Ngurra Barayagai
(Song Belonging to Country)

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A thesis submitted to fulfil requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

This is to certify that to the best of my knowledge; the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any degree or other purpose.

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Abstract

Ngurra Barayagai (Song belonging to Country) takes the form of an insider researcher's perspective and cultural lens of a Darug song woman's point of view. This thesis is practice-based research and is documentation of my lived experience, while wogga (sewing) a virtual budbili (possum skin cloak/rug) creating an anchor for the reader to visualise the many different aspects of a Songline and how it can be repaired in a city like Greater Sydney. It has included field trips, yarning, ngara (imaginative knowing), oolnga (intuition and gut-knowings) and wingarra (deep thinking).

This thesis is creating formal documentation of the language from Country, in all its different forms, which it communicates to its people. It is creating a record of the lived experiences of some of the Darug people communicating with their environment as a form of Country's song. By gathering the many different aspects of Songline repair, I aim to create new discussions and insights, evoke deeper desire for greater connection into this ancient fields of knowledge and bring back true respect for our amazing past, present and future Australian culture.

The literature review is a way of speaking back to literature and historical documents. Through the literature review I reply to colonial literature from my Darug unique lived experience in Country, where we have found ourselves 250 years on. Each hole created in the budbili represents literature that has been written in the past from non-indigenous points of view. Opposite holes are oral and written works of other Aboriginal educators. This speaking back to the literature is a form of a journal from my Darug perspective.

Through the methodology I will wogga the different cultural lenses together, creating a common ground, like a call and response to non-indigenous writings as a way of bringing balance to the wogga of knowledge shared in these academic systems. The thesis is filling the gaps in our current education systems, and providing alternative views to the colonized curriculum, which has presented a one-sided approach to Australia's history, and in turn influenced our society today and how Australia promotes itself.

The methodologies covered are Decolonization (Back to BLACK), Right to reply (talking back), Storytelling (My talk, their talk), and Yarning (we're talking).

This research is taking decolonial steps forward through Indigenous knowledge and current mainstream research. It is exploring the ethereal visions and dreams, and it is creating a space for the other than human to be heard. The outcome of the PhD is shedding new light on Ngurra Barayagai (Song Belonging to Country) that is still present and ongoing for some Darug people who wish to create a better environment for all living life forms to come.

This is to certify that the content of this thesis is my own work. This thesis has not been submitted for any other degree or purpose.

I certify that the intellectual content of this thesis is the product of my own work, and that all assistance received in preparing this thesis and all sources have been acknowledged.

Jacinta Tobin

Author's Note

A small amount of material from chapter 5 of this thesis has been reworked for an in-press publication: Jacinta Tobin, Ceane Towers and Amanda Harris (Forthcoming 2025), "Casting our Nets: singing a women's fishing song from the past, in the present, for the future" *Music & Practice*.

In addition, song lyrics from the candidate's self-published albums and accompanying booklet are included throughout the thesis from: Tobin, Jacinta. "Yarramundi and the Four Leaf Clover." Blue Mountains, NSW: Jacinta Tobin (self-published), 2001; Get Down and Darug'. Blue Mountains, NSW: Jacinta Tobin (self-published), 2017, with funding from Connect Child & Family Services as part of the Parent and Community Engagement Project of the Australian Government, 2016.

Jacinta Tobin,

27 February 2025

As supervisor for the candidature upon which this thesis is based, I can confirm that the authorship attribution statements above are correct.

Jakelin Troy,

27 February 2025

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Glossary & Abbreviations

Dharug words:

baggi	skin
baraya, burria	to sing
budbili	possum skin cloak/rug
balgoyalang	south
boomerang	a hunting tool and musical instrument
banga	make
barami	the branch of the tree
bardo	freshwater
barrugin	echidna
baya-la	let's speak
bayinmarri	west
be-al	no
Biami (Biame, Biiami)	Creator
booni	no (only used as a suffix)
budbili	Possum skin cloak/rug and musical instrument
budjuri (budyari)	good
bulla	two
Caradyee	(see Karadji)
coe-wing	sun
coogee	smelly
corroboree	gathering
dalang	tongue also used to describe language
damun	Port Jackson Fig Tree
Darug (Daruk, Darook, Dharug, Dharrook)	People of Greater Sydney region from Georges River to Mooney Mooney at the Hawkesbury River to Little Hartley
Dharug	The language spoken in Greater Sydney
Dharuga	falling star
duwan	death bird
Dyarubbin	Hawkesbury/Nepean River
eora	See iyora
gai	belonging to

galgala	sickness
gana	burning
garal	black cockatoo
garraway	white cockatoo
gadyan	Sydney cockle shells
garragarrang	saltwater
gawura (gurawul)	whale (also in Dharawal and Yuin)
gin (dyin)	woman or wife
gudugulung	turtle
Gulguer (Bents Basin)	a falling or shooting down or swilling round, which causes the water to make a large round hole
gumada	spirit
gumah	king parrot
gunya	home or shelter
Gunyalungalung	The Dreaming
gurugal	long time ago
guwi (gawi) cooee	come here
iyora	people from here
Karadji (Koraji, Caradyee)	Aboriginal doctor and healer
killi	shining
Killimai	bright eyes
kimberwalli	many stars
kooka	the sound of the bird
koori	people
-la	let's (only used as a suffix)
makri	male emu
marri	big
mariong	female emu
-matta	place usually around water
mittigar	friend
mudjin	family
murru	path
murrumac	pathway to the mountain
muttong (mudung)	brave

nawi	canoe
ngallowan	they live, they remains
naa	see
ngara	imaginative knowing
ngullawul (ngool-laa-wul)	we care
Ngurra	Country is everything. No Country no us. It holds more reverence in our Indigenous world view. It is wind, water, soil, vegetation, animals, birds, and aquatic life. It holds places of great sacredness where connection to other knowings can be accessed. It is a reflection of the Stars and ourselves.
ngubadi	Love
nuga	nose
nyindi	You
ooggee (oog)	the sound of a kookaburra the bird laughing
oolnga	intuition and gut-knowings
pemul	earth
warada	waratah
Warrawal	The Milky Way
wingarra	deep thinking
wirawi	Aboriginal women
wirri	bad
wogga	to sew together
wombut	wombat
womera	wood tool for throwing a spear
wugul	one
yagu-na	today
yana	to walk
yanada	full moon
yinyun	up and down

Words in other languages used in this thesis:

Aunty or Uncle	Generally, a form of respect and connection
Brought up	Taught by Elders

Cus or cousin	Connection to larger family group
Dhwaulwulyun	(Yolngu) whale
dedirry (dadirri)	(Wiradjuri) reflect and think deeply
gurawul	(Yuin, Dharawal) whale
Gurangatch	(Gundungarra) Rainbow Serpent
Tjukurpa	(Western desert languages) Dreaming time of creation and setting the rules for moral behaviour

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Acknowledgement and Gratitude

My first gratitude or thankfulness is to my beautiful Mother, the matriarch of our family. She showed us that even though life has thrown her a curveball many a time, she has the gratefulness, graciousness, the fortitude, respect, and love to hold her head high and keep shining like no other. She has sacrificed so much to give her children a better opportunity than she had. For that I am always grateful and in awe of the amazing woman she is. I love you, Mum. To my Father now passed, thanks Dad for your belief in pursuing your dreams, your love for puzzles and the adventurous spirit required to live the life I have. Miss you and love you, Dad.

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To my ancestors thank you for guiding me, supporting me, connecting me back to Ngurra (Country) and connecting me to some of the greater levels of creation. Teaching me to always respect and love all that has been given by the creator God. To my Darug family, to my larger Aboriginal family and non-indigenous family and friends you know who you are thank you and love you all.

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I would also like to acknowledge all Aboriginal Traditional Owners and others who may be finding their way home, for the knowledge that had been shared. It has shaped this thesis to become what it needed, to be a collaborative multi-disciplinary approach to understanding the

complexity of Songline healing and knowledge, that frames better cultural awareness when piecing back my Darug Ngurra Bayaragai.

Thank you to the team of investigators on ARC Discovery Project *Hearing the music of early NSW 1788-1860* (DP210101511) (Neal Peres Da Costa, Amanda Harris, Jakelin Troy, Toby Martin Matthew Stephens and Graeme Skinner) for supporting my scholarship through the University of Sydney Australian Government Research Training Program scholarship and Sydney Water and Shoshana Fogelman for a top up scholarship.

Ngurra Barayagai
(Song Belonging to Country)

1. Introduction

Map 1. Map of Country by Chris Tobin (By permission of the Artist)

1.1 Overview of Thesis

Ngurra Barayagai (Song Belonging to Country) is written from an insider researcher's perspective and through the cultural lens of a Darug song woman. This thesis includes practice-based research and documentation of my lived experience, because it explicitly seeks to propose ways of communication and methodologies for repairing songlines that are still present in Darug Ngurra (Country).

The thesis starts as a conversation with you, the reader. I will start by giving you a sense of my Country, my identity, my history, my epistemology. I am the storyteller. I am creating a space /place of learning, a framework of different approaches to Songline repair, in an urban space with one of the longest Australian colonial histories.

Each chapter starts by creating a virtual budbili wogga (possum skin cloak), to help the reader visualise the many different aspects of a Songline and how it can be repaired in a city like

Sydney. The idea behind the story, or the process, is for you to place yourselves inside those of us who are written about. It is a way of indigenising you. It includes field trips strengthening connection to Country, yarning, baraya (sing), ngara (dreams or seeing), oolnga (intuition) and wingarra (deep thinking).

This thesis is creating a formal documentation of the language from Country, in all its different forms, which it communicates to its people. It is creating a record of the lived experiences of some of the Darug peoples communicating with their environment as a form of connection with their Country's songs. Fellow indigenous and non-indigenous academics have respectfully contributed our stories to the academy to create space for Darug people to continue to grow academic knowledge in our way. [1] This research project is unique in how it contributes and validates Darug knowledge and current lived experience with the communication from Country. By gathering the many different aspects of Songline repair, I seek to create new discussions and insights, to evoke deeper desire for greater connection into these ancient fields of knowledge.

The literature review is taking a decolonial approach using the "Right to reply"[2] to literature and historical documents that have given rise to our current Australian identity or lack thereof. Reintroducing Australia back to its original flavour, from my cultural lens as one of the original families documented from the start of colonisation.[3] I will start with colonial referencing due to the Darug people's unique lived experience in Country, where we have found ourselves 250 years on.

Each hole is the first skin created in the budbili (Possum skin), representative of my history, and literature that has been written in the past from non-indigenous points of view. Then the opposite skin are holes from oral and written works of other Aboriginal educators, Graham[4], Atkinson[5], Cameron,[6] Yunkaporta,[7] and others. This the start of connecting to knowledges, threading the knowledge back into Country, that original skin, my birth-right.

The thesis acknowledges the many brilliant writers that have come before, with respect and gratitude. I have utilised their different cultural angles or lenses of knowledge to comprehend

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[1] Elizabeth Cameron, "Is It Art or Knowledge? Deconstructing Australian Aboriginal Creative Making," *Arts (Basel)* 4, no. 2 (2015), https://doi.org/10.3390/arts4020068.
[2] Indigenous Archives Collective "The Indigenous Archives Collective position statement on the right of reply to Indigenous knowledges and information held in archives" *Archives and Manuscripts* 49, no. 3 (2021).
[3] J. Brook, *Shut out From the World: The Hawkesbury Aborigines Reserve and Mission 1889-1946*, 2nd rev. ed. (Berowra Heights, N.S.W: Deerubbin Press, 1999); Grace Karskens, *People of the River: Lost Worlds of early Australia* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2020) J. L. Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours: The Traditional Aboriginal Owners of the Sydney Region* (Blacktown, N.S.W: Darug Link in association with the Blacktown and District Historical Society, 1993); Dianne Johnson, *Aunty Joan Cooper Through the Front door: 'A Darug and Gundungurra Story'* (Mountains Outreach Community Service INC (MOCS), 2003.
[4] Mary Graham, "Some thoughts about the philosophical underpinnings of Aboriginal worldviews:," *Australian Humanities Review* 45 (2008).
[5] Judy Atkinson, "Trauma trails, recreating song lines: the transgenerational effects of trauma in Indigenous Australia," (North Melbourne :: Spinifex Press, 2002).
[6] Liz Cameron, "Australian Indigenous sensory knowledge systems in creative practices," *Creative Arts in Education and Therapy (Online)* 7, no. 2 (2021), https://doi.org/10.15212/caet/2021/7/4.
[7] Tyson Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk:How Indigenous Thinking Can Save the World* (Melbourne, Victoria, Australia: Text Publishing Company, 2019).

the holistic approach, required for Songline and Country's repair. Using this cultural knowledge-sharing in written form and the oral sharing of Elders and other Aboriginal people, I will bring knowledge and insight into the gaps in current and past literature. Due to White privilege this has meant that Aboriginal voices have been absent from the literature.

This other approach has been unable to hear the voices of 'the other' in Australia's original ancient history, land management and spiritual knowledge. Historical literature has largely presented a one-sided approach of Australia's history, which in turn has influenced our society today. This speaking back to the literature is a form of a journal from my Darug perspective.

I use a range of methodologies, and I will wogga the different cultural lenses together by creating more common ground. The thread is the sinew of the burru (kangaroo). It is the methodologies as the action of wogga (sewing), a 'call and response' to non-indigenous writings as a way of bringing a balance on the wogga of knowledge shared in these academic systems. The methodologies covered are:

3.1 Decolonisation (Back to BLACK)
3.2 Right to reply (talking back)
3.3 Story telling (My talk, their talk)
3.4 Yarning (we're talking)

The conclusion of the PhD is shedding new light on Ngurra Barayagai (Song Belonging to Country), that is still present and ongoing for some Darug people who wish to create a better environment for all living life forms to come. Tens of thousands of years' knowledge is a big call, to think one can do it justice in 3 to 4 years research. The more you learn, the more you realise how much you do not know.

The need for more financial and political support for Traditional Owners in their Countries to sustain cultural practices has become obvious throughout this research. The Darug people are very accommodating and have been running to everyone else's demands. There has been no time, culturally appropriate housing, or funding given for Darug peoples to strategically plan and afford to create generational repair and sustainability initiatives.

Greater Sydney region is now a city, and the elephant in the room when thinking of regenerative practices of Songlines is the question of how traditional owners can work with developers and governments. We end our time together by sitting on our budbili wogga, (possum skin coat) looking for solutions for all living things with a deeper appreciation for all that makes this life and the effects we make on it. I will shine light on how Australia promotes itself and its lack of sustainable practices, which are at odds with ancient laws. But every good story has a starting point, and this one goes back at least 50,000 years.[8]

[8] Karskens, *People of the River*21-27.

1.1.2 Ngurra (Picturing the Times Passed)

This walk through the written word, we can do together, as if we are walking together looking over the beautiful Sydney basin out to sea, from the top of a ridge on the Blue Mountains. From this ridge you can see distant smoke rising from camps of your families, who seem to be all going about their daily business. The Whale's migration can be seen from the ridge as many are gathering on the ocean's beaches.

At Marrong (Prospect Hill), waters flow from its top feeding the flood areas of Eastern Creek, Cooks River, Toongabbie and Kemps Creek. Towering over the landscape is the great monolith of Marrong. It thrusts out of the earth bearing the basalt pillars and shale. It is rich soil, the remains of its ancient volcanic activity of Songline connections to the Mountains and the sea. From its height it captures a 360-degree view of awareness as Wyannamatta (mother), a creek flows from the waters given by Marrong. The sacred story of the two ways of being, from the shaft of attention to the underground waters of Marrong, to Bents Basin, keep some areas grass low and tea tree strong. The woods start to thicken in places. Smoke follows a tree trunk as men hunt and scale the grand tree with ease for the possum reward. There is rejoicing going on. It looks like we will have enough possum skins to start our coat.

As your eyes roll across the beautiful vista, seven hills show themselves. Behind are distant sparkling sands and marri nawi (many canoes) fill the waterways. The men throw the returning boomerangs that fly over the heads of the ducks on the lagoons around Richmond and Mulgoa. The women are on the other side of the lagoon with their nets, ready to capture those ducks who choose to fly in. Many ducks have been gathered.

As you are looking out, a smell crosses your nose of the gentle smoke of the cleanup, the tribe is starting to move from the ridge of the mountain. The men left earlier to set the new camp, while the old people are leading the way with the children assisted by the younger girls. The women will stay back and burn the camp where their family just finished staying.

The women start from the ridge or hilltop from the camp where they had just stayed, then move the fire gently down to the waterways. With each setting-alight of the grass, the women's thoughts are filled with gratefulness about how much the land has shared with their family over their stay. They are giving thanks and prayers in their hearts and minds. They burn around the hanging swamp knowing, that the fire will finish on the edge of the wet ground or water area. They are saying thank you in a form of action of clean up by fire, with gratitude in their thoughts. While occasionally grabbing a creature or two who are trying to run from the fire or berry or fruits still left on nearby bush, they make a peaceful and respectful movement through the landscape. The weather is changing and so are the people. Living in harmony and cooperation with all that lives in those places.

Now 250 years have passed, the view has changed, and the trees have grown too high. Too many smaller trees and bush cover the view, but you can still see the majestic Dyarubbin

(Hawkesbury/Nepean River). No longer are the banks full of the flower of the Daruk (Yam) or the huge river gums. Now grass, if lucky, and smaller scrub remain between the concrete pathway of every growing, local walker and jogger. Now the movement of the river has been changed by sand and gravel mining. The Songlines are now highways and roads with satellite cities and skyscrapers blocking the views of those beautiful waterways. Those waterways hold no drinking waters, no yabbies, with little fish life as concrete fills its tributaries.

It's a scarred landscape of over-development with no thought of life other than human. Marong doesn't tower over the plain as times past it has been mined down to a hill. The sacred water sources of the past are now gone. A manmade reservoir lays on its flood plains, as a sponge for the waters still remaining on the ground. Large scars are created as a new airport endangers those waters for drinking. Pollution fills the sky, and the ocean view has but now all disappeared with the growth of the concrete jungle.

The humans are now mostly of other cultural ways. They have not come in through family ties or in a kinship way. They have come as strangers with no knowledge of the laws and protocols that keep this Country so healthy. No fault of their own, but we are now sharing our knowing in these academic spaces. In these places where our best and our brightest reign. Where intellectuals ponder and new ideas are formed and embraced, yet we really have only continued with our colonial past masters' systems and not truly embraced our Original Australian culture. I think we have a path to walk through together, to find that middle ground where my possum skin is completed so we can sit together both feeling connected to the place where we may call home.

Welcome to my Country.

Figure 1. "Amy's story" by Leanne Tobin showing the city in the background and the ancestors watching the change from the mountain ridge (By permission of the Artist).

1.2 First Wali - Possum Skin

This research aims to translate a language from Country which it communicates to its people in many forms. It is written from my Darug point of view, as I can only speak for myself. Through this process I am decolonialising myself and you, the reader. I will start this thesis with a story of a lived experience, while creating an imaginary wogga.

This word "wogga" was given to me by the late Aunty Betty Lock.[9] She described it as a lot of material sewn together, it was a word used to describe a quilt. I am using the word wogga as a description of the process of sewing a budbili, possum skin cloak. This word has not been identified in written form as Dharug dalang (Darug tongue) but I choose to use it. It is my way of keeping hold of the sounds, from the tongues of those who remembered and still held some of that old language style.

The University of Essex, library and Cultural services 2024 states:

> Decolonisation involves identifying colonial systems, structures and relationships, and working to challenge those systems. It is not "integration" or simply the token inclusion of the intellectual achievements of non-white cultures. Rather, it involves a paradigm shift from a culture of exclusion and denial to the making of space for other political philosophies and knowledge systems.[10]

Each hole created in the making of the budbili wogga comes from a different point of view expressed through literature, documentaries, oral transmission and lived experience relating to Songline repair in its broadest sense. Through this thesis, I will connect the dots through indigenous and non-indigenous writers, documentary makers and oral teachers. Both sides of each pelt must line up and complement each other. With good alignment a strong stitch can be made.

My methodology covers storytelling, yarning, wingarra (deep thinking) and oolnga (intuition)[11] by using the metaphor of the making of the budbili wogga. Knowing that the methodology of Barayagai Song is not just the songs from myself to Country but the Song we live in called the Dreaming. Each thread of sinew of the kangaroo is connecting the holes that are the pathways to relevant research and ancient ways of knowing. Each stitch is showing the intricacies of the

[9] Personal conversations and oral language shared from 2000. One story from Aunty Betty was about the "Wogga" which was explained to me as the quilt made from old linens, something sewn together.
[10] University of Essex Website, "What is Decolonisation?" Accessed 22 August, 2024 at https://library.essex.ac.uk/edi/whatisdecolonisation.
[11] Cameron, "Australian Indigenous sensory knowledge systems in creative practices," 119.

patterns needed for Songline repair and creating common ground between the different approaches.

This is a challenging wogga as we are in the 21st Century, in a Country scarred by colonisation and a lack of connection and pride in its ancient past. As John Pilger described it, "A Country with amnesia".[12] From the homelands of our colonial masters, a change in thinking is happening and this thesis is one of many new styles of sharing intellectual knowledge. Essex university library states:

> One of the most significant problems relating to gaps in the curriculum in higher education is the lack of representation of black and minority ethnic groups. This is commonly referred to as the colonisation of the curriculum. The content of the curriculum in western universities often reflects and maintains a colonial legacy through the presentation of a white, western intellectual tradition as not only superior to other forms of knowledge, but as universal.[13]

I am creating a space in an academic paper for you, the reader. Due to the colonisation of the curriculum, it is in a written form. This brings its own restrictions. as Shlain points out when looking at the written word's effects on our civilisation.[14] I will walk you through a creative process from the art on the skin through forms of energy singing, dabura (painting),[15] minay (scraping) gana (burning) on my budbili wogga. As each process is done, song fills the space imprinting the life and history of my budbili wogga by doing these songs over the skin it creates an energy transference from the creator to the created.

Once the wogga is completed the skin will be smoked, this is a time for the trauma of the past to be spoken and shared. In this stage of the process it creates a safe place, giving the victim a chance to feel heard and their pain acknowledged. Once the trauma of the past is brought to the surface then, with the smoke, it is released from the cloak.

Now the cloak is ready to be worn, played or sat on. We can sit on our cloak and share our thoughts on what has been created. We will end our time together creating brave new approaches to real, on-the-ground solutions. Finding and creating funding for Traditional Owners in their own Countries supporting them to sustain and maintain their cultural practices. Their cultural practices are our Australian ancient history. By creating new systems, you will see our ancient practices in motion. This is our process of co-creating through our journey together. It will lead us to a positive step forward, for better use of ancient ways of viewing educational practices, through connecting to Country and hearing it song.

I believe in the Dreaming, it is the past, present and the future. Please don't just read this thesis, help create sustainable opportunities for generations to come. There is new science and research like Bakker[16] with 1000 references of science showing new methodologies of bioacoustics

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[12] John Pilger, *A secret country* (Random House, 2010).
[13]University of Essex Website, "What is Decolonisation?"
[14] Leonard Shlain, "The Alphabet Versus the Goddess: The Conflict Between Word and Image," *Journal of the American College of Surgeons*, 200, no. 2 (2005). https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jamcollsurg.2004.10.016.
[15] Jakelin Troy, *The Sydney Language* (Canberra, ACT: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2019), 70.
[16] Karen Bakker, *The Sounds of Life: How Digital Technology Is Bringing Us Closer to the Worlds of Animals and Plants* (Princeton University Press, 2022).

practices. Her gathering of different research brings greater possibilities of better land management systems based on Barayagai Ngurra (Song Belonging to Country). These forms of research are creating new spaces and systems by working with indigenous cultures around the world. Using western technology collected information into becoming some of our new ways of co-creating with Country. This thesis will bring a Darug perspective to academia in a decolonial methodological structure to shed a little light on a very real phenomenon for some, called “Barayagai Ngurra” (Song Belonging to Country).

1.3 Why a Possum Skin Cloak?

My possum skin cloak it is like my shield. I must be true to my shield as my possum skin will be true to my song. Possum skin cloaks were always noted to be worn in my Country when the colder months set in and traded across the many different language groups on the East Coast and interstate.

The Wiradjuri are one of the Darug neighbours and the largest tribal group in New South Whales. Lynette Riley, a Wiradjuri woman writes:

> A ‘Possum Skin Cloak’ would be either created to commemorate a person’s birth and would then be added to with each new piece recording a person’s life journey. As such, no two cloaks would ever be similar, each was unique to represent that person and as such each person’s cloak would be valued and recognised by all. The intricate design on these cloaks represented a person’s Moiety; Nation and Clan affiliations; their Totems; and recorded specific ceremonial or other experiences in that person’s life.[17]

[17] Lynette Riley, “Reclaiming tradition and re-affirming cultural identity through creating kangaroo skin cloaks and possum skin cloaks”, *Journal of Indigenous Wellbeing Te Mauri Pimatisiwin* 1, no. 1, 7.

Figure 2 "Grandmothers Country Cloak" possum skin coat. Image: Vicki Couzens 2014 skin side up ochred with incised design of Clan and Country.[18]

First, I will paint my cloak with concentric circles of white and gold. The white ochre from my mother's line of the (mothers place) shale. The gold ochre because I was born in Ballarat, Vitoria where gold was found and where my Grandparents lived on my father's side of the family. This gold ochre has been found in Emu Plains. Emu Plains is where my first, longest time of growing in one place occurred. The colour gold also represents yellow colour. That is because I have been told Darug are the people of the Sandstone from Blue Mountains to Sydney. Red is represented in some important places and charcoal for the fire that gave rise to writing this thesis. Lastly blue ochre found from the land, where I have raised my family and where this thesis has been written.

Suzanne Kenney states that "Ochre colour highlights were also used on the cloaks, which were highly prized gifts and trading items".[19] I am creating a highly tradable item for you, the reader. The trade that Kenney speaks of is what I was told not to say. In a cousin's vision, my ancestors were saying that it is not trade but it is more like an even gift exchange.[20] The idea of even gift exchange is to note that we would not profit from each other as clan or nation groups. We would share our gifts with each other, making sure that everyone had all the resources that they needed for survival which included their ceremonies.

Dr Vicki Couzens, a Keerray Woorroong Gunditijmara woman, writes:

> The time spent in the gathering of resources, in production and the ceremonial and spiritual significance contributed to the high esteem and economic value of Possum Skin Cloaks […]
>
> Communities and individuals seek these knowledges and begin to relearn their 'mother tongue'; dance and sing story and create ceremonies; strengthening pride and identity in an affirming creative cultural way.[21]

I have been blessed to wear a possum skin cloak at Carriageworks in Redfern, Sydney, for a performance and ceremony with Wagana dance company. This feeling of strength and healing is true for me as I have personally experienced these sensations from wearing the cloak. Many family members have started their own cloaks, one can see their cultural knowledge growing with each craft that is learnt and then reproduced. It is not a light item, so I think 30 pelts would be enough. [22]

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[18] Australian Museum Website, "Possum Skin Cloaks Then and Now." Accessed 28 August 2024 at https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/possum-skin-cloaks-then-and-now/.
[19] Suzanne Kenney, *Mount Tomah Darug Aboriginal connections* (Sydney: Royal Botanic Gardens Sydney, 2002), 13
[20] Personal communication, Cindy Laws, 1999.
[21] Vicki Couzens, "Possum Skin Cloaks, Then and Now – Same Same but different," Australian Museum Website. Accessed 28 August 2024 at https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/possum-skin-cloaks-then-and-now/.
[22] Couzens, "Possum Skin Cloaks, Then and Now."

Figure 3. Jo Clancy with Jacinta Tobin wearing possum skin cloak. 10 June 2013.

1.4 Wali Possum Fur was Used for Many Different Reasons.

My totem was used for many purposes: food, fur for warmth, to make water carrying bags, uses to create ball games. Couzens states:

> Possum flesh was eaten and roasted in fires. Whole de-haired skins were used as watercarriers and storage containers. Small bags were hung around the neck to carry pegs or in mourning, ashen remains; fur was rolled with hair to make string; string and skin pieces were created for body adornment ie: necklaces, arm bands, head bands, dance belts; skins sewn together made a ball used in a game called 'marngrook', a game of keepings off between two teams '. The lower jawbone was hafted to a handle producing an engraver which used to carve designs into wooden implements. Nothing was wasted.[23]

Another use of the wogga was known to be used as an instrument. One could fold it over itself to create a drum or use it across the knees, creating the tension that would be required depending on the song sung. Our women were noted singing in Country and playing the drum. Ironically, I when I was a child at Emu Plains Public school, I was told that I couldn't play the drum as it was a boy's instrument. Thank heavens those times have changed; my daughter now has a drum set that my cousin Chris Burke once played. A possum skin coat drum is a way of weaving all the different threads of a Songline understanding together in a 21st Century virtual reality way.

The Gay'wu group of women used possum fur creating a string in their writings. They state, "The Milky Way is the pathway for Guwak to the spiritual world, the possum string links land

[23] Couzens, "Possum Skin Cloaks, Then and Now."

and sky and all that is underneath the sky".[24] Of course possum links to the stars as nighttime is possum's time of connecting to the earth, so it connects sky and earth.

As a Cannemegal Wali possum woman from an unbroken mitochondrial DNA lineage,[25] I will have to let someone else kill and skin the possums for me. So now I start with the first process preparing the skin with the sap from the wattle to tan. Holes will be made first to stretch the skin on a piece of bark. Wooden pegs will be places in the holes to keep in place and the last bits of flesh are removed and the skin is tanned. This is my lived experience, my life story, how my totem, its people and my Country has been used for many reasons, now I wish to speak for it and finally sing for it and create a healing vibration for true connection to present in many people's lives. It's not just my story it is my family's story, but I can only speak for myself.

1.5 Protocols Followed

I am a proud Darug woman of the Greater Sydney Region, Australia. This research and lived experience of over 25 years in Darug language and cultural revitalisation has now led me to Songline repair and healing. I introduce myself and where I'm from as part of my protocols. Aileen Moreton-Robinson explains:

> The protocol for introducing oneself to other Indigenous people is to provide information about one's cultural location, so that connections can be made on political, cultural and social grounds and relations established.[26]

Figure 4. The historic Lake Condah cloak, collected in 1872, fur side and skin side up showing the different designs and colour.[27]

[24] Gay'wu Group of Women, *Songspirals: Sharing Women's Wisdom of Country Through Songlines* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 2019), 128

[25] Anthony McKnight, "Mingadhuga Mingayung: Respecting Country through Mother Mountain's stories to share her cultural voice in Western academic structures," *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 47, no. 3 (2015), https://doi.org/10.1080/00131857.2013.860581.

[26] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Talkin' Up to the White Woman: Aboriginal Women and Feminism* (St Lucia, Qld: University of Queensland Press, 2000), xv.

[27] Museums Victoria Website. "The Timeless and Living Art of Possum Skin Cloaks." Accessed 20 June 2024 at https://museumsvictoria.com.au/article/the-timeless-and-living-art-of-possum-skin-cloaks/

This possum skin cloak is my journal of colonial history from a seven-generational Darug woman affected by colonisation. Warlpiri identify a maternal line as "a matrimoiety with all the people who share the same skin name as his mother, mother's mother, mother's mother's mother, and so on."[28] Our Australian history is full of journals of our colonial masters, financial free settlers or poor convicts who made it rich are still filling our book shops and libraries. Many times, I have learnt from journals of our colonial forefathers and am grateful for the records that were kept. But this is not his story, this is my mother story, this is part of our collective Australian story. Below are some words from a song I wrote. What I am trying to translate here is that I am part of Australian history not just from across the waters. This song is from this Country, it is acknowledging our Australian ancient past:

> You can't deny me because I am a product of your Australian history.
> From Blue Mountains to Sydney this is my Doorook family.
> No you can't deny me a Sydney Originee.[29]

1.6 Embracing Songlines

What are Songlines? Higgins writes in *Songlines and Land Claims; Space and Place* that:

> The Songlines of the country now called Australia constitute a vital aspect of Indigenous life. These routes were established long before the period of colonisation by the Indigenous creation beings of Tjukurpa. They consist of a series of invisible, interconnected routes across the State, which mark significant sites for Indigenous peoples and map paths between such sites. [30]

Margo Neale and Lynne Kelly say in the *Songlines: The Power and Promise*, part of the *Songlines* series of "First Knowledges" books:

> Songlines are a knowledge archive perfectly tuned to the way the human brain has evolved over thousands of years. This is a reason that every Indigenous culture of the planet has engaged so intensely with their territory, their land, their home: the human brain naturally recalls information when it is triggered by physical cues in its environment. Nothing is more powerful than a location where an event has happened you can see it clearly in your mind [31].

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[28] Wanta Jampijinpa Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Miles Holmes, and Alan Box, *Ngurra-kurlu: A way of Working With Warlpiri People* (Desert Knowledge CRC Alice Springs, 2008), 13
[29] 'Sydney Originee' by Jacinta Tobin, 2018
[30] Noelle Higgins, "Songlines and Land Claims; Space and Place," *International Journal for the Semiotics of Law* 34, no. 3 (2021), 1. https://doi.org/10.1007/s11196-020-09748-z.
[31] Margo Neale and Lynne Kelly, *Songlines: The Power and Promise, First Knowledges*, (Port Melbourne, Victoria: Thames & Hudson/National Museum of Australia, 2020), 104

Other knowings of this collective lore of the land are from the Gay'wu group of women. They refer to the Songlines as songspirals. This concept I will also look at further through later possum skins, or chapters. The women assert:

> The songspirals locate a place, locate Country, and they take us there. They connect us to that Country and to the person who was there and has passed away, to the ancestors and to those yet to come, and they connect that Country to other Countries, to other clan homelands around it, in a great pattern of co-becoming and co-emergence. Through songspirals, we know where we are, and we know who we are.[32]

Songlines of my Country have been changed. Many of the Darug Songlines have become roads. Some examples are the Great Western Highway, Parramatta Road, Bells Line of Road, Old Northern Road, Blacktown Road and Botany Bay Road, to name a few. This is part of my concerns when thinking of Songline healing. Our Songlines are covered in tar and concrete, which I will argue is worth the investment in long term planning for its repair, using holistic healing and future planning for generations to come.

Emu Plains and the surrounding areas of the Dyarubbin Nepean River are places of great interest for Songlines on Darug Ngurra or Country. In *People of the River*, Grace Karskens tells of camps, workshops for tools, artifacts, fishing areas, attacks from soldiers on my people, through to a great corroboree as a performance showing others of the tragic tales of what had been happening in our Country with visiting clans and tribes.[33] Karskens describes a performance to both First Peoples and settlers alike, and states using the name Yallahmiendi as who I identify as Yarramundi.

Hawkesbury and Mc Donald River leaders Yallahmiendi and Jabbinguy were among the actors and dancers. At the time of this corroboree, it had been forty years past, since Gomeberee and Yallahmiendi (Yarramundi) had met Philip's party on the Dyarubbin (Hawkesbury River). This corroboree is my family's attempt to try to get the colonisers to understand what grief and sorrow they had brought to my Country and its people. Karskens writes that Yarramundi is painted in white ochre and Jabbinguy in red ochre. This is showing in a cultural way our grief and anger. Karskens goes on to say:

> Perhaps still more astonishing was the dramatic performance that played out the colony's political and legal struggles under Governor Darling. Young Bungaree, son of the famous Bungaree, put on his father's old military jacket, sash and cocked hat-worn Aboriginal style, with no trousers-and acted the role of the departed Darling. Broken Bay man Terriabalong, robed in a bandicoot-skin cloak, his frizzy hair tied up with grass to look like a wig, played 'Barrister' and most successfully personated the whole Australian Bar […]

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[32] Group of Women, *Songspirals: Sharing Women's Wisdom of Country Through Songlines*, xxiii, Djalkiri
[33] Grace Karskens, *People of the River: Lost Worlds of Early Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2020).

> As the play continued, Terribalong in his role as 'Attorney General' clashed with two 'Colonial Attorneys', played by Yakabil from Murrumbidgee and Black Boy from the Hunter."[34]

Many of our extended kin were in contact with each other, as Karskens noted, from the South to the North. Those men came together as many still do today through plays, concerts, art exhibitions, dance and musical performances. Amanda Harris, Tiriki Onus and Linda Barwick confirm this in their article, "Performing Aboriginal Rights in 1951*"* by outlining this solidarity of Aboriginal performance to create greater communication:

> We examine political uses of performance in Australia's assimilation era, and show how Aboriginal agitators used music and dance to connect struggles for rights across Australia, and to keep cultural identity alive. In doing so we show how performance operated both as work and as assertion of cultural sovereignty.[35]

These are Indigenous methodologies; it's our Indigenous way of strengthening connections and continuing our education for generations to come. This *idea* of Aboriginal performance that Karskens regales to her readership continues today to mainstream audiences.[36] This strengthens my knowing that we as Darug people were working with others up and down the coastline, trying to find a way of getting through to the colonisers to say, "We see the inter-politics at play and we are still not happy with the false words that have been given".

Unfortunately, the colony didn't see the corroboree as a teaching of a different point of view and a protest. Instead, they found it quite amusing, Karskens continues. She notes, "The settlers in the audience were highly amused, and the author of the report joked that if ever New South Wales was granted self-government, then it should be remembered that 'the grand corrobory at Nepean' was its first expression".[37]

With the mixture of Irish and Aboriginal I grew up in a musical family, on both sides, Mum's and Dad's. We played instruments and did lots of singing, be it at home or at church. This songline research feels very appropriate for me to pursue because of my personal connections to song from both cultural lines in my family: as a descendant of Yarramundi, and a descendant of Irish ancestry where song is also tied to the land, resistance, performance and identity. Today, I am a performer of my own song of my Country's history and issues. Leanne Tobin, my sister, has written plays on our history. As children the family were involved in plays at Emu Plains Primary then Nepean High School which eventually became a school of preforming Arts. I wonder, does the school know of the theatre performances done in the early time of the colony prison farm? In its colonial history it was a soldier's settlement and a convict farm.

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[34] Karskens, *People of the River*, 444

[35] Amanda Harris, Tiriki Onus, and Linda Barwick, "Performing Aboriginal Rights in 1951: From Australia's Top End to Southeast," *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 69, no. 2 (2023), 227. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajph.12823.

[36] Amanda Harris et al., *Representing Australian Aboriginal Music and Dance 1930-1970* (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2022).

[37] Karskens, *People of the River*, 45.

Music was always a creative outlet in both my Aboriginal and Irish family culture. The start of my university studies was the start of my songwriting through assignments that were required at the time of my undergraduate and then my Masters in Social Ecology. Social Ecology looked at the effects of humans on Country and the interactions of those energy exchanges. We were encouraged to become agents of positive change. I chose to create change through music and songwriting to describe the history of my Darug Nation. Music is my natural part of connecting. I am not alone in this methodology for educational purposes, as referred to by Grace Karskens and Mark McKenna in their conversation on Nah Doongh's song. Nah Doongh known as "Black Nellie" who lived from Camden to Penrith and sang this Song. It was sung in language but not notated. She teaches her history through song, Karskens and McKenna explain:

> Who is she singing about in the song? Most likely the wealthy, powerful Macarthurs. 'All the land belong to Mr McCarthy' rings true because, of course, they owned vast tracts of land. Also, there had been 4 generations of Macarthurs by this time, which possibly explains the 4 fingers in the refrain. The family was also important to Nah Doongh because she befriended the Macarthur women – just as she later befriended Sara Shand and other women around Penrith. It was one of her survival strategies.[38]

1.7 Family History and Lived Experience (My story my Songline)

I am Jacinta Tobin of the Darug language group from mixed heritage. We are the Darug people from the Blue Mountains to Sydney in New South Wales, Australia. On my mother's side I am from an unbroken line of women in Prospect, Greater Sydney. We are the original people, the Cannemegal. I am also a direct descendant of the Boorooberongal people of Richmond in Greater Sydney, dating back 50,000 years.[39] Mum has these lines and mixed blood of the Irish and English. On my father's side we are Irish Catholics escaped from Ireland to make Australia home from 1889. Dad's line is from Irish, English, French and Nordic.

My Mother Valerie Burke married my Father Kevin Tobin, and each child was born in a different state in Australia. The first three children were products of the Air Force requirements at the time for postings to be every two years, by the time I came along Dad left the Air Force after sixteen years of service. We drove as a family, me being included in my Mum's womb as she was three months pregnant, down from Darwin Northern Territory (Larrakia) to Ballarat Victoria. Ballarat is part of the Wathaurong Nation, this is where I was born in 1969, mixing with my father's family until thirteen months old, then off we were again to live in Nhulunbuy (Gove) Northern Territory, Yolngu Country.

My musical side was always at home with all of us singing or putting on little plays for our parents, as there was no TV in Nhulunbuy at that time. The eldest sister Leanne would always

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[38] Grace Karskens and Mark McKenna, "Nah Doongh's Song: Grace Karskens and Mark McKenna in conversation," *Aboriginal History* 43 (2019), 12. https://doi.org/10.22459/AH.43.2019.03.
[39] Karskens, *People of the River*, 21-29.

have Chris, Lisa, and myself in character with scripts written, but not for me. I was a toddler; I was there to look cute. Music solo performances of Joni Mitchell's "Both Sides, now" was on the program as Leanne was learning guitar. We lived in Nhulunbuy for two years, then off to Darwin again. One year later, cyclone "Tracy" hit Darwin on Christmas eve, 1974.[40] That drew an end to our family's travel because the next move was our last move as a family from one state to another.

1.8 A Healthy Respect for Nature

The cyclone took a huge toll on my family as we had become bankrupt just weeks before it hit. We had to leave our upstairs house with a breeze way and move into social housing. That move just might have saved our lives. My father when informed of the cyclone approaching made a shelter in the lounge room with an old desk and mattresses against the built-in wardrobe with no door. Prayers of Hail Mary's filling our mouths the whole time. The new house was single story and when the cyclone hit the wires kept the roof on just long enough for the walls to jam with the roof. At that time my father told me he had left his body, saw the walls caving in and thought we would all die together.

When driving around in our damaged car to see what had become of Darwin, we saw our old house, gone with only the downstairs breeze way and laundry still standing in the steel frame of the former house. This was like what June Epstein wrote of in her book *When Tracy came for Christmas.* This story was written for children, it had the house on stilts collapse and the father and son had to take shelter downstairs for protection.[41]

[40] National Museum of Australia Website, "Cyclone Tracy". Accessed 09 of February 2025 at https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/cyclone-tracy.
[41]June Epstein and Kate Fewster, *When Tracy Came for Christmas* (Louis Braille Productions, 1988).

Figure 5. This is the suburb that my family and I lived in at the time of Cyclone Tracy, 1974.[42]

We had to fly out of Darwin due to the state of emergency it was in, and Mum needed to go home to her family. In that year 1974 her sister Lorna and her father both passed away. Mum couldn't make it back for both funerals, it was only natural Mum needed to be with her family. My dad stayed back as an emergency volunteer because of his history in the service. He helped with the dead, as his family were the local undertakers in Ballarat. This was a very influential time for me as a young child, seeing nature in her full rage. When referring to Cyclone Tracy of 1974 it is written, "It left more than 25,000 out of the 47,000 inhabitants of the city homeless prior to landfall and required the evacuation of over 30,000 people."[43] She still lives in Emu Plains.

[42] Darwin suburb of Wagaman. Photo by Laurie Gwynne for the National Museum Australia. Accessed 09 February 2025 at https://digital-classroom.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/cyclone-tracy-hits-darwin
[43] Wikipedia, "Cyclone Tracy". Accessed 29 August 2024 at https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cyclone_Tracy

1.9 Remnants of the Past

I was five when we came down from Darwin. My first introduction into my mother's culture was Mum's family. Great Uncle Teddy Moran was living with Aunty Grace, mum's oldest sister, and her husband in North Parramatta. Great Uncle Teddy Moran was a music guy, and I have great memories of him singing and playing the organ or the mouth organ 'She'll be coming around the mountain when she comes'. I also remember Uncle Ted, as we would call him, playing the cigarette paper over a hair comb. It makes me think this is a transition from the gum leaf to the cigarette paper.

Robin Ryan states, "The leaf actually vibrates more than the lip, producing a tickly feeling as one begins to play".[44] As soon as I read this my head tingled as memories came back to me of the tickling feeling on your lips when the cigarette paper starts to vibrate. This is a very strong memory in my mind of being very young at my Aunty Grace's house in 1975.

Uncle Ted was in a band with his brothers Uncle Billy and Uncle Jimmy. None of them could read and write, but they all could play many instruments. They would swap the squeezebox, the guitar, and the drums around when they got bored. They used to do performance at the Log Cabin on the Dyarubbin (Hawkesbury/Nepean River) in the 1920s. I was given and still have the squeezebox the uncles played.

1.10 Finding a Stable Base

We first rented and then bought a home in Emu Plains. By car it was a good hour's travel, back then on the Great Western Highway to Parramatta and its surrounding areas where mum's families lived. We met Aunty Gloria; mum's sister closest in age, Uncle John Brien and my cousin Karen who helped us get the house in Emu Plains due to family's history of bankruptcy. We would have family gatherings with my Aunties and Uncles and their cousins always around the Parramatta area. One of those cousins was Aunty Glady Smith. Aunty Glady was an extremely gifted psychic and spiritual mentor for me. She would read our jewellery and tell us what would happen for the next 6 months as a Christmas present. I will talk more about Aunty Glady in future chapters as she had a very strong influence on me and still does. Some of the family (usually the older ones like Aunty Glady and Aunty Grace) knew we were Aboriginal, and some didn't. Mum was one who didn't know.

Life in Emu Plains was suburban, middle class, a white catholic up bringing. I went to the local Emu Plains public school then Nepean High School. Life was a bit hard at first, I was bashed as a child in the playground because I was a refugee from Darwin. This led to me going home every lunch time. I was sick in the stomach every week and with the schoolkids' response, it

[44] Robin Ryan, "A Spiritual Sound, a Lonely Sound"*: Leaf Music of Southeastern Aboriginal Australians, 1890s-1990s.* PhD Thesis. (Monash University, 1999), 13. Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://bridges.monash.edu/articles/thesis/_A_spiritual_sound_a_lonely_sound_leaf_music_of_Southeastern_aboriginal_Australians_1890s-1990s/5440717?file=16725797.

created migraines in my stomach which later became migraines in the head. Of course, the trauma from cyclone Tracy also was a very strong factor as well. I ended up being operated on in hospital on my 6th birthday, with the stomach problems and the doctor thinking it maybe cancer which I was grateful it was not, and I still carry the scars. This was also the time I was discovered to be dyslexic. In Darwin I had started school and was a very clever young kindergarten with no signs of dyslexia.

I had an imaginary friend Charlie who was a small Aboriginal boy, and I would eat the small bulbs from what I know now as Christmas or plum puddings (*Romulea rosea*) from the grass at Emu Plains Public School. When talking to an old friend from that time, we both realised that no one told us to do, it we just did, she too found out she is from the Grenfell of Wiradjuri Aboriginal language group from Grenfell, NSW, Australia.

1.11 Darug Link

At the age of 17 in 1986 we came to know that our family was part of the Darug people's families that had been documented at the time of colonisation from what is now Greater Sydney. There were always stories that we may be Aboriginal but when Uncle Kenny Webb rang to ask Mum "Was she Val Burke from Harris Street, Harris Park?" Then our connections grew stronger. This was the start of me going with Mum and Dad to the 'Darug Link' meetings in the 1980s. Darug link was a way to get the families together for a BBQ and to start to meet each other.

Many of the families knew each other growing up but didn't realise they were more than friends. These Darug link gatherings were a great way for the families to meet up with the many from childhood after decades of adult life. Many photos were shared and re-connections with greater understanding of why some knew, and some did not. When I was in Nepean High School more information came out about the family due to the work of Jim Kohen and other family members like the late Aunty June Workman (née Tangy), Uncle Gordon Morten, Uncle Colin Gale and the late Uncle Kenny Webb. A book was written called The Darug and their Neighbours.[45] All were involved with the book, but Jim Kohen is the author.

The late Uncle Kenny Upton stated in an article in The Herald newspaper:

> When I was going to primary school… I remember my mum saying that I should tell them I was Italian or Greek, or anything but Aboriginal." Sometimes he would sit in class, listening to the teachers talk about the 'savages' who had once populated Australia–- and he would get cranky. A few beatings from the school bullies taught him that such conduct was unwise. You learned real quick that you don't go around letting it be known… Even with jobs – if you say you're Aboriginal they think you're lazy or

[45] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours.*

> something. Being Aboriginal became a secret matter, although the identification wasn't necessarily any the weaker.[46]

By 1991, Darug Link was running a course with what was known as University of Western Sydney (UWS) now Western Sydney University which was known as "A Tradition Rediscovered". Some of the people who assisted and supported this were Uncle Jack Gibson (Aboriginal Development Unit, Tranby College) and the late Aunty Joyce Dukes (Pittuma Aboriginal Arts and Crafts Centre, Emerton) with Aunty Jean South and Aunty Janice Dennis from the Aboriginal Liaison Unit at the University of Western Sydney. The aims were as follows:

> 1. To provide education for Darug descendants in the specifics of their traditional culture: the history of Darug resistance: the polices of white society and the contemporary situation, with a view to:
>
> a) Empowering these Darug descendants as advocates and educators for the Darug culture in the broader community:
>
> b) Extending their opportunities through skills development, especially oral skills of public speaking. These skills may then be utilised through paid work opportunities for these people in formal situations, e.g., in speaking at schools, Darug sites and community gatherings about Darug culture and history.
>
> 2. To develop a further course of study based largely on the first course, but designed instead for the broader community, particularly professional groups such as teachers. This course would educate people about the Darug culture and people in order to:
>
> a) Extend the knowledge and understanding of sympathetic and interested people about Koori ways; and'
>
> b) Demonstrate the methods they may employ to redress the imbalanced and racist views which still predominate in white society.[47]

This course now in hindsight was paramount for Darug people for that time. What wonderful foresight of those on the ground, as most of my family are generally shy, because of the racism they received even before it was spoken in our family due to their colour. The educational institutions would look down on your people and you would be told that "Your culture is dead. That ten thousand years of sustainable practice of harmonious movement on Country, has nothing to offer 21st Century". Unfortunately, these comments are still common in today's settings. We the Darug are still standing up for what we believe in and what we know should be known in mainstream society. Linda Tuhiwai Smith writes, "This story of invasion is therefore one of social, cultural, and environmental destruction, the impacts of which have resonated across the generation".[48]

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[46] Wanda Jamrozik, "The vanishing people come together once more," *The Sydney Morning Herald* 1991, 3

[47] Western Sydney University, "A Traditional Rediscovered" course extract, 1991.

[48] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology* (London: Bloomsbury Publishing, 2019).

The Darug continue to try to strengthen their connection to Country since time of colonisation. Many a beautiful soul has helped us along the way one of those souls was Aunty Joyce Dukes.[49] Aunty Joyce was one of the children brought down from Darwin when the bombing of Darwin Harbour happened in 1942.[50] These children removed ended up at Mulgoa mission.[51]Aunty Joyce[52] as a form of respect. By 2023 when she passed, we were honoured to claim her as one of ours. We were able to find one of her family members from the Northern Territory to play the didgeridoo for her. Her family still live in Emu Plains and generations are now born here.

Copies held and returned by Peter Carroll of all the information that was able to be saved were given back to Aunty Edna Watson and her family. Thank you must go to all the families and friends that were involved at this time to the present day. From the 1980s we have just become stronger as a Darug language group. From all our ancestors' ceremonies past through to the present day, these right-intent expressions or actions are constantly strengthening ripples of cause and effect that have helped create the opportunities we have today.

There are tapes of Uncle Kenny Upton and his family speaking. These are very important as Uncle Kenny and his family were a driving force and one of the organisers of Daruk Link, which I have hand deposited in PARADISEC. These tapes are still at a private setting, as information is still being checked for permission to be given to me to make public. These tapes were from Peter Carrol from the early years of Darug Link.[53] I have returned the tapes to the Watson family of the Dharug Custodian Aboriginal Corporation.[54] When I returned the tapes, photos and information, it was told to me that Aunty Edna Watson – the only one left of that generation of that family line – cried when she received her families' voices, pictures and their memories. These are some of the wonderful opportunities that have arisen from this research.

One of the video recordings is of the Welcome to Country for Oodgeroo Noonuccal also known as Kath Walker[55] at Lewers Art gallery, Emu Plains, now known as Penrith Regional Gallery. My mother was asked to do the Welcome, but she is not good at those things and kindly refused. Oodgeroo Noonuccal wrote a poem for Maria Locke and us Darug people. The poem was to say thank you for the Darug hospitality. She travelled to sites with Uncle Kenny and his family sharing culture with each other.

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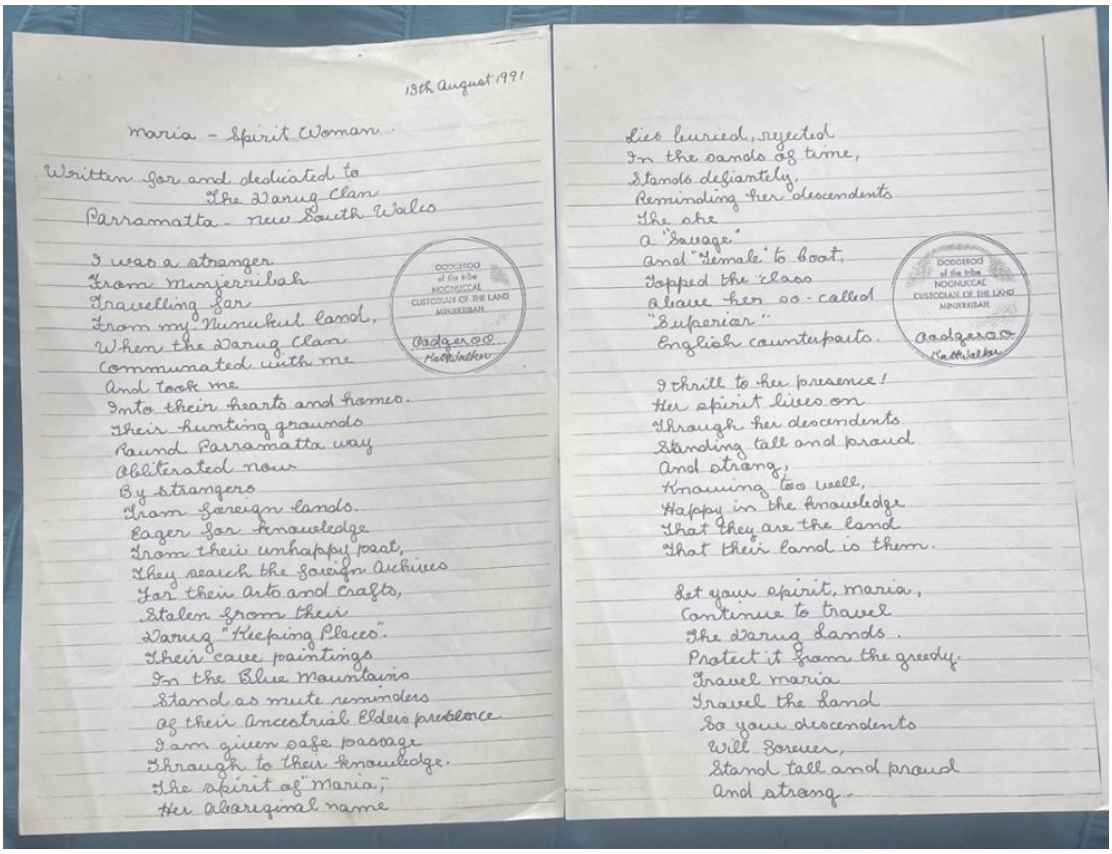
[49] Sydney Morning Herald, Saturday 29 Jan 1949. "Protests at Moving of Half-Castes from Mission Home". Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://trove.nla.gov.au/newspaper/article/18088477.
[50] https://www.awm.gov.au/collection/E84294
[51]A Personal Reflection on Identity, "The Stolen Generations: What does this mean for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children and Young People Today?," *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Education: An Introduction for the Teaching Profession* (2015), 22
[52] Goomeda gin jannawee (Spirit women with me)
[53] Jacinta Tobin (collector), 1990. Jacinta Tobin collection; Collection JT2 at catalog.paradisec.org.au [Closed Access]. http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/JT2
[54] Darug Corporation Website. Accessed 13 February 2025 at https://darugcorporation.com.au/
[55] Noonuccal Oodgeroo and Adam Shoemaker, *Oodgeroo, A tribute* (St. Lucia: Australian Literary Studies, 1994).



13th August 1991

Maria - Spirit Woman

Written for and dedicated to
The Darug Clan
Parramatta - New South Wales

I was a stranger
From Minjerribah
Travelling far
From my Nunukul land,
When the Darug Clan
Communated with me
And took me
Into their hearts and homes.
Their hunting grounds
Round Parramatta way
Obliterated now
By strangers
From foreign lands.
Eager for knowledge
From their unhappy past,
They search the foreign Archives
For their Arts and Crafts,
Stolen from their
Darug "Keeping Places".
Their cave paintings
In the Blue Mountains
Stand as mute reminders
of their Ancestral Elders presence
I am given safe passage
Through to their knowledge.
The spirit of Maria;
Her Aboriginal name
Lies buried, rejected
In the sands of time,
Stands defiantly,
Reminding her descendents
She she
A "Savage"
And "female" to boot.
Topped the class
Above her so-called
"Superiar"
English counterparts.

I thrill to her presence!
Her spirit lives on
Through her descendents
Standing tall and proud
And strong;
Knowing too well,
Happy in the knowledge
That they are the land
That their land is them.

Let your spirit, Maria,
Continue to travel
The Darug Lands.
Protect it from the greedy.
Travel Maria
Travel the Land
So your descendents
Will forever,
Stand tall and proud
And strong.

Figure 6. Maria-Spirit Woman by Oodgeroo Noonuccal (Kath Walker)13th August 1991. Written for and dedicated to The Darug Clan Parramatta, New South Wales.

This was at a time when the now Deerubin Land council was called Darug Land Council. In those times the land council asked for a Welcome to Country by the late Aunty Mavis Halvorson and true respect was given to the Darug people. Below is a quote from the Parramatta Advertiser on the 6th of July 1994. It shows clearly that when we first welcomed the Land Councils, it was because we were working together:

> Representatives of the Daruk and Gandangarra Aboriginal Lands Councils, Darug Link Association and the Gol Gol Aboriginal Group have been invited to the public release of the document by Councillor Chris Worthington, representing Lord Mayor, John Haines, OAM.[56]

I'm grateful and humbled by the foresight of so many and the faith in our Darug people to rise after all that has been done to us, generation after generation. We are the case study required, to see the long-term effects of colonisation and those needing the most work done for Country and all its life forms. We need truth telling from the start of our mixed history and after the "No" vote in the 2023 Referendum for a Constitutionally Enshrined Voice to Parliament, it is obvious that more growth in original ways of thinking is still needed in Australia in the 21st Century. The colonisation effects will be threaded through this thesis as this is my life, not a

[56] *Parramatta Advertiser*, 6 July 1994, 10

career choice. Now it seems that our culture, land and its people are not acknowledged as our land sales have become more valued and profitable than the culture that the land council sits on. Not through fault of their own, land council value systems came from the government requirements and policy of profit before the health and wellbeing of Ngurra.

Figure 7. From the left: my dad, me, Mum next to Aunty Glady with her family at a Darug Link Gathering 1991. My brother Chris Tobin is kneeling on the lower right Corner with our larger Darug connections.

Darug Link ended up divided into two Aboriginal groups, Darug Aboriginal Tribal Corporation and Darug Aboriginal Custodians Corporation. Darug Link produced a book called *Darug and their Neighbours* (1993).[57] This was acknowledging our family connection, and that Mum's families were of the Darug people. At this time, we found out that Yarramundi was recorded as Chief of the Richmond tribe the Boorooberongal, his wife's name is unknown. He had a daughter called Maria we later found her Dharug name Bulunggayi (Bulung is spotted quoll and in inland Darug gayi/gai is belonging too)[58].

In *Darug and their Neighbours* there is my family tree.[59] There are also some of the family's memories of words and old stories of mythological creatures. One that my mother was shown by her mother I will talk about this in a later chapter. Some remembered the names of those creatures and some words remained and were documented in *A Dictionary of The Darug Language* by James Kohen.[60] Some of those families were Aunty June Workman's family which included the Locks from the Blue Mountains, they too belong to the Tangye, Coopers and Webbs, to name a few.

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[57] Kohen, *The Darug and their Neighbours.*
[58] J. L. Kohen, *A Dictionary of the Dharug Language:Tthe Inland Dialect*, 2nd ed. (Seven Hills, N.S.W.?: Blacktown and District Historical Society, 1990).
[59] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours: The Traditional Aboriginal Owners of the Sydney Region*, 166.
[60] J. L Kohen and Blacktown and District Historical Society, *A dictionary of the Dharug language : the inland dialect*, 2nd ed ed. (Blacktown and District Historical Society, 1990).

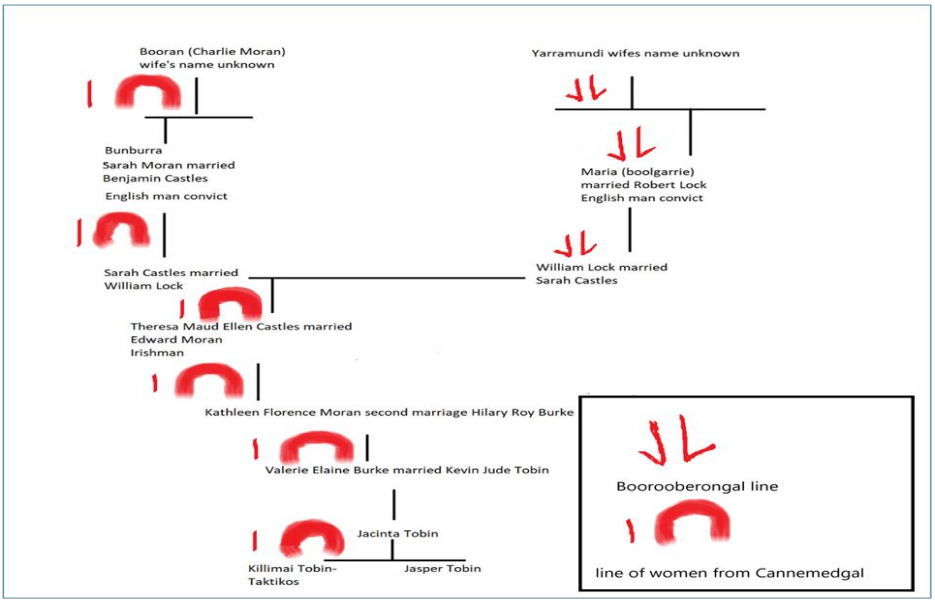


Figure 8. Family tree from the start of colonisation. Notice that there is an unbroken women's line to those ancestors at the start of colonisation. I was the first not to be born in Darug Country from my bloodlines, but my daughter and my son are born in Country again.[61]

Kohen writes about my ancestors Yarramundi and his father Gomebeeree meeting with Governor Phillip on the Hawkesbury River, now known as Yarramundi Lagoon, in 1791. The expedition was accompanied by two coastal guides, Colebee and Balladerry who were able to communicate with the freshwater people and it was noted the different dialects from the colonisers. He refers to Yarramundi's healing nature and shows my family's constant connection with Country. The meeting established the start of a friendly relationship between the Boorooberongal clan of the Darug and the white visitors:

> There was no hostility from either party, and in fact the coastal Aborigines, familiar with the healing power of Yarramundi, who was a koradji, asked him to heal the pain which Colebee had. This pain was result from an old spear wound. Yarramundi sucked the painful area, then withdrew it from his mouth a small stone which he indicated had been the cause of the problem.[62]

I believe our clans knew each other well before colonisation. In Tim Flannery's book, *Watkin Tench's 1788*, he observes that "Colbee himself seemed nevertheless firmly persuaded that he had received relief, and assured us that Yellomundee was a Caradyee, or 'doctor of renown'. And Boladeree added that not only he but all the rest of his tribe were Caradyee of special note and skill".[63] There are mixed reports of good and bad relationships between salt water and

[61] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours.*
[62] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours.*
[63] Tim. Flannery, *Watkin Tench's 1788* (Text Publishing, 2009), 196-97

freshwater people. One must remember that pay back and tribal life was still alive and well with the extra stress of the colonisers.

It was noted by Maria in her letters to the governor that her father, Chief of the Richmond Tribe, took her to the Parramatta Native Institute in 1814. We believe as Darug descendants of Maria's, that man was to be Yarramundi. This is the ancestor I believe, who has guided me since the start of my secondary education. One of the first songs I wrote was called "Yarramundi" from my CD on the history of the family called "Yarramundi and the Four-Leaf Clover". This song was written in response to finding out about the horror and injustice that has been done to my family. The amount of time it takes to sing the song was the amount of time it took to write it. I was in disbelief that as an Australian first fleet convict stock, gold rush ancestor, I didn't know about our Aboriginal history. This really seemed crazy to me and still does 25 years after the fact. Some of the words to the song are as follows:

> Yarramundi used to live at peace in this land
> Around the Hawkesbury he roamed
> This whole place he called home
> And his song lines are still humming on ……
> His people had smallpox, but Yarramundi knew
> He knew the ancient ways
> The secrets aren't dead we can find them in our head
> Yarramundi please lead the way
> Did you understand about energy?
> Did you use your heart with your brain
> You didn't need technology or complexity
> and your pain yeah it still remains[64]

Yarramundi's daughter Boolgarie, known as Maria, made quite an impact on the colonial masters. She was married to Bennelong's son Digidigi, as recorded in the Proceedings of the Legislative Council:

> "Maria married Digidigi Dicky c.1822/23. He was also known as Coke, Thomas Walter, Bennelong's son who was born 1803 and died 31st January 1823. They were both at the first removal of children for the Parramatta "Black Native Institute" 1814 in New South Wales."[65]

I always wonder whether not only did Digidigi and Boolgarie meet at Native Institute, but I theorise that they may have been promised to each before going to school by the fathers

[64] Jacinta Tobin, "Yarramundi and the four leaf clover," (Blue Mountains, NSW: Jacinta Tobin (self published), 2001).
[65] Dixon Library, "Aborigines Question: Report from the Committee on the Aborigines Question, with Minutes of Evidence" Sydney: J. Spilsbury pr. [1838], 56. In Miscellaneous papers regarding the welfare and treatment of Aboriginal Australians, ca. 1816-1842.

Yarramundi and Bennelong. I have heard in community talk that meetings were held between the two. Digidigi was known as one who would work with the colonisers, Fullagar writes:

> But Digidigi's was not, after all that, a story of total assimilation. Just before he died he married a darug-speaking woman called Maria, indicating a commitment to Aboriginal continuation that had been undertaken by his Ancestors for millennia. Even more telling, he appeared to be a vocal advocate for Aboriginal people.[66]

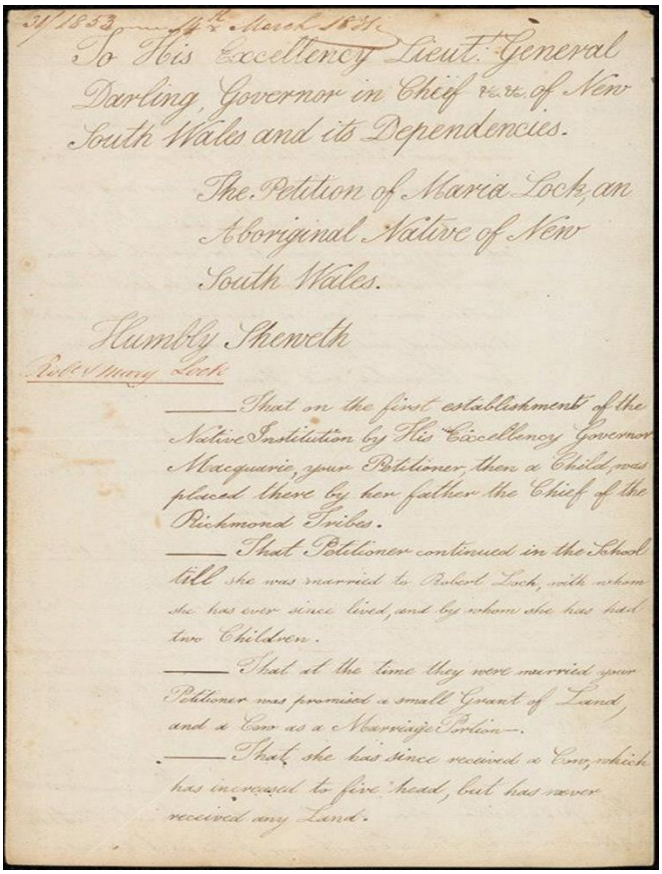
It is wonderful to know that Boolgarie and Digidigi were advocates. This written documentation of my family's constant advocacy work is another point of view and is exactly why I am writing this thesis: to continue the wonderful ways that my family has had to learn to adapt and change with the times.

Due to Digidigi's early death, Boolgarie (Maria) married Robert Lock, a convict allotted to her due to her educational background. This would be known as the first legal marriage of black and white in New South Wales. Robert Lock was allotted to Maria as she was a landowner, and he was still serving his sentence:

> Up until this time there had been few permanent relationships developed between white men and aboriginal women, although casual liaisons had occurred almost from the time the first fleet arrived. This is evident by the number of aboriginal children in Sydney region referred to by titles like 'White Poly' or 'White Johnny'. In 1824 a precedent was set, for on 26th of January the first marriage took place between an Aboriginal and a white man. At St. John's church in Parramatta, Maria married Robert Locke. As a convict he was a sign to his knew Maria married Robert Lock.[67]

There are wonderful letters that Maria wrote to the Governor requesting land as husband and cow both breeding well. Maria could read and write but Robert couldn't.

[66] Kate Fullagar, *Bennelong and Phillip: A History Unravelled*, (New York: Simon & Schuster Australia, 2023), 38.
[67] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours*, 94.



To His Excellency Lieut. General Darling, Governor in Chief &c. &c. of New South Wales and its Dependencies.

The Petition of Maria Lock, an Aboriginal Native of New South Wales.

Humbly Sheweth

Robt & Maria Lock

——That on the first establishment of the Native Institution by His Excellency Governor Macquarie, your Petitioner, then a Child, was placed there by her father the Chief of the Richmond Tribes.

——That Petitioner continued in the School till she was married to Robert Lock, with whom she has ever since lived, and by whom she has had two Children.

——That at the time they were married your Petitioner was promised a small Grant of Land, and a Cow as a Marriage Portion.

——That she has since received a Cow, which has increased to five Head, but has never received any Land.

Figure 9. The letter Maria wrote, held at the State Archives of New South Wales.[68]

From Maria and Robert Lock came their son, William Lock. William married Sarah Ann Castles known as Granny Lock (1847-1933) her father was an English convict named Benjamin Castles, and her mother was a Darug woman, Sarah Moran, of the Warmuli (Cannemegal) clan.[69] Sarah Moran's father was Boorin, Charlie Moran, of Warmuli (Cannemegal) of the Darug language group. Oral history from Cindy Laws says that he is a Koradji of fire. This time must have been hard, and Aunty Glady remembered Granny Lock as a hard woman, who would whip you from her horse if you were playing up. Family oral history indicates that she walked from Eastern Creek to Parramatta to see the arrival of the first train in 1855.[70] These are the stories of the time when the families were dealing with the reality that the English were here to stay and if you are planning on staying in Country you must get used to this new way on Country, either you conformed or died.

[68] Maria Lock's 1831 petition, Colonial Secretary's Letters relating to Land 1826-56. Item No: 2/7908 | Reel No: 1153 | State Archives of NSW.
[69] Australian Royalty: Genealogy of the Colony of NSW Website, "Benjamin Castles." Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://australianroyalty.net.au/tree/purnellmccord.ged/individual/I10555/Benjamin-Castles.
[70] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours*, 86

In the Sydney Dictionary from the State Library, it reiterates this observation:

> There was nothing ordinary about Maria Lock. She was the daughter of an Aboriginal chief; her educational achievements were advanced and her marriage to a British convict was unusual. Indeed, the fact that her convict husband was assigned to her was unique. She also became a landholder which was extraordinary. Lock's achievements throughout her life were remarkable even for a European woman in the nineteenth century, let alone an Aboriginal woman in Sydney.[71]

There were over 100 Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal students in the school anniversary examinations, and she topped it. English was probably one of 5 languages she could communicate in and straight out of the bush. I will explore the scientific aspect of my culture in later chapters.

William was from Boorooberongal and Sarah Castles from Cannemegal people. I surmise this was about keeping the bloodlines connected through kinship. From this marriage came Theresa Lock who married Edward Moran, an Irishman. These are my Great Grandmother and Grandfather on my Mum's mother's side. Theresa or Granny Moran and Grandfather Moran were short people. Grandfather was 4 foot 11 inches and Granny Moran was shorter. Tench recorded that the tallest he recorded was five feet eleven inches.[72] Granny Moran was also known for the famous plum tree which had presents on it for Christmas. These are the stories we are told about our family which help us understand our habit and traits as Darug people.

The land that Granny Moran was born on would have been the land at Plumpton on Richmond Road. Kohen states:

> A subsequent court case determined that the Lock family had forfeited its right to the land when they moved away from it, although it is clear that they were forced to move away. This decision seems strange indeed, since the original grant to Colebee by Governor Macquarie had stated "His heirs and assigns to have and to hold for ever." This may have been the wish of Governor Macquarie, but not the wish of the Aborigines Protection Board.[73]

My Grandmother Kathleen Florence Burke (née Moran) was a child of Edward and Theresa Moran. My Nan realised that she would speak little of her Aboriginality to keep her family safe. Nan knew of course who we were but was told "don't make waves and keep your head down". The women also knew never leave the house without your face on. This was plain white flour used as make up, to look whiter so as not to draw attention to yourself. By this stage of the game the removal of children was common, and laws were in place to exterminate Aboriginal culture from the psyche of mainstream Australia.

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[71] The Dictionary of Sydney Website, "Maria Lock". Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://dictionaryofsydney.org/entry/lock_maria.
[72] Flannery, *Watkin Tench's 1788*, 244.
[73] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours*, 120.

Granny Lock moved into the Harris Street group of terraces and died the year Mum was born in 1933. These were the terraces that housed many families on Harris Street, Harris Park. It is told that card games were played on Tuesdays with the women at Nan's home. Why Tuesday? Maybe that was the day when not so much drama from the influences of the modern world was plaguing the family. I wonder if this was a time that the women could get together and share information on what was going on where. Keeping those secrets and knowledge a closed affair.

My mother was born on Harris Street, Harris Park delivered by nurse Fritz, midwife who also delivered non-indigenous babies I speculate that my Nan wasn't encouraged to go the hospital or knew that the treatment she would receive wouldn't be worth it. This reminds me of the story I heard from Janelle Evans,[74] another Darug woman about how she was born on the veranda of the hospital on a wheelchair because of the service her mother received. Mum came out very fair and no more talk of Aboriginality was allowed to be spoken from that time on. In Mum's case to be too white you would have been removed. This action was due to the Aborigines Protection Board that would come and get her because she would be too white to be in an Aboriginal family. Peter Read speaks of these knowings in this book A *Rape of the Soul so Profound*. He states, "They include Joy Williams, baffled as to why she was taken from her mother and sent to a non-Aboriginal institution until she obtained the chilling committal notice- 'Reason for admission: a fair skinned child to be taken from association with Aborigines'".[75]

Mum remembers hiding with the dog from the rent man in his black car. According to Aunty Joan Cooper who was born too in Harris Street, Harris Park as was Aunty Betty Lock, both Darug women would say to me, "that was not just the rent man, that was the Aborigines Protection Board".

Aunty Joan and Aunty Betty would tell me stories as I would drive them to places in the 2000s, they relayed a story of what it was like living at Parramatta. The Aunties had made a beautiful "wogga" or quilt from all the old clothes and under wear, and when the Aboriginal Protection man saw it, they removed it from their possession. This is our history in this nation.

It was hard days in Parramatta back then. Aunty Lorna, Mum's sister, was taken to the Female Factory. These stories were explored in the recent book, *Parragirls: Reimagining Parramatta Girls Home through Art and Memory*.[76] It's very sad to think how much is hidden of our past from history books to our own families. Mum ended up leaving school at 14 years of age. Mum joined the Women's Royal Australian Air Force the WRAAF in 1954. That's where Mum and Dad met at Bankstown/Regents Park Depot 2SD, the Royal Australian Air Force RAAF base. Some of the family did join the different forces because of a better life experienced, more equality and prospects than what was happening at home at the time.

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[74] Personal Communication, Janelle Evans, December 2021.
[75] Read, Peter. *A Rape of the Soul So Profound: The Return of the Stolen Generation* (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2020). https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003137313.
[76] "L Hibberd et al., "Parragirls: Remagining Parramatta Girls Home through art and memory," (New South Wales, 2019).

There are also stories that we are related to Burke from Burke and Wills, well-known explorers from Australian's early colonial days.[77]

An interesting side note that when I was growing up in Emu Plains, I went to Brownies and then Girl Guides. This was at a time when you could carry a knife on your Girl Guides belt. I was in two different sixes at brownies, one Moora Mooras and the other Tookonies (see figure 10 badges).[78] I always wonder where these words came from and where are those stories of these fairly-like folk. The tunes of those two groups are still in my memory and I could sing them to you today after 40 years past. Looking and reflecting, my language and culture were always around me and shaping me through time.

Moora Moora Song
We're Moora Mooras, happy and bright
Trying hard to do what's right

Moora Mooras are nice fairies, who help all bush creatures. Moora Mooras look out for young kangaroos who may have accidentally fallen out of the pouch of their mother.

Tookonies Song
We're Australian bush land brownies
bright and helpful we're Tookonies

Tookonies are fairy folk. They are a plant spirit, and they love looking after growing things. They live at the top of eucalyptus trees.

Figure 10. Two badges that I received as a child in Brownies in the 1970s. Sixes refers to the patrol which generally had six members. The patrol leader was referred to as a 'sixer'.

[77] When records to prove this connection were searched for, those who went couldn't find the paperwork, the church in Ireland having been burnt so no records were found just family memories of the Burkes at the time.
[78] Girl Guides Ballarat Website. Accessed 04 September 2024 at https://girlguidesballarat.org.au/resources/history-of-girl-guides/brownie-guides/

1.12 Colour of the Skin

Figure 11. A personal photo from 1980s showing the colour difference in family. From left to right: Aunty Grace, myself, Aunty Gloria and my Mum. This photo was taken at Windang Caravan Park, NSW

I know that the family would hang with the other Darugs. Aunty Joan Cooper and Aunty Betty Lock would talk about my Uncle Roy (William Roy Burke) as racey Roycee because of his love for women, or my Aunty Grace (Hillary Grace Burke) as muggy because of her bad legs from poliomyelitis. Also, Aunty Lorna as a protector of all children who they knew would bash anyone who hurt them, even though Aunty Lorna was a little woman. Uncle Kenny Webb would tell me about Aunty Lorna and how he had a crush on her. These stories I knew were evidence of our connection to the other families. But these stories from other Darug families were told to me in my late twenties in the early 2000s when I started to work with our local communities.

I taped Aunty June Workman talking for some Parramatta research called “Dharug Nation Past Future and in Reconciliation” in 2009.[79] The video recordings were commissioned by Reconciliation for Western Sydney Inc. In this recording, Aunty June talked about her daughter Leanne and herself looking for the names of the families but having lots of trouble due to the nick names. I was told that the nick names were a safety practice for family, because if the Aboriginal Protection Board people would call, they would ask for the name on the birth

[79] Parramatta City Council, “Dharug Nation Past Future and In Reconciliation, by Reconciliation of Western Sydney Inc.”, Parramatta Heritage Stories and Research Fund, NSW, 2007.

certificate. Then the family knew that they did not know the family member personally. This made a lot of sense to me and makes me sad too.

Aunty Glady, Aunty Grace and the older family members knew we were Aboriginal and Aunty Glady practiced it in her own way. Being in the Northern Territory, Mum would say we are too fair to identify, but for my cousins who were darker everything started to make sense. Aunty Grace's boys would constantly be bullied at school, this is why so many are shy. Even today my children are constantly questioned on their Aboriginality. They can identify as any other race in the world, but as soon as you say Aboriginal everyone wants to know what percentage you are. Maybe we as the original people should be questioning what percentage are they Australian?

We started to ask Mum more about what she may have known because it was always Dad's side of the family that we knew the most about. I would ask Mum before we knew, "Where does your side of the family come from?" and she would say Australian. I'd say "Yes, but where from?" and Mum would say Irish, and maybe some Spanish or Māori. The Spanish and the Māori would be said to explain the colour of the other cousins.

I have noticed from other cousins that society's treatment of those who still carry the colour means they are more likely to feel racism the hardest. This knowing can create a denial with other Aboriginal people of the fair skins being not worthy of identifying, which can hurt many of us who look like Irishmen or Englishmen. Sometimes I wonder if the national Anthem is about rubbing our faces in it by singing advance Australia fair. I think of the Immigration Restriction Act of 1901. This Act was known as the White Australia Policy.[80] The policy stopped any immigration of darker skin into the Country supporting the real colonial idea of Australia as a purely white nation. This also gives the background knowledge of the colonisers mating with us to breed the colour out, which was noted at time of colonisation. But as my family says, you can take the girl out of Parramatta, but you can't take Parramatta out of the girl.

Aunty Chris Burke (23 April 1953 to 20 January 2016) is my mother's brother's daughter. Even though Chris had fair skin she was not going to be deterred. Chris was the cousin that discovered our family's history when I was about 15 years of age. There was lots of talk made about it, when looking at some of the cousins' features. Some were happy to know, others were very resistant to our Aboriginal connections. Chris asked Aunty Grace and Aunty Glady if they knew of our connection to the Aboriginals of Sydney, they both knew. They were asked to keep quiet about it due to the skin colour. Since Chris found out, then they had nothing to hide. This was in the 1980s and because the secret was out, they started to talk, that's when Darug Link[81] contacted us.

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[80] National Museum Australia Website, "End of White Australia Policy". Accessed 02 September 2024 at https://www.nma.gov.au/defining-moments/resources/end-of-whit-australia-policy.

[81] History of Aboriginal Sydney Website, "June Workman Nee Tandy Starts Darug Link". Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://historyofaboriginalsydney.edu.au/west/june-workman-nee-tandy-starts-darug-link

1.13 Conclusion

This is a very personal, auto-ethnographic thesis which is who I am as a Darug woman of the Blue Mountains and Greater Sydney. I have tried to keep all the different people's names in with their permission, as like those of the past who have documented us, we are now documenting ourselves. I need to bring you into my circle, into my ontology of the world as a decolonial response to a colonial curriculum, but I know this a very different a long-winded way compared to song. This thesis is a song belonging to Country and Country is ancient in time. The protocols were set long before the creation of this form of education came to this Country. I will follow those protocols and respect for the knowledge gained, all the way through this thesis to the best of my abilities, for Country, my ancestors and descendants to come.

2. Literature review

Conceptual Framework (influential ideas)

On the individual baggi marri (many skins), you can see some holes have already been made through my history and what you, the reader, have read as an introduction. The skins have now been dried and tanned, with the holes of the stretching process complete. The colour of the white, gold and blue ochre has been laid down with the ripples of my parent's places of connection combined with mine are created as concentric circles. That is the start of this possum skin, it is its own Songspiral.[82]

I will create more holes in my skin with the needle from the burru (Kangaroo) bone. With the new holes created, my thread can pass through. These holes are influential ideas, creating a greater picture of deeper respect and perspective of the complexity of layers, required to comprehend when looking at songline repair. Each literature reference is as different as their research outcomes, yet each hole will need to be joined through a common thread throughout the chapters to come. Each will have a connection to the bigger cloak required, so you can sit on these ideas and wingarra (think and feel deeply).

Each new hole is a representation of the literature written from a non-indigenous point of view. The opposite pelt with its holes being created must align with the other side of the other skins. The hole are the Indigenous responses. This is the "right to reply"[83] brought into this literature review and future chapters. By allowing many different responses to current and past literature, I will create more space in academia for the other, outside, Indigenous voices to tell their side of history and the current environment we have found ourselves in. This is to fill some of gaps that have been left due to colonisation of the curriculum. I will tell my side of a 250 years' history of heartache and misunderstandings. I will bring greater knowledge of these two sides of the coin, an approach to create dreams for a better future for generations to come.

2.1 The Right to Reply to the Colonial Records

This thesis is a Darug worldview and explores relevant publications and research on the effects of colonisation and how our past affects Songline repair in the 21st Century. The first lot of literature examples concern the colonial aspects of Australia's past. Two of these sources to be explored are from Karskens' books *The Colony* and *People of the River*.[84] With her collection of historical documents placing names and events in the original words of the people of the time, Karskens shows how Australia has become the place it is today, with its underlying racism and class systems that are hangovers from colonial masters.

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[82] Gaw'yu Group of Women, *Songspirals.*
[83] Indigenous Archives Collective "The Indigenous Archives Collective Position Statement on the Right of Reply to Indigenous Knowledges and Information held in Archives."
[84] Grace Karskens, *The Colony: A History of Early Sydney* (Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2010); *People of the River.*

People of the River was a challenging book for me to read. Karskens has used historical literature with its obvious biased language of the times. This is a very close-to-the-bone historical account in which Karskens reflects a history of my ancestry. Conversations about the land you were brought up on, written history books, that you didn't know yourself. This comes with a deep sorrow in my heart for the tragic stories told of my family's brutal invasion. Reading through the language of the time, trying to comprehend what my family had to live through. Seeing the background of colonial mentality and its generational effects still rippling through every aspect of society today.

I received an insight, and a bigger picture view of how European last names first came into my families' Country. It gave me a deeper knowledge of street names, parks and suburbs in the place I called home. The coloniser family names that Karskens refers to are people who I knew of growing up in those families that had been given a new start in life in my ancestral lands. These families were given land to be used and do with as they pleased.[85]

I had to put the book down a few times due to the distress from page after page. From the language used about my family, to the abuse of the people, Country, and our waterways. Our powerless predicament used against us, chained and shackled with no means to protect the environment and our larger family. So much love, time and effort that was put into our landscape and waterways was destroyed. The colony was ignorant to the long-term effects of such thoughtless actions. More open-minded writers such as Victor Steffensen[86], Pascoe[87], Pawu-Kurlupurlurnu[88], supported by non-indigenous writers like [89] are bringing their knowledge of the wonderful land management that has happened all over Australia pre-colonisation. I will explore more of these writers in Chapter 7.

Through Australian history there are the land grants given and parcelled out to the colony, yet my people received little. Kohen refers to letters that Maria Lock had written, requesting land:

> In March 1831, she wrote to Governor Darling that she be given the land which had belonged to her brother, Colebee, the land which he had shared with Nurragingy since Macquarie's grant in 1816."

Kohen goes on to recall the wording of the letter stating, "That at the time they were married your Petitioner was promised a small Grant of Land and a Cow as a Marriage Portion".[90] Maria

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[85] Wendell Cox, *Demographia International Housing Affordability*, Chapman University (Frontier Centre for Public Policy, 2024), 9. https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2023/11/29/these-are-the-worlds-most-expensive-cities.
[86] Victor Steffensen, "Fire country: How Indigenous fire management could help save Australia," (CSIRO Publishing, 2020).
[87]Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Aboriginal Australia and the birth of agriculture*, New edition. ed. (Broome, Western Australia: Magabala Books, 2018).
[88] Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes, and Box, *Ngurra-kurlu: A Way of Working with Warlpiri people*.
[89] Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Crows Nest, N.S.W: Allen & Unwin, 2012).
[90] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours*, 95.

didn't get her own land as promised but consequently received her brother's land Colebee who had died. By the 1920s our family were being moved off the land. Kohen continues:

> A subsequent court case determined that the Lock family had forfeited its right to the land when they moved away from it, although it is clear that they were forced to move away. This decision seems strange indeed, since the original grant to Colebee by Governor Macquarie had stated "His heirs and assignes to have and to hold for ever." This may have been the wish of Governor Macquarie, but not the wish of the Aboriginal Protection Board.[91]

My oral history claims that's how Granny Lock ended up at Harris Street, Harris Park. The year she passed, in 1933, my Mum was born on Harris Street in the terraces.

Map 2. People of the River: Parish of Castlereagh, 1833, showing the 1803-04 land grants along the Nepean River and Macquarie's later planned town of Castlereagh.[92]

Map 2 shows just one section of Darug Ngurra that was cut up and given without consent from the rightful custodians of Greater Sydney. In turn the people of the Country became their servants, renters, and taxpayers. As Traditional Owners it is hard to stay in Country due to the cost of living. According to Wendell Cox in the *Demographia International Housing*

[91] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours,* 120.
[92] State Records and Archives of New South Wales**,** 182-3.

Affordability Survey, I live in the second-most severely unaffordable English-speaking city in the world.[93]

Imagine finding yourself in the place where your family has lived for tens of thousands of years yet priced out of the land that was stolen from your family. This is the frustration of my family at the lack of land and housing given to the Darug people. We are some of the original Aboriginal Families who were hunted, raped, poisoned and robbed. The English broke its own laws when coming to Australia to colonise, that is why the talk of *terra nullius*. It was a justification of taking the land while creating a silence in our Australian history of the traditional owners of Greater Sydney.

Langton and Corn state, "Terra nullius was a fiction of imperial laws developed during the British Empire's expansion across the globe. The term means "Land belonging to no one".[94] Bennelong at the start of colonisation let Governor Phillip know of the different clan names and areas of belonging. Mel-Mel, now known as Goat Island, was part Wanngal clan land. It was Bennelong's Island, noted in Paul Irish's book *Hidden in Plain View.*[95] How we have allowed this notion that the land belonged to no one is absurd, when it is clearly stated in many different references.

Gideon Lang clearly stated this his 1865 publication:

> Every tribe occupies its own territory, which is as distinctly defined as any estate in England and is on no account encroached upon by any stranger, unless upon pain of death; and I have known death to be inflicted in such a case without the smallest hesitation or compunction [96.]

Jimmy Shepard was recorded by Frank Walford on the story of Orphan Rock in Leura, Blue Mountains. In this story it states, "Now there was a law among all tribes, that its members should not enter the area of another tribe. There was room for all. And by each remaining in its own territory, friction was avoided".[97]

The family not only lost access to the rich riverbanks for yams, but due to the lack of sustainable practice and the wastefulness of barbaric hunting practice for pleasure, it created a huge gap in accessibility of bush tucker. I know from oral conversation with Gundungurra people that Billy Lynch came to Katoomba because of this exact reason. That loss of access to traditional trading

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[93] Cox, "Media Release".
[94] Marcia Langton and Aaron Corn, *First Knowledges Law: The Way of the Ancestors* (La Vergne: Thames & Hudson Australia Pty Ltd, 2023), 11.
[95] Paul Irish, *Hidden in Plain View* (Sydney: University of New South Wales Press, 2017).
[96] Gideon S Lang, *The Aborigines in Australia, in Their Original Conditions, and with Their Relations with the White Men: A Lecture.* (Wilson & Mackinnon, 1865), 5
[97] Frank Walford, *Legends of the Blue Mountains Valleys*: *Wentworth Falls, New South Wales.* (Den Fenella Press, 1882). 2003 ed., 14.

routes and the fencing coupled with foreign farming practice lead the families into urban existence.[98] In *The Colony*, Karskens writes:

> In this book the narratives of town-building, rural settlements and environmental responses are encircled by histories of the Aboriginal people of Sydney. Of all the rich and gripping stories of what happened in the Sydney region after 1788, these are the most astonishing and the most poignant. It is time to shake off the idea that Sydney was a "white" city, that Aboriginal people simply faded out of the picture and off the "stage of history"; it is simply untrue. The time has come, too, to recognise that Aboriginal people became urban people very quickly.[99]

2.2 The Lack of Freedom to Access Sites of Significance

The more I study, the more I see the hypocrisy of our Australian history and what happened to the Darug people. Our ancestral birth rights to travel through and stay on the land were removed. Not just through the use of guns and fences but also the Aboriginal Protection Boards requirements. People could only regain certain freedoms by being granted an "exemption", known as the old dog tags (Figure 12).

Figure 12. "Moruya Elder Aunty Dorrie Moore has kept her father Walter Davis's Certificate of Exemption, issued by the Aboriginal Welfare Board in

[98] Personal communication, Aunty Lyne Stanger, 2000s.
[99] Karskens, *The Colony*, 12.

> 1957, in recognition of its significance as a symbol of a time of social and political transformation in Australia."[100]

A Certificate of Exemption issued by the Aboriginal Welfare Board in 1957.The certificate above, commonly referred to as a 'Dog Tag' even by those granted exemption themselves, released the identified person from the constraints of the provisions of the Aborigines Protection Act (1943). New privileges bestowed upon them included the right to drink alcohol, the right to leave the state, the right to receive a pension (my grandfather was denied a war pension or government benefits of any kind until 1956) and, importantly, if not explicitly, the right of the agency to retrieve stolen children and potentially shelter your family against future intervention by the Board[101] .

My people's movement was at the whim of the Protection Board and the colonial masters. To stay with Country was a big sacrifice for our cultural practice and growth. Many of our ancestors were forced to disidentify to keep their family together due to fear of children's removals. Denis Foley speaks of this reality in his book *What the Colonisers Never Knew*.[102] He also goes on to say in his paper "Too black to be white and too white to be black",[103] that many fair skin Aboriginal children will not identify.

Yet we are encouraged with words from Jack Brooks, stating:

> It is ironic, but undeniable, that the agents of death and destruction over the lands of the Dharug were, in the final analysis, the salvation of the dwindling local Aboriginal community. Without the uniting of a number of black and white people there would be scarcely a soul today who could proudly claim to be of Dharug stock.[104]

2.3 Recordings of Heritage Sites and the Jigsaw Puzzle of Re-connection with the Help of Kin

Due to colonisation many were not able to travel in Country freely, so how do the Darug people continue their cultural practices? For some of the Darug people, we have little information on sites and rely heavily on the work of others who have access to knowledge of them. There are a lot of Aboriginal people from other areas coming into Country and recording. Some are teachers and hold kin with other Darug people. Kin is a relationship of mutual respect: they share deep knowledge with each other that crosses boundaries of language. This interconnection

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[100] ABC News Website, "Right Wrongs". 2023. Accessed 27 February 2025 at https://www.abc.net.au/rightwrongs/story/dog-licence/.
[101] Australian Museum Website. "Stolen Generations". Accessed 04 September 2024 at https://australian.museum/learn/first-nations/stolen-generations/
[102] Dennis Lance Gordon Foley and Peter Read, *What the Colonists Never Knew: A History of Aboriginal Sydney*, Canberra, ACT: National Museum of Australia Press, 2020).
[103] Dennis Foley, "Too white to be black, too black to be white," *Social alternatives* 19, no. 4 (2000).
[104] Brook, *Shut Out from the World: The Hawkesbury Aborigines Reserve and Mission 1889-1946* (Seven Hills, N.S.W: J. Brook, 1994). 9.

across Ngurra (Country) with those whose practices have not been interrupted as much as the Darug come with those ancient knowings. These relationships are rare and should be recognised. Recently one who shared much has passed and the Darug did the "Welcome" and spoke at his funeral with the same respect and love as one of our own. These relationships are important for information exchange and growth in cultural best practice.

Val Attenbrow[105] has recorded so many sites in Sydney. This fastidious recording has helped us as Countrymen and women to use her archaeological recordings to piece back together our Country's story through the carvings and living areas. This is a ground map of songs and sites of connection where regular ceremonies would be held.

In most of the recording of sites a Darug presence is missing. This creates a huge gap in understanding of these sites because Ngurra Barayagai (Song Belonging to Country) is wanting its people to connect again. Ngurra Barayagai is for those of Country who are given responsibilities and in further chapters we will show that this approach is now changing and becoming inclusive of the Darug people.

Other recorders of our site's information and photos are Eugene Stockton[106], Kelvin Knox[107] and Will Moon.[108] They also have recorded many of our sites. Wayne Brennan,[109] a Kamilaroi man who is currently writing his Doctorate with The University of Sydney, is one of our Aboriginal community people. He has walked the Blue Mountains for 40 years and has shared insights into some of our places in the Mountains. I will cover these archaeologists more in Chapters 6 and 7, as I had the pleasure of working with these gentlemen. They have a love for the mountains and that is why they have recorded so many sites. Because of the work they do, they have a greater insight when they talk about our Country and belief systems of its Original inhabitants.

Kelvin Knox reflects on sites in the Blue Mountains:

> My experience and impression as an amateur archaeologist is that a much greater effort now takes place to involve Aboriginal people in heritage work. Their stories and traditions can survive and receive protection through recourse to archaeology. On this, I am reminded of Wayne Brennan's philosophy and practise in Aboriginal archaeology: "Recognise the owners, build and maintained respect, act with responsibility and seek reciprocity.[110]

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[105]Val Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past: Investigating the Archaeological and Historical Records*, 2nd ed., (Sydney: UNCW Press, 2010).
[106] Eugene Stockton and John Merriman, *Blue Mountains Dreaming: The Aboriginal Heritage*, 2nd ed. (Lawson, N.S.W: Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, 2009).
[107] Kelvin Knox and Eugene D Stockton, "Aboriginal Heritage of the Blue Mountains: Recent Research and Reflections," (Lawson, NSW: Blue Mountain Education and Research Trust, 2019).
[108] Wayne Brennan, Kelvin Knox, and Will Moon, Linden Ridge "Rock Art Recording Project - Echidna Site" (Heritage and Spatial Pty Ltd, 2021).
[109] Paul SC Taçon et al., "Assessment of the aboriginal cultural heritage values of the greater Blue Mountains world heritage area," Unpublished Report for the Department of Environment and Water Resources (2007).
[110] Knox and Stockton, "Aboriginal Heritage of the Blue Mountains: Recent Research and Reflections," 219

And Eugene Stockton States:

> Such a religion was thoroughly earth-based. The land and its inhabitants had been created by Dreaming events of the ancestral spirits, which came to rest at the sacred sites, whence their creative power still emanates.

He goes on to say:

> This equilibrium is assured through specific individuals, in complex kin networks, taking responsibility for regenerating the spiritual forces which reside in the sites with which they are identified. [111]

This is a clear statement that shows that our non-indigenous people can still experience and sense something of great importance in those areas. Only when the Darug and others walk together in Country will the gaps of knowledge lessen. This is what Knox and Brennan refer to because at the end of the day there is very little written from a Darug point of view. Even when books are written about our Country, its history or our people, very few come to us as the Traditional Owners to ask, "Is this ok?" Or "What do you think?" This lack of relationship has been very persistent in so much written in the past.

The works of Kate Fullagar,[112] Jim Smith,[113] Dianne Jonson[114] James Kohen[115], and Jack Brook[116] are all part of this research. These written words are from non-indigenous people who have and are writing about my history, family and Country. They are professionals in their fields. Some have become very close to our families. Kohen and Jonson were recording the family when those now passed remembered language and stories. We share a common interest either in our history or our Country. Many times, it is our pecked, or carved sites that are recorded the most, which has left a gap in recording or even seeing our women's processing areas in mapping Country. I will cover seeing Country further in my field notes and lived experience within Chapters six and seven.

2.4 Relationship with Country

This research has shown me that so much more work is required to fully put in place strong sustainable systems that enable 21st Century Original people of Greater Sydney to have access and continual connections with other original Country men and women to practice their ceremonial responsibilities in culturally safe places relevant to Country songline requirements.

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[111] Eugene Stockton, *Blue Mountains Dreaming*, 240.
[112] Fullagar, *Bennelong and Phillip.*
[113] Jim Smith, *Aboriginal Legends of the Blue Mountains* (Wentworth Falls, N.S.W: J. Smith, 1992).
[114] Dianne Johnson, *Sacred Waters: The Story of the Blue Mountains Gully Traditional Owners*, (Rushcutters Bay, N.S.W: Halstead Press, 2007).
[115] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours.*
[116] J. Brook, *Shut out from the World*..

In *First Knowledges Law*, Marcia Langton ad Aaron Corn describes the Speaking Homelands and areas of significance:

> This sense of living in coexistent relationships with other species and ancestors is rich with significance and meaning to indigenous people, irrespective of whether they are now traditional owners of a remote homeland or major city. Places have their own agency. They speak, and the ancestral beings within them are agents in the spiritual encounters that living people have with them.[117].

As a Darug descendant and a woman of Country I am grateful to learn more about the ancientness in the Country I grew up on and the shared deep history that connects Country and its people. For example, learning more about the Dyarubbin (Nepean River) being a waterway since the time of Gondwana when all the land mass was one:

> Dyarubbin, the Hawkesbury-Nepean River, has the deepest history of all, running vast and wild when Australia was still part of the supercontinent Gondwana more than 90 million years ago.[118]

I remember the Dyarubbin being mined at Emu Plains and then Castlereagh. I would swim across it as a form of exercise and jumping off ropes when there were big old trees on the banks. I grew up in Emu Plains from the age of five.

2.5 Hearing the Voices of Country Men and Women

I have also chosen our indigenous writers, Country men and women like Liz Cameron[119] and Richard Green, who speak of the ancestors and land still giving messages to its' people through signs and signals or dreams and intuition.

Green and Oppliger discuss their process of developing Dharug language classes. They explain about the issues of linguistic structure, but what I find the most interesting are their three questions:

> How does the land teach people and speak to people?
> What is the place of stories in Law and learning?
> Who gave them that right?[120]

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[117] Langton and Corn, *First Knowledges Law*, 45
[118] Karskens, *People of the River*.
[119] Cameron, "Australian Indigenous sensory knowledge systems in creative practices."
[120] Richard Green and Amanda Oppliger, "The Interface Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Systems of Knowing and Learning: A Report on a Dharug Language Programme," *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* 36, no. S1 (2007), 82. https://doi.org/10.1017/S1326011100004749.

These questions will be further examined in Chapters 4 and 5, which explore language and song. Green describes how you are selected through cultural roles and how the land protects you and connects you to its requirements:

> For centuries Dharug people have walked the land - have established walking lines and songlines. These lines are interconnected with language and lore with the sky and the Earth. As the language is brought up once again (revitalised and spoken) the energy of the land is being brought back up creating a cause and effect.[121]

What is referred here is the knowing of interconnection of frequency in Ngurra. Experiments of Chowdhury and Gupta given similar results.[122] Plants that are talked to or receive certain music grow better, so does Ngurra.

It was pointed out to me by Mulgo (Black Swan) aka Leanne Watson,[123] a Darug woman involved with the Dyarubbin project,[124] that some of the words of the river are body parts, which make sense when you think everything is alive. We now can see again the river as a living entity. As Anne Poelina and her people too see the life force that is the river. Both Nations share a dream for healthier waterways. She states, “We send the Dream out for the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Watershed, a living ancestral serpent being, to continue to have the right to life, to live and flow”.[125]

The gap in most literature is the language of Ngurra; connecting with it through signal and signs as part of a collective living universe. Signs and signals are noted by Green and Oppliger as they witness the process of connecting to Ngurra that strengthens their students. These deeper connections require a leap of faith that Ngurra can hear you and your request for a signal, or a sign will be shown. The students are engaging with Country and Country is engaging back, they state:

> Also, recently some Year 7 boys came into the Culture Room, where Dharug language lessons are conducted, and went directly to look out the window to see which birds had come to join and confirm us. These students were listening to the land. They were expecting the land and the animals on it to speak to them. The children are leading the way in their openness to embrace an Indigenous worldview and way of learning.[126]

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[121] Green and Oppliger, “The Interface Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Systems of Knowing and Learning: a Report on a Dharug Language Programme,” 83.
[122] Anindita Roy Chowdhury and Anshu Gupta, “Effect of Music on Plants – An Overview," *International Journal of Integrative sciences, Innovation and Technology* 4, no. 6 (2015).
[123]Personal. Communications, Leanne Watson, 2 March 2024.
[124]NSW Government Website, “Dyarubbin: Mapping Aboriginal history, culture and stories of the Hawkesbury River, New South Wales”. Accessed 30 March 2024 at https://portal.spatial.nsw.gov.au/portal/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=82ae77e1d24140e48a1bc06f70f74269#
[125] Anne Poelina, Magali McDuffie, and Marlikka Perdrisat, “Martuwarra Fitzroy River Watershed: One Society, one river law," *PLOS water* 2, no. 9 (2023), 15. https://doi.org/10.1371/journal.pwat.0000104.
[126] Green and Oppliger, "The Interface Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Systems of Knowing and Learning: a Report on a Dharug Language Programme," 84-85.

Green is giving an insight into how some of us, not all Aboriginal people, use these ways of communication. The vibration of the Country where the vibration was first made is reflected in the language of the people, who in turn speak and sing that vibration back to Ngurra. Green reports that a light infuses you and confirms you as you write songs and learn language. He is of the opinion that if you are willing to listen and be open to the spirit of the land, you can be healed and taught by it.[127]

Indigenous academics are standing for their own knowing and teachings as valued forms of education with deeper vision and a holistic point of view. Kakkib Li'Dthia Warrawee'a from the Ya-idt'midtung language group of alpine south-eastern Australia, speaks of the knowledge of relationality that everything is relevant, like cause-and-effect principles. When talking about medicine and health, particularly the lack of holistic approaches to health, he says:

> Considering the physical, psychological, socio-environmental, and spiritual is holism. Some physicians will say that we must place emphasis on the spiritual because of its sanctity. No. Not so. You cannot have a glass of water without the glass—nor without the water: Every element of the holistic equation is as important as the other. As one can see that without our truly holistic approach much is lost.[128]

What Kakkib Li'Dthai Warrawee'a is saying that all aspects are required. Even the thing that carries your water has the right to be included when thinking of the outcome desired. This I translate to Country and Songlines, that those first movements through Country are still present. There are Songlines from ants to whales, from fire and water, how some soil came to be or how the stars form in the sky. Keeping that in mind, all is relevant, and a holistic approach is the only way to approach Aboriginal culture.

Mary Graham is a Kombu-Merri person through her father's heritage and a Wakka Wakka clan through her mother's heritage, whose writings and video lectures have influenced this thesis. Graham brings a cultural strength and encouragement to Indigenous and non-indigenous people, the deeper knowledge that we are not alone. Graham speaks about the knowledge that we are not alone in her paper "Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews".[129] Maintaining relationship with Country and all its' forms of life is of prime importance. Graham is talking about the interconnectivity of living things; I liken it to Green's reporting of the children waiting to see which bird confirmed them or Kakkib Li'Dthai Warrawee'a and his understanding of that all life has a life force.[130] As Country men and women in the city and urban spread out, Graham confers these interconnections, stating:

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[127] Green and Oppliger, "The Interface Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Systems of Knowing and Learning: a Report on a Dharug Language Programme," 85.
[128] Kakkib Li'Dthia Warrawee'a, "Wisdom, Knowledge, and Information: Have we Lost our Way in Our Understanding and Practice of Medicine?" (Mary Ann Liebert, Inc., 2004), 1.
[129] Graham, "Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews, *The Ecological Humanities*."
[130] Kakkib li'Dthia Warrawee'a, *There Once Was a Tree Called Deru* (Harper Collins, 2002), 25

> Aboriginal people have a kinship system which extends into land; this system was and still is organised into clans. One's first loyalty is to one's own clan group. It does not matter how Western and urbanised Aboriginal people have become; this kinship system never changes. (It has been damaged by, for example, cultural genocide/Stolen Children/westernisation etc, but has not been altered substantially.) Every clan group has its own Dreaming or explanation of existence. We believe that a person finds their individuality within the group. To behave as if you are a discrete entity or a conscious isolate is to limit yourself to being an observer in an observed world [131].

This statement not only gives an insight into Aboriginal structure. It encourages me as a Darug woman who has observed and appreciated the strength and bond many of my family have with each other. It acknowledges that our colonial educational systems have mostly been based on 'observer doing the observing', as if the observer has no effect, which is a conflicting ideology to Indigenous worldviews. Many believe that if ceremony is done the right way, the cause and effects will be made to the larger environment. Otherwise, why do ceremony?

Graham speaks of the repetitive actions that create the normal good behaviour in Aboriginal people. She creates a picture in one's mind that everything comes back to Country and that the main objective is that we can manoeuvre ourselves in the collective space. Creating a relationship with something other than the self, brings great awareness of your environment and a sense of belonging, which is so needed in many Australians' lives. Country gives us the interconnections and places of learning that were created by Ancestral Beings that can't be changed or altered.

The late Uncle Wess Marne[132] always stated this whenever we met, that lore/law never changes. This is the repetitive practice of learning which I have experienced through my interaction with Elders. The old people repeat stories because there is a gem of wisdom, they are waiting for you to extract from those stories and only once all angles of understanding are covered will the repetition sometimes stop. These moral codes and ceremonies in Country are part of our sustainable practices as Aboriginal people. We can help bring in a new paradigm in the 21st Century for the whole world to be in harmony with the Earth, because that is the main repetition: how to care for the Country. When you care for Country, Country cares for you.

2.6 Dealing with a Colonial System and Revitalisation of what Remains

The colonial-lens curriculum has reinforced itself on all aspects of songline repair due to the enforced writing, reading and arithmetic view that has been limiting on our natural learning of song, dance and ceremony.

Levitin is a cognitive psychologist, neuroscientist, writer, musician, and record producer in his studies demonstrate that people can typically remember songs in a way that is like how they

[131] Graham, "Some Thoughts About the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews", 1.
[132] Personal. Communications, Wess Marne, 15th of April 2023.

heard them, even without a reference to the music pitch. Through this new research he has found that the visual performance as well adds to the emotional content to stimulate the reward centres in the brain. In explaining the relationship between the ear and the brain to known music, he writes:

> If the physicists are right, string theory says that we live in a 10-dimensional universe and that all we see of it is a projection or flattening onto final length width, and time. These suggests that me may the one thing in our world that allows us to visit the hires dimensions an moreover have them make intuitive and visual sense to us.[133]

I ngara (imagine) that my ancestors after careful observation, knew the human responses to music and created Songlines as forms of education creating amazing sustainable longevity. We are currently revitalising our song and language aspects of culture. The song and language traditions as record-collecting, analysis and continuation of lived experience is explored in literature by Jakelin Troy, Amanda Harris, Linda Barwick, Clint Bracknell, Myfany Turpin and Jim Wafer.[134] Their literature examines traditional and historical songs. They explore the current and past recordings which has helped shape my chapters on Language and Song. Levitin states:

> Knowledge songs shared within a tribe and family would have constituted one of the greatest forms of social bonding, allowing for the transmission of culture and survival information before the written word existed.[135]

Revitalisation of song means revitalisation of the Dharug *dalang* (tongue). The saltwater dialect was recorded in William Dawes' manuscript. Vocabulary of the language of New South Wales in and around Sydney has been utilised by Troy in her book, *The Sydney Language*. She has also drawn from Arthur Phillip, John Hunter, David Collins and Phillip Gidley King."[136] These authors bring clues, and these clues help create a greater depth of connection when revitalising language. The language and songs are then used as a tool for healing Country and its people.

Historical documents were brought to my attention and it was suggested that I may want to revitalise and perform 'The Fishing Song' that Bennelong and other ancestors were recorded singing at Tubowgule, Warrane and Woccunmagully (areas around Sydney Harbour). Through collaborative research with Troy with her linguistic and archaeological knowledge and Harris as a musicologist and historian, we explored the notation of Freycinet's as it was the most complete work, I sang it with Ceane Towers, a Cannemegal Grandmother. Both Ceane's and my ancestors were recorded at the time of early colonisation but were present prior to colonisation. Great pride and a sense of guidance from our Ancestors are always present when

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[133] Daniel J. Levitin, *This is Your Brain on Music: Understanding a Human Obsession* (London: Penguin Books, 2019), 27

[134] Jakelin Troy and Linda Barwick, "Claiming the 'Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe'," *Musicology Australia* 42, no. 2 (July 2020), https://doi.org/10.1080/08145857.2020.1945254, https://doi.org/10.1080/08145857.2020.1945254; Linda Barwick, Amanda Harris, and Jakelin Troy, *Music, Dance and the Archive* (Sydney: Sydney University Press, 2022); Jim Wafer and Myfany Turpin, *Recirculating Songs: Revitalising the Singing Practices of Indigenous Australia* (Canberra: Asia-Pacific Linguistics, 2017).

[135] Daniel J Levitin, "Knowledge songs as an evolutionary adaptation to facilitate information transmission through music," (2021), 3.

[136] Troy, *The Sydney Language*.

singing the song. To be able to sing to Ngurra 21st Century women, with blood and kin connections to the place of the song's origin is amazing to say the least, it brings a sense of destiny that can't be denied. For more detail on the creation and Oolnga (dreams) and Ngara (imagine) and a lived experience from both Ceane and Jacinta working with Harris' expertise and research, refer to "Casting our Nets: singing a women's fishing song from the past, in the present, for the future".[137]

Daniel Levitin is shedding light on why song is used in our ancient cultures, utilising modern technology. Margo Neale and Lynne Kelly have similar appreciation for mind and music like Levitin, stating, "Songlines are a knowledge archive perfectly tuned to the way the human brain has evolved over thousands of years".[138] These knowledge systems are tools of learning which would benefit many if given funding, space and real long-term interest. They state:

> Songs were learned as the people travelled to places named in the song and the rhythm of The Walking took the song into the body. Through the body, song became dance, which in turn became ceremony. Painted with the designs of the ancestral beings being sung the dancing body unlocked the knowledge of the master archive.[139]

2.7 Moving into the Unseen Learnings

Tex Skuthorpe, a Nhunggabarra man, and Karl-Erik Sveiby speak of self-driven learning in their book, *Treading Lightly*. They speak of the intangible and the value system of knowledge which is held high in culture but needs no material reflection to show its worth, they state:

> Intangible value is generated when new knowledge is created (innovation) and shared between people (collaboration). Intangible value is also created when knowledge is converted from one form to another".[140]

Skuthorpe and Graham's literature is decolonising our current way of thinking, while bringing new and old cultural knowledge-sharing. Graham puts forward this understanding:

> In a sense, Aboriginal Law is 'grown' not 'made'- and this is also what makes it a system of natural law. The outcome of this approach to knowledge is that absolutely everyone in the traditional Aboriginal community was acknowledged to have something unique to offer, because of his or her spiritual identity and personal experience of life. Essential to this system is the fact that Aboriginal personal identity extends directly into land

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[137] Jacinta Tobin, Ceane Towers and Amanda Harris (Forthcoming 2025), "Casting our Nets: singing a women's fishing song from the past, in the present, for the future" *Music & Practice*.
[138] Neale and Kelly *Songlines:* 183.
[139] Neale, and Kelly *Songlines*, 54-55.
[140] Karl Erik Sveiby and Tex Skuthorpe, *Treading lightly: the hidden wisdom of the world's oldest people* (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2006), 176.

> itself; this helps to explain why knowledgeable members of the Aboriginal community continue to assert that, "the land is the Law".[141]

These literatures are the start of decolonisation, showing our ancient value system which is knowledge and connection to Ngurra Country. Our recent colonial mindset has limited our education system. We need to evolve to a multiple discipline platform which is reflected the multicultural Australia we find ourselves in.

Larissa Behrendt[142], Aileen Moreton-Robinson[143] and Linda Tuhiwai Smith[144] raise awareness of the power imbalance of the current education system and how to stand up for our Indigenous ways of knowing to decolonise ourselves and the system. They give strength to Indigenous methodologies with conviction and passion. Emma Lee and Jennifer Evans, a Dharug woman writes about the work of Tuhiwai Smith stating:

> The ripples of her work are felt deeply across time and space, speaking to the hearts of those in Indigenous research practice, both as beginners and respected scholars. Among these voices are testaments of the impact of Linda's work, from affirmations of Indigeneity in our research to confirmation that we already know how to do decolonizing work intuitively.[145]

Evans, like Green and Cameron, is reflecting an Indigenous paradigm and epistemology. Tuhiwai Smith speaks of the underlining pressure that a student as an insider researcher must work with:

> I have also suggested that they needed to understand that the institution of research by its nature would alienate them from their own communities and aspirations and would perpetuate the colonizing structures that many aspired to overcome, and that as a response they needed to be more conscious about decolonizing the academy.[146]

This statement rings very true to me. I hesitated to come back to academic study as I listened to the constant talk in my community about the lack of understanding that academia has for my people's ontologies or the lack of respect for the knowledge that it holds. Many a family member questioned me, saying "Not another PhD to sit on a shelf for the institutions to think they now know our people because they read a book or have done their 'Cultural awareness training', now they're all experts". This sort of talk is common in my communities, which can create gaps in sharing knowledge as well as shallow research. This is

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[141] Graham, "Some Thoughts About the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews," 116
[142] Larissa Behrendt cited in Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Research.*
[143] Aileen Moreton-Robinson, "Towards an Australian Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory," *Australian Feminist Studies* 28, no. 78 (December 2013), https://doi.org/10.1080/08164649.2013.876664.
[144] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*, Third edition. ed. (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).
[145] Emma Lee and Jennifer Evans, *Indigenous Women's Voices: 20 Years on from Linda Tuhiwai Smith's Decolonizing Methodologies* (London: Bloomsbury, 2021).
[146] Tuhiwai Smith, Linda. *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples.* 1 ed. London: Zed Books, 2021. doi:10.5040/9781350225282, 273

why insider researchers are required. These different influential ideas encourage me to keep up the cultural boundary pushing that needs to be present in this society.

2.8 Strengthening Connection Country Calling Ngurra Coo-ee

Tyson Yunkaporta,[147] Oliver Costello,[148] Victor Steffensen,[149] Bruce Pascoe[150] and many more, through other literature and video recorded documentaries, show the ingenuity of our ancestors on this continent. They examine land management, cultural burns as a coexistence and the mutual respect relationship our people have with the Country and all things in it. Pascoe leads us away from an understanding of a colonising, 1788 mindset, outlining that "Europe was convinced that its superiority in science, economy, and religion directed its destiny". He goes on to investigate the Darwinist view: "Charles Dawin's theory of evolution was still to come, but the basis of it, the gradual ascent from beast to civilised man, dominated the psychology of Europeans at the time".[151] From this understanding of the colonialist standpoint, Bruce's voice, alongside those peers I have mentioned earlier, are the other side of the coin, or another perspective on what we call Australia. My family history is one of the stories that dramatically changed in 1788.

Bruce Pascoe's *Dark Emu* uses colonial written documentation, to show clearly that Aboriginal people had established, active relationships with Country that were coexistent, sustainable, and organised prior to colonial interference. Pascoe helped me visualise the living landscape that was in the past. I could see how unkept our bush has become today. These ingenious practices of interspecies communication and connection have been ignored and even ridiculed. Yet as Pascoe demonstrates, these exact methods of knowing are part of the solution for the environmental disruption we have found ourselves in, as Aboriginal people, and as a community at large. Pascoe's writings demonstrating Indigenous technologies have encouraged me, as a Traditional owner, to embrace, reinvigorate, and hold with pride the Darug technology that is still present within the landscape. Through Pascoe, alongside the work of Gammage,[152] and of course through my Elders guidance, I have been given me the tools to connect to Country and work with technology from that Country. This thesis is concerned with this revitalisation process.

Walking in the bush, it feels sometimes unruly and overgrown. By reading Bruce's research I understand why these feelings were always there. I still walk through the bush and think, "How the hell did we as women walk with young children, old men and women in such hard terrain?". Through this research I know that Country needs to be opened with bigger trees, not a mass of spindle ones with too much undergrowth. My oral history tells me that a man on a horse could

[148] Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk.*
[148] Oliver Costello and Liz Cameron, "Yarning up with Oliver Costello–An interview about Indigenous biocultural knowledges," *Ecological Management & Restoration* 23 (2022).
[149] Steffensen, "Fire country: How Indigenous fire management could help save Australia."
[150] Pascoe, *Dark Emu.*
[151] Pascoe, *Dark Emu*, 3
[152] Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia*.

ride through an old gum tree in Blacktown, before they cut them all down. On the National Parks and Wildlife 'Natural tree hollows factsheet' it states, "Valuable hollows for wildlife are generally found in mature and dead trees".[153] The old gums create hollows with age. I don't think of those old trees as dead, but they have transformed. They give shelters to create life to many forms. I think it may have more life in it than when it first started, it really is just the way you, ngara (imagine) it.

The tragic lack of knowledge of good farming practice in places like Australia is still leading to lack of habitat for life other than human, shade on soil, and the highest horrific extinction rates in the world.[154] This behaviour in turn caused the waterway's degradation of the banks leaving very poor water flow and, in some cases, eventually stagnation.

Oliver Costello and fellow colleagues in "From Songlines to genomes: Prehistoric assisted migration of a rain forest tree by Australian Aboriginal people" look at the transference of the *australe* across Northern New South Wales and its connections to Songline knowledge they state.

> We recovered three Dreaming stories of the movement, maintenance and significance of C. australe in NNSW, of which the Nguthungulli Songline told by Ngarakbal woman Charlotte Brown and recorded by Roland Robinson in the 1950s is the most pertinent.[155]

This story is of the travel of Nguthungulli and the 'bean tree' creation in Country. This ancestral being travelled with what is known as 'bean tree': his walk through the Country from the East Coast to the Western rangers. The evidence of this journey is the 'bean tree' presence still today. "In our study, the Songline was traced for the first time on a topographic map by local Aboriginal man, Oliver Costello, and traditional pathway expert, Ian Fox".[156]

Here Oliver and his collective have used multi-disciplines from Songline knowledge of "Nguthungulli" and his travel with the Castanospermum australe 'bean tree'.

> We reveal anthropological evidence for prehistoric Aboriginal-mediated dispersal by verifying that: Aboriginal people used the species; and several sources including Songlines (Dreaming tracks) describe the deliberate movement of this species by Aboriginal people.[157]

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[153] Environment NSW Government Website, "Tree Hollows Factsheet". Accessed 07 February 2024 at https://www.environment.nsw.gov.au/resources/nature/Factsheet5Treehollows.pdf
[154] Michelle Ward et al., "Impact of 2019–2020 mega-fires on Australian fauna habitat," *Nature Ecology & Evolution* 4, no. 10 (2020).
[155] Maurizio Rossetto, Emilie J. Ens, Thijs Honings, et al., "From songlines to genomes: prehistoric assisted migration of a rain forest tree by Australian Aboriginal people," *PLoS One* 12, no. 11 (2017): e0186663, 8.
[156] Rossetto, Ens, Honings, et al., "From songlines to genomes".
[157] Rossetto, Ens, Honings, et al., "From songlines to genomes", 8.

DNA sequencing of 96 individual trees from 12 sites, suggests that "Each population originated from a single maternal lineage", matching that Songline. This generates new thoughts, stating that:

> Western scientific thought has told us that the truth must be separated from religious or spiritual interpretations, which has resulted in modern understanding and misinterpretation of many traditional or Indigenous knowledge systems across the world.[158]

These stories and songs are gems of wisdom which are multi-layered teaching metaphors with multiple functions of delivery. So many times, our ancient stories and songs are patted on the head as if a mythology and Costello et al agree that it must stop; serious science needs to investigate with real commitment and funding.

Victor Steffensen, like Pascoe, brings in another form of knowledge about seasonal change, and how to utilise the tools of the landscape according to those changes. Steffensen's work walks with his Elders to describe a caring for Country methodology. He describes to his reader a kinship system that relates to the tree community, that in turn tells the story of when to appropriately burn Country for different tree communities. Those tree communities are also associated with different soil types. Steffensen reminds me of my own understanding, as taught to me by a Wiradjuri Elder,[159] that once our people knew the dreamtime story of the songline that ran through that Country, and which tree it related to, they would be able to move with the requirements of that ecosystem, the tree was the marker for where the people stayed. Steffensen's writings bring to my research the demonstrable need for Indigenous-led investigation of these knowledge systems so that both Darug culture and Country can be replenished and respected through ongoing, practical, and culturally informed methods of deep connection, as Mary Graham[160] reminds us, then repetition becomes the norm.

Just as Steffensen draws together his knowledge with practical outcomes for Country through fire management, Tyson Yunkaporta's[161] brilliant book, *Sand Talk: How Indigenous Thinking can Save the World* dares to take the reader to a place where our ancient science is shown. Throughout the book he is explaining the concepts of our Aboriginal ways of knowing and he shows a scientific reflection when he talks about the turtle shell and how it came to be. The concept of Leonardo Pisano's, known as the Fibonacci discovery from his book *Liber Abaci* written in 1202.[162] Yunkaporta's Fibonacci knowledge was given to him by Oldman Juma: he was sharing his culture with him. The Uncle says, the great turtle was hit on the back which created the pattern of one plus one is two, two plus one is three, three and two make five, five and three make eight and it goes on. Yunkaporta states:

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[158] Rossetto et al., "From Songlines to Genomes", 6-8.
[159] Personal communication, 2010.
[160] Graham, "Some Thoughts About the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews."
[161] Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk.*
[162] Brittanica Online, "Fibonacci: Italian Mathematician," Accessed 30 April 2024 at https://www.britannica.com/biography/Fibonacci#ref235946.

> I laughed and said that's the Fibonacci sequence, 'discovered' by an Italian mathematician around eight hundred years ago. Might add a couple of zeros to that date- it's been around longer than that.[163]

This is the mathematics of the Fibonacci sequence known as the golden ratio, this spiral appears in many forms of life throughout our planet, and throughout the galaxies creating the universe. This pattern is seen in many forms of nature from the pinecone, sunflower to the seashell and of course our weather systems. He was amazed with what his uncle was telling him. I argue that the current colonised education system has not yet acknowledged that the Fibonacci scale or golden means spiral was already known, before Fibonacci wrote his thoughts down. The problem with our colonised curriculum is the concept that writing is the only form of legitimacy. It is constant ignorance that the world of the written form is the only societies that have the intellect to think of such worldly law of science.

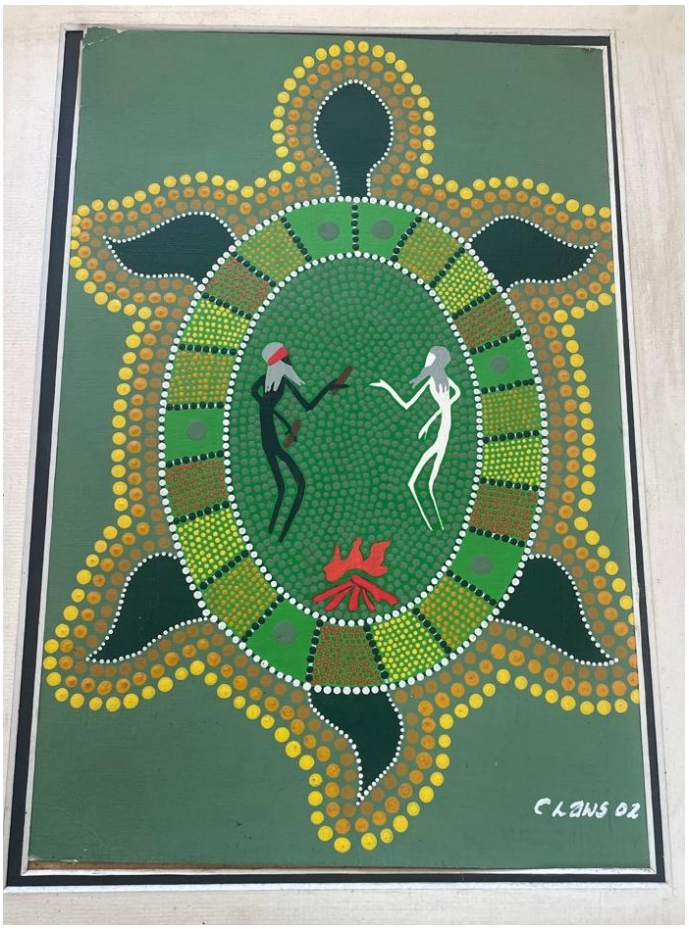

Figure 13. Gudugulung Ngara Turtle teaching - by Cindy Laws - This painting represents the sharing from those ancients to the new generations who fathers come from across the sea. Reproduced with permission

[163] Yunkaporta, *Sand Talk*, 253.

2.9 The Past and the Ripple Effects still Felt Today

In *Trauma Trails*, Judy Atkinson states, “Land is a story place. Land holds the stories of human survival across many generations. Land shapes people, just as people shape their countries”.[164] Atkinson is referring to our understanding as Aboriginal people that when the land is sick, we are sick. Being, as I am, from one of the first families colonised in Australia, we truly see Country as being in a lot of trouble and this mirrors our own personal tragic stories of sickness through dispossession, lack of power to care for Country and connection.

Judy Atkinson speaks to the pain and trauma in Songlines and its people, exploring ways of yarning and underlining sanctity of cultural value system of deep listening. She reminds us that we as human being carry trauma and need to heal internally as well as externally. Like the tales of trauma like Michelle Bishop[165] and her honest encounter of racism due to the colour of her skin, or like Dennis Foley in *Too Black to be White and White to be Black*[166] with the fear of identifying due to racism.

Most Australians would not know that Aboriginal people were also denied the rights to own a house, land or even the chance to purchase it. Although there where exceptions like Maria Lock’s family, there were other Aboriginal families not allowed to own land. Only when the 1967 referendum went through those who had stayed identified were given the same rights as other Australians. But this move was at a great loss we then became bound to a foreign law.[167] The wording in the Australian constitution prior to 1967 it was written that we as Aboriginal were not bound by the constitution. The myth that this change in the constitution so we as Aboriginal people could be counted as equal has shown itself to be very much wrong, when looking at today’s Australian bureau of statistics. Here are some examples from their website.

> Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples
>
> - The Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander population comprises around 2.5% of the Australian population and is relatively young.
> - Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have lower life expectancy than non-Indigenous Australians.
>
> Housing circumstance
>
> - Most Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults lived in rented housing, however, the proportion living in homes being purchased has increased.

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[164] Judy, Atkinson, *Trauma Trails, Recreating Song Lines: The Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia.* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2000), 27.
[165] Michelle Bishop, “‘Don’t Tell Me What to do’: Encountering Colonialism in the Academy and Pushing Back with Indigenous Autoethnography," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 34, no. 5 (2021).
[166] Foley, “Too White to be Black, Too black to be White."
[167] Murray Goot and Tim Rowse, “The Debate Over the Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians: National Unity and Memories of the 1967 Referendum,” *Australian Journal of Politics & History* 70, no. 1 (2024). https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1111/ajph.12889.

- Fewer Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people lived in housing with major structural problems, but overcrowding rates remain similar.
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander adults living in housing with structural problems were more likely to report high/very high levels of psychological distress."[168]

Prisoners in Australia**,** key statistics

As of 30 June 2024:

- there were 44,403 adult prisoners in Australia, up 6% from 2023 (2,474 prisoners)
- the imprisonment rate was 208 prisoners per 100,000 adult population, up from 202 prisoners in 2023
- three in five prisoners (60%) had experienced prior adult imprisonment
- Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander prisoners increased by 15% (2,019) to 15,871[169]

One can see after the 1967 Referendum that the equality of economic stability and better influential out-comes for Aboriginal people, we as the Australian populations at the time were looking for was not achieved. We have also witnessed great mismanagement of Country and the extinction of too many species.[170]

Goot and Rowse[171] point out that at the time of the 1967 referendum, Aboriginals were counted in the census but due to nomadic lifestyles of the people the system at the time could not count those in remote areas. For those on the ground suffering under the Aboriginal protection board and living on missions at this time, any change was needed. Ironically by us receiving the change in the referendum, we as Aboriginal people were taken out of the Australian constitution, still with no reference of its ancient people and its culture. It could be argued that it was the final victory of the perceived complete colonisation. What the master planners of these laws didn't count on was our strength in Spiritual connection that has kept our will and determination strong.

Even though our determination is strong, Tuhiwai Smith speaks about her frustration at the fact that it is 20 years on from the first talk of decolonization of academia and acknowledges so much more needs to be done.[172] Tuhiwai Smith speaks about how our own ways of communication are just as relevant as the academic approach. Aileen Moreton-Robinson[173] also refers to the white privilege of academics and the middle-class white woman and the underlying

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[168] Australian Bureau of Statistics Website, "Census of Population and Housing - Counts of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians." Accessed 07 February 2024 at https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-peoples/census-population-and-housing-counts-aboriginal-and-torres-strait-islander-australians/2021#new-south-wales.

[169] Australian Bureau of Statistics Website "Prisoners in Australia." Accessed 07 February 2015 at https://www.abs.gov.au/statistics/people/crime-and-justice/prisoners-australia/latest-release.

[170] Ward et al., "Impact of 2019–2020 Mega-fires on Australian Fauna Habitat."

[171] Goot and Rowse, "The Debate Over the Constitutional Recognition of Indigenous Australians: National Unity and Memories of the 1967 Referendum."

[172] Smith et al., *Decolonizing Research.*

[173] Moreton-Robinson, "Towards an Australian Indigenous Women's Standpoint Theory."

issue: why is Indigenous always the other? Through more Indigenous academic writers coming through, shedding light on different realities and how to work with those in mainstream spaces, this in turn has created a broader and more inclusive vision that is slowly growing.

2.10 Indigenous Thinkers and Problem Solvers

Now that we explored all the different variables that need to be considered in Songline repair and our pathway of connection is cleared through the smoking of the budbili wogga (Possum skin coat), it is time to sit and think deeply through the guidance and wisdom of Bawaka Country[174], Skuthorpe[175], Marcia Langton & Arron Corn,[176] Gay'wu group of women,[177] and so many more on what true depth one must dive into to conceptualise these ancients' sciences that are the framework of our Aboriginal ways of being. These 21st Century brilliant minds that will help shape a deeper understanding of the complexity a Songline or Songspiral and how many aspects need to be covered.

I have come with my own bias and a need for another side of our Australian history to be told. In *Decolonizing Research: Indigenous Storywork as Methodology*, Larissa Behrendt interjects:

> Indigenous standpoint notes up front that we, as individuals, are shaped by our cultures, cultural values, and experiences with society's institutions. And this is true no matter what background someone has and it challenges those who do not reflect on the values, biases, and assumptions they bring into their work.[178]

Most of the time if you work for your cultural responsibilities, you are paid spasmodically by private or government organisations. You put yourself out on a limb because you don't have the privilege of a 9am to 5pm safety net of sick days or superannuation. You can work for organisations that look after Aboriginal people and Country which I am grateful to all those who do but there is no support for Traditional Owners who live in their Country to have cultural and economic sustainability processes in place. Most of the people I would consider my Elders are very much poverty stricken. As one Elder said to the other about being and Elder or thinking of retirement: "As Elders we don't retire, we just die".[179]

The literature I have selected creates deep reflection on my family's past. The history my family has lived through, the generational scars we need to bear and then heal. These scars are reflected in our landscape as a reflection of our history which is now intertwined becoming Barayagai Ngurra (Song Belonging to Country), Darug Ngurra. These places in colonial history are quite small in distance of time compared to the deep time my family has with Ngurra. We have a

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[174] Bawaka Country et al., "Co-becoming Bawaka: Towards a relational understanding of place/space," *Progress in Human Geography* 40, no. 4 (August 2015). https://doi.org/10.1177/0309132515589437.
[175] Sveiby and Skuthorpe, *Treading Lightly.*
[176] Langton and Corn, *First Knowledges Law.*
[177] Gaw'yu Group of Women, *Songspirals.*
[178] Smith et al., *Decolonizing Research*, 176.
[179] Conversation in front of myself in Katoomba, 2022.

communication, a language with Ngurra. It is unique for us as Darug people still connected, as it is for all other Indigenous peoples from around the World.

You may be thinking at this time what has this got to do with songline regeneration? When you consider the history and now the lack of cultural acknowledgement of Australia's deep rich and ancient past. You need to see our dilemma like pieces in a jigsaw puzzle how; we have come to be a Country with no reverence for our ancient history and that does not have areas set aside for cultural showcasing or practice, like a Country with no culture.

Mr David Miller said at a meeting in Canberra in 2010, "You mob gotta help us…these Songlines, they are all broken up now..you can help us put them all back together again".[180] Every church from Buddhism, Hindi, Christianity, Muslim, Judaism, or any other religious group can be practiced in my Country but there is no place given where Aboriginal people can go to learn the first spiritual practice in my Country in shelter with no tax attachment.

2.11 Conclusion: How Can this Help with Future Vision of Songline Repair

The purpose of referring to so many scholars from so many different fields is to give you the reader a sense of the interconnectivity of all the parts of a deeper connection to Country. Through language, song, water, the stars, fire and connecting with the landscape's I look for my sacred places. All elements are the tools for ceremony to heal the people and all that is my Country. There is an extra dimension to those the ancient stories that seem to be reliving their selves through a modern-day lens. Just as Margo Neale says:

> This deep meaning sets the boundaries within which there is some mobility of interpretation at the narrative within which there is some mobility of interpretation at the narrative or storytelling level. The story shifts in the hands of different storytellers, in different circumstances, at different times, with different groupings of people, at different sites, but the 'inside' essence, or the metadata, is unchangeable post op the shifting and movement arising from a variety of cultural elements keeps the Dreaming alive keeps the archive active relevant and memorable. [181]

It may be the same song but depending on who is singing it, it will have its own flavour; the bones of the song don't change. This creates deep, respectful and love for the research because it is my family's history, song, and Country I grew up on. These approaches if acted upon the Country and Songlines will take generations before the true worth of such a brave collaboration of the greater collective will show the fruits of its labour.

[180] Neale and Kelly, *Songlines,* 57.
[181] Neale and Kelly, *Songlines,* 74.

Chris Macklin et al state: “Bringing Together the Mind and the Heart Participants highlighted the significance of learning through culture, connection, Elders, ceremony, and Indigenous ways of knowing and being”.[182]

The biggest question remains, Will those in power work with Traditional Owners in their own Countries, listen to their knowings and mostly act upon that knowledge? If only the system could change it value systems environment verses economics, age verses beauty, sharing verses greed, collective verses individualism. Can we start to see the value in another way of thinking, another way of owning and another way of belonging. In Yanama Budyuri Gumuda it states:

> Caring-as-Country recognises that Country is active and that, much as humans have an obligation to care for Country, Country also has an obligation to care for humans. Indeed, the entanglement is deepened when the boundary between Country and humans is blurred and we acknowledge that people care as part of Country.[183]

How can we use new ways to heal and connect to those ancient Songlines? By combining the lived experience which grounds my epistemology, while referencing readings, articles, songs, books, oral communication, and documentaries of many different sources, will strengthen mine and hopefully your conviction for a healthier approach to Songline repair which includes all that lives in it.

These are stories that support our Darug stories, the literature helps make sense of stories you have been told. It sheds light on areas that need to be reactivated, through the research others have already done. I am threading, my oral history, the written documentation of my family’s history and my lived experience to balance mine and your understandings of the many layers of Songline repair which must include the people back in Country. These literatures have shaped this thesis each idea is its own hole. there are the now more skins for our budbili wogga so new holes are now made.

As I said to my youngest child the magic you read in Harry Potter[184] is the magic that is still present here in Country you just must learn to be still and listen because my ancestors are wanting and waiting to share with all that have the right heart and good intent. Guboo Ted Thomas obituary states:

> A gentle activist and a spiritual innovator, Guboo believed that everyone, black and white, could share the Dreaming once they truly respected the land and began to open

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[182] Christopher David Macklin et al., “Planting the Seeds: Insights for Researchers Interested in Working With Indigenous Peoples," *International Journal of Indigenous Health* 16, no. 1 (2021), 208-222. https://doi.org/10.32799/ijih.v16i1.33193.P 214.
[183] Darug Ngurra et al., “Yanama Budyari Gumada: Reframing the Urban to Care as Darug Country in Western Sydney,” *Australian Geographer* 50, no. 3 (July 2019), 4. https://doi.org/10.1080/00049182.2019.1601150.
[184] JK Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Philosopher’s Stone* (London: Bloomsbury, 1997).

> their hearts to her mysterious teachings. His mission was to make Aboriginal spirituality relevant to the 21st century.[185]

I hope and pray my work honours his legacy.

[185] Adrian Newstead, (2002). Guboo, man with a dream. *Sydney Morning Herald*, 8 June. Fairfax Media Australia, https://www.smh.com.au/national/guboo-man-with-a-dream-20020608-gdfcjm.html.

3. Methodology

Introduction: sowing ideas to strengthen a bond of connections

I lay the marri baggi (many skins) out to piece each of them together, like a jigsaw puzzle. In any kinship there must be two sides opposite each other complementing each other. Appreciating the difference that each brings to Ngurra (Country). I must focus on the bigger picture ngara (ways of imagining) this cloak even though the skin is not finished, its creation story has already started in my mind with my right intent, as I share my map of my Songline healing journey back to black.

The marri baggi (many skins) need to be joined in a strong and balanced rhythm as my kangaroo sinew threads its way from piece to piece. Its pattern of repetition forms constant geometrical shapes which bond each skin together. As my thread gives each hole it passes through the Right to reply talking back to each other. I am the Storyteller this is my talk. Their talk comes from those who have past and shared their wisdom and from those I am blessed to still have in my life.

Making the designs, telling your mob's story as it is burnt, etched, painted and sung in this cloak. The holes are now yarning (talking) as we do too, when budbili wogga (sew possum skins) together. Like all good conversations, we give each other space for each other's story to be told. For this part of our wogga it is essential to see that bigger picture oolnga (Intuited) and Nanga(imagine) as we create its existence.

My thesis demonstrates a decolonial approach to research into my songs, language and Country. Each section starts as I gift myself permission, to speak plainly as I would do with my family and then I transfer into a formal speak to satisfy academic expectations and requirements. I started the wogga, (sewed each part together) using a decolonizing approach of storytelling from my extended Aboriginal family and my lived experience. I will be complementing it with the visual aid and metaphor of the budbili wogga (Possum skin coat) being processed. As my fellow academic Darug woman Liz Cameron explains:

> Imaginative processes are entwined in intuitive ways of knowing as they cultivate abstract thinking that enables us to develop new and innovative insight. This is reiterated through our cultural stories, which encourage imaginative thinking as a process to grasp an understanding of the non-physical world. Ways of imagining also allow us to seek spiritual guidance to carry empathy for Country, as Country is a living being that feels and responds to change. When we learn to be imaginative, we can learn to think more clearly in terms of relationships– to see the world as an interrelated whole.[186]

[186] Liz Cameron, "Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems – Exploring sensory narratives," *Ecological Management & Restoration* 23 (2022), 31.

Each hole that was created in the literature review is threaded with the stories that constitute the body of this thesis. Through the lived experience in my field work and yarning, I have been creating a space for the researcher to be an active creator in my own research. Rey confirms:

> Doing so involves critical reflexivity, critical reflection, activisms, and creativity and together we co-become in the experiential, doing-learning, between the binaries that are the agency of change. I argue that it is here, in this doing-learning that provokes critical reflexivity, that the decolonisation process takes place.[187]

Recordings of myself and others' lived experience seems to be the only way to capture those very real moments, this part is a deeper language of a Songline. We hear the story from the people of those places to give a complete song of the Country, to subsequently repair through yarning and wingarra (deep thinking). The many different pelts of the budbili- possum skins - will be needed for the full story of this cloak to be sown. This cloak is what we will share, the processes help ngara (imagine) the information stored in it. All its collective ways of knowing create a very big interface of cultural frameworks to complement our current systems. The cross stitch is the common ground where lines can be seen to connect the many ways of knowing. These cross stitches are the strengthening of a collective common ground: the meeting ground. Where opposites complement each other. Each connecting thread of the sinew is many Aboriginal voices from writings and my lived experience and family's oral history. This is my way of answering back to what has been written about my Country and family. Wanta Jampijinpa Pawu-kurlpurlurnu (Steven Jampijinpa Patrick) is a fully initiated Warlpiri man from the Northern Territory community of Lajamanu. He speaks of the breakdown of culture and the interconnectivity of all aspect of life like the cross stitching all is related.

> Language becomes weak then people will not know the proper terms to address each other respectfully. This means Skin becomes weak because the social relationships are not being reinforced. If Skin is weak then people will not be able to follow the Law which establishes the rules and responsibilities that people must show towards each other and country. If people do not know the Law then it is not possible to run Ceremony. If people do not run Ceremony they will not know the rules and ecological knowledge to look after country. If country is sick then it cannot support people. The whole of ngurra-kurlu will fall apart if one piece is neglected.[188]

Unlike Wanta my Country is sick, the language broken and little respect given due to the void created by colonisation. Through these methodologies I offer another a possum fur line of hope to all mobs who may feel too much has been lost. I have documented the Darug quiet activism[189] that is happening in Country. I have documented through this thesis the tangible outcomes from the Ancestors and Country which haven't given up on us.

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[187] Jo Anne Rey, "Quiet Activism through Dharug Ngurra: Reporting Locally Grown – Not from the European South," *Eur. South* 10 (2022), 34.
[188] Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes, and Box, *Ngurra-kurlu: A way of working with Warlpiri People* (Desert Knowledge CRC, 2008), 10-11.
[189] Rey, "Quiet Activism Through Dharug Ngurra."

3.1 Decolonisation: (Back to BLACK)

One of the biggest challenges I faced in academia, is trying to decolonise my own mind. Coming from a military and Irish Catholic background, certain ideologies and framework have been indoctrinated into my very identity. This goes with all of what is expected of yourself and what is right and wrong, so I thought. Then one day my world was turned upside down and the history of my Country of birth and the family I knew took on a whole new layer of understandings. This is when we found out we were of Aboriginal heritage. The constant world of Aboriginal issues and responsibilities are now everyday life for me and my children. This is a world most people do not know or even live in. I know this because before we learnt about our Aboriginality, my family were living mainstream mostly, apart from Mum's cousin, who we called Aunty Glady Smith. Even now I question what was mainstream because compared to a rich free settler family I probably grew up like other urbanised Aboriginal families as grace Karskens notes in *The Colony*.[190]

At the time of my first higher educational study while learning of my Aboriginal history through an Undergraduate then to a Masters in Social Ecology, I was so young and growing as an Aboriginal woman. My history was not deeply embedded in my being. I was constantly defending the colour of my skin and my need to identify, as spoken about in Foley[191] and Bishop.[192] Karlie Noon speaks of a different experience of response to being questioned about her Aboriginality, which was new to her as she grew up in her Aboriginal community. The community knew who she was as a local Aboriginal family with connections, so no need for any proof of identity, but that changed when she went to university.

> I didn't understand being light- skinned Indigenous person in this country can be controversial. I was aware of the different experiences I had faced being light skinned compared to having dark skin, and the countless ways my light skin privileged me in navigating the world. But these never made me think I was any less aboriginal [193].

When embedded in local Aboriginal community you have no need to identify but as soon as you leave those comfort zones then you may be bombarded with the constant questioning of "who are you?" I am still reminded that my story holds its own weight. Yet it is also a problem and an experience held by many Indigenous people, as Tuhiwai Smith outlines at the outset of her book, *Decolonizing Methodologies*.[194] This is hard to experience time after time, as you are questioned constantly of your right to identify from many different angles of society, Bishop too reflects on this stating.

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[190] Karskens, *The Colony*,12.
[191] Foley, "Too White to be Black, Too Black to be White."
[192] Bishop, "Don't Tell Me What to Do".
[193] Karlie Noon and Krystal De Napoli, *First Knowledges Astronomy: Sky Country* (Thames & Hudson Australia, 2022), 31.
[194] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies:Rresearch and indigenous peoples*, Third edition. ed. (London: Zed Books, 2021).

> And then, once I've 'disclosed' my Aboriginality, I become the 'expert'. Actually, it's not so simple. As the only Aboriginal student in the classroom, and as a fair-skinned Aboriginal woman, my disclosure would almost always be followed by curious questions or alarming accusations that essentially ask me to 'prove it'. From then on, as an act of benevolence (or fear), whenever anything was mentioned that involved Indigenous 'issues', it became my responsibility.[195]

When people ask me what part of me is Aboriginal, I reply "The part that never left". I am born of this Country, Australia, and all my mother's line of women who carry the sacred mitochondrial DNA of the women's line come from Prospect (mapped in chapter 1 figure 3) from written records dating at least from the start of colonisation.[196] This blood line has mixed with others who arrived in our Country. Tragically pointed out by McCorquodale is his journal article "The legal classification of race in Australia". Evidence over the last 250 years has illustrated that no matter how we tried to work with the colonial masters the more the rules change according to who was holding the perceived power.

> A new species of legal creature was created and sustained as a separate class, subject to separate laws, separately administered. This form of legal apartheid preceded that of South Africa by more than two generations, and continued on a different, but parallel, course for another three.[197]

In this lived process of decolonising my own mind I now question "what percentage are people Australian"? Why should we as the original inhabitants of this beautiful Country become less as time passes of our constant occupation of this land. When new Australians get their citizenship papers, they become first generation Australians? The first generation Australian I believe are my ancestors. If evidence shows that we have been here for at least, 50000 years, then how can we be seen as less because we are still here. No one questions what percentage is the King English? In the journal article 2025 titled" Early Britons had dark skin, 'Cheddar Man' research indicates. "Some of the first modern settlers of Britain from 10,000 years ago had dark skin and curly hair, according to new analysis of a historic skeleton."[198] This is the hypocrisy that is constantly lived out in Australia. We the ancient culture of Australia have a lot to offer the world, and to contextualise those offerings, we must be given the right of reply, as the First Australians, to talk back to tell the other story of that which has been written and said about us from a colonial, imperialist, racist standpoint.

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[195] Bishop, "'Don't Tell Me What to Do", 373.
[196] Kohen, *The Darug and their Neighbours.*
[197] John McCorquodale, "The Legal Classification of Race in Australia," *Aboriginal History* (1986), 15.
[198] Zahid Mahmood, "Early Britons had Dark Skin, 'Cheddar Man' Research indicates," *CNN Wire Service* (2018), 1.

3.2 Right to Reply (talking back)

In “The Indigenous Archives Collective position statement on the right of reply to Indigenous knowledge and information held in archives”, the authors point out the importance of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people accessing records that have been used as tools against us as the original inhabitants of this land.

> The Statement frames the right of reply within the context of the colonial silencing and dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, voices and knowledge in the creation of the colonial archive.
>
> Without knowing of records and collections, existence, there can be no right of reply. The recognition of the need to set the record straight through a right of reply was also evidenced […][199]

We are some of the first documented at time of colonization, we must be informed of what is written about us and our Country, and how to access it. We, the Darug, are some of the families that a great city grew up around; we were documented by British colonists and set into written the foundations of the colonial state before we could participate in those stories on our own terms, Mc Corquodale, Leane and Behrendt.[200] We are not the go getters who went looking for a better life, financial security, better education, and we were at times removed with no choice. Through years of decolonization of my own mind I have created tools of resilience and wilfulness to accept the current environmental mismanagement created from a colonial curriculum imperial view.

In Linda Tuhiwai Smith’s chapter, “Getting the Story Right, Telling the Story Well: Indigenous Activism, Indigenous Research,” she states in relation to addressing and warning fellow Indigenous researchers and the traps that are set in academia:

> I have also suggested that they needed to understand that the institution of research by its nature would alienate them from their own communities and aspirations and would perpetuate the colonizing structures that many aspired to overcome, and that as a response they needed to be more conscious about decolonizing the academy.[201]

Smith’s observation of community’s reaction and feelings of alienation rings very true to me. I hesitated to come back to academic study as I listened to the constant talk in my community about the lack of understanding academia has for my people’s aptitudes or the lack of respect

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[199] The Indigenous Archive Collective “The Indigenous Archives Collective position statement on the right of reply to Indigenous knowledges and information held in archives,” 245. GLAM Galleries, Libraries, Archives and Museum.
[200] McCorquodale, "The legal classification of race in Australia."; Jeanine Leane, "Tracking Our Country in Settler Literature.," *Journal of the Association for the Study of Australian Literature,* (2014); Larissa Behrendt and Fiona Foley, *Finding Eliza: Power and colonial storytelling* (Univ. of Queensland Press, 2024).
[201] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies,* 274.

for the knowledge that it holds. Many a family member questioned me saying, "Not another PhD to sit on a shelf for the institutions to think they now know our people because they read a book or have done their "cultural awareness training" - now they're all experts." This sort of talk is understandable and common in my communities, but it can also create gaps of sharing knowledge as well as shallow research.

3.3 Storytelling (My Talk, Their Talk)

Narrative or story telling is a useful methodology to explore and explain this inter-relationship with Country that is personal and spiritual. Michelle Bishop a proud Gamilaroi woman portrays the feelings as I do, she states.

> Unapologetically critical. Fuelled by love and respect of the genius of Indigenous Knowledges. Aware of my relational responsibilities and ethical obligations to make my work accessible. Attentive to the importance of storytelling, reflection and narrative. Always looking to the Old People, who show how to connect the patterns of the past to determine the intergenerational consequences if systems and structures of power remain the same. And enraged/inspired to do something about it.[202]

Bishop shows her commitment to her Country and Community by supporting the use of story. When that story is not being heard I have felt the rage that Bishop speaks of I have also learned to calm that rage. As Aunty Pearl Wymarra a Gudang Elder pointed out to me one day, in her gentle voice, "Hey don't get all like that! Us Aboriginal people have dealt with this racism for long time now. No need to get so angry." Thanks Aunty Pearl, I've had to pull myself away at times to remember those beautiful words.

Tuhiwai Smith advocates for research methodologies that support the interests and agendas of Indigenous peoples and communities. This can include tribal research and insider/outsider research. In this thesis, I engage with Tuhiwai Smith's conceptualisation of insider research, of which a tenet is the fact that I, my communities and my family, "have to live with the consequences" of my "processes on a day-to-day basis for ever more." This means, as you will see in how I build yarning as a method into this thesis later in this chapter, that I need to build "particular sorts of research-based support systems and relationships" with my communities, for this research to live and benefit all. Ultimately methodologies that are decolonising, Tuhiwai Smith asserts, are those "that engage with Indigenous projects of perpetuating Indigenous futures by story-telling, remembering together, revitalising practices, representing and reframing the world and ourselves, restoring Country, and returning to culture - to name a few.[203]

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[202] Bishop, "'Don't tell me what to do encountering colonialism in the academy and pushing back with Indigenous autoethnography," 376.
[203] Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies*, 137-144.

Tuhiwai Smith also goes on to say that decolonial approaches are questions like, does the research assist or hinder Indigenous activism? This has been part of my experience when coming across papers written about my family or myself. On the theme of living with the consequences of research, words can hurt and in the wrong minds create a greater gap of understanding. When it is written, suddenly, it becomes real, yet we have seen constantly that our history comes from a biased white dominated culture. In this thesis I aim to show how one needs to use *more* research from the community that research impacts, to strengthen activists' arguments. Once strengthened, we can use both research and activism to create a shared vision. By coming together, we can build pathways of cultural sustainability. This includes social, economic and political good practices that include First Nations people's voices and the good will to act on it. Therefore, insider researchers are required. As McKnight writes:

> Grandfather Sun provides the light for the nourishment of Yuin Country to show people how to heal the Western 'progressive' thought that has disrupted our sight. 'Decolonizing' and reculturalizing Western 'progressive thought' (human/male centred) through listening to Mother Earth has the potential to liberate people from colonial intrusions on Aboriginal knowledge, ways of knowing and learning.[204]

McKnight is challenging his own colonial past. He sat with Yuin Elders and felt the Country and learnt from it. He understood that the Country is a teacher, he had to learn to hear Country and sit in silence. This thesis explores how Country is still talking to its people through that insider research. By working with others of different disciplines the purpose of inquiry for me is to share a deeper connection to Country through its language and the use of song as a tool for ceremony to heal and connect to Country. This creates meaningful research because it is my family's language from Darug Ngurra my Country and the place I grew up on.

In talking back, research from an Indigenous standpoint and following Indigenous instruction and methodologies is helping to create the threads of connections between those in the past, who have studied us as observers, to those same people now working with us and our communities as co-creators of the studies. Talking back and sharing stories from Indigenous values as methods of research creates stronger research, better research ethics, and engaged future research projects for all. We have read misinformation on family lines concerning Cindy Laws' family,[205] engaging in the right to reply this is helping to create real outcomes for those they are studying. I have attempted to achieve this reality. For example, through my study I exhibit a lived experience and connecting to Country framework that was achieved and will benefit my community and Country after the research is finished, through the first traditional burn in 21st Century in Linden Ridge in 2025. I used fire recovery funding for more community's connection to Country. I will explore this act of a decolonial approach in chapters to come, but at the heart of this desire to connect my research to Country and community is my

[204] McKnight, "Mingadhuga Mingayung: Respecting Country through Mother Mountain's stories to share her cultural voice in Western academic structures," 287.
[205] Geoffrey Eric Ford et al., "Darkiñung Recognition: An Analysis of the Historiography for the Aborigines from the Hawkesbury-Hunter Ranges to the Northwest of Sydney [commonly written with English characters as 'Darkinung', Darkinyung or Darkinjung]" Masters thesis (University of Sydney, 2010).

knowing that land reflects the people's creation. In *Trauma Trails* by Judy Atkinson she states, "Land is a story place. Land holds the stories of human survival across many generations. Land shapes people, just as people shape their countries".[206]

Atkinson is referring to our understanding as Aboriginal people that when the land is sick, we are sick. Being, as I am, from the First People colonised in Australia, beginning with the British invasion in 1788, we truly see Country as being in a lot of trouble, and this mirrors our own personal tragic stories of sickness through dispossession, lack of care for Country and dis connection. Showing deep trauma trails and poor health outcomes for people and Country. With future decolonization approaches and a win-win outcomes for the researcher and the researched, we may just sustain ourselves for another 50,000 years.

As I referred to in Tuhiwai Smith's work on decolonising methodologies and research methods, narrative or storytelling is a useful methodology to explore and explain this inter-relationship with Country that is personal. Instead of justifying autoethnographic methods in relation to western literature on these practices, I focus on Indigenous examples of this method and methodology to achieve decolonising aims. I do this to locate my use of storytelling methods among those who share scholarly, and community aims. For example, Rey demonstrates:

> If people are disconnected then the caring is not activated and storying of connection does not happen. Thus activism, in essence, involves moving towards storying, sharing, respect and reciprocity. It is only storying from traditional owners of Dharug Ngurra who can bring an authentic voice to the literature because they have the continuing connections to presences, places and peoples of that Country.[207]

Aboriginal writers and scholars have many self-determined reasons for arriving at ethnographic methodologies. Cameron engages in conceptualising indigenous ontologies taking an ethnographic path stating:

> An ethnographic approach draws on a body of knowledge and gives agency to our perspectives, involvement and participation in 'caring for Country'. This provides us with the knowledge and skills to also heal Country.[208]

Leane also shares her story of developing an autobiographical methodology for writing by asking herself how to best tell her story using the materials and the way stories were presented to her by her family and community. [209] Michelle Bishop in her insightful article, called "Encountering colonialism in the academy and pushing back with Indigenous storytelling", uses an Indigenous autoethnography perspective. She uses autoethnography to dares to stand up to academia. She is arguing that as Indigenous researchers we are now placing our story into

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[206] Judy Atkinson, *Trauma Trails, Recreating Song Lines: The Transgenerational Effects of Trauma in Indigenous Australia* (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 2000), 27.
[207] Jo Anne Rey, "Indigenous Identity as Country: The "Ing" within Connecting, Caring, and Belonging," *Genealogy (Basel)* 5, no. 2 (2021), 4. https://doi.org/10.3390/genealogy5020048.
[208] Cameron, "Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems–Exploring Sensory Narratives," 28.
[209] Jeanine Leane, "Another Story," in *Research Methodologies for Auto/biography Studies* (Routledge, 2019).

academic writings, like so much research of those documents, like journals from Australia's victor's past with all their bias and ideologies.[210] Denis Foley's recollections have also been used as a form of autoethnography in his "What the Colonists never knew". Partnering with non-Indigenous historical Peter Read's historical work, Foley's stories are used to write back, or talk back, to colonial records and show the deep humanity and knowledge that colonial and western methods of documenting Aboriginal people have left out.[211] Denshire similarly pushes back and gives many examples of the stages of the decolonisation movement. She describes the way storytelling shapes the writing:

> In emphasizing the centrality of the personal, their account arguably backgrounds the social or cultural world in which the writing occurs, or, rather, reads the social and cultural through the personal.[212]

My Aboriginal and Irish background can be well expressed through storytelling and our community practise around story telling is deeply embedded in the practises of what is called in academic thinking 'auto ethnography' for me this is 'storytelling'. As Sara McDonough's review of Tuhiwai Smith's work draws out:

> Indigenous methodology that places research in context provides an opportunity to relate the nature of that context and that is most effectively done through the act of narrative or story. Relation of life story and experience becomes an important context for Indigenous scholars but also plays an important role in the academy.[213]

Depending on which side of the family is telling the story it will be more creative or more practical. This is also a personal narrative as an insider research project. I also bring another perspective from experiences in the start of my life, not knowing my Aboriginality at that time, I bring an outside empathy to the narrative to create a safe place for both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal readers. There is great impact in using autoethnographic to document the specifics of my Aboriginal life because it supports the fact that Nations and language groups are different and specific: our different stories allow us to work together as located people, as you will read in this thesis. As Morris et al write:

> Not only is it important to acknowledge and privilege the colonial experiences of the Nauiyu community in Daly River, Northern Australia, it is crucial to recognise that Aboriginal communities are not homogeneous, nor are the effects of colonisation uniform. As such, the impacts of colonisation should be considered unique to each

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[210] Bishop, "'Don't tell me what to do' encountering colonialism in the academy and pushing back with Indigenous autoethnography."
[211] Foley and Read, *What the Colonists Never Knew.*
[212] Sally Denshire, "On Auto-ethnography," *Current Sociology.* 62, no. 6 (2014), 831-850.
[213] Sara McDonough, "Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples by Linda Tuhiwai Smith (review)," *Collaborative anthropologies* 6, no. 1 (2013), 176-77. https://doi.org/10.1353/cla.2013.0001.

> community context, thus, in this chapter there is a deliberate shift to narrow the focus to the colonial experience related explicitly to people of the Nauiyu community.[214]

Story holds knowledge and location and connection as in Daly River it also shows rights across Nations.
Cameron writes "Indigenous methodologies also employ sovereignty, reflecting the lived experiences infused in spiritual and cultural knowings of Country through a storied landscape*"*.[215] This is a very conflicting approach to our Western education where you are spoon fed all the information you want on any subject and if you can recall that information, then you've passed. Our education of our ancestors was self-driven learning where a story is given, then you need to comprehend the teaching.[216] By deciphering the teachings in each layer of the story, your brain truly captures the concept and leads you to the next level of teaching. When discerning of Indigenous ways of thinking, we are intwined with the environment, and we do know we create change in it, our intention is felt and received by our environment, this is a very different approach compared to non-Indigenous ideology. Non-Indigenous scholarly pursuits are based on 'the observer doing the observing' as if the observer makes no effect to the observed, in my ontology this just is not true. Mary Graham states that "Aboriginal logic maintains that there is no division between the observing mind and anything else: there is no 'external world' to inhabit. There are distinctions between the physical and the spiritual, but these aspects of existence continually interpenetrate each other".[217]

Auto-ethnography is the chance to home in on the bloodlines in Country; to take a personal journey through the eyes of the researcher in a very intimate way. It brings our humanness to research and the different points of view required for a holistic approach to Songline repair. In my experience, with so many reports to government and so many times you as an Aboriginal person may be consulted, change rarely comes. We say "Consultation, consultation and plane out insultation." We have had a systemic domination of an imperial colonial curriculum. Now it is time for the story tellers of those who once were studied. Now they need to teach. By using these methodologies, academia will gain a greater insight into our Indigenous worldview. Much like the strange timings of quantum physics, life has been full of a delightful play of what some call coincidences. Now I wonder whether it is not driven by ancestral connections through the consistency of the dreaming; that these acts are not anomalies but are an Indigenous scientific way that requires better documentation and future inquiry. This method of auto-ethnography allows me to document some of these instances throughout this thesis.

In the weaving of Aboriginal science and modern being, my language, which is nestled in our culture, must be used for purposeful communication. I ask, what is the use of idle chitchat? Song in certainly sacred in places; Country can create a pathway of deeper connection and insight. Aboriginal philosophy – which is embedded in both language as it is used and the

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[214] Gavin John Morris et al., "Nauiyu Empowerment: Intergenerational Voices and Stories" (Singapore: Springer Singapore Pte. Limited, 2023).
[215] Cameron, "Indigenous Ecological Knowledge Systems," 28.
[216] Sveiby and Skuthorpe, *Treading Lightly.*
[217] Graham, "Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal Worldviews," 113.

Songlines expressed in our languages – finds meaning or purpose in the landscape that created these expressions of our culture. The literature I have reviewed has helped me to engage with the thinking of other scholars to help me develop my own purpose in my research. I will show the purpose which led me to culture and language of the lived experience of being on Country as a reflective auto-ethnography.

This brings me to be clear about how methods of autobiography, auto-ethnography, talking back and drawing on many disciplines and mediums. Wogga is a type of research that is necessary in the way I have communicated it, because I am choosing the best ways to communicate my story so that repairing Songlines is advance. As I have outlined before, Aboriginal, and Darug people have long been written about. Often, however, how we talk back is challenged or constricted by traditional academic norms that have not originated from Aboriginal traditions of identifying what is important to say from listening to Country. As Lyn Riley states:

> Much of the research in the 1800s and 1900s, being undertaken and considered to be worthy was collected by a patriarchal society. What this meant for Aboriginal people is that much of what was recorded was done so by non-Aboriginal men, who failed to recognise and were not privy to the cultural traditions, skills, experiences and eldership of women, within Aboriginal Nations, Clan groups and families.

The on-going test often for Aboriginal people is gaining recognition of how they present their cultural traditions; that they do this in the manner they see fit; and that this representation is accepted in the format that Aboriginal people chose to present.[218]

Yet learning how to listen to, read, and interpret cultural traditions according to my community, Elders, and Country, is exactly how I learnt to analyse and reflect information in order to grow as a Darug woman. How can these ways of understanding and communicating be excluded from what is recognised as complex knowledge inquiry and production? How can Songlines be repaired when the methods to do repairing are not welcome or taken seriously in places where big decisions and power are made? Growing up, I never knew the old dreamtime stories, songs and dances from old lore people. Later in life, the only exception to the statement is the 'Kookaburra Song',[219] shared by Aunty Betty Lock and Aunty Joan Cooper explored in the next chapter, as well as a peace bird dance, given to me by my Aunty Glady Smith. I have had to learn about these through researching in both an Indigenous and non-Indigenous way due to my upbringing and maybe public education. By strengthening my connection with others who lived a very different life to my own, I have been blessed that those stories and knowings have been shared with me from other Darug and my broader Aboriginal family. These connections shaped and created my auto-ethnography.

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[218] Riley, "Reclaiming Tradition and Re-affirming Cultural Identity through Creating Kangaroo Skin Cloaks and Possum Skin Cloaks," 7-9.

[219] Jacinta Tobin, "Yarramundi and the Four Leaf Clover," in *Yarramundi and the Four Leaf Clover*, ed. John Kelly (1st, Hazelbrook, NSW, Australia: self-published, 2001 2000), Track 2.

Understanding oral history (particularly Indigenous histories) ethnography (including narrative ethnography (telling the group story) and auto ethnography (telling your own story) of documented events is my core methodology. These documented events and conversations will be explored in future chapters when I describe walking on Country with my community and others. I have collected the oral histories, narratives, Indigenous thinking from my Elders and community of my Country, that was undertaken during my field research. The research was done on Country and in a relaxed atmosphere to create an environment where my family/community were comfortable enough to talk. You must remember that for generations in my Country, many were told to shut up and not talk about their Aboriginality. Why? Because so many of our children were and are still being removed from their families. Not only is there a still real threat of removal, but there is a cultural void even shame in our Australian Nation of its ancient past. No celebration of the amazing culture that brought the first astronomers, first bakers of bread, first genealogists, first inventors of aerodynamics, first agriculturalist, first aqua culturists and of multi-linguistic, multi-cultural Country it was before it became Australia. I will say it again: Australia has forgotten its own flavour.[220]

What I bring is the lived experience of an insider researcher. Which means that my family will tell me more about a site or share their spiritual experiences. Many a time there is a fear of being judged due to the insight one may receive through maybe spirit talk or Country's feel or presences. When out on Country one just senses different. As Lynette Riley describes it: "This reflexivity is what some call dedirry or I think the word wingarra to think deeply or could we say think, feel. Be Country".[221] Today I live my life in two very different realities: I am a modern-day woman paying bills, getting my child to school; I am an ancient woman connected to songs and stories that are still living. These vibrations and frequencies continue in the now for us to connect to. I believe we need to learn to understand the unseen.

3.4 Yarning (We're talking)

In the section before I mentioned collecting and presenting the stories of my community and Elders as part of this thesis, in an environment where everyone was comfortable talking. This is yarning, and it is a method I use to wogga in this thesis. Mooney et al. argue for using yarning as a form of indigenising academia:

> They employ Aboriginal methodologies that privilege Aboriginal ways of being, knowing and doing utilising a yarning methodology which is a culturally appropriate conversational process of sharing stories to develop knowledge and educate younger generations. In this way, they generate new knowledge on what works and why for Aboriginal woman in academia, identifying historical pathways and platforms to success, revealing common significant influences, investigate key drivers of success and

[220] Larissa Behrendt dir. *The First Inventors,* Ronde Pty Ltd, 2022.
[221] Atkinson, *Trauma Trails.*

> aspects of cultural and social life, which have enabled them as Aboriginal women to succeed.[222]

This takes me to a teaching that I was taught once through having a yarn of the Australian cockatoo in my Country. Yellow tail glossy black cockatoo is the young fella coming through: he will eat pine or other introduced food as well as native bush tucker as well. The red tailed glossy black cockatoo is the old fella that has been through business. You know this because of his eating habits: he only eats native bush tucker. Both the yellow tail and the red tail call is quiet and calm. White cockatoos are the women because they talk loud and lots. Their call is much harder like its name in language according to oral understanding. Troy documents the words as white cockatoo garraway and the black cockatoo garal.[223] Many of our birds' names are reflections of the sound they make. When I was just starting to revitalise the language, I always tried to mimic the sound of the bird itself.

I remember yarns I have had in the past with Aunties and Uncles. Not only is the yarn an important space for sharing and teaching, but it also brings back feelings of fondness of those who shared. Yarning is a common word amongst many Aboriginal communities. Complementing my observations and Riley's, Bessarab suggests that mainstream non-Aboriginal methodologies have dominated the academic space for too long:

> Yarning, which is a method of Aboriginal dis-course known throughout Australia, enables Indigenous people to talk freely about their experiences, thoughts and ideas, and enables the researcher to explore the topic in more depth, which results in information emerging that more formal research processes may not facilitate.[224]

I want to show you an example of what yarning can do, by yarning with you now. Cindy Laws and I meet at Jack Brook's book launch of his second addition of *Shut out from the World*,[225] a historical account of the Sackville reserve families of the Darug and Darkinjung people of the Sackville reserve. The launch must have been years later, as Jack was waiting for the Hawkesbury City Council to clean the reserve which held the obelisk dedicated to the last black of the Hawkesbury Martha Everingham.[226] Cindy's Great Grandmother, according to the Hawkesbury gazette. As Cindy and I talk we are constantly remembering times through the growth of our children, so please be assured, we are still here as descendants of those families.

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[222] Janet Mooney, Lyn Riley, and Fabri Blacklock, "Yarning Up: Stories of Challenges and Success," *The Australian Journal of Education* 62, no. 3 (2018), 1. https://doi.org/10.1177/0004944118803403.

[223] Troy, *The Sydney Language*, 55-57.

[224] Dawn Bessarab and Bridget Ng'Andu, "Yarning about Yarning as a Legitimate method in Indigenous Research," *International Journal of Critical Indigenous Studies* 3, no. 1 (2010), 47.

[225] Brook, *Shut Out from the World.*

[226] There are inaccuracies in Ford's account of Martha Everingham bloodline. See Geoffrey Eric Ford et al., *Darkiñung Recognition: An Analysis of the Historiography for the Aborigines from the Hawkesbury-Hunter Ranges to the Northwest of Sydney*, Masters thesis (University of Sydney, 2010), 122.

Cindy speaks about her journey with me as we grow stronger in our Aboriginal knowings. Cindy recalls me testing her with my thought projection to see if she could hear me. I was calling Cindy by her name in my head and then she turned around twice. I was standing with her mother who had informed me of Cindy's abilities. Cindy's recollections of this time are as follows, to show yarning and what it sounds like:

> I heard my name being called twice in my head not my ears. As a looked around I saw my Mother with Jacinta. Then Jacinta pointed at me and said I knew you would hear me. From that time, we started to talk together about our histories.
>
> Then we met up at Richmond women's cottage for the Aboriginal Art classes that Jacinta was running. I had never painted before, but I started painting in those classes. Everyone was very welcoming, and we shared a lot of stories and those stories came out in our art.[227]
>
> I (Jacinta) interject here. I just want to note, the women had so much to tell I was just the facilitator that helped create a safe cultural space for the women to express themselves and their stories. The art works created in our art classes and with local Artist Aunty Edna Watson, became three exhibitions around the Hawkesbury region. We raised ten thousand dollars and the women donated 25% back to the Women's Cottage as a thank you for the art supplies, travel and space provided by the project. Cindy recalls:
>
> There was a time when two American First Nations men turned up at the Cottage to ask for myself and Jacinta. We were shocked that they knew where to go, who we were and how to find us. They just came from the airport and were sent by the Chief from the area of the poisoned river from the gas lines. The Chief had a dream and that is how they knew where to find us. They gifted us a leather tobacco pouch and two travelling stones for safe travels to them. We must admit we haven't got there yet. They walked off with no assistance, we offered to take them to the airport, but they told us that they must do it on their own. This was to be one of many strange journeys to come, with and between Jacinta and I.
>
> The next strange encounter was at Homebush for Sydney Dreaming festivals. At the first one we met Jack Thompson and Deb Mailman compliments of Rhoda Roberts. This was where Peta Straughan and others danced the mermaid dreaming and it rained. Next time we performed on stage and met Donny Woolagoodja and his dance troupe and got to dance with them in the Blue Mountains, exchanging cultural intellectual talk.
>
> My grandmother keeps coming to me in a dream and when I asked Donny, he got his seer to talk to me and explained that my Grandmother was asking me to take care of

[227] Personal communication, Cindy Laws, 1999.

> Country. This was shown through her picking up the sands and letting them fall through her hands slowly and running her hand on the top of the grass.

These are the lived experiences that yarning brings into a space for others to hear and learn from. In the section before, I described learning how to listen to and understand Elders, community and Country in what might seem like unconventional ways. In this yarn I have shared, you can read a subtext about Cindy's and my connection. You can learn how together we read circumstances and have unusual experiences and make sense of them with our community and Elders. Instead of being dismissed, we as Aboriginal women take these signs seriously: this is our connection, and our connection to culture. Part of taking signs and happenings seriously is talking to each other about them. We talk about the outcomes, and we talk about how signs from Country, community and Elders show us agreement or disagreement. We connect together stories that may seem disconnected but are actually threaded together to make a bigger whole story and point us in a direction towards listening to and loving Country and community. There are times in this thesis where I use yarning in order to connect up ideas and experiences. I invite you to stay with these yarns, stay with the thread of the wogga, and make sense of things with me, instead of me spoon feeding you an answer or an analysis. This is my autobiographical way of showing you the process of Songline repair, which includes community, sharing, yarns with others, signs, spiritualism, science, and music.

3.5 Conclusion

The possum pelt I have added to our cloak in this chapter is my self-determination as an Aboriginal woman. I am not self-determined individually. As I have demonstrated and discussed by presenting different methods of research production for this cloak, my knowledge and priorities are shaped by the values I have been taught through those exact research methods. Knowledge can exist and be legitimate through these methods, because I exist as a legitimated Darug woman. Every day I am legitimated through my People, my Elders and my Country through these methods I have talked about, and many others I will not use in this thesis. In the chapters to come you will see how through my wogga methodology, and methods of talking back, autobiography and autoethnography, yarning, and music, I am able to show you ways of regenerating and repairing Songlines on Darug Ngurra. As Michelle Bishop puts it so well:

> Indigenous autoethnographies cannot and will not be defined or reduced to a checklist. They operate from a different axiology and ontology that does not seek to categorise, classify, or simplify; instead, Indigenous autoethnographies strive to increase complexity. In this way, cultural agency is asserted; bound by obligations to family, communities, Country, Knowledges– 'where storytelling can spiral into a bigger pattern,

an interconnected ness that recognises and links together infinite experiences across time and space.[228]

[228] Michelle Bishop, "'Don't Tell me What to Do': Encountering Colonialism in the Academy and Pushing Back with Indigenous Autoethnography," *International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education* 34, no. 5 (2021), 368-9.

4. Language

Sometimes language picks you, that seems to be the case for myself. When creating designs with meanings, the language of my songline, my Mother's Country will be the base of my coat. I first needed to learn my language for greater interpretation when connecting to my Country. Learning a meaning behind a name as like Burramatta (Parramatta) the place of the eels, the knowledge or key is kept in its name the language of the Country.

Each symbol, once understood, will be etched into the skin. My language is a representative of deepening of knowledge and strengthen of connection, what shape this coat and the reflections of those learnings. This is a big picture of a lived experience of language revitalisation over 25 years. Lynette Riley explains how my wogga budbuli should look:

> Basically a traditional cloak is divided into sections; using a central point as the focus of the cloak, with each section covering a story or representing a person in a particular way, such as: their Totems, history or connections; and the cloak must be totally covered using symbols, which due to their context or combination will tell different stories.[229]

Language fills our Country, from the cicada to thunder, from frog to a baby's cry. Each life force has its own Song. We just must learn to listen so we can harmonise with all life again.

4.1 The Dharug Language Knowledge Sharers

Like many other nations on the East coast of Australia, our language has been interrupted and forcibly denied being spoken. A conscious movement is being implemented by many Darug-identified people to revitalise our language and cultural practices. I will explain how still today, so much is still being pieced back together. As for the written form of language, I will explore the restrictions of a colonised approach that is still dominant in our current Australian systems of authority.

My language really started in the late 1970s when I was at primary school, in Emu Plains Public school camp. We were off to a place called 'Yarramundi', not knowing at the time of my own blood line connection to Darug people. I heard the name 'Yarramundi', and I thought, wow what a cool name. Of course, I would be drawn to the language of my mother's tongue even though her knowledge of her native tongue was denied for many years.

In 1990 Jim Kohen published *A Dictionary of The Darug Language – The Inland Dialect*.[230] I like this resource because Jim at the time was talking to the family who still had the Dharug

[229] Riley, "Reclaiming Tradition and Re-affirming Cultural Identity through Creating Kangaroo Skin Cloaks and Possum Skin Cloaks," 8.
[230] J. L. Kohen, (1990). *A dictionary of the Dharug language: the inland dialect.* Seven Hills, N.S.W., Blacktown and District Historical Society.

dalang who had memories of the language, and some had songs. I was told that the word Darug related to the yam. Kohen writes in his book *Darug and their Neighbours*:

> The word Darug may have come from the Yam or from a non-indigenous person and it comes in many spelling ways. Some examples are Daruk, Darook, Dharug […] Along the Nepean and Hawkesbury Rivers, where the yams grew in large numbers, the banks of the river were continually being turned over by the women with their digging sticks to gather the succulent yams or daruk (darug).[231]

At Yarramundi, Shaws Creek it was known as one of the last yam beds. We would have one tributary for us and one for nature. We always would let nature do its thing. This would keep the balance; this is my understanding of the totem system. One was always responsible for some form of nature and made sure that the system they were responsible for was always looked after. Pascoe also writes of many different explorers noting the yams agriculture: "Captain John Hunter, captain on the First Fleet reported in 1788 that the people around Sydney were dependent on their yam gardens".[232]

Pascoe talks about this aquaculture systems destruction:[233]

> Destruction of these systems was witnessed by the very earliest Europeans. Aboriginal Protector William Thomas saw many aquaculture systems but reported that most were destroyed by Europeans in the first days after their arrival.[234]

The Dyarubbin, known as Nepean/Hawkesbury has changed from when I was a child, and turtles were still present.

4.1.1 Valerie Tobin (née Burke) Passed to Her by Florence Burke (née Moran)

Parramatta is where my Mum grew up. She and her family would eat eels out of Parramatta River. I would say to Mum didn't you think you were Aboriginal eating eels out of the river? She would reply we ate rabbit too, I just thought we were poor. It has been a shame that our Aboriginality has been so hidden in so many Australians' past.

Darug words like the "duwan" were written in Kohen's book. This word my mother remembered.[235] My Nan Florence (Flo) heard it's call which created sorrow and worry about who was passing. It is the death bird, and it sang before Nan's favourite brother Uncle Billy Moran died in a motor bike accident in 1951. Kohen acknowledges this knowledge of the bird:

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[231] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours,* 14.
[232] Pascoe, *Dark Emu,* 20.
[233] Pascoe, *Dark Emu,* 80.
[234] Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu,* 80
[235] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours,* 43.

> The Darug and Dharawal also believe in a bird called the duwan, which was said to be a messenger which brought bad news. It has red eyes and a piercing cry, and in its animal, form is probably the white winged chough, although there is a large owl which was also known as a duwan.[236]

4.1.2 Aunty Joan Cooper

I had an experience with Aunty Joan Cooper who grew up knowing her Aboriginality and hearing Dharug dalang spoken. She would say, “I never heard the word Darug, I heard what sounded like a bird call”. I had this doooorrrook sound in my head but due to growing up with Aunty Glady, I thought it was a spirit bird. I made the sound to Aunty Joan, and she burst into tears. She said she hadn’t heard that sound since she was a child. This is how I say the word when singing or talking, but I spell it Darug the people and Dharug the language.[237]

A lot of the words I use are those that were given to me by oral knowledge. I do not wish to give up these ancient understandings which can be lost in some forms of language revitalisation when creating a written form.

4.1.3 Aunty Edna Watson

We had little language classes in the back shed at Aunty Edna Watson’s house in Kellyville in the late 1990s. Her sisters Aunty Pat Jarvis and Aunty Faye Richards would turn up to help. In the 90s Aunty Edna Watson and her sisters were known as the Upton’s sisters Aunty Faye, Aunty Pat and Aunty Edna. The seeing language as a written form and hearing it strengthened my interest.

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[236] Kohen, *The Darug and Their Neighbours,* 43.
[237] Personal communication with Aunty Joan Cooper, 2000.

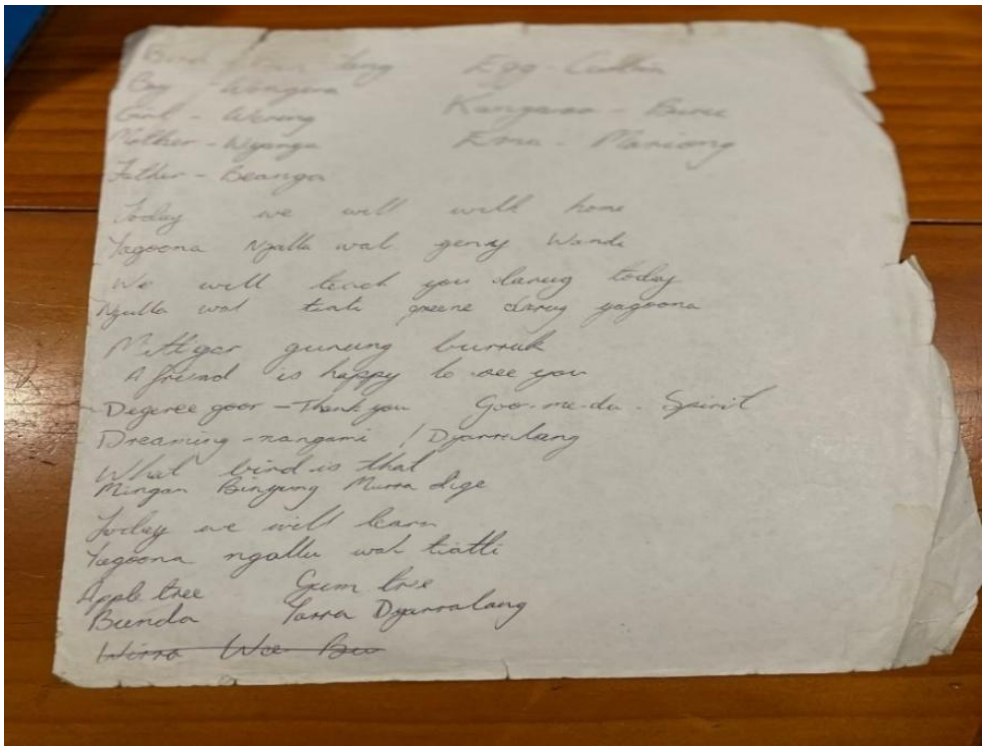

Figure 13. Photo of the original hand notes from one of the Dharug language classes.

4.1.4 Cindy Laws

Cindy Laws is a very close and long-time Darug cousin. She is Darkinjung and Darug, Cindy does receive words and visions which I have appreciated for over 25 years. The "Ancestors Plea" was given to me through Cindy's visions. The songs, Wirawi, Aboriginal Women Strong" and 'Murru Killi, A Path of Light' were co-written with Cindy and her sister Michelle Laws.[238] Cindy's advice and spiritual sensitivity is interwoven through this thesis.

4.1.5 Kim McLaughlin

We also have the willie wagtail, a messenger bird. Depending on how he dances at you, this is how you know what kind of message he is giving. This language of Country was shared with me and my mother by Kim McLaughlin. I have had times when they danced in a circle in the sky. Where they danced is where now the university are wanting to develop. Many strong teachings come from Werrington campus at the University of Western Sydney, being one of the highest points on the plains and right next to The Great Western Highway at

[238] Jacinta Tobin, "Yarramundi and the Four Leaf Clover" 2001 track 14 "The Ancestors Plea", track 3 "Wirawi Burbwal" track 13 Muru Killi".

Werrington/Kingswood. This is also the place where Aunty Glady danced the Peace Bird for me.

4.1.6 Aunty Betty Lock

Aunty Betty had more memories of the Kookaburra song. She remembered the old naughty, naughty, naughty word as best to translate to English on a page as noorragee, noorragee, noorragee. This fits with the repetition of words to emphasize the meaning.

4.1.7 Aunty June Workman

Aunty June Workman couldn't remember the goanna song she used to know by the time I got to tape her. When recalling old ones speaking, she said it was like they spoke a whole heap of words in one long breath. This observation gives us evidence of the linguistic framework of the language.

4.1.8 Uncle Colin Lock

During my research, yarning was recorded with Uncle Colin. In those interviews he informed me of his knowledge of boundaries. He also informed me that his pronunciation of the common word corroboree was "Koori" meaning the people and "Booree" a big fire or gathering. He shared his knowledge of songlines on the ridges and through the waterways.

4.1.9 Uncle Richard Green

Richard Green was a proud Dharug Songman. He speaks of the spirit of the land and the language and teachings it holds while teaching on Darug Nura:

> Green explains that for centuries Dharug people have walked the land - have established walking lines and songlines. These lines are interconnected with language and lore. As the language is brought up once again (revitalised and spoken) the energy of the land is being brought back up.[239]

4.1.10 Rhoda Roberts

In my understanding of my Country-language boundaries, we travel from the Blue Mountains to Sydney. When talking about Songlines and boundaries, Rhoda Roberts[240] commented on the fact that many coastal people have three rivers and a mountain. For Darug, the three rivers are

[239] Green and Oppliger, "The Interface Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Systems of Knowing and Learning: a Report on a Dharug Language Programme," 83.
[240] Personal communication, Aunty Rhonda Roberts, 2019 and 2024.

the Hawkesbury River, the mouth of Sydney Harbour, and the Georges River, with the Blue Mountains over to Little Hartley another boundary. With new oral and written evidence this boundary area may change. But like a watermark on a piece of paper, those boundaries are always blurred. Intermarriage is a common place and we the people need to get back to coming together as Aboriginal people of the east and help to co-create a brighter future for all living things.

In a colonial point of view, land maps and ownership need to be black and white, clear cut. Yet in original ways there were laws/lores for hunting, ceremonial and other rites that go past land boundary business. Howard went to see a leader of a clan linked to a small area of the Blue Mud Bay claim Northern Territory, in his journal records it states:

> In the afternoon [I] went to see X. I said I wanted to make sure that the Gälpu group that he is the senior member of was happy to be included. He said they had to be included as their country was Garrimala (in the claim area). That the freshwater from Gälpu and Djarrwark country and the quiet snake [Olive Python] flowed from there and mixed in with the Dhal̲wangu and Mad̲arrpa waters lower down at Yakutja. He also had a ringgitj place 'you know, like embassy' on Blue Mud Bay itself. He stressed it was his country and he could live there if he wanted to, and no one could stop him doing the paintings for that country. This was how it had always been.[241]

Songline connections reflect the interactions of Ngurra, and blur language boundaries yet strengthen tribal interconnections, like on Garrimala Country.

So many more people over the years have been sharing their knowledge with us, the Darug people. I think of Shellie Morris and her beautiful totem song for Katoomba Public school 'Gumah King parrot'. All the different interactions help me grow as Aboriginal woman in culture so we can thrive again.

4.2 Educational Opportunity

The University of Western Sydney, as it was called back in 1997, was where I first started my formal studies. I was down from Darwin after living a colourful life on land and sea.

My cousin Karen Brien my Aunty Gloria's daughter who worked at Westmead hospital in the kitchen. She had been away on a holiday and came back to work with a very good tan. One of the women who she worked with asked her, "Are you Aboriginal? She said, "Yes". They discovered that they too were both Darug Nation. Late in life her mother became one of my teachers of my culture, due to my taking the old Aunties Joan and Aunty Betty to visit their cousin in Nepean hospital. That cousin ended up being Karen's coworker's mother Aunty Nin.

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[241] Frances Morphy and Howard Morphy, "Witness Statements as Cross-Cultural (mis)Communication? Evidence from Blue Mud Bay," *Anthropological forum* 33, no. 3 (2023), 184, https://doi.org/10.1080/00664677.2023.2271673.

Karskens writes, “The time has come, too, to recognise that Aboriginal people became urban people very quickly”.[242]

When Aunty Joan Cooper passed, I was at the grave site with her cousin Aunty Alma Polton, known as Aunty Nina (maiden name Alma Joan Webb). She said to me what happened to the Aboriginal part of Aunty Joan’s funeral, as Aunty Joan was a Christian woman, and her funeral reflected that value system. I told her that Aunty Joan had asked me to write her death song for her. Then she asked me to sing it for her, so I grabbed my clapping sticks and sang the song to her. She stayed with me at the grave and would not leave till she had heard the song:

> Goomeda djin janawee - Spirit woman with me
> ngallawah butbut nyndi - here in my heart you will always be a part
> goomeda djin janawee - spirit woman with me[243]

From that time on I would pick up Nina and take her to events. She was with me when Macquarie University released *William Dawes' Notebooks on the Aboriginal Language of Sydney 1790 -1791*.[244] This was an exciting time for us as Darug people, where our language was being lifted and supported by different Universities.

Aunty Pearl Wymarra was the Aboriginal Liaison officer to Western Sydney University. In 1997 I was asked by Aunty Pearl to come into her office and see her. Aunty Pearl’s daughter married my friend from school so there were different ways of connection. I went in and she talk to me about what social ecology a course they had running at the university and how I could get into university if I wanted. I had a meeting on that day with the Head of Social Ecology at the time and was enrolled. This was a hard thing for me when the reality hit with the amount of reading that was needed to be done for the course. Aunty Pearl knew I had reading difficulty, so she shared videos with me “Women of the sun”,[245] “lousy little sixpence”,[246] “The Secret Country”. I sat in lectures one from Henry Reynolds and others learning of the shameful history of this land. Our history as Australians that was never talked about never seen, never acknowledged. Pilger writes in his book *A Secret Country*:

> I have long regarded my own country as secret, as a land half-won, its story half-told. It was as if the past was another country, mysterious and unexplained. ‘Australian history’ either was not taught or was not required for ‘higher learning’. Contemporary history was unheard of. Black history was ridiculed. Historians and politicians, more concerned with imperial propriety than truth, covered up and distorted. Wars were fought against

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[242] Karskens, *The Colony*, 12.
[243] Jacinta Tobin, “Goomeda Dyin (Spirit woman)," in *Another Darug Song 4 u 2* (2006).
[244] David Nash, Rayner Susannah, Brown Sturt, *William Dawes' Notebooks on the Aboriginal Language of Sydney, 1790-1791*, ed. David Nash, Rayner Susannah, Brown Sturt (Darug Tribal Aboriginal Corporation: the Hans Rausing Endangered Language Project and SOAS Library Special Collection and school of Oriental and African Studies, 2009).
[245] Dwitami Arinda Yasmine, “Self Empowerment of Aboriginal Women Against White Hierarchy in Women of The Sun by Hyllus Maris and Sonia Borg” (Universitas Negeri Padang, 2023).
[246] Morgan, A, *Lousy Little Sixpence*, 1983, Digital or Visual products, Sixpence Productions and ABC.

> invading British armies, wholes Aboriginal nations were wiped out and their land stolen, but no mention was made of them.[247]

These are hard facts, and it was an eye-opening experience for me. All my friends that I had grown up with and knew me as a child where all wondering why do I care and why do I identify? I care because this is our Australian story that no one was taught. Even fourteen years after Pilgers book we are still talking about truth telling, yet the vote went through without the whole history being taught, warts and all. We must learn from our past and I believe as Darug people we hold some of those answers due to our history. I identify because I am born in Australia, as it was said at the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture 2024 opening ceremony, that "Our identity is not negotiable" and I am who I am.

4.2.1 Learning the Hard Truth

With this history in mind my first introduction to Darug language was with inland speakers or freshwater dialect and knowledge holders. During this time, I started studying. It was a big and painful lessons tears would roll down my face for all the massacres that occurred on the land I grew up on. As part of my way of coping with the horrific history of my family I wrote my first song. We were always musical people, and I would write poetry, so this was the first time I decided to mix both, the song was called 'Show me the Way' written in 1997. The last line of the song reads:

> Education it must be,
> to help them to see,
> Well, if that's the way we should go,
> Well do you know,
> and can you show me the Way.[248]

This was just the start of my Song woman journey. This is where the combination of language and song started. Song always filled my head as a child and now as an adult. I would remember the song from the advertisement jingles. This was a frustration to me as I couldn't remember how to spell words, but words of songs were no problem. This has been a growing process, and now new songs come to me in my mother's tongue and English. I would work with others on the language and run it past Elders who had heard the language before, as more language became required to tell our story. I am one of many who have attempted to awaken the language. I always found that song was the easiest way to learn the language. This experience has also been discussed by Lynne Kelly and Margo Neale in their recent book:

> Every human who ever enacted a particular Songline had the same set of bones, but the way their flesh was distributed on those bones and their skin tone and the colour of their hair and costume varied. So, it is with Songlines. The ancestors laid down the initial

[247] Pilger, *A Secret Country*, 2.
[248] Tobin, "Yarramundi and the Four Leaf Clover," Track 9.

> tracks, the songs and dances and knowledge, but each player intensifies the Songlines through their own level of understanding and interpretation. The Songlines are dynamic, and as robust as the country itself.[249]

Many songs have been made since Yarramundi. The first language songs were 'Wirawee bulbwool' and 'Murru Killi', both co-written with Cindy and Michelle Laws. Cindy and I have had many different collective thoughts, seeing of spirits and messages. Cindy has given words from the ancestors to me to create the songs and to perform it.

The main song I think of is the Ancestor Plea. Some of the words are as follows:

> Our land has been forgotten and our laws are disobeyed
> Our people have been changed, will their souls return to us
> Our soul and spirit are one and we watch this land disappear
> The Earth is calling us let us all be one.
> Yanamanama beagal bidigal yanamama[250]

These words Cindy was given we had no idea what the words meant but we were told through Cindy that it is about men healing and making better decisions around development of Country which was women's business camp and all those things this was the 1990s. The area was on the Northern Road an old songline. We didn't manage to safe all the land but got some as reserve which is now closed in by development. In the book by Fran Bodkin, *D'harawal Seasonal Change*, one of those words, "Bidigal" was written as the Grandmother life cycle.[251] This knowledge was a gap of ten years, but I continued to sing the song, not knowing what the language meant. This would make sense for men's healing to go back to first law Grand Mother's Lore. Some words are shared with our neighbours and sometime regions interestingly it took over a decade to learn a deeper meaning to the song given by the ancestors.

4.3 Olympics 2000

It was the 90s and the talk of the Olympics was in the air. The men who came from the Kimberley to dance the Wanjina for the 2000 games danced with us first in the mountain, wanting to come in right way and be welcomed to Country. Rhoda Roberts writes about these men: "Accompanied by Worrora man, Donny Woolagoodja who designed the Wandjina, Roberts travelled to Arnhem Land to meet the lore men and women involved in the ceremony from the Top End".[252]

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[249] Neale and Kelly, *First Knowledges; Songlines*, 63.
[250] Tobin, "Yarramundi and the Four Leaf Clover," track 15.
[251] F. Bodkin and L. Robertson, *D'harawal: Seasons and Climatic Cycles* (F. Bodkin & L. Robertson, 2008), 86.
[252] Sydney Opera House Website, "How Sydney Olympics Amplified First Nations Voices On and Off the Track. Accessed 24 February 2025 at *https://www.sydneyoperahouse.com/community/how-sydney-olympics-amplified-first-nations-voices-and-track*

Before the 2000 Olympic games started, we were called to meeting about it. The Dharawal land council was claiming that it was their Country and we the Darug people were pushed out. Many wanted to claim Country but when the central women went to dance and were welcomed by a Dharawal person they felt sick and had to ring Aunty Edna Watson to do the welcome. As soon as Aunty had finished, the sickness went.

Given their significance, it seemed fitting that the 'Dance of the Pleiades' was performed by Pitjantjatjara Aboriginal women from the Central Desert at the Opening Ceremony of the Sydney Olympics in September 2000.[253] This encounter will have rippling effects years after. In 2023, that event of the past shaped an important cultural exchange. This relates to Peta Straughan and the Uluru women, but this will be examined through this thesis.

4.4 Language History Songs for Children

By 2000 I put Dharug words to the song 'Heads, Shoulders, Knees and Toes' for Penrith City Council children under the guidance of Aunty Edna Watson. We needed to use words the kids would enjoy saying. I came up with the saying "Don't get a boogga on your nuga." This little bit of laughter helped the children remember the song.

A lot of the people from many nations used to take shelter in Darug homes. Maybe that history needs to be revisited by those who choose to deny the continued Darug; some of those homes were in "The Gully" in Katoomba, Blue Mountains,[254] Sackville reserve in the Windsor region,[255] Blacktown Road on the plains,[256] Narrabeen[257] and La Perouse on the coast,[258] to name a few.

[253] Johnson, *Aunty Joan Cooper Through the Front Door*, 3.
[254] Johnson, *Aunty Joan Cooper Through the Front Door*.
[255] Brook, *Shut out from the world.*
[256] Kohen, *The Darug and their neighbours*.
[257] Foley and Read, *What the colonists never knew.*
[258] Karskens, *The Colony.*

RHYME TIME . . . Children at Cooinda Preschool learn nursery rhymes in the Darug Aboriginal language.

Kids in touch with their manowey

CHILDREN at Cooinda Preschool in Erskine Park are learning the words of one of the world's oldest languages, the language of the Darug tribe that has inhabited these parts for 40,000 years.

They're learning to sing the nursery rhyme *Head, shoulders, knees and toes* in Darug as part of the Penrith council's Aboriginal access program.

The words of the rhyme in Darug are: *coco, tarong, bunung* and *manowey*.

The idea for translating nursery rhymes into Darug came from Maureen Silleri, of the council's children's services.

She asked Darug woman Jacinta Tobin, a local singer, to translate the song into Darug under the guidance of Darug elders.

Cooinda Preschool, in Colorado Drive, is holding an open day on Sunday, September 22, from 10am to 2pm, with plenty of activities for adults and children, including craft and cake stalls, pony rides and facepainting.

Details: 9834 3857.

Figure 14. The article from *Penrith City Star*, 17 September 2002, page 1.

4.4.1 Records Coming to Life

Jakelin Troy is a woman that I have known for decades. She is my lead supervisor and has been a constant strength for me to continue the revitalisation of *The Sydney Language* which I call Dharug. Troy speaks of a revitalisation of "T*he Sydney Language* in the preface of her book and we the Darug people have taken that desire and revitalised our language from those encouraging words. *The Sydney language*[259] book has been a go to for many a Darug or Sydney-identified person. It has come from the linguistic base of understanding. Troy states:

> The waratah on the cover is symbolic of my hope that this book will revive popular interest in the Sydney Language. Aboriginal people in the Sydney area used the waratah in burial ceremonies to help resurrect the spirit of the deceased.[260]

Ironically the waratah, the New South Wales state emblem, is a death flower associated with death and resurrection, and let's hope it will help resurrect the spirit of the land and its people. Even though it is not a complete list of the Sydney language as Troy states, it created a greater understanding of the grammar and syntax of my language.[261] The notes in the book and word

[259] Troy, *The Sydney Language*. P 5
[260] Troy, *The Sydney Language*, 5,20.
[261] I like to say "sleeping". In the Gully in Katoomba and at La Perouse near Botany Bay words could still be heard around the campfire and in some homes. It had then become a pidgin form according to some.

list helped encourage us to try to speak what little was left. Troy originally thought the language was "extinct", stating in *The Sydney Language*:

> I wrote this book to revive interest in a long extinct Aboriginal language of the Sydney district and to make readily available the amount of surviving information about the language. I refer to the language as simply 'the Sydney Language'. However, it has been known as Dharug and Iyora.[262]

This may be true but the sound of fluent speakers of the language is still in the memory of Elders like Uncle Greg Simms. He still remembers the tongue being spoken in La Perouse. Aunty Joan, Aunty Betty and Aunty June now deceased also remember the families speaking it too in the Gully in Katoomba, which was still spoken fluently in the late 1960s. These were some of the Elders I spoke to about the language.

Unfortunately, the Gully was destroyed, and families pushed out. Aunty Lyn Stanger shares the family's experience of it in the book, *Sing you Brave people- Burria Nyindi Koori Muttong*.[263] In Collins journals he writes about the two dialects that were used from the saltwater and freshwater people stating that comprehension what each other were saying was done with ease he states:

> In an excursion to the banks of the Hawkesbury, accompanied by two Sydney natives, we first discovered this difference; but our companions conversed with the river natives without any apparent difficulty, each understanding or comprehending the other…We have often remarked a sensible difference on hearing the same word sounded by two people; and, in fact, they have been observed sometimes to differ from themselves, substituting often the letter b for p, and g for c, and vice versa. In their alphabet they have neither s nor v; and some of their letters would require a new character to ascertain them precisely.[264]

Aunty June Workman would say "we will never speak the way our ancestors did".[265] But if we are Country and Country is us, we have changed and so has Country, so our language has changed too, I believe there are teachings in this interwoven throughout this thesis.

We were so much stronger. when our social ties were stronger, and each knew their job. When a tribal system is watered down, water down, watered down small remnants of a past lives still in the landscape slowly influencing the people of the Country. I would try to tape the Elders, but too much time was spent going to, community meetings or a Welcome Country there is

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[262] Troy, *The Sydney Language*, vii.
[263] Lynette Stanger and Kim Mooney, *Sing you Brave People! = Burria nyindi koori muttong!: (Darug Language Inland Dialect)*, Burria Nyindi Koori Muttong, (Penrith, N.S.W: Lynette Stanger], 2004).
[264] Trove Online, "David Collins" Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://nla.gov.au/nla.party-459200; David Collins, John E. B. Currey, and David Collins, *A Voyage to New South Wales with Governor Phillip, 1787-1788* (Malvern: Published for the Banks Society at The Colony Press, 2006), 506.
[265] Jacinta Tobin, "Dharug Nation Past Future and in Reconciliation," interview in 2009.

always something taking the time from the people, so our business gets left way down on the list.

A constant lack of Traditional Owners be their Native Title given or not, being supported to continue such an ancient culture is ridiculous. Australia your Aboriginal history is your history connecting you to this beautiful place. It has become obvious that traditional owners need to be paid to be traditional owners just like Countries around the world display with pride their culture. Australia needs to keep its ancient cultures alive. Due to our youth as Western society our buildings and culture we will never be able to boast of those attributes, but we have got an amazing treasure the rest of the World doesn't have and that us your Aboriginal Culture one of the oldest in the World, now that should be something to be proud of.

4.5 Where do You Think our Aussie Accent and our Unique Ways Come From?

Even then so many Australian traditions like "she'll be wright', "don't worry" even a kinship terminology like "mate" does mainstream Australia think these sayings came from the English? Of course not, that was the remains of our culture rubbing off on the newcomers. I theorise that is why Australians have a nasal accent due to the influence of Dharug and other Aboriginals on the English language. Troy explores the development of Australian English and the influences of this development and the influences on this development from Aboriginal languages, particularly of Sydney and southeastern Australia more broadly and languages other than English including Irish and varieties of English including Irish English. It is very clear in her works that Australian English is not simply an imported variety, but one that developed from the earliest period of invasion. Aboriginal people and our languages also had a profound effect on the development of our Australian flavour.[266]

4.6 Making Music from the Mountain to help Heal Country in 21st Century

Many beautiful souls share their time and energy with others in the Blue Mountains. There is a sense of community here. Over the past 20 years I have created music for dancers of Wagana dance company, a business owned by Jo Clancy, a Wiradjuri woman and much-loved dancer in the local Blue Mountain community, nationally and internationally. Jo and I both connected when she was on the board of the Aboriginal Culture and Resource Centre, and I was the coordinator. This was a time of much creativity; Jo would have a dance, and I would create a soundscape full of sounds from Country.

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[266] Troy, "Der Mary This is Fine Cuntry is there is in the Wourld": Irish English and Irish in late Eighteenth and Nineteenth Century Australia'," *The Language Game: Papers in Memory of Donald C. Laycock*, no. 110 (1992); "Melaleuka: a history and description of New South Wales pidgin" PhD Thesis, (Australian National University, 1994); *Australian Aboriginal contact with the English language in New South Wales, 1788 to 1845* (Canberra: Pacific Linguistics, 1990).

First creations of these soundscapes were for the "100 women dancing in the Gully". I found out the hard way that dancers need more cues in the music and rhythm to help the dance come alive. I have written many musical landscapes since that time. Some are Yarragan, lyrebird and Eagle of course the Giant Dragonfly, which I believed brought my daughter to me: I was writing the music which always includes the sounds of nature. I was writing the scene when the mother dragonfly lays her eggs. I got up to walk around, next thing I see two dragonflies dancing their mating dance in a beautiful heart shape display. I got my son to grab the camera, but I only managed to get them still together, resting on my peach tree in a half heart shape. It wasn't too long after that I found out I was pregnant with my daughter. I was aged 43 when she was born. This is what I call the Language of Country, which is the interactions of the right intent and the gifting from Country.

In Song Spirals the Gay'wu Group speak of the knowledge travelling with the whales, but also, they state:

> We sing Dhawulwulyun, over there, where the whales or the mantra rays are feeding, diving with their mouths open, going down. As we sing, we are connecting, remaking, and when we arrive at a place we sing towards the next place, connecting with it, remaking it. Forever.[267]

Or Uncle Max Harrison when speaking about the ceremony that he and others did for the whales:

> Just as we finished the dance, four whales breached. That is the spiritual connectedness that I talk about, which I must keep teaching people to hold this long tradition. There is no ceremony which is complete and ends, it is a continuous process of doing ceremonies.[268]

Like other Aboriginal people around the Country I believe that these inner action with song and music help create a bond between you and your natural surroundings, which have been ignored by mainstream society.

4.7 Questions on Language Revitalisation by Richard Green and Amanda Oppliger

The Late Richard Green would use words around me, and I taped him speaking for a children's language program of one of our local schools, unfortunately when it came to the writing of the words the work stopped due to some very interesting questions that needed to be addressed. The idea of writing an oral culture and the process for consent among those who still remember the sounds and words of the language was hard to coordinate. Many of the older ones didn't

[267] Gaw'yu Group of Women, *Songspirals.*
[268] Max Dulumunmun Harrison, *Gurawul the Whale: An Ancient Story for our Time* (Broome, Western Australia: Magabala Books, 2023), 50.

know why we would write in the form of linguistic styles. I will reflect on Green and Oppliger's paper "The Interface Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Systems of Knowing and Learning: A Report on a Dharug Language Programme".[269] Green and Oppliger speak to the other knowledge of language and why it took so long for Dharug language lessons to start. Since that time language classes have adapted to the curriculum. I argue that Green brings these very valuable lessons when thinking deeply about language and its revival. I confer with Richard Green's and Liz Cameron's epistemology as Darug educators and respond below to the questions Green and Oppliger put forward.

4.7.1 How Does the Land Teach People and Speak to People?

Here Green has put forward the question truly that creates a clear back story to the language that is given to different ones in our family. What Green might be referring to is the sound of Country, not just the onomatopoeia like the word guuwayana the wind. Guuwayana creating sound like wind rushing through a valley or roaring over the sea. The air moves through your mouth, from the back of the throat to bounce around and end on the up and it exhales out the mouth. These sensations are all part of the language in a deeper form. The ancestors come on the wind. I believe this is represented in the "guu" sound.[270]

The sounds I speculate that Green is referring to are the signal of the bird. The appearance of the bird can confirm the answer to a question we have asked, or the language of land, when looking at the landscape. It could also be the language of the landscape itself be it a tree or water place the land has a language too. Some animal names indicate the sound they make. Burru the kangaroo creates its name from the feet hitting the ground this knowledge shared with me by Jinki also known as Kerrianne Cox. It's like wallaby the rock wallaby and wallambuy the swamp wallaby. The wallaby bounces quicker than the wallambuy as it takes longer for its foot to leave the ground. These teachings about the wallabies were given to me by Richard Green.

4.7.2 Oolgna the Intuition

There is another language, which Liz Cameron quotes.[271] Green states that is Oolgna the intuition, dreaming, ghost language. One receives from the ancestors still present in Country be they awake or asleep. This the epistemology woven into this thesis: a knowing of extra-sensor perception from Eora (the people belonging to Country) of Ngurra, with Ngurra.

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[269] Green and Oppliger, "The Interface Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Systems of Knowing and Learning."
[270] Personal Communication, Graham King and Cindy Laws, 2006.
[271] Cameron, "Australian Indigenous Sensory Knowledge Systems in Creative Practices."

4.7.3 What is the place of stories in Law and learning?

Here is another fantastic question, asking where is the learner at their stage of learning? Are they ready for what needs to be taught. There is a real sense of teaching with Oral culture. You see each other's eyes. You get to read their body language. Did that person get what I was trying to say? My Aunty Glady would say to me "Don't throw your pearls of wisdom to swine'.[272] The teaching of this is, who are you talking to? And where is their level of knowledge? These protocols create boundaries of level both for the student as well as the teacher. This is the self-driven learning that Uncle Tex Skuthorpe and Sveiby would speak of in their book *Treading Lightly*.[273]

4.7.4 Who Gave Them that Right?

Who gave them that right? This is a question I have heard many a time about language revitalisation programs and practices. This involves the education department who choose teachers, not the Elders and knowledge holders of that language. This has become a problem through many a learning hub. Language holds Lore; it comes with responsibilities. Like some cultural responsibilities it is asking of you, not you ask of it. I would have conversation with language speakers who omit that the more language they speak, the more interaction with spiritual encounters occurs.

4.7.5 Do the Ancestors Teach People Today?

I know through the lived experience that ancestors walk with us. I am always thrilled when two or three of us see or sense the same thing. This is a practice that I use as a tool as a Darug person to immerse myself into another state of being in Ngurra. Green and Oppliger knew that our cultural/spiritual and science/academic systems need to now complement each other for a healthier relationship with Country, they acknowledge this type of co-operation stating:

> The respect, acknowledgement and dependence on the cultural/spiritual system of knowing as well as the scientific/academic way of knowing is leading to authentic and authoritative decisions regarding the revitalisation of the Dharug language at Dunheved.[274]

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[272] Glady Smiths oral teachings from 1974 to 2016.
[273] Sveiby and Skuthorpe, *Treading Lightly.*
[274] Green and Oppliger, "The Interface Between Indigenous and Non-Indigenous Systems of Knowing and Learning," 83.

4.8 Language Education

I wrote music for children in the classrooms to help them to sing in my language. I created the "Get down and Darug" CD booklet which has now been surpassed by some many other wonderful Darug language teachers, artists, dancers, and song people, which is what an awaking of Darug language should look like. Here is a link to the Dyarubbin: Mapping Aboriginal history, culture and stories of the Hawkesbury River, New South Wales.[275] It is a wonderful interactive map that shows the names from Mc Garvie list. Covering names parts of the river and history some of prehistory is recognised through the names and post contact recordings. Darug Custodian Corporation has put together for the community to get back what once was forbidden.[276]

Many classes are now being offered to Darug and others to teach in the classroom. Elders and community members would get confused with "u" having a "oo" sound as an example, when first writing the language The use of the linguistic style was not known to the broader family of those who still remembered words of their childhood. Now through different teachers like Leanne Watson, Jasmin Seymour and Corrina Norman books and songs in language through the linguistic lens are being made. These songs include sentences make it more accessible to the family.

4.9 Working with Jakelin Troy and the Sydney Festival

I met Jakelin Troy[277] back when both our children were toddlers and now, they are both in their twenties. Jakelin encouraged me for many years to come to university again and I know that without her persistence I wouldn't be doing this thesis. Through this thesis journey, it has given me a stronger commitment to the knowing of the language of the land. This language of the land is always present holding knowledge from times past.

In 2016, one of the cousins, Louana Salisbury, who was working for the Sydney Festival under the direction of Wesley Enoch asked if I would do language classes and sing the National Anthem in Dharug. I said NO. I was not drawn to the celebration of what Australians call Australia Day. Part of me feels that the Anthem was not written from a place of respect of this ancient Country or for the Original inhabitants of these lands. There is also in the lines of the song 'Advance Australia Fair', and I wonder if it is a dig at breeding the colour out of us as a race of people. Later I got another phone call from her asking would I be interested to sing a song in language before the National Anthem, co-written with Nardi Simpson, and do the

[275] NSW Government Website, "Map Series." Accessed 11 September 2024 at https://portal.spatial.nsw.gov.au/portal/apps/MapSeries/index.html?appid=82ae77e1d24140e48a1bc06f70f74269
[276] Darug Corporation Website, "Fun Things." Accessed 11 September 2024 at https://darugcorporation.com.au/fun-things.
[277] Troy and Barwick, "Claiming the 'Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe'."

workshops. I said yes.[278] This is when Ancestors showed themselves to me and I will share the experience and words that I wrote in the next chapter on Song.

4.9.1 Language Class for Sydney Festival

I taught beginners and advanced language classes at the Sydney Festival between 2017 to 2019 with Joel Davidson and Jakelin Troy. We mainly based the classes around Troy's book, *The Sydney Language*.[279] This was a terrific experience working with Jakelin on my language speaking my truth in country. Showing Sydney mainstream that we the Darug people are still alive and present in Country revitalising our language for all to share.

A very strongly visible denial of the Darug people is shown when a Wiradjuri woman gets up on "Invasion Day" or what is known as "Australia Day", the 26th of January, and does what is known as a "Welcome to Country". A "Welcome to Country" is a practice that I was asked to do by my Elders: it is a form of an ancient practice that would happen pre-colonisation. Rhoda Roberts coined the phrase "Welcome to Country" this was told to me by Rhoda in 2024 at the 13th Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture in Hawaii.[280] What has been shared with me from many Elders now past, orally taught, was: "You could only enter someone else's Country with permission from those of that Country". This knowledge of law/lore was recorded by Walford given to him by Jimmy Sheppard who was born1880 and lived till 1940 he was a man from our neighbouring tribe the Gundungurra, he states:

> Now there was a law among all tribes, that its members should not enter the area of another tribe. There was room for all. And by each remaining in its own territory, friction was avoided.[281]

You would make a fire at the boundary area of your Country and wait till those of that Country came. You would let them know you are wishing to enter. Maybe they knew you were coming, or you would wait till they came to you. Part of that fire making was also the Coo-ee call, which was from our word for "come here".[282] Those of the Country you were visiting would ask you, "Why are you traveling through their Country?" This could have been because of ceremonial responsibility or due to food shortage, or even for marriages. Some of your neighbours could be a family to you or needing medical attention from those known for their healing qualities. For many reasons a clan or band of people would be crossing over others' land. Once the purpose of your visit was established then those from that Country would walk you through their lands, making sure your travel was safe and that you left their Country too. If you did not receive permission to enter some ones Country, you became spear practice.

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[278] Sydney Festival Website, "Bayala Sing Up Country", Accessed 25 February 2025 at https://content.sydneyfestivalcdn.org.au/2017/17_Events/Bayala_Sing_Up_Country/%E2%80%98Budjari%20Gunyalungalung%20Baraya-la%E2%80%99%20Lyrics.pdf
[279] Troy, *The Sydney Language*.
[280] Personal communication, Rhoda Roberts, 2024.
[281] Walford, *Legends of the Blue Mountains Valleys*, 14.
[282] Personal Communication, Aunty Edna Watson.

I am a Dharug woman who was asked to stand strong with Country. This is our story and what I would hope is, that others learn from our wins and fails throughout our constant existence in the Country, as one of the first to experience colonisation and its negative effects that have rippled across our great continent.

4.9.2 Creating a Ceremony to Accompany Ancestral Guided Song

I co-wrote a song with Nardi Simpson,[283] author of *Song of the Crocodile* for Sydney Festival. We taught 'Budyari Gunyalungalung Baraya la' meaning 'let's sing good dreaming together' to twelve choirs. We preformed the song over three years leading to Barangaroo Vigil, a 24-Hour ceremony from Sydney to the Blue Mountains in 2019. This ceremony included Local Elders from all our neighbouring tribes and Yothu Yindi from Yolngu Country. Nardi was one of the singers in the band, "Stiff Gins" whose harmonies are outstanding and moving. Nardi took the role of choirmaster at the workshops leading up to the first performance of 'Budyari Gunyalungalung Baraya la,' which she did with such ease and grace.

I created a ceremony to accompany the Sydney Festival song. In the ceremony I would soak my ceremonial stick. The stick came from the 600-year-old tree I tried to save in Mount Victoria. In my way of thinking, the knowledge that was here 600 years ago remains in the wood of the tree. I believe that the ceremony stick had grown from the highest point of the Blue Mountains, in a place of final initiation before marriage at Little Hartley River Lett. At River Lett, the three tribes Wiradjuri, Gundungurra and Darug would meet, so this ceremony holds that old knowledge. The Ancestors associated to this area are with me through the connection of that old Tree.

Water places where I chose to soak my stick in were of salt water, bracken water from salt to fresh, fresh water and up to the sweet waters of the Blue Mountains. The right intent for this ceremony was to acknowledge the connection from the salt water from Warrin, Sydney Harbour, to Paramatta salt water fresh water, touch base at Blacktown and soak the stick in the Dyarubbin:

> Meaning place of yam near big water, which transforms into many colours. Its descriptive message informs us of a large body of water with interchangeable colours (due to the dropping of eucalyptus oils on the water that creates a kaleidoscope effect in the sunlight where yams can be located.[284]

Then off to where Mum still lives, Emu Plains and up to the top of the mountains where light mist covers the stick. The whole time, following as best as possible the old Songlines. Elizabeth Rd to Parramatta Rd, to the Great Western Highway; all old songlines scarred up by tar, rubber,

[283] Nardi Simpson, *Song of the Crocodile*, Sydney: Hachette Australia, 2020.
[284] Cameron, "Indigenous ecological knowledge systems–Exploring sensory narratives."; Cameron, "Indigenous ecological knowledge systems–Exploring sensory narratives," 30.

concrete and pollution. Uncle Max Harrison would think of these exact damages when talking about the Whale dreaming songline. “I wonder how much of the canvas was destroyed when Sydney and Parramatta were built, the roads and the arteries”.[285] We Darug people must make the best of what we got in Darug Ngurra.

4.10 Language which Remains in Country

Currently the family is learning Dharug dalang through a linguistic lens. This is great for larger communication with other Nations of Aboriginal language speakers, but I feel it doesn’t bring the deeper understandings of Country where the language was conceived. I have been recovering my language for over 25 years and only now I am understanding the greater depth of the larger framework to the Dharug dalang which is the Country and the non-physical subtleties that bring these greater understandings.

Uncle Colin Lock talk to me about the name Bulla Burra, which is a little town on the Great Western Highway Blue Mountains. When Uncle Colin and I were yarning about place names, he shared that he was told that Bulla Burra means two stones. Bulla is two known commonly in the Pama-Nyungan languages. He explains it like Kookaburra: kooka is the sound the bird makes and burra is its colour as in the colour of stones.[286] This was pointed out to him from his Elder at the top of Mount Hay. He was told that the woman is in Hazelbrook and the Male in Bullaburra. At Bullaburra in the Blue Mountains, one looks over from the Great Western Highway facing Bells Line of Road. Another Songline like the Great Western Highway and you see Mount Hay and Mount Banks. These are the two stones. This is also the reference to testicles as in the stones that men carry. These are the oral knowledges that linguistics can’t give you. Yet on the sign in the Blue Mountains, it is referred to as “Blue Skies”. This naming for the sake of naming is not how we as Indigenous people name our places. There is always a teaching behind these naming processes we are practical people who never were flippant about such important things like naming a place. My understanding of a name is that it creates a vibration that must be appropriate for its purpose and its teaching. I have recently learnt this and have pulled away from naming places due to my wingarra deeper thinking of such things. Ngara is to hear or think but wingarra is that deeper listening.

4.11 Connecting to Others’ Songline

I had the honour to go with Jakelin Troy,[287] Linda Barwick,[288] Amanda Harris[289] and others to sing the “Snow Song” from the article, “Claiming the ‘Song of the Women of the Menero

[285] Harrison, *Gurawul the Whale*, 88.
[286] Interview with Colin Lock, 2022.
[287] Troy and Barwick, "Claiming the ‘Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe’."
[288] Barwick, Harris, and Troy, *Music, Dance and the Archive*.
[289] Harris et al., *Representing Australian Aboriginal Music and Dance 1930-1970*.

Tribe'" in the land that it came from. We set up and sang the song near the river. It was cold and fresh, but the sun was shining. Troy speaks of the time of year we were there:

> By early Autum, when the Song was performed, the appearance of a frosty moon – a moon with a glowing frosty ring around it- indicates the beginning of the snow season. Ngarigu people today look for this and also for brown clouds…..From March onwards, the onset of winter is also signalled by the migration down into the warmer Canberra area of High country birds like grey currawongs and magpies with large white saddles from their heads to the lower back […] Troy's grandmother told her — and her mother also reinforces this essential of Ngarigu cosmology — that nothing ever disappears. The past and the present coexist: we are always living with whatever has happened before and our ancestors look down on us as stars in the sky. Troy's mother says: 'We stand on the ground and we touch the sky. In Ngarigu Country the sky and the earth meet on our high mountains' […] Thus, our work engaging with this Song continues the practice of caring for snow and caring for Country, as well as creating an opportunity to repatriate this knowledge more widely to the Ngarigu community.[290]

The farmer who owned the area asked if we would like to see the part where the crystals were. As we got to the top of the hill I could ngara imagine the ceremony times past. Its nighttime fires were lit with the moon full shining. As the light of the moon and the fire hit the crystals, the ground sparkled like stars on the ground. I felt a deeper understanding. This was to bring the snow and the first frost. The frost would reflect the light, even in the morning. The crystals are milky quarts and the reason why they are milky colour is because they have water trapped in them at time of formation. To me this makes perfect sense as the ceremony is to bring the water as snow and frost. The crystal amplifies the intent, as my knowledge crystals have been used in ceremony for a long time as referred to by Elkin[291] and Lawlor.[292]

In *Aboriginal Dreaming Paths and Trading Routes* by Dale Kerwin he speaks of the Bora rings and states:

> However, they were generally located close to resources such as water and food. They are represented by a larger ring and a small ring with tracks connecting them. Most are circular with the centre of each ring scooped out and cleared of vegetable matter.[293]

There was what looked to me like a bora site with two adjoining like many others that have been recorded. One was larger and straight line to the other which was smaller created with the

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[290] Troy and Barwick, "Claiming the 'Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe'," 95-96.
[291] Adolphus Peter Elkin, *Aboriginal men of high degree*, 2nd ed. (St. Lucia Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1977), 18-20.
[292] Robert Lawlor, *Voices of the first day: awakening in the Aboriginal dreamtime* (Rochester, Vt: Inner Traditions International, 1991).
[293] Dale Kerwin, (2010). Aboriginal dreaming paths and trading routes: the colonisation of the Australian economic landscape. Brighton [England], Sussex Academic Press.

milky quartz crystals. The ceremony was based around the moon cycle which again makes sense due to the influence the moon has on water. As this is not my Country, I will leave that ceremony, but I was honoured to sing up that snow.

Figure 15. *The Sydney Morning Herald*, "Snow news is good news"**,** page 37 on the 21st of April 2023.

4.12 Elders, their way of teaching and it all comes in time

Aunty Glady Smith, my Mum's first cousin, was one of my first spiritual teachers. I still love her dearly. She told me about this time in my life. Mum reminds me of this information given because Mum was usually there when we were getting our readings (a spiritual reading from jewellery that you wear). I was more influenced by Aunty Glady where the others would say that Aunty Glady was too much of a Christian. But you'd meet a lot of the mobs all over the Country, a lot of them are Christian-oriented folk. They're very heavily into the church, and so was Aunty Glady. I'm realising what she taught me wasn't quite Catholic teachings. I would ask "How can we be Christian and Aboriginal?" She would respond "We are just God's first people." I think of the language called "bya" the "la" is let's speak like "byala" lets speak and then I think about the word Biami the creator, and wonder where we as Darug saying we speak the word of God? Like my Elders past, I too am a believer in God the great creator.

Aunty Glady would talk of chakras, energy fields, ceremonies and their effects on Country, the ability to communicate from those who have past: astro-travel, the works. I found a document about research called "Gate way",[294] through this research I have found out what Aunty Glady was teaching me is called transcendental meditation; it's about changing the pulsing of the blood. Through relaxation and breathing techniques, the left ventricle changes in turn to stimulate both sides of the brain and to work more cohesive, this can help put one in a deep meditation. At the time I didn't know what it was, but Aunty Glady used to teach me how to breathe, to slow my breath, to slow my heartbeat so I could stay underwater longer. I was a big

[294] Department of the Army, USA, "Analysis and Assessment of Gateway Process" (Maryland, 1983). Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://www.cia.gov/readingroom/docs/CIA-RDP96-00788R001700210016-5.pdf.

swimmer at the time, I always have loved water. I would think like a turtle and to go slow long distance. These methodologies and pedagogies are how I learnt and what I was taught to do. Most of these teachings were on a one-on-one bases, throughout my life till she passed.

As someone who has grown up with limited traditional cultural knowledge, I have had to look at nature for confirmation. I have learnt from the natural world, the environment, birds and animals as I have been taught to do by my Elders. We have not lost our connection with our traditions, as I have been explaining through this thesis, but we need to listen and look for the signs that our environment sends us through our ancestors and the spirits of our 'dreamtime' Gunyalungalung. Many signs from birds or nature have been given to me and through my cultural lens, I build knowledge like understanding kinship, landform and the dreaming story attached to the Country or the song that should be sung at this place at this time. We as Darug people must question everything and piece together the little gems each one of us carries. As if our ancestors knew one day, we would have to all come together to learn more. Like the times past we gather and share information.

Aunty Glady taught me to keep my eyes open for signs and signals. Like different birds meant different messages. One of those birds was the red breasted robin. In 2006 I filmed Aunty Glady Smith. I asked, “Am I on track with my Aboriginality and writing of songs and singing of language about our cultural concerns?”. When I asked, she tuned into spirit talk and started to sing the song “When the Red, Red Robin Comes Bop, Bop, Bopping Along.” This song was written by Harry Woods in 1926. She told me when I see the Red Breasted Robin that all my prayers will be answered.

4.12.1 Living in the Dreaming

In 2021 I started my PhD journey, and my first trip was down to Thredbo where I had been before with Jakelin Troy, Amanda Harris, Linda Barwick and other academics. This was a follow up meeting after the ceremony/performance and research of “Claiming the ‘Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe’”.[295] I was asked to go for a walk around the village with Jakelin and others so off we went. As we were walking, I saw for the first time a red breasted robin (14th of April 2021).

[295] Troy and Barwick, “Claiming the ‘Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe’.”

Figure 16. A picture taken by Amanda Harris of Red Breasted Robin, 14th of April 2021.

This was a very exciting thing for me as I had waited 15 years to see this bird. That is the plus and the minus of culture and modern day the different time values. Uncle Max Harrison speaks of waiting seventy-odd years to wait to see the carvings this grandfather told him about so I should be grateful it was only fifteen years.[296] This sign in my mind was my go ahead to keep on the studies. It is hard coming out of Community work to study again and the very real feelings of "What the hell am I doing here?" or what they call the imposter syndrome. All these feelings were with me on the trip, but once seeing the Robin, I knew that I was on track.

I got to bed early that night after seeing the robin. I am a possum person, so this is very different for me to do. Because I went to bed so early, I was up early too. That's when I saw Aunty Glady's spirit bird. Aunty Collen Hudson, Glady's sister said to me "If you see the currawong, you know that's Glady". I had only seen crows there till that morning and didn't see another currawong the whole trip. While I was away, I had my phone go straight to messages. When I was traveling back, I checked my messages, and I had a call from Aunty Glady's grandson Noel. I hadn't talked to him for years, his Dad, Aunty Glady's son, had passed. He was hoping I could help him with work that was going to happen in Blacktown that never came to be, but in my way of thinking it was only to reconfirm that Aunty Glady was with me. This is the tricky way my Aboriginal family would teach. It's not always what people think. You don't even know you're being taught when your Elders are teaching you in this manner.

[296] Harrison, *Gurawul the Whale,* 83.

Figure 17. My Aunty Glady Smith as her spirit bird photo taken by Jacinta Tobin 15th April 2021.

4.13 Conclusion

While in Hawaii I went to a workshop. It was great to see those who I have met in the past still standing strong and as songmen sharing culture in their way. It was described as, "First Instruments and Singing the Song Line". Steven Pigram and his grandson joined with Josh Sly presented the knowledge shared of the individual songlines we create and those of tracks laid down in the past. It was advertised as below:

> Songline lyrics contained important knowledge of creation, navigation, water sources. Repeating the song cycle, lyrics and enacting the dance, cemented both tangible and intangible elements of the story. Giving the songman a full understanding of his environment and the formation of the landscape that shapes us all.
>
> Today our songmen are continuing the language and the connections – it's a huge commitment and lifelong learning.[297]

These are the people who hold their culture close to their heart. Steven Pigram and his brothers got to meet Aunty Joan Cooper for the Blue Mountains music festival so naturally you go and say hello to keep that connection alive.

Other knowledge-holders like Ray Kelly talk about this time growing up on East Armidale reserve 1960s. He is reflecting on a song that was sung which reminding him of the woman's roles growing up:

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[297] Creative Australia Website, "Festival of Pacific Arts and Culture (2024)". Accessed 24 October 2024 at https://creative.gov.au/advocacy-and-research/events/festival-of-pacific-arts-and-culture-festpac-2024/

> For me, this song evokes the voice of Thupara 'Knowledge holder' whose role was to serve as a guide or mentor for younger members of the Aboriginal communities in and around the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. As each child grew, the senior woman would make regular assessments of their readiness to progress through the stages of growth as a person. This song references one of the important roles periods of growth for Aboriginal children: the transition from tiny people into the world of guraa or guraamun'big boy' or 'big girl' […]
>
> Our words for age-groups and social roles were not only labels and meanings, but also guidepost for how young people acted-good, bad and indifferent.[298]

I know that my Elders, most of them now passed, would watch my growth and make sure that I stay on track in a Darug 21st-century style. They taught me other form of language that comes from Country in its natural landscape and the knowing of areas for certain uses. Be it engraving for tool-shaping to animal tracks or figures human or not. All have a story, a song attached to them. This is my language journey, which naturally creates Barayagai Ngurra (Song Belonging to Country).

[298] Kathryn Wells, "Recirculating Songs: Revitalising the Singing Practices of Indigenous Australia," *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2018, no. 1 (2018), 181.

5. Song

With language comes song, we wogga (sew) with song like the thread of the sinew of the burru (kangaroo). My songs are the thread of the lived experience and the signals and signs from Country. Songs have guided me to speak my truth, my family's history, the Country we grew up on, the place we call home. Song fills the space as we sing into the skin. We give thanks to the marri wali (many possums) and burru (kangaroo) who have given their lives so this wogga can be made.

The songs are teachings that are stored in the skins through the actions of creating the right intent into the designs on this cloak. Those vibrations from the actions are then embedded into the skin through the action itself and the songs connect it to the larger story in which it lives Barayagai Ngurra (Song Belonging to Country). My cloak represents where it has come from, the journey through its creation, and who made it.

Through this next chapter I will visit different instances of song in order to demonstrate the lived experience of generational, cultural knowledge transfer. We will now walk with my thread that connects each memory to each song. Like an invisible force leading me on a pathway through my songs and for your reading journey. In the song I share the memory of those places I have seen and the lessons I have learnt, anchored in the landscape that you may call home too.

5.1 Kookaburra Song

I was and am still privileged to hear those who remember their language. Some words and stories were transferred by Elders and fellow Country men and women to me. The only traditional song that I was able to learn orally, shared by Aunty Joan Cooper and Aunty Betty Lock, was the Kookaburra song, the recording was done in Katoomba, in the year 2000. Aunty Joan grew up in Parramatta and Sackville, Aunty Betty grew up La Perouse and Parramatta. Both Aunties were born on Harris Street, Harris Park where my mother was born.

I recorded them singing which then became part of my album, "Yarramundi and the Four-Leaf Clover". Track one is 'The Kookaburra Song'.[299] In the interview process of this thesis Uncle Colin Locke, Aunty Betty's son, gave me a deeper understanding of the word Kookaburra. Aunty Betty said, and Cindy Laws recalls the same teachings from Aunty Betty. The words are as follows:

> Coogee oogee oogee, kooka burra barmi, coogee oogee oog ooge oog ooge oog
> Translation is "coogee smelly
> Ooggee and oog is the sound of the bird laughing,
> Kooka the sound of the bird

[299] Tobin, "Yarramundi and the Four Leaf Clover," Track 1.

Burra is the colour of the bird, like stone
Barami the branch of the tree
the kookaburra sits in the gum tree laughing[300]

It makes me wonder if that was the start of the original song, 'Kookaburra Sits on the old Gum Tree', though it was written in Victoria by Marion Sinclair in 1932. Our song and her song have the same concept. This is a traditional teaching of a song from my Elders, which they believed was in their language. It was shared with me about Coogee,[301] the suburb in Sydney, means smelly place, as the seaweed would wash up on the shoreline before the nets were introduced to stop this problem.

This is an example of Darug keeping knowledge of that Old Song alive. It has been left in Country, and I am sure with further research more will be discovered of those many songlines that are still humming but now need to be sung up. Now they can be sung again, just in maybe a 21st century skin, over the old bones.

5.2 Blacktown Joe

Aunty Betty Lock and Aunty Glady Smith both had the 'Blacktown Joe' song. They sang the same tune just had different words. I now believe that these maybe remnants of old songline tune, just put into English words so the removal of the children would not happen, but at least the tune remains the same. I have heard people talk about this song when I have sung it and said there is one similar sounding. The character is a woman name Mary from Queensland way. Also yarning with the Goulburn Islanders, they said that their family would hide their songs in hymns for Church.[302] They would sing a hymn but suggest a tune. That tune is their old song just with Christian words. This song like many since 1788 is a composite of traditional Aboriginal music and stories influenced by Irish music and other musical tradition imported to Australia from that time on. I earlier commented on Australian English and how it is influenced by Irish language, other languages imported to Australia, and Aboriginal languages (Refer to Chapter 4, section 4.5). Troy and Barwick, Harris, Bracknell and Hodgetts[303] all write about the influence of imported musical traditions on Aboriginal music and how this changed those traditions. Philip Jones discusses the movement of Dreaming songs across different localities as demonstrated in the Martu exhibition "Why the Martu don't need a map":

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[300] Personal communication, Cindy Laws, 2012.

[301] Personal communication, Bundaluk (Ian Watson), 1997.

[302] Personal communication, 11th Symposium of the Study Group on Music and Dance of Oceania, Honolulu 4-6 June 2024.

[303] Jakelin Troy and Linda Barwick, "Claiming the 'Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe'," *Musicology Australia* 42, no. 2 (July 2020),85-107. https://doi.org/10.1080/08145857.2020.1945254, https://doi.org/10.1080/08145857.2020.1945254.; Amanda Harris, Tiriki Onus, and Linda Barwick, "Performing Aboriginal Rights in 1951: From Australia's Top End to Southeast," *The Australian Journal of Politics and History* 69, no. 2 (2023), 227-247. https://doi.org/10.1111/ajph.12823; Clint Bracknell, "Rock band: A Third, Brave space for Indigenous Language," (United Kingdom: Routledge, 2023); Jesse Hodgetts, "Guthi Girrmara 'Stirring Up Songs'" PhD thesis (The University of Newcastle, Australia, 2022).

> Travelling Dreamings are those which went on long travels, crossing several estates. Their songs and rituals often involve a meeting of several different groups. Estate Dreamings are those which travelled generally within the estate of a group. Localised Dreamings are those which moved only in a certain locality within an estate; they are usually associated with a particular geographical feature.[304]

Despite this, the original Aboriginal cultural voice persists in the Song. While 'Blacktown Joe' might sound like an Irish song, it is still very much Aboriginal Barayagai Ngurra (Song Belonging to Country):
This part of the song came from Aunty Betty Lock:

> Blacktown Joe it is my name
> And Blacktown is my station
> And there ain't no shame in me being black
> Cause I got a lot of relations
> So, grab a little gin all jump in
> And dance the wild corroboree

This verse was given to me by Aunty Glady Smith:

> Blacktown road,
> is a bugger of a road
> It has no food or water
> And I meet a little gin
> with her nose caved in
> And she asked me to marry her daughter.

5.3 *The Secret River*, 2013

In 2013 I received a call to come down to the last dress rehearsal of the play "The Secret River".[305] I was told that the actors were uncomfortable, that every time they performed a rehearsal it rained. Some were also hoping to get a blessing from someone as the spirits of our ancestors were being felt. One of the main characters were called "Yalamundi" very close to the name "Yarramundi". I went to the last dress rehearsal with my sister Leanne Tobin and Aunty Carol Cooper. We sang Yarramundi to them and gave them a "Yarramundi and the four-leaf clover" CD.[306] We took the white ochre and Aunty Carol gave her blessings, that was the last day it rained.

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[304] Philip Jones, "Tracks of the Ancestors: from 'Walkabout' to 'Songlines' in Margo Neale (ed.), *Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters*. (Canberra: National Museum of Australia, 2019), 212.
[305] Kate Grenville, *The Secret River and Searching for the Secret River* (Canongate Books, 2011). The production was based on Grenville's fictional book *The Secret River* and non-fictional counterpart, *Searching for The Secret River* The playwright was Andrew Bovell produced by the Sydney Theatre Company, and the play was first performed on 8 January 2013 at the Roslyn Packer Theatre.
[306] Tobin, "Yarramundi and the Four leaf Clover," Track 2.

What happened to me was something quite profound, as one of the scenes put me in trauma. I wasn't ready for that scene as it was of a woman from the clan who was chained up with the dogs, for the coloniser to do with as he saw fit. This is a little reminder that trauma runs deep and intergenerationally if not treated quickly. That is a scene that is etched in my brain, but I will not speak any more of that scene. There has been death and sorrow associated with the play after it left our land to go on tour. I believe as an Australian collective that we haven't dealt with the first pain in Country and its original inhabitants, so trauma still follows our Story, but these knowings will be raised and healed in the smoking of the cloak as part of the process of this thesis.

The late Richard Green was involved with the language used in the play *The Secret River*. Richard was also involved with language used in *The Secret River* a television mini-series on the ABC. Julie Webb and I and our children were asked to the ABC studios to record our voices for the series based on the book.[307] The song written by Cindy and Michele Laws and me, "Wirawi Burbwal[308]" (Aboriginal women strong), was sung in that series. Again, we are being called to sing our songs and reclaim are kinship connections and responsibility to our Song and stories.

5.4 The Sydney Festival Song Response

After saying yes to writing a song with Nardi Simpson to be performed before the National Anthem, I hung up and a group of Darug men were standing in front of me in spirit in my loungeroom. I knew they were my ancestors because of the shield they were holding as they wacked their woomeras on to them to create a beat and sang at me. They were angry. In my mind they were saying if you do this you had better tell them our story. In that time, I got an understanding of the tune; they were dancing and singing too.

Then the women turned up in spirit. Not like the men: I couldn't see their whole bodies, I just saw the top of their knees standing in the salt water, sandy brown soil like a mangrove area. They had a different tune being sung and their message was different too. They spoke about me being part of the possum people and how a possum knows how to be upside-down. This upside-down business is what I and it seem to be them. I believe that this worldview is current and erosive in modern society. What do I mean by upside-down business? Well, instead of everyone sharing their resources, in the modern day, acting with greed is how to succeed. The wisdom and respect Elders gain over time is now seen in modern society as a burden. Instead of sitting as a collective around a fire in silence listening to our Elders' wisdom, we in this modern world, place our Elders in nursing homes and ignore them. Looking and loving our natural environment is slowly getting some momentum but generally we live in a pollution-filled, throw away society. These are some examples of the upside-down business I talk about.

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[307] Australian Broadcasting Corporation, *The Secret River*. Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://www.abc.net.au/contentsales/programsandgenres/secret-river/13949828

[308] Tobin, "Yarramundi and the Four Leaf Clover." Track 3.

What these spirit women wanted of me, was to sing mainstream society healthy. They said to me that as Original people we can't stay angry as this is what is creating great sickness in our people. I need to sing with love of all that is and bring that love and vibration to the people watching and participating. I did what was asked of me from my ancestors.[309]

After the encounter with ancestors due to the request from Sydney Festival of a song. Which I wrote about in the last chapter. I immediately recorded the tunes I had heard from both the men and women. I continued the processes to put it into song.

From Recirculating Songs Wafer et al wrote:

> If we treat it as the record of a deliberately undertaken private ritual, akin, to the practice that C.G. Jung […] called 'active imagination, then it suggests quite strongly that Aboriginal people have techniques for inducing dreams or visionary states in which songs are expected to be manifested- in other words, methods of 'song incubation'.[310]

My song incubation process is similar to the one described in the song from the Warumpi band on the album "Too Much Humbug". Their first track is a song called 'Wayathul'. In the song George Burarrwanga sings about being in a strange land of his Grandfather's Country. He was hungry but he slept, and he dreamt. He sings, "When I woke, I had been changed, and the land recognised me again".[311] On awaking he then recalls seeing all his old people, wiping their sweat on him, sing and dancing for him. His ancestor's spirit was keeping him safe. In that dream state they lead him to food and water which was found once he woke.

Instead, my song for Sydney Festival came not to me in dream, it came in a woken state. We must remember there are ways of communication that are present in my Darug reality. I can relate to the words and the atmosphere the song creates. I believe there is a language that Country can share with us, as demonstrated in 'Wayathul'. It is more than an intellectual exercise to sense Country, and one must have the right intent and goodness of heart, these are what my Aunty Glady Smith would always say. She was very careful when discerning a spirit's intent and was very God-minded. Songs are given, I believe, from the vibrational frequency from events and of those who have passed. If there is a collection of songs in the same place, at the same time, in my Indigenous ways of knowing, these songs create a natural cause and effect. This is knowing of energy is what Burarrwanga, Laklak et al, for Bawaka Country talks about in its paper Co-becoming:

> Co-becoming is our conceptualization of a Bawaka Yolngu ontology within which everything exists in a state of emergence and relationality. Not only are all beings –

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[309] Australian Broadcasting Corporation, "Sydney Festival Invites Choir to Sing in Darug on Australia Day". Accessed 30 July 2024 at https://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-25/sydney-festival-invites-choir-to-sing-in-darug-on-australia-day/8210330.

[310] Wafer and Turpin, *Recirculating Songs*, 198.

[311] Warumpi Band on YouTube. Accessed 02 October 2024 at http://www.youtube.com/channel/UCm73ZnSAPuG52EWd0dG_xaw.

> human, animal, plant, process, thing or affect – vital and sapient with their own knowledge and law, but their very being is constituted through relationships that are constantly re-generated. Everything is entangled in a web of connectivity which is constantly in motion, constantly co-becoming.[312]

This is part of a mapping-Country exercise for many of our people. One must sit in Country to feel Country, in those time of quite reflection can ancestors connect, and the landscape itself lets you know what it needs. The Late Uncle Max Harrison stated "The land talks to us and when we see the beautiful golden wattle, we know that these whales are going north to have their babies. That's why we sing them on that safe journey."[313]

5.4.1 Men's Song

The first half, Budyari Gunyalungalung, is the men's tune. It is strong, like the sound that they were making on their shields with their womera (spear thrower). Interestingly I found out that the men in Sydney would use the gadyan (Sydney Cockle Shells) on the end of their womera. Being from inland, I knew we use the kangaroo bone, when I wrote the song and included the gadyan I didn't know its saltwater connection to the womera. When I found this quote from Charles Wilkes from the 1800s, I could recall those ancient men dancing at me:

> The music consists in beating time on their shields, and singing, and to it the movements of the dancers conform. It must not be supposed that this exhibition is a dance in our sense of the word, nor is it like anything that we saw in the South Sea Islands. It consists of violent and odd movements of the arms, legs, and body, contortions and violent muscular actions, amounting almost to frenzy. [314]

I remember them hitting the shield with their womera and the dance was a shake-a-leg style. Their movements were hard and aggressive, but the message was clear. If you are going to do this, you better tell our story.

5.4.2 Women's Song

Then the second part is the women's song. Not like the men's style; their message was love for all living things. They were speaking of healing, honouring the values of the past, respect age, wisdom, love compassion, sharing and connecting to the Dreaming. Their tune was a sound like

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[312] Country et al., "Co-becoming Bawaka: Towards a Relational Understanding of Place/space," 2, 462.
[313] Harrison, *Gurawul the Whale,* 50.
[314] Charles Wilkes, *Narrative of the United States Exploring Expedition During the years 1838, 1839, 1840, 1841, 1842*, Nineteenth Century Collections Online (NCCO): Science, Technology, and Medicine: 1780-1925, (Philadelphia: Lea and Blanchard, 1845), 198.

the gentle waves on the mangroves in the sandy soil of the saltwater and freshwater meeting places.

I finally tuned the song with help from Nardi Simpson, who brought her beautiful knowings of harmony from the wonderful music of the "Stiff Gins".[315] Nardi was brilliant in bringing in the other aspects of the harmonies as the choirs called in the damun Port Jackson Fig Tree, gadyan Sydney Cockle Shells, the burramurring Sea Eagle and the gawura Whale. Each harmony was like the waves, that were part of the women's tune and the gentle feel of the women. It gave me goose bumps when I heard the choir come together which such heart and soul.

5.4.3 Expressing in Words the Messages from the Ancestors

The gawi (come here) is coo-ee as most Australians would know this word. I call in the four winds, with the gawi, I bring the story of the people to the forefront. The women are in the middle of the song as the men shield and protect the wisdom and love through their almost lullaby tune. The words are as follows.

"Baraya la "Budyari Gunyalungalung" Sing Up together a good dreaming"

"Gawi Buruwii	Come here east wind
Gawi Buruwan	Come here north wind
Gawi Bye-an-marri	Come here west wind
Gawi Budge-i-alung	Come here south wind
Gurugal wirri galgala guwi	A long time ago bad sickness come
Be-al marri iyora booni	No more big Sydney people
Yugu-na baray-a-la	Today let's sing
Banga budjuri gunyalungalung	Make good dreaming
Gunyalungalung	The Dreaming
Gunyalungalung	The Dreaming
Wugul -ora	One people
Wugul bemul	One Earth
Wugul coe-wing	One Sun
Wugul garri-ga-rang	One Sea
Ngool-laa-wul	We care
Ngubadi-la	let's love
Wugul marri	one big

[315] Nardi Simpson Yuwalaraay; Kaleena Briggs, Yorta Yorta; Wiradjuri, 2 singers who are the "Stiff Gins."

Mudjin	family
Buruwii dharrook	East wind Darug
Buruwan dharrook	North wind Darug
Bayinmarri dharrook	West wind Darug
Balgoyalang dharrook	South wind Darug
Gurugal wirri galgala guwi	long time ago bad sickness came here
Be-al murri iyora booni	No big mob of Sydney people, no more
Yagu-na buria-la	Today we all come together
Banga budjuri gunyalungalung	to make good dreaming[316]

Figure 18. Picture taken of the 12 Choirs that participated in the Baraya la "Budyari Gunyalungalung" sing good dreaming.[317] Jacinta Tobin (left) and Nardi Simpson at choir rehearsal.

[316] The song is described and sung by Jacinta and Nardi and the Choir on YouTube. Accessed 23 March 2024 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vvOrkVHRU-s.

[317] ABC News: Karen Michelmore. Accessed 24 March 2023 at www.abc.net.au/news/2017-01-25/sydney-festival-invites-choir-to-sing-in-darug-on-australia-day/8210330.

5.4.4 Upside-down Business Right Way Round

In my way of thinking, I believe that my ancestors were extremely brilliant at ceremony. This ancient original connection was replayed repeatedly to keep balance on Country. It would assist the environment to produce its abundance of food, water and shelter that sustained my people for 50,000 plus years. In "Gurawul the Whale" by Uncle Max Harrison describes an astonishing increase of whale sightings that followed a performance of ceremony of the Whale the day before. Describing the experience out on the boat he states:

> Sitting up the top, the skipper's jaw dropped. In over 10 years of whale watching, he'd never seen them come up like this- there were over 300 of them![318]

The ceremony, 'Budyari Gunyalungalung' was performed at Barangaroo Sydney Harbour from 2017 to 2019. In 2019, the ceremony which had accompanied the 'Budyari Gunyalungalung' Song changed from sunrise on the 26th of January 2017, 2018, to sunset 25th of January 2019. I reflect on the upside-down business and how the ceremony changed from a sunrise to a sunset ceremony. The changes of time I had no say over, but as a possum woman this change was more in line with my possum ways, for our ceremony would be in the evenings. When that change was made, I decided to do a 24-hour ceremony. We started at Sunset in Barangaroo and finished at sunset in Mount Victoria on the 26th of January 2019.

The other areas where the ceremony was also performed were covered in Chapter 4. I thank Aunty Carol Cooper for her constant participation in all the mountains protocols for these ceremonies, as this Elder's back up is really appreciated. My son Jasper was with me the whole 24 hours, my daughter Killimai was with our family friend and right-hand man, Lisa and her son Cooper, who were all involved in the ceremony in some capacity.

In the span of that 24-hour ceremony, I saw for the first time, my mother painted up with the white ochre, this was at Emu Plains where I grew up and now Mum is being grown up there. You grow up in an area, but to be grown up, culture has had a hand in it. This shows me that song revitalises culture and practice. It does so in ways that can be seen to be coincidental but are in fact deeply deliberate positive signs from Country and ancestors that they are with us. When Uncle Max Harrison speaks about his whale's story and finding others with the same story he states: "I know it' s no coincidence, I know it' s all spiritual connecting".[319] Uncle Max was also part of that 24-hour ceremony at Parramatta.

5.5 Indie Rock Band, The Preatures

Through the Sydney Festival language classes in 2017, I got to meet with Isabella Manfredi, better known as Izzy who wrote a song, 'Yanada', after seeing a play *The Secret River*.

[318] Harrison, *Gurawul the Whale,* 55.
[319] Harrison, *Gurawul the Whale,* 77.

Manfredi, who is part of the band The Preatures, approached me to ask about using language for their upcoming album called "Girlhood".[320]

On this album, a song called 'Yanada' was in the process of being written. Izzy came to my house after meeting me at the Sydney Festival Language classes to see if there were words. She could use that would fit, the song she was writing. As she started to sing the song I heard the words Yanada which in language is the full moon. She was taken back by this, and I gave her some words, but I told her I had to consult with the extended families of some of the Darug nation to ask permission for a non-indigenous woman to use and sing our language. I knew who I needed to ask through my families and didn't think I would consult with another language group.

This is where Terri Janke got involved. She is an Aboriginal lawyer and a leading scholar of copyright law. In her book, *True Tracks*, she speaks of my interaction with the band through the book. She points out other musicians' collaborations with Aboriginal people to assist in preserving the languages in a contemporary setting.[321] One example is Dennis Foley, a Gai-mariagal man, with musician Paul Jarman on the song about Pemulwuy, known to come from the Bidjigal from Botany Bay who was a fierce warrior.[322] She acknowledges that the language and all its rights should be back in the hands of the people of who that language belongs to. That language should be easily accessible and revitalised, to be promoted and sustained for the generations to come without the sacrifice of royalties.

Terri organised a meeting at Yarra House so protocol could be met. I was used to meeting family at Yarra Bay Yacht club and went there by mistake. I ran into Uncle Vic Simms, also a Bidjigal man, kin with the Great Pemulwuy from La Perouse, and he was talking about a meeting they are having at Yarra House. I realised that's the meeting I'm supposed to be at and Uncle Vic being one of our songmen he came with me to the meeting. When we got to Yarra House there were four Dharawal men and one relative of Uncle Vic's. Terri and the band the Preatures were all there. I thought it strange that I am asking Dharawal about my language. My understanding was La Perouse just in saltwater dialect of our Dharug dalang. Uncle Vic left that meeting early, angry because the men were claiming La Perouse as Dharawal. Recorded evidence given in *Condition of the Aborigines 1845: Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Committee on the Aborigines* strengthens Uncle Vic and my knowledge. When questioned by the colonisers Mahroot alias the Boatswain born at the Cooks River, stated:

> 7. What extent of country belonged to your tribe – to your family – how much land did you walk over? Only as far as here to Botany Bay and around the seacoast, away from the heads at Port Jackson, to the heads at Botany and all inland.

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[320] The Preatures, *Girlhood*, 2017, Universal Music Australia.
[321] Terri Janke, *True Tracks: Respecting Indigenous Knowledge and Culture* (Sydney, NSW: UNSW Press, 2021).
[322]Terri Janke, *True Tracks*, 122-23.

> 9. By Mr. Lord: How far was your country before t'other black fellow come and claim it – before any other tribe claim it? Liverpool; because Liverpool black fellow speak another language, and Five Islands speak another language again".[323]

Troy's book, *The Sydney Language*[324] mapped the areas with the most reliable evidence from the late-eighteenth and early-nineteenth centuries, for the language spoken in Sydney basin was documented. It is clear there was one language with likely clan/local variations spoken across the Sydney basin area, including La Perouse. There is some evidence that inland across the Hawkesbury River there was a dialectal change. Later nineteenth-century documentation of languages in the Sydney area is unreliable, as so many groups moved into the area engaging with the thriving British colony of Sydney. Mahroot also went on to say when quested by the Chairman:

> 98. By the Chairman: What clothing used the black fellows to have before they used to come into the town to the whites, what did they have to put on? Sometimes they had tea tree bark, and sometimes kangaroo skins from foreign parts, from the Liverpool black fellows, Lake Macquarie, and Five Islands, they came from theses foreign parts […]
>
> 103 Did they leave off making opossum skin cloaks when they got blankets? No, They still make them in land.[325]

There is always mixing on boundary business like a water mark on the page, just like up here in the Blue Mountains we share the space. I like the "Yes and Yes" approach as families always had intermarriage. Many families like Cindy Laws case being Darug and Darkinjung or Aunty Carrol Cooper, Uncle Greg Simms Gundungurra and Darug and the list goes on. There always had to be two for kinship to work these are our meeting places.

Due to Uncle Vic's exit, I was very torn with which way to go on sharing the language. In the end I asked a great ancestor Eagle to show itself in a span of three days. This ended up being a very tricky thing as I was in a conference for two of these days. On the third day, I was on my way to the Richmond Show with my daughter and her father. I was staring out the window waiting to get into the car park when suddenly I saw two eagles flying. One up high and the other down lower. As soon as I got out of the car, I rang Izzy, and she started to cry. It did seem a very hard thing to base many hours of work on a song, to get the go ahead from an Eagle. Due to the weight of the request I had to hand it over to the ancestors for true guidance. An interview on "The FEED" for SBS shows both responses to the song and its challenges, such as rights and responsibility of language, who shares it, what are they using it for etc.?

I see these coincidences or responses from Country, like an intangible framework that my ancestors sung for me tens of thousands of years ago. The effects of their songs still resonate

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[323] *Condition of the Aborigines 1845: Minutes of Evidence Taken Before the Committee on the Aborigines* (Woden, A.C.T: Popinjay, 1989), 6.
[324] Troy, *The Sydney Language*, 15 -21.
[325] *Condition of the Aborigines 1845*, 8.

today. These vibrations and frequencies are in the now, for us to be constantly connected to. We are all in the Dreaming, now let's create positive change with right intent.

5.6 The Fishing Song

I will add another lens and back-story around the lived experience of these intangible frameworks I have described through many of the examples I have given, this time through the revitalisation of the Fishing Song. This experience became a paper co-authored by fellow both Cannemegal woman of the Darug dalang Ceane Towers, non-Indigenous scholar Amanda Harris and me. Titled, "Casting our Nets: singing a fishing song from the past, in the present, for the future"[326], we describe the process of repairing a songline by tracing and repairing a particular song. In the paper we describe that:

> These processes have involved engagement with the Country this song comes from, with the resources of that Country, and have drawn on the creative license and cultural knowledge of people descended from the singers. We start by describing the history of the people who sang this song, and what is known about their life on the harbour in the 1790s and beyond. We then examine the fragments of historical documentation of the song for what they tell us about text, melody, rhythm, and meaning. Finally, we give first-person accounts of the processes of re-connection, re-imagining, creativity, spiritual and cultural knowledge that were brought together in realising a version of the song that can be sung by people of the region in the present day.[327]

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5.6.1 Revitalisation of Language in Country

A Song is not just a song to me when it comes to Country. A song, if recorded or shared by an Elder, is an honour to learn. Songs have always filled my head since I was a child.

Margo Neale and Lynne Kelly state in the series' *First knowledges: The power and Promise*:

> In all Indigenous cultures, Knowledge is performed. Think back your childhood. Can you remember songs you learnt then? How about songs from a few years ago? .... Music brings out an emotional response, and anything you feel emotionally is much easier to recall." A song will take me back to time, make me laugh or cry. It will trigger a smell or emotion. Song is everywhere in this Land scape.[328]

I believe old songs are memories of times gone by; they connect us to the past. Darug songman and language custodian, Richard Green, described genetic memory as a term that explains "an

[326] Tobin, Towers and Harris, "Casting our Nets"
[327] Tobin, Towers and Harris, "Casting our Nets"
[328] Neale and Kelly, *Songlines*, 185.

ancestral passing-on of the language". Through these understandings of song and vibration is what I believe is the start of creation. I am not alone in this understanding. In *Voices of the First Day*, Robert Lawlor describes this knowledge from Elders:

> The great ancestral beings were the vast, unbound, intangible, vibratory bodies, like fields of energy. They created by drawing vibratory energy out of them and stabilising this energy and by specifying, or naming-the inner name is the potency of the form or creature. The comparable image is the creation of sounds, words, or songs from the vibration of breath. Aboriginals refer to the Dreamtime creation as the world being 'sung' into existence.[329]

Part of oolgna (intuition) as a lived experience came when Ceane got a calling to the harbour. She needed to find the place she was taken to in astral form through her dreams. She sent me a video of her singing in her kayak on the harbour. The tune she sang started with the same musical movement and word of the fishing song. What I call 'The Fishing Song' was recalled by David Collins in 1798 (Figure 20).

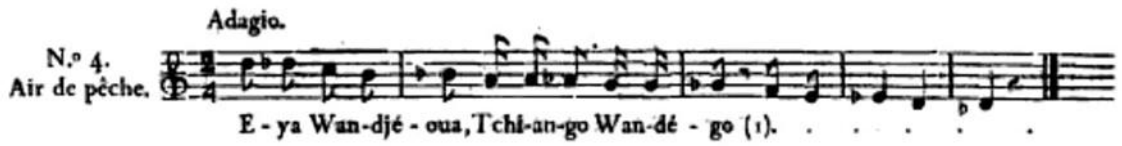

Figure 19. *Air de pêche* in de Freycinet, *Voyage Autour Du Monde: Entrepris Par Ordre Du Roi ... Exécuté Sur Les Corvettes De S. M. L'uranie Et La Physicienne, Pendant Les Années 1817, 1818, 1819 Et 1820 ...* Paris: Chez Pillet Aîné, Imprimeur-Libraire, 1824-39, p.775.

Ceane had never heard the fishing song. She had sent to me, a small clip of her singing in the harbour. The first note and word were eerily like the descending notes to the tune, that Freycinet notated. The rest of the tune she sang was different but to the word "E-ya" this is to me a confirmation that song is still in Country waiting for us to relearn to connect. Here in 21st Century, Ceane dreams about the harbour, follows her calling and sings the first words of the fishing song quite amazing. This naturally led me asking Ceane if she would like to sing with me. Ceane is a dancer and doesn't usually sing but this is not about a musical performance to Ceane and me, it's about our ancestors guiding us together for ceremony:

> To keep Country at the centre of the performance, we arranged to gather at a site in the area of Woccanmagully (Farm Cove) with a view down to the shore of the harbour where the early records describe women singing in canoes and then coming ashore where Bennelong joined in the singing. We also liaised with our colleague Matt Poll at the Australian National Maritime Museum to borrow a nawi (canoe) held by the

[329] Lawlor, *Voices of the First Day.*

museum and constructed by Dean Kelly in 2014 through the revitalisation program on nawi craftsmanship.[330]

Like Dean Kelly knows when speaking of the sacred ceremony that Uncle Max Harrison shared with him concerning the whale he states, "So we sung them up to do that and help them on their journey. It's what we have to do."[331] Sing up those fish is exactly what Ceane, and I believe we are doing. These are sequence of events and signs are the language and song from Country. These connections run through our western timeline and are patterns of old stories from our ancestral roots.

Audio Example 1. Performance #1 24 November 2022 – Jacinta Tobin and Ceane Towers:[332]

Figure 20. Jacinta and Ceane singing the fishing song with nawi made by Dean Kelly and loaned by the Australian National Maritime Museum, 24 November 2022.

5.6.2 Using the Fishing Song with Harmonies

Through explorations of the harmonic interweaving of the fishing song, I was honoured to create and record with Yuwalaraay musician Nardi Simpson and Wiradjuri / Yorta Yorta, singer Kaleena Briggs both known as the band, Stiff Gins. It was then added to BARANI, an animated project for the Vivid Festival and displayed at the Maritime Museum from 24 May to 15 June 2024 at 5:08 minutes in.[333] The harmonies at times took us all into different feelings of being

[330] The word nawi/nuwi (nowey, nowee, nao-i) is recorded in a range of colonial sources, see Troy, *The Sydney Language*, 44. On Dean Kelly's awi, see David Payne, 'Bark Canoe building at Bents Basin – a NPWS Sydney Aboriginal Community Cultural Gathering', Australian National Maritime Museum blog, 26 May 2014. Accessed 16 April 2024 at https://www.sea.museum/2014/05/26/bark-canoe-building-at-bents-basin-a-npws-sydney-aboriginal-community-cultural-gathering.
[331] Harrison, *Gurawul the Whale*, 53.
[332] Available on YouTube at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oa-CbzwqSQ8&list=PLSFHNq95NCPlT3El08B1xu24SXm9JZ-zO&index=1.
[333] Audio Example https://app.frame.io/presentations/8a18725b-c137-4402-99ef-1bd5477b5c6c

on the harbour with the women fishing. When I first heard the song, I did a recording for Jaky Troy this version was very similar, but this one has the beautiful harmonies.

5.7 Song of the Emu

The 5th of October 2024 was the first time I performed the song I wrote called 'Emu in the Sky' at the State Library. This song is at the end of this study: it's to capture the knowledge I have gained on Songlines during my research. All the songlines are present in the sky as above and so below. Those songlines are then reflected in the waters of Earth as a silent recorder of every photon it has encountered. In *The Emu Sky Knowledge of the Kamilaroi and Euahlayi Peoples,* by Michael Anderson et al share the knowledge of the Emu in the sky. They refer to a collective of knowledge around the Emu, but Micheal Anderson a Kamilaroi and Euahlayi Elder held the most complete knowledge:

> In Spring, around November, the Emu once again is transformed. For the Kamilaroi and Euahlayi, the Emu is also Gawarrgay/Gawarghoo, a featherless emu who travels to waterholes and looks after everything that lives there… Some of the major themes of the Kamilaroi Project, such as 'what's up there is down here', are reflected in the Kamilaroi/Euahlayi stories of the Emu.[334]

This song is written to explain the connection between the sky and the Earth:

> Warrawal Naa marri mariong makri burawa
> pemul naa bardo garragarrang
> killi birrung yinyun burawa Gunyalungalung ngallowan
> The Milky Way see the big female to male emu in the sky
> Earth see in freshwater and saltwater
> Shining stars up and down The Dreaming it lives it remains.

The Emu in the sky teaches us about seasonal change. The movement of the Emu through the sky lets us know when the eggs are good to harvest. Ngurra guiding us through its signals and signs singing us through its landscape. With its subtle indicators sign posting where we need to go and what ceremony is required for certain times of the year.

Interestingly the Emu egg has seven layers, and I was taught to carve them with the old shearers blade again like the cigarette paper over the comb instead of the gum leaf, we as Aboriginal people adapt and change but Lora/Law or the Dreaming remains ngallowan (they live they remain).

As Uncle Ray Kelly states when talking about the revitalization of recorded songs:

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[334] Robert Fuller et al., "The Emu Sky Knowledge of the Kamilaroi and Euahlayi Peoples," (Ithaca: Cornell University Library, 2014), 176-77.

> It is always a sorry when writing things down as it gets set in stone. Our culture is always growing and we have to learn to adapt and change this is why our culture is still here today through the adaptions and changes. No doubt my present understanding will deepen as lifelong learning unfolds. Nothing like an absolute or define interpretation is being suggested here.[335]

5.7.1 A Gift from Country for the Song of the Emu

As I have shown through different teachings of song creation and revival, my/our lived experience always compliments our achievements, whether the gift be a child spirit or a song maybe a sacred site. All these things come to be or as a gift from the right intent and the creation of song and ceremony just in a 21st Century style.

The practice of song is not just the singing itself, but the environmental threads of lived experience that bring a depth to a revitalised Song of the past. Writing about the singing of Aboriginal women in Central Australia, Linda Barwick writes:

> As the Country itself changes over time in response to human activity or larger flows of climatic or ecological change, the song system is able to adapt, to find new contexts for meaning making.[336]

I was asked to go on a field trip to a sight in the Blue Mountains. I was gifted to see the emu woman in all her glory at the edge of a tessellated patch work sandstone platform for the first time.

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[335] Wafer and Turpin, *Recirculating Songs*, 18.0

[336] Linda Barwick, "Songs and the Deep Present," in Ann McGrath, Laura Rademaker and Jakelin Troy (eds.) *Everywhen: Australia and the Language of Deep History* (University of Nebraska Press & American Philosophical Society, 2023), 110.

Figure 21. Photo by Jacinta Tobin of Erin Wilkins on the Emu woman platform, 23rd of October 2024.

I was told by those who gathered for the World Heritage conference 2002 that when you see those tessellated sites you know it's women's business. The Emu woman is responsible to help the women say goodbye to their sons. I realized later that it was my Mother's Birthday, it's my mother's blood line that has led me on this journey. When I experience a site like this is always for filling but to see it on my mother's birthday is amazing, I believe this is the Ngurra Barayagai (Song Belonging to Country). This song belongs to Country, because it's my songline and I am Country and Country is me. Country is sharing back with me I shared my song with her.

Figure 22. Emu woman photo taken by Erin Wilkins, 23rd of October 2024.

5.8 Conclusion

Developing a relationship with Ngurra and repeating that connection creates an insight into Ngurra Barayagai (Song Belonging to Country). Ngurra has signs for changing seasons developing one's own observational sense or oolnga according to Ngurra and its needs. When repairing Songlines, one must first learn the seasonal changes in the Country, its soil type, vegetation, fauna, water courses and access to them and of course the stars. Moving through Country to utilise the resources that were created over tens of thousands of years. Our lives are guided and supported by the resonance of these interconnectivities. The instances where these conjunctions do not happen also tell me information about what is not happy, resonant, and able to be realised.

These things are real. Many of these different ancient pieces of knowledge were extremely scientific in their nature, handed down from generation to generation. Hard science research into these relationships with Country need funding and genuine long-term commitment. Knowing that our lives on Earth are participating and interacting in its Song. Seeing the stories of the past still visible on land and in the night sky. Singing with the right intent till Ngurra's ancient tune becomes known. When collective and individual lives are shaped by this knowledge and have made our survival and creativity possible in an historical and contemporary context – it is the Dreaming.

6. Connecting the Song to the Country through the Gift of Fresh Water

Let's pace ourselves along our learning journey, as we make this budbili wogga: there must be time for rest, and rest time usually was around water for us in Darug Ngurra. Let's have some water to replenish with this sacred force that joins us all. Water is life, no water is no life. Water is the life force held by the mother from which all are born. Water is intelligent:[337] we are made of it and need to communicate with it again.

Water holds memory, all the sacred stories of the night sky that are reflected in places where water gathers. These are the great adventures of past creator beings like the Great Rainbow Serpent Baiame which have shaped our Earth. We remember and dance and sing their journeys across the Country.

In this chapter, water will be a connective conduit: while I demonstrate though this chapter that water is a method of Darug rest and restoration, I will also call on water on my Country as a flow between stories that interconnect. These memories of my journey are sown, etched, burnt and painted into this cloak we are making. Telling these stories onto the cloak and resting; both reinforce the process and proposal of wogga as a methodology of inquiry and presenting research in a Darug way. At the same time, the telling and interconnecting of these stories about and through water. They demonstrate Darug ways of coming to know, and coming to share connections, lifeways, science, and history as an holistic knowledge and research practice that can replenish and recover Songlines.

I want to begin this chapter with a Dharug Dreaming shared by Kim McLaughlin given in her own words.":

> **Dharug Dreaming: How our land and waters were created.**
>
> **Auntie - Eva Webb, Grandmother - Mavis Taber, Father - Eric Taber,**
> **Shared by Kim McLaughlin**
>
> Here is our Dharug Dreaming of the 3 Sisters and how our world evolved, and the water was separated from land. A long, long time ago, when I was only a young girl, my Nan used to always tell me this story. The reason that she used to share this story with me was so I could connect to Dharug land as I am from this land, and how precious it is and how it was created.
>
> Our river system keeps us safe and gives us the abundance of food and water and life. That allows us to keep warm and cool when we need to. So, the yarn my Nan used to always start with was a long, long time ago. This story was shared. It was shared with

[337] Masaru Emoto, (2011). *The Hidden Messages in Water,* Simon and Schuster.

her by her mum and dad, aunties and uncles and her grandparents and shared from our ancestors when time begun.

They told her this story so she would never forget her connection to land and waters on Dharug land. Dharug land is surrounded by our five rivers. We have a responsibility to keep them clean so our land can continue to shine and look after our people. My Nan used to always start this dreaming with the world it was kept in a very, very dark place. The world back then was filled with water and water only surrounded by the night skies.

There was one shining star spirit that came across our world and was mesmerized. She saw the beauty. She looked deeper and deeper into our world and saw the miracles under the waters. She circled the world and saw that there were only waters.

So, she was really excited, and she went and had a yarn with her two sisters about what she saw, and they were not interested. They said, it's only water. Don't worry about that world! because it is only water. Well, the Star Spirit kept on visiting our world. She would look deeper and deeper through the water and saw such beauty within and under the water.

Once she met a spirit that raised itself out of the water. It was the Ocean Spirit. The Star Spirit was just so excited, and she asked the Ocean Spirit if he could just pull back the water and let some of the wonders under the water rise to the top, he refused and said no and told her to go away. So, the Star Spirit left to yarn with her sisters. She met them quite regularly and let them know about the Ocean Spirit, how he was so rude and angry, but he was the caretaker of all the waters. He would not withdraw any water so the wonders under the ocean could come to the top of the world. Her sisters laughed and said go away, time after time.

The Star Spirit wouldn’t give up and kept on approaching the Ocean Spirit and he would regularly refuse. One day, the Star Spirit said to her two sisters, come with me, you have got so much more wisdom, he might listen to you and say yes. I am sure you can talk the Ocean Spirit into pulling back the water so we can look at the marvels under the water.

So, the two sisters agreed and said they would go with her. So, the three Star Spirits went to visit the Ocean Spirit. The Ocean Spirit appeared. And the three sisters asked him if he could hold back the water so they could see all the wonders that were beneath it. He once again said no and rudely asked them to leave. The youngest sister was so upset because she couldn’t believe that he even said no to her wise sisters and started to cry.

She cried and cried and couldn’t stop. Each tear that fell from the Star Spirit actually started to divide the water. The water was separating because fresh water and salt water cannot mix. The two older wise sisters noticed what was happening and the Ocean Spirit was getting very angry.

He asked her to stop crying. But she couldn't stop crying because she could see what was happening under the water. That all the beauty was actually coming to the top. So,

> her big sisters helped her and started crying themselves. When they had all finished crying, they discovered our beautiful land and called this land Dharug land. It was beautiful. The Ocean Spirit said, what are you doing? I am going to take back this land. You cannot have it
>
> The girls said, they have lifted the land from under the ocean. To let other creations begin. That's why today we have our land and it's protected by our rivers, our creeks, our lakes, our natural dams filled with freshwater tears of our 3 Sisters and our ocean waters surround all our lands preventing the Ocean Spirit from taking over the land.
>
> You can see the ocean is always trying to take back on our land as the waves of the ocean always slap our beaches and cliffs, reminding us of the power the Ocean Spirit holds. This Dharug Dreaming highlights our connection to Country being the true Custodians of Dharug Land that are surrounded by our five rivers, keeping the salt water at bay. As a little girl this is one of our Dreaming's shared with me to explain why Parramatta River has fresh water and salt.[338]

I like to thank Aunty Kim Mc Laughlin for sharing this story, as it is the first time it has been written down. Those Five Rivers are the Dyarubbin (Hawkesbury/Nepean), the Parramatta, Lane Cove, Colo and the Georges River all keeping that Saltwater at bay. These stories take me to a time on the Earth when three celestial bodies may have come very close to the Earth. I ngara (imagine) that one planetary body got caught in the orbit of the Earth for a time, then the three stars and their water from their heavenly bodies fell on to the Earth. I ngara it, put pressure on the platonic plates creating Earth's movement of the plates.

> The experiments aren't alone in suggesting a water-bound planet. "There's pretty clear geological evidence," too, says Benjamin Johnson, a geochemist at Iowa State University. Titanium concentrations in 4-billion-year-old zircon crystals from Western Australia suggest they formed underwater. And some of the oldest known rocks on Earth, 3-billion-year-old formations in Australia and Greenland, are pillow basalts, bulbous rocks that form as magma cools underwater.[339]

What many don't know is that these creation stories come from a deep place of connection with all that is. Instead of being abstracted stories, my thesis argues that Aboriginal people know these records are scientific histories. Until they are treated as science, modern culture will continue to resist and patronise the knowledge and ingenuity of First People.

We as Aboriginal people know that we were not in physical form at the time. We have received these stories from our spiritual connection to a non-physical plane of existence and the memory held on Country. The invisible world or a field of possibilities or Songlines are still present today. Lawlor who knew and acknowledge the late Uncle Bobby McLeod had connection to

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[338] Personal communication, Kim McLaughlin, 24 June 2023.
[339] Paul Voosen, (2021). "Ancient Earth was a water world." *Science (American Association for the Advancement of Science)* 371(6534): 1088-1089.

the Monero people through his father and to the Tomakin Wandandian and Yuin people through his mother. He was a cultural advisor for "Voices of the First Day" it states:

> These magnetic song lines guarded the physical, ceremonial journeys of the tribes. Initiated men and women learn to travel these subtle an invisible energy veins using their psychic or spiritual body thus they were able to exchange songs, dance, and mythical visions of the ever unfolding-dreamtime reality over great distances.[340]

This story of "The Three Sisters" is the start of the fresh water and its connection to land. As my mother is a freshwater woman from Cannemegal, I will start this story of water education at Harris Park a suburb next to Parramatta, the place of my mother's birth. Through this chapter, I will take you a journey of a lived experience of being grown up in Country and submerging in its water. From the saltwater, freshwater meeting place of Parramatta to the top of the Blue Mountains, returning to the shorelines of the sea and back up the mountain again in a constant flow. Teachings from water in Country from its birds, its trees, its geology and each layer of connections with water places creates greater deeper insight into all its reflections from the stars to the sea. The chapter is of water and my relationship to it and its relationship to Country.

6.1 Immersing Myself in the Water Lessons of Dyarubbin

My Aunty Glady lived at Toongabbie. Toongabbie was known as a paint up place, according to Richard Green, before heading to Parramatta for ceremony, where scar trees remain as ancient signposts. Mum and her family would eat eels out of Parramatta River. I would say to Mum, didn't you think you were Aboriginal - eating eels out of the river? She would reply, "We ate rabbit too, I just thought we were poor". My Mother's brothers would make tin crafts to fish in the river. I was told that they would send Uncle Kenny Fuller, the youngest cousin, out to grab the tar off the road to repair the tinny when needed, as he was young enough maybe to get away with it. Waterways have always been part of our Family's story as well as being able to adapt and change.

Aunty Glady showed me how to hold my breath and swim underwater for a long time like a turtle. I was a great swimmer; I was swimming from 18 months. This was a way of slowing your heartbeat down and being in a very relaxed state so I could glide through the water like a turtle and not exhaust my energy. The whole time Aunty Glady would teach me, I never knew it had anything to do with being Aboriginal. I would swim the Dyarubbin, which has been changed from when I was a child by Boral mining for gravel and sand. Turtles were present in the river then and it was probably very polluted, but we weren't aware of those things in the 1970s and 1980s.

These respectful connections through water and breathwork brought a love for water and a feeling of peace as I would submerge myself in its embrace. Water has always been my friend,

[340] Lawlor, *Voices of the First Day,* 126.

company that needs no words - just being in its presence creates peace. This use of breathing techniques has assisted me in spiritual realms and connecting to Country. This is one of the lessons that I learnt from Aunty Glady and only on deep reflection, can I see the path that was set in motion as the Elders watched me grow. Stockton one of our local archaeologists and a priest as a non-indigenous man here has a wonderful insight to our world view, he observes that:

> Aboriginal people live both the mundane (ordinary, everyday) and the liminal (moving towards the sacred) at the same time. Their daily 'living in the myth' climaxes periodically with ceremony to reinforce knowledge and lore, to meet obligations to country as an individual and as part of a collective. Knowing where you are in the story tells you where you are in the landscape.[341]

These are places where a relationship through my childhood has already been created, now it is time to go to Country in ceremony having the confidence to know it is listening as I am learning to listen better. These are ancient stories that even when we as its Country men and women are not always aware of its presences its presence is always with us.

6.2 Gulguer Connection to Ancient Water Serpent

Bents Basin is known as Gulguer and is a place where the Darug, Dharawal and Gundungurra would meet:

> Billy Russell said that 'Gulguer' ("meaning a falling or shooting down or swilling round, which causes the water to make a large round hole") was the name of Bent's Basin. He said it was one of the lurking places of Gurangatch.[342]

This is also the place where the three dharuga (falling stars) fell, that I talked about in Chapter 5:

> Auntie Robyn Williams tells the story of Mirragan, the hunter who chased Gurangatch, the big eel thus creating much of the landscape around Sydney. Gurangatch was finally caught at Gulguer, Bents Basin.[343]

In this story, Gurangatch got away but lost part of its flesh which was then shared with all. I have also heard that Bents Basin is where the serpent still lives and is a place where only those of Country should swim.

The Gulguer story sounds like the Warloongarriy from Western Australia:

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[341] Knox and Stockton, "Aboriginal Heritage of the Blue Mountains," 179.
[342] Harold Koch et al., *Aboriginal Placenames: Naming and Re-naming the Australian landscape*, vol. 19, Aboriginal History Monograph, (Canberra: ANU E Press, 2009), 102.
[343] History of Aboriginal Sydney Website, "Bents Basin." Accessed 11 November 2024 at https://historyofaboriginalsydney.edu.au/south-west/bents-basin-robyn-williams.

> The Warloongarriy ceremony re-enacts the Woonyoomboo story, when the ancestor being Woonyoomboo speared the serpent, Yoongoorrookoo, who created Martuwarra in the Bookarrarra.[344]

These stories create a good, respectful ceremony between tribes which reinforces kinship connections. Dharug, Dharawal and Gundungurra can come together as tribal groups again and learn from each other's ceremony of the old Song lines in Ngurra - it will help with repair. I show this power of sharing stories between tribal groups to revive Songlines through this chapter.

Waterholes, where you could find them, were always fun. One of those places was Gulguer. As a young teenager I would slide down the rapids, swim all the way across and dive off the rocks. Swimming across it, feeling the icy cold spouts of water in different parts of the deep hole, gave you a sense that the mountain water must be connected. These places are referred in many books; these are my places referred by Knox and Stockton, Karskens and Attenbrow.[345]

I had a very scary time once at Bents Basin. We were jumping off the rocks, but this day I wanted to dive. As I left the platform my body started to turn, and I flopped on to the water on my left side. A massive sound echoed through the basin as I sank deeper and deeper. I thought at the time I will never make it to the top. Just as I felt like my last bit of air was fading, something helped me get to the top. My friends were in a position ready to dive in and look for me. They told me when I hit the water the sound was extremely loud and echoed through the basin. Later in life I found out that it is the place of the Great Serpent Gurangatch and to this day I believe I was helped to the top by something. I wonder if that loud whack woke it up.
Now we head upstream through Warragombie: Now known as Warragamba. 'Warragombie' was the name first recorded for the lower Cox River, and it was formalised by Governor Macquarie. The name later changed to 'Warragamba'. It was almost certainly the Dharug name for the river"[346] to Yarramundi past Emu Plains. We can't travel like we used to, but the Spirit of Dyarubbin still remains and shows itself in times of flooding.

6.3 Yarramundi Teaching Water Protocols and Practicality

At Yarramundi where the Grose, Nepean and Hawkesbury rivers are confluent, there were the remains of the old fish traps, though it is hard to see evidence of them now, after great floods and human carelessness. Pascoe talks about the destruction of fish traps in Port Fairy, Victoria in *Dark Emu*. He details Aboriginal aquaculture systems, and how many were destroyed:

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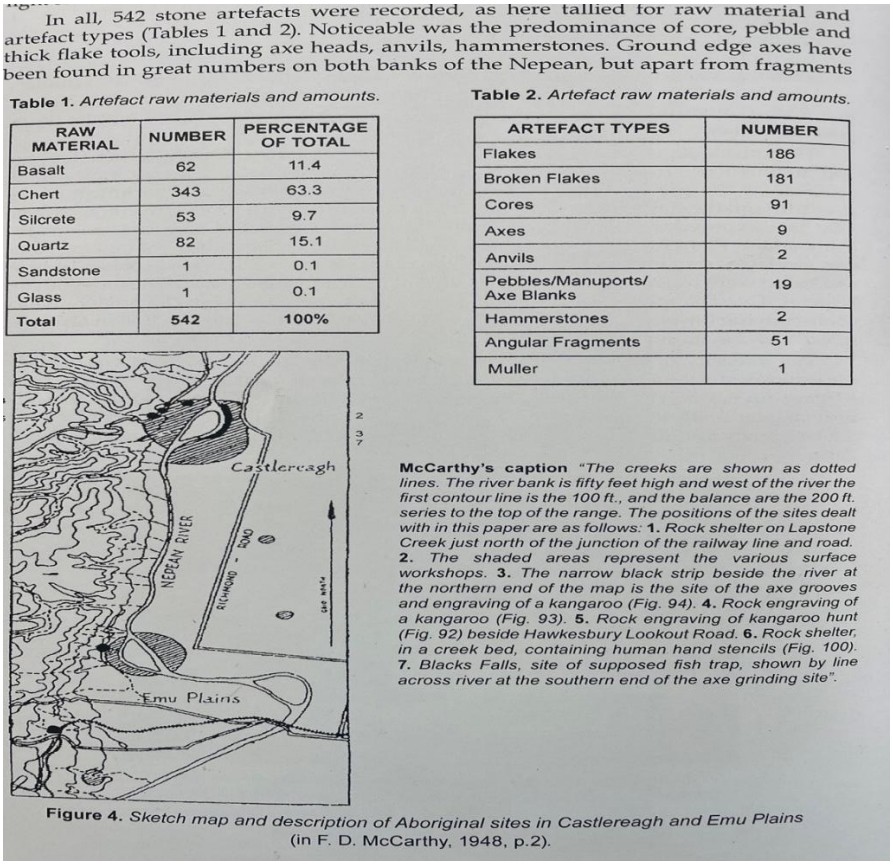
[344] Poelina, McDuffie, and Perdrisat, "Martuwarra Fitzroy River Watershed," 8.
[345] Knox and Stockton, "Aboriginal Heritage of the Blue Mountains"; Karskens, *People of the River*; Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past,* 20.
[346] Koch et al., *Aboriginal Placenames,* 19, 101.

> Destruction of these systems was witnessed by the very earliest Europeans. Aboriginal Protector William Thomas saw many aquaculture systems but reported that most were destroyed by Europeans in the first days after their arrival.[347]

Not far from the old fish traps is an area known as murrumac (pathway to the mountain), a place where you can cross the Nepean River from Penrith to Yarramundi Shaws creek at the base of the Blue Mountains. Leanne, my sister, took me as a child to the water pools that embrace the water coming from the Mountains to the plains: icy cold water in the middle of summer. I have now learnt my protocols of sacred waters; not to swim in those places that are for ceremony like the icy cold waters tell us all is connected. Further down, those sacred waterholes are for food processing and then at the bottom one can swim and have some fun.



In all, 542 stone artefacts were recorded, as here tallied for raw material and artefact types (Tables 1 and 2). Noticeable was the predominance of core, pebble and thick flake tools, including axe heads, anvils, hammerstones. Ground edge axes have been found in great numbers on both banks of the Nepean, but apart from fragments

Table 1. *Artefact raw materials and amounts.*

RAW MATERIAL	NUMBER	PERCENTAGE OF TOTAL
Basalt	62	11.4
Chert	343	63.3
Silcrete	53	9.7
Quartz	82	15.1
Sandstone	1	0.1
Glass	1	0.1
Total	**542**	**100%**

Table 2. *Artefact raw materials and amounts.*

ARTEFACT TYPES	NUMBER
Flakes	186
Broken Flakes	181
Cores	91
Axes	9
Anvils	2
Pebbles/Manuports/ Axe Blanks	19
Hammerstones	2
Angular Fragments	51
Muller	1

McCarthy's caption *"The creeks are shown as dotted lines. The river bank is fifty feet high and west of the river the first contour line is the 100 ft., and the balance are the 200 ft. series to the top of the range. The positions of the sites dealt with in this paper are as follows:* **1.** *Rock shelter on Lapstone Creek just north of the junction of the railway line and road.* **2.** *The shaded areas represent the various surface workshops.* **3.** *The narrow black strip beside the river at the northern end of the map is the site of the axe grooves and engraving of a kangaroo (Fig. 94).* **4.** *Rock engraving of a kangaroo (Fig. 93).* **5.** *Rock engraving of kangaroo hunt (Fig. 92) beside Hawkesbury Lookout Road.* **6.** *Rock shelter, in a creek bed, containing human hand stencils (Fig. 100).* **7.** *Blacks Falls, site of supposed fish trap, shown by line across river at the southern end of the axe grinding site".*

Figure 4. *Sketch map and description of Aboriginal sites in Castlereagh and Emu Plains* (in F. D. McCarthy, 1948, p.2).

Figure 23. Sketch map and description of Aboriginal sites in Castlereagh and Emu Plains.[348]

Pascoe also writes, "Captain John Hunter, captain on the First Fleet reported in 1788 that the people around Sydney were dependent on their yam gardens".[349] One of Darug's main source of food was the yam, *Dioscorea transversa* or *Dioscorea bulbifera*. Yam is used as a common a word for tuber, bulbs, rhizomes and corns. They grow in rich soil like those found near and around waterways.

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[347] Pascoe, *Dark Emu*, 80.
[348] F.D McCarthy, "Blacks Falls, Site of Supposed Fish Trap, Shown by Line Across River at the Southern End of the Axe Grinding Site." (Aboriginal Heritage of the Blue Mountains, 1948), 36.
[349] Pascoe, *Dark Emu*, 20.

I have been told That around Yarramundi was one of the last yam beds, we would have one tributary of water from the river for us and one for nature. always reciprocity: this would keep the balance. As the Elders would say, what goes around comes around. One was always responsible for some form of nature and made sure that the system they were responsible for was always looked after. The yam being such a staple diet of course has its own Songline and totemic requirements. This is my responsibility to the family, to come which is inclusive of human and non-human. This is my knowledge of the totem system, as Bird confers:

> To my original point about the inseparability of regimes of rights and regimes of responsibilities, my contention is that these Native Title rights and interests are not parasitical-they include not only the right to take resources, but also the responsibility to ensure that resources will be there in the future. Totemism appears to constitute just such a jurisprudence of responsibility and right.[350]

Barkandji writer Zena Cumpston, geographer, scientist and Wiradjuri descendant Michael-Shawn Fletcher and non-Indigenous geographer Lesley Head draw attention to women's particular relationship with yam cultivation:[351]

> Women have maintained the food supply through the environmental knowledge, connection to Country, a memory, and in many contexts continue to do so.… the invisible plant of human history is closely tied with the invisibility of women. Collecting yams was and continues to be almost universally undertaken by women often accompanied by children.[352]

6.4 Katoomba Waters for Pleasure and Process

Cindy Laws would point out to me the indentations in the rocks at Mini Haha Katoomba. This of course is summertime, as Cindy hates the cold. It is known to some Darug that Katoomba is the place for summertime, to get away from the heat on the plains, just like winter is at La Perouse for the whale migration. She said *"*See those holes? We put toxic plants in there as part of the processing". I could see where the waterfall channelled grooves into the rocks. If there were foods needing extra processing, then dilly bag tied to a tree would be all that was required; nature would do the rest. We would work with our waterways; this is a concept spoken of in "Aboriginal Heritage of the Blue Mountains", that engineering sites have been found in Darug Country. Jim Smith states, "A key element of this landscape is the sophisticated methods used to control water flow".[353] Some of these sites I ngara as processing and cooking places. Aunty Joan Cooper would speak of Mini Haha (its traditional name so far unknown) as a women's

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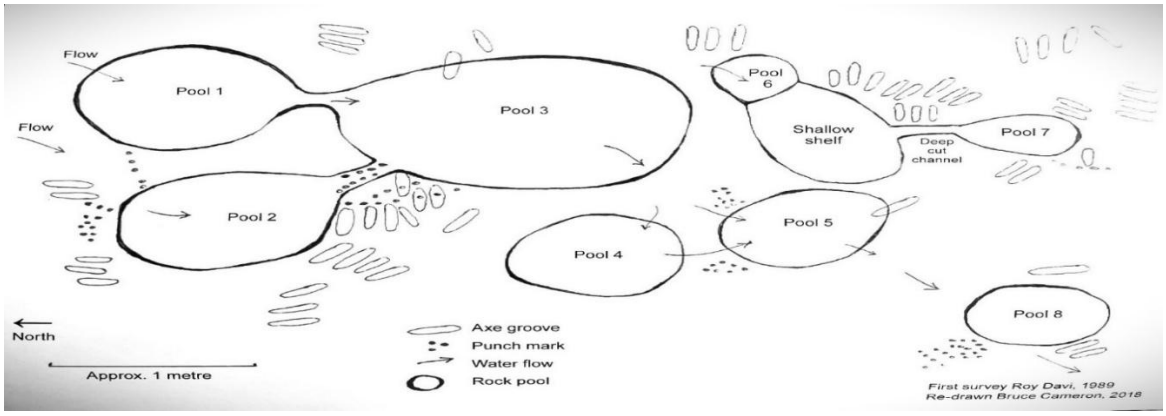
[350] Deborah Bird Rose, *Common Property Regimes in Aboriginal Australia: Totemism Revisited* (Canberra: ANU Press, 2013), 131.
[351] Karskens, *People of the River*, 48.
[352] Zena Cumpston et al., *Plants: Past, Present and Future* (Port Melbourne, Victoria: Thames & Hudson Australia, 2022), 121.
[353] Knox and Stockton, "Aboriginal Heritage of the Blue Mountains: Recent Research and Reflections," 71.

business place. She also shared knowledge on the native sarsaparilla (smilax glyciphylla). It was told to me that "Every child in 'The Gully' due to the cold which is more common than not in Katoomba had to have a shot of native sarsaparilla every day to keep the cold and flu away".[354] Cox states in his paper that antioxidants are present in the native sarsaparilla which may be why it kept colds and flu away, but there is another gift from the plant:

> On the other hand, it seems reasonable to assume that consuming Smilax glyciphylla as a tea would expose the gastrointestinal mucosa to significant levels of glycyphyllin, even if its uptake and metabolism to phloretin is limited. The level of antioxidant activity and the Fe-chelating effect reported here might, therefore, be sufficient to reduce oxidative damage in the gastrointestinal tract and contribute to a protective effect against stomach, colon and rectal cancer.[355]

As amazing as the properties of Sarsaparilla are, the fact that it needed to be heated interested me. Jim Smith states when referring to R.H. Mathews' records of Darug Hydraulic Engineering, "Mathews' interpretation was that these channels had been constructed to divert water away from all but one hole, so that the remaining holes could be used for cooking purposes".[356] Smith informs us that Mathews believed hot rocks were used. This Darug engineering shows evidence of the use of hot rocks of for heating water and has always been used in Darug Ngurra. These findings substantiate the knowledge that has been shared on the Blue Mountains. Old practices had to adapt and change, from rock pools with hot rocks to a fire in the humpy with a boiling Billy Can. Here I know is evidence of Darug Hydraulic Engineering and heating processing methods. The heating of water is required for our native sarsaparilla to be used as medicine, this was told to me in the Gully by Aunty Joan Cooper.[357] The knowledges my Elders have shared with me in the past, are now being confirmed.



[354] Personal communication, Aunty Joan Cooper, 2000 to 2010.
[355] Sean D. Cox, K. Chamila Jayasinghe, and Julie L. Markham, "Antioxidant activity in Australian Native Sarsaparilla (Smilax glyciphylla)" *Journal of Ethnopharmacology* 101, no. 1 (October 2005), 166-67. https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jep.2005.04.005.
[356] Knox and Stockton, "Aboriginal Heritage of the Blue Mountains: Recent Research and Reflections," 73.
[357] Johnson, *Aunty Joan Cooper Through the Frontdoor*, 119.

Figure 24. Hydraulic engineering site sketch plan. Drawn by Bruce Cameron, 2018 (from a site survey by Roy Davi, 1989 re-drawn by Jim Smith, 2016 and drawing updated following a site visit by Bruce Cameron and Kelvin Knox).[358]

6.5 Faulconbridge Ridge Trusting Your Internal Waters

While doing cultural consultative engagement with Parks and Wildlife we were asked to travel on the fire trails to investigate if there are any sites that the road turning circles may damage. This day Cindy Laws and I asked the rangers. *"*If we get a feeling can, we stop the car to check why we are feeling that way, please?*"* and they said yes. One hour had just past of being able to navigate to areas of interest. We managed to find 4 carvings that had not been registered on Aboriginal Heritage Information Management System (AHIMS) which is a register for sites.

Figure 25. Photo taken at 10:07am of three deep marks in the sandstone on the 13th of April 2002 by Keirilee James.

[358] "Aboriginal Heritage of the Blue Mountains", 72.

Figure 26. Photo showing the barrugin (echidna) carving taken at 10:13 am on the 13th of April 2022 by Keirilee James.

I argue that our oolnga (intuition)[359] is essential to site management and protection as we are the Country and the Country is us. We have a sense, we resonate with Ngurra, and we work better with other Country men and women as if to confer with each other, on the intangible knowings of Ngurra Barayagai (Song Belonging to Country). We had trust in the company we were with so we could relax, and let those feelings come forward. By sensing our internal waters, Oolnga (intuition) leads us to the places we need to find to help learn and then repair our songline through our Ngurra.

[359]Cameron, "Australian Indigenous Sensory Knowledge Systems in Creative Practices," 119.

Figure 27. Scar tree found by Keirilee James Photo taken at 11:31 am on 13th of April by Keirilee James.

Due to the excitement of finding sites so quickly, it encouraged the Parks and Wildlife staff to go in search of other evidence of the family's signposting, and they were rewarded. Figure 28 is one of the scar trees they found. With a respectful relationship we can work with Parks and Wildlife, appreciating the ingenuity and harmonious movement of our people in our environment. We never wanted to conquer her we just want to work with her seasons so the best weather and lifeways could be maintained and sustained.

Figure 28. Cindy Laws and I standing and overlooking the vast and spectacular Gross Valley at the end of the Faulconbridge Ridge. Photo taken at 1:01pm on the 13th of April 2022 by Keirilee James.

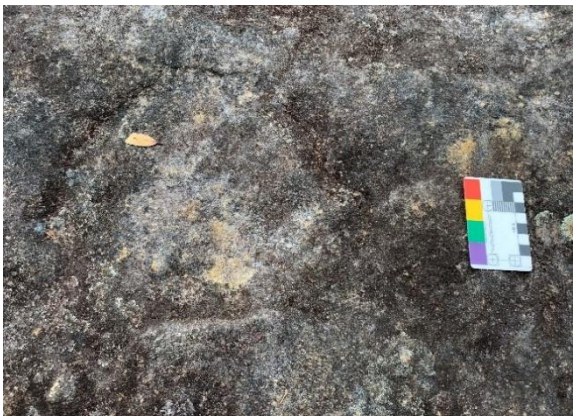


Figure 29. Echidna carving 1 photo taken at 3:04pm on 13th of April 2022 by Keirilee James.

Figure 30. Echidna carving 2, photo taken by Keirilee James at 3:04pm on 13th of April 2022.

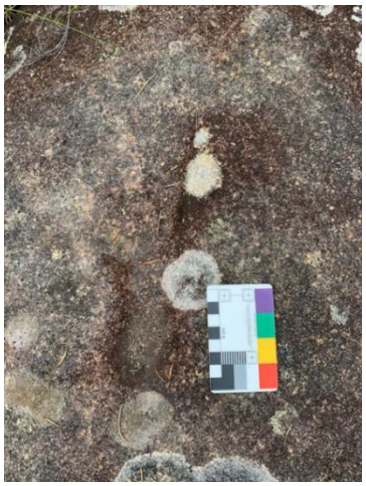


Figure 31. Hook or Mundoe (footprint) photo taken by Keirilee James at 3:06pm on the 13th of April 2022.

The Echidna carving is a Songline part of a marriage line that runs parallel to the Great Western Highway and Blue Mountains.[360] I have been told by Uncle Bill Allan that Little Hartley is a marriage place, which makes sense if you are starting from the plains and heading up. It is where the three water sheds meet of the Darug, Wiradjuri and Gundungurra for marriage and other business, as we know that spear heads have been found in Hartley too. As Darug People, Mount Victoria is the highest point of what I would consider my Country. The Sydney sandstone, known as the Darug main stone, finishes at Little Hartley. At Mount Victoria there are ochre pits, carvings, waterholes and waterfalls but this time instead of Linden Ridge having the three lines around the echidna we have three eyes the same as the lizard carving down the road from me. Each level of elevation brings you closer to the end goal. For a young man coming to the end of his journey through law/lore that is marriage. Why in the water chapter? Because echidna can travel by water too, they swim because more related to platypus but that's another story.

6.6 Linden Ridge water for gathering

One of the processing areas that displays Aboriginal science and lifeways is at Linden Ridge. With many carvings covering 12 kms of sandstone ledges with small pools of water, grinding grooves and hanging swamps. The ridge is covered with multi-functional processing places that are still present in Ngurra. From 2021 to 2024, I was engaged in fieldwork at Linden Ridge and noticed that even on hot days there was still small amounts of water present. With my Elders' guidance, I started to immerse myself within Ngurra, seeing with ancient eyes. We visited in different times of the year, observing all the changes. Not just looking at the engaging carvings, or stone arrangements that cover the ridge, but instead seeing and resonating with the story of food processing and recognising our Darug Hydraulic Engineering and ingenuity. As women we need to know where our food is coming from, we would be processing and cooking. Due to the number of sites on the ridge, we sense that larger groups would gather so there were lots of mouths to feed.

[360] Knox and Stockton, "Aboriginal Heritage of the Blue Mountains: Recent Research and Reflections," 166.

Figure 32. Aunty Carol Cooper and I with basalt hot rock to cook on and/or to heat water with. photo by Lis Bastain on the 16th of September 2022.

I can ngara (imagine) the relevance of the hanging swamps with all its native grasses conveniently growing next to the smooth platform. I imagine women around this very spectacular site with its amazing views and all the convenience of a shopping mall. Away from the carvings for the men's eyes but close enough to assist. Unfortunately for a brief time observing their radiance as their song of seasonal changes stimulates the landscape. Ngurra itself has taught me which way as women and children with our Elders are the easiest ways to travel through Country. While the grasses teach what time of year is best to visit, and when we should say thanks through the ceremony of burning around the hanging swamps ensuring their safety and productivity, after we have harvested and fed on their bounty. We moved with the season and repeat the processes, so it becomes the norm.[361]

[361] Graham, "Some Thoughts about the Philosophical Underpinnings of Aboriginal worldviews."

Figure 33. Not far away from the hot rock, is the hanging swamp filled with grasses while the sandstone ridge inviting with its smooth texture and pools of water for processing. An open plan kitchen koori style. Photo taken by Lis Bastain on the 16th of September 2022.

It is always a pleasure to get out on Country. When we are out there together with others from our family, we are constantly learning. Time goes so quickly, and we never seem to have enough time to be present as we should. While I am sharing with you now, brief moments that are interconnected stories about water on Country, imagine what I could share, what research could be achieved, through prolonged time on Country with Elders and community. Time away from Country is time we are unable to Care for Country: we are unable to advance, reconnect with, and reinvigorate Aboriginal science and our old lifeways. I argue that being on Country and being practically supported to spend time without the clock of the west, is a core piece of resourcing that those who want to engage with Aboriginal science can offer us as traditional people. In this way, funding Aboriginal research, funding biodiversity and conservation work, is resourcing a space for us to be without the gaze of the west, and without the pressures and measures of the west. Maybe one day we will have the responsibility to live and care for Country so we can grow in our Aboriginality in tune with nature and not on the time clock of the western world.

Our neighbouring tribe is Dharawal Aunty Jodi Edwards with Yuin and Dharawal kinship connections says:

> Our cultural knowledge-holders were sharing cultural and language practices through play-based learning and through the environment to identify flora and fauna, shaping our understanding of the uses of the flora and fauna for food, as fiber for tools and

technologies. Our Cultural Custodian shared knowledge to place us within and connect us to Country, shaping our identities".[362]

Figure 34. Aunty Carol and I honouring the fields of native grasses, observing, immersing ourselves in our learnings about its resources with love and laughter in Country. Photo taken by Lis Bastain on the 16th of September 2022.

We are building a relationship with Linden Ridge so we can place a traditional burn with Parks and Wildlife in the area to protect and encourage Country to again thrive and prosper. We are ngara, new and more supportive, respectful interaction with government organisations on traditional land care practices Aboriginal Science and lifeways, which we are grateful for but more needs to be done. The effects have been obvious from fire to flood but at least David Keith article raises this awareness looking at the hanging swamps, example as follows:

> In these latter swamps, pre- and post-fire monitoring of soil moisture showed that long-wall coal mining underneath the peatland had substantially reduced water retention, eroding the resilience of the swamps to fire and predisposing them to collapse when the 2019–20 fires swept through the landscape, while unmined swamps remained functional and are rapidly recovering. A year after the fire, the collapsed swamps remain poorly vegetated, while eucalypts are invading their margins.[363]

6.7 Water and the Night Sky

Our waterways hold the same fractal patterns and the many Songlines on the Earth are as many in the sky. This is why the stars are part of getting to know Water in all its forms. The water is

[362] Jodi Edwards, "Two worlds, One Culture:Sustaining Dharawal Cultural and Language Pactices through Play," in Julie Davis and Sue Elliot (eds.) *Young Children and the Environment: Early Education for Sustainability*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2024), 54.
[363] Owen F. Price et al., "Short-term impacts of the 2019–20 Fire season on Biodiversity in Eastern Australia," *Austral Ecology* 48, no. 1 (2023), 3. https://doi.org/10.1111/aec.13247.

evaporated into the clouds as above so bellow. Water holds the stories of those songlines that are reflected in there watering holes, silent Songline keepers. Keeping the Songlines alive as it shares itself with all living things that enter, or part take in its gift of fulfilment.

The Cannemegal clan name, I learnt later, we would call ourselves the Wamali known as coming from the Possum. Possum is my family, and I do possum business. This is where my Mum's unbroken mitochondrial DNA line comes from and connected to the area Marrong. Mitochondria are maternally inherited organelles that are present in most of our cells in the body. The Mitochondrial interest is increasing in research pioneered by Picard in 2016, who contributed to its recognition.[364] There is a word that the Warlpiri use for the Mother's, Mother's, Mother line, it is "Lampunu (Breast milk line)".[365]

Interestingly, Marrong was one of the highest points on the plains, in my way of thinking this makes sense as a possum is nocturnal so naturally it is relating to stars and it being the highest point closer to that connection with them. Which connects me to the learning from Jakelin Troys Country with the many crystal shards littering the ground in ceremony these would be used as a reflective stimulating mirroring effect, of many stars at the full moon setting, referenced in "Claiming the 'Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe'".[366]

In Yolngu people's sharing by the Gay'wu group of women in their book called "Songspirals" their Songspirals is their way of talking about Songlines. This nonlinear approach is how they capture the multi-layering of understandings, that is not present in the word Songline. Songline gives the reader a sense of lineal concept and creates limitations of the deeper knowledge that is Songlines or Songspiral truly are. A Songspiral gives that multi-dimensional visualisation of what a Song can do. They call the possum fur string their passport to the Sky Country. When speaking of the possums and it furs importance they state:

> The string and the possum fur have many meanings, and not symbolic or metaphorical meanings. The string in the fur our identities they bring the world into being, bring worlds into being. They are the passport to the universe. They embody a multiplicity of things and bring them together. They are the connection between clans, between countries, between the earth and the sky.[367]

As the late David Mowaljarlai said after pointing to the logs near a lake:

> We service them," he says, "those sacred stones or logs. There are always two. One is in the water. We dive down, pull'em out, dry'em up a bit, put'em back. The second one

[364] Martin Picard and Bruce S. McEwen "Mitochondria impact brain function and cognition." *Proc Natl Acad Sci U S A* 111, no. 1 (2014), 7-8.
[365] Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes, and Box, *Ngurra-kurlu*, 13.
[366] Troy and Barwick, "Claiming the 'Song of the Women of the Menero Tribe'."
[367] Gaw'yu Group of Women, *Songspirals*, 138.

> comes from the Milky Way, through the mirror in the water, There are two of everything, one in the Milky way, one on the ground. They witness each other.[368]

To bring these two concepts together, I see the Songlines like the fractal branching of the tree in its branches and in its root system. A well-known Bundjalung Elder shared with me an aspect of a burial ceremony; of the upside-down tree being the feature in the ceremony which reflects this knowledge. Our bodies too have the same fractal branch to lung and blood vessels. I liken it to the rain maker ceremony, spoken about from the Walpiri people. They say the "murrawadji" tree is the women spirit she forges together the fire and rain. Again, across the continent the information and repetition that everything is connected and has a cause and effect.

6.8 Connecting Across Country and Time

Heritage managers meet

A meeting of World Heritage Managers from Australia was held at the Blue Mountains on March 8 and 9. The second day of the meeting was set aside for an Indigenous workshop which was attended by the property managers from all the world heritage sites and staff of Environment Australia's World Heritage Branch.

The idea for an Indigenous workshop came from a series of previous recommendations from World Heritage Manager's meetings, and also from an Indigenous Network within World Heritage properties.

The World Heritage Branch facilitated a teleconference hookup between the Indigenous People from the properties over a six-month period leading up to the workshop.

It was during these phone hookups that the World Heritage Branch and the Indigenous people from world heritage properties were able to talk about the critical nature of Indigenous engagement in world heritage property management.

The Indigenous property managers from Tasmania, Willandra Lakes, Uluru, Kakadu, Fraser Island, Riversleigh, Great Barrier Reef Marine Park, and Wet Tropics in Nth Queensland discussed their need for an Indigenous forum and were able to set the agenda for a way forward for more meaningful engagement on their properties.

The workshop was a success in that the Indigenous and non-Indigenous property managers were able to commit to a process in developing outcomes relevant to their particular properties.

The highlight to the workshop was the welcome by the Darug and Gunnengarrin peoples welcoming the Traditional Owners from other properties onto their land. They were then overwhelmed by a reciprocal acceptance from the Traditional Owners from Uluru who performed the Seven Sisters Dreaming Story through song and dance and left a recording for the local traditional owners to use. The property Managers were committed to the outcomes of the workshop and have in fact started the process of engagement in working together with the local Traditional Owners.

Thanks to the Darug and Gundungurra peoples for their warm hospitality and generous spirit in sharing their country.

Graeme Calma, Chair of the Mutijulu Community Council Inc, attended the workshop.

At the Blue Mountains meeting were Daisy Walkabout, Nyinku Jingo, Jo Willmot and Judy Kunmunara.

For further information on the Cultural Heritage Projects Program, contact the Heritage Assistance and Projects Section at Environment Australia on (02) 6274 1111.

Figure 35. The Blue Mountain Gazette, 13th of March 2002. Featuring the Gathering of the World Heritage Managers, which included different Traditional Owners as part of what was "The World Heritage Indigenous Network".

The women shared a dance of the Seven Sisters Connections as a video recording. The recording of the dance that was shared wouldn't work once we tried to replay it after our visitors had left but it was just static.

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[368] David Mowaljarlai and Jutta Malnic, *Yorro Yorro: Everything Standing up Alive: Rock Art and Stories from the Australian Kimberley* (Broome, WA: Magabala Books, 2001), 49.

One of those times when we had a chance to meet up was in 2019, where I was supported by the Jill Parliament Memorial Scholarship Fund to participate in the Big Sing Community gathering in Rope Creek Northern Territory.[369] Big Sing was run by non-Indigenous, ex-Blue Mountains resident Rachel Hore. The program connects First Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians through music, singing together in a choir. At this event, Aunty Judy Kunmunara joined the gathering. She is the woman on the far right in Figure 36. This time I got to dance part of the Seven Sisters Story with Rene Kulitja - a Pitjantjatjara woman and artist who has travelled around the world with the Central Australian Women's Choir. Rene and I met at the Woodford Dreaming Festival in 2008, and ten years later we danced together at Big Sing.[370]

Reinvigorating these connections, in 2023 through the support of my community, Kimberwalli, and The Sydney Conservatorium of Music, University of Sydney, I was able to raise the money to bring Seven Women over to share this Songline. When the women arrived, they had places they wished to visit. First stop was Coogee women's bath where we were greeted by a waterspout. I ngara (imagine) that Water Serpent, that Ancient Being saying, "Hello I see you brought visitors". I Oolnga (intuition) that it is big Songline because that's a big sign. This sign is confirming my relationality with my Country. Honouring our attempts of right intent, to create healing and growth for Country and its people by acknowledging, relearning and energising our old Songlines. Seeing that ancient Being show its presence, we engage with my ancestors' gifts of Country and its song.

Figure 36. Waterspout in the foreground is Wedding Cake Island. Photo taken by Jacinta Tobin on the 17th of May 2023**.**

The area is called Wedding Cake Island, that area now covered by whitewash can be seen in the photo, once dry land. It was known as a women's place: this knowledge was shared with me by Biripi Elder Sue Pinckham.[371] The women were welcomed and gifted a book of the non-Indigenous history of Coogee's women's Bath from the volunteers that keep guard, so it remains

[369] Jacinta Tobin, "Connection through Song." Accessed 12 January 2025 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SiBwEJL83uk.
[370] Mid Mountains Local News website, "Reconnecting the Seven Sisters Songlines from Uluru to the East Coast of Australia." Accessed 12 January 2025 at
[371] Personal communication, Sue Pinkham 2023.

a woman's place. I note here, the continuity of the serpent in the water hole: this is a common story right across the Country - just like Bents Basin.

Figure 37. Waterspout is leaving as we are leaving**.** Photo taken by Jacinta Tobin on the 17th of May 2023.

See in the photo there is a smaller spout forming. I ngara, that is the next generation starting to learn:

> While Country is an archive of ancestral actions, the full extent of the archive can be accessed and worked only by the custodians with the knowledge and authority to do so. As with all archives, the archivist doesn't just guard the archive: they interpret and add to it, engaging creatively with it to keep it alive, or to keep its knowledge relevant and active in the present. For the Aboriginal archivist […] They are effectively present-day incarnations of their archive.[372]

Parramatta girls' home was next on the agenda. The women wanted to understand what happened to us over here. We met up with family there Peta Straughan, Julie Webb and representatives of local Council. Then we saw Bonnie Djuric from Parra girls[373] who gave books to the ladies on the horrific history that women like Bonnie had lived through. Then the rain came, and we needed to go.

[372] Neale and Kelly, *Songlines,* 61.
[373] Hibberd et al., "Parragirls."

Figure 38. The Water Serpent followed us as a Rainbow to the left as we head up the freeway. Photo taken by Jacinta Tobin, 17th of May 2023.

The next stop was Lawson where we filled the bus with 40 women plus. Then we went to home of the Three Sisters songline, known as Echo point. Aunty Carol Cooper gave the Welcome from the Darug and Gundungurra, as she is both. The sunset looked amazing with no rain, but Sydney had big storms. Our women all got together, cooking for the masses that night. It was great meeting of many old and new faces coming together:

> Songlines come from the Tjukurrpa as everything does, and Tjukurrpa is Dreaming law, which provides a governance structure for life as well as knowledge system. Knowledge is archived in the land (which I refer to as the master archive), and song and performance (inma) are a way of remembering in a non-text-based society. Unlike Western archivists who archive knowledge in books, the arch- or Ancestral archivists placed this knowledge in the earth. Putuparri Tom Lawford expresses a difference thus: 'Kartiya law is all written down on paper: Blackfella law is written in the stars, on the ground, on the Countryside, in the hills, everywhere.[374]

Figure 39. Gathering at Echo Point, home of the Three Sisters on the 17th of May 2023.

[374] Palmer, "'Songlines: Tracking the Seven Sisters' exhibition National Museum of Australia, Canberra." P 203 to 204

Figure 40. Sunset on the other side of the group some could see the Three sisters in the clouds photo taken by Ceane Towers**,** 17th of May 2023**.**

In the article "Reconnecting the Seven Sisters Songlines from Uluru to the East Coast of Australia", Lis Bastain, reflecting on this experience, writes:

> Senior custodian Rene Kulitja, one of the seven from the Mutitjulu Community, which sits lightly in the shadow of Uluru, said they wanted to come to this World Heritage Area because "We are one people working together." She spoke of Tjukurpa, the ancestral knowledge of the Anangu people of Uluru, which is the basis of their spirituality, law and moral systems; and of their duty to pass this knowledge from generation to generation, "to teach the young for the future". She explained how they are bringing this Tjukurpa from Uluru "to the rest of the country, and to other countries too", so that they can help heal people everywhere.[375]

It was a big learning experience. Many from different organisations and individuals gifted the women as it was cold for them, being May and in the Mountains. Our women danced, sung and shared. Our growth compared to 2002 from the Darug Nation was obvious. We are hard on ourselves and so are others too, but I see our cultural growth and I am proud. I have watched my family crawl out of extinction stand up for Country when no one else cared, giving over their time, money and resources. There is a realisation the gap in our knowledge of cultural protocol and songline is limited, but the audacity for Darug people to still be standing as the longest-hit with colonisation is our strength. Our spirit, our ancestors, are constantly engaging our western indoctrinated brains, back to Country. Manifesting signs and signals, as our ancestors wait patiently for our observations to heighten, and ngara (imagine) those ancient beings still present today. Empowering those who experience its presence. The women would sit and paint, and some learnt from that experience and others didn't. Tex Skuthorpe's in his book explains: "The Nhunggabarra had many methods for ensuring the flow of the capacity to

[375] Mid Mountains Local News Website. "Reconnecting the Seven Sisters Songlines […]."

act between individuals: buurras, storytelling, learning tracks, initiation, songs, dance, artwork, ceremonies, walkabouts, learner-driven education, to mention but a few[376]”.[377]

What was relayed is by painting the stories, you further embed them in your knowledge. That learning takes good listening and keen observation skills with a desire to learn.

F**igure 41.** Photo taken by Peta Strachan on the 18th of May 2023**,** facing Sydney when we had returned to Sydney**.** I ngara that the serpent is now returned back to the sea. Letting others know business is finished for now.

I have chosen the photos to reflect the responses from nature to our gathering. These are the magic moments very rarely captured and reflected on. This is Barayagai Ngurra the song belonging to Country, saying it is watching and responding.

In April 2024 I had the opportunity to go to Uluru with Peta Strachan and Dharpaloco Serene Yunupingu for a five-day, on the ground, no electricity, no running water experience. This was not a gathering where photos were taken, or any communication about the gathering can be shared. “Mary Graham views that through repetition a norm is created, so we strengthen our connection by going to the women’s Ngurra as we grow and learn.[378] Peta found out that the woman who she meets at the Sydney Olympics 2000 and who would always catch Peta in different places was Rene’s Mother. Rene’s Mum was one of the group of dancers who danced “The Seven Sisters” for the games.

[376] Sveiby and Skuthorpe, *Treading Lightly*, 178.
[377] Sveiby and Skuthorpe, *Treading Lightly*, 178.
[378] Graham, "Some thoughts about the philosophical underpinnings of Aboriginal worldviews “

6.9 Conclusion

My Country is being threatened by mining, over-development, and mismanagement. Ngurra is a living entity. You need to take a whole-of-landscape approach when dealing with its complexities in 21st Century. Many times, our time and resources are wasted in meetings where only one aspect of Country is involved, be it Water, development, a patch of National Park here or a bit of Council land there. These limited and constrained opportunities for Darug people to advocate for Country in the meeting rooms and conference tables of developers and businesses, often demonstrates that these establishments would rather control Country as an asset, than allow Country to become a place for all, in the hands of Aboriginal people. As Pascoe states:

> Encouraging full participation of Aboriginal people is not a simple task of handing them fluorescent vests so they can work in billionaires mine but requires a conversation with Aboriginal people about the future of the country. The opportunity to be involved in the future of the country will release Aboriginal people from some of the shackles of colonialism. The country will still be colonised but the dispossession will be included, not just in a vote or a constitution but in general Australian psyche. We will approach the idea of one nation not by exclusion, but by an inclusion that rarely gets mentioned aboriginal participation.[379]

In this statement, Pascoe acknowledges the long road many have had to travel due to Government and Non-Indigenous agendas. This statement gave me courage to work with Sydney Water. For the first time I felt as an Aboriginal woman from Greater Sydney that I was being heard. Sydney Water assisted me with a top-up scholarship over the three years out of four-year completion. I was invited to participate in a five-day sprint for Sydney Water Innovation Festival where ideas were shared and future vision for our waterways were explored. Unfortunately, that person left the job so the communication with Sydney Water has stopped. We are only as effective as those on the inside the belly of the colonial masters. And even less effective if we never get to speak to the head.

[379] Pascoe, *Dark Emu*, 228.

On the NSW Government "Groundwater Strategic Priorities and Actions" web page it states:

> **Build community and industry resilience through sustainable groundwater use**
>
> Through sustainable groundwater use, water dependent aspirations of Aboriginal people are supported, water resilience for urban populations is improved and development opportunities are realised.
>
> **Key actions**
> 2.1.3
> We will:
> - Increase access to groundwater for Aboriginal people implement any Closing the Gap targets relating to groundwater entitlements and use
> - review the existing cultural access provisions in water sharing plans to overcome barriers to Aboriginal people acquiring these access licences
> - consider reserving unassigned groundwater for Aboriginal people were of benefit.[380]

Waterway health is a key element in all Aboriginal communities: no water, no life. I remember being told that a man on a horse could ride through the old gum trees in Blacktown before they cut them all down. This tree removal in turn caused the degradation of the banks of waterways, leaving very poor water flow and eventually stagnation, not to mention the pollution in the water due to sewerage overflow in heavy rains. Concrete vessels creating no natural flow, filtration and wastewater contamination is an ongoing and widespread issue across Darug Ngurra. For example, here is an ABC news article from the 11th of January 2025:

> Beachwatch NSW monitors water quality across the state, and according to , several Sydney beaches and baths are listed as either having "possible" or "likely" contamination.[381]

To address these challenges and take care of water and all communities here on Darug Ngurra, I have worked with representatives from Planetary Health Initiative[382] and six other Darug women on a sixteen-page submission for Water NSW 40-year plan.[383] Sydney Water is now

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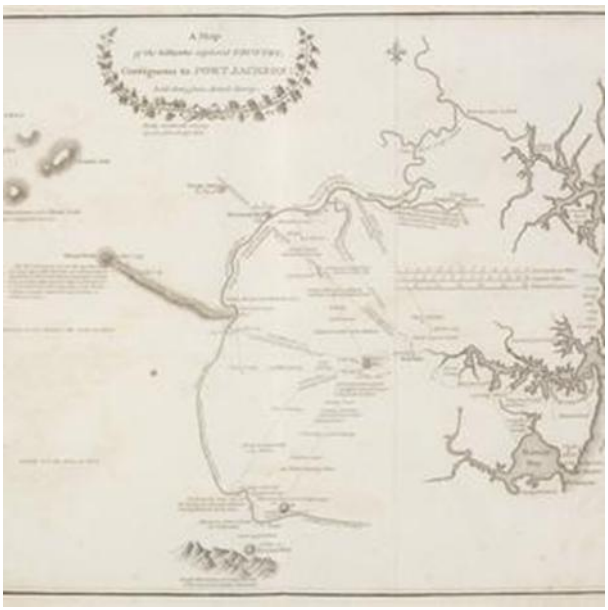
[380] NSW Government Website, "NSW Groundwater: Strategic Priorities and Actions." Accessed 09 February 2025 at

[381] MSN Media Website, "Sydney Beachgoers Urged Not to Swim in Waterways Amid Pollution Warnings and Bull Shark Activity." Accessed 11 January 2025 at https://www.msn.com/en-au/news/other/sydney-beachgoers-urged-not-to-swim-in-waterways-amid-pollution-warnings-and-bull-shark-activity.

[382] Blue Mountains City Council Website, "Blue Mountains Planetary Health Initiative." Accessed 14 January 2025 at https://www.bmcc.nsw.gov.au/planetaryhealth.

[383] NSW Government Website, "The NSW Water Strategy will Prepare NSW for the Future." Accessed 09 February 2025 at https://water.dpie.nsw.gov.au/our-work/plans-and-strategies/nsw-water-strategy/the-strategy/our-water-our-future/the-nsw-water-strategy-will-prepare-nsw-for-the-future.
From the website current information is not available: "Development of the Greater Sydney Water Strategy is being guided by customer feedback, with public exhibition and consultation planned for the third quarter in 2021."

looking at naturalising the waterways, instead of the concrete that heats the water with no filtration. I encourage these initiatives to be implemented more quickly to keep up with the development of Country – especially around the new airport affecting my clan lands Cannemegal and neighbouring clan Cabramattagal – as it has been built on our flood plain, lands that connect underground to Bents Basin through the aqueducts that covers that area. "In the map by Walker, he regularly writes "Bad Country frequently overflowed" around Marong. The sacred place where Sydney's drinking water comes from, now threatened by the airport and fuel dumping that will be going on. I oolnga that too many buildings will not be able to be supported by the soft soils of Cannemegal Country."



Map 3. A map of the hitherto explored country contiguous to Port Jackson [cartographic material]: lain down from actual survey / J. Walker sculpt. Published London 1793.[384]

Water and all its aspects are practiced-based fields of discovery; of my own culture and learning to feel the land, connect to the land and hear its song. My ancestors knew, and we, their descendants still feel in our urban 21st Century settings, these ancient Songlines and places of great significance. As I have reflected before and used all the way through this thesis, I wish to review like taking that sip of water at the start of this chapter. Liz Cameron, a Darug woman, writes about her knowing of the artist expression of our culture stating:

> "The seven human senses of creativity in making Indigenous theories of the human senses consist of the external senses, which include seeing (vision), hearing (audition), tasting (gustation), smelling (olfaction), and touching (somatosensorial). The internal senses comprise of intuitive being ("oolgna") and imaginative knowing ("ngara"). While there is a loss within English translation, oolgna is interpreted as felt gut sensations—a natural bodily alertness that generates deep, emotionally felt insight.

[384] Accessed 09 February 2025 at https://collection.sl.nsw.gov.au/record/74VKqDK0JyRZ.

> Ngara refers to the imaginary, an ability to observe through a sense of curiosity that is deeply grounded within memory and dreams. These seven senses combined are perceived as guides of the emotional unconscious and are consciously felt vibrations that perpetrate cognitive thinking. Hence, it is not the mind that drives creativity in practice but the deep connection we have with our body and the world around us."[385]

These deeper connections or language of the land is somehow revealed to Darug people in many ways. One aspect of what I believe Cameron is describing is what my Aunty Glady Smith would call "the gift", which Camron describes as oolgna: visions, hearings, feeling and translating extra energies or vibrations in that space at that time. This is what I believe I was experiencing at Faulconbridge Ridge site finding, Bents Basin being assisted, and Coogee ngara the Water Serpent. My journey became highlighted by my environment – especially though water – because the environment responded to my intentions. In turn my intention, and all intentions, effect the environment. These Songlines hold knowledge – just like the Walpiri say, **"**Malpaya, summoning the rain with firestick".[386] Now we have rested together near the water, in the next chapter we will explore the relationship between water and fire.

[385] Cameron, "Australian Indigenous sensory knowledge Systems in Creative Practices," 6.
[386] *Ngapa Jukurrpa – water Songline*. Directed by Francis Kelly, Steven Patrick, Jeffery Bruer, PAW Media 2016.

7. Connecting with Country through Fire and Lived Experience

This is the last pelt to be sown into the cloak. As I mention in my introduction, Wiradjuri woman Lynette Riley talks about the process of the possum skins being added to the cloak throughout your life's journey.[387] In times past, each piece would have been made starting from birth and continuing to grow with age, but like the history and its landscape, my Ngurra has been changed. Old ways and responsibility to Country of the past have been broken due to colonisation, but one thing our Darug people are good at is adapting. I have had to sow many pieces together, amplifying the effects as those ceremonies of the past would have done. Like the written word, my budbili (Possum skin cloak) is a virtual experience to assist the mind to picture and learn the many aspects that create songline repair. The burning of story into the pelts is now transforming the etching and staining into a connecting story covering the skin. The burning acts as a murru (pathway). Fire assists in connecting all the stories I have told together. I am learning more lessons on the connection of fire to water.

Using the stick that may have been thought of once as a dead piece of wood is now a live ember. They have been sitting in the fire patiently waiting for their turn. This reminds me of the old iron rods with three different shaped heads for burning designs on boomerangs that would wait their turn too. One rod was solid and round for heavy work, one crafted with a pointed end for fine work and the other flat for design. This is as Uncle Greg Simms recalls: he would watch his father and the other men in La Perouse as a child, after they had collected the wood from the mangrove. Once the boomerang was made, three rods were for burning the design, always geometrical in shape, always diamonds, rectangles, squares but never circles. But this cloak only wants a gentle burn, as part of the cloak's song showing its story of fire so a stick will do. Our fire is used to encourage new growth like water, it cleans the land like water, and it adds to the health of Ngurra, like water. We burned, which when burned well releases less carbon than when left to burn in wildfires. The element of Fire showing its song of change and transformation from dead to alive. Like fire it transforms the dead grass into new shoots. We work with fire as a tool and a spiritual practice that deserves respect. Like the live ember on the stick onto the skin of the wogga, Ngurra's surface shows the marking of where the fire has burnt its way through the landscape. Like our old way and the design on the wogga, each burn had a desired result; a pattern or mosaic is shown.

I use the charcoal and ash to show Country after the 2019 to 2020 mega fires. It shows the effects on 80% of the Blue Mountains World Heritage sites that burned.[388] This is less than half of the whole of Darug Ngurra from the mountains to the sea. These areas have escaped development, but not mismanagement of Country due to no cultural care.

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[387] Riley, "Reclaiming Tradition and Re-affirming Cultural Identity through Creating Kangaroo Skin cloaks and Possum Skin Cloaks," 7.
[388] Ward et al., "Impact of 2019–2020 Mega-fires on Australian Fauna Habitat."

7.1 Introduction

In this chapter, I will show a relationship that is still needing attention to grow well, which is Traditional Owners connecting to Country through different initiatives. Many are working with Government organisations as part of the "Caring for Country" framework,[389] sharing their knowledge and meeting their cultural responsibility through the use and respect for fire. It's our Country's Lore which we as the people of Country need to oversee and practice in our way for a safer and healthier Country for all.

I watched the fires in 2019 to 2020 with feelings of frustration and despair. Due to the devastating mega fires, I was compelled to commit to writing a PhD to gain greater knowledge and contribute to gaining the respect required to practice all forms of Songline repair, and part of that repair is traditional fire practice. I had been led to this conclusion after many years of service through song, ceremony and meetings. I was asked in 2000 by four of my senior Darug women, Elders now passed, to work with my Darug people from Sydney to the Blue Mountain. Ward et al state:

> Australia's 2019–2020 mega-fires were exacerbated by drought, anthropogenic climate change and existing land-use management. Here, using a combination of remotely sensed data and species distribution models, we found these fires burnt ~97,000 km2 of vegetation across southern and eastern Australia, which is considered habitat for 832 species of native vertebrate fauna.[390]

These statistics hopefully gives you an understanding of how much was lost and why a action in a cultural way is required. This hope and desire of land management back in the hands of the original people has been a pursuit of mine. A sense of what can become of Country when not caring for it in our ancient ways became tragically real in the 2019 to 2020 mega fires. I don't know if words can explain the heart wrenching sight of your Country burning. Feeling the lives of so many being lost. Our fauna and flora incinerated. The heartbreak and shame I felt as a Darug woman who was asked to look after this Country: I watched it burn, and I had no power to stop it.

7.2 Frustration in the Past

It is great in theory to work with government departments, but on the ground one is constantly stifled by the lack of appreciation of Traditional Owners and a feeling of a patriarchal, colonial, male domination. I still experience it and did so when working before and after for Parks and

[389] Peter Ballard, Herder, Jessica and Moore, Brad, "Caring for Country: Aboriginal Outcomes Strategy 2024" (NSW Department of Planning, Housing and Infrastructure, 2024), 33.
[390] Ward et al., "Impact of 2019–2020 Mega-fires on Australian Fauna Habitat."

Wildlife. Victor Steffensen explains his experience when being blamed for a fire the Traditional Owners didn't set and the lack of respect or commitment when working with National Parks:

> But every time we got the chance to interpret the landscape to them from the traditional perspective, it fell on deaf ears. They were so intimidated to hear anything that we tried to tell them about the country. Whatever we showed them the indicators of sick country, they would take it personally, maybe because they were the managers? It was the perfect example of the ignorant attitudes we were facing.[391]

Over 20 years I was involved in meetings, after meetings, after meetings, mostly on an unpaid basis, about fire and the need for cool burns. Victor also felt this frustration stating:

> Time was too precious to waste on pointless government meetings, especially with the elders getting older. We were still doing traditional knowledge work here and there with other communities as well. It's a shame to say but when it comes to the aboriginal aspirations of looking after country and reviving our culture, the government just got in the way.[392]

I haven't had enough experience with traditional burns as I would like to have but I will show you a progression of what Darug scholar Jo Anne Rey writes and experiences when connecting to Country:

> Given that Dharug Ngurra (aka Sydney, Australia) represents one of the most urbanised areas in Australia (geographically and by human population), it is logical that 'quiet activism' being undertaken by Dharug traditional custodians is a site from which others can gain insights and opportunities from which to contextualise their own areas of connection, caring and belonging.[393]

The "caring and belonging" that Rey speaks of has been a struggle, as we the Darug people are denied by government bodies such as land councils and are priced out of our traditional lands.[394] We haven't been given spaces in Greater Sydney to practice and move with the seasonal changes, so we must work with the government to care for our Country under the prying eyes and key-holders of the old chain master. A lot of time-wasting with non-Indigenous rules and restriction placed on Aboriginal people, when wanting to burn Country. These regulations lead to delays and inappropriate fires. These disruptions for those wishing to reconnect to Country and take on their spiritual responsibilities, are hindered by counterproductive restrictions and costly reports. Rey recognizes these faults in bureaucracies and warns:

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[391] Steffensen, "Fire country: How Indigenous fire management could help save Australia." 82
[392] Steffensen, "Fire country: How Indigenous fire management could help save Australia." P 83
[393] Rey, "Quiet activism through Dharug Ngurra: Reporting locally grown–not from the European South." P 28
[394] Cowlishaw, "Mythologising culture: Part 1: Desiring aboriginality in the suburbs." Gillian Cowlishaw, "Mythologising culture [Series of two parts]: Part 2: Disturbing Aboriginality in the suburbs," *The Australian journal of anthropology* 22, no. 2 (2011), https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1757-6547.2011.00124.x.

The context since the summer megafires of 2019-2020 has brought the realization that the relevant bureaucracies cannot continue down the path they have followed in the last 232 years.[395]

7.2.1 Example of Darug Working with Parks and Wildlife

I started working for Parks and Wildlife in 2010 having to resign from the Darug Peoples Advisory Committee to work for them to implement our 'Memorandum of Understanding'. With the help of Oliver Costello, I got to meet Victor Steffensen, the author of the book "Fire Country", in the Blue Mountains. Victor walked with us and the leader patch managers of the Blue Mountains in Country showing the need for traditional burns and warning us of disasters to come. We got funding to send Chris Tobin and Lex Dadd both Darug men and some of our neighbours as part of World Heritage collective to Queensland where Victor and his Elders were teaching others about traditional fire practice. I remember the excitement and the spiritual fulfilment both Darug men expressed to me about their trip away. Their faces were peaceful and relaxed, yet their eyes were sparkling with enthusiasm and thoughts full of possibilities. We had a dream to bring traditional burns back into Country. Permission was given with a Parks and Wildlife patch manager, Glen Mead, at Yarramundi at the base of the Blue Mountains to put the fire on the ground. This area is still receiving traditional burns today. Without Glen Mead's past connections to traditional fire management in the Northern Territory and Victor's cross-cultural exchange the knowledge, and practice wouldn't have been brought back to Country.

Figure 42. Jacinta Tobin, Peta Straughan, Cindy Laws and Lex Dadd 2018 gathering at Yarramundi**.**

In "Yanama budyari gumada: Reframing the Urban to Care as Darug Country in Western Sydney", the authors reflect on the lessons learnt while walking and camping with us at Yarramundi in an area called Shaws creek:

[395] Rey, "Quiet activism through Dharug Ngurra", 35-36

> In 2014 cultural burns were reintroduced to Yellomundee as part of a collaboration between Darug custodians, the NPWS, Yellomundee Firesticks, the Rural Fire Service, Murru Mittigar, Landcare, and Merana Aboriginal Community Association".[396]

Yarramundi is a very small section of the Blue Mountains national park which didn't burn in the 2019 to 2020 mega fire. In the "Yellomundee Living Culture Camp 2018" YouTube video, you will see many of us Countrymen and women coming together to do fire practice.[397] Yarramundi is part of my connection through blood relatives and my lived experience of growing up around the area and exploring those places.

Due to the lack of incentives, funding and access to sites on a constant basis, there is a gap in knowledge and relationship to Country that is exacerbating the fire problems caused by climate change and lack of connection to Country. Even though these events took place, and with Victor's visit to the Blue Mountains to warn us of the dangers, not enough was able to be done to Care for Country. No long-term planning system that would follow a Songline from ridge to ridge and through our waterways was implemented. Men and women in different areas cleaning with cool burns, show reciprocity with Country. Fire is saying thank you for the food and we are leaving now, according to the late great Uncle Wes Mann. He remembered the women burning the camp area after the old people and children had already started walking. This knowledge correlates with what Uncle Collin Lock would talk about, he said to me, that the ridges were quicker, the men get there first, check if it's safe and have it ready when the others arrive. The ridge line is a quicker pathway and sometime the old "Blacks Ladders", large fallen trees where used. This is also a reminder of men's sites and women's sites which is the next step of reconnection that we as Darug people are heading to.

7.2.2 Darug Doing it for Themselves

Another small patch of the Blue Mountain National Park that didn't burn in the 2019 to 2020 mega fires was my brother's camp. Chris's Camp is off the Darling course way, in the Blue Mountains part of National Park boarder and the old colliery left over from mining activities. This is not an official camp but a place that Chris and mostly other men took shelter and time out in. I believe a picture paints a thousand words, so the photo below documents Chris' Camp (Figure 44). This is another small way family connect to Country. By connecting to Darug Ngurra I believe what Chris has done here to show repetition of connecting over years has sincerely helped in reinvigorating its songline.

In figure 44, you can see Chris had removed the canvas that sat over the structure, as he thought for sure all would be lost, yet if you look closely not even Chris's bedding has been burnt. This was amazing to see when just centimetres away evidence is of how severe the fire became.

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[396] Ngurra et al., "Yanama budyari gumada," 285.
[397] NSW National Parks and Wildlife YouTube Channel, "Yellowmundee Living Culture Camp 2018." Accessed 24 August 2024 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0tXIAeQ-4sg.

Around the Gross, from valley floor to ridge tops everything was charred yet Chris's camp didn't burn.

Figure 43. Chris' camp after the 2019 to 2020 Mega Fires, 6th of January 2020. Photo by Jacinta Tobin**.**

The below images, to me, are a perfect example of Country caring for Chris due to their relationship that has built up over years.

Figure 44. The area around Chris's camp after the 2019 to 2020 Mega Fires. Photo taken by Jacinta Tobin on the 6th of January 2020.

Figure 45. Area of Darling Causeway area near Chris' Camp - Devastation as far as the eye could see. Photo taken by Jakelin Troy on the 30th of January 2020.

What has happened to our Ngurra (Country) was already oolgna (intuited) and spoken of according to Kakkib Li' Dthia, who writes when recalling an ancient story from Kaia Kakkib. It starts with a very sad tale about those coming from the underside of the world. When asked what can we do about this sad tale?

> 'You do not need to do a thing; just live your lives true to yourselves,' she replied. Then she continued to tell that when the fire had spent its fury and everything seemed lost – killed, cut away, or burned to a cinder – just as it always does, the rains will come. New life will spring forth. New and pure life that will seek to be true. [398]

[398] Kakkib Li' Dthia Warrawee'a, *There Once was a Tree Called Deru* (Thorsons, 2002), 261.

Figure 46. Chris's Camp showing the dance circle, and the structure is now covered. Photo taken by Jacinta Tobin on the 31st of January 2020.

Figure 47. Jakelin Troy and Cindy Laws able to sit on the seats that didn't burn around fire pit. Photo taken by Jacinta Tobin on the 31st of January 2020.

Figure 48. Chris' camp with canvas back on structure. Left to right: Amanda Harris, Jacinta Tobin and Cindy Laws. Photo taken by Jakelin Troy on the 31st of January 2020.

Figure 49. Country recovering: old scar from coolamon cut by Lex, but too many trees are still present. Photo taken by Jacinta Tobin on the 17th of August 2020.

Figure 50. Chris reconnecting at camp. Even Chris' little dry stick gunya didn't burn in the fires seen to the right of photo. Photo taken by Jacinta Tobin on the 17th of August 2020.

Figure 51. Life is getting back to normal. As you can see ochre decorates the trees again the land feels Chris and Chris covers her with beauty. Photo taken by Jacinta Tobin on the 3rd of November 2020. Life getting back to normal. As you can see, ochre decorates the trees again the land feels Chris and Chris covers her with beauty.

7.2.3 Darug Working with Government over the Sydney Region

Fire is required, not just for the fauna and flora, but it also protects our waterways. Fire and water are not enemies but coexist as complementary elements. Where you find the people, you find water. Where the water is, fire is needed to either protect hanging swamps or cold burns for bush medicine in wet areas. Steffensen refers to this knowledge:

> Another value of Aboriginal fire practice is ensuring the country avoids major wildfires. It is a key goal of burning to keep the land and waters clean, to ensure the natural resources are not destroyed by mega-fires.[399]

The Key findings of the NSW Department of Climate Change, Energy, the Environment and Water's review of published literature on the effects of bushfires on aquatic ecosystems states:

> Research shows that moderate and low intensity fires do not pose a significant threat to aquatic ecosystems unless during periods of extreme drought, when the water quality of river refuge pools may already be at critical levels. However, severe and extreme bushfires can pose a significant risk to aquatic ecosystems, particularly when followed by large rain events.[400]

Many Darug people are working towards greater care for Country. One of those people is Brad Moore the Senior Land Services Officer, for Aboriginal Communities in the Greater Sydney Local Land Services. Even though Moore's position is funded by government, I feel the tide is starting to change and they are listening a little more. I know that when the weather isn't good for burning, all of the Aboriginal groups have had to cancel the traditional burn. Maybe that's why you don't hear about them on the news, because we don't have runaway fires generally. Here is a response from one of the Landcare representatives who has experienced a traditional burn:

> Darug Country is also teaching Landcare groups and Rural Fire Service participants that fire is a non-threatening living entity. Unlike conventional hazard reduction operations that demand a combative approach to fire, these cool burns draw people together. Country cares by enabling community participation, a place, and an activity, that provides and nurtures reciprocity.[401]

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[399] Steffensen, "Fire country," 97.
[400] NSW Water Website, "Impacts of Bushfires on Freshwater Ecosystems and Potential water Management Options. Accessed 29 January 2024 at https://publications.water.nsw.gov.au/watergroupjspui/bitstream/100/1059/1/Impacts%20of%20bushfires%20on%20freshwater%20ecosystems%20and%20potential%20water%20management%20options%20-%20a%20literature%20review.pdf.
[401] Quoted in Darug Ngurra et al., "Yanama budyari gumada," 287.

Moore has created 10 agencies and organisations engaged in Cultural Burning. He has organised over 20 traditional burns in Country. One of those was Blue Mountains City Council who agreed to do a burn at Glenbrook Lagoon in October 2023. Local Elder stated that it was a beautiful feeling around that kind of traditional fire. The residents came out to watch and learn. This is a great initiative to help ease the feelings of fear when it comes to fire in the Blue Mountains since the 2019 to 2020 mega fires. I am grateful that different organisations are working together through Firesticks, which helps educate others who have never experienced a cultural burn:

> Firesticks has invested in building partnerships in the Greater Sydney region, across Dharawal, Dharug, and Gundungurra nations. As a built-up, urban environment, Greater Sydney offers a lot of opportunity for camp and infrastructure burns which are more difficult to practice in rural areas.[402]

7.2.4 Darug Working with Waterways

Jo Rey, with support from Macquarie University, has achieved traditional burns in the Lane Cove National Park at Browns Waterhole (BWH) with women such as Corina Norman and Leanne King. On the Dharug Country x City website it refers to the cultural burns stating:

> Today, and through the research, and alliances with others who are caring for the well-being of the river and its bio-diversities, BWH is the site of regeneration and return of cultural fire as a mitigation approach against the likelihood of mega fires in urban environments due to climate changing challenges. As such it is the activation of the site for the protection of urban communities through Dharug biocultural knowledges and practices.[403]

She calls the work of the collective Darug movers and shakers the "Quiet activism through Dharug Ngurra" Rey confirms the traditional burns approach:

> Unlike a western 'hazard reduction' burn, this is a gentle, relational process using fire to engage the animals, to protect their habitats, to 'clean up' the weeds and colonising urban invasive plants. Across 2022 and 2023 a collaboration and activation is anticipated, involving the people and stakeholders connected and caring for and caring about the presences, places and people of the Lane Cove National Park inclusive of the Ancestral practices of reciprocity that underpin Aboriginal Law.[404]

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[402] Firesticks Website. Accessed 29 November 2024 at https://firesticks.org.au/communities/greater-sydney-nsw/#intro.
[403] Darug Country Website, "Browns Waterhole." Accessed 29 November 2024 at
[404] Rey, "Quiet activism through Dharug Ngurra," 36.

We need greater support and funding for these types of initiatives. It has potential to become an employment opportunity. We the Darug people can't be expected to do this work for free, as many still expect from the second-most expensive English-speaking city in the world.[405] Participants in cultural burns state that:

> "[They] have listened first-hand to what Caring for Country means and how it relates to practicing Landcare. They understand that it is a more holistic idea, encompassing spiritual, cultural and social realms.[406]

This connection to Country brings a spiritual aspect of connection.

7.2.5 Darug Working on the Mountain

I was asked to be a participant in a rock art recording project which included Cindy Laws and Erin Wilkins as Traditional Owners. Others were Kevin Field, Jessica Wardhaugh, Tina Hill, Keirilee James, Shane Smith all from Parks and Wildlife. Wayne Brennan, Kelvin Knox and Will Moon as local archaeologists and rock art experts who were the authors of the report on the findings at Linden Ridge.[407] From this interaction at Linden Ridge, I was alarmed by the number of sites of significance. I understood that a site like Linden Ridge needs to be protected.

In 2020 I received funding from the Regional Bushfire Recovery Fund. The project's name was "Community Caring for Country" and the project ran from 2020 to 2023. Due to Covid-19 this project was delayed. The keys to the gate were only received mid-December 2022 and were handed back by November 2023. In that time, as photo shown in chapter 6, I have taken Darug members and Community members out on Country. The dream is to bring local Royal Fire Services, concerned citizens, local Aboriginal communities and those Darug who have achieved fire knowledge to demonstrate traditional fire in mid mountain country.

These funds were needed so we as traditional owners could meet the requirements of Parks and Wildlife to do our traditional burns in their area. I have got all the paperwork completed for a traditional burn to take place 2025. I need to point out that a lot of requirements are needed to be met for the government to create a Burn Plan for Linden Ridge that included burning around the Echidna carvings.

Cultural burning has for millennia been integral to the health of all species in the Blue Mountains, and its reintroduction is critical to recovery from recent devastating hot fires, and to future management if we are to have the best chance of protecting the area, both designated

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[405] Wendell Cox, "Media Release – Demographia International Housing Affordability Report – 2024 Edition," (CE Think Tank Newswire, 2024).
[406] Landcare NSW Website, "Landcare Yarning on Country." Accessed on 01 December 2024 at https://landcare.nsw.gov.au/groups/greater-sydney-landcare-network-inc/landcare-yarning-on-country/.
[407] Brennan, Knox, and Moon, *Linden Ridge.*

cultural sites and the health of Ngurra. This biodiversity is currently under threat. By using traditional fire practice this will help keep what little we have left after the 2019 to 2020 catastrophic events. There are different fires for different plant communities as Pascoe and Gamage state:

> Big fires were rare, but after one, people cool-burnt patches of new growth, some big, some small, some as habitats, some as refuges, then over the years kept these plains and clearings open as the bush grew around. It was no accident that newcomers delighting in 1788's park; so often reported no 'underwood'. That not only made parks; it was a vital fuel control.[408]

In the 2019 to 2020 mega fires, we saw unprecedented life loss of flora and fauna.[409] The "Community Caring for Country" project enables the return in the Grose Valley of Aboriginal traditional and culturally respectful community led Fire with cultural values. As one of several such projects in this area, together it is aimed that the project leads to wider application of what we as Darug people have demonstrated to help restore Ngurra. Our dream now is to develop a Cool Burn Team in Darug Ngurra This project is building capacity for cultural burning in the Blue Mountains by undertaking the cultural knowledge and spirit work needed to reintroduce this practice, as well as building the cultural workforce and building collaborative relationships with mainstream organisations who work on land management.

7.3 "Looking Back, Moving Forward: the many facets of fire": A Story of Fire from the Djinkarr People.

There are men and women around the Country who are creating a practice of cultural burns being carried out by Traditional Owners in their own Country. They are showing the song of fire and how it is part of our ceremony and our responsibility, our law and our connection to Country. A documentary titled, "Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Many Facets of Fire" streamed live on the 13th of June 2024. It is a wonderful presentation showing the works of others in the Northern Territory.[410] Mr Dean Yibarbuk is a Traditional Owner of Djinkarr, a fire ecologist, researcher and mentor. Yibarbuk is Director of Arnhem Land Fire Abatement Ltd (ALFA) and Warddeken Land Management Ltd, and the Co-Chair of the Karrad Kanjdji Trust. He speaks about making sure that the Traditional Owners go out with the helicopter to see the land when creating fire plans. He knows they may have an insight to an area, even if they haven't been in that area before. Some people kept fire lore going, they kept burning even with the authorities threatening them with prison, as they knew they have a responsibility to Country.

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[408] Bruce Pascoe and Bill Gammage, *First Knowledges Country: Future Fire, Future Farming* (Thames & Hudson Australia, 2021), 136

[409] Ward et al., "Impact of 2019–2020 mega-fires on Australian fauna habitat."; Commonwealth of Australia, Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20 (Canberra ACT 2600: Committee Secretariat, 2020).

[410] Australian Academy of Science YouTube Channel, "Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Many Facets of Fire." Accessed 25 August 2023 at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bsn0ZGeyr3E.

Yibarbuk goes on to say it's their cultural reasons and obligations to do so. They are using modern technology to work with the Traditional Owners of specific clans associated with that Land, letting them see the landscape and where they belong.

Baz Childs, First Officer of the Rural Australia Fire Service is interviewed about how much he has learnt from Traditional Owners in Northern Territory. He tells of how he has worked with people for the last few years. He has learnt burning smaller and more spasmodic is a better approach in line with the ancient knowledge. He is growing in this form of his education, of the mosaic burning and cool gentle burns. He states that the traditional Owners are wanting all to work together, which will benefit more when it comes to caring for Country.[411]

Yibarbuk explains that the way they burn Country is to open the space. Like many had told me when visiting the Blue Mountains as part of the World Heritage cultural gathering, they would look at the landscape and say with a whistle "too many trees" I now know what they meant. We would use any tree under 20 cm radius for tools and fire, this gave the larger trees space and thinning out the tree take over.[412] When looking at big old trees, a large area usually around them is clear, I have heard others say it because the old tree has taught the others about personal space.

Yibarbuk remarked on opening up the Country through fire use, saying that the animals love it. He talks about the return of the Emu in the parks after regular fire. I believe we had many emus here in Country, they are part of Ngurra, reflected in the many Emu tracks and carvings in the Blue Mountains.[413] Aunty Joan talked about the Emu fence put up for the racecourse that was in The Gully. This statement gives me hope, that if we start to use traditional burns in Parks and Wildlife on a great scale of the mosaic patterns following a songline, we may be able to encourage the Emu back to Country. Unfortunately, this process has been taking years.

I have known of the carbon credits that Yibarbuk has being used in the NT as part of my work for Parks and Wildlife. I was a member of the Australian World Heritage Indigenous Network 2002 to 2012. These are initiatives and partnerships with Traditional Owners and the mainstream services, yet it comes back to the reality that the funding comes from those who don't understand culture and how to grow it. We need good long-term partnerships and agreements, policies that far exceed a political party's turnover of 4 years, we are talking 7 generations at least. There are over tens of thousands of years to repair, we need to plan a future of another ten thousand years. I know we don't own the land as those from Northern Territory, but it would save the government billions. If we the Darug in partnership with others have the same opportunity and respect given here, Greater Sydney Darug Ngurra Country has a real chance to recover while we its people are given the responsibility to practice our law/lore again.

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[411] Australian Academy of Science YouTube Channel, "Looking Back, Moving Forward: The Many Facets of Fire." https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bsn0ZGeyr3E
[412] Pascoe, *Dark Emu.*
[413] Stockton and Merriman, *Blue Mountains Dreaming*, 76-77.

After the devastation of the 2019 to 2020 fires a commission was made. Here are some of the responses by Wiradjuri descendant Associate Professor Michael-Shawn Fletcher on behalf of the Cultural Burning Research Group (2020):

> The openness of government, media and the public to engage with conversations about Indigenous fire practice has been a successful aspect of the bushfire response. A deeper engagement and commitment to working with traditional owners to undertake these practices is the next step.
>
> The bushfire response was limited, and unable to effectively respond to worsening bushfires. This is due in large part to a lack of existing and coordinated strategies for implementing Indigenous land and fire management practices. It is also due to insufficient resourcing of traditional owners groups, Indigenous ranger programs and public/school education relating to Indigenous conceptions of and practices relating to fire.[414]

It is the desire of many a Darug person for government to see the future of the land we love, to thrive once back into a relationship of care, with the people of that place the Traditional Owners.

7.4 Ngapa Jukurrpa: A Warlpiri Water Songline Looking at Others' Knowledge to Deepen my own Knowledge of Fire and its Connection to Water on Country [415]

A documentary narrated by Wanta Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu (Steven Patrick) which portrays his Warlpiri peoples search for a ngapa jukurrpa songline (water dreaming songline) brings me a greater understanding of one aspect of the 2019 2020 mega-fires, which I will discuss through this knowledge sharing from the Warlpiri. It also encourages me to keep on with songline repair, as they are doing as well. They too have had many Elders die and knowledge has been broken but they are not giving up. It has been lost for 70 years.

Kurlpurlunu is where the final ceremony needs to take place. It is where fire ignites the rain. Nobody knew where Kurlpurlunu was. Knowledge that has been kept about the making of big fire says that only at certain times were the people able to create the rain around October. It starts at Warnayaka Country. This Songline covers a great distance. It is about two hunters that come from the west, they chase a karnyarla (kangaroo). They light a fire to flush out the Karnyarla hiding in the bushes. They must call on the four winds to encourage the fire. The winds create a big fire that creates large smoke transforming into a special cloud ngangkarli that makes rain. The first rain falls in Warlapampa where the heart of the cloud is still there.

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[414] In the Submission to the Royal Commission into National Natural Disaster Arrangements, Australian Government, Canberra. See Australia State of the Environment Website, "Caring for Country." Accessed 25 January 2024 at https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/indigenous/management/caring-country.

[415] Ngapa Jukurrpa – *water Songline* Accessed 03 May 2023. At https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/watch/1562007619759.

The songline heads south-west creating water sources as it flows like the movement of a storm, its name is ngapa jukurrpa. The ngapa ceremony is a way to show the people how to come together to create the outcome desired it involves the four elements. The men become the 2 hunters of the story attach to the songline. Yellow head band wears are for drying out grasses that burn they are west wind and sunset to light fire they head north, and green holds the dreams of the regrowth after fire and the life water sustains, they head south.

The eagles teach us to read the winds currents. If the eagle or other hunting birds fly too high, it will not make rain as the clouds aren't low enough due to lack of moisture. Wanta's father Jerry Jangala, shows while speaking and pointing to his painting:

> This here is the fire. The fire that brings the rain. These are the fire's creation laws and ceremonies that surround it. Here is water, all of these circles. This is smoke rising smoke rising up in a column going higher until it spreads out crossways in a thick layer spreading across the sky. Up here is ngangkarli becoming a big rainstorm cloud. Here, the storm makes a lot of smaller clouds, lighting strikes and floodwaters running towards us.[416]

29 minutes into the documentary, you are informed that a large unbroken line of fire is lit to create rain. This line of fire reminds me of what you could see happening with fire fighters' teams creating long containment lines and the big fire storms that could be seen in the 2019 to 2020 fires. I speculate that when the fire services and RFS were doing the fire hazard reductions lines they unwittingly created the rain making ceremony.

7.4.1 Knowledge of a Cloud Formation Technology Utilised for Thousands of Years

Interestingly in Meteorology, that same kind of law knowledge is called Pyrocumulonimbus cloud. The western framework separates the fire from people's actions, yet in Warlpiri way this is law/lore part of the responsibility of those who carry that lore/law. The Bureau of Meteorology defines this cloud as:

1. A plume of hot, turbulent air and smoke rises.
2. Turbulence mixes cooler air into the plume, causing it to broaden and cool as it rises.
3. When the plume rises high enough, low atmospheric pressure causes its air to cool and cloud to form.
4. In an unstable atmosphere a thunderstorm can develop: pyrocumulonimbus cloud

[416] *Ngapa Jukurrpa – water Songline*. Accessed 20 July 2024 at https://www.sbs.com.au/ondemand/watch/1562007619759.

5. Rain in the cloud evaporates and cools when it comes into contact with dry air, producing a downburst
6. Lightning may be produced and can ignite new fires.[417]

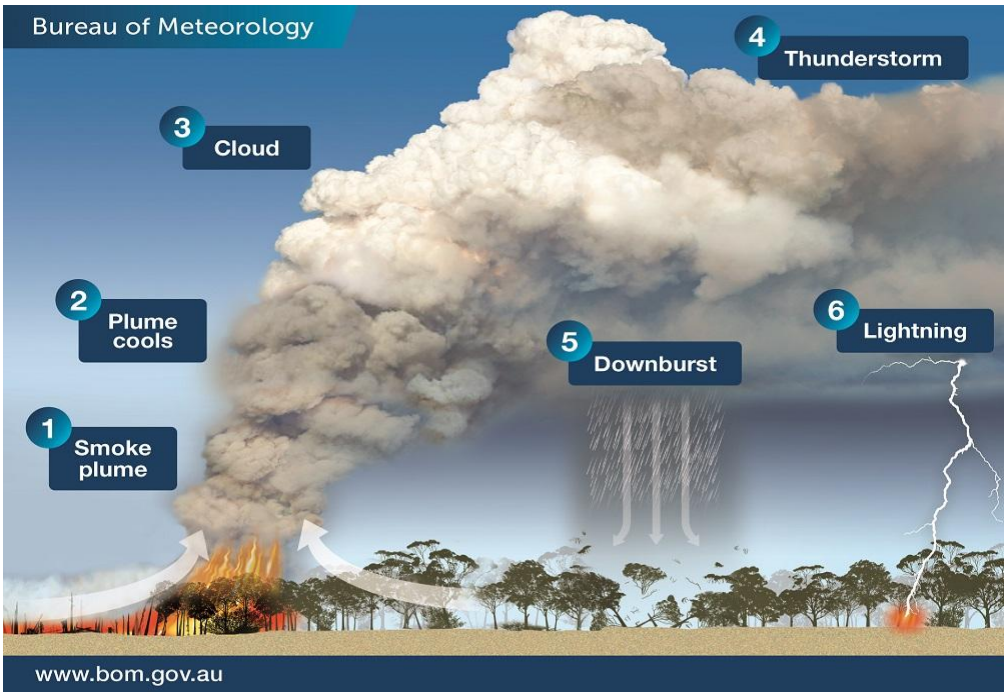

Figure 52. Pyrocumulonimbus cloud development from Bureau of Meteorology.[418]

Here is a perfect example of an ancient ceremony describing the science behind how to work in with the natural Lore/Law, or what the Warlpiri call Ngapa Jukurrpa. We are communicating with the environment. Observing the relationship with each living thing, like the birds of prey are communicating with the observer. Each element of Country is waiting to be utilized as a biotechnology that created no harm.
In the documentary, Wanta explains that Mikanji is a big creek bed, it's the last big flow of water dreaming. After that water is only found in rock hole or as underground water supplies. At Mikanji it changes form from a storm cloud to a water dreaming snake. This takes me to the waterspout that was seen at the Coogee women's baths spoken about in Chapter 6. The waterspout was seen to the women as a water serpent.

The snake can't travel fast or far, so the brown falcon carries it on its head to the next dreaming place. The brown falcon carries the water dreaming snake on its head but sometimes drops it on the ground. Wherever the snake lands an underground water is created, all the way to Papunya. Papunya is on the Northern point of the song line and is still well known. Again,

[417] "When bushfires make their own weather" - *Social Media Blog* - Bureau of Meteorology, Accessed 26 January 2025 at https://media.bom.gov.au/social/blog/1618/when-bushfires-make-their-own-weather.
[418] "When bushfires make their own weather" - *Social Media Blog* - Bureau of Meteorology, Accessed 26 January 2025 at https://media.bom.gov.au/social/blog/1618/when-bushfires-make-their-own-weather.

referring to Chapter 6, we too saw that serpent travels over land, we saw it as a rainbow in those areas of my Country that carry a lot of underground water. I just wonder which bird may have been carrying it in our songline.

In the Ngapa Jukurrpa, the hunters at first couldn't get the fire going, so they had to call in the four winds to get the fire going. The fire got out of control by the time it got to Kurlpurlunu. It burnt to death a man and badly burnt another. They were countrymen of a legendary woman Malpaya who's spirit lives in a tree. That tree is called murrawadjia. Her role is to hold up a fire stick to summon the healing rains that come up from the south. The Walpiri people have been searching for Kurlpurlunu for forty years by land and air. The sad reality is that the areas that need to be accessed for the rain making have been denied and the people haven't made rain in decades. Molly Nappurrurla was invited for the first time to oversee navigating the pilot in the helicopter on where to go. She knows where to go; it's her father's Country. She was there as a child, and she found the site. This is the place where Malpaya, summons up the rain with her fire stick.

Unfortunately, the helicopter time had finished. They didn't get to make rain that time. The rangers were doing mosaic burning but to make rain, you must burn as much Country more intensely. The heat and smoke make the rain clouds form, but you need to make an unbroken line of fire. You need to burn as much Country as you can, in one go. This creates enough smoke and heat to assist the rain clouds to form, so timing and cooperation is everything. Many of us have given our time but sometimes cooperation isn't so easy.

7.5 Colonial Ideologies and the Constraints when Trying to Fulfill Cultural Responsibilities

I have been a member and held seats in Darug Aboriginal Tribal Corporation, World Heritage Indigenous Network, Darug Aboriginal Advisory Group, National Parks and the local Aboriginal Educational Consultative Group plus advisory groups for government and non-government. This has led me to a grass roots approach and community acceptance for me to do this work, to help create respect for our ancient cultures in 21st-century settings. Like a good burn slowly things are changing as a new "Caring for Country" framework has helped Traditional Owners have a voice. "Caring for Country" is described on the Australia State of the Environment website as "A reciprocal relationship, whereby land is understood to become wild or sick if not managed by its people, and in turn individuals and communities suffer without a maintained connection to Country".[419]

When you turn your back on Country then Country turns its back on you. I see the similarities when Warlpiri people returned to Country and got sad to see how overgrown it had become, they used the word yapa-wangurla:

[419] Australia State of the Environment Website, "Caring for Country."

> Yapa-wangurla is translated as ‘without people’ and implies that country is ‘sick’. In contrast, country that is healthy is yapa-kurlu, ‘with people’; it is being used, engaged with, and learnt about.
>
> People being there for country and country being there for them. Yapa-kurlu is the idea that country can’t do it by itself, it needs yapa to do it. It’s like in the Milpirri rain song you need people to make the rain. It’s like you need a man and a woman to make a baby – they work together.[420]

Unlike the Northern Territory, on the East Coast we have not been given the same privilege or received the same native title rights, to keep up our responsibilities of fire. Caring for our Country has been taken out of the Traditional Owners’ hands, which in turn has led to neglect. This effects our water, as we know from Wanta's story. The 2019 to 2020 mega fire that took out most of my Country was from a back burn gone wrong, the main fire did not reach my Country but the go ahead was given for the fire to be lit. In “D’harawal Seasons and climate cycles”, Bodkin states that in the Hot and Dry time of year, “Cooking fires were avoided wherever possible during this time of year, and when they had to be lit the preferable location was in sand and well away from other vegetation”.[421] I am not blaming anyone of those on the ground as some of those people I knew. They didn’t want to do the burn but had no choice. In “Lessons to be learned in relation to the Australian bushfire season 2019-20” by The Senate Committee, Mr Greg Mullins, who I have had the pleasure to meet when he was Fire and Rescue Commissioner and was actively trying to help in 2010 to encourage traditional fire practice to no avail, testified that, “We've actually had a lot of situations where prescribed burn fires have got out of control and spread beyond where they should have been. That's happening increasingly”.[422]

We should know better and those who have had years of work and sacrifice are sometimes blinded by their own way of knowing and not opening their eyes to the possibility of learning from the ancient cultures. Dare I say, maybe it’s hard for those in power to know they are wrong or is this just plain racism from our colonial past. Janke emphasises the urgency of the need for Indigenous management:

> For many Indigenous people across Australia, colonisation has severely impacted their ability to continue to manage Country and ensure its continued health. The mismanagement of Country for several generations drives the urgency for many Indigenous groups to seek management options that recognise and include Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous communities in environmental work. Throughout Australia,

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[420] Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes, and Box, *Ngurra-kurlu,* 31.
[421] Bodkin and Robertson, *D'harawal*, 39.
[422] Parliament of Australia, “Lessons to be learned in Relation to the Australian Bushfire Season 2019-20,” 60. Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://www.aph.gov.au/Parliamentary_Business/Committees/Senate/Finance_and_Public_Administration/Bushfirerecovery/

> Indigenous people call for greater recognition of cultural practice, to strengthen language, culture and social connection to fulfil obligations to ancestors and future descendants.[423]

I have been in meetings with those who were in power at the 2019 to 2020 mega fire disaster. They were very closed off, choosing not to engage in any talk of traditional cool burns or any of our First Nations fire practices. The meeting was taken up by the celebration of Elvis, the helicopter. Dropping fresh water or any water on hot fire to me seemed a waste in the driest continent in the world. At the time we had no idea of Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS).

Now with the knowledge of Perfluoroalkyl and polyfluoroalkyl substances (PFAS), pollution in our drinking water in our local dam is currently being tested after finding alarming amounts. It is closed until investigations are concluded in mid-2025:

> Investigating fire and firefighting history-Water NSW is working with multiple government organisations including Rural Fire Service and NSW Fire and Rescue to explore historical land use including potential activities where PFAS has been used, such as firefighting activities.[424]

In ABC news coverage, Marcia Langton drew attention to the need for Aboriginal management of Country:

> Take a commonsense view, adapting to the Aboriginal way of managing country, using science and coming to grips with this Australian landscape and its ecologies, and not importing European ideas here which frankly have been disastrous for the country.[425]

Langton is stating, to me the obvious, that Aboriginal people over tens of thousands of years hold the solutions for creating a safer and more productive environment. Many researchers are now starting to understand the amazing co-operative that was working so well before colonisation; our track record since this time is very appalling. Ward has made this knowledge very clear, stating “Australia has one of the worst extinction rates in the world, including the highest mammal extinction rate. Species declines showed no sign of slowing, even before the 2019–2020 fires”.[426]

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[423] T. Janke et al., *Indigenous: Downloads and Supplementary material*, Australian Government Department of Agriculture, Water and the Environment (Canberra, 2021). Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://soe.dcceew.gov.au/indigenous/about-chapter/downloads-and-supplementary-material.
[424] Water NSW Website, “Blue Mountains: PFAS Investigation and Raw Water Testing Results.” Accessed 25 January 2022 at https://www.waternsw.com.au/water-services/water-quality/pfas/blue-mountains-investigations.
[425] ABC News Website, “Scientist Investigating Australia's Past says Indigenous Cultural burning Key to Controlling Bushfires.” Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-06-26/cultural-burning-to-protect-from-catastrophic-bushfires/100241046.
[426] Ward et al., "Impact of 2019–2020 Mega-fires on Australian Fauna Habitat," 1324.

Our cultural knowledge of fire is no secret, and the research is out there, some examples are Gammage, Michael Shaun Fletcher, Victor Steffensen to name a few who have been researching the effects of cultural burns. This ABC news report when speaking of Mr Lapsley a former Country Fire Authority (CFA) deputy chief officer responding to cultural burns and seeing the benefits states:

> The former CFA deputy chief officer is calling on the Federal Government to implement a national Indigenous burning program.
> "It doesn't need pilots," he said.
> "It needs [funding, action] and implementation."
> "Cultural burners often need a number of local and state approvals and usually can only access certain areas.
> Much more investment would be needed to adopt cultural burning as part of mainstream fire-management plans.[427]

Reported in the National Indigenous Times by Keira Jenkins in August 2024, Yothu Yindi Foundation chairman Djawa Yunupingu has reflected on The Vote outcome and is looking to the future, so he states.

> "The Theme: Fire, Strength, and Renewal
>
> 'Gurtha-Wuma Worrk-gu – Fire, Strength, and Renewal' is the theme for the 24th annual Garma Festival. Gurtha (fire) is an important concept for Yolngu people, with Mr. Yunupingu explaining that it is the foundation of life.
>
> "My totem is the tongue of the fire, Gurtha, and Gurtha-Wuma Worrk-gu is deeply connected to the ceremonies of the land," he said. "Following fire, the land and all that is in it renews and comes back to life – and with it the people. This is the Yolngu circle of life."[428]

At Garma 2024, Jack Gula Thompson explains the message behind the Gurtha ceremony. The ceremony is associated with fire. The fire he states is about renewal after loss. I take comfort in that, as I hope and pray, that the Mega fires of 2019 to 2020 become the start of that renewal. A renewal of our ancient land management practices that are time tested and needed.

7.6 Conclusion

[427] ABC News Website, "Indigenous Fire Practices have been Used to Quell Bushfires for Thousands of Years, Experts Say. Accessed 24 February 2025 at https://www.abc.net.au/news/2020-01-09/indigenous-cultural-fire-burning-method-has-benefits-experts-say/11853096.
[428] Keira Jenkins, "Fire, strength, renewal at the heart of Garma Festival", *National Indigenous Times*, 2 August 2024,
https://nit.com.au/02-08-2024/12851/fire-strength-renewal-at-the-heart-of-garma-festival date view 2025-02-23.

Fire is part of ceremony. It is life giving and cleansing. It is a practice that is required for healthy Ngurra and people. We need support and regular work for our fire lore keepers in Country. This could be great employment for many in their local area. Part of being in Country and hearing song is the relationship that needs to be built with it, and fire is part of that relationship. When the weather is right, it is time for cultural fire, using the harmonious flow of working with Ngurra, not against her. Creating a culture of educated fire knowledge holders who clear the pathways for Songline movement through Ngurra

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Wanta Pawu speaks about Ngurra and his people's definition. Ngu means inside and ra means to move or action. So Ngurra is to move inside.[429] This teaches about Ngurra is something about our home and something with home and the home with in. This to me make so much sense that we are the cause and effect of the moving inside Country Ngurra. Now is the time to be putting the people back in the landscape. It is a funding problem to get people back on Country. The carbon program is bringing the money into NT Communities. Carbon standards and market is working for employment opportunities and biodiversity we could be looking at that here in Darug Country. But as Yibarbuk pointed out that it is their land, they own it, and it is a very different story here in Greater Sydney areas from those of my blood line. There is room for other clan groups to sit with Yibarbuk people and learn. Yibarbuk speaks of a collective approach right across Australia.

It's our responsibility to do our cultural practices, repetitively in Country. Nature needs us to help create space for her mother trees.[430] Through fire, food gathering or new shoots to be thinned out and utilised creating spears, digging sticks, clapping sticks or warmth from the fire. She is our Mother and we should treat her with the utmost respect. Due to this constant power struggle with government and the very real lack of control and access to Country, the concerns are if government doesn't work well with the Traditional Owners, then charcoal and ash will cover two thirds of Country. This will be the effect if old knowledge and practice is not continued. As the late Great Aunty Joan Cooper would say, "Never fight over land she is our Mother. She gives us shelter, air, water and food." We must take care of the Mother and the Mother will take care of you.

[429] The University of Melbourne YouTube Channel, "Cooking the Kangaroo: Shaping Mutual Responsibility through Songlines." Accessed 18 June 2024 at https://youtu.be/_YUA4r2-0Y0. See 3:46 time stamp.
[430] Suzanne Simard, *Finding the Mother Tree: Uncovering the Wisdom and Intelligence of the Forest* (Penguin Books, 2022).

8. Conclusion: Smoking the past looking forward to the future while being in the present

The fire has been lit, and embers are placed in my coolamon. My coolamon has been covered by Wianamatta shale (white clay relating to the mother) and the green leaves cover the embers. The exhilarating aroma of the eucalyptus leaves covers our bodies internally and externally. The cloak is lifted over the coolamon, clearing and cleaning any residue that the creator of the wogga budbili may have unintentionally placed on the skin, ochre and sinew. Burn from the stick even the pain of the past of the many possums and kangaroo that gave over their lives for this cloak. The gentle smoke is cleansing and clearing it is creating space for new and right way intentions action to be embraced on this skin covered with its story.

I am singing, my Country sings and we are sitting in a vibrating soundscape. All its sounds in our landscape have a role to play. We are part of that kinship system; we need to learn our role to help that vibration of that kin. I picture my ancestors tapping into that first wave form. That first song that first movement through Country creating our beautiful Ngurra. This is one of the first movements on the soil that was created from the first tears of the Three Sisters from Chapter 6. The Three Star Sisters left their tears forming the first dry land, creating the First Fresh Water and by the meeting of land and sea, became and created our Great Dyarubbin (Hawkesbury/Nepean River), Georges, Colo, Lane Cove and Parramatta Rivers keeping that saltwater at bay.

Ancient beings forming the land creating the first original songlines. The original sound movement keeps its form by reinforcing those sounds through its dreaming's origins – song and dance that was once shared from generation to generation. Even with such devastation of the people and cultural roles here in Darug Ngurra, Country is still singing.

The healing has begun as we sit together and dream. It's time to invest in the dreaming together let's reflect on the journey through lived experience. Where can we be heading from those lived experiences? And how are we going to get there?

8.1 Reflect on the journey through lived experience

This thesis demonstrates the Songline healing and current continuation of Darug cultural practice. This form of practice and connection to Country has its own flavour due to seven generations of interrupted knowledge sharing. This interruption came from the effects of colonisation for my family. The deliberate targeting of Aboriginal people and subjugation of people from those of the colonial creators of Australian law, is illuminated in McCorquodale's Journal article titled "The legal classification of race in Australia" from 1986 stating:

> A new species of legal creature was created and sustained as a separate class, subject to separate laws, separately administered. This form of legal apartheid preceded that of South Africa by more than two generations, and continued on a different, but parallel, course for another three. The effluxion of time might have seen the success of government policy demonstrated with removal or dismantling of the more repressive definitions and provisions. But Victoria, for example, maintained the same legislative content for 60 years. Western Australia increased its controls by extending definitions in 1936, and Queensland did likewise as recently as 1965. For Aborigines, therefore, the vacuity or bankruptcy of policy in some States was matched only by the ingenuity of others in extending the reach of legislative control. Those who escaped through having a lesser amount of 'black' blood suddenly found themselves made subject to law; those who obtained exemption could lose it. 'Half-castes' might be placed on the same footing with 'full-bloods' for some purposes (testimony, liquor), but not others (reserves, guardianship of children). The unequal provision and treatment of law even within extended Aboriginal associations mocked the notion of equality; when considered in the absence of any comparable law for 'whites', or even other 'colours', it evokes the Aristotelian dictum that 'injustice arises when equals are treated unequally and also when unequals are treated equally'. But how greater is the injustice when even unequals are treated unequally![431]

Due to the constant changing of government Laws, this is not a one-size-fits-all approach. I have confirmed and documented through the chapters, of lived experiences: Darug's continuous connection to the intangible through the tangible. I have exhibited that the disconnection from culture enforced on my family failed the colonial masters of our extinction. Our bravery is that we are still here; that is our strength. Some are starting to hear Barayagai Ngurra (Song Belonging to Country) and some never stopped listening, connecting always with Country. "The Language of Country, the motto of Milpirri 2007" translated from Walpiri into English states:

> Listen to the land and the land will speak back'. It means that land has a language through which it communicates to people. This language is non-verbal and Wanta has called it the 'body language' of country. It means that if you are very observant, the land, through its sights, sounds, patterns, and shapes, will tell you how it is functioning and tell you how to live with it.[432]

Taking these arguments seriously requires a type of professionalism, seriousness, patience, and dignity from western knowledge systems, towards Darug knowledge creation. When analysing Ngara (visions), growing up with people like Aunty Glady Smith or being comfortable enough to speak of ancestors watching or guiding one to sites, is not what many call a normal day at the office, but for some it is. We as a collective of those who Ngara (imagine) this way, ponder why some can see and some can't. I put forward a theory that like the rainbow is not to say that the reality we see is maybe in the green spectrum of light. I have had Country show itself to me

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[431] McCorquodale, "The Legal Classification of Race in Australia," 15-16.
[432] Pawu-Kurlpurlurnu, Holmes, and Box, *Ngurra-kurlu.*

like layers of time being peeled away so you see how Country used to look. Or you dream of those who have moved past speaking on issues of the present. Even dreaming the future, where everyone is dressed as the dream preordained, how can that be? If we go back to the rainbow just because we are currently in the green, doesn't mean red and indigo are not still present and at the same time. I have learnt, sometimes you just have to tilt your head or look from a different angle – because if you don't learn to adapt and change you may miss a very important lesson. I have shown you practice-based research, through my language, my song, water and fire. The documentation of my lived experience and the different expression from the environment of this relationship has been demonstrated. I have sought to propose ways of communication and culturally relevant methodologies for repairing songlines that are still present in Darug Ngurra.

I have walked in the shoes of those decolonization champions, who cleared a path for this thesis. The journey of Country's song through the Elders and teachers of my past, has brought me to a greater and deeper connection to Country. This thesis with all its methodologies provides a choice of a "paradigm shift" of relationality to Country all that is the Dreaming. I have challenged the culture of our colonial masters to show a gentle and time in memorial practice of ceremony with fire and water.

From my first sign of the Red Breasted Robin to the Water Serpent at Coogee women's baths, to mountain ridges and to water ways, I have been taking you the reader on a few examples of Barayagai Ngurra (Song Belonging to Country). Being in Country building relationship with Ngurra as was brilliantly demonstrated at Chris's Camp through his repetitive action of connecting. Or seeing the time stamps in Faulconbridge Ridge trusting the teachings Oolgna for unregistered site discoveries. The documentations of relationality with Ngurra have given you an insight that only an insider researcher can. I exhibited the cause of bad policy and pointed out that discrepancies and the patience required when working in colonial systems.

They are stories interlinked through and because of song, culture, family: they are not superstitious, coincidental, loose threads that have been diminished by colonial definitions of vague inconsistency that have typified the way colonial records have come to describe Aboriginal people. These are deep interconnections that demonstrate how practically, physically, intergenerationally, spatially, spiritual song is one part of a broader language of deep belonging and connection for Darug people.

8.2 Where can we be Heading from those Lived Experiences?

I dream of a time when my family are encouraged and supported to care for Country in line with seasonal change. In these times, children will eat their native food again with that season, as they travel through Country in tiny homes meeting up with Elders at their Cultural Camp. In this time to come, my family will regain its confidence to go bush and know they can thrive as they harvest its gifts. Knowing their environment, practicing their caring of Country and celebrating its presence, to then burn it gently for others to feast on the fresh grass to come.

Neale and Kelly state, “Aboriginal people travel to maintain their Songlines, renew their knowledge and call up Country, to teach the next generation all they need to know, and to trade ideas”.[433] These ideas are what I wish to trade with you now: how are we going to get there?

8.3 How are we Going to get There?

In the Fire chapter (7) examples were given on carbon credits in the Northern Territory. As pointed out it is their Native Title Land; they are the owners, the boss. Due to the cost of living in Greater Sydney from one of the first families colonised, we need the will of the government through reciprocity of good accommodation and land which will be culturally appropriate for those who wish to practice and engage with Ngurra and help fulfil our cultural responsibility to Ngurra. I take comfort when I hear of my neighbours and what they are doing, like Jodi Edwards:

> We'll be out on boats, out on the water. We'll have drones up; we'll have hydro drones down.
>
> We'll be in the water, on the water, on land – because we're not only mapping the whale migration, but we're mapping the ocean floor, we're mapping the land that relates to the stories of the ocean, and we're mapping the sky that relates to the stories that relate to the whale migration.
>
> Research first of its kind.[434]

Like the Dharawal, we too know that a whole of Country approach is needed. This thesis has explored and shown these processes in many ways; through this wogga practice, to help regenerate my Country known as Darug lands. I am determined to create a better environment for those who follow. We always would encourage the natural engineering which Country created and utilise this to our advantage. Regaining those rights with no restrictions to access Country is a major requirement. Like keeping up with the housework of your home. Not have the keys to the door sounds ridiculous, yet here we are. I have a home that has been in the family for tens of thousands of years, with no key to the gates let alone the doors. We need to carry out cultural responsibilities, as in ceremony, harvesting, hunting, traditional fire and water management practice to truly repair Songlines. Programs are starting to Care for Country, for example across Greater Sydney[435].

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[433] Neale and Kelly, *Songlines,* 114.
[434] Genevieve Swart, "Reawakening the Whale Songline," *The Illawarra flame* (PO Box 248, Helensburgh, 2508). Accessed 11 March 2024 at https://www.theillawarraflame.com.au/news/unique-project-to-reawaken-the-whale-songline.
[435] Rey, "Quiet activism through Dharug Ngurra”; Ballard, Short Caring for Country; Darug Ngurra, Yanama Budyari Gumada, Walk with Good Spirit as Method.

Realising that we can't ignore the development beast at our door, the Darug people are taking their rightful place in their role for Caring for Country framework with developers creating safer places for human and non-human cohabitation. The Darug are asking the developers to learn to have respect for the landscape that holds their investment. Walking with Planning Departments to understand the underground water, topography, soil type, eco landscape, fauna and flora needs we are stretching the minds of those who can help create better outcomes for Country. Taking responsibility for their own environmental footprint into a small win for Country. Really only when modern society gives up its last Century idea, of combustion engines and looks at our Earth's natural magnetic fields will the soundscape of industry not have to compete with nature but learn to be in tune in relationship with Country's individual eco landscapes.

Each visit to Country strengthens the bond as we learn first to listen, then learn how to play. After repetition, we fine-tune our skills on all the instruments from Country. Through the gift of stone and wood we engage with Ceremony, Song, Fire and Water. Utilising all the different tones and textures of the season we have found ourselves in, composed by Ngurra Country. Moving through its Song on Country participating in your own part of its musical score. The ceremonies from Ngurra Song must be repeated as we all know practice makes perfect. Always remembering that someone must conduct this biological orchestra. Instead of a baton we Country men and women use the fire stick to keep the time, tune and balance of each instrumental family of the orchestra in harmony with each other.

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