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“ab-Original: Journal of Indigenous Studies and First Nations and First Peoples’ Cultures” is devoted to issues of indigeneity in the new millennium. It is a multi-disciplinary journal embracing themes such as art, history, literature, politics, linguistics, health sciences, and law. It is a portal for new knowledge and contemporary debate whose audience is not only that of academics and students but professionals involved in shaping policies with regard to concern relating to indigenous peoples.

Submission Information

Publishing two issues per year, the content will consist of both themed and unthemed editions, based on considerations of topicality, the amount, and quality of submissions. The journal encourages authors to submit unsolicited articles and comprehensive review essays. Authors interested in contributing short research reports, or ideas for thematic editions, should contact the editors before submitting a manuscript or proposal. Each issue will consist of 40,000–50,000 words. All academic articles should be approximately 6,000–10,000 words long. An abstract of approximately 150 words must accompany each manuscript. All articles and comprehensive review essays will be peer-reviewed. Opinion pieces or short research reports, which are not peer reviewed, should be approximately 1,500 to 3,000 words in length with abstracts no more than 50 words long.

To submit an article, please visit http://www.editorialmanager.com/ab-original. The online system will guide you through the steps to upload your article to the editorial office.

Subscription Information

“ab-Original” is published biannually by the Penn State University Press, 820 N. University Dr., USB 1, Suite C, University Park, PA 16802. Subscriptions, claims, and changes of address should be directed to our subscription agent, the Johns Hopkins University Press, P.O. Box 19966, Baltimore, MD 21211, phone 1-800-548-1784 (outside USA and Canada: 410-516-6987), jrnlcirc@press.jhu.edu. Subscribers are requested to notify the Press and their local postmaster immediately of change of address. All correspondence of a business nature, including permissions and advertising, should be addressed to Penn State University Press, journals@psu.edu.

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With the first issue of *ab-Original: Journal of Indigenous Studies and First Nations and First Peoples’ Cultures*, this editorial introduces a new and highly innovative addition to international scholarly engagements with Indigenous Studies and First Nations cultures and peoples around the globe. Indeed, this first editorial can be read as something of a manifesto. We map out both the intended purpose of our new journal and the intellectual terrain that we envisage will be discussed and debated within its pages in the years to come.

We think it fitting that *ab-Original* is hosted by the University of Sydney, the oldest and arguably most prestigious center of higher learning in Australia, located on the Country of the Gadigal people of the Eora Nation, ground zero of the invasion of the Australian continent by British colonialists that began in the eighteenth century. Moreover, the geographic location of Sydney and its university has significance to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples everywhere as the starting point of contemporary struggles against both settler colonialism and white supremacy. Gadigal Country is today also recognized by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders as an important transit point for Indigenous peoples entering and exiting Australia. For Indigenous peoples in the wealthiest nation-states, the rapidly growing possibilities to engage in overseas travel have brought with them new opportunities for the exchange of past experience, today’s challenges, and new ideas for the future. The sharing and transmitting of Indigenous stories about analogous anticolonial struggles, daily battles with structural forms of ignorance, racism, and political marginalization from the “mainstream,” as well as exploring how best to nurture Indigenous cultures, languages, traditions, and access to land and sea resources, are creating new intellectual conversations and models of practice that truly confirm that the age of global indigeneity is upon us.

Unashamedly, *ab-Original* intends to play a critical role in the exchange of Indigenous-generated ideas now taking place in the global context. Though hosted by the University of Sydney in Australia, the new journal is a publication of Penn State University Press. In our view, partnership with
A scholarly press based in North America is critical to fulfilling the global ambitions of this journal and signals our intent that *ab-Original* be like no other scholarly journal presently produced in the field of Indigenous Studies in Australia or elsewhere.

In many respects, the launching of *ab-Original* as a journal of global indigeneity is a direct outgrowth of two academic initiatives, the National Indigenous Research and Knowledges Network (NIRAKN) in Australia and the Native American and Indigenous Studies Association (NAISA) in North America. Both NIRAKN and NAISA have worked hard to build global networks of engagement with indigeneity that move beyond both the localized parochialism that often characterizes Indigenous Studies in Australia, on the one hand, and the insularity bred of American exceptionalism that frequently stifles the breadth of Native Studies in the United States, on the other. Many of us involved in the creation of *ab-Original* have also been active members of either NIRAKN or NAISA or both, and this journal seeks to further and augment the fine work commenced by these networks of Indigenous scholars. With this objective in mind, we hope that *ab-Original* becomes an effective publishing vehicle for scholars to break free from the parochialism, colonialist theories, and the sense of international incomensurability that often characterize current writings in Australian-based Indigenous Studies.

Another important dimension of the journal’s philosophical remit is to nuance the concept of “authenticity.” Although narratives of cultural truth and entitlement have been important safeguards against the many forms of colonial ignorance and violence, authenticity has proven as much an impediment as a tool for those of us who want to liberate our thinking, ways of being, and actions on ab-Originality. Mindful of the many forms of cultural possession—those belonging to the sacred, to memory, to the story—our journal will at the same time attempt to be as prospective as possible. That is, while mindful of the rhetoric and weight of cultural “originality” reflected in its name, *ab-Original* is committed to the shaping of new concepts of indigeneity that are as valid to the present and the future as they are to the past. In keeping with the efforts of many Indigenous cultures to dispel colonial primitivist narratives of the cyclic perpetuity of non-European cultures, we will constantly explore the nature of change in our respective (and overlapping) cultural inheritances, while also celebrating the dynamic and creative capacity to revisit, reshape, mold, and reestablish our respective identities.

As an Australian-based journal with global intent, *ab-Original* strongly believes that the knowledge and understanding that Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders have developed as the oldest continuous cultures in
the world have value, meaning, and applicability beyond Australian shores. Likewise, we also strongly believe that our colleagues in North America and elsewhere have much to learn from intellectual engagements with indigeneity in theory, practice, and reflection that are shaped by ideas, stories, and experiences that exist beyond their borders.

To this end, it is our desire that ab-Original be a forum of indigeneity that extends beyond Australia and North America (and the Pacific) to include Indigenous scholarship originating in the global South. Although the difficulties posed by language, divergent colonial histories, and, most critically, the lack of financial resources necessary to participate in global forums combine to make this an ambitious strategy, ab-Original is committed to opening a new channel of knowledge exchange, dialogue, and learning in which scholars engaged with issues of indigeneity and First Nations and first peoples’ cultures in Central and South America and Southeast Asia in particular are encouraged to initiate, participate, and add new perspectives to debates, problems, and solutions that have salience to Indigenous peoples globally. We believe that the key to fulfilling the global intent of ab-Original is extending connections between international networks of Indigenous Studies and First Nations and first peoples’ cultures that presently operate between Australia, Canada, the United States, Hawaii, and Aotearoa (New Zealand) to include scholars engaged with issues of indigeneity in national contexts including but not limited to Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Peru, Malaysia, Indonesia, Burma, India, Pakistan, Ireland, Afghanistan, South Africa, Botswana, Namibia, and Wales.

Our insistence that ab-Original not be restricted by national boundaries, histories, and political contexts is similarly matched by a commitment that the journal be a truly multidisciplinary publication, embracing science, art, history, literature, politics, society, linguistics, health sciences, economics, sport, music, law, and other subject matter yet to be determined. As editors, we therefore encourage contributions from scholars who professionally identify themselves as anthropologists, archaeologists, economists, political scientists, psychologists, sociologists, historians, heritage and cultural studies experts, Indigenous Studies specialists, nurses, social and youth workers, creative writers, artists, or performers. Our belief that ab-Original will be a journal known for its interdisciplinary inclusiveness of all who share a scholarly interest and have expertise in issues concerning global indigeneity is grounded in our understanding that Indigenous Studies remains a field of interest and not a rigorously defined discipline restricted to its own conservative canon. This view is based in the fact that extremely few of the scholars with whom we collaborate and network, whether they identify themselves as Indigenous people or not, formally possess qualifications in
Indigenous Studies. We argue, however, that it is the very nature of Indigenous Studies as an ill-defined, unstable field that enables progressive, emancipationist, and sometimes revolutionary impulses in our scholarly engagements with global indigeneity to emerge from within the same Western academe that has acted as the compliant hand servant to colonialism, imperialism, and the historical oppression of Indigenous peoples worldwide throughout the past five centuries. Indeed, we feel the winds of positive change within these same discourses. We hope that *ab-Original* will gain a reputation as the journal for giving voice and intellectual gravitas to a scholarship of positive engagement in the field of Indigenous Studies.

We, the founding editors and editorial team, have been shaped by the real and troubling inability of Indigenous Studies scholarship to influence public discourse and policy agendas in Australia so as to improve the lives of Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders in significant and measurable ways. In the “culture” and “history” wars that emerged in Australia during the 1990s, the anticolonial critique developed by Indigenous Studies scholars exposed the shortcomings of Australian anthropology and its classical ethnographic method by demonstrating its tendency to reify Aboriginal cultures and its general failure to acknowledge the poverty, marginalization, distress, and hopelessness that many Aboriginal people have faced and continue to face in their daily lives as a result of their isolation within a hostile and settler-colonial state. The anticolonial critique of anthropology and its associated disciplines by Indigenous Studies as the dominant academic field engaged with indigeneity in Australia was, in our view, largely justified. Although anthropologists have confirmed the reality of cultural differences represented by Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders, they have had little to say about the effect of racial discrimination and social and economic disadvantage. Indigenous people in Australia have long endured the equivalent of Third World–like poverty in a settler-nation where status is universally defined by wealth. Though small in number, Indigenous Studies scholars critique and emphasize the inequality experienced by Indigenous peoples in Australia.

It has been disappointing, however, that so few of our colleagues have sought to take their analysis to Aboriginal communities in ways that ameliorate the inequality their work has helped make visible. This became most evident in the failure of Australian Indigenous Studies scholars to provide a meaningful and effective response to the Northern Territory Emergency Response legislation that was first introduced by the Australian government in 2007. Instead, many have sought refuge in the archives, secure in writing about the colonial past. Still others have theorized about indigeneity without feeling the need to test their theoretical insights against the empirical evidence that comes from substantive and
long-term engagements with actual Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. As editors of ab-Original, we advocate an Indigenous Studies scholarship that values both the theoretical and the empirical. We encourage contributions from scholars whose work can be promoted as exemplars of a scholarship of engagement that we believe to be fundamental to the field of Indigenous Studies if it is to be considered transformative to Indigenous peoples and their communities. In seeking to strengthen and promote such a scholarship, ab-Original is informed by the anticolonial works of Franz Fanon, Paulo Freire, and their successors in the field of Indigenous Studies, including Linda T. Smith and Martin Nakata, who advocate the need to decolonize education and, in particular, the way in which academics conduct research with respect to global indigeneity.

Our commitment to promote and enhance a scholarship of engagement of the type that seeks to bridge the gap between theory, practice, cultural difference, and racial inequality compels us to state that ab-Original, although a scholarly journal of Indigenous Studies, seeks to engage with an audience and potential contributors far beyond academics and students. Its reach is ambitious and inclusive, looking outward to include both professionals involved in shaping public policies and administration that impact on Indigenous peoples, on the one hand, and Indigenous Elders, activists, and artists whose work and advocacy of Indigenous issues provide critical insights about the practice of anticolonial politics, on the other. Giving voice to the Indigenous community unmediated by academic interpretation means that ab-Original encourages contributions in the form of reports and opinion pieces that speak to individual and group experiences and to the current social and political concerns that are important to specific Indigenous peoples themselves.

It should be noted that in seeking to position ab-Original as an interdisciplinary publication that includes Indigenous scholars of global indigeneity as well as Elders, activists, artists, and others whose voice speaks directly for the Indigenous communities from which they come, we do not seek to exclude non-Indigenous scholars and activists from making expert contributions to our journal. On the contrary, we encourage contributions from non-Indigenous scholars and others whose writings and social and political activism provide new insights and articulations of anticolonial struggles by Indigenous peoples around the world. In doing so, we reject the notion that “blood quantum” and other biological constructs of identity have any merit as determinants either of indigeneity or of a contributor’s ability to engage with issues of concern to the Indigenous peoples of the world in meaningful and useful ways. In short, this journal rejects the gatekeeping so typical of both the hysterical Left and the paranoid Right.
Making this point about the contested nature of Indigenous identity leads us to the name of our journal, *ab-Original*, which will perhaps be considered a somewhat controversial choice by some of our Indigenous Studies colleagues and some of the Indigenous peoples whose issues and agendas we hope to connect with through our publication. The hyphenated title of the journal is of course a subversive play on the term “Aboriginal,” the term British colonialism applied to name the more than 250 distinctive Indigenous nations found to be occupying the Australian continent from the time of first invasion in the late eighteenth century (a number commensurate, incidentally, to the that of language groups and dialects in Europe in the same period). In Australia, the term “Aboriginal” has become both entrenched and ubiquitous in popular settler culture, in the formal language of colonial government, and in the policies and administrative practices applied to subjugate “the natives.” Given that the usage of the term in Australia now spans two centuries, it is perhaps unsurprising that the Indigenous peoples of Australia have also accepted the term as a marker of their identities, at least to some degree. Indeed, many Indigenous activists in Australia today embrace the term as a badge of honor; the word “Aboriginal” has been appropriated as a form of anticolonial resistance, paying homage to the past social and political struggles of ancestors who fought and died for culture, land, and civil rights while being labeled, oppressed, and marginalized as “Aboriginal.” In including the word “Aboriginal” in the name of our journal, we also appropriate a colonial terminology that for so long was forced upon our peoples whose rightful names were Gadigal, Ngarigu, Wiradjuri, Koori, Kurnai, Nyungar, Gurindji, Palawah, Luritja, Mulba, Pintupi, Nunga, Gunditjmara, among so many others. We do this in a way that applies Australian Aboriginal humor (*larrikin* sarcasm) as a means, to use the colloquial phrase, “to take the piss out of”—not to take seriously, to burlesque, to satirize.

More seriously perhaps, we use the term “Aboriginal” in the name of our journal in a particular way. Replacing the capitalized “A” with a lowercase “a” signals our intention that *ab-Original* be recognized as an Australian-based journal of Indigenous Studies whose scope and aspirations are truly global in breadth and audience. In hyphenating the term and capitalizing the letter “o,” we deliberately place an emphasis on the “original” in “Aboriginal.” In doing so, we position our publication as something that seeks to be different—dare we say original?—and innovative compared to present journal offerings in the field of Indigenous Studies. This emphasis on the word “original” also may be read as reference to the Latin origins of the term “Aboriginal,” which translated into English means “from the beginning” or, more simply, “first.” We think this reference is apt since *ab-Original* is a journal not only of Indigenous Studies but also of “First Nations and First Peoples’ Cultures.”
The artwork on the cover of our journal—by the Sydney-based Koori artist Blak Douglas (aka Adam Hill), also a longtime collaborator of one our journal editors, Adam Geczy—also reflects our subversive intent in naming the journal *ab-Original*. “Blak Douglas” is a direct reference to the artist’s mixed heritage and to his need to openly acknowledge the mixture rather than hide it, “Douglas” being his middle name and signifying his mother’s Scottish heritage. (“Black Douglas” is the name of a Scotch whisky that was heavily marketed in the 1980s, when the artist was a teenager.) The title of the artwork, *Kloset Koori*, evokes the many attitudes to the contentious issue of the authenticity of “blackness.” The subject’s “tribal” body markings are percentage signs, while his nether region is lighter than the rest, suggesting he is not wearing his swimsuit at the moment that he acts out one of several identities. Of the work, the artist has stated:

The piece remains one of the very few that I’d wished I’d retained or . . . was reluctant to let go, the main reason being that it is the most personal self-narrative created thus far. My emergence 17 yrs ago [in 1998] into the cesspool of commercial “Aboriginal Art” was an arduous affair. The seasoned “grandes dames” of cultural authority presided upon all that moves in Sydney quickly sharpened their Boondis (clubs) and let loose with a barrage of queries regarding my origins. Sadly this STILL continues today. So . . . what better way to throw that back in their faces than to stylize “body paint” into PERCENTAGE symbols. The HEART-shaped shield is an attempt to seek love while in the battle as mentioned above. The Gooloo (Magpie) is an adopted totem of interracial existence. The boulders on the distant escarpment are literally the “big balls” one has to possess when entering the realm of modern cultural identification. And finally, the dramatic pink/orange sky is representative of the OTHER question that hung over my head re sexual preference.¹

The artist’s defiance, trenchant intelligence, honesty, and strength are all evident here, and we could not think of a better image with which to inaugurate this journal.

In one of his writings following his travels to India and Southeast Asia, the Swiss novelist Hermann Hesse expresses how hard it was to divest himself of a “homesickness for India [*Sehnsucht nach Indien*].”² Affinities can be forged through deep engagement: affinities with another culture once thought remote and removed that one has come to claim as one’s own. Indeed, it was with books such as *Siddhartha* that Hesse so powerfully communicated many of the Indian spiritual values to the West. But the point here is that not all non-Indigenous writers can be disregarded because

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they are infected by some imperialist, orientalist agenda. Rather, we need to remind ourselves of the shared heritages and shared experiences between cultures. And many of us feel a yearning for home: for a past place, a past people, a past language that is either in shards or irretrievably lost. This yearning, this loss begets a great melancholy and heaviness—but a heaviness that can be combated with the resuscitation of languages and the reshaping of new cultural frontiers where communities can share their histories and their plans for the future. And the ignorance and neglect that underlie and feed it can be actively combated through sober intellectual exchanges. This journal serves just these purposes.

Our commitment is to address issues of global indigeneity and to advance a scholarship of engagement in ways that support and encourage what we describe above. The progressive, emancipationist, and revolutionary impulses we believe to be implicit in the field of Indigenous Studies are demonstrated in this, the very first issue of *ab-Original*. Contributing authors reflect current scholarly engagements with global indigeneity that originate in Australia and include important articles whose focus is on the Americas (the Caribbean) and the South Pacific.

In the lead article, “Nyungar of Southwestern Australia and Flinders: A Dialogue on Using Nyungar Intelligence to Better Understand Coastal Exploration,” Len Collard, Clint Bracknell, and David Palmer question the sole reliance on documented colonial accounts of the first encounters between Nyungar and British people in the southwest of Australia and the history of maritime exploration in that region. They revisit journals and records produced by European explorers, navigators, and mariners concerned with coastal exploration along the southern areas of Western Australia, focusing on instances where the Nyungar were the center of attention and where mariners’ actions were motivated by their interest in the Nyungar and Nyungar knowledge. The authors draw on oral accounts and knowledge of the Nyungar language and culture to offer unconventional, irreverent reinterpretations of these encounters from a more Nyungar perspective. By “talking back” to (and “taking the piss out of”) the documented evidence using Nyungar ways of thinking, frontier encounters are reframed in a way that highlights the peculiar nature of European exploration in the nineteenth century. Though not seeking to be authoritative, these reinterpretations challenge existing perceptions of Australian maritime exploration by putting a Nyungar angle on the yarn.

In the second article, “Ngapartji Ngapartji: Finding Ethical Approaches to Research Involving Indigenous Peoples, Australian Perspectives,” Gina Louise Hawkes, David Pollock, Barry Judd, Peter Phipps, and Elinor Assoulin provide a detailed discussion of the tensions between conceptual
frameworks developed and adhered to by Indigenous peoples and their communities and those developed and imposed by non-Indigenous institutions, in this case, Australian universities. In a series of five vignettes from their current research in the South Pacific and Australia, the authors provide empirical insights into conflicting Indigenous and non-Indigenous systems of ethical engagement and ask their readers to consider whether the imposition of national ethical frameworks, though designed to protect the interests of Indigenous peoples, may in fact prevent them from engaging with non-Indigenous researchers and Western academe in ethical terms framed by their own unique knowledge systems. The article concludes that non-Indigenous institutions, in particular universities, would do well to recognize the authority represented by ethical and other concepts and practices drawn from Indigenous knowledge systems.

In “Cultural Identity and Practices Associated with the Health and Well-Being of Indigenous Males,” Mick Adams, Peter J. Mataira, Shayne Walker, Michael Hart, Neil Drew, and Jesse John Fleay not only provide an insight into the health of Indigenous males but also explore their cultural practices and obligations and the interconnection of these within the kinship system, as well as the impact of social policy, which has caused serious psychological damage to Indigenous males. The authors argue that Indigenous customs and practices across the globe are deeply rooted in the beliefs, practices, cultural evolution, and identity of a people. The conceptualization of what it means to be male in traditional perspectives is challenged and revitalized through a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultural beliefs from these nations. It is essential to inform the direction of cultural identity and practices through a coordinated approach to breaking the cycle of disadvantage affecting Indigenous males. The cycle that occurs in a context characterized by poor community and family resources contributing to young Indigenous people making less than optimal lifestyle choices and thereby perpetuating the cycle of disadvantage.

Issues of global indigeneity and the identity politics associated with the concept of hybridity are explored by Maria E. Posse Emiliani in “From the Caribbean to the South Pacific: Cultural Hybridity, Resistance, and Historical Difference.” Here Emiliani engages in a comparative analysis of Indigenous peoples and diasporic communities in the Caribbean and South Pacific to discern the extent of the creative effects of cultural hybridity.

In the final article, “Inside Out: An Indigenous Community Radio Response to Incarceration in Western Australia,” Clint Bracknell and Casey Kickett provide readers with Indigenous media responses to what amounts to the systematic criminalization of indigeneity in the Australian state of Western Australia. Their case study revolves around an increasingly popular

As we move into an era where the United States can go from electing a liberal black president with a social justice agenda to electing a right-wing white one who is openly against difference and human rights, it is increasingly important that we as Indigenous peoples speak with a united global voice. Perhaps we will become the voice of reason and social justice. This journal will be a venue for this voice, a place where all of us and our allies in the broader world beyond our Indigenous communities can comment and craft a joint future that privileges difference, diversity, and the freedoms we all value—particularly the freedom to be ourselves. Who are we as Indigenous people? What makes us Indigenous? How do we unite against people who would not tolerate our right to assert our indigeneity? These are all issues we, the team behind *ab-Original*, encourage you to explore in considering our joint, Indigenous and non-Indigenous, futures. Consider our agency in the war against the mediocrity of uniformity that is so clearly beginning to drive international agendas. The globalization of humanity is leading to a reduction in the diversity of our languages, our cultural traditions, and our social, economic, and political systems in favor of monolingual, monocultural, wealth-driven agendas. We as Indigenous people, united with other like-minded human rights–driven individuals, may be able to provide a place for diverse points of view that push back against the trend toward global homogeneity. It is our aspiration that *ab-Original* will be a key forum for brave thinkers.

*Barry Judd, Adam Geczy, and Jakelin Troy*

*with contributions by Mick Adams and Len Collard*

**NOTES**

1. The final remark about his sexuality pertains to Blak Douglas *not* being gay. In other words, it is a jibe at the way that the (mostly white) art world stages cultural difference in the name of a liberal agenda that gives preference to such difference, only to aestheticize it. The remarks were made by Blak Douglas in e-mail correspondence with Adam Geczy and the other journal editors on 13 December 2015.

Nyungar of Southwestern Australia and Flinders: A Dialogue on Using Nyungar Intelligence to Better Understand Coastal Exploration

Len Collard, Clint Bracknell, and David Palmer

ABSTRACT | Methods used to investigate the history of mapping the coastal areas of Australia have relied heavily on the journals, diaries, ship’s logs, maps, and other accounts of European mariners available in the archival record. Although these records give some details of the part played by local Indigenous peoples, such texts by themselves are a far from reliable way to arrive at authoritative conclusions about Indigenous influence in coastal exploration. Taking the form of a dialogue, this article revisits archival material concerned with coastal exploration along the southern areas of what is now Western Australia from a fresh perspective, drawing out instances where the Nyungar took “center stage” and where mariners’ perceptions were shaped by their interest in the Nyungar and Nyungar knowledge. It draws upon Nyungar methods for “reading” the history of contact along the southern coast, incorporating oral accounts, knowledge of the Nyungar language, and Nyungar place-names to “talk back” to the old texts.

KEYWORDS | Aboriginal, history, Flinders, Nyungar, exploration

Nyungar moort (family) has an extended history of offering kaatitj (knowledge) about our boodjar (country), offering local sources of daatj (meat), mereny (plant food), kep (water), karla (fire), kornt (shelter), kwop wiern (spiritual goodness). Nyungar accounts and wedjela or nyidiyang (European) diaries, journals, and other historical documents demonstrate that Nyungar (local Aboriginal people, also spelled “Noongar”) were critically important to early encounters along the coast of southwestern Australia (see Haebich 1988; Hodson 1993; Pope 1993). This began even before European mariners set foot on land, with the Nyungar presence signaling sites of strategic importance. In this article, we will revisit some of the historical accounts of early contact along the southwestern coast of Australia, drawing out
instances where the Nyungar were important in shaping the experience of British mariners.

In particular, we will focus on Nyungar contact with the expedition led by Captain Matthew Flinders in 1801. We will also extend the way in which these early texts are interpreted by “talking back” to the old voices through the adoption of what we will call “Nyungar hermeneutic methods.” Most of those who turn their attention to European maritime contact with the Nyungar rely exclusively on archival material as their sources. For his part, however, Paul Carter (1987) has focused on “spatial history,” relying on a breadth of material—with language at its center—to question fixed assumptions about the past. Rebe Taylor (2002) has vividly reconstructed the cross-cultural history of Kangaroo Island by reflecting on oral, literary, and visual, as well as archival, evidence. And Nyungar author Kim Scott (2010) has even employed historical fiction to offer alternate perspectives on early Nyungar-British relationships.

In addition to applying elements of these methodologies, we will enter into conversations with the past, inspired by how the “old people” (Nyungar Elders who have passed down their practices) read the country, listen to it speak, and assess what has happened. The style and methods we have adopted are therefore somewhat unconventional. We have drawn on the knowledge gained from cultural experiences: Nyungar nyin (being Nyungar), kaadidjiny Nyungar maya waang (learning to speak the language), and kaadidjiny Nyungar-mokin (thinking like a Nyungar or interpreting the “evidence” using Nyungar ways of thinking). We have also drawn on the oral accounts of other Nyungar as well as material from the written historical record. At times, we will playfully imagine what might have happened using the lenses of the present. Although some Western-trained historians might question the evidentiary strength of this approach, what is important here is that we are trying to move into and out of Nyungar and non-Nyungar traditions and history making.

Djinanginy Nyungar: Looking for the Presence of Nyungar

Let us start with a story from koora (a long time ago). The Nyungar remembered their stories by singing them. Some stories are also included in the colonial record. When the Nyungar first realized that the big ships carried people, they wondered who these people were. Some kept their distance while they checked things out. Others were intrigued since the newcomers did not seem to have yorga (women) or koorlanguar (children) with them. Some were frightened and ran and hid because they had seen American sealers who were cruel and did bad things to Nyungar moort (relatives).
Others invited the visitors into their country as they had done for “outsiders” for many generations—it was their role to help those who were *dwankabət, miyalbət, kaat warra—nyoorn*! (blind, deaf, and crazy—poor things!).

Captain Matthew Flinders was the first official European envoy to interact with the Nyungar. He came in summer (December 1801–January 1802). Captain George Vancouver had come in early spring (September 1791), when fewer Nyungar would have been in the vicinity. A routine practice of early coastal explorers was to note the presence of Nyungar. From the ocean side, smoke and any sightings of Nyungar were carefully noted in journals, and land parties painstakingly recorded all evidence of Nyungar material culture. Signs of Nyungar represented signs of life. Water, stocks of fresh meat, and intelligence were all valuable commodities. Set ashore at King George Sound on Sunday, 2 October 1791, Vancouver found a small shallow stream of excellent water: “On tracing its meanders through a copse, it brought us to a deserted village of the natives, amidst the trees, on nearly a level spot of ground, consisting of about two dozen miserable huts, mostly of the same fashion and dimensions with that before described” (qtd. in Bartlett 1938, 44). Indeed, Sylvia Hallam (1979, 66) claims that, from the earliest of coastal explorations, signs of Nyungar use of the country were instrumental in leading coastal explorers to freshwater and good land.

Like other commanders of his time, Flinders was careful about landing and sending parties ashore. This is understandable given his lack of knowledge of the coast and what he perceived as the inhospitality of the country and its inhabitants. But this did not stop him from seeking out signs of Nyungar; indeed, his expedition had been instructed to take careful note of signs of fire so that evidence of Nyungar habitation could be recorded (Flinders [1814] 2000, 51). While exploring in the King George Sound area in December 1801, Flinders observed that there were many “smokes’ on the coast” (qtd. in Hallam 1979, 115) and that “marks of the country being inhabited were found everywhere” (qtd. in Hallam 1979, 21).

Coastal explorers also sought out Nyungar fishing practices since there was much to be gained from knowledge of their use of fish stocks. In one instance, while exploring Oyster Harbour, Vancouver’s party came upon several fish weirs, some constructed with loose stones, others with sticks and stumps of wood (Bartlett 1938, 44). Flinders’s party likewise sought out Nyungar fish traps and remarked on the “plentifulness” of fish caught. Later explorers, including French navigator Louis de Freycinet and his men, consumed more oysters than they could manage (Bloomfield 2012, 118).

Imagine what the Nyungar must have thought watching the very conspicuous *wam* (strangers) come their way and prepare to explore their
boodjar or land. Without doubt, the Nyungar would have had enough warning to make themselves scarce and likely would have remained hidden and observed these wam while giving each other instructions like

*Balai! Baal koorliny nidja. Ngala mordak nyin ba djinang baal, unna?*

Look out! Here they come. We’ll go and hide in the bush and watch them, eh?

This might have been followed by the whispering of questions such as

*Natjal baalap djinang nitja boodjar? Natj baalap kaadidjiny? Natj baalap ngardanginy?*

What are they looking at this ground for? What are they thinking about? What are they after?

Or, as Tom Bennell (1993, 23–24) tells us:

They used to say *ngala maam, ngangk hän maam*, mother hän father see, *balap nyinanginy nidja wardan*, thas Fremantle sea, *barl balap djinangany, wardany nidja wadjela yaarl koorliny*, in the boat see, they seen ’em come on the boat. . . . Red Coat fullahs, hän’ they used to go from ’ere, hän’ when they got off the boat from ’ere, they went through from Fremantle.

**Djinang Wam: Looking for the Strangers**

At the same time, it is likely that the Nyungar were keeping an eye out for visitors. In the late 1700s and early 1800s, around the time Flinders arrived, young Nyungar men who were unattached are likely to have been sent to stay at lookout places near the entrance to King George Sound to keep an eye out for whales and small whaling vessels (Shellam 2009; Scott 2010). It is likely that they had been told about Vancouver’s visit in 1791 and seen American whalers like Captains Thomas Denis of the *Kingston* and Christopher Dickson of the *Elligood*, who visited in August 1800 (Shellam 2009, 17). And it is highly likely that the Nyungar understood the difference between the crews of the formally sanctioned English expeditions of Vancouver and Flinders and the raggedy and multicultural crews of the American whalers. They certainly would have been able to see that Flinders’s vessel was much larger and his crew more formally attired and more disciplined (Flinders [1814] 2000, 46–55). There is some evidence that
the earlier meetings with the American visitors were not at all pleasant and involved harsh treatment (Scott 2010). There is certainly good evidence from elsewhere that whalers and sealers were brutal in their treatment of Aboriginal women (Merry 2003).

When on the evening of 8 December 1801 or by the following day they spotted Matthew Flinders’s ship, the Investigator, entering King George Sound, they would have been very excited and would have immediately set about letting others know. It is also possible that Nyungar to the west had already warned them. According to Flinders’s journal, Nyungar had set signal fires earlier on the 8th to the west of Albany. They might have said:


Hey, hey, hey, look out! On the water, hither coming, lots and lots of strangers. Brother! My brother! Hurry up and make fire. The old man sitting over there across from us will see our smoke rising.

Whether through fire or voice, it is likely that they were keen to go and get the older Nyungar men who had earlier told them stories about the arrival of Vancouver ten years before (Flinders [1814] 2000, 47–48). Given the size of the strangers’ vessels, the slowness of their arrival, and their unfamiliarity with the terrain, it certainly would have been much easier for the Nyungar to spot the newcomers than vice versa. Indeed, evidence from elsewhere (see Reynolds 1982) tells us that the first response of the Nyungar would have been to keep themselves hidden while they observed and studied the strangers.

**Nyungar Kaitijin: Studying Nyungar**

Many of coastal explorations of the south coast were also driven by the Enlightenment desire to further scientific knowledge; the explorers also saw the southwest as being rich in intellectual resources. The region presented tremendous opportunities and challenges to those who were motivated to extend knowledge and fill remaining gaps in relation to science and the study of “man.” The west coast was considered pristine. Unlike Europe, the Americas, Africa, and Asia, it remained largely unaffected and unspoiled by international commerce, trade, politics, and Enlightenment thinking. Scientists saw the region as one where they could carry out fieldwork examining and describing places and people that were “only slightly, if at all, affected by the expansion of Europe” (Marchant 1988, 70–71).
The French commander Bruny D’Entrecasteaux was one of the first charged with the scientific exploration of the southwest coast of Australia. The instructions given to D’Entrecasteaux were very clear: he was to comprehensively survey the coast on land and sea, to make a detailed study both of the variety of natural resources, assessing their potential for agricultural and other commercial use, and of the culture and life of the people who inhabited the region (Marchant 1982, 81). The scientist under his command was botanist Claude Antoine Gaspard Riche, who was interested not only in gathering and studying new plant specimens but also in making contact with the Nyungar.

We first hear of Riche when he was sent ashore from the Espérance. Upon seeing campfires in the distance, he headed toward them, seeking out the Nyungar who he supposed must have been in the area. Unfortunately, however, the smoke he saw was much farther than he had initially imagined and he became lost (Marchant 1982, 98). Although we can see from his attempts that the study of the south coast Nyungar was of considerable importance to him, like so many other Europeans, Riche was unsuccessful in making much of it; indeed, he left the area without making direct contact. Nevertheless, his conclusion that the Nyungar were a unique species of human that could live on salt water and on special types of nourishment was taken seriously, commented on, and investigated by subsequent French exploratory missions (Marchant 1982, 99–100).

Imagine what the Nyungar must have thought if they heard Riche talking about them as people who drank salt water. It is rather a bizarre conclusion, particularly if it were based on his deduction that, since he could find no freshwater, the Nyungar must be capable of surviving on salt water. It’s a little like me (author Collard) saying to you that, because I haven’t seen you sitting on the toilet, you must be a special breed of human being that doesn’t shit. The Nyungar might have looked at the strangers and said:


Oh, those poor strange fellas. They have traveled far without freshwater. They must be really thirsty all the time from being out on the sea. Maybe they’ve been drinking that seawater!

In the late eighteenth century, the French government was especially supportive of the Enlightenment project and scientific exploration of places like the southwest of Australia. Indeed, Napoleon Bonaparte’s support for the study of lifestyles and customs of the Aboriginal people was central to his
personal approval for Nicolas Thomas Baudin’s trip to the west Australian coast (Jacob and Vellios 1987, 98). As a consequence, Baudin recruited scientists among whom were those deeply interested in the scientific study of the lives and cultures of Indigenous people. He instructed them not only to study, keep records, and collect samples in a variety of different fields such as astronomy, geography, mineralogy, and botany, as well as other branches of natural history, but also to make an exhaustive study of the physical and “moral conditions” of the Indigenous people living in the western part of Australia. Not surprisingly, the records of Baudin’s voyage contain a wealth of information about the physical features, life, material culture, and diet of the Nyungar (Marchant 1982, 116–17). Indeed, according to Leslie Marchant (1982, 115–16):

The comprehensive orders given to [Baudin’s] naturalists in this regard represent a turning point in the study of man which occurred in France as a result of the revolution, and resulted in the foundation of scientific anthropology, which soon took a place alongside archaeology in the general effort being made to explain the origin and nature of the human race.

Matthew Flinders was also strongly influenced by the newfound European desire for science and discovery of knowledge. In 1801, using Vancouver’s charts to guide him, Flinders found King George Sound, where he stayed a month, studying the landscape, observing, drawing plants and animals, and making contact with and recording his observations about the Nyungar (Flinders [1814] 2000, 46–55). He and Baudin shared a similar interest in the “study of man” and in making careful observations about the lives, conditions, and physical features of local people. It was with the last of these areas of study that Flinders’s scientists appeared to be most fascinated. Indeed, today it may even seem bizarre the extent to which members of his crew were taken by what they called the “manlinesss” of the Nyungar (Brown, qtd. in Flinders [1814] 2000, 51).

We Nyungar have always thought that wedjela have projected their wam or strangeness onto us and tended to show us their own hand pretty readily. Since they arrived, wedjela have had this strange fascination with nudity and sexuality. Part of the explorers’ obsession was a fear of the Nyungar as dirty, uncivilized, barbaric, and sexually promiscuous. This is pretty funny when you consider what people like Flinders’s naturalist, Robert Brown, seemed to be drawn to. He was keen on measuring the size of our old fellas’ bits: bellies, lips, arms and legs, nose, eyebrows, scars, penises and testicles. But, then again, I suppose the old Nyungar would have been pretty
keen on checking the wedjela’s bits out, too. All those uniforms hiding everything, especially the bits that matter. But it seems that Flinders’s mob wasn’t that shy. Indeed, according to Brown ([1801–1805] 2001, 97), when the old Nyungar who met them early on showed himself to be “inquisitive” and “anxious to ascertain the sex of several persons,” he was “indulg’d.”

The Nyungar might have been thinking:


Who are these strangers? I see nothing. . . Are they men? Are they women? Are they without male bits?

Mr. Brown seemed pretty impressed when he met the Nyungar, saying, “One man with whom we had communication, was admired for his manly behavior” (qtd. in Flinders [1814] 2000, 51). Now I can only guess what he was talking about here.

Although he didn’t get the ruler out, Brown ([1801–1805] 2001, 97) had this to say: “Their parts of generation of moderate size. The preputium entire and moderately large. Their testicles rather under than full sizd.” He then went on to say that these old fellas wouldn’t allow the wam to follow them. I bet Sigmund Freud would have something to say about how the English spent so much of their time checking out these old blokes. At the time, the Nyungar must have found it very amusing and confusing watching these kaat warra (crazy) fellas sniffing around. They would have been perplexed at the strange behavior of people who were so obsessed with learning about the Nyungar that they carefully checked out their bits. Some Nyungar might have watched and said:

*Karnya, djoo! Kaat warra wam baalap djinang Nyungar mert wa? Nyoorn, baalap mert wer yoitch djinang baalap karnarn kaat warra unna?*

Oh, shame! Those crazy strangers are staring at us, eh? Poor fellas, to be doing this they must be truly crazy, right?

*Nadjal baal djinang yoitch wer mert wa? Natj baalap kaadidjiny nidja? Baal yoowarl koorl ba ngany boorpiny boorpiny baal miyal, unna.*

Why is he looking at us like this? What do they mean by doing this? They better not get too close, wonder if that bloke’s got a working-with-children card?
Nyungar Bidiyar Koorliny: Nyungar Leading Explorations

The European mariners and scientists of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries who followed Dutch routes along the west coast of Australia expressed much excitement not only at seeing the unique vegetation and landscape but also at seeing Nyungar for the first time (Appleyard and Manford 1979, 27). Zoologist François Péron accompanied French explorer Nicolas Baudin aboard the Géographe to survey southwestern Australia earlier in 1801, a few months before Flinders and the Investigator would arrive. Taken ashore in a small boat, the eager Péron (qtd. in Marchant 1982, 132) explained:

As soon as the boat landed us, I ran towards the interior in search of the natives with whom I had a strong desire to be acquainted. In vain I explored the forests, following the print of their footsteps. . . . All my endeavours were useless and after three hours fatiguing walk I returned to the sea shore where I found my companions waiting for me, and rather alarmed by my absence.

On Monday, 14 December, Brown ([1801–1805] 2001, 96) continued his search:

After breakfast went on shore and observing smoke at the head of the harbour walkd to it . . . when we reached the place where the fire had been we found it just extinquishd. No shells or other mark of the natives having been there. But in a few minutes we saw on the beach one man who advanced towards us loudly hollowing at short intervals in a very particular manner. After coming within 100 yards of us he turned off the beach, repeating as before with some variation his exclamations from the accompanying gesture we suppose was intended to prevent our nearer approach. . . . As we continued to advance still nearer he began to set fire to the long grass which soon began to blaze with violence. At the same time we heard some voices among the bushes and soon we observed several other natives, most probably a family consisting of men, women and children. . . . The same man who had formerly acted as centinel [sic] to the party continued to watch us at considerable distance.

That brave Nyungar, facing off against these strange people as his family hid in the brush, might have been shouting, “Warra! Warra! Warra!,” warning the intruders to retreat, as some of the Swan River Nyungar did later (Collard and Palmer 2008). He would have displayed a mastery of
fire common to Aboriginal people elsewhere, using it as a deterrent or even a weapon to alter the path of the intrepid explorers and thereby influencing the terrain they would record and map. Later on, he would have reported back:


I saw real strange people! I said, “Keep away!” I lit grass on fire, made lots of smoke and they took off. I stalked them, but they weren't angry. They dropped their stuff on the ground. It's still sitting over there, you can go see it.

Reading Brown’s account of the exchange, it is easy to miss the significance of the Nyungar man's influence. He may have been simply defending his family from strangers, but in changing the path of the intruders, he could well have also steered them away from an important site, freshwater source, or any number of natural resources that perhaps needed protecting from interlopers. There is certainly good evidence that this Nyungar was taking seriously his cultural obligations of keeping the visitors safe. Anthony J. Brown (2008, 168) tells us that, according to one of the party, the Nyungar knocked a poisonous snake out of the hand of a seaman to protect him from danger. The use of fire and other knowledge of the country to redirect the movements of the wam (outsiders) and keep them safe shows us the subtle but nonetheless important way that Nyungar knowledge of the country played in shaping the direction of those exploring, surveying, and mapping it.

Of course, records of the knowledge gained from Nyungar were made and themselves became critical for later coastal explorations. The intelligence gathered by Vancouver from Nyungar was used by Flinders, who added to it and in turn provided source material for later maritime explorations such as those by Nicolas Baudin, Phillip King, and Jules Dumont d’Urville (see Shellam 2009). In the years after this earliest of encounters, many reports exist of the Nyungar’s willingness to lead wam to their freshwater supplies. In February 1837, while traveling through the York region of southwestern Australia on an exploratory trip from King George Sound to Perth, British surveyor Alfred Hillman and his party were directed by eight unnamed Nyungar to a spring when they were in quite desperate need of water (Markey 1976, 8). In 1829, only three years after the initial garrison had been established in King George Sound, Mokare, an Albany Nyungar,
guided a party under Hillman’s leadership to inspect country sixty miles north of the small settlement (Hallam 1983, 138).

The colonists quickly learned the value of this kind of knowledge and made it a priority to seek it out. These wam were shown Nyungar biidi or roads and paths, kaarlap or camping places, the best hunting grounds, and ngama or water holes. There is also evidence that colonists were able to survive and stay healthy in more isolated regions because they drew on Nyungar medicinal knowledge. For example, the knowledge that sap from the marri (Red Gum) has medicinal qualities was gained very early on from the Nyungar. Marri sap can be used by those with a sore throat. You mix the crushed powder of the sap with water and then gargle it. The sap acts as a disinfectant. It can also be used to relieve the pain of toothache if applied in the same way. Koorbal mindich or stomachaches can be cured like this, too. Early wam who suffered from dysentery because of poor water quality saw Nyungar using marri sap powder in this way. They followed the Nyungar example and found it worked. Nyungar also provided tanned kangaroo skins to make water bags for excursions into dry areas; they put the gum from the marri on the kangaroo skins to make them both pliable and waterproof. The wam took up these ideas; they also learned about other uses of plants from the Nyungar (CALM 1998). This information was to become as important to the colonists as it had been for the Nyungar.

**Noitch Nyidyang Kenyiny: The Dead Man Dance**

On 8 December 1801, Captain Matthew Flinders, R.N., brought the HMS Investigator to anchor in King George Sound, in present-day Western Australia. On 12 December, the ship entered Princess Royal Harbour, on which the city of Albany now stands. Her captain and crew surveyed the sound, its islands and possible harbors, and collected wood and freshwater, while the naturalists studied the plant and marine life. Flinders ([1814] 2000, 54) noted:

> On the 30th, our wooding and the watering of the ship were completed. . . . Our friends, the natives, continued to visit us. . . . I ordered the party of marines on shore, to be exercised in their presence.

> The red coats and white crossed belts were greatly admired, having some resemblance to the Nyungar’s own manner of ornamenting themselves; and the drum, but particularly the fife, excited their astonishment; but when they saw these beautiful red-and-white men, with their bright muskets, drawn up in a line, they absolutely screamed with delight; nor were their wild gestures and vociferations
to be silenced, but by commencing the exercise, to which they paid the most earnest and silent attention. Several of them moved their hands, involuntarily, according to the motions; and the old man placed himself at the end of the rank, with a short staff in his hand, which he shouldered, presented, grounded, as did the marines their muskets, without, I believe, knowing what he did. Before firing, the Indians [sic] were made acquainted with what was going to take place; so that the volleys did not excite much terror.

Robert Brown ([1801–1805] 2001, 104, 105) also had some important observations to make:

Landed after breakfast at the observatory. 4 of the natives had come down to the tents. One of them three had been there the first day. The fourth [was] a young man who had not us before seen. The marines exercise fired several vollies. The natives especially the old man attentively watch[ed] their motions & with a rude stick attempt[ed] to imitate them, not terrified by the explosions [but] much pleased with the red jackets & cross belts of the soldiers.

The old man and the middle aged stout man with a name we supposed was Warena allowd themselves, especially the latter, to be measured with the greatest patience tho it took up nearly an hour. Mr [William] Westal[l] shewd Warena his own figure w[hic]ch he had drawn. He appeared pleas'd & bared his body to the waist that Mr W[estall] might be able to finish his work. They appear[ed] to clearly to understand our wishes to know the names for the different parts of the body & one of them unaskd began to run over them. We aquird the names of several parts pretty accurately, the orthography [, however,] not wholly to be depended on: Cat—Head, Collit—Breast, Nillok—Cheek, Taa—Mouth or lips, Warrat—Neck, Gur—Arm, Matt—Leg, Twang—Ears, Mite—Penis, Menel—Eye, Wurrit—Cloak of kangaroo skin

As Carter (1992) has discussed, the military drill performance, though unlike most in the Aboriginal performance repertoire, would have been considered a suitable piece to share with these Nyungar men in keeping with established Australian musical and performance traditions of visiting regional groups sharing in song and dance. Henry Reynolds (1982) speculates that many Aboriginal groups would have had advance knowledge about the power and magic of firearms via songs and stories about
contact with wedjela in various regions, knowledge exchanged along established trade routes and kin networks. This would explain the numerous incidents recorded in which Aboriginal people seeing Europeans for the first time would display interest in, rather than fear of, muskets and, later, handguns.

It is likely that senior Nyungar, such as older people who may have remembered seeing Vancouver, stout and friendly Warena (mentioned by Flinders), and the protective father whom Brown first encountered had brought their young countrymen to meet these strange people. It is possible that they took some comfort in the knowledge that these wam meant no harm. The British continued to follow Nyungar rules of diplomacy by trying to learn the local language, which the Nyungar men would have ably facilitated. Acting as models to be sketched and measured would seem to have been a novel experience, but one not entirely unlike the waiting involved in the process of “painting up” for ceremony. Since the exchange of cloaks between different regional groups was a common Nyungar diplomatic practice, the men would have been understandably excited in anticipation of exchanging their kangaroo skin cloaks for the bright red uniforms. They might have said to each other:

*Wam, baalap keniny noitj-mokiny. Karnarn wam keniny.*

These strangers dance like stiff dead people. We’ve never seen that before.

*Baalap mirdar kwoak kwop djinang . . .*

Still, their red coats are so nice to look at . . .

*Aliwa, baalapang kaarlmaata worlak yaakiny. Yeyi, bindari-mokiny maya waaliny.*

Look, they’re raising their fire-sticks to the sky. Now, a thundering noise is shouting out.

More than one hundred years later, this event was recounted by the writer Daisy Bates (1904–1912, qtd. in White 1980, 35) as a Nyungar named Nebinyan had described it to her:

They made a dance of the visit and parade. . . . I got all this from the only old man left, a grandson born about 1830 or 40. He saw the
dance as a boy and taught it as a man. He covered his torso with red and put white pipeclay across the red and did with his club what he had seen his fathers and grandfathers do as the bayonets were exercised. Nebinyan died in 1908 a very old man and he could tell me all the history of the visit—its importance made it a sacred dance and memory.

Although Bates did not transcribe the song that must have accompanied the dance, we can imagine the kind of things that may have been sung. Research shows that Nyungar in past centuries incorporated words from English into their compositions (Bracknell 2014a, 2014b). The song could have been something like:

\[
\begin{align*}
Mamang-koort-ngat & \text{ wam keniny} \\
\text{By the harbor, strangers dancing} \\
\text{Wam keniny} \\
\text{Strangers dancing} \\
Noitj-mokiny & \text{ boorn-mokiny} \\
\text{Like the dead, like trees} \\
Mirdar daardar & \text{ mirdar daardar} \\
\text{Red ocher, white pipeclay, red ocher, white pipeclay} \\
Boolwool & \text{ kaarlmaat maya waaliny} \\
\text{Magic/secret/sneaky fire stick cries out} \\
\text{Boom! Boom! Boom}
\end{align*}
\]

**Conclusion**

We can see that the Nyungar were of immense importance to Flinders and others exploring the southwest coast of Australia. They helped identify key strategic points (where freshwater, cover from the weather, and natural resources such as fish were to be found) through their presence and signals. And the perception that the Nyungar represented a source of knowledge of the history of “man” was of immense importance, particularly to the Enlightenment project. As Edward Said might have explained, the physical and cultural difference of the Nyungar became important as markers of their otherness and helped with the formation of modern ideas about what it means to be European. In Flinders’s case, the Nyungar provided practical insights into how to go about trade, exchange, and information sharing. This was to become critical to the mapping and exploration of Australia over the next two hundred years. Through rich oral traditions, Nyungar helped add to the body of information we have about place-names, resources, labor, economic enterprise, and the use of space.
Some Nyungar were not frightened by the wam. They would have said, “Baalap djanga ba baalap ngalang moort. We must go and meet our relations and networks.” They would have taken the wam to their karla or home fires and said, “Noonookat ngalang moort. You are our relations. You must dat nyin dwonk-kaadadj or listen and learn important things about our boodjar or land.” The Nyungar would have showed the wam their boodjar, and they would have waanginy or talked to them, telling them important things. They would have said, “Kaya, ngalang moort. Yes, our family. Noonookat koorliny noonookat karla. You have all come home. Ngalang koort kwop. Our hearts are happy.” And they would also have said, “Boorda noonookat kwop waanginy, noonook boola kaditj-kadak. Later you will be good speakers and understand much because we have introduced you to Nyungar ways.”

LEN COLLARD is a Whadjuk Nyungar maaman or man from the southwest of Western Australia. He is a Traditional Owner of the land, seas, swamps, and rivers that his people have cared for since time began.

CLINT BRACKNELL lectures in ethnomusicology and contemporary music at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, and researches Aboriginal Australian song and languages. He not only composes but also produces and performs original music. His Nyungar cultural Elders from the south coast of Western Australia refer to their clan as “Wirloomin.”

DAVID PALMER teaches Community Development in the School of Arts at Murdoch University in Western Australia. He also spends much of his time “tracking along” with Aboriginal community-controlled organizations, helping them reflect on their work and tell their story. He has written about groups that draw heavily upon Indigenous language, cultural immersion, song, dance, and the arts and about the importance of intergenerational transmission knowledge. He lives in Fremantle with his partner and two lads.

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Ngapartji Ngapartji: Finding Ethical Approaches to Research Involving Indigenous Peoples, Australian Perspectives

Gina Louise Hawkes, David Pollock, Barry Judd, Peter Phipps, and Elinor Assoulin

ABSTRACT | National frameworks to guide universities on the ethical conduct of Indigenous research have emerged from a troubling history of ethically dubious inquiry in Australia. Although the development of such frameworks is commendable, we contend that institutionalizing them can have unintended unethical consequences. Through five personal vignettes, we share some of our research experiences where university ethics processes have resulted in neopaternalist, disrespectful, and therefore also unethical situations. These vignettes paint a picture of the challenges that arise when bureaucratic, neoliberal systems of legal accountability interact with systems of Indigenous custom, knowledge, and expectation. We argue that a greater focus on Indigenous knowledges in institutional frameworks would lead to more appropriate research behavior, better research outcomes, and fewer unethical situations.

KEYWORDS | research ethics, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC), Indigenous research, decolonizing institutions, university ethics

The historical relationship between non-Indigenous researchers and Indigenous peoples in Australia is highly problematic, with much of the research designed to confirm theories of racial and cultural hierarchies. Scholars at Australia's universities have played a critical role in confirming popular racist ideas about Indigenous peoples as “authoritative scientific truths” (e.g., Spencer and Gillen 1899; Elkin 1977; Haddon 2011). A relatively recent intervention by the Australian government with the aim of remedying this historical bias was the creation of national ethical frameworks to guide researchers and research institutions. This article explores the gap between the comprehensive and flexible national frameworks on research ethics and the narrowing of these frameworks by the administrations of...
large universities. Developed as well-intentioned national institutional responses to the long-standing grievances of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, the frameworks are now inflexibly enforced at the university level in ways that often undermine ethical research practice.

Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders have long objected to being two of the most overresearched cultural groups in the world and have consistently argued for greater input and control over the way Australian universities conduct research in their communities (AEPTF 1988; Herbert 1997). Similar grievances have been voiced by Indigenous communities globally, where, instead of engaging with Indigenous peoples in collaborative, ethical, and culturally appropriate ways, institutionally prescribed research programs have, in effect, objectified them as scientific data sets, to be mined and exploited. For example, as Timote Masima Vaioleti (2006, 22) points out: “Pacific peoples have endured years of disempowering research with little improvement in health or education,” which can be seen in their overrepresentation in poor educational statistics. Drawing on our experiences as Australian-based researchers whose work engages with both Aboriginal peoples and Indigenous Pasifika diasporas in Australia, this article provides five short vignettes from our various research projects to demonstrate how rigidly applied national frameworks for research practices can result in unethical outcomes that are contrary to Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination. We present these vignettes in our own voices as separate authors working on different projects to highlight their diversity and how this diversity is effectively ignored and unnecessarily limited by the often one-size-fits-all approach of institutions attempting to implement the principles of national ethical frameworks.

We question the role these frameworks play in shaping contemporary relationships between Australian-based academics and Indigenous peoples in the context of field-based research. Guidelines on Ethical Matters in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research, introduced by the National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC) in 1991, provided the first national ethical framework to guide researchers whose scholarly work focused on Indigenous peoples in Australia. Australian universities responded to the 1991 NHMRC framework, now superseded by the National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007; hereafter National Statement) and the Australian Code for the Responsible Conduct of Research (2007), by introducing internal processes and procedures to uphold the principles of ethical research established in these national guidelines. Looking at different research projects conducted by its authors, this article asks whether the regulating and policing practices of human research ethics committees at the university level genuinely fulfill the intentions of
the national frameworks to ensure that research on Indigenous peoples is conducted ethically. We focus particularly on the issues of informed consent and reference groups. Chapter 2 of the National Statement (which we expand on below) is dedicated to the question of consent. A close reading of this document makes it clear that many of the complexities of ethnographic fieldwork with Indigenous and other communities were taken into consideration in its drafting. It recognizes that what is required to satisfy consent “depends on the nature of the project, and may be affected by the codes, laws, ethics and cultural sensitivities of the community in which the research is to be conducted” (National Statement 2007, 16). But what happens to those nuanced principles in the bureaucratic ethics approval structures of large universities, where administrative processes are increasingly driven by neoliberal managerialism—an organizational paradigm that values the ends (economic efficiency) over the means (ethical process)? We argue that these national ethical frameworks and the ways Australian universities have inflexibly enforced them have unintentionally created a mode of Indigenous research that imposes a neopaternalist relationship of assumed “white” “Western” superiority of the researcher as communicator and keeper of the researched “Indigenous subject,” a relationship that echoes Australia’s paternalist colonial past.

Through each of our vignettes, we demonstrate how this neopaternalist structure is embedded in the ethics practices of Australian research institutions, often to the detriment of ethical research itself. In vignette 1, Barry Judd discusses the incompatibility of academic conventions with Luritja and Pintupi traditions of reciprocity for the giving of consent in the remote Aboriginal community of Papunya, traditions that continue to shape social norms across the central Australian deserts and that also shape research relations in fundamental ways. In vignette 2, Gina Hawkes provides an example from her doctoral research with diasporic Indigenous Pacific Islanders living in Australia to argue that cultural respect and epistemological flexibility in understanding different ways of communicating and consenting should be more highly valued within the university ethics process. In vignette 3, David Pollock highlights how the institutionalizing and management of national ethical frameworks at the university level can overlook intracultural diversity, leading to the misrecognition of Elders and activists’ agency and the marginalizing of their voices in research. In vignette 4, Peter Phipps illustrates the gap between the university-imposed shaping of “community reference groups” and established Yolngu research ethics and reports how Indigenous intellectuals had to educate him and manage the ignorant imposition of his “good intentions.” And, in our final vignette, Elinor Assoulin describes how she came to realize that, though they may show little interest
in an “Aboriginal Reference Group” as “ethically” prescribed by research institutions, community Elders are deeply interested in the work of reciprocity as the foundation for ethical research. These vignettes serve to illustrate some of the challenges encountered by researchers and Indigenous research participants when researchers try to comply with demands placed upon them by the governing structures of their institutions. The regulation of researchers by these institutions in response to the national ethical frameworks can and often does lead to frustrating and unethical outcomes for Indigenous peoples and for the researchers working alongside them.

**Historical Context**

This section outlines some of the figures, moments, and movements—a small slice of key historical happenings—that led to the establishment of bodies responsible for the production of ethical guidelines governing research with Indigenous peoples in Australia.

Since the outset of British colonialism in 1770, the Indigenous peoples of Australia (the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples) have been the subjects of ongoing scholarly inquiry. Ideas of race and culture imported by the British were applied to Aboriginal peoples, whose representation as “noble savages” existing in a “state of nature,” uncorrupted by the corrosive influence of civilization, made them the perfect “objects” for Enlightenment (and Christian) theories of human difference. Non-Indigenous research of Aboriginal peoples on the “new” continent commenced with the written orders and observations of British officials such as Captain James Cook, Captain Arthur Phillip, and George Augustus Robinson during the formative years of British colonialism in Australia, providing much of the basis for non-Indigenous knowledge of the “natives.” Later, it was well-to-do colonists with an amateur interest in Aboriginal peoples and their cultures that came to shape non-Indigenous understandings of them. In the case of Victoria, where the researchers of this article are writing from, it was local men including Robert Brough-Smyth, James Dawson, R. E. Johns, and Alfred Howitt, who in the mid- to late nineteenth century engaged in differing capacities with First Nations peoples in the southeast of the continent. In the “antipodean colonies,” it was not until the closing decades of the nineteenth century that professional career academics based in universities became actively engaged with research about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

The Horn Scientific Expedition (1894) to the central interior of the Australian continent marked the beginning of the research relationship between university-based academics and Indigenous peoples and confirmed
the relationship between non-Indigenous researcher Baldwin Spencer (professor of Biology at the University of Melbourne) as “expert” and the local Arrernte people as the “objects” of his scholarly inquiry. “Experts” such as Spencer often exemplified the characteristics and function of Edward Said’s “Orientalists”—determining what was “knowable” about the object “Other,” why that “knowledge” would be of use, and, what is most important, for whom it would be “useful” (Said 1978). In this relationship, the rights of the Arrernte people were largely ignored by Spencer. Conclusions drawn from his study and many of those which followed “confirmed” Social Darwinist explanations of Aboriginal racial and cultural difference, situating the Australian Aborigine at the very bottom of racial hierarchies that framed non-Indigenous understandings of human difference globally. Theories of social evolution and racial ordering like Social Darwinism and eugenics were important tools for imperial and colonial projects, not least in Australia, where they offered “intellectual” and “moral” justification for the violent assertions of British and later Anglo-Australian dominion over increasingly large swaths of territory across the continent.

Following the Horn expedition, researchers based at Australian universities would replicate this power relationship between non-Indigenous scholars and their Indigenous “objects” of study for the next hundred years. As a key part of their modus operandi, non-Indigenous academics denied Indigenous peoples their right to participate or withdraw from research on the basis of informed consent. Indigenous people had no input or influence on the type of research, how the results of that research would be communicated, or how their cultures were (mis)represented by academic researchers, who overwhelmingly used their academic authority to reconfirm the idea of Aboriginal peoples’ “racial” and cultural inferiority.1 During the period from 1894 to 1993, Australian universities and national research organizations played little or no role in upholding the ethical standards of research being proposed and undertaken with respect to Indigenous peoples.

A consequence of this history has been the recent and increasingly effective pressure brought to bear on Australian universities by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander scholars, students, activists, and their supporters, who have demanded that Indigenous peoples’ rights be recognized through ethical research. This coincided with, and in large part resulted from, an upsurge of international anticolonial politics earlier in the twentieth century and the waves of resistance and assertion by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples through the middle of the century, finally breaking into “mainstream” Australian consciousness with the turbulent and powerful Aboriginal rights movements of the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.
In response to Indigenous demands for the decolonization of research, institutions of higher education have developed tightly regulated bureaucracies to enforce national ethical frameworks. Unfortunately, these bureaucracies’ strict, inflexible adherence to formal ethical codes frequently disempowers Indigenous peoples by questioning and often limiting their ability to negotiate the terms of their relationships with research academics by and for themselves and their communities.

Human Research Ethics Committees: A Site of Neopaternalism in Practice

At many Australian universities, it is the role of the Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC) to uphold the national ethical framework devised by the National Health and Medical Research Council—and, with respect to research involving Indigenous people, also those endorsed by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in the institute’s Guidelines for Ethical Research in Australian Indigenous Studies (AIATSIS 2012). In doing so, the task of an HREC is to uphold the National Statement (2007, 3) to create an “ethos” for those who are engaged in human research to conduct their research in the “right spirit, out of an abiding respect and concern for one’s fellow creatures.” Accordingly, the HREC assesses the ethical compliance of research proposals by asking the following key questions:

1. What is the research about and what is the researcher seeking to do?
2. Why is it important and necessary to conduct the research?
3. Although all research is associated with some level of risk and inconvenience to the participants, does the benefit outweigh the risk with respect to this proposed research?

In the national ethical frameworks, Aboriginal peoples, Torres Strait Islanders, and diasporic minorities identified as Indigenous, such as Pacific Island and New Zealand Maori peoples, are populations defined as “vulnerable.” Through the establishment of a specific subcommittee, the HREC is therefore tasked with applying the terms and directives of Chapter 4.7 of the National Statement, where research proposals seek to engage with Indigenous people. This chapter specifically addresses ethical concerns that apply to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples as
“vulnerable” populations. According to the NHMRC, the ethical guidelines framework is based on

. . . six core values identified as being important to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The message for researchers is that there is great diversity across the many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures and societies. Application of these core values, and of additional cultural and local-language protocols, should be determined by the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities or groups involved in the research. The six core values are:

• Reciprocity
• Respect
• Equality
• Responsibility
• Survival and protection
• Spirit and integrity.

(National Statement 2007, 62)

In working to uphold these core values, the concept of informed consent is central to how the Human Research Ethics Committee functions to assess the ethics of research projects at Australian universities involving Indigenous participants. According to the HREC, “informed consent” is the central ethical principle for conduct of research involving Aboriginal peoples, Torres Strait Islanders, and other Indigenous peoples. The principle of informed consent is founded on the doctrine of respect for the Indigenous participants and their communities and is underlined by the principle of autonomy. “Autonomy,” or stated somewhat differently, “self-determination”—the idea that Indigenous peoples are the rightful determiners of their lives and what should and can be done with them—is the keystone of the national ethical frameworks. With an emphasis on autonomy or self-determination as a core principle, few might doubt that the emergence of the National Statement and the HRECs to ensure that researchers adhere to the statement’s core values is anything but a positive development. Such a conclusion, however, becomes far less certain when the actualities of substantive research practice are considered in any detail.

The gap between the formal concern to uphold Indigenous peoples’ right to self-determination and how the National Statement is applied in practice is clearly illustrated in the way the Human Research Ethics Committees assess informed consent. At Australian universities, HRECs ideally require
that informed consent be evidenced through the application of formal documentation and formalized reference groups, approved by them, with signatures obtained from Indigenous participants before any research project may proceed. Although the National Statement does refer to other ways of gaining consent, it is difficult to find how these alternatives can be used in practice with HRECs inflexibly focused on regulating through the promotion of written informed consent and highly structured reference groups in their ethics approval processes. These processes require Australian-based researchers to formalize their relationship with the Indigenous communities in which they work by forcing a highly bureaucratic procedure into the research design. As graduate students and academics actively engaged in research, we have found that the HRECs’ strict requirement of formal consent forms and reference groups to evidence the informed consent of Indigenous peoples and their communities can often undermine the ethical relationships and effective research projects we seek to build. It is our contention that the requirement for formally prescribed informed consent often disregards the right of Indigenous people to be autonomous, both by questioning their ability to make such a decision and by failing to acknowledge the role that cultural difference may play in defining what is meant by the concept of informed consent. The following vignettes illustrate some of our concerns about how implementation of the national ethical frameworks is regulated by research institutions.

**Vignette 1: Barry Judd—Consent Forms, Campsites, Kangaroo Tails, and Cappuccinos?**

As part of an Australian Research Council (ARC)—funded research project that investigates the role of competitive sports in promoting well-being in a remote Aboriginal community, I have been required to develop a professional research relationship with the Luritja residents of Papunya, a community of some 300 people located 240 kilometers northwest of Alice Springs in the western desert region of the Northern Territory. As required by the HREC of the university I then worked for, RMIT University (the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology), the ethics requirements with respect to my project included a paper-based informed consent form and explanatory statement that outlined the rights and responsibilities of voluntary participants in the project. The forms were duly stated in plain English, although English was a third, fourth, or even fifth language for my participants. During an early visit to Papunya in September 2015, a meeting was organized with the most senior male Elders of the community to discuss how my colleague and I would gain consent from the players, coaches, and support
people who make the Papunya Eagles a highly successful Aboriginal-run Australian rules football team.

The meeting took place in the local government office occupied by one of the Elders, who was then president of the MacDonnell Regional Council (MacDonnell Shire). Although an administrative office, there was not a pen or paper in sight. As we moved through the agenda battling the noise of power saws and drills of construction workers renovating the offices next door, the issue of informed consent forms was considered the most difficult subject to broach and was the last item to be discussed. When the issue was finally raised and the paperwork for the formal consent form and supporting explanatory statement produced, the Elders looked at each other with a sense of bewilderment and quickly proceeded to step away for a cigarette break on the front porch of the building. The meeting was at an end. The paper-based consent form that met the national standards of ethical research according to the National Health and Medical Research Council, the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and the Human Research Ethics Committee of RMIT University had been swiftly rejected by the Elders with whom we had to partner in our research. I have never again raised the issue of paper-based consent forms being used. Although the Elders are men of few words and have never explained their reaction, I assume their response was in part shaped by the historical experience of government interference and protectionism. A deep-seated distrust has developed, born of signing a lifetime of paperwork as a (perceived) indicator of perpetual consent to a denial of rights or yet another ineffective policy or program agenda of distant settler-colonial government—a distrust of having signed paper contractual agreements with non-Indigenous people for cars, houses, and mobile phones, only to have the terms of those agreements violated or disregarded altogether. In this particular case, distrust of paperwork was, I suspect, compounded by a sense of confusion about why my colleague and I were asking for signatures in the first place. This situation forced us to reconsider our approach to ethical research practice in our project and to question how the HREC had applied the values and principles of the national ethical frameworks to the research we were committed to undertaking. Since the Elders rejected the HREC-mandated ethical requirements of our project, I have come to realize that the contemporary frameworks for ethical research involving Indigenous people, despite the HREC rhetoric of autonomy and self-determination, may do further harm to Indigenous people as well as undermine established, meaningful, and productive research partnerships. This is certainly how I now feel about the national ethical frameworks. The rhetoric of national values, reciprocity, respect, and equality that are emphasized in HREC assessments of potential projects seem to have little or no meaning in the context of how
Papunya Elders responded to the paper forms required by my university’s HREC to indicate that my research project was forming ethical relationships with my Indigenous participants.

Reflecting further on the confusion the Elders demonstrated when confronted with written informed consent forms, I now believe that, from the Elders’ perspective, they had already given informed consent. Giving consent within the Anangu communities of the deserts of inland Australia is subtle and continues to draw upon traditional ways of doing business according to the law of land that emerged from Tjukurpa (Dreamtime). Following the essential precepts of doing business, the Anangu way is, in my view, the proper basis of ethical research practice where I work in the field. It starts with the practice of when, where, and how one camps. Camping rights are important in Central Australia. Asking where you can camp is critical. Traditionally, visitors to the Country of another Anangu group would be required to approach from the direction of their homeland, set up camp within view of their hosts, but initiate no contact with them. Then they would wait. Wait for half a day, a full day, or two full days. Only when their hosts approached their camp did it indicate that the visitors were welcome. This is the protocol that our research project has used on field research visits to Papunya, despite adherence to traditional and proper forms of doing business being frustrated by the constraints of time and money.

Doing business the Anangu way also requires the sharing of food. As a result, a significant ethical component of our research project has in practice come to focus on supermarket shopping. The purchase of kangaroo tails, T-bone steaks, or both as gifts to key Elders is a critical part of maintaining a proper and respectful relationship with the Aboriginal people with whom we work. Although good kangaroo tails are particularly prized and find long-standing reference in the Tjukurpa, the requirement to share food as a sign of respect to hosts often takes on contemporary twists. The sharing of our cooked meals with the grandchildren of the key Elders has become a regular occurrence, as has the purchase of cappuccinos for the male Elders who spend their time in conversation by the side of the Papunya store.

That visitors are required and expected to provide hosts with gifts in exchange for visitation rights has led our research project down some very interesting pathways that extend beyond the realm of food. Among other things, our research project has sponsored attendance by a Papunya Elder and his nephew at a Grand Final match of the Australian Football League (AFL) in distant Melbourne, facilitated an exhibition of contemporary Papunya artworks at the RMIT Gallery, and led to the purchase of several pieces of that art for our personal collections. This is one way we researchers can directly support employment at Papunya and in a very small way
improve the lives of artists and their families. None of these extra research activities are recognized, let alone funded, by our research grant. That “extra-research activities” are not accepted as important indicators of our commitments to ethical research practice by the HREC is telling in terms of how the national ethical frameworks presently operate in practice. In Central Australia, the concept of reciprocity is encapsulated by what Anangu peoples call “Ngapartji Ngapartji.” In return for observing Anangu protocols in the way we go about our business, we have been rewarded with openness, acceptance, and cooperation. Strict application of HREC directives would have significantly damaged our standing at Papunya and our ability to undertake effective research with Indigenous partners.

Vignette 2: Gina Hawkes—The Ethics of Talanoa and Paperwork: Some Early Reflections on Pasifika Research in Australia

This vignette provides an example from research with Indigenous Pacific Islanders living in Australia who are classified as “vulnerable” and “high-risk” in the HREC system. It is included here for two main reasons: (1) to show how university ethics bureaucracies are deeply embedded within Western frameworks that often unwittingly ignore different ways of being by categorizing all Indigenous peoples as one “vulnerable” group; and (2) to show solidarity with the growing movement in Pacific and Australian Indigenous Studies aimed at decolonizing university structures.

For this ongoing doctoral project at RMIT University, I wanted to talk with a variety of people who identified themselves as Indigenous to the Pacific Islands, and who now lived as part of a “Pasifika” diaspora in Sydney, a small, yet rapidly growing group with a current population of more than 72,000 (Ravulo 2015) and with an overrepresentation of athletes in commercially popular rugby codes. I was interested in the prominent role of rugby in their lives and wished to learn their thoughts and experiences of playing in or engaging with a rugby union or league code as members of a Pasifika urban diaspora. Despite the rapid involvement and visibility of Pasifika men in these sports (see Lakisa, Adair, and Taylor 2014), social sports studies are still dominated by the global North, and voices and perspectives that favor local, nondominant points of view are desperately needed (see Molnar and Kanemasu 2014; Uperesa and Mountjoy 2014). But how does one engage with these other, nondominant ways of being within the dominant world of neoliberal, bureaucratic university ethics processes?

In developing my research design, I deliberately aimed to minimize the use of structured formal interviews, which, particularly for young Pasifika
men, can feel like police or welfare interviews. To downplay the power
hierarchy of interviewer-interviewee, I explained in my ethics proposal the
importance of having a more casual approach, attending events and games,
and striking up conversations with other spectators, much like Pasifika peo-
ple would do when talking with one another. My methodology would be one
that valued and made use of *talanoa*, which comes from the Tongan *tala*
(to talk) and *noa* (about nothing; Vaioleti 2006), and which is a recognized
and valued way of communicating among people of Pacific Island decent.

Because my research involved “vulnerable” Indigenous minorities
(Pasifika peoples), my work was considered to be “high-risk” and in need
of review by my university’s Human Research Ethics Committee. This
involved filling out a twenty-three-page form with some ten extra pages of
supporting documentation. The required details, however “exhaustive,” did
not acknowledge, much less include, diverse forms of communicating with
others. All of which led one of my supervisors (author Phipps) to describe
the ethics review process as a form of “epistemological violence,” echoing
calls from Indigenous scholars on the need to decolonize learned epistemol-
gies inherent in many university structures (Smith 1999; Uperesa 2016).

My proposal to the HREC came back with many notations—I had to
change the word “chat” to “interview,” which directly contradicted what
I had argued for, and the reviewers wanted me to be more specific with the
number of people I would be interviewing and what questions I would be
asking them. Having made my case for oral and other informed consent, I
was told by the committee to provide a Participant Information and Con-
sent Form (PICF) and to obtain “written consent” from each “interview par-
ticipant.” Despite closely following the guidelines of the *National Statement*,
the flexible ethnographic approach I had put forward was simply consid-
ered too risky. When I asked one of my more senior colleagues what other
social researchers did in such a situation, he said, “They just lie,” a sentiment
shared by many social scientists I have spoken with since.

In my ethics proposal, I outlined the impracticalities of getting everyone
I would meet to read a PICF and sign a consent form. Not only would it be
awkward but it also might taint the information people gave since there was
a common suspicion among Pasifika people of such formalities, which could
feel like legal proceedings. For those with strong cultural and historical ties
to oral traditions and the reciprocal nature of talanoa, I have found that a
casual chat is far more conducive to good research than a formal interview
with set questions and a four-page information sheet to read and sign.

In the planned interviews I have conducted so far, I have met people
(most with a higher education) willing and eager to read and sign forms,
but I have also been in situations where it felt extremely inappropriate to
pull out the paperwork, to the point where I simply could not bring myself to do so. One example was an interview I conducted with two Samoan men working as community case managers in Western Sydney, the lowest socio-economic area of the city with a large Pasifika population. I arrived at their office, a large dark room loaned to them rent-free from their local council so long as they kept crime rates low (which they had successfully been doing). We introduced ourselves, talked about some of the objects in the office, and eventually sat down in a circle of couches. They were fine with my recording the conversation, but when I asked if they would like to read the participant information sheet, they both declined, preferring that I tell them about my research instead. Our meeting then moved on very naturally, the three of us sharing experiences from our own involvement in sports and with Pasifika communities. In the course of our conversation, the older of the two men became very emotional and was brought to tears when telling about the tragic suicides of young Pasifika athletes he had known. There were long moments of silence and reflection, and I was very aware of letting him take his time to express his feelings. I offered him tissues and afterward made sure he was okay.

At this point, according to the HREC ethics process, I should have presented the consent form for the two men to read and sign, but I could not. The energy in the room was both charged and somber—we had spoken openly, personally, and at times passionately, and I had also shared some of my own stories, my experiences as a young athlete, and my family connections to Samoa. I was so grateful for their honesty that changing our casual conversation into a legal and formal one of paperwork not only felt inappropriate and disrespectful; it also felt unethical. And asking them to sign a consent form would have made our reciprocal conversation one where their knowledge was perceived as more “vulnerable” and in need of regulation than my own. It would have negated the reciprocity of our dialogue. The two men expressed their gratitude for my work and their willingness to work with me again in the future, and I expressed my gratitude and my desire to work with them, offering my time as a volunteer for their organization. These spoken exchanges, along with the entire process of our dialogue, can be viewed as a more culturally appropriate and context-relevant way of giving informed consent, despite the rigid directives of the university’s HREC.

**Vignette 3: David Pollock—The “Vulnerable” King**

Human Research Ethics Committees often fail to take into account the intracultural diversity of First Nations peoples. This vignette examines how such failure can lead to (i) the misrecognition of these peoples, serving
to marginalize them and suppress their agency; and (2) situations where, paradoxically, the work of researchers can be rendered unethical despite their intentions to conduct themselves ethically.

There is an expression in the Australian vernacular, “the back of Bourke,” used to denote a locale that is particularly remote. In February of 2014, I traveled to Weilmoringle, literally 150 kilometers “back of” Bourke in New South Wales. It was here, on 30 March 2013, that members of the Murrawarri Nation declared their continuing nationhood, reasserted their claim to sovereign status, and formed the Murrawarri Republic People’s Council and Provisional Council of State. As far as self-declared micro-nations go, the Murrawarri Republic covers considerable territory; about the size of Austria, it is significantly larger than the neighboring Euahlayi People’s Republic, which declared its continuing nationhood later that same year. Having driven 1,200 kilometers to Weilmoringle, I was very excited at the prospect of finally meeting the man some had jestingly dubbed “King Fred.”

Through a case study of both the Murrawarri and the Euahlayi People’s Republics, sovereignty was to be the focus of research for my Honors thesis, “Articulating Sovereignty in the Murrawarri and Euahlayi People’s Republics: A Study of Conceptualisations and Understandings of First Nations’ Sovereignty.”

Fred was gracious in his hospitality and in sharing with me the inner workings of his political and social reality. We spent many hours discussing not only his understanding of sovereignty and political actions asserting claim to it as chairperson of the Murrawarri Nation, but also intimate details of his personal history growing up as a Murrawarri man. It was distressing to me and confusing to him that, despite all his generosity and the relationship we were developing, Fred would not have the opportunity to fully tell his story through my thesis.

Because the research component of my thesis was constrained both by the short period of my Honors year and by the requirements imposed upon it, I decided that the arduous and lengthy process of applying for ethics approval (which typically takes about three months), given that my work with Aboriginal people would immediately be classified as “high-risk,” should be avoided. This immediate classification operates on the assumption that the participants in such research must be “vulnerable” people, an assumption that allows the HREC to make an uninformed judgment about the situation and capacity of all First Nations peoples and to ignore their intracultural diversity. In Fred’s case, it was hard to see how a decorated ex-submariner in the Royal Australian Navy and now the chairperson of a self-declared micronation was in any meaningful sense “vulnerable.”
The NHMRC Values and Ethics: Guidelines for Ethical Conduct in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Health Research states: “In the research context, to ignore the reality of inter-cultural difference is to live with outdated notions of scientific investigation. It is also likely to hamper the conduct of research, and limit the capacity of research to improve human development and well-being” (NHMRC 2003, 3). This statement, though agreeable, is not well supported and fails to mention that ignoring the reality of intracultural difference is also to live with outdated notions of scientific investigation and likely to hamper the conduct of research. It goes on to quote Professor Charles Taylor, with his own observations about misrecognition: “to ‘misrecognise or fail to recognise (cultural difference) can inflict harm, can be a form of oppression, imprisoning someone [or a group] in a false, distorted and reduced model of being’ . . . Research cannot be ‘difference-blind’” (qtd. in NHMRC 2003, 3). There is a clear emphasis on group identity, conveyed through the council’s amendment to this quote (in square brackets), an emphasis that continues through the NHMRC framework, and one that, ironically, can serve to essentialize and overlook intracultural diversity: imprisoning some people in a false, distorted, and reduced mode of being (Taylor 1994). The National Health and Medical Research Council further developed its provisions concerning cultural diversity two years later in the council’s guide for Aboriginal peoples and Torres Strait Islanders participating in research, where an addition was made to “respect,” one of the six core values identified by the NHMRC: “Respect for each other’s dignity and individual ways of living is the basis of how Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples live” (NHMRC 2005, 9).

Indeed, it would seem that the national guidelines have evolved over the years with an increasing awareness of the importance of recognizing intracultural diversity, but an awareness not shared by most governance bodies administering the guidelines. It is not that the emphasis on group identity is unimportant; it is that failure to also properly recognize individual identity can serve to unbalance perceptions and spur problematic processes, as happened in my research relationship with Fred during my Honors year. I was restricted to using the time Fred and I spent together merely as a means of contextualizing and informing my interpretation of data when undertaking “Critical Discourse Analysis” of published materials. I am sure that this restriction alone significantly limited my use of the data-rich knowledge Fred had imparted to me in our discussions. I am also sure that it was disappointing for him to see so many parts of his story go untold. Beyond this, the need to eliminate large parts of his voice in the project and to emphasize my own as a non-Indigenous interpreter of the limited data set was something I consider both poor and unethical research practice. Despite all of
this, Fred and I have remained in touch and have developed a friendship through our continuing engagement in shared interests and political events. He is now assisting me in providing consultation and access to First Nations activist networks for my doctoral studies.

Today, my research interests have changed little from my earlier postgraduate years. Perhaps unsurprisingly, those I seek to engage with as partners in research are typically highly motivated, socially mobile, and politically adept persons, who do not fit “the mold” of Indigenous research participants conceived of in the prevailing paradigm of “protection,” which operates through the national ethical frameworks as translated into governance mechanisms at the university level.

I am presently applying to an HREC subcommittee for ethics approval of my doctoral research and am concerned that those I seek to partner with will be misrecognized by the subcommittee as vulnerable and disempowered people. My concern is that such misrecognition could discourage researchers and communities seeking to challenge an outdated research paradigm that has historically focused on “Aboriginal problems” and could frustrate them in their efforts to contribute to the development of one that promotes Aboriginal-led solutions.

Vignette 4: Peter Phipps—Mistaking an Ethics Process for Ethical Engagement on a Beach in Northern Australia

This vignette illustrates issues that can emerge when a researcher attempts to implement “ethical research practices” yet also brings some of the bureaucratic mentality discussed above to the “field.” In this case, it is not the grinding wheels of a university committee system causing the problem, but a general cultural density, including the determination to use preset solutions where nuanced negotiations with Indigenous intellectuals were called for. Real, substantive negotiations around research ethics demand a willingness to deeply rethink research methods and approaches.

In 2007, I was working on a project looking at the well-being effects of festivals on a number of Indigenous communities in Australia and elsewhere. I was attempting to act in accord with the six core values of the 2007 National Statement in regard to working with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities (outlined above). I had asked senior educators in a Yolngu community in northeast Arnhem Land to meet for a discussion about this work at a meeting of a “community reference group” (variously referred to as a “CRG” or as an “Aboriginal Reference Group” or “ARG”) to be brought together for the purpose of vetting the project from a local
community perspective. The two of these Elders I knew best were renowned cross-cultural educators and researchers in their own right, with many years’ experience working with researchers from outside their community. I had repeatedly sought their advice about the project and asked about an appropriate time and place to come together within the strictures of my limited time and budget.

In Australia’s Northern Territory, acts of repeated unsolicited requests are colloquially known as “humbug”—bothering people for something you want: a cigarette, money, research data, or, in this case, a kind of authorization at odds with local practice. As anthropologists or sociologists conducting fieldwork involving Indigenous people, we easily fall into the category of a social annoyance, “humbugging” people with endless questions in our quest to gather “research data.” Add to this usual fieldwork humbug the intention to gather and manage those data in ways that are ethical in the sense of a researcher’s own university processes, the 2007 National Statement guidelines, and deeper understandings of research ethics in relation to Indigenous people, and the researcher can become quite anxiously fixated on a prescribed way of “doing the right thing”!

Once reciprocal relationships have been established over time in a community, there may be some obligation toward the person who humbugs you, even if that person’s demand is not entirely reasonable. After a relationship in the community that had developed intermittently over five years, and after our working closely on a festival with their families, two of these Elders knew my family and me well and had seen my mistakes and the few things I had gotten right. They were exceedingly patient, kind, and generous women. In this instance, they seemed sympathetic, perhaps because of that history, perhaps because they, too, saw value in the idea of meeting about this project as a worthwhile innovation—good in principle even if not in keeping with established local practice—and perhaps they just felt sorry for me that I wanted so desperately to have a meeting! Even though these were very busy people with multiple community responsibilities, they finally agreed to meet at the allotted beach (a known intercultural space) in the shade of a tree well before sunset on the last possible day before my departure.

That day came, and after many delays at the art center, we got into the Toyota with the senior Elder involved. Our first stop was the supermarket to buy food for the meeting—as in vignette 1, the giving of food is a crucially important form of reciprocity deeply embedded in Indigenous Australian life. That took a while, as “peak hour” shopping tends to at the Captain Cook Shopping Centre. Then we drove out to the community, and some of the food had to be dropped at a relative’s house to fulfill that Elder’s
personal obligation to ensure her grandchildren went to bed fed that night. Eventually, we got to the beach road as the sun was setting. We were late and the other participants had waited, but they had family responsibilities to attend to, and cross-cultural meetings of that nature don’t usually happen in the dark on that beach, but in the light of day.

Despite that, we sat down for a little while, had some food and a gentle chat, but it was clear the “meeting” simply was not happening. The gentle, amused resistance of this Yolngu educator was instructing me in proper ethics, and I was finally relaxing my stored-up fixation on a “CRG meeting.” It was only then that I realized I had been pushing for something that was simply not appropriate. It wasn’t working because I was trying to impose a model that was not compatible with well-established Yolngu ways of being with and relating to researchers within the Yolngu world. Yolngu intellectuals had carefully developed protocols over two generations of managing and exchanging knowledge with ngapaki (non-Indigenous) intellectuals (researchers, educators, missionaries, art specialists, and others). My attempt to impose the model of “community reference group” only demonstrated my lack of understanding of this history, while being yet another failed “good intention.”

A few months later, this remarkable Australian intellectual suddenly and unexpectedly died. As well as feeling terribly sad myself, and sorry for her family and her community, I regretted that my last interaction with her had been to make her go through the patient steps of yet again training an outside researcher in the nuances of Yolngu ethics. She was directing me toward the Yolngu gamma research methodology she was responsible for; a method that uses knowledge of water and of the feelings that move like water to approach research across cultures (Marika 1999). I hadn’t been paying sufficient attention to this feeling in me or in the people I was working with for it to be a properly ethical process from this gamma perspective.

This brings me to the last named of the six core values of the National Statement, “spirit and integrity.” Clearly, there are many things in research relationships that cannot be captured or guaranteed by formal processes, but instead rely on our capacity to listen deeply, and to be prepared to critically reflect on and let go of much of the cultural, institutional, and personal baggage we carry with us in fieldwork (and for the rest of our lives). This can be challenging, even a little disorienting, as acts of decolonial self-liberation tend to be. But if we are not prepared to be personally and professionally reoriented and transformed in the research process by the discreet instruction of community Elders, then we may well still be caught in the lamentable Enlightenment-style research practices of the past. I would like to think that the thoughtful people who framed those core values in the
National Statement might just have included this last one as a reminder of the possibilities of personal and professional transformation. The challenge now is to communicate that elusive understanding of “spirit and integrity” to our ethics committees.

Vignette 5: Elinor Assoulin—Show Me the Work: Reflections on the Process of Establishing an Aboriginal Reference Group

In this last vignette, I will focus on the “bureaucratic mentality” I brought into my fieldwork, believing that I was following appropriate ethical research practices in establishing an Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG).

My art-based research, developed together with key Aboriginal Respected Persons within each of two communities across southwestern Victoria, looked at the phenomenology associated with participation in an art-making program that combined art therapy processes with Indigenous knowledge systems. My hypothesis was that, when used in research with Indigenous populations, art therapy tools and processes can enhance both individual existential knowledge of cultural identities and communication between different worldviews. Ian Anderson (1996) points out that traditional research methods have failed to show us how improvements to Aboriginal health can be achieved. I saw the use of an art-based method that focuses on meaning making through art making and that aligns sympathetically with the visual and storytelling media of Indigenous Australian cultures as one possible remedy for this failure.

My participants included Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women and men, the women from several country towns and the men from a correctional facility, both located in southwestern Victoria. To gain ethics approval for this project, I had to complete two lengthy ethics forms, one from the Human Research Ethics Committee at my university (RMIT University) and the other from the Victorian Department of Justice. Like my co-authors, I have been challenged by the institutionally imposed notion that the Indigenous people I collaborate with are considered “vulnerable” subjects simply because they are Indigenous and that my research with them is therefore “high-risk.” These challenges are not simply theoretical but cast shadows on the practical formation of relationships and taint, if not belie, the presentation of my research findings as a product of active collaboration with Indigenous communities, where such collaboration translates, among other things, into people consenting according to their preferred forms of expression. In this process, I have learned the importance of reciprocity in my relationship with an Indigenous community. The request from one key
Elder to “show me the work, not the paperwork” was for me a call both to show community members the value of art therapy tools and to actively listen to the ways in which the members wanted to make these tools work for their community.

The *National Statement* (2007) referred to throughout this article has the concept of consultation interwoven throughout its six core values. Many scholars affirm this process as crucially important for the recognition of the cultural diversity and self-determination of Indigenous peoples (see, for example, Crespigny et al. 2004; Jamieson et al. 2012; Pyett and VKHRCDU 2002). Priscilla Pyett, Peter Waples-Crowe, and Anke van der Sterren (2009, 52) discuss differences in approach to appropriate consultations with Indigenous communities in rural and urban contexts, suggesting that, in urban contexts, the relevant peak organizations provide the initial approval for the research, followed by first-level consultations. From these initial consultations, researchers are then referred to suitable representatives at the community level for more tailored consultations. Such an approach places the communities in an empowered and active position from which to communicate their needs and processes within the research. Members of my women participants’ community did not see either a formalized partnership or a research agreement as a priority despite my attempts to convince them otherwise. Instead, they made it clear through both action and inaction that the focus should be on development of the art-making program with the Elders who were available to collaborate on this task at the time.

Using an approach similar to Pyett, Waples-Crowe, and van der Sterren (2009), I went about establishing an Aboriginal Reference Group (ARG) by contacting two Elders and the research team at the host organization. These key people were introduced to me through my supervisor, an Indigenous professor connected with the community. Although Pyett, Waples-Crowe, and van der Sterren (2009) advise researchers to establish a consistent membership early in the project, I found my attempts to do so were met with resistance. Attending an initial meeting were three Elders, an Aboriginal community member, and two non-Indigenous professionals from the host organization. All the Indigenous people present expressed a willingness to sit on an ARG and also discussed other potential people for the role. With time, however, I found that membership in the reference group placed a substantial burden on one Elder and one non-Indigenous worker in particular, who were expected to carry the load because the others had been engaged in higher priorities since before my research project (see Jamieson et al. 2012 in this regard). Concerned by the need to do things as recommended in the formal guidelines and existing literature, I approached the Elder to further discuss how she would like to proceed with the formalities of
establishing the Aboriginal Reference Group, given the challenges of getting other nominated members to participate. By repeatedly avoiding direct conversations, the Elder indicated that formalizing the ARG was not of high importance. When we came to finalize the art-making program, the Elder brought another Elder with her and, together with the non-Indigenous staff, we worked to ensure that both the needs and cultural perspectives of the community and my desire to use art therapy tools and processes were met.

Some months later at a conference, I met with the other male Elder present at the initial ARG meeting, who explained that a “consultation [based] on need” suited him better, and we ended up having a very useful discussion on an aspect of my research while sharing lunch. These experiences were valuable lessons on the importance of working with what the Elders perceived to be important (the development of an appropriate art-making program), rather than insisting on formalizing an ARG. By avoiding direct responses and redirecting conversations, they have politely resisted my earnest efforts to establish a consistent membership early in the project and to have all members attend meetings regularly. This made me reflect on how strictly following a “Western” epistemology, by demanding that members establish the ARG the “right” way, was in this case, the wrong way.

Within relevant literature, there has been a substantial undertaking on when Aboriginal Reference Groups should be established—from some perspectives, always (Pyett and VKHRCDU 2002, 59)—and how they should be maintained. Some argue that researchers should constantly review their project goals with an Aboriginal Reference Group (Jamieson et al. 2012, 17), and others argue that relations should be regulated through formalized agreements, like a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU; Pyett, Waples-Crowe, and van der Sterren 2009, 53). Although my research design has included these perspectives, and although I still believe they exemplify ethical research practice, my experience with this Aboriginal community revealed that its members preferred a “consultation [based] on need” to a formal mechanism of monitoring. And, rather than prioritizing a formalized agreement, they clearly preferred to honor an oral one and to focus on ensuring that the art-making program be delivered, that it be culturally appropriate, and that it respond to the identified needs of their community.

Concluding Remarks

We are not arguing for the abandonment of research ethics guidelines; they are a necessary corrective for the ethical breaches that inevitably follow in the wake of unchecked power. We are genuinely troubled, if not perplexed, however, by the implementation of these well-intentioned guidelines through the
neoliberalized, hypermanagerial systems charged with their governance in Australian universities. The instrumental implementation of the Australian National Statement guidelines can lead to perversely neopaternalist outcomes as a result of the large bureaucratic systems that manage and administer them. University-based research ethics processes are implemented in ways that suggest a strong preference for institutional risk management (based on both the reputational and legal obligations of the university) over nuanced ethical concern for the Indigenous people and communities being engaged as “participants” in the research process. Illustrating this through these five experiential case studies, we hope to have elevated our concerns from simple “field anecdotes” to a more systematic critique.

The national ethical frameworks represented by the National Statement aim to secure the rights of Indigenous people from unethical research by empowering them to self-determine the nature of their relationships with professional researchers at Australian universities. Although well intentioned, the institutional mechanisms to put the statement’s ideals in practice do much to undermine the autonomy of Indigenous people. The rigid requirements of written informed consent forms and formally implemented consultation meetings provide clear examples of how HRECs may function to disempower Indigenous people by denying them their right to determine for themselves how consent should be given and consultation undertaken. As the vignettes indicate, alternative ways of consenting to and participating in research, not yet recognized by the national frameworks, could do much to reduce the occurrence of unethical situations. Things like understanding camping rights, sharing informal stories, valuing oral consent as highly as written, or giving greater emphasis to listening to the wants and needs of the group being researched should be further incorporated into how Human Research Ethics Committees implement ethical guidelines that shape research with Indigenous communities. The principle of reciprocity is critical to the conduct of ethical research, which in turn leads to the maintenance of good relations between researcher and Indigenous community, making positive research outcomes more likely.

Our analysis of contemporary national frameworks that govern research ethics in Australian universities suggests a significant gap remains between what is said about reciprocity, respect, and equality in those frameworks and how it is implemented by Human Research Ethics Committees. More often than not, the inflexible implementation of national ethical guidelines by these committees works to reinstate the paternalism of the past. If there is to be any progress in the quality and scope of cultural and social research with Indigenous peoples, the methodological taboo against seriously engaging with Indigenous ways of learning and being needs to be challenged.
GINA LOUISE HAWKES has a Bachelor of Arts with First Class Honors in Anthropology from the University of Sydney and has worked on a number of Australian Research Council projects. As a doctoral candidate with the Centre for Global Research at RMIT University, Hawkes is exploring Indigenous masculinities and sport among diasporic Pasifika communities in Australia.

DAVID POLLOCK has a Bachelor of Arts in International Studies with First Class Honors and a Vice Chancellor’s List Award from RMIT University and is a doctoral candidate with the School of Global, Urban, and Social Studies, RMIT University. Pollock’s research interests include First Nations politics and social movements, postcolonialism, and political science.

BARRY JUDD is a professor of Indigenous Social Research at the Northern Institute, Charles Darwin University, Alice Springs. He grew up in the Goldfields region of Victoria with family connections to Central Australia. In his formative years, frequent visits home to Alice Springs and the surrounding country played a key role in forming his ideas on identity. Having received an Australian Research Council Indigenous Discovery Grant to examine how participation in organized sport affects identity and everyday life in remote Aboriginal communities, he is undertaking research in Alice Springs for the next two years. Judd is a widely published, experienced researcher in the fields of Australian identity, Aboriginal identity in postcolonial Australia, Aboriginal peoples in Australian sport, and Aboriginal education policy.

PETER PHIPPS is a senior lecturer in Global Studies at RMIT University. After postgraduate training in cultural anthropology at the University of California, Berkeley, he completed his doctorate on the cultural politics of postcolonial theory at the University of Melbourne. He has published on Indigenous festivals, tourism, and the politics of cultural globalization. A founding member of the Globalism Research Centre, Phipps has served as consultant to a number of organizations and government bodies including the City of Melbourne, Victorian Multicultural Commission, the Papua New Guinea (PNG) Department for Community Development, Aboriginal and Torres Islander Commission (ATSIC), Aboriginal and Torres Islander Commission Arts Board (ATSIAB; Australia Council), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP; Sarajevo), and the Yothu Yindi Foundation.

ELINOR ASSOULIN is a doctoral candidate at the School of Global, Urban, and Social Studies at RMIT University, Melbourne. A practicing art therapist, Assoulin is interested in the intersection of art, culture, identity, and race. Her research is a qualitative art-based inquiry into the lived experiences of participating in an art program, which combines art therapy techniques and processes with Indigenous knowledge systems in collaboration with Indigenous communities in southwestern Victoria.

NOTE

1. We use the term “racial” here as a reference to how Indigenous Australians were historically categorized during the times discussed. Our use of quotation marks seeks to diminish rather than perpetuate the relevance of such a term.

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Cultural Identity and Practices Associated with the Health and Well-Being of Indigenous Males

Mick Adams, Peter J. Mataira, Shayne Walker, Michael Hart, Neil Drew, and Jesse John Fleay

ABSTRACT | In this article, we explore the traumatic impact of social policy that has caused serious psychological damage to Indigenous males for centuries. We argue that a deeper understanding of Indigenous cultural beliefs around the world challenges and revitalizes the conceptualization of what it means to be male in traditional perspectives. We draw on contemporary responses to the trauma from significant literature, with recommendations for the improvement of health and economic policy. In providing insights into the health position of Indigenous males, we also promote scenarios of their cultural practices and obligations and the interconnection of these within the kinship system.

KEYWORDS | Indigenous, cultural identity, kinship, cultural practice

Sociocultural and emotional awareness are at the core of Indigenous well-being. Because the interplay between historical and contemporary factors impacting social, cultural, and emotional well-being is complex, understanding them requires more than a simple description of the problem. Arguing that the customs and practices of Indigenous peoples around the globe are deeply rooted in their Indigenous beliefs, cultural evolution, and identities, we discuss the practices and histories of a number of Indigenous peoples, particularly those who have ancient and enduring origins within the modern borders of Australia, Hawaii, Canada, and Aotearoa. Cultural identification is a dynamic and multidimensional construct, encompassing affiliation with one’s ethnic group and with other ethnic groups. Ancestral cultural values, beliefs, and traditions passed down by mothers and fathers can bring a sense of cohesion and sense of belonging to one’s ethnic group in the face of marginalization, assimilation, and racism (Tengan 2002; Adams 2015b; Kana’iaupuni and Malone 2006).
Indigenous communities, peoples, and nations are those which, having a historical continuity with the preinvasion and precolonial societies that developed on their territories, consider themselves distinct from other sectors of the societies now dominant there. Though, at present, they form nondominant sectors of the larger societies around them, they are determined to preserve, develop, and transmit to future generations their ancestral territories and their ethnic identities, as the basis of their continued existence as peoples, in accordance with their own cultural patterns, social institutions, and legal systems (Gargett et al. 2007; Lutz and Ledema 2004).

We have observed that Indigenous peoples—such as those of Australia and Hawaii—share in their spiritual ways of confirming their identities, ways that are greatly significant to their existence as peoples and cultures, both past and present (Kana'iaupuni and Malone 2006; Spry and Lowe 2001). In this article, we explore the serious psychological damage to Indigenous males caused by social policy. We focus predominantly on the forced removal of children from their parents in Australia, with reflections on the impacts of similar colonial practices that occurred in Canada and Aotearoa.

The kinship system is about knowing your identity, your Country, your family relationships, and, most important, your place within the kinship system (Fejo-King 2013; Adams 2015a; Tengan 2002). The system is structured to ensure that everyone has clearly defined responsibilities and obligations; that Indigenous males play meaningful, active roles with authority; and that they stand responsible for the management and maintenance of traditional obligations, sacred objects, spiritual matters, and the performance of rituals (Wenitong 2006; Adams 2015a; Adams and McCoy 2011). In this article, we examine the interconnections within the kinship system between the cultural practices and obligations of Indigenous males.

**Colonial and Postcolonial Trauma: Theory and Practice**

The forced removal of Aboriginal children from their families in Australia, Canada, and Aotearoa serves as a case for colonial and postcolonial trauma in theory and practice (Consedine and Consedine 2012; Sutherland et al. 2014). We define “trauma” as any persistent seriously damaging psychological outcome of colonial practices, leading to a range of mental illnesses and behavioral issues among the world’s Indigenous people. We argue that this has been an international phenomenon. Indeed, as Michael Halloran (2004, 2007) has pointed out, the experiences and state of Aboriginal people in Australia are not unlike those of Indigenous peoples in many other parts of the world. *State of the World’s Indigenous Peoples* (United Nations 2015) indicates that Indigenous people experience poorer health outcomes than members of
the settler society, as reflected in many (if not most) health indicators. In
their landmark systematic review of health outcomes, Ian Anderson and
colleagues (2016) sampled twenty-three countries, representing 50 percent
(154 million) of the world's Indigenous peoples; the review reinforces the
United Nations findings, highlighting variability across countries due to a
broad range of factors. The devastating loss of populations, lands, law, and
spirituality resulting from contact with Europeans has been experienced
throughout Indigenous America and the Pacific (Anderson et al. 2016).

For much of their history, the cultures of Indigenous peoples have been
suppressed by European colonizers (Hart 2015; Hart and Rowe 2014). As a
result, they currently suffer the effects of cultural trauma, which has seriously
undermined the meaning-making capacity of their cultures, as evidenced
in the prevalence of anxiety-related cognitions and maladaptive behaviors
among Indigenous people (Yellow Bird 2014; Linklater 2015). Moreover, the
transmission of cultural trauma and its effects from one generation to the
next—“transgenerational trauma”—has led to alternative cultures of aggres-
sion and violence becoming the norm for many Indigenous societies. The
links of such trauma to distressing mental health outcomes are irrefutable
(Atkinson et al. 2014), as are its links to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal
young people in the juvenile justice system (Atkinson et al. 2014; Healing
Foundation 2015).

The Social Justice Report, 2008 (Calma 2009), released by the Australian
Human Rights Commission, documented the Aboriginal and Torres Strait
Islander historical experience as one of systematic forced location and relo-
cation, destruction of cultural practices and ancestral ways, demonization
of ceremonial rituals, and commodification of land, language, and intellec-
tual talent. A strong example of this was the forced removal of Aboriginal
and Torres Strait Islander children from their families, which occurred
from as early as the beginning of the nineteenth century and persisted to
as late as the middle of twentieth century (Australian Government 2015).
This forced removal was carried out with the willing support of religious
institutions and the democratically elected governments of the time.
Similar policies were carried out against Indigenous people in Aotearoa, the
United States, Canada, and other nations (Buti 2002; Anderson et al. 2016).
Transgenerational trauma continues today to deeply impact the lived expe-
rience of Indigenous men, resulting in cumulative wounds, scars, and dis-
connection passed on from father to son. As the Social Justice Report goes
on to contend: “Essentially, the devastating trauma of genocide, loss of cul-
ture, and forcible removal from family and communities are all unresolved
and become a sort of ‘psychological baggage . . . continuously being acted
out and recreated in contemporary Aboriginal culture’” (Calma 2009, 155).
As noted above, this trauma is directly linked to the overrepresentation of Aboriginal young people in the juvenile justice system (Atkinson et al. 2014; Healing Foundation 2015).

Violence has no outcome other than trauma and—without appropriate support—can lead to victims becoming violent in future relationships (Mataira 2008; Wei and Brackley 2010). The 1994 Lee Tamahori movie Once Were Warriors graphically depicted Maori men’s violence. Though lauded as a masterpiece of dramatic realism, the movie (and the novel by the same name) was intended to showcase the Indigenous power of the Maori family, power that has over the last two decades provoked critical debate around the social, economic, political, and cultural status of Maori families within a white postcolonial Aotearoa New Zealand. After postreflective analyses revealed complex and competing factors at work on and within these families, Emiel Martens (2007), for example, was sharply criticized by Maori scholars for his simplistic traditionalist and nontraditionalist binary, which failed to capture the nuances of Maori cultural politics (Smith 2009), although he did to some extent unveil the limits of what was “seeable” and “sayable,” not just about Maori identity but Indigenous people’s identities per se.

Current psychological literature condemns any form of abuse in a disciplinary context (Abbassi and Aslinia 2010; Collins et al. 2013). Recent statistics demonstrate that Aboriginal men are 9 times and women 34 times more likely to be hospitalized for assault than their non-Indigenous counterparts, and family violence assaults were 33 times more likely among Indigenous than among non-Indigenous people (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet 2016). That said, positive cultural interventions and approaches to rehabilitating offenders and other youths experiencing the trauma are also well established in such literature (Hill, Lau, and Sue 2010; Mattar 2010).

Other studies suggest that the effects of colonization on Indigenous men and boys in settled former colonies such as Australia, Hawaii, Canada, and Aotearoa have been a topic of great concern (Tengan 2002; Adams 2015a, 2015b; Adams and McCoy 2011; Anderson and Innes 2015; Kana‘iaupuni and Malone 2006; Lowe and Spry 2002). Indigenous males in these postcolonial countries account for some of the worst statistics in the areas of health, crime, poverty, unemployment, incarceration, and alcohol and drug abuse in their respective societies. These studies also point out that colonization led to the loss of traditional beliefs, separation from the land, breakdown of traditional structures of leadership and community, and poor achievement in education and employment. As an example in Australia, young Indigenous people are seven times more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to commit suicide. Further, 79 percent of Indigenous males exhibit low to moderate levels of distress and 20 percent exhibit high to very high levels
(Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet 2016; McCalman 2016). These factors have all contributed to the abusive and hypermasculine behaviors exhibited in many Indigenous males today. Cathy Atkinson and colleagues (2014) confirm that psychological trauma is directly linked to the individual and collective experiences of Indigenous peoples the world over.

Men and Boys in the Community and Economy

Psychological trauma impacts not only the physical health of Indigenous men and boys but also their self-worth. Addressing its effects is not simply a pragmatic matter of the greater good in relation to the economic health of the country (Adams 2014). Health inequalities between social and occupational classes or ethnic groups are a major issue of equity or intrinsic fairness. Health and economic policy must address challenges to the well-being of Indigenous men and boys for the sake of the individuals; any consequent economic benefits are a small part of the greater picture of social equality and public health.

Indigenous males have complained that little action has been taken and virtually no national-level funding has been made available for them to develop proactive male health programs. As an example, A. D. H. Brown (2004) states that, in Australia, the political, economic, and public health efforts directed at reducing mortality rates and perceived sources of environmental risk and uncertainty among Indigenous people have always been funded on a needs basis through Aboriginal health services. Because funding processes for these efforts are mostly small scale and not recurrent, they do not address the importance of significantly and consistently improving Aboriginal male health. The recent review of Indigenous Advancement Strategy funding (Adams and McCoy 2011) made a number of recommendations to address this situation including the need to base funding less on competitive processes and more on service planning and needs mapping as well as the importance of engaging with appropriate, smaller Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander organizations to enable them to participate fully in funding opportunities. Because sociocultural and emotional awareness are at the core of Indigenous well-being, it would be hard to exaggerate the importance of addressing the riskier or unhealthy behaviors and occupational roles of Indigenous men and boys as key factors when confronting other forms of health inequality.

Conceptualizing Traditional Identity

The recurrent challenges to their well-being are not unique to the Indigenous men and boys of Australia today. In traditional Aboriginal, Maori, and Hawaiian societies, young males are nurtured to ensure that
they have a clear passage to manhood. During initiation processes, boys are taught the rights and obligations of adult males, and a few are also taught the secrets of the sacred law. The traditional transition process is an examination of worthiness and courage, designed to instill the qualities of discipline, self-reliance, obedience, and cooperativeness (Warburton and Chambers 2007; Adams 2001, 2014; Tengan 2002). Thus, in Western Australia, Noongar (also spelled “Nyungar”) men and boys follow traditional songlines (Cairns and Harney 2003; Leigh and Vitebsky 2001) as part of their initiation into manhood. A universally applicable task of this rite of passage is the beneficial and enriching practice of finding a personal totem from the natural world, which becomes a significant daily reflection of the Noongar male through life’s challenges and struggles (SWALSC 2016).

The cultural and spiritual framework for Indigenous males is the essence of who they are and informs their positions within their tribes, their communities, and their families. The breakdown of their positions, any manifestation of violent behavior, their overindulgence of alcohol or misuse of drugs places the burden of their roles and responsibilities onto others and leaves the affected males with little opportunity to become leaders, educators, or providers (Adams 2014, 2015a). Nola Purdie, Pat Dudgeon, and Roz Walker (2010) observed that the interconnected issues of cultural dislocation, personal trauma, and the ongoing stresses of disadvantage, racism, alienation, and exclusion were all contributing to the heightened risk of mental health problems, substance abuse, and suicide.

The cultural conditions and the issues of Indigenous males are different from those of Indigenous women. In Canada, for example, the Institute of Gender and Health (IGH 2013; see also Adams 2015b) observed that, although Indigenous men fare better than women on economic measures such as earnings and employment progression, they face poorer outcomes in health and well-being across a range of key indicators. Despite increased research on health challenges affecting Indigenous men and boys in recent years, the remaining gap in research capacity is a significant impediment to promoting evidence-based programs, interventions, and policies for the improvement of the males’ health and well-being (IGH 2013; Adams 2015b).

In traditional Aboriginal, Maori, and Hawaiian societies, the transformation of a boy into an adult male is accompanied by important cultural meanings that are inscribed upon and within his physical body, which, like the earth, sustains physical, social, and cultural meanings. Traditional stories and songlines encompass law, culture, and spirituality to ensure the continuity of all things living (Cairns and Harney 2003; Leigh and Vitebsky 2001).
Song, dance, ocher, and painting are used as a boy comes into and out of the secret and traditional world of male law. His body is not just a vehicle of entry into men's business, a world that is carefully separated from that of women; his body becomes part of that secret men's business that belongs to all of life and its cosmic business. Initiation transforms the boy’s body into an adult male body, where new social relationships are configured and developed (Adams and McCoy 2011; McCoy 2004; Tengan 2002).

In traditional Indigenous cultures, physiological attributes of particular totem animals can become metaphoric representations of the virtues in man. An example of such a totem animal is Warlitje, the wedge-tailed eagle, *Aquila audax* in Western Australia or *Aquila audax fleayi* in Tasmania (Department of Environment and Energy 2016). The bird that dares to fly high, Warlitje is considered a medicinal or well-being totem. Blue was meant to be Warlitje's color, but the little gray wren Chiriger had hidden in Warlitje's feathers, stealing the color for his own blue feathers moments before Warlitje could reach the highest point of the sky. To this day, the splendid wren (*Malurus splendens*), who has the most beautiful blue feathers, chooses not to fly very high, lest he anger Warlitje (SWALSC 2016). Not only do these stories enhance a man’s life; they impart wisdom to him: never underestimate the smallest bird seems to be the moral of this story, with a lesson in humility from Chiriger’s choosing not to anger Warlitje, and another about the interplay of ego, competition, and cunning. Similarly, Indigenous males in Hawaii have expressed their connections to particular ceremonies, storylines, and songlines (Dow and Gardiner-Green 1998).

Indeed, evidence from both the international and Australian literature suggests that the well-being of Indigenous people is enhanced when they maintain their “traditional” culture (Durie 2006; Colquhoun and Dockery 2012). Thus Davianna McGregor, Paula Morelli, and colleagues (2003) tell us that the ‘aina (land) is the foundation of traditional Native Hawaiian cultural and spiritual custom, belief, and practice, where the land and all of nature are alive, respected, treasured, praised, and honored. They go on to say that, in many cases, the Native Hawaiian ‘ohana (family) in rural communities continues to practice subsistence cultivation, gathering, fishing, and hunting in accordance with the cultural and spiritual values and responsibilities taught by ancestors who nurtured both physical and spiritual relationships with their ancestral lands.

There is a scientific benefit to Indigenous men finding totems: a totemic relationship with one of the many important animals in the Noongar lands may lead men to become carers of that animal. It is a practice that can be universally applied across cultural divides, reminding these men of the importance of the natural world and their place among the world. Having a greater
purpose in life can enrich a young man’s life, and many more purposes can be discovered through a healthy, natural pathway to manhood. Suicide and substance abuse are major risk factors in many indigenous communities (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet 2013), and lack of purpose in life has been found to contribute to the frame of mind that leads men in these communities to place themselves at significant risk.

The Australian Ngangkari, who are Aboriginal Cultural Healers working in the Central Australian Desert, say connection to culture is the solution to violence and substance abuse. They say, “When you lose culture, you become a different person, a worse person.” This sentiment is echoed by the senior men of Australia, Hawaii, Canada, and Aotearoa involved in supporting the younger men to create their own paths to think, talk about, and resolve difficult social issues that they may be facing. The senior men encourage the younger to get more involved in traditional tool making. The traditional tools of ancient ceremony, Aboriginal Dreamtime, and law are instruments of cultural identity, cultural continuity, and belonging. As the Ngangkari see it, if you go too far down the “whitefella” side, you’ll lose yourself. But if you stay with your culture, you’ll be right (Walsh 2016). This “losing yourself” has been referred to as “non-assimilated-alienated identitylessness” and “inbetweenity,” where the sense of identity is compromised and a feeling of being lost between the Indigenous and non-Indigenous cultural worlds takes hold (Drew 2014; McKenzie and Morrisette 2003).

There is compelling evidence from a broad range of indicators to demonstrate that the Indigenous peoples of the world currently experience a state of living and health that is well below commonly acceptable standards (Anderson et al. 2016; Halloran 2004; United Nations 2015). In most cases where this situation exists, the cause is attributed to the impact of Western colonization and its ongoing effects (Halloran 2004).

Michael Trudgen (2000) notes that the experience of Aboriginal Australians since European settlement is replete with suppression of their cultural practices and knowledge by the dominant cultural groups. Halloran (2004) informs us that, in the first century of settlement, acts of suppression included forcible dispossession of land, theft of women, slavery and war, introduced diseases, and zealous efforts by missionaries to convert Indigenous peoples to Western religion and to convince them to reject their own cultural beliefs, such as Dreamtime and a connection to the natural world. Moreover, settlement brought with it the assertion of British sovereignty and law, which effectively displaced Indigenous customary laws.

The process of colonization completely demoralized Indigenous males, who suffered as the result of drastic changes to their traditional lifestyles and the disruption of their family structures. Indeed, Indigenous males across
the globe have been disempowered by colonization: their authority, status, and values have been undermined, and their cultural activities restricted or suppressed (Adams 2006). In Australia and Canada, Indigenous males who were members of the “Lost Generation” have become dysfunctional due to stress and have been unable to fulfill their traditional roles.

Contemporary Responses to Genocidal Practices

Indigenous peoples in Canada, as elsewhere, have suffered the undermining of their cultural norms and values; they face an uncertain future, which they have lost the power to change (Colquhoun and Dockery 2012). As a result of their disempowerment, they have experienced low self-esteem and serious damage to their social, spiritual, physical, mental, and emotional well-being. In a series of workshops sponsored by the Australian Healing Foundation and described in Our Men Our Healing (Healing Foundation 2015), Aboriginal men expressed uncertainty about their traditional roles and disengagement from their cultures and identities. They reported that this disengagement had been devastating for them, their families, and their communities. Negative outcomes included feelings of disempowerment, low self-esteem, alcohol and drug abuse, domestic violence, unemployment, incarceration, self-harm, and suicide (Healing Foundation 2015).

Colonial social policies often ignored the role of settlers and government in oppressing Indigenous people—placing them in “managed institutions” and separating from them their homelands and families. That these past policies have directly and drastically impacted the current health status of Indigenous people, particularly that of the men, is well established in social research (Adams 2006; Dowd 2010; Feather, Woodyatt, and McKee 2012; McNamara 2013; Short 2012).

It is important to consider that, before colonization, Indigenous males around the globe had active, meaningful roles within their families and communities (Adams 2014; Adams and McCoy 2011; Warburton and Chambers 2007). Kinship systems ensured that community members knew where they stood with one another, and their responsibilities and obligations were clearly defined. According to Brian McCoy (2004), male Elders were responsible for the management and maintenance of traditional obligations, sacred objects, personal matters, and the performance of ritual. They provided leadership, including resolving disputes, educating the young, and advising them on marriage partners. Moreover, Elders were entrusted with custodianship of the law and with an overriding duty to maintain it and pass it down to the next generation (Warburton and Chambers 2007; Adams 2014; Tengan 2002). In terms of social and emotional well-being and mental health, it has
been noted by some (e.g., Hunter and Milroy 2006; Elliott-Farrelly 2004) that suicide was arguably far rarer in traditional Aboriginal societies.

McCoy’s ethnographic study (2004) constructs the stories and experiences of Aboriginal males (Puntu) presently living in the Kutjungka communities of the Kimberley region in Western Australia. He provides insight on the process of kanyirninpa, or “holding,” which exists as a deeply embedded value among desert Aboriginal peoples (in particular, Puntu). McCoy describes the process of holding as authority with nurturance, where older generations assume the responsibility to care for and look after younger people; he explains that kanyirninpa also holds in balance two other key cultural patterns of desert life, autonomy and relatedness. These values are transmitted across generations, providing Aboriginal desert societies with identity, cohesion, and strength.

Around the world, Indigenous males and women are engaged in struggles for decolonization, self-determination, land, spiritual power, and healing as distinct peoples (Tengan 2002). To do this, they have developed and maintained culturally effective ways of healing trauma and loss by reinstating and reconnecting communities to their core cultural value systems. This enables them to find the solutions to their problems based on thousands of years of knowledge, while incorporating the best of modern knowledge systems, in order to create their own pathways forward.

Noting that a number of studies have shown that individuals from minorities achieve better life outcomes if they maintain a stronger affinity with their traditional cultures, Simon Colquhoun and Alfred Michael Dockery (2012) contend that cultural affinity or engagement acts as a protective factor against the problems of trauma associated with historical loss, discrimination, suicide or suicide ideation, and substance abuse—notably alcohol abuse—that beset many Indigenous communities and populations. Taking a more strength-based view, Noreen Mokuau and Peter J. Mataira (2013) explore how Native Hawaiians and Maori have used cultural strengths and resilience to rise from the trauma, despite continuing challenges. For too long, Mokuau and Mataira argue, settler governments, societies, and social workers have viewed Native Hawaiians and Maori through a problem-focused lens, which tended to ignore both the good works of these groups, including those of their historical leaders, and their collective progress.

A survey of Native American youth, as reported by Colquhoun and Dockery (2012), found that cultural affinity promotes self-esteem and that cultural identity, combined with high self-esteem, is a protective factor against alcohol and substance abuse, whereas lack of cultural identity, combined with low self-esteem, is associated with a higher risk of alcohol and substance abuse. The 2008 National Aboriginal and Torres Islander
Social Survey (NATSISS) data showed that there were positive associations between participation, identity, and language use among those engaged in traditional Indigenous activities (Dockery 2011). Jeannette Schiff and Kerrie Moore (2006) showed that participating in a particular cultural ceremony positively impacted the spiritual and emotional well-being of Native North Americans.

Another factor for enhancing the social and emotional well-being of Indigenous people is “cultural continuity.” In their seminal work, Michael J. Chandler and colleagues (2003) directly linked cultural continuity among Native Americans to land title and the rights to self-government and community control over services such as education and health. To these, we would add the capacity to preserve and reinvigorate cultural lives, with Indigenous women serving in governance positions, and community control over child and family services. The presence or absence of these factors has a direct impact on the incidence of suicide in a range of Indigenous communities.

Noting that the concept of social and emotional well-being has been conflated with mental illness, Graham Gee and colleagues (2014) argue that mental health and mental illness should be positioned within a broader understanding of social and emotional well-being, which, for Indigenous peoples, encompasses connection to Country, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family, and community. This broader understanding of health and well-being shifts us away from the pathological, biomedical interpretations of health that often obscure the importance of culture and cultural identity to the overall well-being of Indigenous people and that just as often lead to victim-blaming responses. It is also consistent with more expansive views on wellness that move beyond an individual and relational to a collective understanding of health (Prilleltensky 2008). In Australia, collective health is about social justice, but, for many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, when it comes to health policy and service provision, there is little or no such justice (McGibbon 2012). This failing breeds mistrust and can have a direct impact on the attitudes of Aboriginal people toward health services, affecting in particular young Aboriginal people’s access to services (Brown et al. 2015).

A history of invasion, the ongoing postcolonial impact of colonization, loss of land and culture, racism within the wider Indigenous communities, family separations and deaths in custody are all examples of what has caused the trauma, the social and emotional distress (including mental illness), and the loss experienced by Indigenous peoples. Such trauma, distress, or loss affects the whole person—the mind, spirit, and body of everyone who experiences it—and also that person’s relationships with others. Unresolved grief is
common in Indigenous communities because of the “unfinished business” of colonization and of the Stolen and Lost Generations (Linklater 2015; Mental Health First Aid Training and Research Program and Beyondblue 2008).

The Western clinical perspective on mental illness is essentially a psycho-medical one that refuses to acknowledge cultural differences. As a result, the different assumptions about causality and control, the different ways of expressing and communicating emotional distress, the different ways of thinking and feeling about others, and the very different objective life circumstances of Indigenous peoples are not taken into account when doctors trained in the Western perspective diagnose mental illness in Australian and Canadian Aboriginal and Maori populations. Many Indigenous peoples believe mental health to be connected to the social and emotional well-being of a person, which incorporates the whole of that person’s life and health. Acting on this belief, they seek not only to prevent or cure the illness of an individual but to address the adverse conditions within the individual’s community that gave rise to it.

Indigenous males the world over have long recognized the significance of the loss of their authority and self-esteem through alienation, loss of land or culture, and recurrent challenges to their individual and collective spiritual well-being and sense of control over their lives. Therefore it is essential that we take a coordinated, integrated approach to the cultural identities and practices of Indigenous males if we are to break the cycle of disadvantage affecting them, a cycle perpetuated by young Indigenous males’ less than optimal life choices in the absence of good community and family resources.

**Human Rights and the Positioning of Indigenous Males**

The Australian government has announced its candidacy for a seat on the UN Human Rights Council for the 2018–2020 term, invoking the five pillars of its campaign for membership—gender equality, good governance, freedom of expression, the rights of Indigenous peoples, and strong national human rights institutions and capacity building (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2016). The validation and use of our Indigenous wisdom, values, and processes is critical for those involved, at all levels (including government), in the healing and with the wellness of Indigenous males.

The 2007 *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* makes it very clear: these are *rights*, not options at the behest of the former colonizers’ current neoliberal “false generosity” (Gargett et al. 2007; Freire 1972). The processes, theories, and practices of those who work in the area of the health and well-being of Indigenous males must respect Indigenous peoples’ cultural values and ethnic identities and our integrity as distinct
peoples (Young et al. 2014), as they must “the right of Indigenous people to make sense of their time and place in this world” (Russell 2000, 10), which is an intrinsic human right. As Indigenous males, we must be able to use and fund theory and subsequent practice that emanate from Indigenous peoples’ meaning, from their right to self-determination culturally, socially, and economically.

Useful government, community, and family outcomes for Indigenous men and boys require a coordinated, integrated approach to maintain and strengthen our social and cultural institutions. It is the right of Indigenous peoples to be free from discrimination both individually and collectively, to be free from forced assimilation and destruction of our cultures. A coordinated, integrated approach that treats Indigenous men and boys “fully” requires all of us to get in touch with the fullness of our humanity. At the government level, we must invest in a coordinated, integrated system to break the cycle of transgenerational responses to colonization that have beset Indigenous men and boys and that are evident in many negative social indices. At the community level, we must continue both to mobilize our Indigenous networks, resources, and people and to provide leadership. And at the whanau (family) level, we must continue to whakamana (empower) the men and boys in our own spheres of influence (Durie 2012).

Conclusion

Siegfried Meryn and Anita Rieder (2001) tell us that the area of male health across the globe is highly complex, but that the potential for improvement is great. Targeted dissemination of information, promotion both of preventive measures in health care and of cultural identity and practice could lead to better health outcomes and improved personal identity and self-esteem (Colquhoun and Dockery 2012; Adams 2014).

McCoy (2004) illustrates the central importance of holding (kanyirninpa) in Australia’s Indigenous cultures: how Aboriginal males in the western desert region of Australia continue to strengthen inter- and intragenerational relationships despite the difficulties and dangers of their changing world. The improvement of male health and well-being through the intervention of clinics may not be possible until such time as Indigenous people overcome their mistrust of non-Indigenous health professionals and institutions and find some meaning, power, and control over clinical health care provision.

Some Indigenous young males describe the important stages in life as being involved and getting into trouble with other young males through things like gasoline sniffing, alcohol and drug abuse, and imprisonment. Turning their lives around often depends on encouragement by older males,
men they can look up to or identify with. Or if they get married and have children, they may discover that there is some future to their lives after all.

But what is most important to understand is the purpose of the kinship system, which enables us as Indigenous people to work out exactly where we stand in relation to one another within the structure of our tribes. It gives us a mental map of social relationships and behaviors, of how we should greet, address, and act toward other members within our tribes.

With songlines and storylines, kinship and totemic systems are passed on from our ancestors to our grandparents, parents, and ourselves, and from us to our children and grandchildren to ensure that they are grounded and confident to follow and pass on these cultural practices to their children and grandchildren (Cairns and Harney 2003; Leigh and Vitebsky 2001). These systems incorporate our rites of passage, our ways of knowing who we are (our identities), our Countries, and our connection to members of our immediate and extended families (Fejo-King 2013; Adams 2015a).

We believe that it is important for our young males to participate in the cultural ways of teaching that are relayed through family kinship and ceremonial responsibilities. This will strengthen their positions and provide a positive way of living that supports and affirms the values and beliefs that are fundamental to the Indigenous male’s view of the world within Indigenous societies.

MICK ADAMS is a descendent of the Yadhigana/Wuthathi peoples of Cape York Peninsula in Queensland and the Gurindji people of central western Northern Territory. His doctoral research study investigating the prevalence and correlates of sexual dysfunction among males of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, where Mick is a respected Elder, was published in 2014 by Magpie Goose under the title Men's Business. Recognized and credited as one of the leading Aboriginal researchers on male health, he has built a national reputation, credibility, and standing as an advocate for improved health of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples.

PETER MATAIRA is of Maori descent from Aotearoa New Zealand. He holds a Bachelor of Social Work specializing in Maori youth and behavioral mental health, a Master of Philosophy in Ethnographic Sociology, and a doctorate in Social Policy. With interests in social entrepreneurship and Indigenous research evaluation, he has taught social work at the University of Hawaii’s Myron B. Thompson School of Social Work and served as the school’s first director of Indigenous Affairs. He and his colleagues were responsible for planning and hosting the first International Indigenous Social Work Conference in Hawaii in 2007. Mataira has experience in both clinical and community work and has published widely in areas research methodologies, nonprofit entrepreneurship, masculinity, resiliency, and leadership. Having worked as a health researcher at the University of Hawaii Medical School for two years, he is now an assistant professor at the Hawaii Pacific University School of Social Work and director of the school’s Master of Social Work program. Peter enjoys running, reading, music, tennis, rugby, travel, and being with his family. He is currently working on a book on Indigenous entrepreneurship.
SHAYNE WALKER has a Bachelor of Arts, a Master of Consumer and Applied Science, and a Diploma in Social Services from the University of Otago, where he is a senior lecturer in Social Work with the Department of Sociology, Gender, and Social Work. His teaching involves working with people in the New Zealand context: the Treaty of Waitangi and Social Services. Shayne’s research interests are Maori social services development, alternative care, social service agencies, and care and protection.

MICHAEL ANTHONY HART is a citizen of the Fisher River Cree Nation. He serves as Canada Research Chair in Indigenous Knowledges and Social Work, director of the Master of Social Work in Indigenous Knowledges program, and associate professor at the Faculty of Social Work, University of Manitoba.

NEIL DREW is director of the Australia Indigenous HealthInfoNet (http://www.healthinfonet.ecu.edu.au) at Edith Cowan University in Western Australia. His background in social and community psychology includes more than twenty-five years of experience working with a diverse range of communities and groups. Neil was co-founder of the Wundargoodie Aboriginal Youth and Community Wellbeing Program, established in the East Kimberley region in 2006.

JESSE JOHN FLEAY is a researcher based at Edith Cowan University. He is undertaking doctoral studies in science education and cosmology and has a variety of research interests, including health, human rights, and access to education. His affiliations include the Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet and the Kurongkurl Katitijin Centre for Indigenous Australian Education and Research at Edith Cowan University.

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From the Caribbean to the South Pacific: Cultural Hybridity, Resistance, and Historical Difference

Maria E. Posse Emiliani

ABSTRACT | The present article brings together two geographically and historically distant cultures and years of researching the subject of cultural hybridity in film, music, and art. My interdisciplinary, participatory methodology draws on experimental film, ethnogeography, social anthropology, and critical theory to flow and navigate through disciplines, experiences, art histories, African cultures, and Indigenous perspectives. In describing the processes of cultural hybridization and resistance, I show how difference and mobility are culturally productive and how they can help us understand the important role that artistic research and practice can play in preserving and revitalizing traditional knowledges and cultures in the contemporary globalized world.

KEYWORDS | Caribbean, South Pacific, participation, film, contemporary art

My work with specific islander communities in the Colombian Caribbean led me to turn cultural difference into a research subject and gave rise to the documentary films QCUH in 2006; La Isla in 2007; and Da Nation in 2008–2009. How the media and experimental documentary film could help us construct memory and culture in a globalized world and thus also understand relations between different cultures through negotiation, exchange, and participation became the subject of the research undertaken for Our Film, produced in Tanna, Vanuatu, in 2013. This recent work focuses on participatory methods to retell oral histories using film and new media; it aims to transform the way islander and Indigenous identities have been represented (or misrepresented) by offering a “culturally productive” dialogue and a fluid, nomadic perspective through collaboration and participation. It aims to contribute to our understanding of the important role that artistic research and practice using experimental documentary film can play for the
preservation and revitalization of intangible cultural heritage, traditional knowledges, and cultures.

**Historical Difference and Relations**

The history of colonization is diverse and complex, and there is no single theoretical matrix to draw upon. But, as Robert J. C. Young argues, a more serious problem of postcolonial critical theory and colonial discourse analysis is that, through what he calls “geographical and historical homogenisation,” scholars and academics have produced a “romanticised history of colonialism” (Young 1995, 164). Analysis of the intense influence of the Spanish Catholic Church and the Inquisition on the colonial project in the Caribbean, however, has revealed a complex convergence of colonial histories: those of migrations, the voyages and settlements of the Spanish conquistadors, the trade in gold and slaves, the settlements of the Dutch and the English Puritans, and the activities of pirates in and around the islands of San Andres and Old Providence and most of the Caribbean.¹

The South Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu, for its part, has both French and English influences, which cohabit with its strong local Indigenous cultures. A linguistic paradise, Vanuatu is home to more than 100 languages, including French, English, and Bislama, a Creole language that evolved from English and is the most widely spoken by the ni-Vanuatu.² On the small island of Tanna, for example, six Indigenous languages are spoken apart from Bislama—Kwamera, Aneityum, Lenakel, Whitesands, North Tanna, and Southwest Tanna (Lynch, Ross, and Crowley 2001, 887).

![Figure 1](Image: McIDAS satellite image.)

Figure 1 | Eye of Cyclone Pam over Tanna Island. Pam directly hit the small island on 12 March 2015, causing devastation. Image: McIDAS satellite image.³
Although learning about historical difference is crucial for understanding colonial singularities, perhaps even more crucial is learning about the forms of cultural resistance, the struggles for autonomy and emancipation, the tactics of survival and hybridization of the colonized, and how these are similar but profoundly different at the same time.

The first European to arrive in Vanuatu, in 1606, was Pedro Fernandez Quiros, a Portuguese explorer who thought he was in Australia (“Terra Australis Incognita”). Europeans did not return until 1768, when Louis Antoine de Bougainville “rediscovered” the islands. In 1774, Captain James Cook named the islands “the New Hebrides” and arrived in Tanna in 1777 (Bonnemaison 1994, 22). Seeing “several fires appear[] upon the island at night, one of which blazed up from time to time like the flame of a volcano,” Cook would call it “Tanna,” which in the local dialects simply means “the land” (qtd. in Forster 1777, 2:259). The Republic of Vanuatu only won its definitive independence from the French-English condominium in 1980.

On the other hand, the Colombian Caribbean, with its own “repeating islands” (Benítez-Rojo 1997) and archipelagos, also has its own singular colonial history of misrepresentations and specific formations in language and culture, which I have described in detail elsewhere (see Posse Emiliani 2015). Tracing thematic relations or common histories of colonization and focusing on hybridization have led me to understand the Colombian Caribbean as a myriad of spoken languages, diasporas, traveling musical cultures, syncretic religions, and transnational music markets (champeta culture is a recent example). A place of interchange and convergence, the Colombian Caribbean is a complex flux of constantly transforming languages and hybrid cultures, a constant flow and counterflow of the old and the new—as is the South Pacific island of Tanna in the Vanuatu archipelago.

Cultural Hybridity and Prohibition

The relation between orality and resistance is not obvious. The capacity of language to transform itself and to fix and preserve its elements at the same time is crucial, even though the changeability of language seems to go against permanence, a principle of identity.

Hybridity may be understood as division or separation, yet it is also, to use Mikhail Bakhtin’s term, “dialogic,” and it has been “profoundly productive historically” (Bakhtin 1981, 360). Difference is also culturally productive: power struggles and the clash of realities and cosmogonies can also be seen as possibilities for dialogue. Indeed, in urban centers, rap and hip-hop have become culturally productive forms of contesting a differentiated reality. In the case of contemporary Cartagena, hip-hop culture has become a space
for youngsters to retell their own oral histories, mostly about their experiences with violence and with tough and unequal realities. A more evident example is the role that the Palenque language, spoken in the town of Palenque de San Basilio to the southeast of Cartagena, has played in the relation between orality and resistance. A hybridization of traditional African Bantu languages brought in by the slaves during Spanish colonization, the Palenque language has survived official prohibition. Indeed, it is because of the transformative capacity of language that the Palenque language and culture have thrived to this day.

Since the first free slaves formed communities known as “palenques,” the everyday cultural practices of singing and music making as well as of cooking, walking, and dancing have, through repetition and resilience, configured the African lifestyle still practiced there. In rituals, songs, and music, Palenque culture has survived to become one of the most influential cultures in the Caribbean region, transforming and reinventing itself through contemporary music and imaginaries of Africanness both in the Colombian and in the global cultural scene.

On the other hand, the Bislama language, spoken in most of Vanuatu, has successfully managed to cohabit with the diversity of the archipelago’s Indigenous languages. The capacity of local Indigenous languages and cultures to be preserved in such quality and diversity despite globalization and neocolonialism is extraordinary. This is perhaps most evident on the island of Tanna, in the south of Vanuatu, where forms of cultural resistance and hybridization take place simultaneously, as they do in other areas of the archipelago. “Within a ‘pidgin’ utterance,” Young (1995, 21) tells us, “the voice divides into two voices, two languages. This double-voiced, hybridised discourse serves a purpose, whereby each voice can unmask the other.” Bislama becomes, then, a hybrid discourse in constant construction and transformation alongside traditional forms of Indigenous culture.

Slavery, the Diabolic, and the Forbidden

The clash between cosmogonies and worldviews in the Caribbean and the South Pacific may have occurred in different historical times and circumstances, but both occurred under the pressures of the colonial European project, so the tactics of resistance in both areas are comparable in several ways. In the sixteenth century, the African slaves were brought to the Colombian Caribbean by the Spanish to work for no pay; the clash between cultures was evident, and African slaves were forbidden by the Catholic Church to practice their own cultures. It was not until they were freed and founded the palenques that they were able to express their own oral
cultures, which eventually became “traditions” through the resilience and practices of everyday life. The Spanish Inquisition played a key role in the colonizing project, imposing the Catholic culture and faith not only on the slaves brought into the Caribbean from Africa but on the local Indigenous peoples who inhabited the region and who were dispossessed of their lands and cultures. African drumming and chanting were officially forbidden by the Catholic Church, which considered these activities to be savage, diabolic, related to witchcraft, and directly contrary to the Christian faith; indeed, dark skin had historically been linked to the diabolic (White 2005). The Church effectively played the dual role of being “savior” and oppressor at the same time.

Cultural practices such as dancing, drumming, and chanting are central to African cultures, and their importance became more evident as the Church started to regulate them both socially and culturally. The modes and tactics of resistance to oppressive forces played a key role in giving shape to African cultural expression in the Colombian Caribbean and elsewhere: traces of such forms of cultural resistance are evident in contemporary champeta and Palenque cultures. The hybrid cultural forms that are popular today in the Colombian Caribbean are a mixture of the traditional African cultures that survived colonization by the Spanish and the Inquisition and by modern cultural expressions as well. It is important to emphasize that the expressions and forms of both champeta and Palenque cultures are identifiable and exemplify a cultural hybridity that includes the complexities of religious syncretization (which in African cultures is difficult to separate out).

Religious syncretization and cultural hybridity are intricately related in the South Pacific archipelago of Vanuatu. On the island of Tanna, in the south of the archipelago, I have specifically identified several elements sharing a common history of slavery, syncretization, and overall cultural hybridity that involved the missionaries and the Catholic Church. This dates from the first interactions with Europeans since the landing of Captain Cook in 1777, to the episodes of blackbirding in the late nineteenth century, to the modern forms of cultural hybridization that can be traced back to the emergence of the John Frum Movement and the Prince Philip Cult.

Parallel to a history of oppression and colonization, there is a history of cultural resistance. When we compare colonization in the South Pacific with that in the Colombian Caribbean to find points of concordance, we find that the tactics of resistance were not so different: under the guise of “missions,” the Catholic Church imposed its imaginaries and beliefs on the
Vanuatu locals while gradually gaining power over them. They were slowly and systematically forbidden to practice their own cultures, kava (their sacred plant) was demonized, and their system of moral values became profoundly affected. The locals started to “want to have what the whites had” (Rice 1974), but, at the same time, they also started to develop forms of cultural resistance. What is extraordinary, though, is how kastom, the ni-Vanuatu word for the traditional knowledges and practices of the archipelago, survived, how it was able to reinvent itself without changing its genuine purpose, and how it is alive today in spite of all external efforts to annihilate it.

In light of the fact that more than fifty thousand South Sea Islanders from the Solomon Islands and Vanuatu, including hundreds of natives from Tanna, were “blackbirded” to plantations in Queensland, Australia, between 1863 and 1904, the question of hegemonic power and oppression arises, and the relation between oppressive forces and subjugated knowledges becomes more evident. How did islander belief systems and oral traditions manage to survive despite the forces working against them? The histories of colonization are related. There are important differences, of course, but there are also similarities that are as important, if not more so: common histories of prohibition, struggle, oppression, and inequality. The cultures and society of the archipelago of Vanuatu were deeply and negatively affected by blackbirding, which in its coercion and kidnapping resembled the slave trade. For more than forty years, with the help of adventurers and human traffickers, the Queensland cotton industry “recruited” thousands of South Sea Islander men—and hundreds from Tanna Island—tricking them onto boats, which then took them to Queensland to work in the Bundaberg cotton farms (Docker 1970). Recently, Professor Clive Moore has insisted that it is not accurate to describe blackbirding as a form of slavery: though they “were at least partly kidnapped and brought here illegally,” the blackbirded South Sea Islanders “were not slaves. . . . They were not owned because they came on three-year contracts [and] were paid for their work.” But they were paid as little as five dollars a month and, all in all, Moore admits, “I don’t think there is any immigrant group in Australia who were worse treated than Australia’s South Sea Islanders.” These “forced immigrants” were later expelled with no compensation, their histories repeated in storytelling, I would imagine, from one generation to the next on their islands. What is especially interesting, though, is how the islanders managed to deal with such harsh realities, how they resolved their present cultural identity in relation to their past, and how they managed to remain resilient and dignified after these and other failed attempts to erase their cultural traditions.
Kava and Sound Systems: Totems and Rituals

In the Colombian Caribbean, the African diaspora laid the basis for cultures that feature “zombies,” voodoo, and human sacrifices. Indigenous knowledges are intrinsically related to religious beliefs and ritualistic performances. When the Catholic Church began to condemn these practices, it became the perfect pretext for colonization. The Presbyterians did the same in Vanuatu by prohibiting, for example, what was most important for kastom and for ni-Vanuatu cultural societies and belief systems—kava (*Piper methysticum*), a tuber related to the black pepper plant. Although the consumption of kava is common in Fiji and other South Pacific islands, in some, like Tanna, kava is held to have magical and spiritual qualities; its consumption involves strict rules and taboos. Thus, on Tanna Island, the consumption of kava is forbidden to women, and men have strict rituals for its consumption; there is an aura of mystery surrounding the kava plant, which is said to “unveil the world of dreams”:

> The practice of kava drinking among kastom supporters is strongly linked to the contemporary renewal of magic and clairvoyance. The “song of kava” is not really the song of the living, but that of the ancestors. It stands at the core of the mysticism of the island. (Bonnemaison 1994, 182)

The cultivation and everyday consumption of kava are central to ni-Vanuatu cultures and the connectors between their cultural and social practices. The early European missions to Tanna, led by middle-class religious leaders of modest origins, did not tolerate the use of kava:

> These men were courageous and sincere but with little schooling beyond their theological and medical studies. They were often narrow-minded and enclosed their missions within the inflexible
limits, which they had imposed upon themselves. Further, their sectarian views meant that they were not inclined to take tolerant views of the society and the culture they would find—nor of the other Christian religions competing with theirs. (Bonnemaison 1994, 53)

Although the first European missionaries to Tanna, like Agnes Watt and Thomas Neilson, thought Christianity would unite the island, conflicts arose both between the Christians and the pagans and between the Christian missionaries themselves. When Christian courts were created later, in 1905, polygamy was banned, and so were the Tannese festivals and rituals because they included night dances, which the ministers assumed were obscene and sexually permissive. Performing the magnificent Toka ritual was especially punished (Bonnemaison 1994, 200).6

Kava was forbidden, and its consumption and transport became symbols of pagan resistance. The banning of kava was the worst form of oppression because it struck directly not only at the islanders’ cosmogony and imaginaries, but also at the core of their cultures and at their dignity. Together with the consumption of kava, other traditions were forbidden, like the yowamen, a sexual initiation rite for young men. Although it was strictly taboo on Tanna to film the moment of traditional preparation and consumption of the sacred drink, I was given permission to document men talking and chanting before and after the kava drinking, as well as rehearsals for the Toka ceremony that would take place months later. All Tannese ceremonies take place around kava. After planning in coordination with the Lenakel

Figure 3 | Chief Yapa proudly holding a kava plant during our interview for Our Film, 2013. Kava was forbidden during colonial times. Photo: Maria Posse Emiliani.
Cultural Centre, we were able to document the Niel or gift exchange, the Toka, and the Night Dances for *Our Film* (2013).

Tanna Island is invested in keeping its local traditions alive, and kava is at the core of these traditions, today probably more than ever. Kava is the Tannese link to the supernatural. Because kava drinking is only permitted to men, my assistant, a man, participated after receiving an invitation. Later, I waited for the men to come out from the bush and learned the details of what happened within their circle. On Tanna Island and in special ceremonies, the kava plant or root is chewed by young boys, who do not drink the liquid and who are still virgins. The men start shouting toward the bush to alert and warn the spirits of their intention. After drinking the cloudy liquid that they have extracted from the chewed root, by now reduced to a paste, they relax and feel numbness in their legs and lower backs. Then they squat down and start talking quietly until it is time to “listen to the song of kava.” At nightfall, around six or seven p.m., the men light small fires, the atmosphere becomes filled with mystery, and the chanting begins. During the Niel (gift exchange) or the postcircumcision ceremony, the dancing begins at night, as seen in *Our Film.*

**Reclaiming the Ritualistic Space**

Certain elements of African pagan ritualistic practices brought in by the slaves in the fifteenth century have been syncretized with Catholic traditions to form the contemporary Afro-Caribbean cultural identity. Not only did the pagan African slaves practice sexualized dancing moves, chanting, and drumming; they also hybridized those practices with traditional Christian beliefs and transformed them through time. We can identify traces of the transformations in contemporary champeta, a musical hybrid and cultural expression that emerged as a form of resistance. Through chanting and funeral rituals like the Lumbalú performed in Palenque de San Basilio, traditional African heritage is performed and reenacted to this day. Thus centuries-old African culture and sensibility are still pertinent and significant for the communities of African descent, giving them cohesion and reinforcing a sense of belonging.

Contemporary rhythms like those of the champeta incorporate traditional African sounds such as *mapale* and *bullerengue,* as well as traditional Palenque songs and rhythms. These sounds, remixed with original Caribbean amplified electronic ones such as those of *soka souk,* reggae, and derivatives like *reggaeton* create what is known as “champeta music.” This merging of belief and cultural systems has reinvented the Colombian African heritage at the core of contemporary Caribbean music and culture. Central to champeta music and culture in popular, poor, and
marginal neighborhoods of Cartagena is the dancing space, made up of ritualistic elements with room for performing and gathering surrounded by a series of amplifiers built one on top of the other in totem-like shapes.

The traveling sound systems known as “pikós” are a powerful voice, and their haughty loudness announces that the party will not be private. Indeed, dancing and loudness will not be restricted anywhere these sound systems go. A form of territorialization, the loud stereo systems mark the ritualistic space: loud volume and speakers that can shake the ground with their power.

Dancing and singing bring a form of cohesion to the island of Tanna as well: no sound systems there, but a powerful belief system based on preserving kastom, which is the foundation of the island’s culture. The sounds of chanting and the echoes of stamping feet are part of the ritualistic past reclaiming the present. Tanna is a small island (550 square kilometers or about 200 square miles), where diverse religious sects (such as the Prince Philip Cult and the John Frum Movement) cohabit under the traditional knowledge of kastom. They do so through the living practice of rituals and massive “festivals” like the Toka dances and Niel celebrations that revitalize the local culture. The dances and chants are so powerful they can be heard all over the island, bringing people together into a collective, sometimes ecstatic state of mind associated with magic and the consumption of kava.

Figure 4 | Chief Albi dances spontaneously for the camera during a rehearsal for the Toka ceremony and during the shooting of Our Film, 2013. Photo: Maria Posse Emiliani.
According to Joël Bonnemaison (1994, 111), the resistance of the Tannese people to change is due to their traditional worldview and how they “perceive, internalize, and account for the dual concepts of space and time.” The Tannese pagans never accepted a form of centralized power. They de-converted to kastom from the Christianity imposed on them, reinventing their belief systems around kastom’s sacred power and affirming their culture over any other vision of the world: “The impressive pride of Tanna’s inhabitants underlines both their language and the island’s cultural memory, which is carefully maintained by an array of chants, dances, metaphors, and myths” (Bonnemaison 1994, 109).

Magic: From Voodoo in the Caribbean to the Prince Philip Cult and the John Frum Movement in Tanna

Catholicism and Christianity became masked strategies of the powerful, while syncretism and hybridization became the tactics of the oppressed. Slowly and gradually, “cultural exchange” revealed the patterns and forms of colonization and of cultural resistance. Cultural hybridity has been a strategy of survival for Indigenous and oppressed people under the various forms of colonization. The process of hybridization is therefore ongoing; it transforms itself constantly.

The African diaspora that arrived with the slaves to the Caribbean marked the identity of the Caribbean region with histories of voodoo and cannibalism, which filled the accounts of the first travelers both in the Caribbean and the South Pacific. That Indigenous and African practices were linked to the diabolic was argued by Catholic religious leaders and travelers alike (see Sheller 2003). The frisson of evil and sorcery both frightened and fascinated travelers, just as stories of danger and drug trafficking, voodoo and gunmen are used to give a thrill to jaded tourists today. By the twentieth century, ethnographers were combing Haiti in search of real “evidence” of “zombies” and cannibalistic practices (Sheller 2003, 141).

On Tanna Island, “cultural exchange” arrived in the form of prohibition and the imposition of Presbyterianism. As in the Caribbean, the Catholic Church imposed its religion on both the local Indigenous groups and the African slaves. On Tanna, the highest point of colonial oppression was the imposition of the Tanna Law (from the 1890s to 1925); this marked “the era when Christians from coastal areas dominated inland pagans, as decreed by the new converts, mission law was to prevail and kastom had to be eradicated” (Bonnemaison 1994, 199). The law became fully enforced in the 1920s,
when local chiefs were gradually replaced by “Christian kings,” and politics became mixed with religion:

The [missionaries’] selection of two major chiefs went against the entire traditional political system. It opened a door to abuse and without fail, generated a reaction of rejection. This wrong move on the missionaries’ part explains why, early on, resistance to Christianity came to be political rather than religious in nature. (Bonnemaison 1994, 199)

Chief Kapere (who guided and assisted my fieldwork visit to Tanna in 2012) explained that, by tradition, almost every man on the island becomes a chief at least once during his lifetime. Consequently, when the Christians started appointing “Christian kings” in the 1890s and implementing the Tanna Law using local militia to oppose “evil magic” and practices, the pagan natives resisted. The ways in which the Tanna Law was resisted varied; one of these was the persistence of chanting and dancing:

All Tannese oral traditions, be they ancient or recent, follow the same tiered pattern. They refer to founding places, which themselves refer
to guardian groups; placed in a sequence, these narratives anchor a cultural system from which originates a political system. Such is the case for the various oral traditions dealing with the islanders’ resistance to the Tanna Law. (Bonnemaison 1994, 218)

The Tanna Law emerged in the 1890s in the aftermath of cannibalistic attacks on settlers and “white kings” in the White Grass area (Hagen 1893, [no page number given] qtd. in Bonnemaison 1994, 198). In one such incident described by Bonnemaison (1994, 197), “the body of the unfortunate settler was cut up on a dancing place in Middle Bush and shared later with allied groups in the course of a ritual anthropophagus ceremony.” Bonnemaison offers other oral accounts of settlers meeting similar fates, the Middle Bush of the island having become the “land of pagans” and the Christian kings having settled in the coastal regions. Christianization did not happen quickly: the missionaries started arriving in the island around 1850, but the first official conversions of pagans did not begin until thirty years later, in 1881 (198).

Enforcement of the Tanna Law reached its peak in 1905 and gradually ended around 1925. The law prohibited Toka dances, polygamy, and the use and transport of kava; it punished kastom practices with forced labor, whipppings, and other forms of humiliation:

It is said that an yremera who was a big man of the Rakatne group in Middle Bush was seized, his penis sheath (*nambas*) removed and replaced by *nangalat* leaves, which cause severe itching, and the man was shown to the women of his group. (201)

The law’s provisions were imposed arbitrarily and with the purpose of ridiculing and humiliating the Indigenous people. In a letter to the *British Resident* denouncing the law in December 1913, an Englishman named Wilkes listed some of the law’s more offensive provisions:

1. No one shall feed the pigs on the day of the Sabbath.
2. No one shall henceforth wear his hair straight.
3. Anyone touching a French lifeboat with his hand shall be jailed for three months.
4. Anyone going aboard a French recruiting ship shall be jailed for six months.
5. Any native who did not attend the Presbyterian service shall be bound hand and foot and whipped in public.

—Ad infinitum ad nauseam (qtd. on 201; Wilkes’s translation)
As a result, kastom, and especially the drinking of kava, was practiced in secret; far from ending, however, such secret practice created new alliances and strengthened cohesion between the pagans of the island.

**Resisting the Tanna Law**

“Those of the Law are lying. Kastom will be reborn,” sang the kastom men (207). Cultural hybridity has been a strategy of survival for Indigenous and other peoples oppressed by colonization in all its forms. The process of hybridization and syncretization is therefore ongoing and constantly transforms itself. On the island of Tanna, two definitive and contemporary examples of cultural hybridity and syncretization are the Prince Philip Cult and the John Frum Movement: “The magic of space and that of dreams have been revived in contemporary times in step with the growth of the John Frum Movement, all of whose leaders were and are clairvoyant” (180). Magic plays a crucial role in both, and it has been a fundamental part of kastom on Tanna Island:

The list of its uses and traditions is nearly endless; each group has its own techniques, stones and traditions. Further, magical practices are like goods that may be borrowed or exchanged between villages. Not only does the magician work for his group, he is able to serve an entire network of alliance in this respect. (173)

The John Frum Movement is a form of religious syncretism between what anthropologists have called “Melanesian millenarianism,” on the one hand, and “cargo cults,” on the other (Tabani 2009). Although the movement has divided into many groups since it officially started in the 1940s, the origin of John Frum remains a mystery. His “first apparition” can be traced back to several years after the end of the Tanna Law in 1925. Anthropologist and expert on Vanuatu Kirk W. Huffman puts it in 1938.8 Bonnemaison (1994, 221) puts it around 1938 or 1939, linking Frum’s “first appearance” to the figure of “Karapanemum” (the “black god of Tanna”), who inhabits Mount Tukosmera and Yasur Volcano and whom Chief Isaac Wan identifies with.

The John Frum Movement practically invented the “Joh hemi savem kastom” (salvage of custom), which has become a generalized motto among the Tannese. The millenarian and kastom themes converge into one, although the movement divided itself into more than four groups after the imposition of the Tanna Law, which attempted to wipe out most aspects of traditional culture (Bailys 2005). These groups of the John Frum Movement include the Prince Philip Cult, whose members believe
that all other groups are wrong not to recognize John Frum’s true identity as the Duke of Edinburgh (Bonnemaison 1994, 8). The oral histories about the myth of John Frum intertwine with one another and are layered with meaning and symbols. Bonnemaison (1994, 215–17) suggests that the different versions of “John Frum” are linked to Mount Tukosmera, to Yasur Volcano (as seen in Our Film, 2013), and to a series of “messengers”:

One odd version, first told in public in 1978 and known as the Imanaka version, affirms that a man by the name of Mr. Lani—we later learn he was a surveyor who came from South America—was the first to prepare the path for John Frum’s arrival. The story tells that during the Tanna Law, kastom had to be “hidden under the leaves of the forest. . . . The big men met and asked if there was a country that could help kastom . . . and they sent a message.” Mr. Lani arrived in Tanna apparently to survey the lands near Green Point and Mount Tukosmera and after “leaving something in the mountains to protect them” announced that “someone would arrive soon with an important message.” Mr. Lani was never seen again. Months later, people began to meet in secret with “a white man, who was wearing a hat, pants, a
jacket with shiny buttons and who walked with a cane”; this was John Frum, the savior of kastom.

Another account of John Frum, confirmed by anthropologist Huffman, is believed by Tannese in the southwest of the island, where it continues to flourish near Ipeukel (Lamakara village) on the slopes of Yasur Volcano (as told in Our Film, 2013). This well-known oral account links the figure of John Frum to World War II and the United States of America. According to Huffman, that the Americans recruited Tannese men in 1942 to work on the island of Efate (where Port Vila is) to build the Bauerfield Airstrip may have affected the imaginaries of the John Frum Movement itself. Huffman affirms that when the Tannese returned to their island after one year of work, the men incorporated elements that impressed them from their experience on Efate, such as the military marches, the red cross, and the flag ceremony.9

These are clear examples of cultural hybridity and syncretization. In Tanna and in other places in Vanuatu, it became common to build fake
airstrips, fake radios, and fake versions of other artifacts that were popular with the military. Fake radios would enable communication with John Frum, and clairvoyants argued that John Frum spoke to them through these devices, which became forms of incorporating and hybridizing new technologies with their traditional belief systems. Because imitation was a form of conciliation and understanding, many started incorporating military performances and movements into their ritualistic practices; “mocking” and imitation became part of understanding cultural difference.

Champeta culture is at its peak today; like the John Frum Movement and the Prince Philip Cult, it illustrates the capacity of a culture to reinvent itself. And just as both these syncretized and hybridized traditional elements with the Christian belief system to survive colonization, so champeta culture incorporated elements of African traditional heritage (and was incorporated by them) to revitalize and reinvent itself as a contemporary musical form to survive social inequality, poverty, and discrimination. Not only did it succeed, but it also managed to put champeta culture and its music in the global spotlight.

**Conclusion**

Difference can be culturally productive through participation and collaboration. Indeed, when they focus on participation, film and video that use experimental methodologies for working with specific communities have made a proven contribution toward revitalizing cultures and improving our understanding of historical and cultural difference. Bridging cultural and historical difference requires the researcher to navigate through identities, cultures, and ways of knowing and doing, to be less systematic and more fluid. The histories of colonization are multiple and diverse—there is no single theoretical matrix, and the postcolonial perspective is not a unified model or an ideological system. And even though the researcher’s framework must be defined, it is in constant flux and functions more like language. Any comparative analysis of the postcolonial perspective between the Caribbean and the South Pacific requires an interdisciplinary approach.

At risk of fragmentation, Indigenous and African cultures need to revitalize themselves against past and contemporary forms of colonization. Extreme weather and climate change, imposed inflexible systems, the colonial Eurocentric perspective, and other factors all represent a threat to the vitality of both islander Indigenous cultures and cultures of African descent. Just as songs, ritual, and magic are key for keeping kastom alive on Tanna Island in the South Pacific, so African songs and dances, reinvented
in contemporary forms such as champeta and reggaeton music, are key for preserving and revitalizing African heritage in the Caribbean. By supporting the preservation and circulation of traditional knowledges through participation and collaboration, film and video can contribute to the revitalization of traditional knowledges and cultures.

MARIA POSSE EMILIANI has a doctorate in Contemporary Art and Film from the University of Sydney, a Master of Fine Arts in Film and Video from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, and a Woman of Letters magna cum laude in Art and Literature from the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá. Emiliani has taught Visual Arts and Social Communications courses at several universities in Bogotá, where she worked as a videographer and producer in local media and then engaged in Colombia’s cultural and artistic scene as a video artist and writer. While serving as an associate professor on the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities at the Universidad Tecnológica de Bolívar from 2005 to 2010 in Cartagena, she directed special film projects with the participation of local communities on cultural identity, environmental issues, and popular culture. Maria currently lives in Cartagena, where she teaches at the Universidad de Ciencias y Artes de Bolívar (UNIBAC) and is working on a film and artistic project about contemporary Caribbean music that addresses postcoloniality and cultural hybridity.

NOTES

1. In the Caribbean, there is also a strong French influence, although the French did not settle in the Colombian Caribbean specifically. The revisionist anthropological perspective of the Colombian Caribbean no longer centers its analysis exclusively on the arrival of African slaves, their interactions with Europeans, and how the posterior histories of resistance were constructed, but on migrations as well.

2. Used to refer to all Melanesian ethnicities and all citizens from Vanuatu, “ni-Vanuatu” simply means “from Vanuatu.”


4. I use the term “imaginary” here as Édouard Glissant does in Poetics of Relation (1997). “For Glissant,” translator Betsy Wing tells us, “the imaginary is all the ways a culture has of perceiving and conceiving of the world. Hence, every human culture will have its own particular imaginary” (xxii).


6. The Toka is another important festivity celebrated on the island of Tanna that takes place every two years in August and is two days long. People from the villages come together to dance and chant intensely; their powerful chanting can be heard from any point on the island.

7. Parenthetic page numbers for next five in-text citations are also from Bonnemaison 1994.

8. Kirk W. Huffman in interview with me at University of Sydney, 24 February 2015.

9. Ibid.


Inside Out: An Indigenous Community Radio Response to Incarceration in Western Australia

Clint Bracknell and Casey Kickett

ABSTRACT | An Indigenous prison requests show in Perth, Western Australia, Inside Out has emerged as a response to the disproportionately high incarceration rates of Indigenous people in the state and is the most popular show on the community broadcaster Noongar Radio, airing across twelve prisons with more than 270 requests per week. Incorporating interviews and analysis of language and music, this article will discuss how Aboriginal people in Western Australia use Inside Out as a shared communicative resource to assist in upholding their connections to family, community, and Country, connections that can be central to Aboriginal Australian social and emotional well-being but are most often impeded by incarceration. Using language and music—mostly country music—to enact Aboriginal cultural and social connectedness, Inside Out serves vital community concerns not addressed by commercial broadcasting, while also creating representations of Aboriginal culture for non-Aboriginal listeners.

KEYWORDS | community radio, incarceration, Noongar, Aboriginal English, Indigenous broadcasting

The prison requests program Inside Out on Noongar Radio in Western Australia is an example of how Indigenous people actively employ communicative resources such as radio broadcasts, language, and music to address pertinent community concerns while also creating representations of their own communities. Like many radio programs devised and produced by Indigenous people, Inside Out serves as a “cultural bridge between the parallel universes of Indigenous and non-Indigenous society” (Meadows 2009, 523). Indigenous peoples in many nations have used radio broadcasting to reinforce specific regional languages and cultures, while actively combating negative stereotypes and providing information or perspectives absent from mainstream sources (Smith and Brigham 1992; Stuart 2003; Rodriguez and El Gazi 2007; Meadows 2009). Like much Indigenous broadcasting,
Inside Out is an act of resistance against the dominant cultural influence of mainstream media.

Background

Almost fifty years after the first Australian public radio broadcast, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples won access to radio broadcasting with the introduction of community radio licenses in Australia in 1972 (Australian Government 2010). Originally designed to serve interest groups inadequately represented by commercial and government media, the not-for-profit Australian community radio sector continues to provide a platform for Aboriginal self-representation and the articulation of specific Aboriginal community concerns. One among twenty dedicated metro and regional Indigenous community radio stations operating across the continent (CBOOnline 2009, 9), Noongar Radio 100.9 FM is the only Indigenous radio station in Perth, the capital city of Western Australia. “Noongar” (also spelled “Nyungar”) is a term used today to refer to the Aboriginal people, language, and culture of southwestern Western Australia. More than 30,000 people—including the authors of this article—identify as Noongar, constituting one of the largest Aboriginal cultural blocs in Australia (SWALSC 2009).

Although, as Perth’s only dedicated Indigenous radio station, Noongar Radio aims to “support and promote the achievements and aspirations of the Noongar community it serves” (http://digital.radius.org.au/service/noongar-radio), much of its content is also relevant to Aboriginal people living in Perth but originally from other areas, and many of its programs are simulcast on regional radio stations in Western Australia. A requests show that aims to keep “loved ones connected on the inside and out” (http://www.noongarradio.com/nr_programs/inside-out/), Inside Out is the most popular program on Noongar Radio. The very practical need for the program is underscored by the disproportionately high incarceration of Indigenous people in Western Australia and the significant impact of this phenomenon on Aboriginal families. Inside Out exists as a communicative space involving the families and friends of prisoners, the prisoners themselves, and the broader Noongar Radio audience, which includes a large number of non-Aboriginal listeners.

Methodology

This article will discuss how Inside Out on Noongar Radio 100.9 FM assists in the maintenance of bonds between families, communities, and Country otherwise impeded by incarceration. Furthermore, it will identify how
Aboriginal cultural identity and the importance of kin relationships are conveyed through the language and music featured in the program’s broadcasts. Margaret Kovach (2012, 13) proposes that, in Indigenous research contexts, “methodology itself necessarily influences outcomes,” leading researchers such as Juanita Sherwood and Sacha Kendall (2013) to stress the privileging of local Indigenous voices as a key methodological consideration. Additionally, Indigenous researchers can often share a heightened “sense of responsibility to be useful” to their communities (Bracknell 2015a, 1). Indeed, we the Noongar authors of this article approached the research with preexisting contacts within—and accountability to—the Noongar community.

As casual listeners of Inside Out already aware of the generally positive effect the program has in the community, we determined the general scope of this preliminary study of the cultural, linguistic, and musical dynamics of Inside Out. Through talking with key Noongar Radio staff, we gathered information and advice to determine the direction of a subsequent review of the pertinent literature. We then analyzed three episodes of Inside Out, gathering data on language and music, while seeking to verify the claims made by the Noongar Radio staff we interviewed. Although our own lived experiences as Noongar people—especially with regard to the symbolic relevance of language and music—contributed to this study—we relied on a range of Aboriginal voices to reflect the diversity of the community concerned, rather than on our own preexisting knowledge.

Noongar Radio

Launched in July 2009 after the West Australian Aboriginal Media Association (WAAMA), better known for its station name, 6AR, was de-licensed for failing to recognize and meet the needs of the Western Australian Indigenous community, Noongar Radio was licensed with the primary objective of supporting Noongar culture and people in Perth (Johnston 2011). At present, the station has four employees, forty volunteers, and twenty-five programs broadcast directly to the Perth metropolitan area. All its programs are available anywhere in the world through live streaming on the Noongar Radio website (http://www.noongarradio.com; Wilson 2016), and some are also broadcast to other areas in Australia through the National Indigenous Radio Service (NIRS), a national satellite program delivery service distributing news and programs to Indigenous community radio stations.

Noongar Radio employee and volunteer coordinator Mechelle Wilson—affectionately known in the Noongar community and prisons as
“Big Girl”—produces and presents the prison requests show *Inside Out* every Sunday night from 5 to 9 p.m. Wilson (2016) recalls that, soon after its launch in 2009, Noongar Radio was receiving hundreds of requests for prisoners from their loved ones, as well as from prisoners through prison officers. Once the then Station Manager Michelle White decided that Noongar Radio needed to provide a show specifically for prison requests, it took a year for the station working with Corrective Services to establish a procedure that would allow for the broadcasting of requests to and from prisoners and their loved ones, while also making sure that restraining orders would be upheld and vulnerable people would be protected (Wilson 2016). As Perth’s only prison requests show, *Inside Out* first aired in May 2010 and has recently grown to include all prisons and juvenile detention centers in Perth, Greenough, Carnavon, Roebourne, Mullewa, Derby, and Meekatharra (Wilson 2016).

Wilson receives just shy of three hundred requests, “shout outs” and messages, for the show each week, with a large portion from Bandyup Women’s Prison, just outside Perth (Wilson 2016). Request forms are usually made available to inmates in prisons. Family or friends on the “outside” can select songs and make dedications by SMS messaging, by contacting the *Inside Out* Facebook page, or by dropping in to the Noongar Radio station headquarters on Beaufort Street in Perth. Although most of the requests on the program are from and dedicated to Aboriginal people, there are also a smaller number from and for non-Aboriginal people, signaling both the wide audience listening to *Inside Out* and the fact that Noongar Radio is providing a service to the broader community not provided by mainstream media (Wilson 2016). In recognition of this success, the Community Broadcasting Association of Australia (CBAA) honored *Inside Out* with the 2011 National Award for Best New Program or Content Initiative.

**Indigenous Incarceration and Radio**

that the “extraordinary differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous media in form and content” support the idea that Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples may inhabit altogether separate universes even though they share the same geographic location.

As of June 2016, Indigenous Australians made up only 3.7 percent of Western Australia’s overall population, yet represented 38 percent of Western Australian prisoners, with an incarceration rate sixteen times higher than non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2016). And disproportionate Indigenous imprisonment in Western Australia was far worse among the young: as of 2015, 78 percent of juvenile prisoners—aged between 10 and 17—were Indigenous (Amnesty International Australia 2015, 12). Disproportionately high Indigenous incarceration is a global phenomenon, exemplified by incarceration rates in North America, where First Nations peoples constitute 18 percent of the prison population but only 2 percent of the general population, and in New Zealand, where Maori people make up 50 percent of the prison populations but only 15 percent of the national population (Willis and Moore 2008, 11). Although it is not within the scope of this article to discuss the various factors associated with high Indigenous incarceration rates, institutional racism, intergenerational poverty and trauma, mandatory sentencing, minimum jail terms, reduced parole, homelessness, substance abuse, and mental health are all frequently linked to this phenomenon (Amnesty International Australia 2015). In 2014, one in eight Indigenous people in Western Australia reported having a loved one sent to prison or having themselves been incarcerated in the previous 12 months (Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet 2014). And, to this day, incarceration continues to be a significant and highly relevant issue for Aboriginal communities in Western Australia.

Connection to Country and Family

In an Australian Aboriginal context, the term “Country,” written with a capital letter, signifies land as “nourishing terrain” (Rose 1996, 1), alive, multidimensional, and intertwined with local Aboriginal people and culture. Although Western Australia has instituted a regional prison policy to address the “anguish in Aboriginal prisoners’ concerns at being held ‘out of their country’” (Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services 2008, 4), with sixteen prisons operating and more than triple that number of Aboriginal cultural groups across the state, many Indigenous prisoners still serve time in prisons far from their own Country and can be transferred with little notice (Kwaymullina 2011). Below is a “shout out” and request received
by Inside Out exemplifying the importance of Country to an Indigenous prisoner:

Request: Echo voices—Lajamanu Teenage Band.

Shout out: my family and mob in Wyndham and Derby, love and miss you mob, please all take care of our community—it’s very special. I miss my Country so please keep it strong for my return.

Hearing messages and songs from the home Country may help to strengthen the spiritual ties and connection to it.

Listeners from the Kimberley region in the north of Western Australia serving time at Acacia Prison in Perth often get in touch with their loved ones via Inside Out:

Request: Fitzroy Express—Home Sweet Home.

To all my family—to all my country—Kimberly brothers at Acacia—do it easy—take it easy—Kimberley and the country mob—keep our culture strong and stay deadly . . . not long now till we’re reunited all the Country and all the Kimberly mob hey. Can't keep us in here forever—stay strong black and proud.

Inside Out also receives similar messages and requests from prisoners just south of the Gibson Desert:

Request: Any song from Warunyinna Band.

For the Countrymen at Acacia Prison who from Warburton Community. We all must stay strong and focused until we return to our lands to practice true culture and be part of our piece of mother earth.

The examples above make powerful use of the terms “Country” and “Countrymen.” They also select music from their own homeland regions: Fitzroy Express from the Kimberley, Warunyinna Band from Warburton, and Ladjamanu Teenage Band from just a few hundred kilometers over the border from Wyndham into the Northern Territory.

Across Australia, prisons have implemented a range of strategies to specifically support the well-being of Indigenous prisoners, such as establishing areas, shelters, and fire pits for cultural gatherings, along with often regularly
delivered programs that include “visiting Elders and cultural enrichment
packages” (Grant 2016, 347). In her review of initiatives for Indigenous
prisoners in Australia, Elizabeth Grant (2016, 349) concludes that although
“being connected to country and family is paramount to all Aboriginal pris-
oners regardless of whether people originate from urban, rural, or remote
settings,” Australian correctional agencies are presently more attuned to
the needs of Indigenous people from remote regions. With the highest rate
of imprisonment in any Australian state, Western Australia operates four
regional work camps, providing prisoners with the opportunity to work “on
country,” although the many Indigenous prisoners who might benefit from
such alternate prisoner housing programs often have difficulty in obtaining
the low security rating necessary to qualify (Grant 2016, 348).

Even though families and friends can stay in touch in various ways—
including via requests shows like Inside Out—by displacing prisoners
from their Country, incarceration can disconnect prisoners from the iden-
tity, spirit, culture, knowledge, and potential for healing that exists within
it (Anderson 2013), creating a vicious cycle of trauma and incarceration
(Poroch et al. 2009). As the incarceration rates for Indigenous peoples
have steadily risen over the past ten years, Indigenous suicides have also
increased. Indeed, Western Australia has the highest Indigenous suicide
rate in the nation, with Indigenous people more than twice as likely to com-
mit suicide as non-Indigenous people (Georgatos 2015). And disconnec-
tion from culture is identified as a key factor behind the disproportionate
Indigenous suicide rate (Laughland 2014).

An Indigenous person’s social and emotional well-being—inclusive of
that person’s overall social, emotional, psychological, spiritual, and cultural
well-being (Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet 2014)—is put at risk
when entering prison due to the ensuing damage to—and disconnection
from—relationships to kin and Country. Blaze Kwaymullina (2011, 88–89)
ofers a description of this kind of disconnection, explained by his Noongar
colleague, Mia:

I saw firsthand prisoners who had been made to move away from
Country and family and were incarcerated in someone else’s Country,
miles from their homelands, within a tight, heavily, guarded institu-
tion. The “soul sickness” that developed was hard to shake, resulting
in mental health issues whilst in prison, which continued once outside
of it. I asked this prisoner, did he know why he was feeling this way,
and his reply was “I’m heartsick for Country, I can’t see the stars in the
night sky. I know they’re not from my part of Country, but maybe I will
get better if I could see them.”
An Indigenous worldview sees health from a holistic perspective, where spirit, mind, and body are interlinked with an emphasis on Country. David Mowaljarlai explains the health dangers associated with removing Aboriginal people from Country (Mowaljarlai and Malnic 1993, 165):

We grow up with that spirit of caring and warmth of the sun, fire and love from our family. Those are the growth elements, the elements of Wadjina [ancestral being]. Wadjina can't walk in jails. When Aborigines are cut off from that, they want to kill themselves.

Inside Out reaches the Kimberley prisons in the far north of Western Australia, where Mowaljarlai was from. Although unable to bring people physically back to Country, the program creates a platform over the airwaves for prisoners to maintain and express relationships, love, and concerns for their Country. Inside Out can also provide Indigenous prisoners with a forum to uphold their cultural obligations and help them maintain their social and emotional well-being while they are away from Country. Mechelle Wilson (2016) described an Indigenous prisoner from Acacia Prison being transported under security guard to a funeral where he was to read the eulogy for the deceased. The shame of being brought to the funeral by guards left the prisoner unable to speak and therefore unable to fulfill his family obligations to read the eulogy. Distraught at disrespecting his family, the prisoner grew mentally and emotionally unstable, to the point where he was placed on suicide watch. But then he reached out to Inside Out, asking Wilson to read and broadcast the eulogy on his behalf and to invite his family to listen in. Once his eulogy and apology to his family had aired, the prisoner felt as though his obligations to his family had been met, and he no longer wanted to harm himself.

Even though it is the very nature of incarceration to inhibit relationships with family and Country, Inside Out allows prisoners in Western Australia to stay connected. Mechelle Wilson provided a letter she received from a grateful Inside Out listener highlighting the struggle to maintain relationships with incarcerated family members:

My first “shout out” call—there she [Mechelle] was talking and settle me down—taking all the butterflies out of me. It was so great and when I sat back and listen to the call—I cried—it was natural and made me feel so good and happy. It felt like I was actually talking to my grandson and family. Later through the week they rang me, thanking me for their call and told me it was so good to hear my voice.
You see, two years ago I had a freak car accident that left me with a left amputated leg. I’m in a wheelchair and don’t get out and about much. I use to visit my grandson every week in three prisons. My whole day was doing visits every weekend. Now I don’t get to do them anymore because in my situation and currently being diagnosed with bowel cancer and having chemo for liver cancer I find it very hard to go and visit. So this is where lovely Mechelle has helped me so much to overcome all my stress of not seeing my grandson in prison—she brought that closeness back and I do feel so close, when I’m on your show.

Even though family is integral to Indigenous well-being (Pupazzoni 2011; Australian Indigenous Health InfoNet 2014; Department of Corrective Services 2014), fewer than three out of five Indigenous prisoners will ever receive a visit from a family member or even a friend (Anderson 2013, 125). A range of factors associated with poverty, restrictive visiting hours, poor health, transport issues, and the long distances between prisoners and their families can contribute to this situation. Families may also feel intimidated or embarrassed to visit, wary of the institutional setting, prison staff, and the likelihood of strip searches (Wilson 2016). Inside Out provides an alternate means for families and friends to maintain links with prisoners, going some way to overcome the economic, geographic, and cultural obstacles to prison visits. That said, one could readily argue that contemporary issues such as institutional racism, race-based violence, poverty, and extreme stress place increased emphasis on Aboriginal families as key mechanisms of support (Bourke 1993).

Language and Kinship

Across the world, in areas such as New Zealand, Colombia, Canada, and the United States, Indigenous broadcasting is often employed to strengthen local Indigenous languages (Smith and Brigham 1992; Stuart 2003; Rodriguez and El Gazi 2007). Although all 30,000 Noongar people share one common ancestral Aboriginal language, Australian census statistics listed Noongar as a home language for just 163 people in 1996; 213 people in 2006; and 369 people in 2011 (Bracknell 2015b, 68). That this number of speakers has more than doubled in fifteen years is the likely result of committed community language revitalization efforts undertaken since the 1980s and is consistent with the outcomes of similar efforts elsewhere in metropolitan and rural areas of Australia (Walsh 2001).

Noongar Radio has supported language revitalization by broadcasting short Noongar-language education segments, but, in light of the still small
number of Noongar speakers, Inside Out is broadcast predominantly in Aboriginal English, with a smattering of Noongar words and occasionally words from other Aboriginal languages as well. Deborah Hartman and John Henderson (1994, 5) explain how “using words that are distinctive to your social group is a powerful way of expressing your membership of the group both with other members of the group and with outsiders.” Writing with reference to the Australian context, Hartman and Henderson also suggest that it may be possible for collective and individual Aboriginal identities to be articulated without using an ancestral Aboriginal language such as Noongar, for example—through the use of Aboriginal English.

Quickly identified by words such as “deadly” (wonderful), unna (an affirmation), lubby-sing (attractive person), and “yarn” (conversation involving storytelling), Aboriginal English “is a distinctive dialect of English which reflects, maintains, and continually creates Aboriginal culture and identity” (Eades 1991, 57). Its sophistication as a dialect and its wide adoption by Aboriginal peoples in Western Australia makes it a useful substitute or replacement for endangered or dormant Aboriginal languages (Malcolm 2001, 217). Because, however, Aboriginal English is much the same across Australia (Eades 1991; Sharifian 2002), it is more useful in articulating notions of pan-Aboriginal identity than in affirming local Aboriginal distinctiveness. Commonly understood Noongar words such as “Wadjak” (Noongar people from Perth), yoka (female) and baal (he/she/it) heard on Inside Out mark the program as distinctively Noongar. But the surnames of the inmates and their families and friends featured on the program offer an even clearer indication that one is listening to Noongar radio, at least among Aboriginal people in Western Australia—most of whom are able to identify kin relationships through these common surnames.

Fisher (2013, 380) explains that, since the advent of Indigenous community broadcasting, radio has “linked up” Aboriginal families and community “seeking to bring extended families separated by geographic distance, by incarceration, hospital stays, or even boarding school back together.” As a result, many Aboriginal communities have come to understand Indigenous radio primarily as a means for people to connect or reconnect with one another; its programs also provide an “immediacy of community” and “intimate address” for those who are part of the cultural group. That said, Aboriginal broadcasts are produced both for a local Aboriginal audience and, at the same time, for a “listening, non-Indigenous other” (Fisher 2013, 398). For, even though, on one obvious level, the prisoners are “inside” and everyone else is “outside,” in terms of the various levels of meaning that listeners are able to draw from the language and names featured on the program, other kinds of “insiders” and “outsiders” can also be demarcated.
Indeed, according to Noongar Radio Station Manager Paul Whitton, Noongar Radio has a larger non-Aboriginal than Aboriginal audience. Even though the language used in Inside Out functions to mark the program as a distinctly Aboriginal space, a letter Wilson received from a non-Aboriginal listener in Perth illustrates how broadcasting positive messages on behalf of the Aboriginal community can shift existing negative perceptions in mainstream Australia:

I am a White Australian and I was switching stations on my new digital radio when I came across Inside Out, your prison program. It was a real eye opener. It made me realise how racist I was! I had always thought the Aborigines in jail were no-hopers, wasting their lives away but your program showed me they were all individuals with families that loved and cherished them and who ached to hold them once again. It also revealed how much they are respected and needed by their broader community who want them to stay strong and come home as survivors, not victims. If more white people listened I think your station would have the potential to be a great healer between cultures. It can change attitudes and be a strong force for reconciliation. I would like to congratulate you on your work and thank you for the opportunity to see the Noongar people in a new light.

Clearly, this non-Indigenous listener received a key message from Inside Out—the high value of family and community among Aboriginal people.

Fisher (2013, 380) suggests that “linking up through request programs, and the various ‘shout outs’ and music requests that dedicate themselves to distant kin such programs entail, has itself become a key public icon of Aboriginal distinction.” In creating a representation of a local Aboriginal community for itself, radio presenters on requests shows such as Inside Out “publicly and performatively” identify individuals as belonging to Aboriginal families—frequently in long lists of brothers, sisters, uncles, aunts, nephews—by using surnames. In doing so, they link to local Aboriginal cultural schemas associated with kin relationships. Based on his research on Aboriginal English, Farzad Sharifian (2001, 76) has modeled this phenomenon, highlighting shared cultural “schemas” or “conceptualisations” that members of cultural groups may instantiate “through various cultural artefacts,” such as painting, music, and language.

As Sharifian (2005, 76) explains, a cultural “worldview” based on shared experiences and understandings provides a “framework for human conceptualisation.” In an Aboriginal Australian context, for example, a few of the many cultural schemas Aboriginal people share result in terms such
as “spirit,” “family,” and “home” taking on special significance through the specific metaphysical experiences, regional protocols and techniques, and the roles and responsibilities of large extended families and kin networks (Sharifian 2005). Cultural schemas are continually renegotiated, and members of a cultural group sharing some, but not all, the elements of a schema may still belong to the same culture (Sharifian 2003). Individuals can be inscribed with new cultural schemas through lived experience, without compromising their existing schemas or membership in particular cultural groups. Thus Sharifian’s model offers an empowering framework for biculturalism.

Aside from surnames, geographic terms broadcast on Inside Out also invoke particular schemas. Prisons are always referred to simply by their shorthand names, such as Bandyup, Acacia, Casuarina, Boronia, Greenough, Albany, implying an unfortunate familiarity with the incarceration that most non-Indigenous Western Australians never experience. Similarly, groups of people referred to on the show as the “KGB mob” (Koondoola, Girrawheen, and Balga), “Carlisle mob,” and “Banksia Grove mob” are all from suburbs of Perth with comparatively large Aboriginal resident populations. But the most frequent expressions on the program, “kisses and hugs” and “love you always,” are disarmingly direct and require no “insider” cultural knowledge. Inside Out listeners consistently express these two heartfelt phrases toward family members, spouses, and other loved ones. Loving “shout outs” are often received from and to females in same-sex relationships, although Inside Out is yet to pass on a romantic message between two males. Wilson (2016) suggests that homosexual Aboriginal men are still wary of being open about their sexuality in such a public community forum.

**Music and Identity: George and Dolly**

Messages relayed between loved ones on Inside Out feature forthright declarations of love and support but also use language linked to concepts familiar to Aboriginal listeners. Many of the musical choices listeners make when requesting tracks to be played on the air can also be understood as part of the communicative process. The lyrics, genre, and origin of the music selected are loaded with meaning. As previously discussed, tracks by local Aboriginal performers help to link prisoners to distant homelands. However, country and western (or simply “country”) music—mostly by American performers—is the most frequently requested genre on Inside Out (Wilson 2016).

Since it first arrived in Aboriginal communities with the touring shows of the 1930s, country music has been popular in Aboriginal communities across Australia (Smith and Brett 1998). Whereas mainstream Australians
tend to dismiss country music, associating it with “rednecks” and “hicks” (Gibson and Davidson 2004), Aboriginal people have embraced the signature guitar-heavy sound of country music, which has become one of the most common stylistic elements in Aboriginal popular music (Breen 1989; Castles 1992; Gibson and Dunbar-Hall 2006). In his book *Buried Country: The Story of Aboriginal Country Music*, Clinton Walker (2000, 14) suggests that Aboriginal people relate to country music’s lyrical emphasis on storytelling and its “tales of horses and love gone wrong, of dead dogs and drinking”; noting that country music is “music of the land,” portable by virtue of its instrumentation, Walker proposes that the somewhat intangible sense of loss permeating much country music—perhaps arising from its steady rhythms and its crying vocal and instrumental timbres—is something “Aboriginal people identified with absolutely.”

The long-standing relationship between Aboriginal people and country music coincides with the equally long-standing reliance on Aboriginal labor by the Australian pastoral industry (Moore and Curthoys 1995). Peter Dunbar-Hall and Chris Gibson (2004, 44) describe the influence of radio and cinema on Australian audiences in the 1930s and 1940s, who saw country music as “a music of the frontier in early ‘singing cowboy’ and western films.” For Aboriginal Australians, the imported North American screen icon of the “singing cowboy” was often intertwined with the enduring figure of the Aboriginal stockman; indeed, many Aboriginal men working in the cattle industry saw themselves as “cowboys” (Rose and Davis 2005). Intergenerational identification with country music—be it American or Australian, Aboriginal or not—could also be viewed as intergenerational identification with working on the land, reflecting a sentiment once expressed by Aboriginal performers Richard Walley, Ernie Dingo, and Joe Geia that Aboriginal people “feel closer to cowboys than they do to city people” (Kartomi 1988, 21).

The *Inside Out* audience uses country music as a kind of shared communicative resource, as does the radio show itself. The three most popular songs requested by *Inside Out* listeners are all by American country artists. George Jones’s 1999 version of “Choices” (Curtis, Yates, and Lyons 1997) and Dolly Parton’s original version (1974) of “I Will Always Love You” top the list. Produced with Jones’s long-standing intent to keep “pure” country music in mind, “Choices” took on additional resonance in light of his 1999 drunk-driving conviction (Mellen 1999). Read in the context of Aboriginal incarceration, the lyrics of “Choices” take on even greater significance:

I’ve had choices since the day that I was born
There were voices that told me right from wrong
If I had listened, no, I wouldn't be here today
Living and dying with the choices I've made

I guess I'm payin' for the things that I have done
If I could go back, oh, Lord knows I'd run
But I'm still losin' this game of life I play
Losing and dying with the choices I've made

Parton’s two-time hit “I Will Always Love You”—brought to even more lasting mainstream attention by Whitney Houston’s epic 1992 R&B cover version—rearranges one of the most commonly heard phrases on Inside Out, “love always.” Parton’s earnest delivery adds an extra layer of sentimentality to the lyrics:

If I should stay
I would only be in your way
So I’ll go, but I know
I’ll think of you each step of the way

The song’s instrumentation, typical of the country music genre—including a crying slide guitar—is augmented by an almost gospel-sounding group vocal pad in the final choruses, perhaps suggesting a larger, family sense of love, rather than just a romantic one.

Conclusion

Although Noongar Radio aims to “support and promote the achievements and aspirations of the Noongar community it serves,” much of its content is also relevant to Aboriginal people originally from areas other than Perth and many of its programs are simulcast on regional stations in Western Australia. As the most popular program on Noongar Radio, Inside Out garners almost three hundred requests and “shout outs” every week (Wilson 2016). The program provides an invaluable service to the Aboriginal community of Western Australia, helping to bypass, if not overcome, geographic and economic obstacles by providing an alternative platform for families to stay connected with their incarcerated loved ones.

Incarceration breaks or at least interrupts connections that are vital to the health and well-being of Aboriginal people, and it dramatically impedes the maintenance of cultural obligations. This adversely impacts the successful reintegration of inmates after their release. Disconnecting Aboriginal
prisoners from Country—which in turn disconnects them from culture—has been linked to the increasing suicide rates in the Western Australian Aboriginal population (Georgatos 2015). *Inside Out* provides a means for Aboriginal prisoners to maintain family relationships and to express love and concern for their Country. It also acts as a forum for upholding cultural obligations while these prisoners are away from Country, bolstering the maintenance of their social and emotional well-being.

The “shout outs” and requests forming the basis of *Inside Out* are filled with Aboriginal English and Noongar words and expression that communicate kin relationships—including the surnames of prominent Noongar families and the names of suburbs with large Noongar populations. Indeed, these are key markers of *Inside Out’s* discourse. In its use of language, the program constructs a space immediately familiar to Aboriginal listeners, yet nonetheless welcoming to non-Aboriginal ones as well. Listeners’ requests on *Inside Out* reflect an intergenerational identification with country music among Aboriginal people in Western Australia; their requests for music by regional Western Australian Aboriginal groups reflect the prisoners’ need to connect with their homelands.

*Inside Out* exists as a communicative space for the families and friends of prisoners, the prisoners themselves, and both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Noongar Radio listeners. Serving as a “cultural bridge” between Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples, it has the ability to alter perceptions of non-Aboriginal listeners through providing positive and self-determined understandings of Aboriginal situations negatively portrayed within the mainstream media. It exists as both a community strategy to cope with incarceration and a site for the expression of Aboriginal identity and counternarratives through language and music. And it serves as an example of how radio broadcasting can be a powerful cultural resource for Indigenous communities.

**CLINT BRACKNELL** is a Noongar from the south coast of Western Australia and a senior lecturer in Ethnomusicology and Contemporary Music at the Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney. His research explores the links between Aboriginal Australian song and languages, emerging technologies, and Indigenous creative futures. A musician and composer, Clint creates music heard internationally across a range of media platforms.

**CASEY KICKETT** is a Noongar from the southwest of Western Australia and an associate lecturer in Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia. She volunteers at Noongar Radio as a board member and has previously served as a producer and broadcaster for the station for a number of years. Casey is passionate about self-determined approaches toward issues facing Aboriginal peoples and hopes to promote the positive impacts Aboriginal people are having on their communities.
WORKS CITED


Disability Services and Carer Program Gaps in Central Australian Indigenous Communities

Craig Ashley Eibeck

ABSTRACT  | My research objective was twofold: to gather valuable information regarding the gaps in disability and carer services provided to Indigenous Australian communities of Central Australia and to evaluate plans for expanding these services to better meet the needs of all disabled persons and their carers in the region before the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) in 2018. A questionnaire was personally administered to each of the ten disability or carer agency managers participating in the study, and the managers’ responses analyzed. Gaps were found in the transport of Indigenous Australian people to and from Alice Springs to receive services. Gaps were also found in the provision of services for disability housing, outreach accommodation, residential respite, and carer support, as well as for assessment, treatment, counseling, and case management. These gaps increased for all areas of Central Australia the farther the areas were from Alice Springs.

KEYWORDS  | disability, Indigenous Australian people, Central Australia, disability services, carer programs

Mordecai Cooke and colleagues (2007) report both a lack of progress in providing disability accommodation choices and a shortage of services and programs for disabled persons and their carers in Indigenous Australian communities throughout Central Australia. Christine Palmer, Gerard Waterford, and Sue Grant (2011) explain that the strain experienced in caring for someone who is disabled falls unfairly on elderly women in these communities. Heather Draper (2013) asserts that these more reliable household members suffer unreasonable strain and financial hardship in caring not only for disabled children but also for disabled grandchildren and great grandchildren. National Disability Services (2015) found most carers’ accommodations inadequate in size and lack of handicap modifications for
the large number of disabled people living with them. Madeleine Rowley (2013) reports that disability aids and services for disabled Indigenous people and their carers are either unavailable or difficult to obtain.

The trauma for carers unable to take care of all their family members makes them unwilling to give assistance to those with compelling special needs. The Steering Committee for the Review of Government Service Provision (2014) found that Indigenous Australians face greater obstacles to gaining disability support than do other Australians. The Australian Council for Educational Research (2012) revealed that Indigenous Australian people were more likely to require a carer and that the gap was substantial in remote areas of the Northern Territory. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2016) reports that, despite the higher disability ratio among Indigenous Australian people, fewer use disability or carers’ services than their non-Indigenous counterparts do. Currently, any available support for carers comes from government-funded care for the aged, available health clinic staff, and Indigenous Australian traditional healers (Palmer, Waterford, and Grant 2011). According to Australian Healthcare Associates (2004), there has been no increase in funds since the 1990s for health professionals administering services to outlying Indigenous Australian communities and only a limited increase in funds for adapting present housing, for supplementary disability aids and equipment, and for other support arrangements.

Disability service and carer program development in Alice Springs and throughout Central Australia has seen many reviews, but little action has been taken on their findings (O’Neill, Kirov, and Thomson 2004). Malcolm Hopwood (2015) reveals that Indigenous Australian people with special needs, their families, and their carers are suffering immense distress from the lack of available resources. John Gilroy and colleagues (2016) disclose that support for community services to individuals with serious disabilities and their carers has not improved in Central Australian Indigenous Australian communities.

This research report aims to arrive at a better awareness of current disability and carer services in Central Australia in order to make recommendations for the rollout of the National Disability Insurance Scheme (NDIS) there in 2018 (see Arunchalam 2013; Mavromaras 2014). It will explore gaps in services that pose fundamental challenges to delivering suitable health care for the region’s Indigenous Australians with special needs.

**Literature Review**

Palmer, Waterford, and Grant (2011) state that, owing to the extremely high incidence of disability in the Indigenous households of Central Australia, there are many people fulfilling the role of carer for a disabled person with special needs, and they emphasize that parents and carers in these households
feel that they are being left behind without hope when it comes to caring for their disabled family members. Chris Chamberlain and David MacKenzie (2009) report there is an urgent need for housing and care for disabled people in the region's Indigenous communities. But studies by Gwynnyth Llewellyn (2014) and Family Relationship Services Australia (2011) found that arriving at a precise awareness of the extent of disability throughout the region's Indigenous Australian communities is highly problematic; the Productivity Commission (2011) notes that there had been no national audits of Indigenous Australian people's disability prior to the 2002 National Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Survey (NATSISS). The National Rural Health Alliance (2013) found that Indigenous Australian people with special needs were less likely than other Australians to participate in surveys, leading to an underestimation of the extent of their disabilities. Damian Griffis (2010) found that, for many Indigenous Australian people, the concept of disability is simply too difficult to comprehend, lowering the likely accuracy of disability surveys. And Nicholas Biddle and colleagues (2012) argued that the inability of surveys to accurately estimate the extent of disability among Indigenous Australians has created serious gaps in the disability literature, which raises questions about just how many Indigenous Australian people actually require disability and carer services.

Indeed, the Australian Institute of Health and Welfare (2014) found that, due to high rates of nonresponse to survey questions, surveys of Indigenous Australian people were generally inaccurate. Be that as it may, the Australian Bureau of Statistics (2011) reported that 50 percent of Indigenous Australian people older than 15 had a disability as of 2011. Furthermore, studies by Kerry Stopher and Heather D'Antoine (2009) and the Productivity Commission (2011) found substantial evidence that Indigenous Australian people with special needs systematically encountered obvious barriers when attempting to receive support and were marginalized within the disability sector. But Michelle DiGiacomo and colleagues (2013) reported that, even though Indigenous Australian people clearly experience higher proportions of disability than do other Australians, reliable data on the extent of that disability, their connection to services, and service delivery to them are generally lacking. Looking at existing gaps in disability and carer services, this research report aims to make recommendations for expansion of those services for the NDIS rollout, as well as to fill some data gaps in the disability literature.

Methodology

Descriptive, qualitative research examines matters having consequences in people's lives that can be studied and counted. A common coding method in such research, Indigenous grounded theory (IGT) examines what gaps
remain in a given social setting; its constructivist aspects have been applied to the substantive issues of social justice (Jones and Alony 2011). Qualitative constructivism positions the researcher in the context to be studied, constructs a participant-generated framework, incorporates personal values into the study, interprets, and validates the accuracy of the study’s findings, and creates an agenda for advancement. Derived from data, IGT can provide insight, boost understanding, and contribute a purposeful guide to social action (Khan 2014). My methodology made use of five IGT elements outlined by Juliet Corbin and Anselm Strauss (2015): data collection (questionnaires), data organization, data coding, data analyzing, and findings interpretation.

In my antipositivist social action research, I used a structured in-depth questionnaire as the primary method to collect data from the participants and Indigenous grounded theory to secure Indigenous Australian people’s spiritual and social attachment in order to advance their social and emotional well-being (SEWB; Bessarab et al. 2014). The quantitative component consisted of using a questionnaire (see appendix A) as a data collection tool to learn about the characteristics and opinions of agency managers and to answer questions that had been raised, to assess needs, and to determine whether specific needs had been met. Quantitative research was used to supplement the qualitative process to ensure the objectivity, reliability, and validity of the data. Descriptive, qualitative research was used to establish baselines against which future comparisons could be made and to describe the current state of affairs, in what amounts, and in what context. My research was both feasible and affordable: I was able to recruit the number of participants needed within a short time frame; I provided the required expertise as researcher.

**Methods of Data Collection**

To undertake my research, I administered a personal in-office questionnaire whose closed and open-ended questions were predetermined, with the same wording and in the same order for each participant. Using stratified purposeful sampling—nonprobability sampling based on the objective of the research—I chose ten disability and carer agency managers in Central Australia as participants in the research. Participants were chosen from among representatives of Central Australian disability and carers agencies on the Alice Springs Town Council Access Advisory Committee. No Indigenous Australian people were involved in the research; no personal information was collected; and participation was voluntary and anonymous. Participants were given a copy of the consent letter and the questionnaire, which they answered in person at their offices. Quantitative research and
data triangulation supplemented the questionnaire responses to ensure the objectivity, reliability, and validity of the data collected.

**Methods of Data Analysis**

The participants’ responses were analyzed by transferring the collected questionnaire data into a spreadsheet for coding, editing, tabulation, and accuracy. Tables and graphs were used to display the data. Open coding was used to find gaps in agency services and relationships between services and to evaluate the analysis and credibility of findings (see appendix C).

**Ethical Considerations**

I applied to Southern Cross University’s Human Research Ethics Committee for approval of my research, which was granted on 24 August 2016 (approval number ECN-16-258), and I began work on my project on 25 August 2016 (see appendix D). Information given by all participants was kept confidential to protect their anonymity and jobs, and pseudonyms were used for agencies and agency managers’ names. The Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC) provided secure and protected storage for my research data and secure computing systems using network security and access control. All participants were agency managers with experience working with Indigenous Australian people with disabilities and their carers. All questions asked them related to the provision of services and not to any personal issues. Because Indigenous Australian people with a disability are deemed vulnerable (Graham, Powell, and Taylor 2015), none were chosen as participants. Before completing the questionnaire, participants were first required to provide informed consent (see appendix B) and were advised that they could withdraw from the research project at any time.

**Results**

This report outlines the results of my research to determine the gaps in disability services and carer programs in Central Australian Indigenous communities. From table 1, it can be seen that nearly all of disability service and carer program agencies in Central Australia offer both disability services and carer support, and that none offers only carer support.

Complaining of high staff turnover and funding limitations, most of the agency managers identified major challenges for improvement needed to support their work in the areas of transport, disability housing, and accessibility of services, as shown in figure 1.
Table 1 | Summary of the type of service offered by the agency

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<th>Disability service provider agency</th>
<th>Carer program agency</th>
<th>Disability service and carer program agency</th>
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Figure 1 | Major challenges state in supporting the disability services and carer programs.

“Many clients have complex needs requiring access to different services,” one research participant explained. “In a remote community outside of Alice Springs this [access] is very difficult [to obtain].” As can be seen in figure 2, overall, only 10 percent of Indigenous Australian people with a disability living in Central Australia received disability services or carer support.

And, as figure 3 shows, only 20 percent of the agencies provided services to Indigenous Australian people with a disability aged five or younger. One research participant stated that “the clients [of those agencies] had been referred from the Department of Children and Families for out-of-home care.”
From figure 4, it can be seen that gaps exist in the number of clients receiving supported accommodation services, with only 40 percent of agencies stating that they provide supported accommodation services within Alice Springs.
And figure 5 show that no agencies provide supported accommodation services outside of Alice Springs.

“We provide many options for people who have an intellectual disability,” one participant explained, “choices of transitional living, brief respite placements, and independent supported accommodation[, but we do so] in Alice Springs only.” Another research participant stated, “We provide drop-in support to clients in Alice Springs, to enable the clients to live independently,” but only 30 percent of agencies offered residential or supported accommodation services even for clients living within Alice Springs. As figure 6 shows, only 40 percent of agencies said they provided residential respite/carer support within Alice Springs - half of this is planned and half of this is categorized as “other” services. One research participant reported providing “respite care for clients from remote communities staying in Alice Springs in a rotating 2-week time period,” and another reported providing residential respite/carer support to six remote communities, but, due to government funding restrictions, could not provide the support to any other remote communities. The “other” residential respite/carer support includes placing clients into aged care facilities, regardless of their age.

From figure 7, it can be seen that only one agency provides residential respite/carer support outside of Alice Springs (as it happens, to six remote
Figure 5 | Number of clients provided with supported accommodation services within Central Australia, excluding Alice Springs.

Figure 6 | Type of residential respite/carer support services within Alice Springs.
and that no agency provides emergency or crisis residential respite/carer support outside of Alice Springs.

Gaps were found in emergency, crisis, and residential respite/carer support services within Alice Springs and in residential respite/carer support services outside of Alice Springs. A significant percentage of agencies do not provide education, training, supported employment programs, day activity, sport and recreational programs, and the few agencies that did provide them did so only for clients within Alice Springs. “We provide skills development training,” one research participant explained, “for clients who have the capacity to gain employment, and for moderately severe clients who need community inclusion training support.” A lack of permanent staff was also a gap, with most agencies reporting a very high staff turnover, with the result that a large percentage of agency management time was spent on staff recruitment, as it also was on securing funding from both the Commonwealth and Northern Territory governments. As can be seen in figure 8, more than half of the agency managers questioned confirmed that their agencies did not provide assessment, treatment, counseling, or case management services even for their clients within Alice Springs.

From figure 9, it can be seen that—outside of Alice Springs—only 20 percent of agencies provide case management and only 10 percent
Figure 8 | Assessment, treatment, counseling, case management services provided in Alice Springs.

Figure 9 | Assessment, treatment, counseling, case management services provided in Central Australia, excluding Alice Springs.
provide assessment, treatment, and counseling services within Central Australia. Moreover, as a research participant explained, “The services we provide outside of Alice Springs are only drop-in case management and counseling services to the larger remote communities to the south and east of Alice Springs.”

Although no gaps were found in advocacy services within Alice Springs—“Within Alice Springs, we advocate to the public guardian for clients under adult guardianship,” one program manager explained; and another said that “we provide advocacy within Alice Springs to accommodate needs for disabled persons”—gaps were found in advocacy services outside of the two larger towns of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.

Discussion

My purposive sampling approach covered a range of different disability service and carer programs in Central Australia, but a few of the agencies I contacted were unable or unwilling to participate in the study. The fourth Commonwealth State/Territory Disability Agreement (CSTDA) made it a key government priority in 2006 to improve services to meet the needs of Indigenous Australian people with a disability (Gilroy 2008), but, a decade later, funding is still insufficient to achieve that key priority. Even though disability service providers receiving government funding are obligated to serve Indigenous Australian communities (Department of Health 2016), as noted above, my research shows gaps in services provided to disabled Indigenous people of Central Australia for disability housing, outreach accommodation, residential respite/carer support, assessment, treatment, counseling, and case management, gaps that increase for all areas of the region the farther the areas are from Alice Springs. And even though government funding has increased for disability services, the percentage of disabled Indigenous Australian people receiving these services has been disproportionate to the rate of disability within this population (Gilroy 2012).

Thus, as the data gathered in my research show, there are very clear gaps in the provision of disability services and carer programs to the Indigenous Australian communities of Central Australia and an urgent need to inject funds to close those gaps. Currently, if Indigenous Australian people with a disability in Central Australia wish to obtain disability or carer services, they must relocate to Alice Springs. But the gap in disability accommodation funding has resulted in approximately 700 of those who have done so leading homeless lives there (Chee 2016; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2009). And because of gaps in outreach support, respite services, assessment, treatment, and counseling services, Indigenous Australian people
with a disability from Central Australian communities currently constitute 80 percent of all patients in the Alice Springs public hospital (Chee 2016; Chamberlain and MacKenzie 2009).

Conclusion

The National Disability Insurance Scheme will roll out in Central Australia in 2018 with a needs-based allocation of resources; this will let Indigenous Australian people with a disability choose how to spend funding on necessary services according to their support plans. As things stand, however, outside of Alice Springs and Tennant Creek, disability services and carer programs are practically nonexistent in Central Australian Indigenous communities; their remoteness and lack of housing present serious long-term challenges. Greater funding for service providers and broader government initiatives are needed to improve service capability within the region. For the reasons discussed above, it is unclear just how many Central Australian Indigenous people require disability and carer services and whether they will be able to access the NDIS. Actions to be taken for future research and follow-up include submitting this report to the Northern Territory Ministerial Advisory Council on Disability Reform, determining the extent of disability among Indigenous people by area and community within the region, and, as part of this, assessing current and projecting future levels of care required for Indigenous people with special needs. It would be strategic both to further study services funding issues and to develop a priority funding list with relevant stakeholders, as well as to hold regular planning meetings between clients, carers, experts, and health professionals to provide leadership in these areas. To quantify unmet needs going forward, liability assessments need to be augmented and informed by this future research.
Appendices

Appendix A: Agency Management Questionnaire Used in Surveying the Ten Participant Agency Managers

Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

A. BACKGROUND QUESTIONS
1. Brief Timeline/history of your service in Central Australia
2. What is working well in your agency?
3. What are your current plans, hopes and dreams?
4. Can you explain to me what you would like to see more of within your disability program?
5. What is the major management challenges for your agency at this time?
6. How has your agency/industry successfully dealt with these problems in the past?
7. What do you see as the major improvements needed that would support the work done by management and staff within your agency?
8. What do you see as the major improvements needed that would support the work done across the disability services sector in Central Australia in
   - Preventative care
   - Disability housing and accessible services
   - Mobility aids and equipment
   - Better transport and community access programs
   - Family support, carer support and flexible respite care
   - Allied health and other treatment services area
   - Social and emotional wellbeing programs
   - Challenging behaviour and effective client communication support
   - Mental health and dual diagnosis support services
   - Other disability related services areas?

What are the major concerns for management within your agency?
What are your major concern/s or stressors for individual clients and/or the individuals and families you work with in Central Australia?

Any other comments?

Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

B. DEMOGRAPHIC & TARGET GROUP QUESTIONS
How was the target group of your service originally decided upon?
Who is the current target group/s for your service? Please circle the relevant answer.

1. Primary type of disability
   - Physical
   - Sensory
   - Developmental/Cognitive
   - Mental Health
   - ABI/ Behavioural
   - AOD associated issues
   - Dual Diagnosis
   - Multiple/ Severe
   - other [please list]

2. Secondary/other disabilities
   - Physical
   - Sensory
   - Cognitive
   - Mental Health
   - ABI/ Behavioural
   - AOD associated issues
   - Dual Diagnosis
   - Multiple/ Severe
   - other

3. Age: 0-5  6-11  12-17  18-25  26-50  older

4. Place of origin of clients:
   - Alice Springs
   - Alice Springs & local communities
   - Central Aus.
   - Northern Territory
   - Other

5. Ethnicity:
   - Everyone
   - ATSI
   - CALD or other group
6. Has the target group for your service changed over the years? [If yes, can you describe why change was needed and how you managed the change?]

7. Are there current agency plans to change the target group of your agency? [If yes, can you describe why change was decided on, & how you plan to manage the change?]

Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

8A. How would you describe your primary service: Please circle the relevant answer.
Residential care  Outreach/ other accommodation support
Respite care  Carer support  Home support [HACC]
Education/training  Supported employment  Day activity
Social/ sport & rec  Assessment & treatment  Case management
Counselling  Advocacy/AGO  SEWB  Transport
Building modifications  Equipment/ disability aids  other [please list]

8B. Other services provided:
residential care  outreach/other accommodation support
Respite care  Carer support  home support [HACC]
Education/training  supported employment  day activity
Social/ sport & rec  Assessment & treatment  case management
Counselling  advocacy/AGO  SEWB  Transport
Building modifications  Equipment/ disability aids  other
9. How would you describe the model of service provision?

10.A. Primary Funding source
- NT H&FS
- Commonwealth
- Client contribution
- Brokerage
- Other

10.B. Other Funding source/s
- NT H&FS
- Commonwealth
- Client contribution
- Brokerage
- Other

Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

11. Type of organisation:
- Government agency
- Privately owned
- Non-government- not for profit
- Religious/ philanthropic agency
- Local community controlled
- Consumer & families controlled
- Regional/ national organisational structure
- Other

12. Number of full time equivalent [FTE] staff working within agency and/ or program areas [include an estimate of your casual and/or contract staff levels]

13. How is the co-ordination of services to individuals, houses and/or families, managed within your agency and/or externally?

14. At a rough guess how much management time is taken in the following tasks? Please write an approximate time.

- Direct client work or supporting direct client work to happen?
- Supervision and support of staff
Recruitment of staff?
Dealing with other staffing matters?
Dealing with IT, infrastructure and other organisational tasks
Pursuing your own training, career development, supervision and other self-care tasks?
Meetings of board, management teams and broader staff meetings, including agenda setting and writing up minutes etc.?
Representing the agency at meeting and broader strategic planning forums?
Developing agency plans and leading or assisting with agency development discussions?
Securing and acquiting funding?
Other [please list]

Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

If providing residential and/or supported accommodation services:
Provide a brief description/diagram of your service structure.

Number of houses that are:
   Less than three bedrooms [describe]
   Three bedrooms
   More than three bedrooms [describe]

Client numbers within each house

Staffing pattern within each house

Waiting list/s within each house:
   Length of time people are spending on waiting lists

Referral pathways for potential clients

Other comment/s
Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

If providing other/ outreach accommodation support services:
Provide a brief description/diagram of the service structure.

Number of clients that are supported:
Client numbers & family/ carer numbers within each unit of accommodation

Staffing and other support staff patterns

Waiting list/s:
Length of time people are spending on waiting lists

Referral pathways for potential clients
Other comment/s

Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

If providing Respite Care/ Carer Respite:
Brief description/diagram of your service structure.

Describe the type/s of respite/carer support you provide:
Planned residential respite within your agency [provide number of places etc.]
Supported accommodation [please list main agencies that you work with and brief description of the capacity of these agencies to provide support]
Emergency residential respite
Other planned respite support
Other residential care
Other crisis respite support
Number of individuals/ families supported:

Waiting list/s:
  Length of time people are spending on waiting lists

Referral pathways for potential clients

Other comment/s

Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

Referral pathways for potential clients

If providing Education/ training/ supported employment programs
  Provide a brief description/diagram of your service structure.

Brief Description of the Education/ training/ supported employment you provide

Number of individuals with disabilities supported:
  Type of disability groups supported

Waiting list/s:
  Length of time people are spending on waiting lists

Referral pathways for potential clients

Other comment/s

Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

If providing day activity/ social support/ sport & recreational programs:
Provide a brief description/diagram of your service structure.

Describe the day activity/ social/ sport & recreational programs you provide
Number of individuals/ families supported:

Type of disability groups supported

Waiting list/s:

Length of time people are spending on waiting lists

Referral pathways for potential clients

Other comment/s

Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

If providing Assessment/ Treatment/ Counselling/ Case management services:

Provide a brief description/diagram of your service structure.

Type of disability groups supported

Describe the assessment/ treatment or other programs you provide
Assessment referral and/or brokerage treatment services

Allied health therapy focusing on preventative/ restorative/ rehabilitation

Counselling/ psychotherapy/ behavioural programs

Case management/ care planning services

Number of individuals/ families supported:

Waiting list/s:
Length of time people are spending on waiting lists
Referral pathways for potential clients

Other comment/s

If providing Advocacy Services:
  Brief description/diagram of your service structure.

Describe the type/s of advocacy support you provide
Number of individuals/ families supported:
  Access to services

Legal

Other [please describe]

Waiting list/s:
  Length of time people are spending on waiting lists

Referral pathways for potential clients

Other comment/s

Research Project:
Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Agency Management Questionnaire

If providing any other disability programs not discussed above:
  Provide a brief description/diagram of your service structure.

Describe the type/s of disability support you provide
Number of individuals/ families supported:

Waiting list/s:
  Length of time people are spending on waiting lists

Referral pathways for potential clients

Other comment/s
Appendix B: Consent Form for Participants

Title of research project: Disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities.

Name of researcher: Craig Eliech, Gerard Waterford and Frank Coughlan

I agree to take part in the Southern Cross University research project specified above. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand the information about my participation in the research project, which has been provided to me by the researchers. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to be interviewed by the researcher. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to make myself available for further interview if required. Yes ☐ No ☐

I agree to complete questionnaires asking me about the agency in which I am a manager. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and I understand that I can cease my participation at any time. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that my participation in this research will be treated with confidentiality. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that any information that may identify me will be de-identified at the time of analysis of any data. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that no identifying information will be disclosed or published. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that all information gathered in this research will be kept confidentially for 7 years at the University. Yes ☐ No ☐

I consent to the data or tissue collected in this research being used in future research. Yes ☐ No ☐

I am aware that I can contact the researchers at any time with any queries. Their contact details are provided to me. Yes ☐ No ☐

I understand that this research project has been approved by the SCU Human Research Ethics Committee Yes ☐ No ☐

Participant’s name: ____________________________________________

Participant’s signature: ____________________________

Date: ____________________________

☐ Please tick this box and provide your email or mail address below if you wish to receive feedback about the research.

Email: ____________________________________________
### Appendix C: Coding Frame for Qualitative Questionnaire

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic area</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description of code</th>
<th>Example quote</th>
<th>Gaps identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Type of agency service</td>
<td>“Disability service provider”</td>
<td>No agencies that provide only carer program services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Background</td>
<td>Agency commencement in Central Australia</td>
<td>“In 2005”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Observations</td>
<td>Participants description of what is working well in the agency</td>
<td>“We have a stable client base who we believe will still choose our services when client directed funding and more choices become the standard.”</td>
<td>Expansion of client base and more choices</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Plans</td>
<td>Current agency plans, hopes, and dreams</td>
<td>“To continue expanding and providing services in Central Australia under NDIS funding”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Needs</td>
<td>What is needed for the agencies</td>
<td>“More funding to cover the cost of housing and better transport for disabled people in the remote communities”</td>
<td>Lack of funding or cheaper housing and lack of transport to remote communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Challenges</td>
<td>Major challenges for agencies</td>
<td>“A very high staff turnover rate.”</td>
<td>Lack of permanent staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Changes</td>
<td>Major improvements needed to support agencies work</td>
<td>“More funding for supported accommodation”</td>
<td>Lack of funding and lack of housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Management</td>
<td>Major concerns for agency management</td>
<td>“We have a very high staff turnover.”</td>
<td>Lack of permanent staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic area</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description of code</td>
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<td>Gaps identified</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Concerns</td>
<td>Major concerns or stressors for clients</td>
<td>“Many clients have complex issues and needs, and accessing different services is very difficult in remote communities.”</td>
<td>Lack of available services in remote communities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Target</td>
<td>How agency target group was decided upon</td>
<td>“Anybody with a disability in Central Australia who can come to our office in Alice Springs”</td>
<td>Lack of services for persons without transport into Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Age</td>
<td>Client's age group</td>
<td>“Any age from six on up”</td>
<td>Gaps in services for clients below the age of six</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Origin</td>
<td>Origin of agencies’ clients</td>
<td>“Alice Springs and local communities”</td>
<td>Gaps in services for clients outside of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Ethnicity</td>
<td>Client’s ethnicity</td>
<td>“We assist anyone.”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Changes</td>
<td>Changes in target group</td>
<td>“No changes are planned.”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Services</td>
<td>Primary service provided</td>
<td>“We provide home support turnover.”</td>
<td>Lack of permanent staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Funding</td>
<td>Primary funding source</td>
<td>“We are mainly funded by the Commonwealth government and next by the NT government.”</td>
<td>Agencies and the NT government both funded by the Commonwealth government</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Type of agency</td>
<td>“We are a nonprofit NGO agency.”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Staff</td>
<td>Number of full-time staff working for agency</td>
<td>“We have between 20 and 30 full-time staff.”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
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</table>

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<table>
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<tr>
<th>Topic area</th>
<th>Code</th>
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<th>Example quote</th>
<th>Gaps identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Direct</td>
<td>Management time used in direct client work</td>
<td>“About 10 hours per week”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Management time used in staff supervision</td>
<td>“About 10 hours per week”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Recruitment</td>
<td>Management time used in staff recruitment</td>
<td>“About 10 hours per week”</td>
<td>High staff turnover</td>
</tr>
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<td>22</td>
<td>Infrastructure</td>
<td>Management time used in IT and infrastructure</td>
<td>“About 10 hours per week”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Training</td>
<td>Management time used in own training</td>
<td>“About 4 hours per week”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Boards</td>
<td>Management time used in board meetings and broader staff meetings</td>
<td>“About 5 hours per week”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>Representation</td>
<td>Management time used in representing agency at forums</td>
<td>“About 10 hours per week”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>26</td>
<td>Plans</td>
<td>Management time used in developing agency plans</td>
<td>“About 10 hours per week”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>27</td>
<td>Secure</td>
<td>Management time used in securing funding</td>
<td>“About 10 hours per week”</td>
<td>Too much time spent per week securing funding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>28</td>
<td>Accommodation 1</td>
<td>Number of houses with up to three bedrooms</td>
<td>“We only have five houses.”</td>
<td>Lack of residential or supported accommodation housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>29</td>
<td>Accommodation 2</td>
<td>Number of houses with more than three bedrooms</td>
<td>“We have only two houses.”</td>
<td>Lack of residential or supported accommodation housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic area</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description of code</td>
<td>Example quote</td>
<td>Gaps identified</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>30</td>
<td>Amount 1</td>
<td>Number of clients within each house</td>
<td>“We have three clients within one house”</td>
<td>Lack of residential or supported accommodation housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31</td>
<td>Waiting 1</td>
<td>Length of time on waiting list for housing</td>
<td>“Less than 2 weeks if they are children, but up to 4 years if they are adults”</td>
<td>Lack of residential or supported accommodation housing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Outreach</td>
<td>Total number of agencies providing outreach support services</td>
<td>“We provide outreach support services in Alice Springs only.”</td>
<td>Lack of outreach accommodation support services outside of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>Amount 2</td>
<td>Number of clients receiving outreach support services</td>
<td>“We provide outreach support services in Alice Springs only.”</td>
<td>Lack of outreach support services outside of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>Type</td>
<td>Type of respite/carer support services provided</td>
<td>“We provide respite/carer support services in Alice Springs only.”</td>
<td>Lack of respite/carer support services outside of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Respite</td>
<td>Total number of agencies providing respite/carer support services</td>
<td>“We provide respite/carer support services on 2-week rotating basis in Alice Springs.”</td>
<td>Lack of respite/carer support services outside of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Amount 3</td>
<td>Number of clients receiving respite/carer support services</td>
<td>“We can provide respite/carer support services in clients’ homes only.”</td>
<td>Lack of respite/carer support services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Waiting 3</td>
<td>Length of time on waiting list for respite/carer support services</td>
<td>“We can provide respite/carer support services in clients’ homes only.”</td>
<td>Lack of respite/carer support services</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic area</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Description of code</th>
<th>Example quote</th>
<th>Gaps identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>38 Training</td>
<td></td>
<td>Education, training, or supported employment programs</td>
<td>“We provide life skills development.”</td>
<td>No gaps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39 Amount 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number of clients enrolled in education, training, or supported employment programs</td>
<td>“We currently have forty clients in life skills, and we are at our maximum.”</td>
<td>Lack of education, training, or supported employment programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 Waiting 4</td>
<td></td>
<td>Length of time on waiting list for education, training, or supported employment programs</td>
<td>“We currently are full and cannot accept any more clients.”</td>
<td>Lack of education, training, or supported employment programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41 Type 2</td>
<td></td>
<td>Type of day activity, social support, sport, or recreational programs provided</td>
<td>“We provide life skills, housekeeping, and personal hygiene programs.”</td>
<td>Lack of day activity, sport, or recreational programs outside of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42 Recreation</td>
<td></td>
<td>Total number of agencies providing day activity, social support, sport, or recreational programs</td>
<td>“We provide day activity, social support, sport, or recreational programs for anybody in Alice Springs.”</td>
<td>Lack of day activity, social support, sport, or recreational programs outside of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43 Amount 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Number of clients enrolled in day activity, social support, sport, or recreational programs</td>
<td>“Anybody with a disability can sign up and join our programs in Alice Springs.”</td>
<td>Lack of day activity, social support, sport, or recreational programs outside of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>44 Waiting 5</td>
<td></td>
<td>Length of time on waiting list for day activity, social support, sport, or recreational programs</td>
<td>“Anybody with a disability can sign up and join our programs in Alice Springs.”</td>
<td>Lack of day activity, social support, sport, or recreational programs outside of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Topic area</td>
<td>Code</td>
<td>Description of code</td>
<td>Example quote</td>
<td>Gaps identified</td>
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<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Case</td>
<td>Type of assessment, treatment, or counseling case management services provided</td>
<td>“We provide case management services for clients to participate in and connect with the community in Alice Springs.”</td>
<td>Lack of assessment, treatment, or counseling case management services outside of Alice Springs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Amount 6</td>
<td>Number of clients receiving assessment, treatment, or counseling case management services</td>
<td>“We provide case management services for clients in Alice Springs and Tennant Creek.”</td>
<td>Lack of assessment, treatment, or counseling case management services outside of Alice Springs or Tennant Creek</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>Waiting 6</td>
<td>Length of time on waiting list for assessment, treatment, or counseling case management services</td>
<td>“Clients are on waiting list less than 2 weeks.”</td>
<td>Lack of clients receiving assessment, treatment, or counseling case management services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Advocacy</td>
<td>Type of advocacy support provided</td>
<td>“We provide advocacy support to public guardian for clients under adult guardianship.”</td>
<td>No gaps for clients under adult guardianship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Amount 7</td>
<td>Number of clients receiving in advocacy support</td>
<td>“We provide advocacy support for about fifty clients.”</td>
<td>No gaps for clients under adult guardianship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Waiting 7</td>
<td>Length of time on waiting list for advocacy support</td>
<td>“Clients are on waiting list less than 2 weeks.”</td>
<td>No gaps for clients under adult guardianship</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix D: Southern Cross University Human Research Ethics Committee
Research Approval

SCU HUMAN RESEARCH ETHICS COMMITTEE (SCU HREC)

NOTIFICATION

Expedited Application Approval

To: Associate Professor Mark Hughes, Mr Craig Elbeck and Ms Melissa Kruger
From: Associate Professor David Lloyd
Deputy Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee (HREC)

Project name: Disability services and user program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous Communities

Approval Date: 24th August 2016

Approval Number: ECN-16-258

Expiry Date: 23rd August 2019

Dear Mark, Craig and Melissa,

Thank you for the expedited ethics application received 23rd August 2016. This was considered by the Deputy Chair of the HREC Associate Professor David Lloyd and is found to be of merit, low risk and meeting the Statement principles.

I am pleased to advise you that ethics approval has been granted for this research project. Please note the ethics approval number above.

Your responsibilities under this approval are as follows:

1. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will report to the SCU HREC annually in the specified format and notify HREC when the project is completed.
2. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will immediately notify the SCU HREC, on the appropriate form, of any changes in protocol.
3. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the SCU HREC of any plan to extend the duration of the project past the approval period listed above and will submit any associated required documentation.
4. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will notify the SCU HREC if the project is discontinued at a participating site before the expected completion date, with reasons provided.
5. The Coordinating Principal Investigator will immediately report any finding that might warrant review of ethical approval of the project on the Adverse Events form.

Researchers conducting a study in a country other than Australia, need to be aware of any protocols for that country and ensure that they are followed ethically and with appropriate cultural sensitivity.

Should you have any queries about the SCU HREC’s consideration of your project please contact ethics.listings@scu.edu.au. The SCU HREC Terms of Reference, membership and standard forms are available from http://scu.edu.au/research/index.cfm?op=PartID&PartID=1226&FacID=1225.

SCU HREC wishes you every success in your research.

Kind Regards,

per A/Prof. David Lloyd
Deputy Chair, Human Research Ethics Committee
CRAIG EIBECK was born into an Indigenous Australian family of the DjaDja Wurrung clan on his native homeland in Central Victoria. His grandmother was a DjaDja Wurrung princess, with homelands spanning the part of Central Victoria that includes the cities of Shepparton, Bendigo, and Ballarat and the town of Maryborough. After receiving a Bachelor of Social Work in Psychology from Central Queensland University in Rockhampton, Queensland, in 1999, he worked for a year at the Commonwealth Department of Social Security in Gladstone, Queensland. In 2000, he relocated to Seoul, Korea, to work as an English public school teacher for the Seoul Metropolitan Office of Education. Passionate about educating young students, Eibeck continued teaching in Korea until 2013. Upon his return to Australia in 2014, he enrolled at Southern Cross University, Queensland, where he received a Master of Social Work in 2016. His interest in Indigenous Australian people with disabilities led him to conduct research in disability services and carer program gaps in Central Australian Indigenous communities. Craig is now employed as a social work caseworker and researcher for the Link Up Service of the Central Australian Aboriginal Congress (CAAC), based in Alice Springs, reuniting Stolen Generation people with their families in Central Australia.

WORKS CITED


When Size Doesn’t Count: A Comparative Account of Language Endangerment in Australia and Pakistan

Malik Adnan Hussain Bhatti and Jakelin Troy

University of Sydney

ABSTRACT | Is there a correlation between the resilience of a minority language and the size of its speaker community when that community is colonized by people who speak a different language? In addressing this question in our report, we explore shared experiences of the “colonization” of our languages as Indigenous people from Pakistan and Australia. Adnan Bhatti is Saraiki from the Multan area, Punjab, Pakistan, and Jakelin Troy is Ngarigu from the New South Wales side of the Snowy Mountains region in southeastern Australia. Both pre-1947 India, from which Pakistan was partitioned, and Australia were invaded by the British and subsequently colonized. Troy’s language succumbed to English in the nineteenth century, and Bhatti’s language faces being overwhelmed by Urdu and, to a lesser degree, by English as well. Population migrations and government policies have adversely affected the capacity of Indigenous peoples to thrive in the use of our languages. This report draws on our larger research project to compare the experiences of minority language speakers in Australia and Pakistan. In reflecting on our own experiences, we consider government policies and a range of community, education, business, health, and media initiatives that variously support or hinder efforts to maintain or revive the use of our languages.¹

KEYWORDS | Indigenous, language survival, colonization, Indigenous languages, language revitalization

Why Does Size Not Count in Language Survival?

We are members of minority Indigenous communities from very different parts of the world, Pakistan and Australia. Troy has spent many years
researching the languages of southeastern Australia and is now collaborat-
ing with Bhatti to undertake a comparative study of the Indigenous lan-
guages in Australia and Pakistan. Our central research question—Is there
a correlation between the resilience of a minority language and the size of
its speaker community when that community is colonized by people who
speak a different language?—grew out of us sharing, as friends do, anec-
dotal information about our own language experiences. The histories of
our Indigenous peoples have much in common, but it was in thinking not
just about the past but also about the futures of our peoples that we turned
our discussion to the futures of our Indigenous languages. Troy’s Ngarigu
(also spelled “Ngarigo”) has only a few hundred speakers; Bhatti’s Saraiki has
more than twenty million speakers. But each language has an equally fragile
future as a direct result of its devaluation as the main means of communi-
cation for its speakers.

Like those of other Indigenous peoples worldwide, the lands of both our
Indigenous communities were invaded and subsequently colonized. The
sovereign Countries of the Indigenous peoples of Australia were not rec-
ognized in the law of the invading British in 1788, nor at any time since,
and ultimately became what is now known as “Australia,” which remains a
dominion of Great Britain, whose queen is its constitutional monarch. In
the case of Pakistan, this modern-day republic was partitioned in 1947 from
India, which the British had also invaded and colonized in the eighteenth
century. In both Australia and Pakistan, the territories of the Indigenous
populations remain largely unrecognized. Aboriginal peoples in Australia
refer to their territories as “Countries” and give them their local names, such
as Troy’s Ngarigu Country, but the wider Australian population does not
generally share in this practice. In Pakistan, there are movements to have
the territories of Indigenous peoples recognized, and Bhatti’s Saraikistan
is one of these (the Fandom Wiki 2016 article “Pakistan: Saraiki” includes a
map of Saraikistan).

In talking together about our experiences, we were struck by the disturb-
ing realization not only that our Indigenous languages were endangered for
different reasons, but also that the size of our speaker communities did not
appear to play much of a part in their futures. Which is to say, Ngarigu of
Australia, whose few hundred speakers scarcely constitute a community by
themselves, might have a brighter future than Saraiki of Pakistan, with its
estimated more than twenty million speakers (Ethnologue 2016). We came
to this realization because language survival scholars seem almost all to
agree that active community engagement with a language is what keeps it
“awake”—or what wakes it up again if it is “asleep.” We use the term “asleep”
following the growing practice in Australia, where it is no longer accepted
that languages “die.” Thus Aboriginal communities in Australia have been
able to “reawaken” languages, some not spoken for decades, through sheer hard work, fueled by the determination not to let their languages go to sleep forever. The Kaurna language of the Adelaide Plains in South Australia is a shining example of community effort paired with linguistic expertise. As a direct result of government actions to stop the Kaurna from speaking their language and practicing their culture, it was not spoken as a community language for nearly one hundred years. Kaurna was “woken up” over a twenty-year period beginning in the 1980s, when linguist Rob Amery began working with Kaurna people to reawaken their language and to develop Kaurna school programs. It is now a thriving language with some community members raising their children in this language (Amery 2010; Kaurna Warra Pintyanthi 2016).²

Saraiki might well “fall asleep” if its speakers do not take action to ensure its future, whereas Ngarigu will have a future if the community is able to revive its use through research, language resource development, and active measures to use the language again. Leanne Hinton’s Breath of Life Program in the United States of America has demonstrated how successful this kind of community led effort can be and provided an early text on how to revive and maintain a language (Hinton et al. 2002). The size of a community of speakers is not necessarily a deciding factor in the ongoing use of its language. People who believe their language will continue indefinitely because it has vast numbers of speakers cannot take comfort in numbers alone. Even a language spoken by many can decline dramatically over a short period of time. As Daniel Nettle and Suzanne Romaine (2000, 8, 9) point out:

The pulse of a language clearly lies in the youngest generation. Languages are at risk when they are no longer transmitted naturally to children in the home by parents or other caretakers. . . . Icelandic . . . has only 100,000 speakers but is in no danger of extinction. Other languages with much larger populations of speakers can be and are at risk. Some of the precarious languages of Central India such as Kurux . . . have over a million speakers. . . . Therefore, small population in and of itself does not tell us much without examining other indicators such as the status of the language.

The Story of Ngarigu: A Language Begins to Wake

Located in the Monaro district of New South Wales in southeastern Australia and one of the “sleeping beauties” of the Aboriginal languages of Australia (Zuckerman 2012), Ngarigu probably had a speaker population of some thousands in 1788, when the British invaded, although
Ngarigu speakers now number only a few hundred (Gardner 1992; see also Australian Institute for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies 2016). Josephine Flood’s work (1992) on the Ngarigu people of the Monaro is the earliest archaeological study of the “Moth Hunters,” a term she coined in honor of the annual bogong moth feasts for which they were famous (see Young, Mundy, and Mundy 2000 for the most detailed recent account of these Aboriginal people).

Estimates of population size before 1788 in Australia are difficult to make, but Aboriginal people grouped themselves into small family-based clan units that in areas like the Monaro may have formed themselves into coalitions of clans (Gardner 1992, 92–93). Into the mid-twentieth century, Troy’s own clan, the Ngyamitjimitung, lived in the alpine “High Country” on the New South Wales side of the Snowy Mountains district. Her clan may have numbered as few as forty people for thousands of years. By the mid-nineteenth century, the Ngarigu-speaking people of the Monaro were in severe decline, overrun by English-speaking colonists and killed off by imported diseases. The people of Troy’s clan married into the families of English and Irish pastoralists, who began to invade their Country from the 1830s onward and who established large pastoral holdings of cattle and sheep throughout the Monaro. Troy’s clan members are no longer allowed to live in their own Country (the term used by Aboriginal people for their traditional lands) because the whole area has become part of the Kosciusko National Park (New South Wales National Parks and Wildlife Service 2016).

Although we can’t tell you exactly what happened to the Ngarigu language, the story of Kayardild, the Aboriginal language of Bentinck Island, Queensland, as told by Nicholas Evans (2010), could be the story of almost all the Indigenous Australian languages that have “gone to sleep.” It is a story of government policies that had a catastrophic effect on the ability of Indigenous communities to speak their languages and to thrive. The Ngarigu people of the Monaro were similarly displaced, and there is also evidence of massacres of the population by pastoralists invading to take over land to graze their livestock (Gardner 1992, 94–94). Across Australia, there was a planned killing of Aboriginal people in accordance with government policies that sought to “solve” the Aboriginal problem by “removing” the Indigenous peoples from their lands and their cultural and linguistic traditions.

“Kayardild was never a large language,” Evans (2010, xv–xvi) tells us,

At its peak it probably counted no more than 150 speakers, and . . . in 1982 there were fewer than 40 left, all middle-aged or older. The fate of the language was sealed in the 1940s when missionaries evacuated the entire population of Bentinck Islanders from their ancestral
territories, relocating them to the mission on Mornington Island, some 50 km to the northwest. At the time of their relocation the whole population were monolingual Kayardild speakers, but from that day on no new child would master the tribal language. The sibling link, by which one child passes on their language to another, was broken during the first years after the relocation, a dark decade from which no baby survived. A dormitory policy separated children from their parents for most of the day, and punished any child heard speaking an Aboriginal language.

The most recent national survey of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages estimated that, of the 250 or more Indigenous Australian languages, only thirteen are still “strong,” that is, still being transmitted across all ages in their speech communities (Marmion, Obata, and Troy 2014, xii). But these thirteen are fragile because they are also in areas where schooling is largely in English and where the language of government and most commerce is also English. The uses of the Indigenous languages are confined to their communities in remote and poorly serviced regions of Australia. Indigenous people do value their languages, but the only incentive for their young to continue to use these languages is if they remain in their communities.

Most of the Indigenous languages of Australia are now severely endangered, a situation recognized not only by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples but also by the wider population. Many communities are taking immediate and very effective action to revive their languages through recovery programs, working with linguists and educators to develop materials to support these programs. The Commonwealth Government of Australia has embedded the learning of Australian languages within the national guidelines set forth in “Australian Curriculum: Languages” (ACARA 2016). “The Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages” (ACARA 2015) is a vehicle for teaching any of the Indigenous languages of Australia in any of our schools to all students, whether Indigenous or not.

Troy did not grow up speaking her Ngarigu language, but, like many Ngarigu people now, she wants to see her language back in use. Ngarigu are beginning to work on its revival; it is in this context that this fast-asleep language has a potentially bright and wide-awake future. Ngarigu people are using their community memory of their language in conjunction with fragmentary historical documentation, nineteenth-century word lists, and mid-twentieth-century sound recordings to reconstruct how their language worked. Because Ngarigu belongs to the large Pama Nyungan family
of Indigenous Australian languages, aspects of its grammar and lexicon are predictable.

The Ngarigu community effort is being supported by both the Victorian Aboriginal Corporation for Languages (VACL) and the Nindi-Ngujarn Ngarigo Monero Aboriginal Corporation. In November 2015, sixteen people gathered at Lakes Entrance in Victoria, southeastern Australia, to work with community member Doris Paton and Elder Aunty Rachel Mullett, who is still strong in her knowledge of the language. The VACL website (http://vaclang.org.au/item/219-community-gathers-in-lakes-entrance-for-ngarigo-monero-language-workshop.html) contains a resource portal for the Indigenous languages of Victoria; these include Ngarigu, which spans both New South Wales and Victoria. Heather Bowe, Julie Reid, and Kathy Lynch (2010, 315) have made information accessible about relevant historical resources and recent activities to help the Ngarigu community revive the language.

The Gunnai language of the Gippsland region in Victoria is closely related to Ngarigu, as are many of the members of both language communities. The subject of successful revival strategies for many years, Gunnai can provide some guidance and modeling for the revival of Ngarigu. Gunnai community member Lynnette Solomon-Dent, who has been actively working on Gunnai for more than twenty years, tells us that “language teaching, interpretive signage and teaching materials are all well established in the community” (Eira and Solomon-Dent 2010, 31), which now has specific projects in place to grow a more complex understanding of how the Gunnai language works. One such project, begun in 2008, is developing the complexity of the Gunnai pronoun set: “On investigating the historical sources for the language it was found that the full range of pronouns was once more extensive, offering the expected range of meanings and distinctions” (Eira and Solomon-Dent 2010, 31).

Many Indigenous languages of southeastern Australia share a similar ecology with Ngarigu. After more than two centuries of oppression following the British invasion of Australia in 1788, both the Indigenous Australian peoples and their languages are reemerging. The new “Australian Curriculum: Languages” (ACARA 2016) includes a “Framework for Aboriginal Languages and Torres Strait Islander Languages” (ACARA 2015). This framework heralds a new era in the Australian education system, where the Indigenous languages of Australia, once banned from all schooling, are now valued and supported across the country. As lead writer for the framework, Troy hopes that introducing Indigenous Australian languages into the education system more broadly will increase overall support for their maintenance and revival. Pakistan, for its part, has paid lip service to support
for “minority” languages but is yet to even consider this kind of broader support.

The Story of Saraiki: “The Sweetest Language”

Bhatti expresses a commonly held sentiment among his Saraiki community that “Saraiki is the sweetest language of all.” Growing up as a literate speaker of Saraiki, he has a rich experience of his language not shared by Troy in her Ngarigu community. Spoken in Pakistan and India and by diaspora communities elsewhere in the world, Saraiki has an estimated 20,068,000 speakers (Ethnologue 2016). But it is a threatened language facing rapid decline as its speakers shift into Urdu, the national language of Pakistan, and into other languages, like English, with higher social and economic value, particularly northern dialects of Punjabi and, to a lesser degree, English. The shift is threatening the survival of Saraiki and, if not halted, Saraiki might “go to sleep,” as Ngarigu did in the early twentieth century. Joshua A. Fishman (2001) advocated for a scholarship devoted to studying language shift worldwide to consider ways to halt this assault on the world’s linguistic diversity. We hope that this report will help generate wider global interest in the minority Indigenous languages of the Indigenous peoples of Pakistan. It is clear that the case of Saraiki is complex and fueled by a lack of recognition of the distinctiveness of its people as Indigenous people within a population complicated by multiple migrations of peoples across the region of what is now India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Iran.

The members of Bhatti’s own community, located in the Multan district of the Southern Punjab, Pakistan, identify as Indigenous Saraiki people and make up most of the rural farming population. They do not accept the official classification of Saraiki as a dialect of Punjabi and make a clear linguistic and social distinction between themselves and Punjabis and also their neighbors, the Sindhis. The determination of the Saraiki to be a distinctive linguistic and cultural group is reflected in a nationalist movement to create a separate state of “Saraikistan,” which developed in response to the partition and consequent subsuming of a large number of the previously separate communities into new political territories (see map of “Saraikistan” in the Fandom Wiki 2016 article “Pakistan: Saraiki”). The recent migration of large numbers of northern Punjabi people into the Saraiki region is having a major impact on Saraiki speakers, who feel pressure to speak Punjabi rather than Saraiki because it is the language of education and commerce, spoken by successful urban business people and government officials.

In its own region, Saraiki has its academic advocates at Bahauddin Zakariya University in Multan, which established a Department of
Saraiki with focus on the language in 2009 (see http://www.bzu.edu.pk/v2_department.php?cid=33). It is also supported by popular media including Waseb Television (see http://www.waseb.tv/) and Rohi Television. Rohi is “a Saraiki language hybrid channel, encompassing entertainment, news, documentary, infotainment, talk shows, music, four-way interactive discussions on every issue ranging from agriculture . . . to health. Rohi’s dominant feature is its news and current affairs programmes. Rohi brings forth the Pashto and Baloch shades of Saraiki [as spoken] in [the cities of] D[era] I[smail] Khan and D[era] G[hazi] Khan and blends it with its cultural richness [as spoken] in Multan and Bahawalpur” (http://rohi.tv.com.pk/). Saraiki people living in Sydney have told us that Rohi and Waseb are both struggling to remain viable because their main source of advertising revenue is from local agricultural companies selling products such as fertilizer.

The Saraiki of Multan are not alone in experiencing language shift in Pakistan. Urdu and recently English are replacing regional languages across the country as the vehicles of education, government, and commerce. Raja Taseer, a Putwari speaker of Pakistan’s Kashmir region, told us in October 2016 that Putwari, which is not the language either of schooling or of public life, is also rapidly losing ground to other languages as the main form of communication for his people.

Although it continues to be the language of Bhatti’s Multan community, Saraiki is rapidly losing ground as the language of choice for young people. Bhatti was educated in Urdu and English, but Saraiki was the language of his home and continues to be the language used within his own Bhatti clan of more than one thousand people. It is in the streets that he notices the greatest difference, when he hears most of the younger generation speaking Urdu or Punjabi rather than the Saraiki of their parents and grandparents. And even in the Saraiki diaspora in Australia, at least among those we spoke with in Sydney, we found there is little or no support for Saraiki speakers to maintain their language.

Living in Sydney, Bhatti is only able to speak Saraiki with a limited number of other Saraiki migrants. He has friends who sing and perform in Saraiki and who are trying to raise their children with the language, but who struggle with the marginalization of the language even within the Pakistani community in Australia.

**Bhatti: My Language Experience**

When I was growing up in the Multan area of Pakistan in the 1980s and 1990s, most of my friends were Saraiki, but most of my Punjabi friends also spoke Saraiki. And though most friends of my friends spoke Punjabi, this is a mix
that includes Saraiki, too. Indeed, Saraiki, itself, is a mix of Arabic, Urdu, Pashtu, Marwari, and Punjabi. In the southwest, near Karachi, there are people of all different ethnicities, but they mostly speak Urdu, although there are also some Hindi speakers who have migrated from India, as well as some Sindhi speakers. (Saraiki speakers can understand both Sindhi and Urdu.)

In the village near the city of Multan, where I grew up, those of my friends who were not Saraiki were Urdu speakers, but also they also spoke Saraiki. When we played street games, like cricket, they would speak Urdu, which I could understand, and I would reply in Saraiki. When I was growing up, I heard mostly Saraiki spoken in the streets and far less Urdu. But, now in my village, I hear more Urdu. Indeed, when I went back in January 2016, there were far more children speaking Urdu than in my earlier years.

Saraiki parents now believe that Saraiki is for uneducated people with poor “etiquette” and not a good language for their children. So they teach their children to speak Urdu. Punjabi and Urdu speakers call Saraiki people “Jangely,” literally, “the people who live in the jungle.” But we Saraiki call the Punjabis, who came all the way from India after the Partition in 1947, “Mahaja,” meaning “the migrant people.” Punjabi Saraiki and Urdu speakers get along well, at least most of the time. And, throughout the Saraiki region, the Urdu speakers in most government and business offices will use or understand Saraiki, particularly in the Multan area.

*Experiences of Saraiki People Living in Sydney*

Bhatti’s friend Nauman Malik described his experiences to us in Pakistan and in Australia in September 2016:

Saraiki are agricultural and farming people. Now that the population is being educated, it is becoming more cosmopolitan. However, Saraiki continue to be seen as backward. We feel a bit guilty that, if we speak our Indigenous language, we will be seen as backward because we need to speak the language of the country, the national language, Urdu. However, we also need to develop the local Saraiki area so that the people in the country can speak their own language. Local people want to be with local people and continue to speak their language and be themselves. Something needs to be done to improve and develop their background to give them a future as their own people.

Sometimes, if you are capable of doing something, you will be accepted for your abilities and not judged as inferior because you are Saraiki. Research and development of industries and businesses in the area of the Saraiki people is increasingly in English as well as
Urdu and also Chinese, with the Chinese having so much influence in Pakistan.

There is no point speaking Saraiki since no one is speaking it in the street. It is not the language of commerce or in the offices. The root cause for the decline in Saraiki is that there is no point to the language. It has no future unless the Saraiki region becomes developed. It is not used for any purpose that will help the people to get ahead. Without the development of industry and commerce in the Saraiki region, the language will decrease in its usefulness and people won’t speak it. They will learn and speak the languages of commerce, particularly Urdu and Punjabi.

Although his parents used to speak Saraiki, Nauman did not speak it very often and because he spoke the languages that were becoming more popular, particularly the national language and encouraged language of commerce, Urdu, he does not speak Saraiki as well as they do. And now, in Australia, he hardly speaks Saraiki at all because no one in the Australian corporate sector speaks it. Bhatti is his first point of contact if he wants to speak Saraiki in Australia. So whenever he does, he rings Bhatti. He told us it gives him “some sort of satisfaction to remember our parents. There is special flavor to that language and a satisfaction to be speaking to someone of your own kind.”

Nauman said he and Bhatti are living examples of the struggle to keep Saraiki alive, but there are few such examples in Pakistan’s corporate sector. Indeed, he said, in Pakistan, Saraiki marks you as someone from a rural area; it creates a perception that you are poorly educated and unsophisticated, not someone who knows anything worth knowing.

Thus the survival of Saraiki all comes down to economics. The whole south of the Saraiki region is the Punjab. Punjabis dominate the corporate sector; they are the ones who are driving the economy on the national level. When Nauman goes back home to Pakistan, he needs to speak to Punjabis, so he speaks Punjabi, not Saraiki.

Inam Khan and Riaz Shah also spoke to us, in September 2016, about their attempts to maintain a Saraiki identity and to use their language in Sydney. Riaz is a musician who sings and composes in Saraiki, as does Bhatti. He explained that one of the disadvantages of Saraiki is that its writing system is evolving but not yet fully developed, so it is difficult to educate people in Saraiki. This contributes to its decreasing support from its speaker community. Inam Khan is an engineer who works at the University of New South Wales, so he has no opportunity to use Saraiki in his professional life in Australia. For both men, Saraiki is the language of their small community in Sydney,
but there are few opportunities to use it widely, and their children are likely to grow up being able to understand but not fully speak their language.

Conclusion

Saraiki is the victim of what Ghil’ad Zuckerman (2013) has called “glottophagy,” or “language eating,” where a community of speakers begins to discourage the use of its own language and to shift into another language for any number of reasons, including all those described above. Zuckerman contrasts “glottophagy” with “linguicide,” the deliberate “killing of language,” which is the typical experience for Australia’s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages. For its part, Ngarigu has been the victim of linguicide: since the early nineteenth century, its people were oppressed for speaking their language. Looking to the future, with its vast population of speakers, Saraiki would seem to be secure, whereas Ngarigu, with its tiny population of speakers and a not much larger number of Ngarigu people, who are only just now beginning to reawaken their language, would seem to be lost. But when we consider how few Saraiki children are interested in speaking Saraiki and how their numbers have decreased markedly over Bhatti’s lifetime, whereas reviving Ngarigu, in Troy’s experience, has the almost unanimous support of the Ngarigu people, it would appear that Ngarigu has a far better chance at revival and survival than does Saraiki. To save the wonderful diversity of the world’s Indigenous languages, we need a global consortium of Indigenous peoples to work together to reverse the language shifting that is threatening the survival of our collective linguistic heritage.

MALIK ADNAN HUSSAIN BHATTI is Saraiki from the Multan region of the Punjab in Pakistan. His people are a minority Indigenous community, whose rights are diminishing as they are slowly overwhelmed by other language and cultural groups. Adnan is concerned about the welfare of his people and their language and is working with Jaky Troy to develop a research project looking at the Saraiki in their Pakistani homelands and in their diaspora community in Australia.

JAKELIN TROY is Ngarigu of the Snowy Mountains in southeastern Australia. She is currently director of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Research at the University of Sydney. Her research has particularly focused on the endangered Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander languages of Australia. In considering the future of the Australian languages, Jaky is looking at the experiences of speakers of minority Indigenous languages outside Australia in order to understand why languages thrive or decline.

NOTES

An earlier version of this research report was presented at FEL XX: Language Colonization and Endangerment: Long-Term Effects, Echoes, and Reactions, University of Hyderabad, India, 9–12 December 2016. http://www.ogmios.org/conferences/2016/.
Although there are no statistics available for the current number of Kaurna speakers, in 2006, the Australian Bureau of Statistics reported that there were 34, in contrast with previous censuses, which provided no figures because it was thought that there were no longer any speakers of the language (Obata and Lee 2010).

Using historical records, Gardner (1992, 93) estimated the population of alpine Aboriginal people preinvasion: “Conservatively, more than 2,000 Aboriginal people probably occupied the alpine region continuously, and this number may have risen to 3,000 or more with seasonal movements in the warmer months.” He concluded that, by the mid- to late nineteenth century, there had been a “dramatic and disastrous decline in tribal populations,” citing anecdotal evidence for individual groups—for example, “the decline of the Jaitmathang tribe from 400–600 in 1835 to a countable five in 1858”—as indicative of a decline in the overall Aboriginal population of the region (93–94). He gave as main reasons for this dramatic decline epidemic diseases and the deliberate murder of whole groups of Aboriginal people by the land-grabbing “squatter” invaders (94–96).

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Reviewed by Angela M. Nonaka, University of Texas at Austin

Signed and spoken languages originate from an innate human language capacity that is a defining characteristic of our species, Homo sapiens sapiens, which has inhabited the earth for 100,000–250,000 years according to scientific estimates. Though languages expressed in the manual modality have existed since time immemorial, they were dismissed as mere gestures until the 1960s, when they were finally acknowledged as full-fledged languages. Initially, research centered on large “urban sign languages,” especially “national sign languages,” such as American Sign Language, Dutch Sign Language, and Japanese Sign Language, whose countries’ dominant manual-visual languages were associated with deaf education and professional interpreting, and which may also be categorized as “primary sign languages” because they are the first languages of large communities of Deaf people.

Today, however, researchers are studying lesser-known, historically overlooked types of signed languages, including some primary but nonnational signed languages, such as “village sign languages” and “original sign languages,” and also various nonprimary or “alternative sign languages,” such as “monastic sign languages.” Notably, several rare types of signing systems are associated with First Nations groups, such as (1) Hawai‘i Sign Language—a newly discovered but nearly extinct, Indigenous sign language of the Hawaiian Islands; (2) Meemul Tziij—a Mesoamerican complex of Indigenous sign languages likely descended from an ancient sign language family; (3) Plains Indian Sign Language or Plains Sign Talk—a trade language and lingua franca once used by different Native American groups across large portions of North America; and (4) several Australian Aboriginal sign
languages—unique signing systems associated with different First Nations communities who invented manually coded versions of their spoken languages, often as communicative responses to local speech taboos.

Study of uncommon signed languages is transforming our understanding of language typologies by demonstrating the extent to which signed languages vary—information that contributes to larger debates and theories about language complexity, language emergence, pidginization and creolization, and historical linguistics, for example. Similarly, examination of the diverse social circumstances wherein signed languages are created and used illuminates the complex phenomena of language ecology, socialization, maintenance, contact, and shift. Along with these scholarly advancements, there is both growing public interest in and appreciation for the diversity and complexity of signed languages and the cultural creativity of the communities using those, on the one hand, and heightened concern about the widespread endangerment of sign languages endangerment and the possible loss of human cultural heritage, on the other.

It is within that historical intellectual context that Marie Carla D. Adone and Elaine L. Maypilama have written *A Grammar Sketch of Yolngu Sign Language*—an original and timely new book that contributes to disciplines ranging from linguistics and anthropology to Deaf Studies and Indigenous Studies. As its title suggests, the book provides a concise linguistic overview of Yolngu Sign Language (YSL), an Indigenous Australian sign language isolate of Arnhem Land (Northern Territory), which is both an alternative sign language for the local hearing community and a primary sign language for local deaf residents. Divided into seven chapters, this informative, reader-friendly book is intended for a wide-ranging audience of students, instructors, and researchers, as well as Indigenous community stakeholders and the general public.

Chapter 1, “Aboriginal Sign Languages of Australia,” provides a succinct overview of different signed languages found on the Australian continent, reviews early studies of Aboriginal sign languages, and establishes necessary sociolinguistic background information for them. Against that backdrop, chapter 2, “The Sociolinguistics of Yolngu Sign Language,” discusses YSL’s relationship to the larger Yolngu language group, as understood not only by outside experts but also by Yolngu speakers themselves—a powerfully self-reflexive reminder for linguists that their approach is but one possible understanding and organization of the phenomenon being studied. The chapter then introduces readers to the users of YSL and to the complexities of multilingualism in the YSL community. We learn that “one important aspect of YSL is that all members of
the community acquire the language from birth along with the spoken language. This makes the users of YSL typically bilingual bimodal” (15)—an approach to multilingualism that “is an integral part of Aboriginal culture and traditional life style” (16) and that has been instrumental vis-à-vis the traditional inclusion (vs. exclusion) of deaf members of the community.

Brimming with still-video images of Yolngu Sign Language as demonstrated by local expert signers, the five remaining chapters present brief linguistic accounts of different facets of YSL, namely:

- Chapter 3, “Phonology,” discusses analyses vis-à-vis standard sign parameters: hand shapes, location, movement, and palm orientation, as well as other manual and nonmanual signs (facial expressions, mouthings, head tilts, body torques) and multi-channel signs;
- Chapter 4, “Morphology,” examines sign modification, sign formation, plain and agreement verbs, classifiers, and constructed action (also known as “role shifting”);
- Chapter 5, “Syntax,” analyzes word classes and constituent order, as well as simple and complex sentences;
- Chapter 6, “Semantics,” discusses semantic fields and presents examples of homonymy, polysemy, metonymy, and metaphors; and
- Chapter 7, “Lexicon,” discusses native and nonnative signs, numerals, and borrowings from spoken Aboriginal languages, English, other signing systems, and Macassan.

A Grammar Sketch strikes a rare balance: technically detailed, it is also easily readable for novices and experts alike. That said, by way of suggestion, future editions might include a DVD of video footage or hyperlinks to cloud-based film clips to let readers see Yolngu Sign Language in action.

A testament to successful, long-term collaboration between local Indigenous leaders and outside academic experts, the authors’ brief sociolinguistic account not only offers new descriptive data specific to Yolngu Sign Language but also directly contributes to ongoing efforts to better understand sign language typologies. A Grammar Sketch of Yolngu Sign Language is a welcome addition to a small but growing body of scholarship about less common sign language varieties—varieties that bear witness to the true breadth and depth of human linguistic and cultural diversity in the twenty-first century.
Having published Nicholas Birns and Rebecca McNeer’s *A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900* in 2007, American publisher Camden House has now confirmed its vested interest in publishing edited scholarly collections on Australian literature by putting Aboriginal fiction in the lime-light with Belinda Wheeler’s three edited volumes: *A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature* (2013), *A Companion to the Works of Kim Scott* (2016), and the forthcoming *Companion to the Works of Alexis Wright*.

First published in 2013 as a hardback and then released two years later in paperback, *A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature* is a collection of eleven essays by Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australia-based academics and international scholars alike. The editor herself, a South Carolina–based non-Indigenous Australian scholar, reflects such comprehensive diversity. The last two essays on film and music, respectively, by Theodore F. Sheckels and Andrew King would seem to broaden what is meant by “literature” unnecessarily, however. Even though some scholars have argued that pictorial representations could be construed as a form of literature, restricting the scope of literature to a somewhat narrower conception might better facilitate discussions of the subject. That said, in his foreword to *Companion*, Nicholas Jose reminds readers that multifaceted Aboriginal literature “can encompass oral, visual, and performative expression, including in Indigenous languages where song and story, lore and law connect with living traditions from times long before the British arrived” (vii). Therefore, when considering the oral-based cultural heritage of native peoples worldwide, literature could be redefined as a larger category comprising any written or oral text proposed as an end product that possesses a certain degree of fictionality, ambiguity, and aesthetics, bereft of pragmatic function.

Getting the terminology straight is all the more important since Australian Aboriginal fiction, given its dynamic nature, excels in creatively pushing and subverting established boundaries and landmarks while straddling many genres and artistic expressions. *A Companion to Australian Aboriginal Literature* (read: “Culture”) celebrates the building up of a canon that could be seen as having emerged either in 1929 (if discussions are restricted to fiction) or in 1964 (if poetry is the main focus), if not in 1978 (if one is only concerned with novels). David Unaipon, Oodgeroo Noonuccal, and Monica
Clare are all credited with having pioneered different literary genres in Aboriginal fiction in their own times. The blurring of literary categories (novel vs. life writing) quickly becomes an issue, even for nonindexomaniac people.2 Having discussed Monica Clare’s *Karobran: The Story of an Aboriginal Girl* (Alternative Publishing Cooperative, 1978) as a novel in *A Brief Take in the Australian Novel* (Wakefield Press, 2016), in keeping with the way it is indexed in the Austlit database, I was surprised to find Clare’s book analyzed by Jennifer Jones in her essay on life writing, along with autobiographies like Charles Perkins’s *A Bastard Like Me* (Ure Smith, 1975) and Sally Morgan’s *My Place* (Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1987).

But, there again, the very Western conception of authorship and clear-cut distinction between fiction and nonfiction become porous in the face of publishing experiences of Aboriginal people. As Michael Griffiths notes in the lead essay, “much of the Indigenous praxis of life writing involves collaboration” (20), whether in the form of protocols, intergenerational collaborative life writing projects (discussed by Martina Horakova in essay three), or ghost writing. The last was explored by Mary Ann Hughes as early as 1998 and later taken up by Fanny Duthil in her published doctoral dissertation, *Histoire de femmes aborigènes* (Presses Universitaires de France, 2006). In Duthil’s analysis, the challenge with the majority of Aboriginal women writers from an oral tradition was to help them formulate the narrative so as to match the standards expected from a story published in the Western tradition. This discussion of editorial choices is further pursued in the second essay, by Jennifer Jones, who examines the “prevalence of such methodologies, combined with the politicization of these behind-the-scenes processes, [which have] influenced the development of protocols for collaborative publishing.” (37) Although it is arguably difficult for any published author to escape the pressures of editorial control, forced editorial input in indigenized nonfiction could both be detrimental to creative expression and lead to aboriginalism, as well as to the misrepresentation and commodification of Aboriginal culture. Does nonfiction morph into fiction as soon as editorial license depoliticizes life writing?

The fourth essay, by Danica Čerče and Oliver Haag, shows how translations can even further distort an Aboriginal author’s intentionality and generate more misconceptions of Aboriginal culture, but the very technical nature of Čerče and Haag’s argumentation runs counter to this collection’s intention to address general readers as much as scholars, researchers, and students, who, in my view, are to be considered its primary audience.

Since Aboriginal artistic expression derives chiefly from oral tradition, the bulk of this collection unsurprisingly tackles genres that have been influenced by orality, whether in content like life writing or in form like song
poetry and poetry (examined in the fifth essay), performances or drama (analyzed in the ninth). The book’s forte is perhaps to encourage the fruitful cross-fertilization of disciplines, which renews interpretations of Australian Aboriginal literature, such as Griffiths’s view of life writing in the light of Aristotle’s practical philosophy or Jeanine Leane’s intriguing discussion of Indigenous young adult fiction enriched by anthropology in the sixth essay. Another strong feature of Companion is the quite comprehensive timeline of key historical and cultural dates with which the collection opens. Future editions would be well served by including the election of the first Indigenous woman to Australia’s House of Representatives, Linda Burney, on 2 July 2016.

A Companion to Australian Literature Since 1900 fulfills its informing role by attesting to the richness and challenging diversity of Australian Aboriginal culture. Similar ventures can only be encouraged, perhaps with more Indigenous contributors to achieve a balanced collaboration and perhaps, too, with the support of an Australian publisher.

NOTES

1. “[Penny v]an Toorn and [Stephen] Muecke show that literature and publishing do not simply include printed works in book form, but can range from dots and circles in the sand to letters, essays, articles, pamphlets and so on.” Anita Heiss, Dhuuluu-Yala. To Talk Straight (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2003), 25.

2. One could define “indexomania” as the obsession with classifying things.