing to do but sit down on my bed and acknowledge it.

Not today. I put my shoes back down on the step. That mop stick wouldn't make a bad throw. The back room of the shop was dim after the brightness outside. I closed the door quickly, shutting out the sun. Cool air oozed around me. I snuck over to the sink but Les was busy counting the till. I grabbed the mop handle out of the corner and tore off a long strip from the towel. He didn't look up. He was still clunking coins rhythmically into the drawer when I pulled the back door shut. I was at the oval before I realised that the goon squad would be here.

'Hey black boy!'

Danny Digby isn't the sort to let up. A few teachers have tried to make him apply that bloody-mindedness to something useful, but he's only ever managed to hang on to being a dickhead. Well fuck him.

'Least I'm proud!'

I draw a line in the dirt with the ragged point of the mop stick and pace out my running room. Seventeen steps and three for good measure. I face off the stretch, tying the strip of towel around my head. I could do with a haircut.

He's stood up and puffed himself out. The goons are giggling beside him like that cartoon dog Muttley.

'What's that blackboy?'

I take my time, standing on my mark. Maybe I could do this for sport, for real. I've never felt like this before, like there was something I was good at. Something I could tie myself to. I start slow, with long strides, breaking into a sprint closer to the line. My toes hitch into the dirt and my shoulder kicks over, my arm long, wrist flicking slightly on the end of the thrust. My other arm is stretched out, palm down, holding the air steady. The wood smooths out of my grip. Its line is clean, a good sixty degrees.

It's up.

It's wobbling a bit along the grain. It doesn't have the lift of the javelin but it's going where I intended it to, maybe two feet shy to the left, but that's the stick, not my aim. The broken point stabs into the dirt. And then snaps and falls over.

I'm bent over to pick it up and then suddenly I'm flat on my face, the air shoved out of my lungs. Danny Digby is on my back, his hand on my head, grinding my face into the ground.

'What'd you say, black boy?'

I can hardly breathe, let alone answer his stupid question. My top lip is smashed and my teeth are full of dirt. The left side of my face is smeared clean of skin. It burns like hell. He lets go of my skull and grabs my jaw instead, fingers digging into my cheeks. He twists my head around until I can just see his face. He's sneering ugly, shit scared.

'You say anything like that to me again and I'll snap your fucking neck. Got that?'

I nod as best I can, and swallow a mix of grass, dirt and blood. One more inch and my neck is gonna break. His knees stab the backs of my arms.

'You just remember this—you're the only fucking Abo around here.'

He drops my head and pushes off with a shove in the middle of my back.

'Good that we understand each other now, hey?'

He kicks the mop stick and it cracks me on the head.

'Now take your little spear black boy, and run on home to Uncle Les.'

'I said dinner would be on at seven.'

Les is reading the paper, his plate pushed to the side, empty except for the bone of his chop and three peas. My dinner's cold at the other end of the table.

'I lost track of time.'

He looks at me over the paper. His glasses have slipped down his nose.

'What happened to your face?'

'Nothing. Just playing footy.'

I washed the grit out of my lip and splashed some water on my cheek at the oval tap, while Digby heckled and paraded in front of his mates like a bloody rooster. I guess I look a bit of a mess.

'Well I hope it was a game worth remembering. School photos this week.'

He nods towards the calendar on the wall, where he writes everything that needs to be done.

'Wednesday, twentieth February.'

I forgot about school photos. But who cares anyway? There's not a single photo up in the whole house. Les carries on about looking after me but he's got no choice. He's the one who got left looking after his sister's black bastard.

He doesn't say it, but he thinks it. And everybody sure knows it.

'Why did she leave?'

Les looks up sharply. He sighs when he sees I'm serious. He folds up his paper and takes his glasses off. I've waited all my life, I can wait a few more seconds.

'Your mother—your mother was very young.'

As though that explains everything. He fumbles with his glasses. The peas taste mealy, the potatoes dried-up in my mouth. I sip some water and put down my fork.

'Eat up. It's cold already.'

'Can't.'

He runs his forefingers along the crease of the paper. Back and forth to the middle and out again. I wait some more.

'And?'

Sighs again.

'Your father was black.'

Like I didn't know that.

'And old enough to know better.'

'What? That he couldn't be with a white girl?'

It lashes out of my mouth like a whip. Les' mouth tightens. He puts his glasses into their case and places it on the cabinet next to the table. He rubs his eyes, and pushes his fingers deep into the corners.

'It's the way the world is, son.'

He leans his forehead into his hands, his elbows on the table. Looks up at me. He's got black smudges around his eyes from the newsprint. Any other time I would have laughed and taken the mickey. Not today. I stare him down.

'It was impossible, Nathan. He knew that. He and your mother—it just couldn't work. He knew that. And your mother soon found out.'

He sighs again, like he does when he doesn't want to do something that involves me, when he'd rather be anything but the person who has to deal with me. I'm getting really angry, but I take a deep breath and steady myself, let the old man continue.

'Mum and Dad disowned us all. Just cut us off. They kicked her out as soon as they knew she was pregnant. They never even met you. It wouldn't have mattered even if you were white, but a black baby—you can't blame her for what she did.'

'She ran out on me!'

He looks at me for a second and then looks down at his hands.

'She could have given you up. But she wanted you to have some family. She came to me.'

'And aren't you happy about that?'

'I haven't seen her since.'

He pulls his hanky out of his shorts and blows his nose.

'She told you she was going out to get you an ice cream. I came home from work and you were sitting at the front window, waiting for her to come home.'

He looks at me and his eyes are wretched.

'People used to cross the street away from her, and they were the polite ones. She couldn't handle it. She was always the golden girl, always had a smile for everybody. She was a bit wild, had her own head—obviously—but she was loved. People forgave her things. She didn't realise that there was a line that couldn't be crossed.'

He snorts bitterly. I snort too at the same time and realise I've been holding my breath.

'The times—shit, it was impossible. She just couldn't do it. And your dad—he tried.'

I look at him, disbelieving.

'He tried. He came and got you a few times, took you places. Showed you things. You used to talk about it.'

Some glimmer of a memory pushes in. A creek. Walking hand in hand with a tall man.

'And then the bloody busybodies started interfering. Phone calls—that's all it took.'

His fists are clenched tight around the newspaper.

'You needed some kind of a chance in life.'

'And there was no chance with my dad?'

He sits there, shaking his head slowly. He gulps some water from his glass and wipes his mouth.

'They would've taken you away.'

'So you took me away instead!'

He pushes his chair away from the table and picks up his plate.

'People are better around here.'

He walks over to the sink and scrapes his plate into the scrap bucket.

'Does my Dad even know where we are?'

He washes his plate under the tap. The water runs fast and thick and he scrubs the plate too long with the dish brush.

'I don't even know his name!'

He shuts off the tap. He turns to look at me and then puts his plate carefully in the dish rack.

'Eat your dinner, Nathan.'

He heads out into the living room and clicks on the telly.

'Nathan!'

'Yeah?'

'Don't 'yeah' me, son. Come out here. I've got something for you.'

He's sitting on the verandah step, his back to me, his white old knees poking out of his shorts. He never wears long pants, even now, in winter. There's something long across his lap, wrapped up in butcher's paper. I cough lightly, and he straightens himself up. Clears his throat. He stands up slowly and turns around.

'Happy birthday, son.'

He holds the thing out to me with both hands.

'Mr Everingham tells me you've been doing well at school.'

I feel a hot sting in my eyes. For once Everingham is right—I've lifted my game a bit since I found something to like about school.

I slide the paper along the last length of the present. It's a long cardboard tube, with two white plastic lids jammed in at either end. I pull one of them off and spin the tube upside down into my hand. The other end bangs on the verandah roof.

'Careful.'

I lower it carefully and pull the prize free. It's a beauty, a real good one. Les takes a card out of his back pocket and props it on the verandah post. He looks at his watch, gives me a nod and steps off to work. He crunches through the frost, steaming across the yard, his legs stiff as he picks his way through the bark under the old eucalypt.

I know before I open the card what it'll say, *Happy 16th Nathan*, so I nearly don't, but it feels a bit thicker than usual. I tear the card open but instead of a few ones and twos like I expect it's an old black and white photo, three inches by two. It's of a tall dark man and a blonde white girl not much older than me, with a baby, outside an old weatherboard church. Les is jangling his keys at the shop door, worrying the lock. With a shock I realise it's my mum and dad and me. My dad's standing with his hands held together in front of him, wearing a suit that's too short for him. He looks like me. The photo has grooves in it from something written on the back. In Les' faded hand it says,

Shelly, Nathan and Robert King, 1966.

The shop door clicks shut. In the old gum that stands between us, a kookaburra cracks out a laugh.

Lajamanu

Brendan Ryan

Brendan Ryan's latest collection of poetry, *Small Town Soundtrack* (2015), was published by Hunter Publishers.

Wild brumbies complete their dawn ritual—clattering through town chased by dogs. The music of their hooves on the bitumen reverberating, taking me down into the earth.

Satellite dishes in the scrub angling to capture the sun. Metallic flowers that could be straight out of *Gattaca*. I take photos to make sense of the land. Nearby, the shack of a former abattoir.

A posse of dogs slink round dusty corners, biting car wheels nosing through rubbish by the side of the road. Cross-bred mongrels keeping health clinicians in cars, beeping for an elder to make an appointment. Dogs howling through the night, pacing concrete verandahs, ears and tails raised, my senses twitching.

A 4WD on bricks, foam mattresses outside houses, families spreading a loose circle under a tree. Kids playing basketball on a concrete court until dark.

Boys taking turns to dink
each other on the handlebars. *What's your team?*
they ask, brushing my hand, my arm
understanding by feeling what I
struggle to ask.

Four skin names in the community.
Walpirri people moved from their land
for a mine. In Gurrindjiri country,
yawning children line up for breakfast
at the school canteen.

A sign on the supermarket door—*children
will not be served during school hours.*

I watch the boys training barefoot
on a red gravel oval. Light softens
with the memory of kicking a footy at the
end of a school day.

The town is ringed by boundaries—
my expectations, spinifex, signs for men's land.
A dusty gravel patch where people camp for sorry.
A dried creek bed twists with its history
on the edge of town. The Wet has left an
upturned shopping trolley encased in mud.
In dusk light where grasses seem to talk
I walk with a stick that's like
holding a question, holding a look
I'm never sure will be returned.

At Katherine Gorge, an English mother stands
chatting to another woman in singlet,
shorts and ponytail. Her voice ripples
across the viewing platform as other tourists
sit, shuffle, step around for the view.

*Darwin was dirty, I mean
Aborigines everywhere. I was in
the supermarket when this
Aboriginal woman with a full load of
shopping pushes out the door,
and they're on welfare!*

The woman nods in affirmation. I sit
unable to not listen, wondering should I
intervene. I look away to the colours of the gorge
slipping from ochre to deep red.
The woman's frustration—measured,
articulate, defiant and the quiet that fell
when nobody on the platform spoke.

**Yam Country: for Emily
Kame Kngwarreye**
Marian De Saxe

Marian De Saxe holds a PhD in English from the University of Sydney. In addition to writing poetry and book reviews, her research interests include Australian and South African women poets.

This poem contains the name of a deceased person which may cause sadness or distress to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

There is a white trail going nowhere
until the poor outwalk us all.
We have overlooked your yam country,
Utopia, where you exuberantly
translated a land I do not know
but enter, somewhat tentatively,
a foreigner to chalcedony
your desert's blooming gemstone
of carnelian brown.

Great snorts of yam rivers.
The humpy back of a camel.
The rocks we climb.
Your eyes. Your hand
yielding yellow tracks.

I ask: How do I write your world
into mine? My Sydney is dusk
harboured in Cammeraygal,
noisy nights of cicadas and backyards
where we hide, where we do not see
what we cannot find.

In Gondwanaland
Marian De Saxe

I am dusk jumping over your country in the land of Gondwana listening
like a tracker to light sounds alive as lizard scamper to the north
as we follow the tourist trek dripping with sweat, my rucksack dragging
me down so that barefoot dust chokes my throat and flies bite my
confidence and the trilling desert frog builds a sand hut
and I seek a tree and a shed and a bed and a jeep flees, wheels full of skid
and bitumen and oil going round and round asking who are we, who are
we, whistling past the window as saltpans become mirages, as my eyes
scream with sun and I burn your country bit by bit into my pale skin as
an image of what I think I see,
as you see me intrude with my foreign eyes, as you tell me that this road
leads out as well as in as I follow you straight into cicada scrub and a
dingo is whinging on the ridge,
o dingo stalking the blind here among the wedgebills

who	are	we
are	we	who
we	who	are
we	are	who
are	who	we
who	we	are
we	who	are
who	are	we
we	who	are
who	are	we

Clutching the Void

Graham Akhurst

Graham Akhurst has a Bachelor of Creative Arts in writing at the University of Queensland, and an Advanced Diploma of Performing Arts from the Aboriginal Centre for the Performing Arts. Akhurst is of Aboriginal descent and hails from the Kokomini tribe in Northern Queensland.

I saw a picture of the Franz Josef Glacier while we were preparing to leave. A large snaking sheet of ice that filled a gorge created over millennia of slow movement. An impressive block that filed down from the top of the mountain peak to its base, and underneath a fast flowing river of glacial water running light blue and majestically between a forest of trees. Yet, as the path—after a two kilometre walk from the car park—opened up at what used to be the river's edge, I saw a small sheet of ice that could only be accessed by helicopter; a thin river with giant banks of pebbles, which marked the passing of geological splendour; and evidence of the incessant touristic fad of rock piling, which dotted the edges of the path that opened onto a view of the receding ice.

We landed in Christchurch two weeks earlier and had driven into the heart of a broken city. At 12:51 pm on the 22nd of February 2011 the earth shook Christchurch apart. One hundred and eighty people perished. Thousands were injured. The devastation was still evident in the city. It was eerily quiet. Vacant. I heard the resolute sound of construction echoing off the walls of hollowed and broken buildings waiting for destruction or new life.

I put down my bags in our room at the Ibis, located in the heart of the city. My girlfriend C complained in her thick French accent about how dull the city seemed. I mumbled something in agreement and turned on the television. It was the Maori station. The programing was predominantly spoken in Maori, which surprised me as NITV (the Aboriginal station in Australia) is mainly in English. The Maori language is unified and spoken by its first nation people, compared to the over 250 different Aboriginal languages and dialects. Yet, as we journeyed I notice a predominant absence of Maori people, despite the fact the census says they make up roughly 15% of the population.

The next morning we drove through hilly terrain on our way to Akaroa. We stayed at the Takamatua Farm, a backpackers around five kilometres from the small town center. The farm facilitated guided walks of the hills, which gave scenic views of the water, and kayaking and swimming with the Hectors dolphins that frequented the harbour.

From the moment we set foot in the backpackers C was angry with me. She had been off her antidepressants for a couple of weeks and thought that the trip would be a great way to start afresh drug free. This included roping me into giving up cigarettes. My last smoke had been at Brisbane airport before departure. As I butted it out we smiled, embraced, and closed the void for a moment. She was seeing a psychiatrist. It took a lot of convincing from myself and a couple of good friends from her PhD program to seek professional help, not just for her benefit, but for those around her. She had a tendency to snap uncontrollably, plunging into dark moods. Fits. Rage. The psychiatrist prescribed medication. C said that it made her numb, and that she didn't want to live with a cloud over her head. I could only imagine how it felt to live in a haze. I was willing to help her get off the drugs and become a rock bracing uncertainty.

We drove down to the harbour's edge, put on our wetsuits and jumped into a two-seater kayak and ventured out onto the water in the hope of glimpsing a dolphin fin. We worked together in controlling the kayak and found joy in the moments a dolphin would approach tentatively and then disappear. *This is what she needs*, I thought. In hindsight, my naivety was startling. The group activities reminded me of school camps and team building exercises.

Our relationship had moved quickly. We met at a point of change in our lives. C was entering her late twenties. She was new to Brisbane and felt that she could gain a new world by entering a relationship with a local. I was in my early thirties and feeling the pressure of expectation. My friends were getting married and having kids around me. Yet, I was still studying, single, and thought it was about time I started acting like an adult.

After our swim with the dolphins we drove 270 kilometres to the small coastal town of Kaikoura, and checked into the Albatross Backpackers Inn. We had a clean room to ourselves with an overly soft double bed. The second day of our stay there was our anniversary. We slept late and then walked along the water's edge taking snaps of the scenery before having an early dinner at the Green Dolphin Restaurant and Bar. Our table at the restaurant had a view of the water. We dined on mussels before a main of lamb, with the blossoming colours of the slowly setting sun on the

horizon. C particularly enjoyed that our waiter was French. After dinner we saw *The Imitation Game* at the local cinema, the story of Alan Turing and his cracking of the Enigma code. There was contentment for a day.

After breakfast the next morning we rummaged through the abundant flyers advertising the tourist adventures on offer in the area. C wanted to see the whales and I agreed. I also grabbed a flyer for a Maori tour; I would approach C about attending it when the time was right. I still hadn't really witnessed anything of the Indigenous culture, except for pictures and carvings, which seemed tokenistic and a part of the foundation of the tourism industry.

The Cessna touched down and blurted towards us. Gasoline fumes wafted into the waiting area. We climbed into the six-seater plane with a German couple—I heard more German than English on the trip—and we took off. All of the local whale watching boats and planes communicate with each other. Whenever a whale breached the water to fill its lungs there was a frenzy of movement and chatter. 'Es ist nicht schön' I heard behind me. We climbed quickly and ventured seaward. Five minutes later we were circling a whale. We were one of three planes. Each radioed the other organising whose turn it was to circle next, while three boats surrounded the whale letting the tourists get their pictures and selfies. 'Schauen Liebling, sein Kommen wieder auf. Mach ein Foto' the Germans said, while clicking fervently. The pilot told us through a crackly line that all of the movement and noise didn't disturb the mammal. I found it hard to believe given the attending circus. After we saw the whale the pilot took us for a fifteen-minute scenic tour around Kaikoura before landing. C insisted that we get a picture with the pilot and the plane. She was periodically loading happy holiday pictures to Facebook during the trip. Sometimes pictures lie.

That evening, with the Maori cultural tour flyer in hand I approached C, and asked if she was keen on going. She wasn't. I did my best to convince her that it would be a great experience, and that we hadn't really seen anything cultural, and that this might be an excellent opportunity even if it was catered towards tourists. She knew that I was interested in researching these types of things, but it was no good. She began to cry. Her moods were getting more unpredictable. Shifting. It was becoming exhausting having to pander to her every whim. I was wary of eruption. We had moved in together only four months into the relationship. We lived on different schedules. She was on a good scholarship and researched up at St Lucia campus during the day. I was in my last year of undergrad, and worked thirty hours a week stacking shelves in a supermarket during the evenings. She would come home from uni, I would be gone, I would get

home, C was asleep. We lived in a space where love was communicated via text message. As soon as my last semester of undergrad finished up I worked full time to save enough money for the trip, which only lengthened our time apart. To live in the same place with someone doesn't necessarily mean you're together. Now the veil of absence had crumbled and exposed indifference. I traversed a bedrock of uncertainty.

The next day we left for Picton and Queen Charlotte Sound, which was around two hours' drive away. We stayed at Sequoia Lodge Backpackers. We had a room with a double bed and ensuite. It was convenient not having to leave the room to use shared toilets and amenities. Sequoia Lodge had a hot tub, and a unique tradition: at 7pm every night the staff prepared ice cream and chocolate pudding, enough for every guest. It doesn't sound like much, but that little treat at the end of the day made me love the place. I talked with a German backpacker while waiting for pudding.

'Hey mate, where are you from?' I asked.

'From Germany.' He said in a thick accent.

'Been here long?'

The line inched closer as we talked.

'One week. I just did the North Island. It's more beautiful down here in the South. Better weather, more culture. Where are you from?'

'Australia.'

'Cool. I was there last month. Alice Springs was beautiful. I bought a dot painting. So much culture.' He smiled.

'Glad you had a good time.' I received two servings of pudding from a Scandinavian blonde and returned to the room.

The next morning, we boarded a boat that would take us to the sound where we would do a day's trek. At the entrance to the walk there were two giant intricately calved totems, and an ancient looking canon, which was a reminder of New Zealand's colonial past; the history of New Zealand's colonisation, and treatment of the first nation people, is different to the convict past of Australia. In 1840, the New Zealand Maori were given rights as British subjects, and their lands and other property rights were recognized with the signing of the Treaty of Waitangi. Yet, until a high court decision in 1992, we were afforded no land rights because Australia was declared *terra nullius* (land belonging to no one) at the time of European settlement in 1788. It took until 1967 for Australian Aboriginals to be counted in the national census, by changing the Australian Constitution, so while New Zealand Maoris had full and equal citizenship in their country in 1840, Aboriginals needed to wait a further 127 years to be granted the same status.

As the trek opened up to a view of the water and the mountainous ranges, I was awed. New Zealand is beautiful. Young tourists frolic amongst it. They canoe, trek, and whale watch, casting their youth against agelessness. There are mountains everywhere, green rolling hills, sheep, the most pristine empty beaches you could imagine and forests of wonderment. Whether you are driving, walking, or flying you feel excited by the prospect of what might lie around every turn, and there is no doubt that once you round the next bend another view of unimagined beauty will greet you. And yet, the beauty desensitises, you can only witness so many snow capped mountain peaks, glaciers, crystal clear waters, and pristine forests before it loses its magnificence, as does youthful exuberance.

We slid into the hot tub that evening as the sun was setting, and cracked a Tui beer each. The town seemed in high spirits. There was a festival on the Wharf about five kilometres away and live music drifted on the wind about us. Just as the heat of the water was relieving the stress in our legs from the day's trekking we heard shouting. A domestic dispute erupted on the other side of the fence line. The people were speaking Maori. C looked disturbed and clutched onto me. Here was our first encounter with what was before an absent people. That was the only time on the trip that I heard the Maori language spoken besides on the television. The next morning, while sitting at breakfast with C, I utilised the free Wi-Fi, and read an article about Maori people in prison.

It is impossible to separate the place of Maori in the prison system from the impact of colonisation, and the disputes around the meaning of the Treaty of Waitangi...As evinced in the All Black haka, the Air NZ koru or the powhiri for tourists, New Zealand enjoys a popular image of Indigenous and settler cultures comfortably integrated. The impact of colonisation is, of course, much more complicated. Numerous breaches by the state of the Treaty of Waitangi, the document signed between the British crown and leaders of iwi, or tribes, in 1840, saw swathes of land, in many cases the traditional turangawaewae, or "place to stand", forcibly taken from Maori. Waves of urbanisation amplified the tendency for generations of Maori to grow distanced from their iwi, language and culture.

This reminded me of home. The absent 'other' that colonialism has impacted cannot be glossed over by tokenistic cultural sprinklings along scenic trails. C asked for the juice. There is a danger in touristic portrayals of culture. They hide the fact that in both Australia and New Zealand, a

vastly over-represented percentage of Indigenous people make up the prison population; health issues, and domestic violence are rampant; and that due to the success of governmental assimilation techniques, many Maori and Aboriginal young people are disillusioned, and face an identity crisis. C asked if I thought that sending cheese via post would get to France. Living with fragmented Indigenous heritage and culture, means it is not too great a shift for culture to be sold rather than lived. This places Indigenous people in a strange place, one that cannot be fixed by rock piling tourists. We finished breakfast packed and jumped in the rental.

We travelled on to Nelson and walked the beaches of the Tasman Bay, then down to Charleston. We stopped at Hari Hari where Guy Menzies landed upside down in a swamp on his trans-Tasman voyage. I took a photo with a figure of the larrikin next to a life size model of his plane *The Southern Cross Junior*. Fearful that he would not be allowed to tackle the Tasman, Menzies told the aviation authorities that he was heading to Perth from Sydney, before flying to New Zealand in record time. We travelled on towards the Franz Joseph glacier, where we spent a couple of nights, and then to Queenstown. Queenstown was the busiest place we visited, there was a swathe of tourists eager to spend. I noticed this first hand as I splurged a bit of money to stay at the Hilton Spa and Resort. The hotel was evacuated on our first night due to a faulty alarm system, much to the bemusement of the Germans. From Queenstown we travelled on toward Milford Sound. The sound was to be our last stop before the long drive back to Christchurch and then home to Brisbane. On our journey towards Milford we stopped intermittently and did walks that led to perfect waterfalls. Along the way we were pursued by Germans and their rock piles, and yet again we were confronted by the absence of the Maori people while being inundated by their culture.

Milford Sound was where we ended it. I had driven the entire trip. I didn't mind, we were on my side of the road, and I felt like it was a great chance for her to wind down and view the scenery. C was tired and remarked that maybe we shouldn't have organised such a long trip. That was enough for me. I had dealt with her emotional needs for the last three weeks and to hear that put me right on the edge of my sanity. I could feel myself cracking, dislodging. I was being pushed towards confrontation. I breathed deeply, fortified, and calmed myself. We drove to the sound where a boat would cruise out through the Fiord and into the Tasman Sea before returning. C was cranky that I hadn't made her feel better.

As the boat left the harbour she turned and told me that she didn't feel loved, and then walked onto the deck. I followed, but something inside me would not bend. The wind was unrelenting and fast moving clouds

spat stinging rain as the boat navigated its way between large mountains formed by glaciers in another age. We took pictures and smiled. She could sense that something was different. She reached across the abyss; she tried to joke about something that happened on the trip. I was slightly respondent; it appeased her for a moment and then darkness again.

She yelled at me in the car as we left for the hour-long drive back to the backpackers. Then she slept. As I drove through a long winding road, underneath a line of trees that ran forever, calm and insight came. We had talked of marriage and children before we left. We had gone so far as to look at wedding bands. I imagined the life that our children might have. I was meant to be the rock that braced uncertainty, but the uncertainty of how her depression would affect a family life was daunting. I ruptured.

We got back to the backpackers and I initiated it. I told her that I didn't understand her, but what I meant was that I didn't understand her illness. I said it was for the best, we argued in waves for a time that wasn't relative. I could see in her face that she knew I was gone. I walked outside and down the street to a service station and bought a packet of cigarettes. I left her crying, clutching at the void alone, and it haunts me to this day.

The next day's drive was awkward. Luckily there was a room with separate beds at the Ibis on returning to Christchurch. We ate dinner separately. I went down to the restaurant on the first floor and ordered a steak and a bottle of wine to myself. I drank and pondered. What I found in the south island of New Zealand was an identity crisis. A sense of absence made stronger by the death of my relationship. After dinner I walked the quiet streets feeling drunk and alone. I found meaning in the fractured buildings and reconstruction of a city that is beginning again. I thought about the mundane tasks I would have to contemplate on my return. Moving out, getting rid of furniture, breaking a lease, finding another apartment. I would also begin again.

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'Jabbin Jabbin Kirroo Ka'

Warwick Newnham

Warwick Newnham has had stories published in *Nocturnal Submissions*, *Overland*, *The Lifted Brow*, *Meanjin*, to name a few. He lives in Brisbane with his partner and two blue heelers.

The dry season dust swirls up and Debill-Debills and Willy-Willys carom tangentially offside and then again inside the front bar of the Kath-Er-Rine hotel as road trains in triumvirates of trailers grind down the gears to slow their momentum for the moments it takes for them to transit through town and on northwards for Darwin or southbound to Adelaide and beyond. The bar is packed with ringers and roustabouts and rodeo-clowns. They have been working the circuit as it circumnavigates the territories, drinking down the days. This is their last chance to display their cowboy skills and pit their courage in the roar of the crowd against wild beasts and bush-steer and bullockies. The tables are bolted to the floor as are the bar-stools and the beer is served in plastic schooners whilst the floors and walls are tiled to head high and every morning early they are hosed clean of the detritus left from the night before with blood and teeth and sodden cigarette butts all swirling out the front door and down the gutters and into the drains to ride the Katherine river to the Daly river and out into the Gulf of Joseph Bonaparte.

The dust has given them the thirst.

Outside the post office, opposite the pub, a white haired elderly Aboriginal man in Akubra and R.M. apparel and western riding boots approaches a young hitch-hiker pausing his sojourn north in search of anonymity to rest out the noonday sun in the shade.

'Hey Bunji! You gottim' one cigarette for your Uncle?'

The youth hands over his tobacco pouch and papers and as Uncle rolls a smoke fat enough for three and lights up with his own lighter he says:

'White-Ox Ey? I haven't sabi-ed¹ White-Ox since I been in Jail.'

*The youth says:
'What's your name then?'*

And the old fella' answers:

'My Name is....Elvis..... Elvis Presely.'

'Just like that singer fella, ey?'

'You-Fuckin'-Ey! But I was Elvis long-time for he ever was!'

They smoke in the shade in silence till the old man wanders off to re-join the drinkers on the median strip: thumb out the youth trudges northward in search of a lift as a heat haze shimmers from the tarmac distorting the dust-clouds raised by the roaring transports.

We're sitting in the front bar of the Katherine Hotel, Ray The Roo, Ruby and me, watching as a lone hitchhiker trudges his way north towards Darwin: just another bum on the thumb. Ruby, a Yugul Mangi woman from Ngukkur, a community on the banks of the Roper River, jokes in Kriol that he is a turtle and if you pushed him over he would be on his back waving legs in the air and unable to get up. Ray the Roo translates this to me and we laugh. I have been taken under their wing and feel like I'm accepted as part of their family: I play guitar and sing, I tell a good yarn, I love a good joke and I have that lost look endemic to orphans and the dispossessed that others of the same recognise as a shared bond.

Ray the Roo, the razor-blade whip man, sits with a commanding view of the front bar with rear and flanks covered by walls. Trained as a SAS soldier and tempered on the Mau-Mau uprising he is a hunter and a bushman, a mechanic, a killer and a navigator whose skills give him big ups in the community and with Aunty Ruby at his side it's a dead-man that calls him a gin-jockey.

We share this table with him; Aunty Ruby and me, and with one dole cheque in and another due, we lubricate our table with foamy jugs of beer and fumigate it in Log Cabin and Whinny Reds and Dr. Pats.

One young fella, he comes up bar and drunkenly fixated on my white head and not seeing Ray there he sails on in with humbug afore-thought and lets it rip with a loud: 'You stole my fuckin' land, you fuckin' Djardi Djarbo!'

And then rears up short when Ray points the finger declaiming:

'Fookin' not likely Sunshine. Fook off kindly would you for I sings ye the bone and send ye on to the next fookin' life quick as look at ye!'

The young fella laughs and crosses his hands with humbug forgotten as he smiles and says 'Uncle Ray' and 'Aunty Ruby' and they grip forearm, fist and fingers and laughs again and asks:

'Where you bin' Ray the Roo?'

Ray nods and juts his chin east towards the gulf and the Roper Bar crossing and putting two fingers to his upturned palm, indicates something toward Ruby with a sideward nod of his head. It turns out he's asking her how to place me with Aunty Ruby's people. With upward nod

the other young fella knows what's going on and jokingly assigns me a skin name, 'Shit-Hawk', he calls me, but beneath the joking, this is serious. If I'm going to travel out on country, I need to be placed and Aunty and Ray take responsibility for me. Now I'm placed, the young fella introduces himself: 'Name's Ismahl, but me mates call me Izzy. You can call me 'Cuz' or 'Brudda'. I feel welcomed, but I'm on a steep learning curve.

Izzy leans back and eyeballs me from the stool he's pulled up to join our group.

'You going to that Burunga cuz? Ey? I been dance there proper way for that Bob Hawke fella you-ey?'

Izzy jumps up and back, stamps one foot and,
'Crocodile leg he move like this,'
and waves, and,
'Crocodile arm he move like this,'
and swinging his head from side-to-side he is crocodile king of the still tidal Roper Bar where the once leviathan saurian roamed the earth carving river and motherland. He raises dust from the floor as he exhales:
'HAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!'

We loaded Ray's 71' series three Defender with as many cartons as we could afford we headed south through hill and low scrub and anthills; some sentinel, some cenotaph. Eighty klicks and eight cans later we reach the town limit where Ruby's nephew awaits our arrival.

We make camp in the cans and lighting a small fire to keep down the fly-pest we share shade and drink through the afternoon. Aunty Ruby's nephews' eyes are green like dirty emeralds and he speaks with rasping voiced power. I show my respect: I call him Uncle!

In the early evening we leave the out-skirted drinking place with fresh empty cans again lying amongst the old. We pass the burnt-out hulks of Toyotas on the way into town. Aunty Ruby's nephew rides with us as we make our way into Barunga through camps of corrugated iron housing adorned with ochre hand-prints and the long red smear of sorrow. A killer has been harvested and a hind quarter hangs from the roof in the kitchen area of the shed we share with Aunty Ruby's people: strips of bullock meat are flayed from the bone and apportioned from need and by delegation; fires spit with grease and flare and the smoke is beef flavoured BBQ as we sit in the dust and share a meal. A guitar is produced and the remaining cartons allocated and distributed, apportioned from need and by delegation: Ngukurr people sing.

'Take me back to Roper River,
Cause' that's where I want to be!
Where that clear water flowing:
Take me back today!'

I am drunk and lost and wandering under a waning crescent sliver of a moon in a darkness punctuated by fires from smouldering campfires to roaring bonfires round which law business's dictums are loudly argued by elders who sit in opposing crescentiforms; fire logs are hefted in an explosion of embers in the night. I'm not sure if I should be here. I stagger past other fires lost and drunk and uncertain till Ray the Roo looms out of the darkness to take my arm and leading me back to the safety of Ruby's family camp he whispers in my ear:

'Come on son, you don't need to be seeing this: they be none of ye fookin' business son, come quickly now!'

He leads me back to camp and un-conscious I sleep under falling stars in the dust.

The following morning, I wake at dawn and spend time gathering saplings with Aunty Ruby's uncles and cousins and kith folk and kin; stripping them and heating and hardening them over the fire to manufacture spears. The sporting events start early as representative football teams from different Territory communities come together and pound the dirt oval in bare-feet oblivious to the gravel and dust. Desert teams compete with coastal communities of smaller swifter players and daring acts of sporting abandon are consummated with ease and balletic grace. Visiting journalists and tourists leave the confines and central safety of 'Munaga Park', an allocated camp area with chain link fencing in the town's village green, to marvel at the teams' sporting prowess as sea-folk scramble skyward over taller desert opponents to take spectacular marks. Football matches are interspersed with spearing competitions where woomeras sing the spears the length of the field to find hay-bale targets set up like grazing kangaroos. Children wander the edges of the field firing plastic cap-guns at intervals as they chase each other.

Bob Hawke, the Silver Haired Bodgie, arrives with an entourage of ministers and minders as the early after-noon heat haze rises from the dust of the ceremony grounds. He inspects and opens two new houses; built in close proximity and incongruity to the camps in abundance. He talks at length of new freedoms and funding whilst staying on-message and avoiding any camera angles other than those showing the two new houses. Dancers take the stage on the ceremony grounds in feathered

head-dresses and ochre and lime-white body paints. Amplified didgeridoos drone like summer cicadas to the back beat of clap-sticks and boomerangs beaten to an ancient cadence. The dancers move forward in a stomping shuffle as they dance the demons off in preparation for the presentation of a large bark traditional painting by eight artists containing the 'Barunga Declaration' from the Aboriginal nation to the Australian nation via 'Bodgie Bob'.

Bob sits surrounded crescentiform by elders and ministerial advisors and as the dancers move ever forward the drone of the didgeridoo menaces as the clap-stick cadences assume martial air and the singing becomes hoarse and strident. Dust rises in explosions as foot stumps echo the clap-sticks and as the dancers move ever forward they dance up to and almost on top of the Right Honourable Prime Minister of Australia as he sits ever straighter and eyes ahead maintains his protocols and vigilantly avoids showing any fear. His relief when they are finished is palpable.

The Barunga Statement

Indigenous owners and occupiers of Australia, call on the Australian Government and people to recognise our rights:

- *to self-determination and self-management, including the freedom to pursue our own economic, social, religious and cultural development;*
- *to permanent control and enjoyment of our ancestral lands;*
- *to compensation for the loss of use of our lands, there having been no extinction of original title;*
- *to protection of and control of access to our sacred sites, sacred objects, artefacts, designs, knowledge and works of art;*
- *to the return of the remains of our ancestors for burial in accordance with our traditions;*
- *to respect for and promotion of our Aboriginal identity, including the cultural, linguistic, religious and historical aspects, and including the right to be educated in our own languages and in our own culture and history;*
- *in accordance with the universal declaration of human rights, the international covenant on economic, social and cultural rights, the international covenant on civil and political rights, and the international convention on the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination, rights to life, liberty, security of person, food, clothing, housing, medical care, education and employment opportunities, necessary social services and other basic rights.*

We call on the Commonwealth to pass laws providing:

- A national elected Aboriginal and Islander organisation to oversee Aboriginal and Islander affairs;
- A national system of land rights;
- A police and justice system which recognises our customary laws and frees us from discrimination and any activity which may threaten our identity or security, interfere with our freedom of expression or association, or otherwise prevent our full enjoyment and exercise of universally recognised human rights and fundamental freedoms.

We call on the Australian Government to support Aborigines in the development of an international declaration of principles for indigenous rights, leading to an international covenant.

The Silver-Haired Bodgie makes his escape late afternoon bearing the Barunga Statement and painting back to the nation's capital as rumours circulate the camp of an ancient curse buried within the painting, the song, the dance, the body paintings, that is capable of remote activation at any distance by primordial chants and pointing of bones. I don't know if this is true, if this is bravado, if this came from the mob or from the gathering journos.

Reporters interview elders with intent to reveal the knowledge but are met with stony looks and avoidance and until they too leave none the wiser. Ironically, the camp is declared dry for the arrival of 'Bodgie Bob' and remains so throughout the following evening's entertainment where a stage had been set up on the basketball court and Aboriginal bands play country and reggae and heavy metal music as the children and youths dance under flashing lights and 'Folingsta; Nait Skai. Disco music intersperses between the bands and the dance-floor swells when popular tunes are played with children and youth performing syncopated steps and then they are crocodile and then kangaroo and then moon-walking backwards. 'Purdiwan Yanggels and Yanggais' dance and courtships, sanctioned and otherwise, take place with secret assignations actioned in chin points and nods of head. *A mob decamps from Buranga with a young white fella in tow all squeezed into a 71' Series Three Defender heading north through hill and low scrub and anthills; some sentinel, some cenotaph. Eighty klicks later they reach Katherine where the dry season dust swirls up and Debill-Debills and Willy-Willys carom tangentially offside and then again inside the front bar of the Kath-Er-Rine hotel as road trains in triumvirates of trailers grind down the*

gears to slow their momentum for the moments it takes for them to transit through town and on northwards for Darwin or southbound to Adelaide and beyond.

Ray the Roo, the razor blade whip man, sits with a commanding view of the front bar with rear and flanks covered by walls Aunty Ruby and the young white fella, with the remainder of their dole cheques, lubricate their table with foamy jugs of beer and fumigate it in Log Cabin and Whinny Reds and Dr. Pats.

Coins emblazoned with Kangaroo and Emu and Platypus and Lyrebirds are fed to the Juke-Box and as they slake their dusty thirst, sixties crooner Lionel Long sings:

*'Jabbin Jabbin Kiroo Ka Gla
[All the birds are calling 'Rise!']*

*Kurra Kurra Kir-Oo Ka
[Open wide your sleepy eyes!]
Jabbin Jabbin Kir-Oo Ka'
[All the birds are calling 'Rise!']*

Note

1 Kriol. To know or have known.

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Walking in Old Shoes

Paul Collis

Paul Collis was the first Aboriginal student to achieve a Creative Communications Honours degree from the University of Canberra. For the course, he wrote a novella based on the identity of an Aboriginal boy in his community.

Ghosts walk all over this town. They're in every street, shopping centre and beach road. They are all scarred with memories of my life before now. Youth and strength live back there in my past. My sweat probably still stains the old cricket pitches, and memories of lovings haunt the dark places where I first gave them life.

Like all beach cities, Newcastle doesn't 'shine'... It 'sparkles' in the spring. The harbour reflects the aspirations of an earnest city, bouncing sunlight from the water back onto the foreshore. As if caught in a yester-year day, the city hardly seems to move at all. The minutes slip quietly away with the distant sound of the breakers returning to Nobby's marking time.

How can a city move so quietly? So slowly? Perhaps it does so because of its endless repetitions. Maybe that's why I don't find change in the place? Maybe that's why every day seems like it's... Tuesday?

Oh, the city by the sea, with its painted facades and manicured streetscapes, hides the yester-year city. The old places, that are brickyard red and dusty now, stand out-of-place in the functional modern moment. The new replacing the old; the old barely clinging on, refusing to fall. And yet, eventually they will vanish, like yesterday. In their place will stand a dulled plaque and a few lines engraved as any reference to the old times. History loses; giving way to the modern present until the modern present becomes a yesterday of Lego block buildings, which have a shelf life of only twenty-five years.

Scott Street runs beside the railway line all the way to the beach, but is now all too often empty. The Foreshore Road offers the driver a better view of the harbour. Scott Street has become a rather useless secondary that seems to only get used now as a road trip down memory lane.

But, it's great seeing the beautiful city again.

I drove the beach roads and walked Maitland Road, looking through shop windows and watching hookers and dusty men. I visited the cemetery and played golf at Raymond Terrace with Dave. So many memories of summers past and different cars. Memories of different girls. Those old ghosts don't scare me anymore. They are now more like familiar things that I've put away and only take out now and then to see that they aren't broken. Even the old songs I once loved can't slay me.

It was such a quiet day there in the city. Thunderstorms lurked behind clouds and rumbled their disquiet. But the breeze had the better of the clouds and the rain in that moment. It blew too strongly for the pitter-patter of raindrops to leave patterns upon the earth right then, but, by sundown, the afternoon storm would wash the sea-side city wet and clean.

Remembering Artists

Paul Collis

I grew up when there were a lot of old Murri people in Bourke. Many of them were fantastic storytellers. Some carried their Aboriginal traditional ways of storytelling—evoking the spirit world as a major character(s) in their story. Those storytellers placed themselves as the storyteller according to their position within their traditional community in their performance. Some of them were old Elders, others, were neither Elders nor very old, but their storytelling was fantastic. The way they paused; their eyes burning with delight. They held my world, my attention in their hands. Even mum, her brothers and sister and older cousins held their breath when those old people spoke. We all sat in the dust around the fire. The imagined world became my ‘real’ when those storytellers told their stories.

Other storytellers, moved between two worlds—between the Whitefullas world and our world. Those storytellers use Western ways and different languages and shape-forming techniques, making use and sometimes making fun of the Whitefullas as they performed, dancing and speaking their way through their observations. In doing so, they made comments upon those who tried to hold power over us Blackfullas. Sometimes, the storytellers acted out the voice and presence of a policeman, or some other person of authority. Those old storytellers never missed a trick. They’d only act the vagabond in the world whilst collecting their stories... They would ‘put-on’ the voices of the toffs and of the broken-English too when they gave us their gifts in stories. I reckon they were better than Charlie Chaplin... and they copied Chaplin too. Yes, those storytellers, those relatives and friends to us, did much more than merely exist on the fringe of society. They experienced the world from so many different viewpoints and they made their wise comments about the world in their stories and in their performances.

I saw my grandfather’s nephew, Paddy, a renowned rain-maker and dancer, dance for us when I was a small boy. Mum, Aunty Tina, aunty Doodie and aunty Mookie, all begged him to dance for us one sunny morning. I’d been sitting with uncle Paddy near the fire; I was around 4 or 5 years old... He looked at me, winked, smiled, stood up, kicked his shoes, and removed his shirt. He then moved away from the fire, into free space so he could really move. His skin was shiny black, like the blackest night. He stood in such contrast to the bright yellow morning. Then he began...

He leaped high in the air, spinning full circle as he went. He clapped hands between each leg before he hit the ground again. Then he’d bounce up again. Uncle Paddy danced for about 10 minutes, moving fast and beautifully. Dust flew all around when he hit the hard ground. In later years I went to watch many dancers, tap, jazz, modern, ballet, ballroom groovers... all beautiful... but no one came near uncle Paddy. Not in my books.

When he finished mum and them all clapped and said how ‘neat he was’... He came back to me and put his shirt on and took up his jam tin cup and finished his tea. He looked at me and smiled.

‘Ya like dat, Unk?’ he asked me.

I nodded. ‘The dust...?’ I queried.

He smiled again, looked into his cup, and said: ‘Dass old mumma earth... She look after us.’

Just before my mum passed away in 2010, I reminded her of the day uncle Paddy danced.

Mum smiled, remembering. It was such a beautiful time for her back then when Paddy came to stay with us. She was young back then. She’d not long before, given birth to her youngest (and last) child, my brother, Glenn. Dad had good paying work and so mum and he were able to buy an expensive blue pram, and dress him in fine cotton gear. The photos of Glenn in aunty Tina’s arm show how loved he was, show how much love and effort went into making him precious to us.

Mum said, ‘They, (the Blackfullas) all used ta climb the trees and watch the pictures (the movies) from over the fence. Those good, old black dancers saw what Whitefullas were doing in America and that, and then they used to copy them. But them Whitefullas got their steps from Blackfullas.’

Art is discovered and shared amongst artists and art lovers throughout the world. Always was, and probably always will be. Yes, those old storytellers, the same people who white governments dismissed as ‘un-knowers’, they had power. Appearing at times to the white world as

'no-bodys', they were intelligent, gentle and responsible people. They looked 'outward' upon the world and made comment of the world in their art, leaving indelible marks upon my memory. In their voice, they brought to life the imagined and the 'un-imagined', making them believable to me and to the others who listened. Those old people taught and entertained me for most of my very young life.

I sometimes imagine them old fullas with me when I see something clever or funny, nudging me in the side and whispering, 'See that?'

Threshold: Reconfiguring the Past in *That Deadman Dance*

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Mieke Bal, 'Becoming of the World versus Identity Politics', 9–10

Borders are not lines but spaces – territories that are contested and fought over, but shared spaces nonetheless. ... Some forms of occupation (colonialism, for instance) can generate a mode of resistance that may enhance survival. In a more cultural dynamic, the negotiation of borders can be a model for interpretation... Practices of occupation, resistance, and interpretation are all forms of negotiation.

Striving for a provocative style that subverts hegemonic discursive practices is an enduring theme in Kim Scott's writing. His dynamic narratives testify to the sense of place as a complex site of intersecting stories that are frequently discounted or even forgotten, but can be found in the traces they leave within the landscape. Implicit in the author's decision to represent a multiplicity of co-existing voices is both a resistance of hegemonic representation and an insistence of writing as negotiated space.

Scott's representation of manifold voices that do not share the same vision provides a model for other writers who seek the remnant memories and multi-stranded stories, the 'shadow lines' secreted in the landscape of the Great Southern region of Western Australia where his novels are located.¹ In *That Deadman Dance* nothing is fixed. Place and memory, like the identities of the novel's characters, are in a constant state of change, a perpetual flux that implies a recursive reflexivity in the way they are represented.

That Deadman Dance can be read as a cultural monument that asserts, and indeed affirms a sense of remembrance and belonging frequently absent in everyday life. Disruption and dispossession of cultural knowledge, including stories, songs and dances, is a legacy of all Indigenous people, and remembering, reclaiming the words an important aspect of survival. Embodied practices such as walking on country (as

Scott does as part of the Wirloomin Noongar Language and Stories Project), and story making that responds to the multiplicity of voices, provide a threshold to reconfigure and renew identities, both personal and collective.

While the narrative is told predominantly from the point of view of a Noongar man, Bobby Wabalanginy, the novel makes space for diverse voices and worldviews. Through the relationships, even friendships, of the Minang Noongar and the European settlers, Scott proposes an alternative paradigm for how contemporary Australians might interact with the environment and with one another. In a skilfully constructed narrative that counters customary accounts, the author articulates his knowledge of both the landscape and the cultural heritage of the Albany region. In the novel, that other consummate storyteller, Bobby Wabalanginy, explains the way

you can dive deep into a book and not know just how deep until you return gasping to the surface, and are surprised at yourself, your new and so very sensitive skin. As if you're someone else altogether, some new self trying on the words. (86)

Bobby Wabalanginy knows the power of the printed word: the eager child forming his letters on the slate; the young man manipulating the truth with writing when he realises that his oblique statement to the governor will free him from the gaol; the old man remembering, reflecting on how the lives of the Minang Noongar have been controlled through the dissemination of the written word. Indeed, Bobby strives for the agency, and for what he sees as the permanence of writing, acknowledging its exceptional power in a colonial regime that places little value on the spoken word and the long standing oral traditions of the Indigenous inhabitants.

In that time of transition during the first encounters between the Minang Noongar and Europeans, 'laughing and loved, Bobby Wabalanginy never learned fear; not until he was pretty well a grown man did he ever even know it' (67). Bobby willingly embraces new experiences. He is particularly drawn to the English language and to writing, and

came to need the feel of all those small and intricate movements required to build up a picture, a story, a permanence. Came to need the ritual of it, the absorption in the doing of things, and then stepping back—oh look what had been brought forth. It was like you froze things, froze the fluid shift

and shaping, held it. Like cold time. *Nyitiny*. Like a seed in cold time, and when the sun came out the waters rose. (201)

Scott's novel stands as something remarkable in the body of Australian literature not only because it is a 'shifty, snaking narrative' that energises and disorients and demands to be read and reread, but also because the form revivifies our view of the 'foundation event'.² Scott's willingness to reveal uncertainties in the representation of colonially determined identities can be unsettling. In this way, his purpose presents rich opportunities for those with an interest in challenging and resisting dominant Australian national discourses in literature that deny multiple and coexisting voices. In his hands, the story of the relationships between the Minang Noongar and the sailors, sealers and settlers who made contact on the shores of what is now Albany at the beginning of the nineteenth century, is complex and nuanced, liberating the novel from conventional dichotomies that positioned British knowledge (including land management) as superior to that of the Indigenous people who resided there.

Paul Ricoeur's (2004) ideas of the formation of identity through the constant process of interpretation and reinterpretation that is intrinsic to narration, and the way individual memory is inextricably linked to cultural discourse, helps to explain how story making facilitates understanding through its inherent memory work, interpretation and assimilation of meaning. While remembering is experienced internally, it frequently relies on triggers in the external world. Of course the representation of place in the pages of a novel is wholly different to embodied emplacement. Nevertheless, writing about landscape is an act of translation and the imaginative act of reading allows for a multitude of memories, and, as in this case of *That Deadman Dance*, provides opportunities for reconfiguring a previously held view.

Each year on the first Monday of June, West Australians are granted (and no doubt take for granted) a holiday in remembrance of the State's foundation. But there is little acknowledgement or public recognition of what that might mean to mark the occasion. With this in mind, I consider Scott's representation of the initial contact between Minang Noongar and Europeans as a way in which the notion of a 'foundation event' can itself be seen as the site of an ongoing discursive regime of colonialism. *That Deadman Dance* is located in the contested territory of the Indigenous people's first contact with European invasion, a time in the nation's history that is typically represented from the colonisers' point of view. Although set historically, I contend that Scott's considered use of language, and discursive devices that point to the elision of Noongar knowledge and the

silencing of Noongar voices, grant the novel its contemporary relevance. Furthermore, I agree with Ross Gibson that the suppression and denial of alternative, potentially resistant voices has served, and continues to serve, to legitimise European settlement (150). This includes the denial of the violence that went hand in hand with the land grab, the denial of which Gibson argues has become a national characteristic.

It is worth going back to Paul Carter's (1996) assertion that spatial history (rather than geography) 'begins and ends in language'. Language and the articulation of the sense of place are at the core of *That Deadman Dance*. How the world is organised and classified is fundamental to knowledge and linguistic systems. As a character, Menak signifies traditional Minang Noongar perspectives, and what will be lost. When he predicts what is to come, he is not just resisting a list of European naming, but an entire worldview of the relational nature of reality.

While an account of Noongar and European inter-relationships set on the Swan River around 1829 in Jack Davis' *Kullark* was performed and published in 1982, and Davis and Archie Weller both reference the first contact period from a Noongar point of view in various poems, including Weller's 'Wurarbuti' and 'Midgiegooroo', few literary representations of those first encounters in Western Australia have represented perspectives of both coloniser and colonised. And despite the population of the Noongar nation being the largest in Australia, Noongar perspectives have been represented even less so.³

Scott's evocation of place, and the heteroglossic and multi-stranded approach of *That Deadman Dance*, signify an act of literary resistance. The novel reminds us of the stories of colonial unsettlement that remain untold, and nourishes the nation's collective memory with re-imagined possibilities. Furthermore, it touches on what Keith Basso has conceptualised when he explains that 'wisdom sits in places' (105–49). The ability to 'read' the local landscape (as the Minang Noongar) and relay through narratives detailing the 'right conduct' traditionally associated with these familiar landscapes, presents lessons of how to act appropriately now and into the future.

The creative production of a successful work of fiction, in this case a novel, comprises a nexus of complexity and nuance that enables the reader to become an inhabitant of, or to gain some insight into, an imaginative world-frame that seems both familiar and original, believable and yet often unknowable. Scott's ability to evoke a sense of place, along with his skill at writing in both Noongar and English, endows the novel with authenticity, situating the narrative in a place that the reader can perhaps recognise, but sees now as if with fresh, unveiled eyes. The

'memories within' are the subsoil of Scott's work; social and collective memories gleaned from shared kinship and shared history, both in his personal life and his active work in language retrieval and cultural maintenance with his collaborators from within the Noongar community.⁴

As a writer of the Wirlomin Noongar nation closely involved in the local language retrieval project, but also in the way that he has considered himself 'linguistically displaced' (2011, 1), Scott has both the capacity and the authority to offer a story of the 'foundation event' through the voice of Noongar and settler characters. Although written in English, the novel portrays the ability of the multilingual Noongar characters to code-switch between English, French and their mother tongue. And while the landscape is being renamed by the European 'discoverers', the Noongar characters are always emplaced within their own country, the names of the landmarks, the seasonal shifts and plants and animals tracing their longstanding knowledge and history in the area.

That Deadman Dance encompasses a period of 1826–1844, drawing from archival material, oral material of local Noongar, and family sources. Albany, or King George's Sound, where the novel is set, is the country of the Minang Noongar. On Christmas Day in 1826, a military base was established at Fredericktown by a British Army expedition led by Major Edmund Lockyer, who came ashore with a few soldiers and convicts from the brig *Amity*. In the decades before this, there were encounters between the local Noongar and with seafaring explorers such as Mathew Flinders and Nicholas Baudin, and an ongoing presence of American whaling fleets. However, while the presence of the whalers and their impact on the Minang Noongar people is referenced, the novel is essentially concerned with the period of the founding and settlement of a colony by the British. Although Scott has reworked and reconfigured the material, there are clear resonances in the novel with the local geography, historical record and mythology of the region.

Scott has constructed the imaginative world-frame of *That Deadman Dance* to be believable; the landscape particularised, the language localised, the historical elements based on archival record. The narrative explicates the 'foundation event' in vivid detail so that the novel is a skilful re-imagining of the relationships within the encounter. The author argues that continuity of place

... is fundamental ... is a primal value. Continuity of place: from that you get the importance of relationship of all sorts. In literature—in terms of language and stories continuity is really important for us Indigenous people because that's the

culture, that's the spirit. Culture is a manifestation of spirit. That's not an intellectual concept; that's what I feel. (Scott, in Brewster 232)

'Continuity of place' does not mean to imply that places do not change. Places by their natures are indeterminate and constantly changing, both in the physical and the cultural sense. Edward Casey's (1997, 337) idea of place as 'eventmental' is helpful in understanding a sense of place. There is never a 'single place' but rather even the most particular place is surrounded by other places, and, temporally, and in terms of identity, experienced and remembered in a multiplicity of ways (Casey 2007, 22). Casey draws attention to Basso's writing in relation to the ways in which public memory is able to 'remind us of this procession of ethics from place—to a genuinely place-based ethics', something I would argue Noongar ceremony, (with all that it entails in terms of everyday life), once served to do.

In the novel, the 'place' of both Minang Noongar characters and European characters alike is a manifestation of the tension between the 'natural' environment and 'cultural' setting. There is a threshold in Scott's writing, in his ability to insinuate multiple points of view through a multitude of voices. He reminds us that the 'in between' space is loaded with uncertainties and never straightforward, that events of the past leave traces in bodies, texts and landscapes, and that there is endless possibility in re-imagining the narrative, in remaking the story. Scott's novel resists the narrative tropes of first encounter stories, of the binaries and the notion that it was all done and dusted back then in the past; there is a clear rejection of stasis, and the recognition of the fluidity of place, memory and storying. Indeed, *That Deadman Dance* attends to that deep sense of the 'continuity of place'.

In this respect, Scott's writing resonates with the geographer Doreen Massey's work in the way that there is a 'genuine appreciation of the specificity of the local area' but in a manner that rejects the idea of a place as 'always already coherent'. Characteristic of his writing is the way that it evokes place as 'meeting place ... as open rather than bounded, as an ongoing production rather than pre-given' (Massey 34). Evoking Noongar language, and through it, a sense of place that insists on a responsive reciprocity, Scott's representations of the landscape signify a liveliness and mutability.

Boodawan, nyooondokat nyinang moort, moortapinyang yongar, wetj, wilo ... Nitja boodja ngalak boodja Noonga boodjar, kwop nyooondok yoowarl koorl yey, yang ngaalang. ... Because you need to be inside the sound and the spirit of it,

to live here properly. And how can that be, without we people who have been here for all time. (395)

Not only the language, but the compositional strategies of Scott's novel point to a place where change is inevitable. However, unlike other representations of Indigenous experience during the 'foundation event', Scott articulates a world frame that shows Noongar and Europeans responding to their alteration in circumstances in a multitude of ways. Adaptability, interactive capacity through language and a willingness to change are qualities reflected to various degrees in all of the characters in the novel, both Noongar and European.

Massey insists that this instability of landscapes, the tectonic wanderings that are accepted now in science and geography, presents the possibility for a 're-imagining of landscape and place ... that leads even more clearly to an understanding of both place and landscape as events, as happenings, as moments that will be again dispersed' (35). Important here is her idea that landscapes are like 'provisionally intertwined simultaneities of ongoing, unfinished, stories' (Massey 35). In Scott's earlier novel, *Benang*, the main protagonist, Harley, speaks from the heart, telling the reader:

I am a part of a much older story, one of a perpetual billowing from the sea, with its rhythm of return, return, return, and remain ... there are many stories here, in the ashes below my feet. (1999, 497)

This notion is echoed in *That Deadman Dance*, as Bobby negotiates the stories passed down to him by the elders, those he gleans from English texts, and those that form within his own imagination.

Towards the conclusion of the novel, the capricious narrator reminds the reader of the tenuous truths, the delimiting nature of life rendered coherent and contained in the fixity of the written word, and firmly draws attention away from the intense personal narrative of the novel to the complexity of postcolonial Australia and the many contesting stories that are buried beneath the ground. The text is insistent in its endeavours to bring to the surface the voices that have long been forgotten and to facilitate remembrance. The reader is reminded that the dominant tropes of the 'foundation event' are, like all utterances, constructs, and that just below the surface lies the

bones from riverbanks washed down toward the sea, and only a kindred spirit and tongue can find them, maybe bring them alive again, even if in some other shape. (357)

The production and transmission of stories, whether oral or written, is an essential element in the making and holding of collective memory. Stories become especially important to communities that have been displaced, or where their familiar places have been degraded, even destroyed. While there were some notable attempts to record Indigenous knowledge by Europeans, either because of difficulties with translation or disinterest, Noongar representations of the region and the period depicted in novels are few. This colonial insularity and its byproduct, fear of everything outside of the contained world they tried to reconstruct in the colony, and resistance to the idea that the Australian continent held memory of any lived experience outside of their own, led to virtually anything pertaining to Aboriginal ontology and epistemology being discounted. There is, therefore, something quite radical in Scott's choices in the compositional strategies of *That Deadman Dance*. He states that he 'wanted ambivalence and a lot of generosity. No real strong baddies in there. So the story itself, until the end, doesn't fit the conventional narratives we have of our shared history' (Scott, in Brewster 2).

Bobby Wabalanginy's performance of the 'Dead Man Dance', which skilfully incorporates what he observes of the soldiers into the form of the ancient ceremonial dances, points the reader to a powerful act of appropriation. The elder Wunyeran's irony in naming the resentment of the whites when the Noongar pick up their habits with aplomb and mirror them back to them, functions in a similar way. The novel depicts complexity and ambiguity, but it also reveals what remains unresolved and, hopefully, possibilities for a relationship between Indigenous and non Indigenous Australians that is responsive and reciprocal. Tiffany Shellam claims that it was not a 'simple takeover', and that there was a 'fusion of cultural expectations and material culture' between both Noongar and the British settlers (xii).

This is a useful point to remember, but while it is true that in *That Deadman Dance* Scott refrains from reductive binaries, depicting the agency of Noongar characters in forming the fledgling colony and representing reciprocal relationships between the Noongar and British settlers, the novel in no way implies an even playing field. Rather, we are left with the sense of lost opportunities, of 'if onlys', of 'what might have been' had the 'founding event' been managed differently. In this way, although the novel describes events that are on the historical, and therefore, the written record, it challenges the colonial 'truths' insofar as it attempts to redress the silencing of Noongar language and perspectives. In doing so, Scott opens up possibilities for different understandings

of belonging and identity, deploying language differently, inviting the reader to hear what has long been forgotten through the written record. In *Disputed Territory*, the author explains that:

It heartens me to know that the country I am descended from is boundary territory; between peoples, between desert and sea. In some of the maps—to the extent that you can ever trust them—it is even that labelled 'disputed territory'. The place I write from is also a particular and specific historical place, which might also be thought of as 'disputed territory'. (2000, 171)

Echoing Casey's work on embodied memory, Jill Bennett describes memory in terms of the senses and how remembering is experienced as 'a continuous negotiation of the present with indeterminable links with the past' (38). For Bennett, the poetics of sense memory involves not so much 'speaking of but speaking out of a particular memory or experience—in other words speaking from the body *sustaining sensation*' (38; original emphasis). This has particular resonance in creative production and is salient in reading Scott's work, imbued and embedded as it is in Minang Noongar country, drawing on the historical record and facticity. The opening chapter of *That Deadman Dance* plays on words, plays with words. The reader is plunged into that contested territory where the colonial hegemony proclaims new terms and insists on the discontinuity of the Indigenous culture, including, significantly, evidence of the overriding legitimacy of literacy and the deficit of the oral tradition.

Kaya. Writing such a word, Bobby Wabalanginy couldn't help but smile. Nobody ever writ that before, he thought. Nobody ever writ *hello* or yes that way!

Roze a wail ...

Bobby Wabalanginy wrote with damp chalk, brittle as weak bone. Bobby wrote on a thin piece of slate. Moving between languages, Bobby wrote on stone.

Bob Wablign wrote *roze a wail*. (1)^s

But Bobby was 'only imagining'—he couldn't even remember the proper song. There was no whale' (3). Philip Mead points out that 'writing cannot help him [Bobby] to retrieve the song of the whale in the Noongar oral tradition' (149), that Scott shows us how despite Bobby's cosmopolitan sensibilities, he still has difficulty in recalling, remembering and indeed telling the Noongar stories now that the succession of oral stories is disrupted.

Intrinsic to the form and narrative of the novel is the seminal role writing plays in the colonising process. Gibson identifies a 'pathological' disconnection between 'doing and declaring' that gave those wielding the pens a clear advantage (73). As he grows older, Bobby Wabalanginy experiences this, and comes to see all too well that his youthful confidence in the power of the written word lies not in the words, but those who control them.

The production of text, finding a place on the public record is how history is made, and as Marion Campbell explains, paper and text are weapons that serve colonial interests. 'Everywhere Nyoongars are processed, there is a paper trail' (235). To write or not to write? Scott has talked candidly about his uncertainties in deploying the form of the novel, the written word being implicated as it is in the loss of so many Indigenous languages and cultural mechanisms. Worth noting is his explanation that

this is a society that does not allow the possibility of being part-Aboriginal. Such is 'our' society's division, and its history, that one is either Aboriginal or not. There is no middle ground. (2000, 169)

Over a decade later, writing at the cultural interface is rigorously contested and Aboriginal literature and Aboriginal writers are no longer easily constrained at the margins, refusing to be labelled or indeed to be told what and how they are to write. However, cultural advancement notwithstanding, the text, through the mechanisms of the language and form deployed in the writing, asks that the reader consider Scott's right to write, and how the writing intersects with 'foundation event' literature and with 'postcolonial' writing in contemporary Australia. Whose story, and through which lens, are such events to be represented? Within the context of the novel these are important considerations; Scott underscores the inherent power of discourse with respect to what will be remembered and what will be forgotten.

Writing after 9/11, Casey explains that public memory is constitutive of identities of many kinds and that its power 'once formed and sedimented resides in its capacity to be located in the margins of our lives' (2007, 18). In this way memory is maintained within 'our various identities, specifying what kinds of citizens, family members, friends, and social agents we are' (2007, 19). In the way that the locale of *That Deadman Dance* is a wounded site of contested and conflicting stories, writing and publishing such a story is a significant accomplishment in terms of what constitutes collective or public memory.

Casey describes the way that wounded places embody mourning for the place itself, both the place provided by human activity, including

buildings, as well as the place on which they stood, which is all that now remains, but also the aspirations attached to that place and the loss of what may have occurred had the place remained intact (2007, 22). Moreover, remembering and memorialising is complex and multi-stranded, and even with committed effort to suppress or deny, forgetting is not easy. As Gibson puts it, '[w]ishful amnesia is no protection against memories of actual, lived experience. The events of the past rarely pass' (179).

Stored within stories, memories, albeit in an ever-changing reconstituted form, are passed down through the generations. Displacement and dispossession live on in the remembering of the Noongar people of the South-West. While nothing more than a skilful work of fiction, the lived experience that was played out within the landscape, and the memories of the place represented in Scott's novel serve as a memorial, a reminder of events that have, and continue to take place. In a recent essay, Scott describes a young Noongar boy learning the skills and knowledge that will serve him when he is a man, the natural rhythms sung (and danced) through 'the stories of his place' (2015, 202).

Walter Ong's (2002) ideas of 'residual orality' and the valuable way that this informs cultural expression highlights the rhythmic quality of songs and dance that allows complex ideas to be communicated through more easily remembered mnemonic patterns. Singing the country, both land and sea, is frequently referenced in Scott's version of events: an intrinsic, inseparable aspect of the practices of the Minang Noongar in their connection, knowledge and management of the natural environment, and important to my project, memorialisation and retention of culture. Nevertheless, as Gibson argues, on the Australian continent it was 'as if the surface of the land was all the Europeans cared about. They seemed to have no concern for the deeper forces or spirits that created the country and maintained it in all its changeable depths and charges' (139).

As the narrative moves forward, Scott denotes the rapid changes to the environment; the settlers systematically exploited the biodiversity of the native fauna, hacked down trees, rearranged and polluted precious water sources, mapped, fenced and caused the accumulation of refuse of the kind never seen by Noongar before. The proliferation of hard-hoofed livestock and other plants and animals that accompanied the ships and were delivered onto the shores of what is now known as King George's Sound, led to farming and agricultural practices that would change the nature of the land forever.

'Wisdom sits in places'—*That Deadman Dance* speaks back to a specific time and place of a decisive event in Western Australia's history. The

novel is testimony to the formidable knowledge and skills of the Minang Noongar held in their language, and within the songs and stories of their sacred ceremonies over many thousands of years. Bobby Wabalanginy is given the stories when Menak and the other elders consider it's time for him to have them, in the way cultural assets have been passed down through the generations over thousands of years.

In the novel the characters of Menak and Manit are the oracles, foreshadowing the disruption of the traditions of Noongar story and song and with it, all the Noongar knowledge and spirit intrinsic to their longstanding relationship with their place.⁶ 'Menak made an incision in the whale to release its spirit. It was something he'd done with Wabalanginy's father. But what man stood beside him now?' (254) The whale motif runs through the narrative as a metaphor of possibility and loss, but the exploitation of whales for monetary gain is also a tangible feature of the colonial agenda. The whale has a strong and enduring status in Minang Noongar community life, but after the arrival of numerous whaling ships, which were in turn supported by the settlers, they became collateral damage of the colonising project.

Resonating with Campbell's (2014) work on the agency implicit in heteroglossic texts that open to uncertainty and change, Scott has said that he hopes

the story is about creativity and spirit, about strength: strong Noongar characters. And about possibility being lost. And so the connection between the resolution and the conventional historical narrative does, I hope, a lot of political work through those resonances.

(in Brewster 2)

While he hopes that the story is affirming, a story that views through a positive lens a version of the 'foundation event' at King George's Sound, he adds that 'the ending reminds us how it intersects with the historical narrative, the theme of which is something close to defeat' (Scott in Brewster 2). Salient to my reading is Campbell's assertion that in Scott's writing 'reconfiguring the past as multi-stranded makes agency in the present seem thinkable' (676).

Casey claims that 'public memory is radically bivalent in its temporality, for it is both attached to the past (typically, an originating or traumatic event of some sort) and attempts to secure a future of further remembering of that same event' (2007, 1). In the case of literature, the responsive reader continually reconstitutes the remembering.

At the conclusion of the novel, Bobby Wabalanginy entreats the audience in a last ditch effort to make some sense of what is happening. He proffers what he best has to offer, story, song and dance, appealing for what he sees as the common understandings for any viable future in this place the Noongar and colonists share, achieving, perhaps, at least for a moment, what Casey describes when memory and place are embodied in performance, as '*that of congealing the disparate into a provisional unity*' (1987, 202; original emphasis). But the moment, the memory, does not endure, except now on the leaf-like pages of a book.

Faces—turned away from him. Bobby felt as if he had surfaced in some other world. Chairs creaked as people stirred, coughing. Chaine led them to their feet. Figures at the periphery of Bobby's vision fell away. He heard gunshots. And another sound: a little dog yelping. (395)

Notes

- 1 Scott's writing embodies Stephen Kinnane's notion of stories lingering in the land.
- 2 The character Harley's comment describing his 'shifty, snaking narrative' in Scott's novel, *Benang* (24) is apt here.
- 3 In the Noongar Dialogue Report 2010 the population was estimated at 27,000, the largest indigenous group in Australia.
- 4 In 'Wild Tongues: Affirming Identities' Toni Morrison (1990) describes how as a novelist the 'memories within' are the 'subsoil of her work.' Scott describes travelling on country during the 2006 Wirloomin workshops to 'feel for the pulse of an old land' (2015, 211).
- 5 The play on the word, 'wail' signifies the violent dislocation of the Minang Noongar from their country, and gestures to the importance of whales (which were also violently displaced) in the cultural life of the people. Lady Anna Brassey's extraordinary account during her 1887 visit to Albany in the 'Sunbeam' details how with 'their usual short sightedness', the crews 'were not content with killing their prey (whales) in the usual manner, [but] took to blowing them up with dynamite; the result being that they killed more than they could deal with and frightened the remainder away.'
- 6 Using the word 'settlement' is problematic without acknowledging the contradictions, ethnocentrism and underlying displacement of original inhabitants that it implies. Noongar nations were *settled* across all areas of the south-west of the continent until they were *unsettled* by the appropriation of their land by European *settlers*. The expropriation of Noongar property, language and rights was inextricably linked with the introduction of non-sustainable practices in all areas of agriculture and industry, and the resulting degradation of the land. Forms of protocol are an essential feature of the way Indigenous Australians manage land, and an important component of the stories valued in these communities.

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Dinked on handlebars
we race by the pub
where beers froth like
salt lakes, and smell as
pungent.

Terracotta streets
paint a bleak past bright.
Villas beam of
peach crayon—
the one we use
to draw skin.

Like ghost shackles
ringing where the
Quod used to be,
my bike chain clatters,
falls limp.
Grease streaks our calves,
slightly tanned
and a little bit burnt
at the edges.

Vlamingh named it 'Rotte nest'
after quokkas, large rats.
We get a photo feeding one
stale bread each summer.
Their dull fur foregrounds
a cobalt coast.

Its Noongar name
is Wadjemup
the place across water
where spirits are
and we feel like spirits,
soaking mini-golf days
and evenings of
slouch-chaired cinema.
Time slows with no TV.
It feels free here,

and back at Rous Head
a sun sets on the
dark line of Rotto:
peach disc dropping
like a dollar—
slightly tanned,
and a little bit burnt
at the edges.

Feeding Lake Disappointment

Kevin Gillam

Kevin Gillam is a West Australian poet and music educator. He has had three books of poetry published and works at Christ Church Grammar School as Director of Music.

scabbed. flat. scaly. but fabling.
creek sutures. dances between
these. edgeless. scats. unswathing,
saline. and crow's breath. erem—

ophila. smears. palm of land.
while grit. unpastel. starts hard.
bleached. pewless. and brailled so. sand,
scree. frail sky. but unfleshed. shards

of. urgeless. periphery
greets. these two. cirrus fingered
just. cathedraled. confetti
blurs. two states. uncussed. lingers

so. shushed. on the tongue. and thieves,
staveless. states of being. grieves

Two Sisters revisited

Pat Lowe

Pat Lowe grew up in England and came to Western Australia in 1972. She met Jimmy Pike when she was working as a psychologist at Broome Prison. Pat has written a dozen books, many of them in collaboration with Jimmy.

The title of the book *Two Sisters* may suggest that this is a single story about shared lives. In reality, the book contains two very different stories, approached in opposite ways.

The eponymous sisters are Walmajarri women from the Great Sandy Desert of Western Australia, both now deceased. They spent their early lives within the same family group, travelling their country to follow its resources, learning to hunt animals and to use the trees and smaller plants growing in the sandhills, as well as acquiring all the other knowledge and skills essential to that pared-back way of life.

The elder of the sisters, Jukuna, later known to the wider world as the artist Mona Chuguna, left the desert as a young bride with her husband in the late 1950s, and went to work on Cherrabun cattle station. Her story covers the before and after of that pivotal moment when Jukuna left her country.

The younger sister Ngarta, known also as Jinny Bent, stayed behind with her beloved grandmother, and so became a member of the last group of Walmajarri people—women and children—still living in that whole expanse of desert until the turn of the 1960s. The horrific events that followed, when the group was taken over by two murderous Manyjilyjarra men, and the young girl's plucky escape, are the climax of Ngarta's story.

The stories are different because the two women had such divergent experiences during a formative time in their lives, and they are approached differently because of the way they first came into being and because the sisters worked with two different writers. Jukuna wrote her story in her own language, translated by fluent Walmajarri speaker Eirlys Richards, while Ngarta told hers to me in her limited English, which was still much better than my even more limited Walmajarri.

I met Ngarta in 1986, when I joined artist Jimmy Pike at his camp at the place called 'Kurlku', on the edge of the desert. She and Jukuna were

Jimmy's 'nieces', and had shared a desert childhood with him. The sisters and their husbands had helped set up the camp and often drove out from Fitzroy Crossing to visit us and go hunting. Ngarta came out with her family more often than Jukuna and I learnt to appreciate her gentleness and grace. Jimmy told me something of her experiences after he had left the desert—an extraordinary story of murder, loss and courage, which begged to be recorded. When I raised the idea of writing her story with Ngarta, she quickly agreed.

It wasn't just a question of sitting down with Ngarta for an extended period and taping or writing down her words, although we did do a bit of that. For the most part I had to take opportunities as they presented themselves, amidst all her family's comings and goings. We shared expeditions into the desert to visit former, long-abandoned camps and waterholes: active times that didn't always allow for much storytelling. Because of the ad hoc nature of our work together I seldom had my recorder handy when opportunity offered, and even when I did, while I groped around and tested it or changed the batteries, the natural moment could be lost, or the telling become self-conscious and stilted. I usually found it much easier to listen closely and use the less intrusive pencil and notebook, which I always kept on hand.

Westerly published the first version of Ngarta's story in her own words, which I had edited lightly for readability, in 1991. Friends who read the story said that it was interesting but difficult to follow because much-needed background information was missing, and suggested that I re-write the account in the third person, a method that would allow me to supply the missing context and back story. With Ngarta's agreement and cooperation I worked on this new version, referring to Ngarta whenever I needed more information or something clarified, and so the story expanded. When I had finished the draft I read the first pages to Ngarta, who said, 'You got it!' and declined to hear any more.

The final manuscript was too short for publication in book form, and I wasn't sure what to do with it—I wondered if it might become part of an anthology. Meanwhile, I shelved it.

A few years later, Jukuna solved that problem by producing her own story.

Having worked at Cherrabun for the first few years after her departure from the desert, Jukuna moved with her family to Fitzroy Crossing. She attended the local church and embraced the Christian teachings. Although she never repudiated her own culture and remained deeply attached to her country, her faith too was important to her for the rest of her life. She always travelled with a hefty copy of the Bible in her suitcase.

When linguists Eirlys Richards and Joyce Hudson came to live in Fitzroy Crossing in 1967 with the purpose of translating the Bible into Walmajarri, they recruited speakers of the language living locally to teach them. After a while they ran literacy classes and Jukuna was one of the first women to enroll. She learnt how to write Walmajarri, using the orthography developed by the two linguists. She proved to be a focused and dedicated student and was soon enlisted to help with the Bible translation. She enjoyed working with her language and became skilled in editing written Walmajarri. Jukuna was also one of the contributors to the Walmajarri Dictionary, produced over a period of twenty years, providing vocabulary as well as explanations and sentences to illustrate the use of certain words. Language and stories remained her passion, and she was keen to pass it on to the next generation by speaking Walmajarri with children. She later became a teacher in the more formal setting of Walmajarri classes at Fitzroy Crossing Primary School. Some of her stories, told for the benefit of her children and grandchildren, have been published, with English subtitles, on a DVD.

Jukuna also attended English literacy and art classes at Karrayili Adult Education Centre in its early days. Later, she joined other artists making paintings at Mangkaja Arts. Along with her faith and her language work, painting parts of her country sustained Jukuna during her later years.

As Eirlys tells it, one day Jukuna opened her handbag and produced a small folded bundle of pages, saying she had written her story—in Walmajarri. She knew I had been working with Ngarta on her story, but I don't know if that had anything to do with Jukuna's decision to start writing her own. At Jukuna's behest, Eirlys translated her words into English. It was a beautiful account of a girl's desert childhood, and of her transition to a completely different life on cattle stations and in towns. We wondered if this could be the first example of an autobiography written in an Aboriginal language. Even so, it was clear that there were gaps in the account; for instance, Jukuna had omitted to mention any of her six children. Eirlys and Jukuna spent time together drawing out other elements of the story, which Jukuna drafted in Walmajarri for Eirlys to translate.

Fremantle Arts Centre Press, now Fremantle Press, published the first edition of *Two Sisters* in 2004, two years after Ngarta's death. There was no reprint and we two surviving authors might have left it at that were it not for requests from the sisters' families and other people for a new edition. I took to buying secondhand copies off the Internet to give to people. In the meantime, I had gained additional information about Ngarta's story: newspaper articles and letters to the editor from 1961

referring to her group's emergence from the desert, which had caused a stir, so that for the first time I was able to pinpoint the date and enjoy the irony of the way the event was interpreted by the general population, completely at odds with the real story. I had also had the opportunity to talk to one of the other women who had been with Ngarta's group as a girl and been taken by one of the murderers as his wife.

After updating both stories, Eirlys and I submitted the joint manuscript to Magabala Books, where it was received with gratifying enthusiasm.

Meanwhile, Jukuna had become seriously ill with diabetes and renal failure. When she moved into the renal hostel in Broome, just around the corner from where I live, she got into the habit of coming to my place to do her painting—always colourful landscapes of her beloved country—and tell more stories. Sometimes she would light a fire in the garden and cook ngarlnka—nuts brought back to her from one of the field trips she could no longer take part in—a reminder of her earlier life. Jukuna died in 2011: another of the dwindling members of that singular generation of people who left the desert, a place they had known more intimately than anyone will ever know it again.

Two Sisters is a rare first-hand account of life before and after first contact. As such, it holds an appeal for people who want to know about Aboriginal history and experience; furthermore, as Bruce Pascoe remarked when discussing the reception of his book, *Dark Emu*, interest in such matters has increased markedly in recent years. Eirlys and I are of the opinion that the desert diaspora is one of the great little-known stories in Australian history, with almost biblical overtones, and that is why we were so keen to work with Ngarta and Jukuna to write about it from their point of view. We are delighted to see it being republished.

A Review of *The Intervention: An Anthology*

Danielle Binks

Danielle Binks is a book reviewer on her personal blog Alpha Reader. She completed studies in Professional Writing & Editing at RMIT in 2009 and is currently working on her first novel.

Rosie Scott and Anita Heiss (eds), *The Intervention: An Anthology*. Self-published by Concerned Australians, 2015. RRP \$25.00, 288pp, ISBN: 9780646937090

John Howard was on TV a lot in early March, celebrating the 20th anniversary of his election as Prime Minister. Also in March, there was extensive news coverage of Cardinal George Pell's three-day testimony to the royal commission into child sexual abuse. Both these events seemed to come at an apex of my reading of *The Intervention: an anthology*, a collection of writing which has been self-funded and published by 'concerned Australians' (i).

Edited by Rosie Scott and Anita Heiss, the anthology examines a piece of legislation introduced in Howard's last year of governing. As summarised by the ABC's Indigenous news page dedicated to the topic, 'The Northern Territory National Emergency Response Act 2007, was a legislative response from the Federal Government to the Northern Territory Government's Inquiry into the Protection of Aboriginal Children from Sexual Abuse, or "Little Children are Sacred" report.' (ABC, 2015)

The Intervention features thirty-three chapters from various Indigenous and non-Indigenous voices—fiction, non-fiction, poetry and memoir from writers are interspersed with statements from Elders—all with an aim to: 'make Australian readers think about the plight of other largely voiceless Australians.' (6) Specifically, the anthology is bringing attention to the many criticisms of the NT Intervention, which has since been replaced by the very similar 'Stronger Futures Policy' under then prime minister Kevin Rudd. The anthology highlights the manner in which the Intervention has made a serious breach of human rights, and was never debated nationally as the legislation received bipartisan support in the Commonwealth parliament.

The military and police emergency response, costing \$587 million and deploying some 600 soldiers to the area, concluded in October

2008—but in the years since, there hasn't been one prosecution for child abuse resulting from the exercise. Measures that breached the Racial Discrimination Act were enforced; compulsory acquisition of townships (currently held under the title provisions of the Native Title Act), and suspension of the permit system controlling access to Aboriginal communities were among the bizarre measures. These included restrictions on alcohol, and mandated porn filters on publicly funded computers—none of which have seen change to the figures of sexual offence against children in the Northern Territory.

In 'We Are Many Nations But We Are One People', Anita Heiss opens the anthology with her personal account of the passing of the NT Intervention and the rallies that followed. Heiss recounts attending a rally at the capital, where she listened to Aunty Eileen Cummings give an interview to filmmaker Richard Frankland, telling him: 'Our people need to get back the power to control what's happening in our communities. We're now reliving what happened to us as children when the Native Police came in. Right now in the Territory, I'm reminded of growing up on a mission settlement.' (9)

The Intervention doesn't claim or aim for a balanced discussion of this debate, largely because this perspective hasn't been offered coverage in the public sphere. The government's agenda has been the only one put forth. For that reason, I can understand why Aboriginal commentators and activists such as Noel Pearson, Marcia Langton and Bess Price, who are reservedly supportive of the NT Intervention, have not been included in the anthology. (Whether they were invited or not, I do not know.) But many writers still provide rather eloquent equilibrium to the debate, like Nicole Watson's article, entitled 'Where is the Evidence that Aboriginal Women are leading Self-Determining Lives?' (88) She refers to essays written by Professor Marcia Langton, and cites politician Bess Nungarrayi Price's views as shown on ABC's Q&A program in 2011: 'I am for the Intervention because I've seen progress. I've seen women who now have voices. They can speak for themselves and they are standing up for their rights.' (ABC, 2011) Watson knocks these viewpoints down with hard facts, statistics, and the overwhelming logic that since there's been no consultation with the Indigenous communities affected, there's actually been no opportunity for Aboriginal women to share their experiences of the Intervention—which is one of its biggest faults.

There are so many chapters in this anthology of impassioned, informed and oftentimes infuriated writing—media releases, extracts from press conferences, reports and essays—but particularly the words of Elders and community. 'We declare that we have not been conquered'

(114), for example, reads a statement on behalf of the independently established Yolnuw Makarr Dhuni—Yolngu Nations Assembly.

Rodney Hall's 'The Constitutional Connection' is a particularly timely read, given current public debate for a referendum to recognise Indigenous Australians in the constitution, and is perfectly summarised by Hall's parting line: 'It is time for the truth about who we are and who was here first.' (187) And Yuin man Bruce Pascoe's 'Bread' offers an examination of what Australia is really like, 'so wedded to a story of human history that Aboriginal Australia is forever outside it' (145). This gives some insight as to how we as a nation could accept the NT Intervention so blindly, because, Pascoe writes, 'Australia does not know the history of the country.' (153)

There's also a stand out collection of poems by Ali Cobby Eckermann, the 2013 winner of the Kenneth Slessor Poetry Prize. One of her poems—'A Parable'—echoes Paul Revere (of the American Revolution's catchcry, 'The British are coming!'), but also those words from Aunty Eileen Cummings, remembering the Native Police:

Interventionists are coming interventionists are coming
the cries echo through the dusty community
as the army arrive in their chariots.
Parents and children race for the sand hills (157)

Likewise, there's a stunning fiction piece from Miles Franklin Award-winner, Alexis Wright. 'Be Careful About Playing With The Path of Least Resistance' is a short story of the intervention, as seen through the eyes of a young Aboriginal boy. It's a story that begs the question—how much did the NT intervention hurt those it claimed to be protecting? As the disturbing measures of the Intervention cause insurmountable stress on parents, that does not go unnoticed by their children.

And there it was, you could bet on it every time – a plague of fearfulness in the atmosphere flaring up, and simply by osmosis he is hit by a silent twang, and his spirit is slapped back inside his parents. He thought it was a trick, that their fear was joined to him by invisible elastic that could be pulled by either of them in an instant, to make him feel what it was like inside of their skin. He knew they were frightened of the police, frightened of the government and frightened of officials, which meant they were frightened of any white person in the vicinity, and any others in a proximity that radiated outwards and onwards until it encompassed the

entire continent. A shiver disconnected him. He did not want their fear. (234)

There's little doubt that *The Intervention*—available to purchase through Booktopia—is a worthy and worthwhile book, rousing a debate that we, as a nation, should have had and kept having nearly a decade ago. It's a book worthy of secondary and university study, a hard but necessary read.

But again I'm thinking of how former prime minister John Howard was on TV a lot in early March, as was Cardinal George Pell. The legacy and symbolism of these men cast a shadow over my reading of *The Intervention*. One enacted a deeply flawed piece of legislation that permitted a serious breach of human rights, all for the sake of protecting unnamed children. While the other as a Cardinal stood trial, representing an institution that would have benefited from drastic intervention decades ago to save countless child victims.

Bruce Pascoe was right: Australia does not know the history of the country. Or, at least, we can't see the bitter irony of it.

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A Review of *Timothy Cook: Dancing With the Moon*

Phillip Hall

Phillip Hall is a poet and essayist. In 2014 he published *Sweetened in Coals* and in 2015 *Diwurruwurru*, a book of his collaborations with the Borroloola Poetry Club. He is currently working on a collection of place-based poetry called *Fume*.

Seva Frangos (ed). *Timothy Cook: Dancing With the Moon*. Crawley, WA: University of Western Australian Publishing, 2015. RRP: \$49.99, 250pp, ISBN: 9781742584980 (paperback)

This is a stunningly produced monograph paying tribute to a major Tiwi artist: Tartulawi Timothy Cook. The book brings together five art historians to assess the progress of Cook's career, examining his connections to Tiwi Culture and to contemporary Indigenous and non-Indigenous art. All of the essays are generously illustrated with colour images of Cook's artworks and with photographs of the artist and of his Country (Melville Island). What emerges is a portrait of a dynamic and bold contemporary artist who may be 'cloaked by his Tiwiness but is [also] a thoroughly modern man' (38).

The book has been edited by gallery director, Seva Frangos, as a continuation of her work in establishing and promoting contemporary Indigenous arts. In her essay she provides an intimate portrait of the artist at home with his family and his dogs. Cook's particular experience of Country on Melville Island is located around the area of Goose Creek. And as Frangos shows 'Goose Creek is at the very heart of Cook's being' (37) establishing his connections to family and Tiwi Tradition. Frangos concludes her essay by showing how it is in the way Cook navigates the impacts of modern life and colonialism that he may be seen as the 'ultimate illusionist... slipping between worlds, making art as he abolishes the status quo' (38).

Glenn Iseger-Pilkington, Western Australian Indigenous arts worker and curator, has written the book's second essay. He describes the main subjects and techniques of Cook's art showing how they connect with Tiwi Culture. He describes the paintings (on canvas, paper and bark), ceremonial poles (*tutini*) and bark baskets (*tunga*) that make up the body of

Cook's artworks. Iseger-Pilkington shows how Cook's artworks are 'overtly Tiwi' (47) and how they are also 'fresh and innovative...in the way that they use ochre to render a surface' (47). Iseger-Pilkington concludes his essay with the following astute observation: 'If we allow [Cook's artworks] to speak to us in their own language of marks, colours and pictorial silences, we might understand them as a record of Cook's cultural lineage, and also a quiet yet powerful re-thinking of his Tiwi culture' (55).

The book's third essay was contributed by Bruce McLean, Queensland Art Gallery Indigenous curator, and offers an astounding reading of Cook's artworks from the perspective of contemporary place theory. He begins by evoking Cook's country of Andranagoo (Goose Creek), showing how the art must be seen through the lens of this 'intrinsic connection to country' (62). McLean describes the association with country in the Tiwi ceremonies of Pukukupali and Kulama as he outlines Cook's ideas about materiality, culture, history, ceremony, tradition, change, family and place. As McLean concludes, 'Cook conveys to us the complexity of his contemporary existence in a stunningly simple way' (72).

Quentin Sprague, Melbourne curator and coordinator of Tiwi's Jilamara Arts & Crafts Centre (2007-2009), has written the book's fourth essay. He situates Cook's art practice within the history of northern Australian colonialism, providing an explicitly postcolonial perspective for reading Cook's artworks. Sprague shows how Cook responds to his time of 'radical change' producing work that forms part of 'significant cultural reaffirmation' and 'profound hybridity' (99). It is this, Sprague argues, that not only allows us to see in Cook the 'formation of modernism...but also the very quality that now renders this art contemporary' (99). Sprague goes on to describe the various Tiwi influences on Cook's art practice and to outline the ways that Cook has continued these traditions and also changed them. One interesting example of this dynamic relationship is in Cook's treatment of his Catholic heritage. Here we see a 'striking inversion' of the Church's colonially inscribed power because in Cook's 'dynamic compositions it is ultimately local symbolic systems that endure as the iconographic power of Tiwi culture subsumes and re-signifies the potency of the Catholic icon' (112).

The final essay was written by the National Gallery of Melbourne's Senior Curator of Indigenous Art, Judith Ryan. She summarises that:

Cook is an intuitive artist, with an innate sense of composition and a rare freedom of gesture... His work has a kinetic force of colour and design that insinuates the innovative spirit and vigour of *parlini jilamara* ('olden days Tiwi painting') (116).

Ryan divides Cook's career into its early, middle and mature periods as she discusses his influences, development and impact as a major Tiwi artist. She reinforces the view that Cook's artistic practice must be seen as an expression of his 'Tiwi essentialism and attachment to place' (126) while showing how his 'raw and energetic designs...continue to challenge western preconceptions of contemporary Indigenous art' (145). Finally Ryan shows how Cook fulfills the two criteria of Roger Fry for evaluating works of art:

The vitality in his images—a dynamic boldness—is seen in the free rhythm of his drawing, its intensity of line, whereas sensibility is observable in the materiality of Cook's gritty ochre pigments and its contingent effect and subsequent expression. Sometimes the ochre is smudged or the circles are irregular, perhaps the dotting uneven: there is haptic and perceptual authenticity in the artist's hand, which transcends mechanical facility or regularity' (146).

This monograph establishes Tartulawi Timothy Cook as a leading contemporary Australian artist, with a dynamic and unique set of symbols and patterns that both assert Tiwi culture and challenge northern Australia's colonial legacy. In addition, the book is a superbly produced cultural artifact that celebrates the artistic voice of this significant Australian.

**A Review of Olive Knight,
*The Bauhinia Tree: The
Life of Kankawa Nagarra***
Olive Knight
Phillip Hall

Kankawa Nagarra Olive Knight, *The Bauhinia Tree: The Life of Kankawa Nagarra* Olive Knight. Crawley, WA: University of Western Australian Publishing, 2016. RRP: \$29.99, 192pp, ISBN: 9781742585093

This book raises some complicated issues concerning identity. On one level it is quite a conventionally told story of overcoming adversity: from the 'rags' of Kimberley isolation, poverty and prejudice to the 'riches' of world-renowned singer and political activist. But it is also the autobiography of an Aboriginal evangelical Christian who is descended from a pioneering pastoralist notorious for his cruel treatment and massacres of Indigenous peoples; Kankawa Nagarra remains quite censorious of many aspects of Traditional Culture even while being described as a Walmatjarri Elder. This book is uncomfortable, inspirational, interrogative and celebratory.

Kankawa Nagarra begins her story by highlighting how sexist and exploitative marriage arrangements were under Traditional Law (3-4). She tells the sad story of her mother, given to an old man where there was no affection, and tempted into a 'forbidden love' that could only end in punishment, payback and infanticide (3-5). There is no acknowledgment by the author that the culture she was born into had already been disrupted and diminished by more than three generations of colonialism. Is Kankawa Nagarra critiquing Traditional Law or a post-contact culture already in crisis?

Despite being the descendant of a white pastoralist (her paternal grandfather) 'notorious for his massacres and dealings with Aboriginal people' (7), Kankawa Nagarra 'associates deeply with her Gooniyandi Clan (her other family) and Dreamings' (23). She shares one experience from her childhood, when she was 'enticed by spirits' to wander off away from her family and towards a creek (24). She says that this used to 'happen to a lot of children in those days ... some wouldn't recover ... but most would because we had traditional doctors, and the smoking ceremonies' (24).

As a child, Kankawa Nagarra lived in constant fear of being 'stolen'. The old people would 'hide children from missionaries' (12-13) and her mother used to 'worry a lot' (26)—all the '[old people] worried a lot and tried to hide their children, but to no avail' (26-27). As a grandmother, Kankawa Nagarra served as a Commissioner helping to write the *Bringing Them Home* report; she was also present when Kevin Rudd made his apology to the 'Stolen Generations' on behalf of the Federal Parliament (82-84). Kankawa Nagarra recounts beautifully why this was so important, but also testifies to how emotionally fraught this work was for her: 'it became quite traumatic for me. I actually had to have counselling' (85).

Like her mother, Kankawa Nagarra had been promised to an old man in marriage when she was just a girl. She describes her 'marriage night' as being like a 'rape': 'it wasn't a good experience. I was forced into staying with him. It was terrible' (29-30). Kankawa Nagarra bore this first husband a child but when he passed away she cut herself off from family and the cultural obligations of 'Sorry Business' and fled to a Mission, suffering from depression (32-34). At this time of personal crisis Kankawa Nagarra did not turn to Traditional Spirituality but rather to the introduced religion of Christianity. She relates how 'I began to take hold of the scriptures and take hold of God ... then my depression started to fade. I took hold of my own life' (33-34). This was the beginning of a new life of personal accountability.

At the Mission Kankawa Nagarra 'found love' in meeting her missionary husband (a proud Warlpiri man) and had a further four children. She supported him through his various missionary and political endeavors: the United Aborigines Mission, the Aboriginal Development Commission and the Kimberley Land Council. After her husband passed away in 1985 she took up the mantle of political activism that he left behind and trained as a translator, as a health care worker establishing clinics in remote communities and as the first female chair of the Wangkatjungka Community. Kankawa Nagarra writes of this time 'we were known as the worst and most feared of all the [Kimberley] communities ... the drinking was bad and there was violence everywhere: axings and stabbings ... during my time as chair ... we made attempts at stopping alcohol' (51). Kankawa Nagarra relates how she did much to repair the damage done in her community and to raise awareness of such tragic issues as Foetal Alcohol Spectrum Disorder.

After a lifetime of raising a family and working in remote health care and community leadership, Kankawa Nagarra rediscovered the Mission music of her young adult years. She began to write songs and perform, to release CDs and be promoted by Nomad Two Worlds Project and Hugh

Jackman. One of her proudest moments, she relates, was translating 'Somewhere Over the Rainbow' into Walmatjarri and performing it in Toronto and New York with Hugh Jackman (63). In music she found a new voice for her dynamic and unique slant on Indigenous issues.

As Kankawa Nagarra challenges 'I hope for the day when [Aboriginal people] will be individuals again, when we will be ... financially able to own our own destinies. But it won't come from the suggestions of government ... it will have to come from us, from the ground up. I look forward to a day when we [Aboriginal people] can not only support ourselves, but support other people too' (92–93). This book is a remarkable autobiography, but it also has a complicated set of values embedded in the layering of evangelical Christianity over and above Traditional Spirituality. By its very nature, evangelism is a form of colonisation.

Westerly gives its sincerest thanks to the following donors for their generous participation in our crowd funding campaign at the level of 'Literature Lover' and above. Their donations have played a significant role in the raising of \$15,485 for *Westerly*'s future. The kind support we have received from all who donated has ensured *Westerly* has the opportunity to continue to thrive and we owe you our deepest gratitude.

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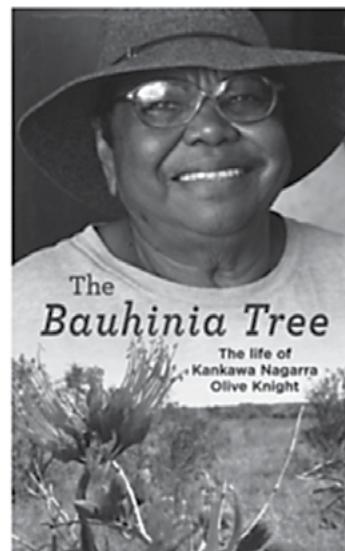
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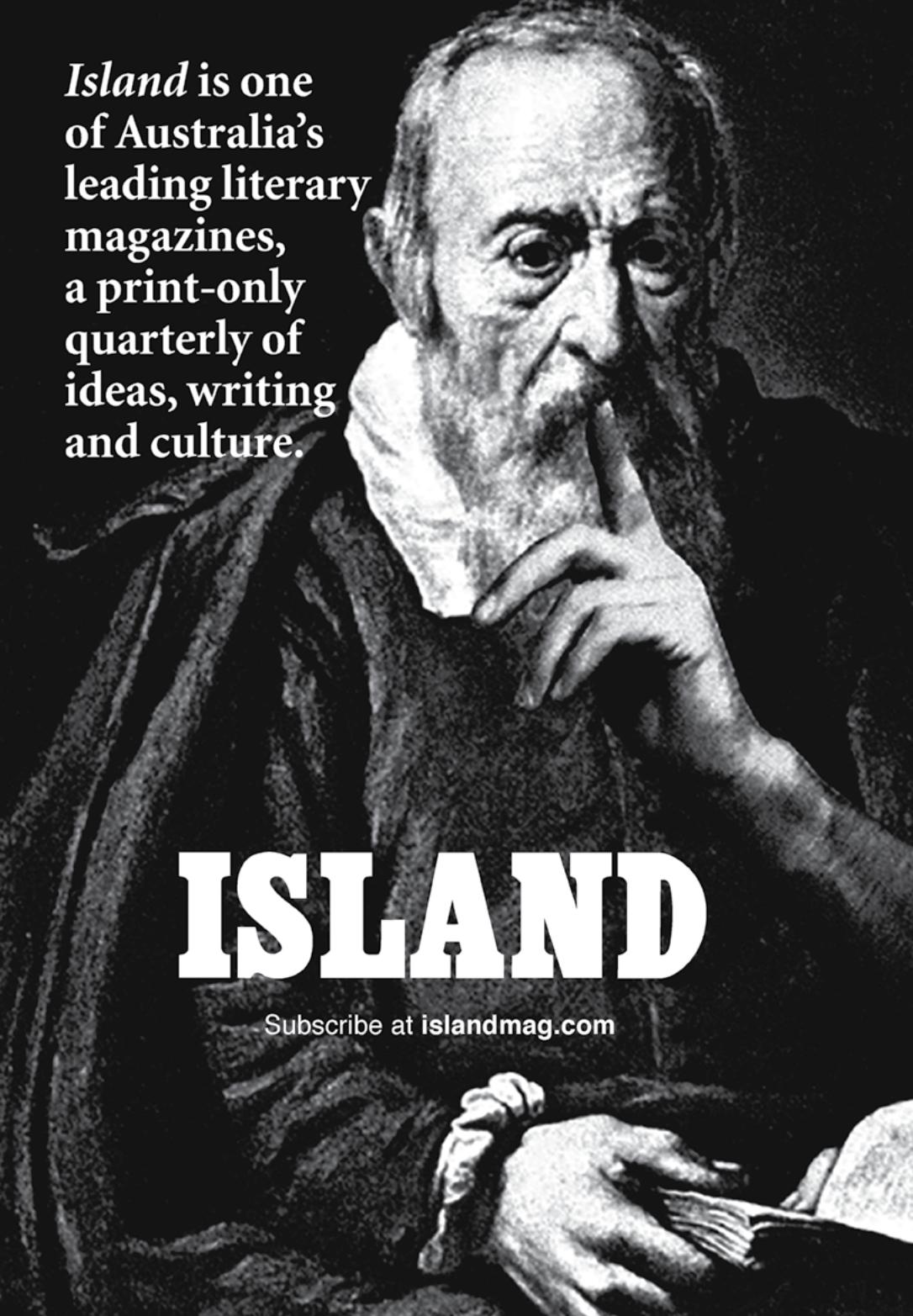
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WA Writers United

Westerly is excited to announce its upcoming involvement in WA Writers United, a new collaboration of literary organisations in Perth. As part of this, *Westerly* subscribers will benefit from member discounts on tickets for all the following events. There are some great events coming, so please support them—and mention WA Writers United when you book!



August

6th 'So You Want to Write Poetry' Session One with Shane McCauley, Peter Cowen Writers Centre
9–30th '10 Steps to Building a Strong Author Brand' with Natasha Lester, KSP Writers' Centre
10th 'Ginko' with Matt Hetherington at Urban Orchard, WA Poets Inc.
10–14th WA Poets Inc.'s Perth Poetry Festival at Northbridge, WA
20th 'So You Want to Write Poetry' Session Two with Shane McCauley, Peter Cowen Writers Centre
20th 'Spooky Stories' at KSP Writers' Centre
27th 'Brushing Up Your Stories: Structure: The Backbone of Short Story Writing' with Susan Midalia, Peter Cowen Writers Centre
28th KSP Sunday Session with Rosanne Dingli and wine from Lion Mill
29th Voicebox poetry readings at the Fremantle Fibonacci Centre
31st Submissions close for *Westerly* Issue 61.2

September

2nd Deadline for 2017 NEXTGEN residency applications, KSP Writers' Centre
2nd Deadline for KSP Speculative Fiction competition
5–11th 2016 Creative Connections Art & Poetry Exhibition, Atwell Gallery, run by WA Poets Inc.
16th Deadline for KSP Writers' Centre Short Fiction competition for youth and adult writers
19th Voicebox poetry readings at the Fremantle Fibonacci Centre
23rd Deadline for applications to the 'Intensive Story Retreat Weekend' with Laurie Steed, KSP Writers' Centre
25th KSP Sunday Session with Guy Salvidge and wine from Lion Mill
30th Deadline for KSP Writers' Centre Poetry competition for youth and adult writers

October

4th KSP Writers' Centre Press Club for writers ages 10–17
15th 'How to Vomit a Novella in 12 Hours' with Writer-in-Residence Chloe Higgins at KSP Writers' Centre
15–16th Writers Retreat with Susan Midalia, Peter Cowen Writers Centre
22nd OOTA Annual General Meeting at Fremantle Arts Centre
25th Halloween themed 'Literary Dinner' with Writer-in-Residence Chloe Higgins
28th KSP Writers' Centre Annual Big Quiz fundraiser at Bassendean Football Club
30th 'The Best Characters in Memoir Writing' with Maureen Helen at Peter Cowen Writers Centre
30th KSP Sunday Session with Rachael Johns and wine from Lion Mill
31st Voicebox poetry readings at the Fremantle Fibonacci Centre

November

5th 'Poetry Editing' with Shane McCauley at Peter Cowen Writers Centre
18th Deadline for 2017 KSP Writers' Centre Fellowships applications
19th WA Poets Inc.'s *Poetry d'Amour* 2016 Anthology launch at the Japanese Garden amphitheatre, Perth Zoo
19th OOTA Workshop with Kevin Gilliam at Fremantle Arts Centre
27th KSP Sunday Session with Serenity Press and wine from Lion Mill
28th Voicebox poetry readings at the Fremantle Fibonacci Centre

Ongoing

From August to December, OOTA will be running weekly workshops, called Writing at the Centre, with Helen Hagemann and Shane McCauley, 1–3 pm every Friday, at Fremantle Arts Centre.

The Fellowship of Writers WA will be running a number of events across the year, see their website for details: <http://www.fawwa.org/events>

For more information on any of these events, please contact the host organisation.

Peter Cowen Writers Centre: www.pcwc.org.au
KSP Writers' Centre: www.kspwriterscentre.com
WA Poets Inc: www.wapoets.net.au
Voicebox: www.voiceboxpoets.com
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