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many contain images of deceased people.

***Dreaming the Keepara: New South Wales
Indigenous Cultural Perspectives, 1808-2007***

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**An Exegesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the degree of
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Newcastle, Australia**

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Declaration

I hereby certify that this thesis contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. I give consent to the final version of my thesis being made available worldwide when deposited in the University's Digital Repository, subject to the provisions of the Copyright Act 1968.

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Mr. Lachlan (Bubba) Vale
Mr. Len Duckett
Mr. Harry Duckett
Mr. Joe Quinlan
Mr. John Quinlan
Mrs. Ellen Davis
Mr. Tim Holten
Mr. Patrick Callaghan

Gathang

Mr. Eddie Lobban
Fred Bugg

Gumbaynggirr

Mr. Frank Archibald
Mr. Len De Silva
Mr. Phillip (Gagu) Long
Mr. Eddie Buchannan

Yaygirr

Mr. Sandy Cameron

Bandjalang

Mr. Richard Donnelly Mr.
Mrs. Evelyn Ferguson
Mr. Bill Turnbull

I acknowledge my father Ray ‘Shoonkley’ Kelly for his insatiable desire to ensure that the traditional knowledge and cultural practices of Aboriginal people living in the State of New South Wales was duly recognised as a living and breathing thing not something long gone.¹ He certainly instilled that into me from a young age and this work is in due recognition of him.

¹ Raymond L. Kelly, my father, will be referred to in this document as Shoonk Kelly or Shoonkley.

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In conclusion, this work is dedicated to the memory of those Aboriginal babies who did not live to experience life among our family on East Armidale Aboriginal Reserve. They lived and died in the old camp called the dump.

The loss of those most innocent should never be forgotten:

Rosalina Elizabeth Kelly
December 1959 – March 1961

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary study investigates the Aboriginal intellectual heritage of the Mid North Coast of New South Wales, through a combination of family history, oral tradition, and audio-recorded songs, stories, interviews, discussions, and linguistic material. This research has uncovered an unsuspected wealth of cultural knowledge, cultural memory, and language heritage that has been kept alive and passed down within Aboriginal families and communities, despite the disruptions and dislocations endured over the past seven generations.

The study's findings are presented in three interrelated forms: a dance performance that incorporates traditional and contemporary songs, stories, and lived experiences of an Aboriginal extended family; an oral presentation within the framework of Aboriginal oral transmission of knowledge; and this written exegesis, which is itself an experiment in finding pathways for the expression and progression of Aboriginal knowledge within the context of academic discourse. The theoretical framework of this work is grounded in my personal experience of Aboriginal traditions of knowledge production and transmission, maintained through everyday cultural activities, family memories of traditional education, and our traditional and present-day language forms and communicative practices. The performance, oral and written components connect this intellectual and cultural heritage with historical and photographic documentation, linguistic analyses, and audio recordings from my grandfathers' and great-grandfathers' generations.

The written component establishes the background to the study, and reviews relevant literature with a prioritisation of Aboriginal voices and sources of knowledge, both oral

and written. It explores aspects of my family history from the early 1800s to the present, including my childhood and early educational experiences and leads on to a detailed look at the work of my late father, Raymond Shoonkley Kelly in documenting and maintaining our intellectual and cultural heritage through the NSW Survey of Aboriginal Sites. The final part of this study focusses on language, which is central to all of the preceding investigation. This work demonstrates how operating from an Aboriginal knowledge base allows us to see beyond surface differences in spelling and pronunciation, to reach a deeper understanding of the cultural meanings and ways of speaking that have allowed us to preserve and maintain our cultural integrity. This knowledge base also enables the linguistic unpacking of previously unanalysable song material from the audio recordings.

Indigenous people in New South Wales are continuing to engage in a cultural and political struggle to maintain and protect our identity in the face of an ever-present threat of assimilation by the mainstream Australian society. The success of our struggle will depend significantly on our ability to keep our language and our intellectual heritage alive.

Glossary

The following are explanations and definitions of cultural words relevant to this work, as I understand and use them, from my family and personal cultural knowledge. Most, but not all, can be confirmed through other sources, and are cross-referenced where possible.

Barrayi: Land, country, place/time.²

Barrun: Dream; **Barrun-ba-tay** ‘dream-there-THING’, The Dreaming/Dreamtime.³

Bingayi: Brother (consanguineal or classificatory).⁴

Buula: Senior Law woman; an authority on the Law and Rules from the women’s perspective.⁵

Crossover Lingo: An Indigenised vernacular form of English adapted to better convey Aboriginal cultural meanings, and which retains some words and other linguistic features from traditional languages; also referred to as Aboriginal English.

Djampi: A type of cousin; shortened to **Djam** as a form of address or nickname. Traditional kinship distinguished among several categories of cousins; this may refer to mother’s brother’s son.⁶

Garrara: One acknowledged as a leading proponent of traditional Law and Rules governing ceremonial practices. **Garr’kung:** plural form: Council of Elders.⁷

Garr’Garr’: Traditional Aboriginal Law and associated cultural practices.

Garr’yi: Proper, in the sense of upholding traditional Law; one who upholds the Law.⁸

Gayiyayi: Place or time of making plenty; totemic increase site.⁹

Giru Giru: Boy who has passed through the first stage of cultural learning; also **dhilgirr**.¹⁰

² Amanda Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar and Dictionary with Dhanggati Stories* (Nambucca Heads: Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative, 2007), 122 has *barri*; HRLM has *parray ~parri*: Amanda Lissarrague, *A Salvage Grammar and Wordlist of the Language from the Hunter River and Lake Macquarie* (Nambucca Heads: Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative, 2006), 132.

³ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 122; Gathang has *buuran* ‘dream’: Amanda Lissarrague, *A Grammar and Dictionary of Gathang: The Language of the Birrbay, Guringay and Warrimay* (Nambucca Heads: Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative, 2010), 197.

⁴ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 124.

⁵ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 120 has *baluwa*. For more on this see discussion in section 4.3.

⁶ Possibly related to *dhapuyn*, mother’s brother’s son: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 131.

⁷ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 140 has this plural form, but not the other related forms.

⁸ Gathang has *giraadji* ‘clever-man’: Lissarrague, *A Grammar and Dictionary of Gathang*, 229.

⁹ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 141.

¹⁰ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 132 has *dhilgirr*, but not *Giru Giru*; cf. also *giru* ‘bird’ (143).

Grandha: ‘King’ or senior Law man; presiding authority for the *Keepara*. Several senior men are recognised as *Garanda* in linguist Amanda Lissarrague’s 2007 *Dhanggati Grammar and Dictionary with Dhanggati Stories*; this could also be related to *gira* ‘first’ plus nominalizing suffix *-ndha*, i.e. the first or principal authority for ceremony.¹¹

Gurri: Aboriginal person or people. This is my people’s word for ourselves, in the languages of the Mid North Coast of New South Wales. Some groups and individuals prefer the forms *Kurri*, *Koori*, or *Koorie*. Nouns in these languages are not inflected for singular or plural, but can be accompanied by plural (or dual) markers. **Gurri-yayn:** Aboriginal people collectively. **Gurri-kung:** many Aboriginal people (plural).¹²

Gurruman: Male who has not passed through the process of cultural learning.¹³

Keepara: Traditional gathering for educational and ceremonial purposes. Also spelt as *Kaypara* or *Gayipara*.¹⁴

Language: In addition to its Standard English use (as a count noun, as in ‘How many languages can you speak?’), in Aboriginal English usage this word is used adverbially, as in ‘They were speaking [in/with] language’, meaning one or more traditional Aboriginal language varieties, according to who was speaking to whom, and under what circumstances.

Lingo: Vernacular; everyday speech.

Maraywun: Contemporary/ies on the journey toward higher cultural learning; sometimes termed ‘initiate/s’; **maray:** inner part of a person, the part that can undergo intellectual, moral and spiritual growth and development; **maraynggul** those who have just passed through The Rules; newly qualified, future leaders.¹⁵

Min: True; **mindhuwan:** truly, in a true way.¹⁶

Muyi: Catfish spawning nest; stone circle for traditional council gathering.¹⁷

¹¹ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, xi; 142.

¹² Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 145 spells this with the non-trilled rhotic, *guri*, but does not have the derived forms.

¹³ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 146.

¹⁴ Listed as *giparr* by Lissarrague: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 142; the Gathang word *gayiparr-gan* ‘a period when women are forbidden to eat kangaroo’ appears to contain the same word plus a feminine suffix, suggesting that this prohibition may be related to the conduct of the relevant ceremonies: Lissarrague, *A Grammar and Dictionary of Gathang*, 47, 225.

¹⁵ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 149 has *maraynggal*.

¹⁶ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 151.

¹⁷ Written documentation not yet found; see discussion in section 5.4 below. Gathang has *muyilang* ‘incoming tide’, Lissarrague, *A Grammar and Dictionary of Gathang*, 255. Gumbaynggirr *muyambiya* ‘spear fish at night with a torch’ appears to consist of *muy* plus derivational suffix *-ambiya* forming an intransitive verb from a noun: Steve Morelli, *Gumbaynggirr Bijarr Jandaygam, Ngaawa Gugaarrigam: Gumbaynggirr Dictionary and Learner’s Grammar*. Nambucca Heads, NSW: Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative: 2008), 95.

Old Man / Woman: Elder with recognized cultural authority including but not limited to senior Law man / woman.

Old People: Respectful term for those who have gone before; ancestors, forebears.

Rules, The: Traditional education or ‘initiation’, as in ‘Those men were put through The Rules in 1935’. It is noticeable that the phrase in English is almost always ‘put through The Rules’ (rather than, for example ‘went through The Rules’). This foregrounds the role of the cultural authorities who do the actions of ‘putting’ younger men through.

Thupara: Champion, mentor or guide in the traditional learning process; one who is charged with ensuring that the instructions of the presiding authority, the **Grandha**, are properly carried out by those who are involved. Possibly derived from **thupi** ‘knowledgeable’ plus **-ara** ‘that one / those ones’.¹⁸

Uwarr’: Do or make something; **uwa:** indeed, that is so.¹⁹

Walanggurr: Mature person at a more advanced stage of cultural learning.²⁰

Yingu: Place designated for cultural education of young men.²¹

¹⁸ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 134 has *dhupiyn* ‘know, understand’.

¹⁹ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 170 has *yuwa* ‘yes’.

²⁰ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 162.

²¹ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 169 also records *yimbimarr* ‘initiation ceremony’.

Chapter 1

Introduction

This study is comprised of three important interrelated components: written exegesis, oral presentation, and dramatic performance. This written and referenced component, in the form of an exegesis entitled “Dreaming the *Keepara*: New South Wales, Indigenous Cultural Perspectives 1808-2007,” is provided here.²² This is accompanied by an oral presentation, which grounds the study within a traditional Aboriginal framework of delivery; and a performance/drama piece completes the study by putting the key elements into a form accessible to a non-academic audience.

The work as a whole combines a reflection on personal family history with a major focus on the importance of language and cultural survival and revival, with particular reference to both Western and Aboriginal education. This project holds deep personal importance to both my family and myself and it reflects my academic and life journey. This study will challenge some people and some accepted ‘truths’ and it is meant to. When I began collecting research material for this exegesis, I was hopeful that I would in time accumulate sufficient written and recorded material that could prove advantageous to the reclamation of traditional languages by Aboriginal people in New South Wales. During the course of this academic journey I have dramatically improved my research skills and expanded my personal knowledge of the linguistic structures of Aboriginal Languages in New South Wales, and through this exegesis endeavour to expand public and academic knowledge of same.

²² This is the period from the birth of my thrice-great-grandfather, ‘King’ Robert Malawanggi, to the death of my father, Raymond Shoonkley Kelly. In this work, although *Kaypara* may be more consistent with the traditional language phonology, I use Kelly’s spelling of *Keepara*: Raymond L. Kelly, “From the ‘Keepara’ to the Cultural Bind’: An Analysis of the Aboriginal Situation,” *Australian Archaeology*, No. 2 (April, 1975), 13-17.

Prior to the imposition of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Act [1909] Aboriginal communities from across the Mid North Coast of New South Wales and surrounding districts regularly travelled vast distances to participate in *Keepara*. Some groups travelled southeast, down through the New England ranges and beyond, across huge tracts of land to the coast to meet at particular times. A *Keepara* was the cultural framework whereby *Gurri* people with obligations and responsibilities to each other could come together for the purpose of applying and celebrating the ‘Law of the Land’ and passing down knowledge. *Garr’Garr’* is the term that best describes the practice of Aboriginal Law; to be considered as one who upholds the Law or is performing in a manner that is acceptable is said to be *Garr’yi*. Our contemporary use of this word has been shortened to ‘*Gudge*’, rhyming with Judge. Over time this word has come to be considered by many as simply a nickname, perhaps still implying a good person, but without connotations of expertise in traditional Law. This nickname and many others having traditional roots are still in common use amongst the Thangatti and Gumbaynggirr groups today; I am continuing the investigation of these as another potentially fruitful source of language and cultural preservation.²³

1.1 Background

In 1935 a *Keepara* was convened by the Thangatti community living on the Nulla Nulla Aboriginal reserve at Bellbrook, a small rural settlement located 35 miles from Kempsey in the upper Macleay Valley. My grandfather, Raymond Terrence Kelly formed part of the Thangatti intake for this historic event. Other language groups involved included the Gumbaynggirr, Ngamba, and Birrbay, with the total number of 60 male participants. The *Keepara* Ground for the 1935 event was built a short distance away from the reserve on land

²³ In most cases I use the spellings of language groups currently in use by the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language & Culture Cooperative, with the exception of Thangatti, which is the form with which I personally identify (also spelt as Dhanggati/ Dughutti) see <http://www.muurrbay.org.au>.

owned by an obvious sympathiser to the cause of the local Aboriginal population. The reason for not creating a *Keepara* ground on the reserve may have been due to the men not wanting to raise the attention of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board or its agent who was charged with managing affairs of the Aboriginal community on the reserve. Another hindrance to holding it on the reserve may have been the restriction that the white manager may have placed on outside visitors entering the reserve.

I was first made aware of this historic event after reading a paper titled “From the *Keepara* to a Cultural Bind” by my father Ray Shoonkley Kelly, which was later reproduced for the *Journal Australian Archaeology* and published in 1975.²⁴ During this period a number of young Aboriginal boys from the Armidale community were being accompanied to traditional sites within the New England area. Our visits into these traditional spaces were approved and supervised by two senior men, Mr. Victor Shepherd (1908-1976) and Mr. Len De Silva (1915-1995) both of whom were *Keepara* ‘graduates’. It was only later that I came to a gradual realisation of the continuity of cultural transmission that was being enacted through these visits, and the storytelling and traditional language phrases and songs imparted by these men.²⁵

The knowledge of traditional sites of significance retained by both Mr. Shepherd and Mr. De Silva was the foundation for the early success of the Aboriginal sites recording and protection program being carried out by the National Parks and Wildlife Service in the 1970s. The *Grandha* or ‘King’ of a *Keepara* was the title given to the most senior male

²⁴ Kelly, “From the ‘Keepara’,” 13-17.

²⁵ Mr. Shepherd was recorded among the Bellbrook initiates by Holmer, 1966. Mr. De Silva had been put through The Rules at Yellow Rock, near Urunga; the active ceremonial tradition there was first documented in 1845 by the surveyor and explorer Clement Hodgkinson, whose picture of the public passing-out or conclusion of a Cawarra (initiation) ceremony can be seen at <http://bellingenmuseum.org.au/the-traditional-owners-of-urunga-and-the-bellinger-valley-and-the-bellinger-valley>

leaders of the Law; highly regarded and well respected, those elected to the position of *Grandha* carried out a role of presiding authority for the *Keepara*. The *Grandha* was typically a man of impeccable standing and was responsible for the safe keeping and transportation of the sacred white stones used in the *Keepara*. In preparing for a *Keepara* all members of a community would undergo a process of reconciliation with those whom they may have transgressed against since the white stones were last carried into a community.

The most senior woman in an Aboriginal family unit had the title *Buula* conferred upon her, affectionately called the 'Boss woman' or the 'Top lady'. She asserted a strong influence over her community and more particularly her family. She would advocate for the women and the children and would influence the men to instigate training with those young boys who she thought needed to be disciplined and taught the appropriate behaviour.

The preservation of Aboriginal language and cultural knowledge by senior Aboriginal men and women from across the state of New South Wales during the middle years of the 1970s forced academics in the field of anthropology, archaeology and linguistics to rethink the accepted position regarding the status of Aboriginal traditional languages and traditional knowledge. Earlier researchers studying and writing about Aboriginal people in this period had wrongly assumed that any knowledge of traditional cultural practices was a distant memory; one such 'expert', J.W. Warburton spoke with uninformed conviction of my own family's assumed loss of culture:

The destruction of the old way of life of the tableland people has been thorough and complete. It is not certain of course, how many tribes were in this area, or what their precise location was, but some descendants of one original tribe seem to know where they come from,

even though they know little about the traditional life of their ancestors and nothing of their language.²⁶

I intend as part of this study to challenge and dispel such widespread accepted misconceptions both in relation to the past and in the present.

1.2 Framing the Research

It has always been my intention to use my ability to story-tell my way through much of this dissertation, and where I can, use my theatre skills to enhance and deliver a representation of the strength and depth of oral histories that I know still exist in Aboriginal communities. To expand on this material I will draw on my personal memory and the stories that I recall from my childhood community of Silver City at Armidale.

I had little or no understanding of the many challenges that lay ahead of me in the production of this work; I assumed that as a matter of course that by simply researching I would acquire every skill I needed to produce a final document worthy of recognition by the academy and that would be the end of the matter. Nevertheless, The contention that Aboriginal cultural knowledge in varying forms was retained and, importantly, handed down is the central focus of this study. This view, while based primarily on personal, family and community experience, is supported by independent evidence, as in this example from a leading anthropological source:

Elkin (1951:177) pointed to manifestations of resentment on the north coast of New South Wales, where Aboriginal religion was acclaimed as equal to Christianity, and there was a revival of the local Aboriginal language.²⁷

²⁶ James W. Warburton, "The Aborigines of New England: Their Background and Their Future," *Armidale and District Historical Society Journal & Proceedings*, Vol. 4 (1962), 26.

²⁷ Ronald Berndt and Catherine Berndt, *The World of the First Australians: Aboriginal Life, Past and Present*, 5th ed. (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1998), 512.

In my own story I look back to great- and great-great grandparents, grandparents and parents passing knowledge down the line over the years. The importance of that legacy to me now is ensuring that our family's stories are in turn passed on to my own children and grandchildren: that is their rich cultural inheritance. I have, from a very early age, struggled to make sense of Australian history and the manner in which Aboriginal people have been robbed of their dignity, deprived of opportunity, and subjected to decades of character assassination by the Australian public. We, the First People of Australia, belong to the Dreaming. In a time span upwards of 70000 years we were the visionaries who created spaces and rituals for higher intellectual and cultural development.

Our people developed educational pathways that provided sustainable learning growth across millennia. Our song lines demonstrate that Aboriginal people prior to the arrival of the Europeans travelled throughout the entire length and breadth of this continent gathering together and communicating about the world at large. This complex but highly effective governance expressed our cultural affiliations and dealt with issues and affairs of law and justice within our communities. Our people spoke of our past with pride: 'we have a heritage, we are proud of that heritage and we want to see it preserved'.²⁸

This is the cultural and intellectual heritage in which this study is situated, the cultural and intellectual heritage that was handed down to me, through the still remaining channels of cultural transmission in my family and community. Language is a central part of this transmitted knowledge, both in my personal experience and this is supported in many other accounts. The scholarly challenge for me in undertaking this research was to trace what I

²⁸ Howard F.M. Creamer, "From the 'Cultural Bind' to a Solution: The Survey of Aboriginal Sacred Sites in New South Wales," *Australian Archaeology*, No. 2 (April 1975), 18.

could of the historical sources and contemporary documentation of this body of family and community knowledge, in the hope of validating my own perceptions, and of finding ways to maintain and revitalise our processes of continuing to pass on our knowledge and traditions to succeeding generations.

1.3 Methodology from an Indigenous Base

In approaching this task, two sets of obstacles presented themselves: the first and most overt is the marginalisation of Aboriginal people, our experience and our knowledges, in the consciousness and written records of the colonisers; our reality is recorded not in any coherent way, but in fragments, passing references, occasional mentions, elusive snippets and marginal anecdotes. These fragments have often been grossly misinterpreted when viewed through the cultural and intellectual biases of the observer. The second obstacle, which I came to recognise more gradually, is our own internalisation of the colonisers' view of us, in a way that operates to suppress our conscious awareness of how much knowledge we still retain and pass on in our family and community life. My father referred to this as the 'residual cultural memory' in our Aboriginal communities, and he passed on to me the drive to honour, validate, preserve and renew these living cultural and intellectual traditions of our people.

Fortunately, there were several promising avenues to explore in this research. Initially, I adopted a historical methodology, tracing my family history through published sources, archival records, and oral history. This part of the investigation is the focus of Chapter Three of this work, and substantially informs the accompanying theatre piece. This led to a closer look at the work of my father, Raymond Shoonkley Kelly, and in particular, his strikingly original ideas about cultural knowledge and education. If history is traditionally 'written by

the victors', contemporary historical practice makes room for more than just the dominant group's perspective, and I found that my family's history although patchy in places, was comparatively well documented, though still patchy in many places.²⁹

The historical research was satisfying insofar as it enabled me to verify and follow up on many of the facts of my family's recorded and recollected experiences over the better part of two centuries. I was also able to place this experience in the broader context of Aboriginal history, through the first-hand accounts by Aboriginal people reviewed in Chapter Two, and other relevant historical and anthropological accounts. But the historical records did not shed much light on the richness and substance of the intellectual and cultural heritage that I experienced and remembered. For that, I required another set of tools to unlock that part of what I was seeking.

The primary element of the knowledge that I received from my elders was in the form of language. The most important cultural concepts usually had traditional words associated with them, for which there were simply no English words, including the terms *Keepara*, *Grandha*, *Garr'Garr'* and *Garr'yi* mentioned above. The elders of my grandparents' generation were bilingual or multilingual; as a young child I often heard them conversing in Thangatti and Gumbayngirr, as well as both Aboriginal English and Standard English. Many traditional words were used in everyday talk, particularly verbs such as *wayikati* 'come here' (i.e. come up to me),³⁰ *ma* 'do [something]' (where the something depends on context, i.e. move; take it; also when giving permission to do something);³¹ *yan* 'walk', *yangul* 'going'. Traditional words were also used for sensitive topics and insulting language,

²⁹ A saying frequently attributed to both Machiavelli and Churchill, to the best of my knowledge untraceable in the published works of either.

³⁰ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 164.

³¹ Cf. *maa* in Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 148.

such as *guna* ‘shit’; body parts like *miil* ‘eye’, *maara* ‘hair’; and common experiences like *buki* ‘tired’.³² Even as a child, I was aware that several of these speakers, including my own great-grandfather, had tape recorded much more of the language than I had picked up at home, and that their knowledge was respected, studied and written about by linguists. Increasingly I came to realise how language was the key to the traditional cultural knowledge and Aboriginal intellectual framework that I was seeking to understand.

In the initial research phase, however, I was solely reliant on the accounts of other language describers and with little or no understanding of the science of linguistics; I began simply by engaging with the written material produced by others. For the terms I had prior knowledge and understanding, I was easily able to ascertain how the language documenter had used symbols of the English alphabet to represent the various sounds of a language, while another researcher would use the same symbols in a different pattern suggesting an alternate pronunciation (e.g. *gurri*, *gurre*, *koori*, *koorie*). Now living in Newcastle, I could readily perceive similarities between some local words and my language from further north, but trying to find my way into the rather divergent representations of the local language was a challenge.³³ This challenge initially confused me and it seemed that I would not find my way through the material.

³² Lissarrague lists these as *guna*, *mii*, *marra*, and *buki*: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 144; 150; 149; 125 respectively.

³³ Cf. the numerous and variable early accounts: Lancelot E. Threlkeld, *An Australian Language as Spoken by the Awabakal, the People of Awaba or Lake Macquarie (near Newcastle, New South Wales) Being an Account of Their Language, Traditions and Customs* (Sydney: Charles Potter, 1981), Enright, Walter J., “The Initiation Ceremonies of the Aborigines of Port Stephens, NSW Wales,” *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales for 1899*, No. 33 (1899) 115-24, “The language, weapons and manufactures of the aborigines of Port Stephens”; communicated by RH Mathews, *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales for 1900*, No. 34 (1900) 103-18, “The Kattang (Kutthung) or Worimi: An Aboriginal Tribe,” *Mankind*, Vol. 1, No. 4 (1932), 75-77, “Further Notes on the Worimi,” *Mankind* Vol. 1 No. 7 (1933), 161-2, “The Worimi Tribe,” *Newcastle and Hunter District Historical Society Journal and Proceedings* Vol. 1, No.1 (1936), 85-9, “Notes on the Aborigines of the North Coast of New South Wales,” *Mankind* Vol. 2, No. 4 (1937), 88-91; John Fraser, “The Aborigines of New South Wales,” *Journal and Proceedings of the*

To address these challenges, I developed a methodology whereby I began listening to and analysing the original audio recordings from the 1960s and 1970s, many which were recordings of or recorded with assistance of members of my family.

These sound files were initially recorded on reel-to-reel tape by various language enquirers working in the field, including W.G Hoddinott, Nils Holmer and Janet Bolt, and a number of short recordings made by Terry Crowley, A.P. Elkin, and later recordings by Ray Shoonkley Kelly and Howard Creamer of the National Parks and Wildlife Service Project. Initially, my motivation for listening to sound files was solely to improve my own skills in language pronunciation. In the early 2000s I viewed the majority of the language work being carried out in New South Wales was little more than a salvage operation and was deeply concerned that any new work would amount only to basic programs of reconstruction, with the final results perhaps developing into a sort of hybrid language that would need to be supplemented by large-scale borrowing from English.³⁴

In the course of this study my perceptions of the quality of the language research has changed dramatically, from a position of scepticism to one of hopeful encouragement.

I believe wholeheartedly that Aboriginal people through the reclamation and reuse of traditional Language will begin a true cultural renaissance. To make a case for this language

Royal Society of New South Wales for the Year 1882 No. 16 (1882), 193-233, "Some Remarks on the Australian Languages," *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales for 1890* No. 24 (1890), 231-53; J.W. Fawcett, "Customs of the Wonnah-Ruah Tribe, and their Dialect or Vocabulary," *The Science of Man* Vol. 1, No. 7 & 8 (1898), 152-4; 180-1; Robert Miller, "The Hunter River: The Wonnarua Tribe and Language," *The Australian Race* Vol. 3, No. 188 (1887), 352-57 and others and more recently: John Maynard, "Awabakal Dreaming Stories, Researched by John Maynard," (unpublished paper, 1996) with illustrations by Tony Keaton (Newcastle: Wollotuka Aboriginal Education Centre, 1999), *Awabakal Word Finder: An Aboriginal Dictionary and Dreaming Stories Companion* (Southport: Keeaira Press, 2004); Lissarrague, *A Salvage Grammar* and Alex Arposio, *A Grammar for the Awabakal language* (Cardiff: Arwarbukarl Cultural Resource Association, 2008).

³⁴ Raymond F. Kelly in foreword to Amanda Lissarrague's *Dhanggati Grammar*, iii; cf. Widders, Terry. "Dhanggadi, An Aboriginal Language: A Linguistic Salvage Study," (Honours thesis, Macquarie University, 1979); Amanda Lissarrague. "A Salvage Grammar of Dunghutti," (Honours thesis, University of New England, 2000).

Potential I have first to assist those who read this exegesis to understand how I came to this conclusion.

1.4 Radical Trust in the Language Data

Immersing myself wholly in the recordings seemed the best approach to allow for my own unmediated experience of language, I felt the need to completely and directly saturate myself and my brain in the voices of the old people, without having my perceptions influenced by or filtered through any outside theoretical perspectives or representations. My main research instruments were my own vocal tract, and my family and community cultural background knowledge. I myself vocalised the words to reproduce as accurately as possible what I heard on the tapes, and by so doing, to identify exactly where and how the speakers were moving their mouths to produce these sounds. Using my own cultural knowledge I was then able to identify words and parts of words, and to link these with the meanings I had learnt and heard as a child. This gave my first-hand investigation of the language material as purely Indigenous a basis as could be achieved.

Collating and examining the language required me to develop a methodology, after first setting up separate wave files for each sound recording and attaching it to a transcription software program called Transcriber, I set about drafting out a rough description of the oral output provided by each speaker and each interviewer. These rough drafts then became lists of each traditional language word being used. These lists became the tool for a deeper enquiry that would be further refined and narrowed to a set of words that warranted further investigation. I began to suspect that my interpretation of the language material was markedly different from that of the initial interviewer and from other subsequent

investigators who had also examined the same recorded files, something I will explore in depth.

The, at time poor quality of the archival sound recordings posed a major challenge to this research as such I was fortunate to be able to employ the services of a sound engineer, Izi Illume from Gambirra Music to improve the fidelity of the audio files.³⁵ Illume was able to improve the sound quality of all the sound files at my disposal, concentrating in particular on the word endings on which my investigation had now begun to concentrate. This required copies of the original magnetic tapes (rather than the later digital versions) and fortunately I had in my possession a set of the Thangatti tapes, which were acquired from the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) in Canberra during the 1990s, under their program for return of material to communities.³⁶ Once the engineer had removed the background noise and compensated for the deteriorated state of the tapes, previously an unheard voice became legible, particularly valuable and significant was the re-emergence of speakers in the background indicating the active use of language in everyday conversation. For example, on one tape two children can be heard arguing and quarrelling between themselves in mixture of Thangatti and Aboriginal English.

These recordings were made with Aboriginal language speakers who identified as speaking Thangatti and were recorded during a ten year period from 1964 -1974. Utilising computer technology and the Transcriber software I began to systematically analyse the sound files in a bid to match up the sounding of words with the earlier written description of linguists and other investigators. The first stage of analysis required getting the draft phonology written

³⁵ The sound engineering was made possible through my being awarded the Freddy Ficke Scholarship administered by the NSW Aboriginal Land Council, see <http://www.alc.org.au/nswalc-in-the-community/freddy-fricke-scholarship.aspx/>.

³⁶ See Bibliography for full listing of audio files including lists of recorded speakers.

down as I was hearing it.³⁷ The second stage was reviewing the written material and noting any differences that I may have uncovered which brought me into conflict with the descriptions of others. What became clear during this second phase was the amount of material that I had described differently to that of the original recorder and the subsequent interpretations of other language describers in the years that followed. I have communicated with many people about the language and sounds that I have interpreted from these files and in return I have received a mixture of responses ranging from support to disbelief and suspicion, and even anger for my perceived intrusion in tampering with intellectual and/or cultural property.³⁸

In Chapter Five I explain in more detail the investigative procedures and methodologies I developed, and the findings and challenges that emerged. My trust in the voices of my forebears as they recorded this material (what linguists would call the ‘raw data’) remains absolute. I believe that anyone who listens closely can replicate exactly what I have discovered in the recordings. As I understand more about the phonological and grammatical processes illustrated by the speakers, I can see more of the reasons underlying some of the controversies.

1.5 Aims and Significance

³⁷ I should make it clear that my current orthography is a still-evolving research tool, not a proposal for change to Lissarrague’s (2007) practical orthography, which is the most consistent and scientific spelling system developed so far. If my discoveries about the sound system eventually lead to proposals for change, that would require widespread consultation.

³⁸ Raymond F. Kelly, “Whose Lingo Is It?” (Paper presented at Hidden Gems: Symposium on the Role of Libraries and Archives in Cultural Revitalisation, State Library of New South Wales, Sydney, August 26th, 2013).

The overall aim of this study is to explore, reclaim, and revalue the Aboriginal intellectual and cultural heritage that was handed down from generation to generation, from my ancestors through to me, and to seek effective ways of carrying this heritage forward for my children, grandchildren and future generations. Language has emerged as absolutely essential in this process. This is not to assert that our ancestral languages must or could be restored to everyday use in their original form. Rather, I suggest that we actively reclaim, revalue and draw upon our living language heritage in all its forms, as the vital source of our cultural resilience and continuity, our uniquely Aboriginal conceptual world, our intellectual framework and a source of strength now and for the future.

The unifying vision of this investigation highlights and demonstrates the legitimacy of our resilient cultural memory and reinstates Aboriginal leadership within all areas of education training, research, and governance as it pertains to Aboriginal people. Aboriginal groups across the Mid North Coast region, including the Thangatti and Gumbaynggirr maintained an affiliation through a prescribed set of skin names. This kinship system is a feature of Aboriginal social organisation and family relationships across the region; it is a complex system that determines how people relate to each other and their roles, responsibilities and obligations, their ceremonial business and their land. The kinship system determines marriage, ceremonial relationships, funeral roles and behaviour patterns with other kin. This detail points to a deep level of cultural unity, embracing the differing but related varieties of traditional and contemporary language throughout our region.

The historical part of the study highlights the determination and resilience of Aboriginal families in making their own decisions and balancing adaptation with cultural maintenance, despite the impact of colonisation, dispossession, control and discrimination. It documents

the strength and continuing value of our intellectual and educational traditions, and argues strongly for their ongoing relevance. Original to this exegesis is approaching the audio recorded primary sources from a completely Indigenous perspective, prior to establishing points of connection with formal linguistic analysis. Through a culturally informed approach, previously unanalysed song material is made accessible, and new insights are gained into sound change processes, grammatical elements, and cultural meanings of words. This original approach to the material allows for new understandings and insights that challenge accepted notions, as all good historical scholarship does.

1.6 Re-Visioning the *Keepara*

The central contention of this thesis is that Indigenous cultural heritage is resilient, vibrantly alive, and being transmitted now in forms that are ever evolving, adapting, changing, and ever continuous, as they have been for millennia. Visionary ancestors who developed the *Keepara* as their spaces for higher intellectual and cultural development created a heritage that we can continue to work with today. The educational pathways that provided sustainable lifelong learning are still navigable. Our song lines, story lines and languages are still vital channels of communication for our people throughout the continent and throughout the generations. Leadership, learning, Law, justice, governance, and sustainability are all available to us through these pathways and channels.

In any research journey comes the point of no return and also inevitably the time and place where a judgement, a decision, must be measured and delivered upon this body of work is now within sight. I have prepared myself to meet the scrutiny of the *Maraywun* (contemporaries on the journey towards higher cultural learning); those qualified contemporaries who will

gather together and listen to the details of cultural landscapes that I have visited. Like the young initiates of old I will need to provide evidence of rigor that has informed my assessment of Aboriginal culture and the language it encompasses.

This study will give an account of the old people whose stories I have been privileged to listen to. I will sing their songs and articulate their portrayal of historical events. I will describe the storytellers who have intrigued my mind and challenged me to see other truths. I will do this by revealing the archival artefacts of our Aboriginal intellectual culture that I have gathered and I will demonstrate their use. In enacting this work, I seek to bring the vision and purpose of the *Keepara* into the present, in a form that we can work with.

This introductory chapter outlined the context, framework and something of the methodologies used in this study, aiming to convey a view of what research procedures and potential outcomes look like from an Indigenous base and cultural perspective. Chapter Two surveys a diverse range of literature of specific relevance to this study, beginning with a consideration of traditional Aboriginal literatures and literacies, through audio and written material from Aboriginal speakers and authors, and proceeding to more academic sources from Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal scholars.

Chapter Three traces some of my family history, as documented over nearly two centuries in the New England region of New South Wales. The performance component of this work includes physical representation of the centrality of journeys, songlines, storylines in family and personal identity and experience, from my thrice-great-grandfather's birth around 1808, through my own growing-up years. In Chapter Four we turn to the cultural and intellectual

work of my father, Raymond Shoonkley Kelly, in his documentation of sites of significance in our region and beyond, and his theoretical observations and perspectives on that work.

The centrality of language to all this will already have become apparent, and Chapter Five examines this in more depth, including traditional, contact and contemporary language varieties and issues, drawing on my investigations of the original data, tentative findings and growing-points for further work. Chapter Six brings these various themes together into a comprehensive picture of the nature of Aboriginal intellectual heritage in this region of New South Wales, highlighting the rich resources this heritage gives us for moving forward into the future.

Chapter 2

Review of Literature

From the outset, I have felt strongly the need to privilege Aboriginal voices throughout this study. Therefore this review begins with the traditional, oral literatures and the literacy practices that were the underpinning of Aboriginal intellectual life for tens of thousands of years. Until the arrival of alphabetical writing with explorers and colonists from Europe, knowledge and tradition were transmitted orally. Thus we start with an account of traditional practices of cultural literacy handed down through my family and upbringing, and trace some continuities from these traditional practices through into contemporary Aboriginal life. The keystone for the oral aspect of the research consists of a large collection of archival sound files: audio recordings of several of my forebears speaking with various researchers over more than fifty years, along with some unpublished transcriptions and notes.

What could be called the oral literature base for the research is followed by a review of more conventional written sources. These range from narratives and memoirs by Aboriginal authors, through to primary and secondary historical sources, and relevant studies by anthropologists and linguists. Some of these written sources are more relevant than others to the focus of this study. They combine to provide a set of perspectives from different angles that is somewhat disjunctive, but each of which contributes some insight on the cultural traditions under investigation here.

2.1 Traditional Literatures and Literacies

From childhood up to the present, I have been fascinated by the storytellers of my family and community, the holders and transmitters of our traditional knowledge and the generators and interpreters of new experiences and ideas. For most of my childhood and youth, my father's work involved visiting significant cultural sites with those who knew the stories and songs for them, and he actively sought to engage me in some of the visits and his reports on them and I watched these songs and stories performed with keen interest. This was my foundation in the cultural and intellectual traditions of which I write. With this strong cultural formation, it is little wonder that I became a cultural performer and storyteller myself. With knowledge comes responsibility, and it was my responsibility to find my place in the chain of cultural enactment and transmission.

Interestingly, the advances of modern technology have opened the minds of many educators to a broader understanding of the nature of literacy, or more accurately, literacies, from print-based literacy to multiliteracies.³⁹ This has led to greater recognition of Aboriginal forms of literacy.⁴⁰ In the Aboriginal intellectual world of my upbringing, being an educated or literate member of our mob could include some or all of the following, with different individuals tending to specialise in different areas of knowledge:

³⁹ A term introduced and promoted in education in Bill Cope and Mary Kalantzis. *Multiliteracies: Teaching and Learning in the New Communications Environment* (Marrickville: NSW Primary English Teaching Association, 2000).

⁴⁰ For example Annah Healy, *Multiliteracies and Diversity in Education: New Pedagogies for Expanding Landscapes* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008) and Mary Kalantzis and Bill Cope, *Literacies* (Port Melbourne : Cambridge University Press, 2012).

- Reading the country at practical, ecological / scientific, and spiritual levels⁴¹
- Reading family: kinship literacy, marriage and family patterns
- Reading songlines and storylines, mapped onto places over generations
- Linguistic literacies: knowledge of languages, where, how and by whom they are used, meanings within them and relationships between them
- Lifelong literacies: passing through the stages of knowledge appropriate to one's age, from early learning, through various educational processes, through into eldership

It was this kind of framework of awareness of learning, knowledge, and education that formed my own cultural and educational interests, although I did not relate this kind of knowledge to my experience of schooling at all. It was many years after leaving school that I became interested in performance work within Aboriginal community contexts, and in theatre, performance and writing for a wider audience.⁴² This in turn led to a revaluing of Aboriginal language heritage, first as a source of authenticity, and then as a key to cultural concepts; and eventually, to an interest in the sharing of knowledge in academic settings.

2.2 Audio Recordings

My early exposure to the Thangatti and Gumbaynggirr languages was through hearing them spoken by my grandparents and their contemporaries, in our home community in Armidale,

⁴¹ A term used by the late Goolarabooloo senior Law man in Krim Benterrak, Stephen Muecke and Paddy Roe, *Reading the Country: Introduction to Nomadology* (with Ray Keogh, Butcher Joe and EM Lohe) (Fremantle: Fremantle Arts Centre Press, 1996).

⁴² *Get Up and Dance* by Raymond F. Kelly. Produced by Freewheels Theatre, Lakeview Street Theatre, Speers Point, Newcastle, 5 April and 30 June, 1989; *Somewhere in the Darkness* by Raymond F. Kelly. Produced by the Australian People's Theatre, Sydney Theatre Company, Wharf 2, 1996; Raymond F. Kelly, "Take the Best and Leave the Rest," (Keynote address at 6th International Drama in Education Research Institute (IDIERI), University of Sydney, Sydney, 18 July 2009); Raymond F. Kelly and Brian Joyce, *Ngarrama: A Lakeside Dialogue Between Birabahn, Threlkeld and...* (Performance event, Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, 12 November 2006, Filmed by John Kirk for the University of Newcastle, 2006).

and other places that we visited. The traditional languages and English were spoken fluently by that generation, with humour and subtlety of expression, and often with highly insightful translation by the speakers. On the tape recordings of them, younger speakers, even children of my generation, can be heard also speaking in a mixture of traditional languages and English. Once I started attending school, the languages prominence receded while I tried to focus on schoolwork in English, often feeling much less than comfortable. As a child I remember elements of this traditional language, and at the beginning of this research I was regularly using single words and short sentences in my everyday life. These words and phrases of oral language formed the very bases of my language investigation and ultimately become the pivot points that led to the discovery of the keys to the structure of a language knowledge. This knowledge has assisted me to move beyond the imposed boundaries and borders of the colonising forces that have deprived Aboriginal people of freedom of speech and intellectual endeavour. This exegesis further challenges these accepted notions regarding the loss of culture, and proving cultural continuity is crucial to proving land rights claims, amongst other things. The critical role that my late father, Raymond Shoonkley Kelly had played in substantiating the claim that Aboriginal people in New South Wales during the 1970s had retained historical knowledge of traditional practices and an ongoing connection to their traditional lands and their sites of significance has played no small role in inspiring and contributing to this study.

In 1961 across the state of New South Wales, traditional language speakers in the safety of community settings regularly communicated in the first language, albeit with an emerging English bridge. I call this language the ‘crossover language’, and it was another important set of clues to the rhythms, patterns and structures of the traditional language material, as I explain in the chapter on language. The opportunity to work in the research context with the

tapes of my great-grandfather and other speakers of his generation, most of them related to or associated with my family, came as a most welcome chance to reconnect with the kind of talk I had sought out as a child, and to learn more about family history and heritage.

The initial examination of sound files, for this study, recorded with traditional language speakers in New South Wales centered on the recordings made by Swedish linguist Nils Holmer on the mid north coast of New South Wales from 1964-65.⁴³ Listening to Holmer's work was vital to improving my accuracy in term of pronunciation and to expand my overall understanding of the written material that he produced as a result of his work in the field. Holmer had served as a professor of linguistics at Lund University in Sweden (1949-1969); with a formidable record of research expertise by the time he visited Australia. During his visit to Australia he and his wife travelled to various Aboriginal settlements in New South Wales and Queensland interviewing and recording older speakers who were identified as especially good speakers of traditional languages.

The Thangatti were among those numerous traditional speakers of the language recorded by Holmer. The sound recordings produced during his field visits to the Aboriginal settlements at Kempsey, Bellbrook and Armidale in 1964, utilized the expertise and skills of noted speakers and cultural knowledge holders including Doug Scott, Len Duckett, and Lachlan Vale, Ellen Davis (née Quinlan), and Frank Archibald. Although this list is not exhaustive, these the key voices that I have consistently consulted throughout my research.

⁴³ Documented principally in Nils M. Holmer, *An Attempt Towards a Comparative Grammar of Two Australian Languages* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1996) and *An Attempt Towards a Comparative Grammar of Two Australian Languages, Part 2 Indices and Vocabularies of Kattang and Thangatti* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1967).

The idea for my involvement in the transcription of these sound files came about after a period of communication with Amanda Lissarrague, who was the senior linguist employed by the Muurrabay Aboriginal and Cultural Co-operative.⁴⁴ After receiving a copy of an earlier draft of her Dhanggati grammar and dictionary from my father, Ray Kelly senior, I made direct contact with Amanda and demonstrated my willingness to become involved in the process of reclamation, renewal and revitalisation of this valuable cultural knowledge.⁴⁵ Amanda has been a good friend and provided much needed resource in the process of finding my way into the language material.

These sound files had mostly been recorded for purposes of Aboriginal language documentation by researchers in philology, linguistics, and anthropology: notably W.G. Hoddinott and his co-researcher Janet Bolt, and Nils Holmer, with shorter recordings by A.P. Elkin and Terry Crowley. There were also some extended interviews recorded by an oral historian, John Gordon and site documentation recordings made by Ray Shoonkley Kelly and Howard Creamer of the National Parks and Wildlife Service Project. This archive contains a range of material in traditional language and English, including linguistic elicitation of specific words, phrases and sentences, stories and reminiscences, oral history material, songs and explanations of them, and conversations among the main speakers and others who happened to be present during recording sessions.

In all, there are recordings identified as being in Thangatti language from ten speakers (listed above in the Acknowledgements), recordings identified as Gumbaynggirr from four

⁴⁴ Lissarrague, *A Salvage Grammar*; Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 2007; Lissarrague, *A Grammar and Dictionary of Gathang*; Anna Ash, John Giacon and Amanda Lissarrague, *Gamilaraay, Yuwaalaraay & Yuwaaliyaay Dictionary* (Alice Springs: IAD Press, 2003).

⁴⁵ Amanda Lissarrague. "A Salvage Grammar of Dunghutti," (Honours thesis, University of New England, 2000).

speakers, recordings identified as Gathang from two speakers, as Bandjalang from three and Yaygirr from one. I use ‘recordings identified as...’ because the intensive study of these recordings suggests to me that at times the language varieties may have been misidentified or oversimplified by the person recording them. In Chapter Three I give details of a song from Frank Archibald, which is classified as Gumbaynggirr, but which, I believe on linguistic grounds to be Thangatti in both lexicon and grammar.

While most of the material listened to for the purposes of this research has been Thangatti, I have taken into account the abovementioned neighbouring languages for comparative purposes, and have since extended my scope by listening to recordings from elsewhere in New South Wales. I describe in Chapter Five the methodology by which I was able to gradually enter into the structure and meanings in the recorded language material, and develop my listening skills to the point of being able to identify many details of words and morphemes, particularly the suffixes, and many reduced or contracted forms that seem to be the product of regular sound change processes.

Despite the relative brevity, fragmentary nature and limited number of speakers in some recordings, the range of material, as indicated above, is much richer and broader than the basic wordlists and fragments available for some languages. Particularly noteworthy with the high quality playback on the remastered recordings is the active role of other speakers interacting with the main speaker during the recording event. Also evident is the interplay of languages among this multilingual generation, who spoke or understood two or three

Aboriginal languages as well as English in both its standard and indigenised forms.⁴⁶ In Chapter Five I discuss in more detail these language contact phenomena.

2.3 Aboriginal Narrative and Memoir

My quest to foreground Aboriginal voices and knowledge throughout this study has been expressed most obviously through the use of the audio recordings and oral traditions as primary sources. In addition to these oral sources, as Aboriginal people over time have embraced the tools of writing to reach wider audiences, an ever increasing body of literature by Aboriginal authors has emerged and continues to grow. My late father, whose work is discussed in Chapter Four, intended to write his personal memoirs, but tragically, a debilitating stroke that struck him less than three months into his retirement left him unable to realise that vision.

I review here the works of a number of key Aboriginal writers who have authored relevant material within the time period of my research. These historical accounts provide crucial evidence of the potency and depth contained in the memories of Aboriginal people. The influence and impact of all these publications is clearly that they give an Aboriginal perspective on our lives and experiences especially whilst under the control of government agencies. The impacts of the conditions of this period on my own family are explored in subsequent chapters of this study. The narratives delivered by these Aboriginal writers challenged the absences and omissions of the wider more general history of Australia that

⁴⁶ In an article on the language maintenance work of Mr. Sandy Cameron, John Van Tiggelen quotes Noel Pearson as saying: 'Typically, everyone in camp would be multilingual. They'd speak four to five languages but they'd own a language in relation to their country. They might not live there all the time ... but they were connected through language. So the prime function for that maintenance of diversity [of languages] must have been identity. The survival of language is paramount for our sense of self.' John Van Tiggelen, "The Sound of One Man Chatting," *Sydney Morning Herald, Good Weekend Magazine*, September 10th, 2005, 27.

largely glorified discoverers, explorers and settlers. Our stories remained for the greater part of the twentieth century erased or missed or de-emphasised.

The first of these Indigenous authors I consulted was Bill Cohen (1914-1983), a grandson of my thrice-great-grandfather, whose autobiography, *To My Delight: The Autobiography of Bill Cohen, A Grandson of the Gumbangarri* (1987), was found in pieces, reassembled and finally produced with the assistance of Helen Williams of the Aboriginal Studies Press.⁴⁷ Bill Cohen's life story is a rambunctious roller-coaster of a tale covering his adventurous career in the saddle and on the sporting fields. Importantly for this study, contained within the edited version of Bill's thoughts are the family links and connections.⁴⁸ Born in 1914 at Jeogla Station on the outskirts of Armidale, Bill and his family were well known station hands in the cattle industry. Acclaimed Australian poet and writer, Judith Wright provided the foreword to Bill's autobiography, recalling that the Cohen men worked on many of the stations she knew of as a child, including her own family's property. Bill and his father were well known along the various droving routes and spent substantial time working in the Macleay Valley with Wright observing:

Finally, readers should remember that this is not a history. It is rather a version – Bill's life as he saw it, remembered it and built it up from his own memory. Professional historians working from written documents are nowadays willing to admit that what they produce is necessarily an interpretation of the facts, coloured by their own view of matters. Bill, without written documents to refer to, and as a member of a long-

⁴⁷ Bill Cohen, *To My Delight: The Autobiography of Bill Cohen, a Grandson of the Gumbangarri* (Canberra, Aboriginal Studies Press, 1987).

⁴⁸ Further family heritage research on this could provide some interesting findings pertaining to kinship ties spreading across New South Wales.

deprived and insulted people, is not likely to have produced a definitive account of his life and times.⁴⁹

The earliest published narrative by an Aboriginal woman in Australia, *Through My Eyes* by Ella Simon (1902-1981) has been a useful source also.⁵⁰ Simon's powerful narrative that charts her life experiences and recalls her family's history living on the Manning River at Taree in New South Wales. Ella's father was instrumental in the establishment of Sunrise Station Aboriginal mission community at Purfleet the same year she was born and she recalls the arrival of the UAM (United Aborigines Mission) being appointed to work there. After attending the local mission school Ella travelled to Sydney during the 1920s where she was engaged as a domestic servant, like many Indigenous young women in this period. On her return home in 1932 Ella soon learned of the powerful and restrictive changes and control now being asserted by the Aborigines Protection Board (APB) over the lives of Aboriginal people, the APB, armed with far reaching new powers began a campaign of stringent control over the movement of Aboriginal people to and from Missions and Stations. This meant that without the written approval of the APB, Aboriginal people could be denied permission to leave or enter these controlled spaces. This initial confrontation with APB set Ella on a path of political struggle and activism which continued throughout her life. In time she gained broader recognition and acceptance and came to be considered one of the most prominent citizens of the Taree District.

Similarly useful regional history is found in the writing of Patricia Davis-Hurst (1934-2013) who was employed in 1975 by the NSW Department of Health at the Purfleet Baby Health

⁴⁹ Cohen, *To My Delight*, 6-10. Another relative also produced a memoir of life in the region: Patsy Cohen and Margaret Somerville, *Ingelba and the Five Black Matriarchs* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1990)

⁵⁰ Ella Simon, *Through My Eyes* (Melbourne: Collins Dove, 1997).

Clinic, beginning a long and distinguished career as a community health worker, teacher and human rights activist for Aboriginal people. Her autobiography, *Sunrise Station*, tells of her life and work toward a comprehensive Aboriginal health service in the Taree and Manning River District.⁵¹ She was a key figure in the foundation and development of the Gillawarra Aboriginal Medical Centre which opened in 1980. Patricia served in many leadership roles on a number of boards and associations, mostly in a voluntary capacity. Most notably she became a Director of the Redfern Aboriginal Legal Service in Sydney, and served locally as the President of the Purfleet Ladies Auxiliary.⁵²

Drawing primarily on audio files, *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker: The Life of an Australian Aboriginal 1900-1972*, as told to Janet Mathews, was compiled by Mathews after Barker's death.⁵³ This to me is a powerful and revealing account of Aboriginal resilience and identity, this story speaks of the intense struggle to maintain culture and language under the pressures of colonialist policies and practices of subjugation in north-west New South Wales. The content of this book is essentially drawn from audio files recorded by Jimmie Barker and provided to Janet Mathews, as well as letters, and other conversations that she recorded directly with him. The struggle for recognition and maintenance of culture is a continuing theme in these sources. Jim Miller's *Koori, A Will to Win* became an influential resource for high school education in New South Wales in the 1980s, as an assertion of Aboriginal rights to country, recognition and justice.⁵⁴ Lawrence Bamblett's book *Our*

⁵¹ Patricia Davis-Hurst, *Sunrise Station* (Taree: Sunbird Publications, 1996), 95.

⁵² Davis-Hurst's contribution was acknowledged with an Order of Australia (AM) in 1993 and an Honorary Doctorate from the University of Newcastle in 2003, for her lifetime dedication to the promotion of justice for her people.

⁵³ Jimmie Barker, *The Two Worlds of Jimmie Barker: The Life of an Australian Aboriginal 1900-1972 as told to Janet Mathews* (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies Press, 1982).

⁵⁴ James Miller, *Koori, A Will to Win: The Heroic Resistance, Survival & Triumph of Black Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1985).

Stories Are Our Survival similarly emphasised the strength of Aboriginal family underpinning the struggle for rights and justice, and celebrates the survival and continuity of culture and tradition flowing into contemporary life.⁵⁵

These important Aboriginal accounts provide critical insight into the all too common control, hardship and marginalisation confronting Aboriginal peoples under the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board. Individually each narrative provides a startling firsthand account of the lived experience that these pioneering authors eventually committed to paper. Collectively their personal histories combine to deliver a potent reminder of ‘The human spirit’ and the ‘Will to survive’, two important elements that contribute to the enduring legacy that is Aboriginal culture in New South Wales. These sources importantly provide valuable Indigenous perspectives of (some of) the period on which this study focuses.

2.4 Historical Sources

Much of the Australian history that was offered to Australian school children during the 1960s and 70s contained little or no Aboriginal content and the few mentions were replete with cultural marginalization and misunderstandings. No *Gurri* heroes or heroines were presented to many of us who were in the grip of the Aboriginal assimilation programs being established across the State of New South Wales; the only protagonists for us to choose from were European. The very small amount of Aboriginal material presented, as for example in the *New South Wales School Magazine* of the period, was intended for the consumption of non-Indigenous students and centred on the glorified and patronising ‘Noble Savage’

⁵⁵ Lawrence Bamblett, *Our Stories Are Our Survival* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2013).

sentiment.⁵⁶ For example, Henry Kendall's 1864 poem 'The Last of His Tribe' was used on many occasions in the *School Magazine*.⁵⁷ Material of this kind largely confined us to the past as belonging to the Stone Age, implying that whatever 'primitive' culture we may have had, had died out long ago, and implied that our culture was non-existent in the present. Refuting these assertions is at the core of this study.

From this discouraging start, it was heartening to find at least some more recent historical accounts in which I could recognise something of relevance to my experience of Australian life. I have examined a number of works that have touched on the history of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board's impact and control over Aboriginal lives. These include Heather Goodall's 1983 PhD thesis 'A History of Aboriginal Communities in NSW 1909-1939' and subsequent book *Invasion to Embassy*, Sue Johnston's ground-breaking 1970 MA thesis 'The New South Wales Government Policy Towards Aborigines 1880 to 1909,' John Maynard's book *Fight for Liberty and Freedom*, and Victoria Haskins' book *One Bright Spot*, that examined the decades 1920s and 1930s.⁵⁸ Each of these books confirmed and validated parts of my family experience that I remembered or that were recounted to me by other family members.

Heather Goodall's book *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972* charted the long-drawn-out fight for land retention by Aboriginal people

⁵⁶ "An Older Kind of Magic: A history of the School Magazine," *Hindsight*. ABC Radio National, 12 September, 2010 <http://www.abc.net.au/radionational/programs/hindsight/an-older-kind-of-magic-a-history-of-the-school/3024590/>, accessed 21 February, 2015.

⁵⁷ Henry Kendall, *The Poems of Henry Kendall* (Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1920), 96.

⁵⁸ Heather Goodall, "A history of Aboriginal Communities in New South Wales, 1909-1939," (PhD thesis, University of Sydney, 1983), *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1972* (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996); Susan L. Johnston, "The New South Wales Government Policy Towards Aborigines, 1880 to 1909," (MA thesis, University of Sydney, 1970); John Maynard, *Fight for Liberty and Freedom: The Origins of Australian Aboriginal Activism* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007); Victoria K. Haskins, *One Bright Spot* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005).

from the 1860s to recent times. She provided evidence of the determination of numerous Aboriginal groups in New South Wales to develop and maintain economic independence. Goodall's work examined early European contact and the establishment of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board in the later nineteenth century, and recorded many of the Aboriginal stations and reserves, examining employment and unemployment, education policy and its shortfalls. Exploring the role of the police and law in ensuring Aboriginal incarceration on these reserves, Goodall's work challenged conventional views (of earlier historical accounts) that the rise of Aboriginal political activism was a supposedly recent response to overseas rights movements. The rich story she revealed was made possible through the words and memories of many of the major activists involved in the long Aboriginal political struggle. Goodall's work has been very important and influential in my study, primarily through the inspiring Aboriginal individuals she was able to unveil.

In a similar fashion, John Maynard's 2003 PhD thesis "Fred Maynard and the Awakening of Aboriginal Political Consciousness and Activism in Twentieth Century Australia" and his subsequent book *Fight for Liberty and Freedom: The Origins of Australian Aboriginal Activism* deliver a revealing and passionate history of the early Aboriginal political fight during the first three decades of the twentieth century.⁵⁹ Prominent Aboriginal activist Gary Foley had no hesitation in publicly hailing Maynard's book as 'one of the most important Australian history books in the past eighty years!'⁶⁰ Maynard's research examined the rise in the mid-1920s of the first organised and united Aboriginal political protest movement: an all-Aboriginal organisation called the Australian Aboriginal Progressive Association

⁵⁹ John Maynard, "Fred Maynard and the Awakening of Aboriginal Political Consciousness and Activism in Twentieth Century Australia," (PhD thesis, University of Newcastle, Australia, 2003), *Fight for Liberty and Freedom: The Origins of Australian Aboriginal Activism* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007).

⁶⁰ Maynard, *Fight for Liberty*, v.

(AAPA), which was headed by John's grandfather, the legendary Aboriginal political fighter, Fred Maynard.

Victoria Haskins' body of work has been greatly influenced from her time as a postgraduate history student, who learned that her great-grandmother Joan Kingsley-Strack, a middle-class housewife, established a relationship with young Aboriginal women she employed as domestic servants and began researching her life and work. Kingsley-Strack learned first-hand of the terrible truths of their removal from families and loved ones and their incarceration into institutions of the girls in her employ. It was through this process that she became an unlikely advocate for Aboriginal rights and a rare white voice in the 1930s speaking out against the removal of children from Indigenous families. Haskins was helped by Kingsley-Strack's comprehensive archive of personal papers when writing her doctoral thesis on the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board's domestic service policies, viewed through the personal narratives of her great-grandmother and the Indigenous women who worked for her. Haskins' doctoral thesis 'My One Bright Spot: A Personal Insight into White and Aboriginal Women's Relationships under the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board Apprenticeship Policy, 1920-1942' and subsequent book *One Bright Spot* have delivered rare insight into this tragic time period and policies, including the forcible removal of Aboriginal girls as young as 11 and 12 for placement as domestic servants in white households, which was a Haskins notes as a key policy of most state governments until the second half of the twentieth century:⁶¹

This is a lesser known but very significant part of the Stolen Generations history. It was a very widespread and gender-specific form of social engineering seen by state governments as an expedient way of

⁶¹ Haskins, *One Bright Spot*.

dealing with what they regarded as the problem of young Aboriginal girls on reserves.⁶²

Early Aboriginal author, Margaret Tucker (1904-1996), expressed the pain of being forcibly taken at the age of 12 to be trained for domestic service: 'It broke our hearts – tearing us apart – by taking us away to learn domestic work.' This too was part of the experience of my family members.⁶³

Other historical accounts were more general but still relevant, including John Ramsland's books *Custodians of the Soil: A History of Aboriginal-European Relationships in the Manning River of New South Wales*, *The Rainbow Man: The Life and Times of Les Ridgeway*, *Worimi Elder*, and *Remembering Aboriginal Heroes: Struggle, Identity and the Media*.⁶⁴ Ramsland's works, and in particular *Custodians of the Soil*, formally reinforced much of my own memories and understandings of the history of relationships between Aboriginal people and the arrival of the Europeans. Ramsland clearly sought to correct the imbalance of written Australian history with impeccable archival research of the historical records related to the Manning River Valley of New South Wales. Significantly, Ramsland argued that Aboriginal people triumphed over the impact of the white invasion, dispossession, attempted cultural destruction and colonialism with the ongoing existence of communities and culture.

⁶² 'Servitude and Stolen Years', University of Newcastle (Australia) Staff Profile interview with Victoria Haskins, 2012, <http://www.newcastle.edu.au/profile/victoria-haskins/>, accessed 24 June 2014.

⁶³ Margaret Tucker, *If Everyone Cared: Autobiography of Margaret Tucker*. Melbourne: Grosvenor Books, 1983; John Farquharson, "Obituary for Margaret Tucker (Auntie Marge)," *Canberra Times*, August 29, 1996; *Yapang Marruma: Making Our Way (Stories of the Stolen)*, Multimedia exhibition curated by Mervyn Bishop, Donna Fernando, Cherie Johnson, Ray Kelly and Rod Smith. Lake Macquarie City Art Gallery, 31 January – 15 March, 2009.

⁶⁴ John Ramsland, *Custodians of the Soil: A History of Aboriginal-European Relationships in the Manning Valley of New South Wales* (Taree: Greater Taree City Council, 2001); John Ramsland and Christopher G Mooney, *Remembering Aboriginal Heroes: Struggle, Identity and the Media* (Melbourne: Brolga Publishing, 2006).

These historical sources were supplemented by newspaper coverage in relation to my study, and exploring the National Library of Australia and the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) online records including the leading periodicals aimed at an Aboriginal readership: *Our Aim*, *The Australian Evangel*, *Dawn*, and *New Dawn*. Online information was also accessed from AIATSIS relating to the New South Wales Protection Board and Aborigines Protection Act 1909 (25/1909), their committees and their reports.⁶⁵

I have also read with interest the works of other Indigenous researchers and their perspectives on Indigenous research methods; most notably Aileen Moreton-Robinson, Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Martin Nakata.⁶⁶ My own methodological concerns are focused more on how to understand primary language sources and cultural meanings, but these ground-breaking thinkers helped to clarify my understanding of the inherently Indigenous nature of my approach.

2.5 Anthropological Studies

Two fine anthropological studies in the last thirty years have documented some of my extended family's experiences. These are *Domesticating Resistance: The Dhan-Gadi Aborigines and the Australian State* by Barry Morris and *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines Under the British Crown*, edited by Ann McGrath.⁶⁷ I had a particular affinity

⁶⁵ New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board records, 1875-1969.

⁶⁶ Aileen Moreton-Robinson, *Whitening Race: Essays in Social and Cultural Criticism* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004); Martin Nakata, *Disciplining the Savages, Savaging the Disciplines* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2007); Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing Methodologies: Research and Indigenous Peoples*. (London: Zed Books, 1999).

⁶⁷ Barry Morris, *Domesticating Resistance: The Dhan-gadi Aborigines and the Australian State* (Oxford: Berg, 1989); Ann McGrath, *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown*. (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995).

with the work of Barry Morris, who many decades ago worked with and within the Aboriginal communities around Kempsey. The work of Morris was richly enhanced through his capacity to listen to the Aboriginal informants like my father, and to perceive that despite the constraints and precarious nature of traditional ceremonial life, it was still there, and that ‘the initiators, still living, had gathered up the sacred artefacts from Petroi and Serpentine initiation sites (some 100 kilometres from Bellbrook) and relocated them in chosen sites around the mission’.⁶⁸ The studies in McGrath’s edited volume, sitting at the intersection of anthropology and history, focused on the experiences and survival strategies of Aboriginal people and families under the varying forms of colonial domination and disruption that were applied to them in the different states and territories. Goodall’s chapter on New South Wales accounts the successive waves of violence, dispossession, dislocation, disruption of traditional interaction, repeated deprivation of land and livelihood, impoverished conditions, control of movement, removal of children, and poor educational provision that were experienced by my family.⁶⁹ These same patterns of colonisation are echoed in the accounts of other parts of the continent.

Of critical importance to my study were the writing and talks delivered by my father Raymond Kelly, and his early collaboration with the anthropologist Howard Creamer. My father’s major paper “From the *Keepara* to a Cultural Bind” particularly informed and greatly directed my work. I was also able to draw upon the work of Howard Creamer, including his chapter ‘Malaise and Beyond’ in *The Moving Frontier: Aspects of Aboriginal-European Interaction in Australia*. Creamer was able to highlight that our communities in and around the Macleay River did descend into a period of ‘gloom and despair’ from the

⁶⁸ Morris, *Domesticating Resistance*, 69.

⁶⁹ Heather Goodall, “New South Wales,” in *Contested Ground: Australian Aborigines under the British Crown*, ed. Ann McGrath, 55-120 (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1995).

1930s; but that some four decades later when writing in the 1970s, our cultural life, despite persisting ‘under duress, ... [was] today undergoing its own renaissance, which is a meaningful reawakening of identity and a growing realisation of the value of Aboriginal culture by themselves and as well many other Australians.’⁷⁰ Creamer’s assessment of an enduring culture is reinforced in this study through language analyses.

2.6 Linguistic Analyses

I have studied many works by both professional and amateur linguists and ethnographers. The early Lake Macquarie missionary Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld (1788-1859) and his work have provided a solid foundation in terms of history, culture and language in assisting my study and analysis.⁷¹ Threlkeld was clearly a man well ahead of his time. It was his amateur linguistic experience in the South Pacific that opened his eyes to a much greater rich appreciation of Aboriginal life and culture. His language teacher and intellectual companion, Birabahn, deserves more credit than is usually awarded for his intellectual input into the work that was published by Threlkeld, and later appropriated by Fraser.⁷²

The research on Thangatti grammar and stories undertaken by linguist Amanda Lissarrague, with the Muurrbay Aboriginal Language & Culture Co-operative, has been evaluated and incorporated as part of the study.⁷³ Without her generosity in sharing her research materials and understanding of the language, my own work would have been greatly hindered. Although coming at the audio recordings from a very different cultural and family

⁷⁰ Creamer, *Malaise and Beyond*, 147 and “Aboriginality in New South Wales,”

⁷¹ Threlkeld, 1834; 1850; 1892; and his unpublished notes and papers. His skill in acquiring the language is demonstrated in his translations of Biblical text: the Gospels of Mark, 1837 and Luke, 1891; also Broughton and Threlkeld, 1834.

⁷² Penny Van Toorn, *Writing Never Arrives Naked: Early Aboriginal Cultures of Writing in Australia* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2006), 39-52 supports this view, in a thoughtful review of Birabahn’s work with Threlkeld.

⁷³ Lissarrague, 2000; *Dhanggati Grammar*

perspective from myself, my understandings sometimes differs from hers, but my respect for Lissarrague's meticulousness and transparency in language reclamation work is unshakeable.

My understanding of New South Wales languages has also benefited from the work of Indigenous linguist Jakelin 'Jaky' Troy as the foundation Director of the NSW Aboriginal Languages Research and Resource Centre.⁷⁴ Funded by the New South Wales and Commonwealth Governments, Troy ran community-led research projects using archival materials to reconstruct and restore Aboriginal languages of New South Wales. Her publications and work has contributed significantly to the Aboriginal language revival movement in South Eastern Australia in general.

2.7 Conclusion

As informative as these many and varied written sources were, nowhere did I find anything approaching a coherent account of the rich intellectual life of my people, the sources of our Law, our stories, our ethical principles, our ways of knowing, the arts and sciences developed over tens of thousands of years on this continent. Nowhere could I see more than the most scattered hints of the intellectual universe that I witnessed and experienced living and moving in the words and actions of my father, grandfathers, great-grandfathers, from the untold generations before them. Through the academic explorations sketched above, it became ever clearer to me that the focus of this study must come through from the

⁷⁴ Jakelin Troy, *King Plates: A History of Aboriginal Gorgets* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1993); "Language Contact in Early Colonial New South Wales 1788-1791," in *Language and Culture in Aboriginal Australia*, ed. Michael Walsh and Colin Yallop, 33-50 (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 1993) and Jakelin Troy, and Michael Walsh, "A Linguistic Renaissance in the South East of Australia," in *Endangered Austronesian and Australian Aboriginal Languages: Essays on Language Documentation, Archiving and Revitalization*, (ed.) Gunter Senft, (Canberra, Pacific Linguistics, 2010).

intergenerational, interpersonal and oral transmission of our cultural knowledges and cultural meanings, as handed down in our family and in the spoken words of our elders, however incompletely preserved in recorded form.

Accordingly, the following chapters will address three areas of knowledge and exploration that bring together at least some of the most important threads of this story. Firstly, I will trace some of the histories of my ancestors across several geographical regions in New South Wales, their experiences through the eras of protectionism and assimilation, and the events and interactions that led to the circumstances of my birth and early life in Armidale. Next, I examine the cultural and educational work of my father, Raymond Shoonkley Kelly, in his quest to revive and renew the knowledges associated with the last generation of our traditional ceremonial practices. Finally, I will explore some aspects of the Thangatti language of my heritage, and other closely related language material. I aim to highlight the cultural keywords most relevant to the intellectual and educational focuses of this study, sketch some aspects of their meanings, and foresee the kinds of linguistic analysis and revitalisation work that could bring these words, concepts and language structures more effectively into contemporary use, to inform our ongoing cultural and educational development.

Each of these explorations draws upon relevant oral, written, and audio recorded material. Each of the three following chapters centres around a song text that gives expression to some of the central cultural meanings that sit at the core of the historical and cultural spaces being explored. These songs also link the written chapters with the performance work that accompanies this exegesis.

Chapter 3

Silver City, Armidale: A Family History Journey

This chapter opens with a historical journey back into the geographic and cultural spaces of my family heritage, which can be traced for at least five generations on both sides through family memory and historical records. This extended family heritage reaches through much of northern New South Wales, but the main focus here is on the Armidale region, leading into my own experiences growing up in that particular cultural context, and the educational encounters that both frustrated and stimulated my search for knowledge and understanding that has led me to this research.

3.1 Armidale in the 1800s

The explorer John Oxley ascended the eastern escarpment of the New England Ranges in 1818, and in the ensuing years of European migration the white man dramatically altered the environment and the food sources for Aboriginal groups who had once occupied every aspect of the northern tablelands.⁷⁵ Armidale in 1846 had a meagre permanent (white) population of only 76 citizens, but even so it already had a post office, courthouse, flourmill, church and several inns, which serviced the district countryside.⁷⁶ Within five years the population had reached more than 500 and Armidale became the central administrative town of the bioregion and as the area was rich and fertile for agriculture and commercial grazing and land was quickly swallowed up by waves of white people intent on making their fortunes from the soil.

⁷⁵ Despite its jarring ring to modern ears, this phrase ‘the white man’ was and is a key term in both Indigenous and non-Indigenous conceptualisations of the colonial process.

⁷⁶ These were by definition non-Indigenous, since Aboriginal people were counted as citizens only from the 1967 referendum.

Connecting my family to the city of Armidale in the latter stages of the nineteenth century were two highly significant events linked to my family through my maternal great grandfather, Frank Archibald. The first event was set down in a song and describes the opening of the railway to the City of Armidale in 1883, historically significant this song is also an evocative expression of the awe-inspiring vision of seeing and hearing the operation of a steam engine for the very first time.⁷⁷ This song was recorded along with interviews, speech and other material by John Gordon when he visited Archibald in 1968. Gordon was seeking to obtain historical and cultural highlights from Aboriginal peoples oral memories; he was looking for an Aboriginal perspective in the form of oral history.

During these interviews Archibald told Gordon about the role that his grandparents had played in the historical event of the railway opening: ‘they built an arch here, across from the railway like, well, him and my Grandmother were standing on the top and the train went underneath...’ Gordon asked, ‘How long ago was that, Mr. Archibald?’ and Frank replied ‘I s’pose about a hundred years ago must be. You see the bell bell *bayiru birr’yilayiru* is when the boy got up to ring the bell... to let the train go through you see...and the *wanggalagiyi* [spinning away] means that the *Gabman* [Government] went then... went along up to Glen Innes or somewhere’.⁷⁸ Here Frank is referring to phrases from the song text, further detailed below.

⁷⁷ A fascinating parallel from the Pilbara in WA is found in ‘Seeing the Song’, a short film based on a song in the Nyamal language, sung by Topsy Fezeldine and recorded by the anthropologist C.G. von Brandenstein at Port Hedland in 1964, about the train that ran across Nyamal country from Port Hedland to Marble Bar between 1910 and 1951. The film, created by historian and film maker Mary Anne Jebb and linguist Doug Marmion in collaboration with Wangka Maya Pilbara Aboriginal Language Centre, is on permanent exhibition at Revolutions Transport Museum, Perth, since 2014.

⁷⁸ John Gordon, Field Tape 17, 1968.

Another historical event concerning Frank's grandparents involved a reception for the 17th Governor of New South Wales. Whilst newspaper coverage of the Governors visit in 1893 suggests that Frank's grandfather, Robert Malawanggi or 'King Robert' (c.1808-1910), was considered a prominent Aboriginal figure in the region, another image taken at an earlier period features a younger Robert and his wife Fanny (Robert is believed to have married three times) for this sitting the couple are posed semi-nude by the Star Photography Company.⁷⁹

This image was later used in the production of a propaganda postcard. Inscribed in bold font below their images are the words; 'N.S.W. Aboriginal King and his Lubra,' the purpose seemingly intended to exploit the Noble Savage image for commercial gain.

The opening of the Railway to Armidale was celebrated on Saturday 3rd February 1883, the railway now connecting the administration centre of the New England tableland with the seacoast. Contemporary newspaper reports record that for three days prior to the official opening special trains had been pouring visitors and government officials into Armidale, and on the opening day people saw large crowds in festive mood on the streets of Armidale.⁸⁰

In Frank Archibald's account Robert and one of his wives stood an archway during this official opening, however, without an official photograph or a newspaper article to authenticate this, my only means of furthering this investigation was to return to the sound file of the interview with Frank Archibald, and the song that he sang in that recording. After close scrutiny of the language words used in the creation of the song and subsequent English translation provided by Frank Archibald, I provide an assessment of the details.

⁷⁹ Star Photo Co., *Aboriginals of New South Wales* [photographic album], 1890-1906.

⁸⁰ 'Opening of the Railway to Armidale', *The Maitland Mercury*, 3 February 1883, 4.

Train Song (full text)

Pirrang ngarruu, banggara
Wanggalagiyi wayinggala Gabmangguu
Ngarri ying guupirri yan
Miyarri mayirri Gabmangguu
Wanggalagiyi wayinggala Gabmangguu
Bell bell bayiru birr 'yilayiru
Miyarri mayirri Gabmangguu
Wanggalagiyi wayinggala Gabmangguu
Ngarri ying guupirri yan
Miyarri mayirri Gabmangguu

The song can be analysed line by line, as follows, pending further investigation of some of the structures involved. It can be seen that line (1) occurs once; (2) occurs at the second, fifth and eighth lines of the full song; (3) at the third and ninth lines; (4) at the fourth, seventh and tenth lines; and (5) occurs only once. The elegance and intricacy of the song structure as a whole hardly needs pointing out. I show each line with an interlinear gloss with the meaning of each word-part, followed by Frank Archibald's translation and commentary from the 1968 recording, followed by my own translation if needed.⁸¹ For the grammatical parts of words, I have tried to use less technical representations, such as *FROM* and *Doer* for what linguists call Ablative and Ergative.

(1) **Pirra-ng ngarruu, bang-ga-ra.**

3sg-FROM high top-ON-AT

FA: He was high on top.

RK: He was high on top there [looking down].

⁸¹ It should be noted that neither the orthography nor the morphemic analysis of the language of this song text is fully developed, and this representation should not be regarded as definitive or final. This study has yielded a more fine-grained analysis of the linguistic material than was hitherto possible, but ongoing research will doubtless reveal further insight into the sound system and linguistic structure of the material.

(2) **Wangga-la-gi-yi wayi-n-ga-la Gabman-guu**

spin-WHILE-LIKE-AS come-NonFut-BE-WHILE government-TO

FA: Wheels were spinning. My Grandfather, he was up high on the top – well him and my grandmother was on top, standing on top and the train went underneath you see.

RK: It [train] was coming along, spinning like, toward the Government [party].

(3) **Nga-rr-i yi-ng gupi-rr-i ya-n,**

through-NonFut-AS be-FROM puff-NonFut-AS go-NonFut

FA: He heard this thing coming along and it was puffing.

RK: As this thing was passing through, it began to puff,

(4) **Mi-ya-rr-i may-irr-i Gabman-guu,**

where-go-NonFut-AS away-Become-AS government-TO

FA: The Government went further up the line, further through to Glen Innes or somewhere.

RK: going away somewhere onward, to the Government;

(5) **Bell, bell bay-iru birri'yi-lay-iru.**

bell bell rise-Doer boy-WHILE-Doer

FA: That's when the boy got up to ring the bell.

RK: while the boy who got up rang the bell.

This song was very likely learnt by Frank Archibald as a young child from his community's oral record of this highly significant event in 1883, the year before his birth. Song texts tend to be more accurately remembered, and less subject to alteration, than other oral genres in the intergenerational transmission of knowledge. The evidence from Frank's clear memory of this song and of the details of its meaning strongly suggests that the song is an accurate Aboriginal oral record of the 1883 event. The sophisticated grammatical structure, with switch-reference tracking of the subjects of each verb, is linguistic evidence of both the time

of the song's creation, and the accuracy of Frank's memory and his bilingual understanding.⁸²

A newspaper account from the previous year, 1882, may explain the significance of the boy who got up to ring the bell:

The contractor engine reached the railway camp on Monday evening. As an improvement upon the ordinary black diamond yarn, we submit the following, which is substantially true. A young boy went out up the line last week to see how far the railway had got. He had been born and raised in the town, and when he came upon the engine gliding along rails his wonder for some time kept him silent. Gradually he advanced nearer, and at last summoned the courage to enquire 'if it was alive'. A man on the engine much amused, replied in the affirmative, and in order to afford proof of the truth of his statement blew the whistle. The boy fell down in a sort of fit from sheer fright, and it was some days before he recovered from the effects of the shock. It is a fact that there are so many, both adult and children, in these parts who have never seen a locomotive that we must ask the pioneer engine drivers to manipulate their monster servants without a view to display, at any rate until the community is a bit civilized.⁸³

The story of this event was probably well known in the community, and from this it can be tentatively surmised that this was the 'boy who got up' after recovering from his shock, and might thus have had a special claim on being the one to ring the bell.

The second of these two significant historical events was captured in an historical photograph taken during the civic parade staged ten years later, for the visit of the 17th

⁸² It seems in this text that *-yi* 'AS' signals that the same subject is doing another action; whereas *-la* 'WHILE' signals change of subject. These affixes each have other functions, and require further analysis from the audio recordings.

⁸³ *The Armidale Express*, 1 December 1882, 4.

Governor of NSW, Sir Victor Albert George Child-Villiers (Lord Jersey), on 21 February 1893. Malawanggi, also known as Robert King of the Gumbuthagang, and an unknown female companion are positioned on the very top of a large floral celebration archway.⁸⁴ Another group of Aboriginals wrapped in blankets perhaps supplied for the occasion by agents of the Government are stationed on a secondary level, with a further larger group situated at ground level. The unknown Aboriginal woman standing next to Old Malawanggi could possibly be his daughter, Frank's mother Emily. Evidence for the speculation is derived from the newspaper article that covered aspects of the Governor's Visit.

The photograph shows the archway in question was strategically placed part way along the city's main street and the Imperial Hotel, opened in July 1890 is visible in the background.⁸⁵ At the time considered one of the finest buildings in the New England, the hotel would serve as the official residence of the Governor and wife for the duration of their stay.

⁸⁴ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 25 February 1893, p. 2. This source spells Malawangi with only one 'g', but the spelling with 'gg' is more consistent with the sound patterns of the language. Investigation of the possible origins of this name is still ongoing.

⁸⁵ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 27 September 1890, 32.



Vice- Regal Visit to Armidale. An enthusiastic reception. *Evening News*, 21st Feb 1893.

The photograph depicts Malawanggi or Robert of the Gumbuthagang,⁸⁶ and a person who appears to be a younger woman, but who is described in the newspaper extract below as ‘a piccaninny’, which suggests that this may be his daughter.⁸⁷ They are elevated high above the main street of Armidale awaiting the arrival of the Governor of New South Wales. Robert is wearing his King Plate and their positioning at the top of this structure symbolises his place of prominence above his people positioned on both sides of the arch at street level.⁸⁸ However, The question remains: what do the two figures on the arch symbolise for

⁸⁶ The origin of this name is currently unclear, but there are indications that it may be linked with a coastal group, possibly in the Bandjalang area. A Coombadjha Creek flows into the Mann River near its confluence with the Clarence, and Coombadjha Road off the Gwydir Highway, halfway from Grafton to Glen Innes. This road runs north almost to Washpool Creek near the headwater of Coombadjha Creek in the Gibraltar Range National Park. This connects with oral history of a massacre of the Gumbatj or Gumbatha mob at a point or tight bend in the Mann River, of which Robert was a survivor as a boy or young man. There is a point formed by a tight bend just opposite the northwestern tip of the Grange State Forest north-east of Grafton, close to where Coombadjha Creek joins the Mann River.

⁸⁷ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 25 February 1893, p. 2.

⁸⁸ The present location of this king plate is unknown; it might be in a local museum in Glen Innes or Inverell. It is clearly similar to those in larger museum collections, described by Troy in *King Plates*, Troy comments

white Australia? Is there a Christian reference to Adam and Eve before the coming of the light? Or a representation before the white man's arrival in the Armidale district that encompasses the distant past, the remnants of the (supposedly) fast vanishing Aboriginal as the last of their tribe? It is rather unlikely that the colonisers intended this as the striking acknowledgement of Aboriginal sovereignty that it might first appear to be.

The newspaper record of Lord Jersey's visit to Armidale expresses the colonial perspective on this event:

Captain Cholmondeley, and The Hon. H. Copeland, arrived by train this morning at 6.50. There was a large crowd waiting their arrival. The Vice regal party was received by the Mayor (Alderman Murray), the aldermen and members of the reception committee, all being presented to Lord and Lady Jersey in front of the station. The party received a guard of honour under command of Captain Arnott.

The party were then driven in a carriage, provided by Mr. F. E. White, through the main street to the Imperial Hotel, escorted by a dozen mounted troopers headed by Superintendent Garvin. A triumphal arch and innumerable flags marked the line of route. On both sides of the arch on elevated platforms were placed groups of [A]boriginals of the New England or Cambathagang [sic] tribe, old King Malawangi [sic], with a piccanniny being on the summit of the arch. The weather has been wet for days, but it is delightfully fine this morning. A public reception is now about to take place in the Town Hall, and the show is to be opened at 2 o'clock. The town is crowded with visitors, and everybody is bent on holiday making.⁸⁹

that such plates were usually awarded to 'senior initiated men' or 'spiritually or intellectually superior men' (14), but also notes the mixed motives of colonists seeking the favour of the leaders whose communities they were energetically dispossessing.

⁸⁹ *Australian Town and Country Journal*, 25 February 1893, 2.

Unlike this later celebration of the visit of the Governor in 1893, no photograph or any other written documentation has been found to authenticate Frank's claim that his Grandfather played a similarly active role in the celebration activities surrounding the opening of the railway line in 1883. However, three pieces of evidence support the view that his oral account is accurate. First, the visual detail in the 1893 photograph aligns sufficiently with his description of the 1883 event to suggest that a triumphal arch may have been a customary way of celebrating vice-regal visits. The further detail that the 1883 arch was beside the railway line, while the 1893 one was in the main street, suggests that these were indeed two distinct celebrations. Second, the evidence suggests, though not conclusively, that in 1883 Malawanggi was accompanied by his wife Emma, while by 1893 she may no longer have been alive, hence his 'piccaninny' stood by his side. Third, the song text refers to Frank's grandfather and grandmother, not his grandfather and mother or aunt; and it clearly refers to the first time a steam train had appeared in Armidale.

What this song and story tells me, is that there is a wealth of historical detail buried in these tapes, the audio recordings of oral history and language documentation. The tapes, when combined with primary and secondary source evidence like photographs or written documents, provide a deeper and richer explanation of not just language but also history and culture. The image that captures my ancestors above the main street of Armidale before the arrival of the Governor by train into the town is a significant example. Public documents of the time give some, albeit limited, glimpses into the lives and cultural practices of the Aboriginal inhabitants of the region:

The Clarence River district... supported three tribes of from four to five hundred men, women and children. Each tribe kept its own belt of country, and separated into small groups – and only collected together

on special occasions, the chief of which being when they met to admit lads who had attained the age of puberty to the Rites of the tribe. The ceremony of this tribe is called Kippara.⁹⁰

So when we look at the landscape of Armidale during the late 1800s the administration centre of the community was isolated and there are clearly, dare I say it? – ‘full-blood’, that is, full descent, Aboriginal people present. The debate I raise throughout my study includes the perception and notions of ‘full-blood’, ‘half-caste’ and ‘quarter-caste’ because of the way in which language is used to separate, classify and alienate Aboriginal people throughout the colonial period, and even today. I would argue that the ramifications are something Aboriginal people all over the country are still coming to terms with. But here is an example of a colonial town – Armidale and its one-sided history of settlement with the arrival of the pastoralists, landowners, and land grabbers. It is noted at the time that perhaps 600 Aboriginal people making up six or seven tribes lived within the local area. By the end of the century, violent death, disease and lowered fertility had reduced that number by half.⁹¹

So what happened to all of those people? Where did they go? What we do know now through research is that disease quite obviously had a major impact.⁹² But we also now know that there are a number of very significant massacre spaces in the area. As Blomfield reveals in discussing conflict in the New England area ‘only stock and men were speared by the Aboriginals, but men, women and children were shot out by the European settlers. In other words, massacre was a policy of extermination, not a punishment for the guilty.’⁹³ The

⁹⁰ *Australian Aborigines Advocate*, 30 September, 1916.

⁹¹ Warburton, “The Aborigines of New England,” 23.

⁹² Noel G. Butlin, *Our Original Aggression: Aboriginal Populations of Southeastern Australia, 1788-1850* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1983), 175. 175; Patricia Grimshaw, Marilyn Lake, Ann McGrath and Marian Quartly, *Creating a Nation, 1788-1990* (Ringwood: McPhee Gribble, 1994).

⁹³ Geoffrey Blomfield, *Baal Belbora: The End of the Dancing: The Agony of the British Invasion of the Ancient People of Three Rivers, the Hastings, the Manning and the Macleay, in New South Wales* (Chippendale: Alternative Publishing Co-operative Ltd (APCOL), 1981), 95.

Honourable Albert Norton, a very distinguished member of the New England community was later led to remark on his memories: ‘it gives me only pain to recall the scenes, which others have described to me. Such incidents I trust will never be repeated in any part of Australia.’⁹⁴

At the turn into the twentieth century three distinct camps of Aboriginal people could be found on the outskirts of the town (or possibly, in the traditional living spaces on the outskirts of which the town was set up).⁹⁵ These groups comprised travellers from the Oban tribe and they were camped on the north hill. Aborigines from Walcha congregated on the south side whilst visitors from the coastal tribes and Kempsey sat down on the East side. The Oban tribe in those days owed allegiance to the so-described ‘majestic old leader, King Robert’, 6 ft. 3 in. tall and weighing about 15 stone:

The tribe was known as the Gumbathagangs, who have since scattered widely over the State until none now remain at Oban. Robert, who was born about 1808, was a tribal leader when the first White men settled the district. He was held in great esteem by the settlers who saw to it that he obtained recognition from the Colonial office as ‘King’ in that district. It is claimed that Robert lived to be about 102 and when he was more than 80 years was still working and prospecting for minerals in the district. There is a record of King Robert cutting and laying the bark walls of the then brand new Richardson Emporium, Retailers and Storekeepers in Armidale. Emblazoned on the awning of the present store at Oban today is a sign stating ‘established in 1845’, but the sign doesn’t mention one of its original builders ... the King. King Robert saw his mineral rich tribal grounds at Oban develop brief glory as a

⁹⁴ Blomfield, Baal Belbora, 99-100. On massacres see also Bruce Elder, *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788* (Frenchs Forest: New Holland Publishers, 2003).

⁹⁵ *Dawn*, vol. 11 no. 12, December 1962, 4-6.

boom mining town. But once the mines were exhausted it fell into decay and today is just a tiny dot on the map.⁹⁶

My great-grandfather and the grandson of King Robert, Frank Archibald (1884-1975), had vivid boyhood memories of his grandfather. He recalls that on many occasions as a boy he stayed with his grandfather at Oban, which then boasted a Government reserve of three tin huts with no facilities:

The old King told his grandson many stories of the old tribal days, of hunting for wildfowl and game on a lake where the New England District Hospital stands today, of the presentation of his Royal shield by the Government. Frank's memory of his boyhood in the Armidale district some 60 years ago is a mixed one. Armidale was essentially a farming centre and a supply point for the mining towns of Hillgrove and Metz, which were going full blast 15 miles away. He remembers the 100 and more teamsters who used Armidale as headquarters and the 21 hotels, which accommodated them and their thirsts.⁹⁷

Frank's mother, Emily King (also known as Emily Cohen and 'Queen Emily' and as Emily Archibald after her marriage) was the eldest daughter of King Robert and Fanny Taylor. It is important to note the title bestowed on Robert became the family surname. Frank looked back on the regal name with humour: 'there were no gold or silver coaches to ride around in... I suppose the title didn't really amount to much.'⁹⁸ Frank spent his childhood roaming the district at Oban, Guyra and Wollomombi. Frank looked back on that life without regret. Read together, these accounts contribute to greater understanding.

⁹⁶ *Dawn*, Vol. 11 No. 12, December 1962, 4.

⁹⁷ *Dawn*, Vol. 11 No. 12, December 1962, 4-5. This passing of knowledge from grandfather to grandson is a feature of the traditional education system, and may be an early indicator of Frank's status as a traditional knowledge holder.

⁹⁸ *Dawn*, Vol. 11 No. 12, December 1962, 5.

3.2 The Archibald Family Story

It was January 1956 and after a lengthy absence of some twenty years, Frank Archibald and my grandmother Sarah returned home to the city of Armidale in the New England district of New South Wales.

There were no bands out to greet him, but he found what seemed a suitable camping spot in the East End of the town, the Armidale dump, where one Aboriginal family, that of Mrs. Dureau, was living. There he found sufficient scrap iron to build temporary accommodation.⁹⁹

Both my grandparents were now in their seventies and they chose to spend their final years living amongst their family and friends in a small Aboriginal community on the fringe of the New England Tablelands. Theirs is a remarkable story, one that deserves attention. They married in 1913 and had spent the early years of their union living at Nymboida and Lismore where Frank was employed as an Aboriginal police tracker with the New South Wales Police Force, a role that no doubt allowed him to see the disappearing opportunities and poor living conditions of Aboriginal people across many parts of the state.

Born in 1884 on the outskirts of Armidale in a small shack, Frank was the son of a Scottish father and a mixed blood mother, Emily King. His mother died when he was a child, and after her death he spent much of his childhood living with his grandparents on rural stations mainly in the Wollomombi – Ebor district. Frank had little opportunity for formal education and ‘attended public school only for three to six months in the Wollomombi area, and has not since learnt to read and write’.¹⁰⁰ Sarah was born in the gold prospecting township of Nundle nestled at the footsteps of the Great Dividing Range in the upper Hunter

⁹⁹ Warburton, “The Aborigines of New England,” 31-2.

¹⁰⁰ Warburton, “The Aborigines of New England,” 29.

Valley of New South Wales. Sarah's parents were James Morris and Sarah Betts. Frank and Sarah according to the traditional rules for marriage among the Thangatti and Gumbaynggirr were of 'right skin' and had wed in their twenties. Circumstances would eventually see the couple moving their large family back to the tablelands city of Armidale where Frank would gain casual employment in outdoor bush and station work in the local district. They lived for a brief time alongside the Widders and McKenzie families in a makeshift camp on the top of North Hill where the lookout exists today.

The Great Depression struck Australia in the 1930s and Aboriginal families struggled like other Australians. The Archibald's situation became decidedly more difficult with the sudden death of a sibling of Sarah's leaving young children needing love and care, for which she and Frank opened their hearts and their home. This was a dramatic increase in the burden the family had to endure: there were now over twenty mouths to feed. Frank recalled living on North Hill, Armidale, in the Depression and supporting all of these kids the best way they could. Eight of the kids were motherless children taken in by Sarah and cared for as their own. The Archibalds themselves had a family of eight daughters and four sons, the eldest of whom, Frank junior, was killed in New Guinea in 1943 whilst fighting with the A.I.F.'s 6th Division against the Japanese in the Second World War.

Franks and Sarah made the critical decision to move the family onto Burnt Bridge Aboriginal Station near Kempsey staying for the next 17 years, later moving to Sydney. The family setting up home at Yarra Bay, near La Perouse, Botany Bay, and Sydney. They remained there for a year or two until the local Randwick Council bulldozed to the ground the Aboriginal camp and their humpies shortly after Christmas in 1954. The search for independence in the city had not succeeded so they headed back up the line, always moving,

and always looking to improve their lot. While this mobility was in part a response to the pressures associated with colonisation and dispossession, the family's movements were also clearly oriented around traditional country and family connections.

There had been some legendary Aboriginal horsemen connected to Walcha during those early years, including Harry Combo and Albert Widders.¹⁰¹ From various records it appears that Walcha during this period was a more progressive community than many for Aboriginal residents; and within days of their arrival the Archibald children were enrolled in the local school with numerous other Aboriginal children from the district. Frank and Sarah had always taken great pride in the fact that their families were able to scratch out a living independent of the Government handouts, and more importantly, free of the insidious controlling policies and practices of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board and its officials.¹⁰²

However all this was about to change. Frank and Sarah received an order from the Aborigines Protection Board that their family would be relocated to the newly established Aboriginal Station at Burnt Bridge on the outskirts of Kempsey. The Archibalds and another part of their extended family from Walcha, with all their worldly possessions, were loaded aboard a Protection Board truck and settled down to make the uncomfortable journey of 130 miles down the mountain and on to Burnt Bridge. On their arrival at the Burnt Bridge station the Archibald's were to find that they would be joining families from other townships in this new socially controlling state government exercise:

¹⁰¹ Maynard, *Aboriginal Stars*, 42-7; Ramsland, *Custodians*, 97-100.

¹⁰² For those who preferred their independence, some localities were more congenial than others; see *Newcastle Morning Herald and Miners' Advocate*, 6 and 9 September 1943; see also Blyton, Greg, Deirdre Heitmeyer and John Maynard, *Wannin thanbarran: A History of Aboriginal and European Contact in Muswellbrook and the Upper Hunter Valley* (Muswellbrook: Muswellbrook Shire Aboriginal Reconciliation Committee, 2004).

He went there unwillingly as he had never before lived under supervision. Although he stayed 17 years at Burnt Bridge, he retains unhappy memories of the experience and has a strong distaste for the Board.¹⁰³



Sarah and Frank Archibald Sr. with their sons Frank and Ronald both young men fought in the battle of Kokoda

Frank Archibald's life story reflects that of many confronted by colonization, his voice has been integral to this work, as recorded by William G. Hoddinott. Terry Crowley, in the 1960s and 1970s.

¹⁰³ Warburton, "The Aborigines of New England," 31; Mrs M. Quinlan's 1983 personal account addresses the full range of problems created for my relatives at Bellbrook by the government policies of the time.

3.3 Dislocation, Leadership, Continuity: Victor Shepherd and Family

Another senior Aboriginal man featured in the language audio files and who approved and supervised visits to traditional sites of significance, Victor Albert Shepherd was born in 1908, and married my father's great aunt Grace Kelly at Kempsey in 1932. Victor Shepherd lived sixty eight years and observed and endured some of the most difficult times of Aboriginal existence under ever-tightening government control. He died the year after Frank Archibald, in 1976. His life can be examined in the context of the forced movement and migration of Aboriginal people across the state. Charting some of these movements, it is astonishing to see the mobility of people attempting to escape the clutches of the Board. Aboriginal people were effectively refugees within their own country and quickly became aware of and tended to gravitate towards sanctuaries.

One such sanctuary lay to the west of Sydney, a very prominent former Aboriginal land holding known as the Burragorang Valley. The Burragorang Valley could be considered a place of protection, as getting in there was not an easy task.¹⁰⁴ Originally this was the home of the Burra Burra clan of the Gandangara people and the custodians of the Valley.¹⁰⁵ Initially, this clan was relatively safe within the confines of their own rugged country, which to some degree protected them from the catastrophic decimation that was inflicted upon the Dharuk people. In the wake of imperial conquest some Aboriginal groups were quick to take up new initiatives in not just fighting for their land but in winning it back, and in this region,

¹⁰⁴ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 29.

¹⁰⁵ Heather Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy: Land in Aboriginal Politics in New South Wales, 1770-1970*, (St Leonards: Allen & Unwin, 1996), 29.

the Burra Burra were active as early as the 1860s in making official demands to regain their land holding title in the valley.¹⁰⁶

These lands provide a representative example of the white pressures on successful Aboriginal farming, pressures not only from white farmers and the Aborigines Protection Board, but additionally from the Catholic Church. Situated in a rich lush area, a 70-acre farm called St Joseph's had been bought for local Kooris in 1876 from contributions made by local parishioners. The farm was made up of the portion bought with these church funds, and another section, which had been a railway reserve before being converted and added to the Aboriginal reserve in 1898, after a local white farmer had tried to take over the land. The Aboriginal occupants had cleverly targeted a Catholic Priest, Father Dillon, as their go-between in officially regaining their land, which was situated at a fertile junction of the Cox's and Wollondilly Rivers.¹⁰⁷

The church-owned section was the piece of land which had become associated with an Aboriginal woman Mary Toliman. Toliman (or Tolami) was evidently a leader within the community, acting as the 'midwife for the whole valley, caring for both Aboriginal and white women in childbirth'.¹⁰⁸ By the turn of the twentieth century a recently widowed Toliman, had married a Tharawal Aboriginal man named Longbottom.¹⁰⁹ Longbottom and Mary shared the land with Mary's daughter Selena, who also married an Aboriginal man named Archie Shepherd (Victor Shepherd was their son). The Aboriginal people on this land were adamant that the church had handed over the land as a gift and had no further claims to it. This appalled the churchmen whom saw this as "tenure" not ownership, but the tone of

¹⁰⁶ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 29.

¹⁰⁷ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 82.

¹⁰⁸ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 99.

¹⁰⁹ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 145-6.

their correspondence suggests they were even more concerned because the men in the family, Longbottom and Shepherd, refused to give the church their allegiance. This is apparent, when speaking of Archie Shepherd, Father Considine wrote to Cardinal Moran in 1908:

He is a very indifferent Catholic and does not attend to his religious duties. I informed him that unless his conduct changed, I should have to consider some fresh arrangements with regard to his tenure of St Joseph's farm... He said most emphatically that he refused to recognise the Church's authority over the farm... So defiant was he that I consider some action must be taken to assert your Eminence's title to the Property... And if the 40 acres could be recovered from the crown it would be very advantageous, as it would complete the farm.¹¹⁰

From 1908 to 1916 Mary Toliman and Selena Shepherd took on the role of negotiating with the Catholic Church, visiting the priest and the Bishop and were instrumental in the conciliation. Mary and Selena had argued that they had a long association with the land, but stressed also that they would attend church and continue to be loyal to Catholicism. While Longbottom and Shepherd held out a hard line throughout these eight years, Mary and Selena had consistently agreed to negotiate; combined these positions may have been elements of the one strategy to keep the land.

The pressure, however, did not ease, and now pleas to assist returned servicemen with soldier settlements were added to the demands on the reserved area. All of St Josephs was still being farmed in 1918 when local white farmers approached the police to request revocation or leasing. The Board resolved most emphatically that because they continued to farm the land, the Kooris should be allowed to remain in possession of the reserve. By 1924,

¹¹⁰ Goodall, *Invasion to Embassy*, 146.

however, as it was doing elsewhere throughout the state, the Board acceded to Lands Department pressure and revoked the farm's Reserve status. The church moved to regain its land soon after, and the farming community was dispersed. At least some of the Burragorang Kooris, the Anderson, Williams and Shepherd families moved to Sydney.¹¹¹ Many Aboriginal families across the state suffered similar experiences of dislocation and the constant mobility to ensure safety and to chase work. In some cases some communities like that at the Burragorang regained land that they then successfully farmed and prospered on before it was later torn away again.

This exploration of ancestral and family connections extending through a wide geographic area highlights several themes pertinent to the educational, cultural and linguistic dimensions of this investigation. It is important in looking back on my forebears to recognise that I am a product of both history and environment, particularly given my own childhood education was affected by having been schooled at a time when teachers knew only what they had learned about my people from the perspective of sociologists, anthropologists and archaeologists, principally from the early colonial era. Unfortunately, they were people who were never given full access to our rich cultural and intellectual worlds, a common problem noted by Creamer:

...very few white Australians have any appreciation of their country's Aboriginal heritage and where any understanding exists at all, the chances are that it will be among those popular misconceptions which we should act right away to correct.¹¹²

¹¹¹ This period, and the subsequent transition whereby Victor Shepherd married my great-aunt Grace and became recognised as a traditional knowledge holder in the New England and Mid North Coast region, are stories worth exploring, but cannot be further detailed here.

¹¹² Creamer, "From the 'Cultural Bind'," 18.

Prominent amongst those longstanding misconceptions was that there was no Aboriginal culture remaining in New South Wales. This theory was held by many purported experts in the field and this impacted onto the wider majority of Australians reinforcing already biased and uniformed views of Aboriginal cultural life and even existence in New South Wales. This perception of a dying race and dying or dead or static culture was common:

Another major misunderstanding which is widely accepted is that Aboriginal society has not evolved since the arrival of the European but that it was, as it were, 'frozen' in a sort of time capsule... it is becoming increasingly obvious that any project that affects the Aboriginal people must involve them in a meaningful participation in both the research and the results right from the start. This goes for anthropology, psychology, archaeology, linguistics, community development, the lot. Indeed given the knowledge that a number of older men in New South Wales still have of traditional matters and also from their experience as drovers, station hands and the like, the researcher would be foolish not to seek their advice at an early stage.¹¹³

The Anglo-centric formal schooling that I endured during the 1960s was influenced by such misconceptions, and it was at times racially discriminatory. Australian children did not learn about Pemulwuy (1750-1802) or many of the other Aboriginal resistance fighters who waged wars in defence of their people and their lands. I was not taught of the Myall Creek Massacre (1838) and the subsequent hanging of seven white men for the murder of 28 Aboriginal people, mostly women, children and the elderly, These forms of education, even at their most well-meaning, treated the world's most ancient and enduring civilisation and intellectual culture as if it were insignificant or non-existent.

¹¹³ Creamer, "From the 'Cultural Bind'," 19.

3.4 Growing Up in Silver City

Today I feel a greater sense of my own identity and belonging to this land and not just the little community that was established on the edge of a rubbish heap in Armidale. This belonging is greater than an individual sense; it is my connection to something far greater than the here and now and the hardships endured by people in this region need to be examined in a historical context.

Non-Indigenous Aboriginal rights campaigner Joan Kingsley-Strack (1892-1983), a close working ally of famed Aboriginal activist Pearl Gibbs (1901-1983), visited Armidale in 1942. Strack noted with alarm in her diary that the Aboriginal people of the area were clearly marginalised and forced to live in squalor at the town's rubbish dump:

Later we drove in the opposite direction to the outskirts of the town. Here, it was hilly & sparsely covered with young straggly gum trees & a little further away, an immense rubbish dump, rusty tins, rubbish or refuse of every kind. Nearby, surrounded by refuse were 3 tiny shacks, built from rusty tins. It merged into the general picture of rust & degradation & here were several tiny shacks built of rusty tin from the dump, here sat a bronze statue, an old Abo lady, still & dignified. This dump covered with millions of flies - the whole thing symbolic of our attitude to these people.¹¹⁴

Some ten years later Strack wrote a letter to the editor of a newspaper and again draws reference to her observations and disquiet at the treatment of Aboriginal people within the area of Armidale:

Frank Clune's letter (28th Dec) re our treatment of Aborigines, comes as refreshing blast of **truth**, after all the drivel, the excuses, the

¹¹⁴ Joan Kingsley-Strack, Diary entry, April 25 [1942], Folder 14, Series 2, Joan Kingsley-Strack Papers.

whitewash etc., indulged in by the so-called Welfare, Protection & political 'boards'. Ten years ago I was absolutely horrified to see Aboriginal people living in rusty, tattered shacks on the outskirts of the city of Armidale, in utter poverty & filth.

There are fine cathedrals in Armidale, it is in the midst of a most prosperous district, the teachers' training college is built on the Aborigines' Sacred ceremonial grounds, on a magnificent hill-top overlooking Armidale. Yet the Aboriginal people themselves are cast out. They are treated like pariahs in their own lands and utterly discarded, like the rubbish in the dump beside which they live. It was a disgraceful & heartbreaking sight...

Dr. Kent Hughes who drove me to this terrible place, assured me 'that everything possible had been done for these people!'

Apparently the situation over the years has **not** improved.

Dr. Kent Hughes herself does all she can to help them medically & the Aboriginal people are frequent visitors at her surgery, where they can always be sure of sympathy & care.

The treatment of Namatjira & others (many of whom have made a name for themselves), the disappearances (?) of Trust Funds etc. are known only too well to me - they have been and still are an absolute scandal.

I myself have battled for these people, individually & collectively till health & funds were almost depleted. I have been slandered & libelled & on one occasion my telephone was removed completely from my home, tho a member of my family was in the house & at that time forbade these people to enter. This was the very day & time that I was in court, trying to defend an Aboriginal girl!

The men & women behind these lies & injustices will stop at absolutely **nothing to stifle truth**.

With all my heart I hope that the courageous efforts of the Lord Mayor & Frank Clune will result in a new deal for our Aboriginal people.

J.K.S.¹¹⁵

¹¹⁵ Joan Kingsley-Strack, Undated Letter to Editor, c.1952, Folder 15, Series 6, Joan Kingsley-Strack Papers.

Kingsley-Strack's insightful and passionate observations provide a written record that clearly places Aboriginal people living and surviving at the Armidale dump during the years 1942-1952. Others also noted the shocking inequality of life the Aboriginal population were subjected to, with Warburton commenting on the town dump conditions "... over 120 people were living in shabby, wretched conditions. There was no running water in their shanties, no lighting or sewerage, any wooden floors or glass windows."¹¹⁶

Warburton saw that the conditions of the Aboriginal population were igniting a degree of support from a minority of the white community to make change:

The living conditions of the people (no water, no sewerage, no lighting, no proper protection against the weather) were so deplorable that a number of the University staff and wives felt that something should be done for them. Last year, just before the allocation of the fourteen houses on East Armidale Reserve (formerly the dump) it was revealed that, of a total population of 115, 82 were directly related to Mr. and Mrs. Archibald. All had arrived here since Mr. Archibald moved here in early 1956.¹¹⁷

It was here in the East Armidale Aboriginal Reserve in Northern New South Wales that my life began, born February of 1961 I spent the first 14 years of my life living there amongst family and friends. Over time a number of names were in use to describe the location for the community including 'The Dump' and 'Silver City,' these were names in common use at

¹¹⁶ Warburton, "The Aborigines of New England," 20; see also Jack Horner, *Seeking Racial Justice: An Insider's Account of the Movement for Aboriginal Advancement, 1938-1978* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2004), 40-43, 71.

¹¹⁷ Warburton, "The Aborigines of New England," 32. A colonial subtext here is one of anxiety about large extended families, both because they challenge the wishful picture of Indigenous population decline, and because in European contexts without a framework of strong traditional law governing marriage, inbreeding could ensue. The fact that traditional right skin marriage was practiced among the Archibald clan accords with the observations of recorded in Fay Gale, *Patterns of Post-European Aboriginal Migration* (Adelaide: South Australian Branch of the Royal Geographical Society of Australasia, 1966).

the time, and their descriptive connotations speak to the history of Aboriginal people who lived on the fringes of the town and white life. Armidale, which was identified as the administrative centre of the New England tablelands and was renowned for its many fine schools and churches. The Reserve was referred to as 'The Dump' during the period when Aboriginal people were able to build a number of makeshift shacks within close proximity to the town's waste area. The deplorable conditions were to change following the tragic deaths of a number of very young Aboriginal children and the subsequent negative media coverage of the policies and negligence of the New South Wales Aborigines Welfare Board which had replaced the Protection Board. The Aborigines Welfare Board announced plans to erect homes at The Dump for Aboriginal people, gazetted it as a Reserve:

a number of homes of simple design, but containing laundry and bathing. The number of homes erected of course will of course, be limited to finances available, but it is hoped progressively to erect [A]boriginal homes until the needs of the [A]boriginal population is met. The fact that the [A]borigines will be residing on an [A]borigines reserve will give the Board and the police officer greater control, particular in the respect of health hygiene and behaviour and should do much towards raising the living standard from the present state.'¹¹⁸

My family lived in one of these fourteen small cottages built by the Aborigines Welfare Board between 1960 and 1961 at cost of £36000, or about \$7,200 in today's terms.¹¹⁹ The houses were clad in rippled iron (hence the name Silver City) and laid out in adjacent streets which we simply called the top and bottom of the mission. Every home was fabricated to the same specifications, three small bedrooms built to accommodate a family of six. These rooms extended off the slightly larger combined lounge and kitchen area with a bathroom

¹¹⁸ *The Armidale Express*, 28 November 1958, 13 The reference here to 'control' as a desired solution to poverty and the consequences of dispossession reflects one of the persistent themes of colonialism, still shamefully evident in Australian political discourse today.

¹¹⁹ *Dawn*, Vol. 11 No. 12, December 1962, 6.

and toilet next to the side door entrance. My great-grandfather Frank Archibald was interviewed at the time about the new dwellings saying

‘I am glad I lived to see the day when the old “Armidale dump” was ploughed under by the bulldozers, he told *Dawn*. ‘Gone are the ugly old shacks and huts and today one never hears the word “dump” anymore and a good thing too.’¹²⁰

The new homes had brought a new order of living for the Aborigines of the town and things seemed to be improving, a children’s playground was installed on the reserve, the cost being met jointly by the Welfare Board and the Armidale Association for Assimilation of Aborigines. Plans had been made for the establishment of a Pre-School Kindergarten operated by the Save the Children Fund, which was linked with the United Nations. However this was still no average Australian suburb of the 1960s and the stark realities of life in Silver City remained for many years: the houses were uninsulated and the challenge of maintaining the heat in the severe Armidale winter in these homes required the constant burning of wood almost day and night. The houses were elevated off the ground and the flooring material was pine, but people could barely afford mats.

In evidence Jim Moran told a 1965 parliamentary enquiry into the Welfare of Aboriginal people in New South Wales panel members about the accumulated residue of smoke and soot on the ceilings of the homes identified in a site visit by the group: “People say that we leave the stove doors open. That is right. We have to do that to keep our children warm. There are no warm rays or open fireplace in the houses.”¹²¹ The consequences of these conditions for the respiratory health of children and adults were severe and long lasting,

¹²⁰ *Dawn*, Vol. 11 No. 12, December 1962, 6.

¹²¹ Jim Moran, *Report from the Joint Committee of the Legislative Council and Legislative Assembly Upon Aborigines Welfare*, 1965 (Parliament of New South Wales, 1967), 345.

particularly for the most vulnerable young children and the elderly. Some years later the Aborigines Welfare Board placed combustion burners into each house, built into the corner of the lounge areas, they provided some improvement, though it appeared that the heaters worked better with the glass door open, and this became a common practice for all households. This may have contributed to a tragic house fire just two doors away from our home in which two lives were lost.¹²²

My great-grandparents Frank and Sarah lived less than a kilometre away. Their home was known as the 'white house' and was built with the assistance from the Catholic Church and Bishop Ted Doody. Many of the families living on the reserve at this time were direct relatives of the Archibald and Morris clans, six of their daughters occupied some of the 14 new homes erected by the Aborigines Welfare Board on the East Armidale Reserve in 1961. It was noted that 'in all there are 42 Archibald grandchildren and 21 great-grandchildren...'¹²³ at that time only one other family lived in that region of town, Soon afterwards though other families began gravitating towards this spot. There was criticism by assimilationists of my great-grandfather and the family for maintaining his Aboriginal identity, with Warburton noting:

The Archibald group, with their links established with the Thangatti people of the Macleay, have not so far shown a similar tendency to lose their racial identity. They tend to marry coloured people. Improved living conditions and expanded educational opportunities, however, are likely to hasten not only the process of assimilation but also the process of complete racial absorption. Some observers have described absorption as the product of a new policy of extermination. Europeans,

¹²² *The Armidale Express*, 24 July 1962. 1

¹²³ *Dawn*, Vol. 11 No. 12, December 1962, 6.

they argue, failed to exterminate the Aborigines by fire-arms and disease; now they are exterminating them by assimilation.¹²⁴

There were others in the area at the time who did not uphold the same intense sense of pride in who they were and in some sense were the biggest critics of their own people. One individual speaking to Warburton about those who had been living at the dump had this to say, reflecting a type of internalised colonialism that is still in evidence today:

“Course”, he said “hit’s a bit ’ard to say right out, ‘We think you ought to be carted outa ‘ere away somew’eres else,’ but if it isn’t said and if people like y’self in authority don’t know, then ’ouses will be put up for these no-hopers and there’ll be fifty more of ‘em come spongin’ tomorrow! Hit’s the dark fella that wants to lift himself that you oughta help. He’ll try to keep the relations off - ‘give us a cuppa sugar’, ‘give us a bitta butter’. Oh yes, I know it. But the fella who wants to rise outa that, an’ is willin’ to help himself, he at least won’t be writin’ to the relations’ ‘Come on, we got a wonderful house ‘ere now’. Work won’t come lookin’ for yer. Ya gotta go out an’ keep lookin’ for it. If ya want to be treated like a white man, ya gotta live like a white man - pay the rent and all and dress decent - yeah an’ send ya kids to school.”¹²⁵

I recall my visits to the ‘white house’ with fond memories, the large open living area with its enormous fireplace positioned in the centre of the room with a large black and white photograph prominently displayed. This photograph depicted an extremely handsome Aboriginal man wearing a uniform; the ornate frame was meticulously hand carved and featured four prominent crosses one in each corner. The image was that of Private Frank

¹²⁴ Warburton, “The Aborigines of New England,” 37. The esteem in which the Archibald family was eventually held in Armidale is recognised in the annual Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture, established by UNE in 1986 and dedicated to Frank Archibald, his family and Aboriginal people of the New England region. The UNE describes Frank as ‘a revered Aboriginal community member of the Armidale area. Frank Archibald was renowned for his knowledge and interest in all issues affecting Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, particularly education.’ <http://www.une.edu.au/connect/events/events/frank-archibald-lecture2/>, accessed 29 April 2015.

¹²⁵ Warburton, “The Aborigines of New England,” 38.

Archibald, who along with his brother Ronald had served in the Australian Army during the Second World War. On the 24th of November 1942 he was shot and killed by the enemy whilst trying to save the life of a comrade. Sometime during the mid-1960s I walked into the white house with my Nan Ethel De Silva. I recall references to Uncle' Ronny's illness coming from the war but not quite understanding malaria and that this was a legacy of his service.



NX15456 PRIVATE FRANK ARCHIBALD
Of the 2/2nd Infantry Battalion, AIF.

These contrasting and interwoven themes formed and shaped my search for my own identity, as an Aboriginal person, as a family member, as a member of wider Aboriginal and Australian communities, as a cultural worker, as a learner and sometimes as a teacher. On

the one side there is a security of family and cultural continuity, and on the other there is a legacy of dispossession, poverty, and lack of access to some of the basic foundations for those wider identities.

My early childhood experience of formal education has profoundly shaped me. During my time at primary school there was a group of students who were placed into an AO (Opportunity A) class. This classroom provided for kids with perceived learning difficulties. Although a small number of pupils attending this class were from non - Aboriginal backgrounds, most were Aboriginal and we often sarcastically remarked that the class stood for 'Aboriginals only'! Today I am a firm believer in flexible learning. It is paramount that we who are involved with the teaching of our future leaders should find alternate ways to connect with our pupils. We must enlist the support of others outside the school system, particularly the parents or relatives of the children in the classrooms and engage and encourage their support in practical ways. The early years of my life were a contradiction in terms; on the one hand I was raised and nurtured in a close-knit environment where the leaders and knowledge holders of my home community insisted on the concept of unity and inclusiveness and yet still celebrated success and achievement. Yet I was being disciplined and trained in a school environment that insisted on individualism and exclusiveness, tragically, without any perceived Aboriginal community support. The support programs for Aboriginal education today are unquestionably better than they were 40 years ago. However, I still witness the great tragedy of loss for young Aboriginal children as they leave the education system without the needed skills and experience to develop meaningful and sustainable futures.

Throughout this work, I use the word *Gurri* (an Aboriginal person, within my part of New South Wales) to describe myself and other Aboriginal individuals; *Gurriyayn* describes Aboriginal people as a collective. *Gurrikung* (Aboriginal people) have always believed in the concept of the *Barrun* (Dreaming) as in the saying *Barrun-batayi* (derived from *barrun-ba-tayi* ‘dream-there-THING’, implying the dimension of creation or origin of all things). In this conceptual framework, the very art of dreaming requires an individual to control and channel their thought processes thereby leading to a sense of healthy wellbeing. If young people were led and guided through these processes, they would be assisted to realise and harness their own individual strengths and weaknesses. This was the primary objective of traditional education and spiritual formation through the institutions of traditional ceremony, which are further discussed in the next chapter.

3.5 Education and the Art of Storytelling

Aboriginal people speak about their forebears and our deceased family members with the great reverence, it is one of the ways in which their memories and their deeds are kept alive, and we speak of them as being the Old People. They are the ones who created and walked the pathways before us – without their stories and our retelling of their deeds our lives will be diminished. From the Dreaming came the laws *Garr’Garr* that governed, managed and censured our behaviour. It enshrined within the people a sense of common decency and was a practical educational framework that upheld the rights to life for all people. The Dreaming was in existence in effect for countless generations before the coming of Europeans to Australia. It created and underpinned a dynamic and robust education system that for most *Gurri* lasted well into adulthood. It provided our people with the arts, music, song, dances and storytelling. It provided a world of science and engineering. It was and will always

remain an important process for Aboriginal people and the growth of our communities. As a child my favourite pastime was always listening to and watching the storytellers of my community, it mattered little whether they were male or female young or old.

The art of storytelling amongst members of Aboriginal communities was for thousands of years the most important means of communication. Travelling song makers, orators and theatre practitioners regularly journeyed to far off distant communities to share their knowledge and experiences with other groups. These forms of communication worked to ensure that Aboriginal people maintained their cultural affiliations and their sovereign rights to the very place of their belonging. Identifying, recognising and documenting these earlier relationships and affiliations can benefit Aboriginal people in many ways, including supporting the process of research and discovery particularly with family history. In uncovering the frequent mobility and movement of Aboriginal groups and families we can begin to once again speak about ourselves not as people who have been broken by processes of colonisation, but rather as people who have survived 226 years of dispossession, dislocation and marginalisation by drawing on our powerful and enduring heritage of resources for resilience, creativity, cultural preservation and transmission.

I was always fascinated by the amount of information that elder members of my community would share time and time again with each other; accounts of this or that event, whoever may or may not have been there and involved. They would correct each other and sometimes argue over the information. Usually they agreed on the details and then they could move on to another subject. This dialogic process, critical to the validation and verification of orally transmitted knowledge over millennia, is clearly evident in the audio recordings of oral history and language from that generation. For Aboriginal people this type of information

when made available to you comes with a responsibility to remember. I was able to read books and watch television when it was introduced to me in the 1960s, but I never tired of the oral storytelling or the storytellers themselves, particularly from those people who used language creatively as a tool to create an atmosphere of suspense in their oratorical tales.

This experience may not seem to be overly remarkable or exciting but the fact was that we communicated in our own community way in a language particular to us, using our own ‘lingo’ is and was of great importance. In the ‘lingo’ of my youth we used many words and phrases from traditional sources, but other words that I assumed were from a traditional source, I have now come to understand are sometimes derived from Australian slang. The word *gammon* which we used to say you are lying or you are a liar is one such word.¹²⁶ I recall an old Aunt using the term *gammon* and qualifying it with the addition of ‘pig’s bum’ (it so happens that a cut of meat from the rump end of a pig is called a gammon). Despite the introduced etymology of this particular word, it nevertheless reflects (by contrast) the traditional emphasis placed on *min* ‘truth’ or *mindhuwan* ‘truly’, a cultural keyword with many derivations, representing a core cultural value underpinning our ethical framework and traditional knowledge base.

The community lingo of my childhood was a mixture of traditional languages Gumbaynggirr and Thangatti, English and Australian colloquialisms. Although viewed by many as hybrid slang or everyday vernacular, in fact this mixture of linguistic resources represents a strong continuity with traditional multilingual practices, whereby stable societal multilingualism was maintained through finely calibrated language choices within each

¹²⁶ The *Macquarie Dictionary* notes that this word was used throughout NSW in early colonial times, but is now limited to remote areas and Aboriginal communities,
<https://www.macquariedictionary.com.au/resources/aus/word/map/search/word/gammon/The%20Centre/>

multilingual person's linguistic repertoire.¹²⁷ Today I am able to understand that the world that we are born into shapes one's worldview; my language was shaped by the world around me and it was a cultural space that I was comfortable in. However, within a few short years I was required to enter a bigger world, a world I had no knowledge about, a world defined by two colours, black and white. For me this world, with its racialised distinctions and heavily loaded terms, did not always offer up words of encouragement for Aboriginal people. It was a time when Aboriginal people only knew the meaning for the word segregation but did not have a word to express it. We would use the expression blacks and whites: these labels were fairly common speech in the school playground and in the township of my childhood.

3.6 Mentorship: Margaret Ann Franklin

Fortunately for me a key figure involved with the political actions of the Armidale Association for Aboriginal Assimilation during the later years of the 1950s was a non-Indigenous woman named Margaret Franklin.¹²⁸ She will forever be an inspiration and source of strength to me. As a child I attended the Armidale Demonstration School and by chance was a fellow student of Margaret's son David and in time she took a direct interest in my personal welfare and education, and became my tutor. There were times after visiting the Franklins' family home I would leave with clothing; usually old school uniforms, shirts and jumpers, shorts and socks. For many this may have been seen as simply a case of charity, a wealthy white woman giving assistance to the underprivileged. But the truth was that these school uniforms were previously worn by her older boys and subsequently divided between David and myself. At no time did I feel inferior or was I ever treated any less than equal to

¹²⁷ The rules governing language choice in an analogous multilingual setting are described in Jean Harkins, *Bridging Two Worlds: Aboriginal English and Crosscultural Understanding* (St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, 1994).

¹²⁸ For her own account of Armidale from the 1950s to early 1970s, see Margaret Ann Franklin, *Assimilation in Action: The Armidale Story* (Armidale: University of New England Press, 1995).

any of her children. Perhaps this was because she had adopted a young Aboriginal boy from Western Australia; his name was Frank, and in time he came to live with our family and became a member of our family.

Margaret took on a tutor's role with me when I was about eight years of age and continued to support me academically until my father received a posting to Grafton on the Far North Coast in late 1974. During that first year of high school I was provided with a key to the Franklin home; if needing food during the lunch break I could simply go to their house and eat. Despite Margaret's efforts, I felt I didn't belong in school and was simply not interested in learning things that had no relevance to the world I could see for myself. Later in life, upon receiving my honorary doctorate from the University of Newcastle (2006), for cultural and community work, I determined to begin studying again. At the age of fourteen I left school and found a job as a station hand at a cattle station at a place called Kangala on the outskirts of Grafton. The long absence away from any formal learning environment meant that any growth that I felt I had achieved throughout my working life was in 'the here and now'; and yet if the truth be told, I had never completely finished with Australian history and the facts of dislocation. I formed a sense of belonging to the land and I still wanted to know more about the lives of our people and the journeys that brought us all together on Silver City. Most importantly I wanted to celebrate our survival in the city of Armidale all those years ago.

Having embarked on university study I was from the outset extremely optimistic that I would eventually accumulate enough recorded material that could be reshaped to construct a modern day cultural movement; material that could advocate and support a range of social reforms in Aboriginal communities. It could be employed with precision and rigour through

processes of cultural verification and discernment, by drawing upon oral tradition and storytelling, informed by reference to written and historical documentation, and firmly based in what we have of the direct voices of our forebears recorded in various media. Re-embracing and careful analysis of our language material, to regain our access to it and reweave it into our daily lives, is central to this vision of renewed Aboriginal cultural and intellectual wellbeing.

The primary focus for any reform and/or renewal must firstly be to improve the overall health and well-being of Aboriginal people; to create enterprise and employment within the local and regional clusters; to create develop and deliver a range of educational programs that inspire, change and deliver services that help to create leadership within our community's activities. The biggest influence of my life was unquestionably my father Raymond Shoonkley Kelly. In the following chapter I will chronicle my father's journey, which in essence directly connects with and influences my own.

Chapter 4

Shoonkley Kelly: From *Keepara* to Cultural Bind

In 1975, my father Raymond Lewis ‘Shoonkley’ Kelly (1938-2007), whilst employed as an Aboriginal Research Officer working for the National Parks and Wildlife Service, began to advocate strongly for the return of a modern day form of the *Keepara*.¹²⁹ Kelly described how the effects of the policies and practices of the New South Wales Aborigines Protection Board and its successor the Aborigines Welfare Board had impacted on *Gurri* people and led them to being trapped in what he termed a ‘cultural bind’. This chapter focuses specifically on the development of these ideas in his life and work. The broader scope of his personal story, encompassing a wealth of experience of Aboriginal community, political and intellectual life through much of the 20th century, merits a full biographical study that is beyond the range of this present work.¹³⁰

4.1 Theorising the Problem

In 1974, speaking to the Australian Archaeology Association, Shoonkley delivered a paper entitled “From the *Keepara* to a Cultural Bind: An analysis of the Aboriginal situation.” Throughout this chapter I will explore my father’s writings of that period as well as the conversations that I can recall of his observations and reflections on the impact of unfair control, segregation and restriction that had led *Gurri* people to this position of severe disadvantage. His view was that education was central both to the problem and to its

¹²⁹ The origins of this nickname, derived from a Yuraygirr word, will be explored in my ongoing research on language preservation through Aboriginal naming practices in NSW.

¹³⁰ Johanna Kijas, *Revival, Renewal and Return: Ray Kelly and the NSW Sites of Significance Survey*. Sydney: Office of Environment and Heritage NSW, 2011 gives a partial account of Kelly’s time as the first Aboriginal employee of the NPWS (1973-87); other sources include Franklin, 1995; tapes of interviews with him held at AIATSIS; and a large collection of his unpublished reports to NPWS; see in particular Ray Kelly’s Reports 1971-5.

solution is evident throughout his work, and forms the point of connection between his work and the present research is illustrated here:

My theory is that we Mission Aborigines have been unconsciously rejecting the Western man's education for fear we would be proven failures in absorbing it. I believe we must try to feed in some of our own education into the school system. By doing this we will gain pride in ourselves and our race and we will gain a sense of knowing who we are and what we hope to achieve out of life. This result can only be achieved when both white and black gain respect for each other. For us to gain respect for white people, we must be respected as human beings. Only then will we respond to white people's offerings.¹³¹

In the late 1960s Shoonkley had taken a new job at the University of New England (UNE) in Armidale. He belonged to a program to provide assistance to Aboriginal 'kids' at school – a tutoring and mentoring scheme which was a major innovation in its time, delivered in association with the Armidale Demonstration School (now Armidale City Public School).¹³² Shoonkley's recruitment to this program is an indication of his commitment to education, and of the local recognition of his abilities and leadership qualities.

Not long after this research funding was found from the NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service (NPWS), to be administered through the then Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies (later known as AIATSIS). Leading this research effort was the archaeologist Sharon Sullivan, one of the first cultural heritage managers employed by NPWS.¹³³ She had contact with Shoonkley through the UNE, and sought his advice in finding someone to lead this

¹³¹ Kelly, "From the 'Keeparra,'" 13

¹³² One of the oldest continuing public schools since public education began in Australia in 1848; it accepted Aboriginal pupils, who elsewhere were often subject to exclusion from NSW public schools during the period 1902-1972.

¹³³ Sharon Sullivan, "The Custodianship of Aboriginal Sites in South-Eastern Australia," in *Who Owns The Past?*, ed. Isabel McBride (Melbourne: Oxford University Press, 1985). At the time of writing, Sullivan is Adjunct Professor at three Australian universities (UQ, JCU, UNE), and a Board member of the ANU Institute for Professional Practice in Heritage & the Arts (IPPHA).

program.¹³⁴ The envisioned program was intended to document what was perceived to be the last of the local Aboriginal cultural material. One of Sharon Sullivan's chief concerns was to find ways to coordinate and deal with the amateur recorders and historians considered by cultural heritage experts to be stampeding through and contaminating the material as they went. Shoonkley was approached and he suggested a senior Thangatti man, Victor Shepherd, as the appropriate person to lead the program.

Victor Shepherd had been put through The Rules during the last *Keepara* held at Bellbrook in 1935. Having been married for two years to my great-aunt Grace, Victor was not required to stay in the young men's camp (*yingu*), but was allowed to return home to the Nulla Nulla Reserve near Bellbrook each evening. Shoonkley knew the details of this significant event because his father Raymond Terrence (Chevron) Kelly (1916-1965) was a fellow graduate of this historic event.¹³⁵ For generations the tight social controls applied pressures to the old ways of knowing and sharing knowledge:

Only certain people were allowed to leave the mission with the manager's approval. No Aboriginal strangers were allowed to camp near these missions. No one was let in or out without a white man's consent. Under these conditions it was impossible for any of us to feel proud of ourselves, and our Aboriginal knowledge quickly began to fade away. The last of the initiations to be performed in our tribe was held in the late 1930's. Many of the old fully-initiated men were now dying without passing on the information to the un-initiated men. We were now in a cultural bind.¹³⁶

Sharon Sullivan noted that whilst Victor Shepherd, unquestionably carried the cultural knowledge, they nevertheless, were after someone younger more dynamic, so with the

¹³⁴ Kijas, *Revival, Renewal*, 69.

¹³⁵ Kelly, "From the 'Keepara,'" 1.

¹³⁶ Kelly, "From the 'Keepara,'" 13-14.

encouragement of some other key people at the time Shoonkley Kelly decided to throw his hat in the ring. He was the right man for the job and the time. In 1973 Shoonkley joined the National Parks and Wildlife Services under a program that was then called the Aboriginal Site Survey.

4.2 Taking Action

Despite working on what was a white academic project, Shoonkley was forthright on his opinions on how things should be done, and the negative impacts of white academic research if left to run unchecked. Of a high priority on his list was in providing results that would benefit and empower the Aboriginal community and foregrounding Indigenous knowledge and perspective:

No doubt our bosses at the Institute of Aboriginal Studies think the knowledge has been well preserved, but I think that although they have the facts they do not have the true Aboriginal meaning. They are only preserving a white man's interpretation – about as good as our understanding of what it is to be an Eskimo. I see the job of people like us on the Survey of Aboriginal Sites to be that of collecting the meaning as well as the facts, and then trying to find a way to give that complete understanding to all our people. Then we will have the same security as all the other people living in Australia. The first problem blocking the way towards this at the present is to encourage white anthropologists, archaeologists and linguists in their 'ivory towers' to give direct feedback to the people they have obtained their material from. The way it has been in the past, all of these 'ivory tower' people have had direct communication with their informant, but no actual feedback has been received by the informant as to what has been done with the information, or whether the real Aboriginal meaning of the facts gathered has been understood. When garbled information reaches the mission, what happens? In my experience, the informants are annoyed

and switch off from providing any further information. It makes things very difficult for sincere researchers when they move into the field at any time after that. It often takes many visits to get these people to respond again. What I feel should have happened was as I stated before: white anthropologists, archaeologists and linguists must return to the people they took the information from, telling them what they have done with it and where it can be found in the future. Most importantly they should make sure that the Aboriginal meaning is correct. Then only do I think the informants will be satisfied and keep on co-operating.¹³⁷

Shoonkley created a graphic model (Figure 4) of his theoretical conceptualisation in the form of a diagram of the relationship between the ‘ivory tower’ of the researchers, and the people from whom the knowledge had come, to whom he considered it should be returned.

¹³⁷ Kelly, “From the ‘Keeparra,” 16.

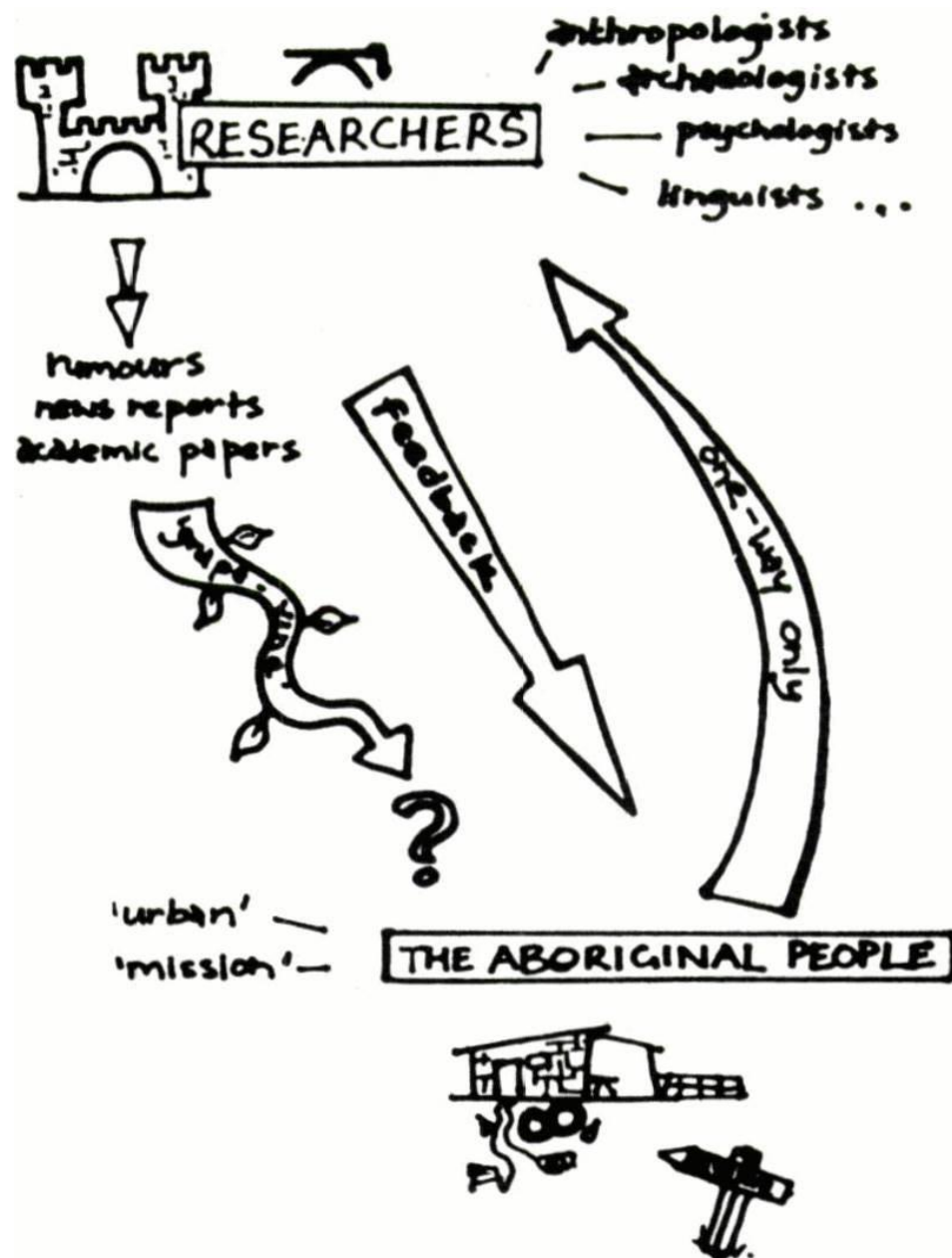


Figure 4. R.L. Kelly's Model of the Research Process:
The problem and the solution, as he saw it¹³⁸

¹³⁸ Kelly, "From the 'Keeparra,'" 15.

Putting these principles into action, immediately he set about enlisting the trust and support of Aboriginal Senior Men. So with the funding and support provided through AIATSIS the project was underway and over the next decade Shoonkley and his non-Indigenous colleague, Cambridge educated anthropologist Howard Creamer, would be confronted and challenged by a longstanding belief that the cultural knowledge of Aboriginal people in New South Wales was in rapid decline and teetering on the very edge of a cultural abyss.¹³⁹ The major obstacle was to put right this untested and misleading judgment and it required a number of stages. Firstly any detail of such knowledge would need to be gathered by using contemporary Western research material and methods, but importantly, coordinated by an Indigenous co-researcher. But before the project 'could even begin to be effective in our work it was necessary for us to make the firm commitment that this research was to be first and foremost for the benefit of the Aboriginal people'.¹⁴⁰ To have merit, the project required this dual approach.

The Sites Project was all about preserving, showcasing and elevating Aboriginal cultural knowledge in New South Wales to its rightful lofty plain through and exploration and documentation of significant cultural sites:

The preservation of the Aboriginal culture in New South Wales rests upon these sites. In the past they provided local territorial landmarks for the hunting groups and in a very real sense the individual was owned by his or her particular mountain. This sense of belonging is evident in many areas of New South Wales today and as I have indicated, we have numerous examples of such sites on the Survey. The ceremonial grounds, including many of the carved trees and rock art sites, are where the great initiations took place, and these symbolise the

¹³⁹ Creamer remained in the NSW public service until his retirement, served on the Armidale City Council, and at the time of writing is an active conservationist in the Port Macquarie area.

¹⁴⁰ Creamer, "From the 'Cultural Bind'," 18.

Aboriginal values and laws and the greatness of the religion, which encouraged such a harmony between Man and Nature.

Our task is to facilitate a renaissance of 'Aboriginality' and to seek every opportunity for it to find expression in Australia today.¹⁴¹

Both Creamer and Kelly felt deeply the need to communicate the richness of Aboriginal culture to wider Australia and whilst Shoonkley did not have a research background, he did have solid connections to the Aboriginal community, and it was felt that this combined with Howard Creamer's training and their shared vision would see them through this initial period. Shoonkley certainly carried a great historical (and personal) perspective of the Aboriginal situation and the ramifications of successive government's policies on Indigenous living conditions:

The Government acted by establishing the Aboriginal Protection Act. Although these missions provided some kind of protection for our people from extinction, it is obvious the missions were used to bring our people under control. Once our people were on these missions it was safe for the white farmers to squat on land that was rightfully ours. When this happened our people were facing depression. They no longer had free access to the hundreds of square miles of tribal land they once proudly roamed. They were now confined to ninety acres. Because of this, the will to be self-supporting was now lost. So the Government introduced rations and hand-outs to our people, again taking away the will to be self-supporting. Of course, there were some people who wanted to break away from this style of life but were afraid to do so because they feared what might happen to them. So they accepted this style of life.¹⁴²

¹⁴¹ Creamer, "From the 'Cultural Bind'," 22.

¹⁴² Kelly, "From the 'Keeparra,'" 13.

Shoonkley was able to provide an Indigenous perspective of government policy which proved an invaluable counterpoint to Western accounts of same. With a rudimentary understanding of the Keepara in 1935 and combined with his family connections to other prominent Aboriginal senior men of the community and the knowledge passed down to him through elders of his family, Shoonkley along with Creamer set about the task of recording over thirty sites in two years. Tracing this knowledge through the period 1935 to 1983 was crucial to the Aboriginal sites team. During the period of working on the project documenting and compiling information through the sites survey Shoonkley's cultural connection to his communities at Armidale, Bellbrook and Kempsey allowed the team a high degree of open access to knowledge. Shoonkley's community connections paved the way for a number of key relationships with Aboriginal knowledge holders or consultants, as Shoonkley liked to term the senior men from that 1935 *Keepara*.

His immediate advisors Len Da Silva and Frank Archibald were both senior men in the appropriate kin relationship with him (father-in-law and great-uncle, respectively). Both gentlemen spoke Gumbaynggirr and became his closest tutors. Frank was reportedly also able to speak a number of other languages including Thangatti and other language varieties of the region, in a manner typical of the multilingualism of the traditional population. As senior men and knowledge custodians they each felt that Shoonkley should undergo and pass through an elementary form of 'The Rules'. For these senior men it was their way of ensuring his personal safety when visiting these and other sites of significance in the future. It was recognised that the knowledge of initiations, ceremonies and old ways was endangered:

... most younger Aboriginal people would have no way to re-absorb their original tribal culture even if they wanted to because so much of it is now either lost forever, or being kept a secret by the elders... The

task would be impossible. Hence, our job on the Survey is to act now to preserve what still remains of the culture, to give the elders a means to communicate their knowledge in an atmosphere of trust and understanding, and then to feed back the results of our work in a simple and effective way that can be instantly grasped by the ‘grass-roots’ Aboriginal people.¹⁴³

Victor Shepherd, another key consultant, was in his mid-70s by this time, having passed through The Rules according to practice of the Thangatti Law men, he was highly regarded and considered an exceptional communicator. Through Shoonkley’s persistence both Victor Shepherd and Len Da Silva would become the cornerstones of the reinvigorated cultural programs (and key elements of the ‘renaissance’) being delivered to young boys in and around Armidale in 1972-73.

I was part of that group of young boys who were accompanied to a number of the lesser important sites and what we were being told at these sites was highly significant to me; this was the first time that I could visualise a cultural landscape on a grand scale. Our traditional knowledge did not exist in isolation, but was interconnected through a range of stories I can only imagine and I use the terminology of songlines to reflect on their significance. I didn’t really understand this concept at the time, nor was I aware that the very place we were standing on was connected to another site on the coast some 180 kilometres away, and that these two spaces were interconnected. This information and understanding did not come to me until I was over forty years of age. The importance of these programs to my father and his visions are witnessed in his challenging and demanding viewpoints on the negative impact of Western education:

When I think back over the years and what I have been told of our past,

¹⁴³ Creamer, “From the ‘Cultural Bind’,” 22.

it seems we Aborigines have stood looking towards the white man's education on the far horizon and unconsciously asking ourselves how much of this education do we really need. I guess we all know we would have had to drop our own culture and education to fit into the white man's way of life, and because of this, we were now thrown into a cultural bind. Our unconscious bind was: could we afford to lose all of our past Aboriginal knowledge just to absorb something belonging to people who weren't going to accept us anyway? Or should we absorb our own traditional form of education fully? In sorting out this bind we had little choice. So we became stuck in this bind, and drifted along doing neither. In my own lifetime, I am sorry to say that many of the old people were now dying without passing on the language and culture. In a way this sorted out the problem for us without us ever making a conscious decision. We were now on the road to trying to absorb the [W]estern man's education. To me it seemed we were stuck out in a desert looking towards the far horizon. Every step we took forward in absorbing the [W]estern man's education, that horizon moved away in the same direction.¹⁴⁴

Kelly's account relates the fraught nature of Western education for many of Australia's Indigenous people. Shoonkley saw the critical importance of traditional cultural knowledge, including language and history, for our future and was asking questions in the 1970s still relevant today:

What should I do about what is left of our tribal culture? Should I push my children into absorbing a white man's system which seems destined to fail them? The migrants who have their own culture and community system seem to be so far in front of us. They have strength because if they fail in the white Australian system, they can fall back on their own. So we must also have our own. I look at it this way though: we Aborigines have no real alternative of our own, unless we do something active about the problem right away. I feel

¹⁴⁴ Kelly, "From the 'Keeparra,'" 14.

we need to get all our people to become knowledgeable about Aboriginal history and culture - things that only a few of us seem to be interested in at present. To get them interested and knowledgeable, we have to make sure first that the knowledge is preserved in its Aboriginal meaning and then fed back into the people generally.¹⁴⁵

I can understand the difficulties that Shoonkley faced at the time, because as a thirteen year old I was often being asked to look at his reports, he would ask what did I think of this word or that word, and with great respect I look back to some of the words he used, although at the time I couldn't understand them. Yet today my memory of his use of words has a deep intellectual and emotional resonance. He would say 'we need to stratify' as if not just creating a new word but the concept of what that meant: 'to *stratify*' – something akin to 'strategise' but with an additional level of meaning. Another phrase he used was 'we will make a *blatant attempt*': whilst it might sound grammatically unclear I knew what he meant – a concentrated effort, a very direct approach, with connotations of intellectual daring and potential risk. The challenge he saw as vast and requiring considerable effort and commitment:

[T]he next block to be overcome is the white education system, which has not accepted the need for Aboriginal kids to be educated in their own history and the significance of those less-sacred sites which it is proper they should know about – e.g. rock engravings, rock art, and burial sites, and how their own tribal forebears found meaning in life. We have plans on the Survey to introduce teaching about these things for mixed classes in Armidale high schools in 1975. This will bring them to something less than kindergarten stage in their understanding of Aboriginal laws and culture but it is a necessary beginning.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Kelly, "From the 'Keeparra'," 14.

¹⁴⁶ Kelly, "From the 'Keeparra'," 16-17. This idea for high school classes was not fully implemented in Shoonkley's time.

4.3 Engaging with Traditional Knowledge

In August of 1973, newly appointed Aboriginal Research Officer Ray Shoonkley Kelly along with the other members of the *Survey of Sites of Significance to the Aboriginal People of New South Wales* team made a concerted effort to engage with senior members of the Aboriginal community living on the Aboriginal reserve at Bellbrook. During the course of this initial visit, it became abundantly clear that the establishment of a working relationship with knowledge holders would be a challenge for the survey team. Ray in this report wrote “we found the fully initiated men reluctant to speak to us about significant sites in the area.”¹⁴⁷

Having spent the first 16 years of his life living in this isolated community, Shoonkley had been given a basic knowledge by his father of the less important traditional teaching sites in the area. He knew of the general location of the more important sites but was not given much information.

Even though he had undergone only a rudimentary form of initiation to the *Giru Giru* stage, he was championed by Mr. Frank Archibald and Mr. Len De Silva of Armidale.¹⁴⁸ They were two men of excellent standing and identification with the Gumbaynggirr people. The Gumbaynggirr and Thangatti share a common section and totem structure. Shoonkley would still have to build the foundations of a working relationship with these Thangatti and Gumbaynggirr men. To a number of these senior men he was still classed a *Gurruman*, which meant essentially that they believed he still belonged to the woman’s side and not

¹⁴⁷ Raymond L. Kelly, ‘Report on Bellbrook Mission Cemetery,’ Report 5. (Hurstville: Department of Environment and Conservation, Cultural Heritage Division, 1974), 1.

¹⁴⁸ The Thangatti word *giru* ‘bird’ is associated with this level. Holmer (1967) recorded *dilgir ~ djilgir* ‘a pretty bird’, and *dhilkirr* as ‘first stage initiation’: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 132.

their side, that is, not to the ranks of initiated men.¹⁴⁹ Evidencing his credentials to speak as an initiated man with these senior men would take time:

When we talked about the Mission cemetery which seemed more important to them, the old men spoke freely about this site and who was buried there. We were hoping to find a way of getting ‘on-side’ with the old men. Because they showed more concern for the cemetery we then told them there might be a possibility of the NSW Aboriginal Relics Advisory Committee agreeing to allow us to fence it.¹⁵⁰

After winning the support of the old men to investigate the possibility of having the cemetery fenced, Shoonkley was to soon learn of the importance of this cemetery and why it remains important for people of Thangatti heritage:

Some of the really powerful men are buried in the cemetery: Ralph Quinlan, Alex Thompson, Frederick Holten and ‘Hoppy legged’ Jimmy Jackie. My Grandmother, Margaret Kelly, and my great grandmother are also buried there. One of the oldest members of the community to be buried in the cemetery is an old lady by the name Bolar Callaghan who was thought to have lived to be over 110 years of age.¹⁵¹

The name Bolar Callaghan connects with my own language research in an interesting way, a way that may shed light on the role of senior women in traditional intellectual and ceremonial life. The name ‘Bolar’, or *Buula* in my current practical orthography, has taken on a new dimension.¹⁵² Since the late Pastor George Quinlan said that the word meant ‘Old Woman’, I have identified a number of other women with this name; it is used both as a woman’s name and a term for a senior woman of great standing evidence for this dual usage

¹⁴⁹ Glossed by Lissarrague as an uninitiated boy or youth; possibly also linked with *gurrmiyn* ‘short’: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 146.

¹⁵⁰ Kelly, ‘Report on Bellbrook,’ 1.

¹⁵¹ Kelly, ‘Report on Bellbrook.’

¹⁵² Possibly linked with *buu* ‘head’ plus *-la* ‘WITH’ (Instrumental case inflection).

going back some time.¹⁵³ Ellen Pearce, also known as ‘Bolla’ Pearce, was the mother of Ralph Quinlan and she was born sometime between 1847 and 1861 at Rolland’s Plains north of the Manning River. Her section was Gargangani and her totem Bulgun (wallaby). These senior women were greatly respected, as much so as the senior men, as indicated in the above quoted account of important elders in the cemetery. Elizabeth Lena Bullock, ‘Granny Bula’, was born in 1830 at Yellow Rock, near Urunga, New South Wales. She was the mother of John Mosley who himself would become a very much respected Aboriginal man, a former police tracker and campaigner to protect Aboriginal land.

This word for a senior woman also surfaces as a term of cultural importance in Aboriginal English, in the forms ‘top lady’ and ‘boss lady’.¹⁵⁴ The following bilingual English/Thangatti song, celebrating a coming initiation process for a young boy, appears to present the ‘top lady’ or *buula* in a key role, which may have implications of cultural leadership.

Keepara Song (full text)

You and me, tiny man, magi walu-galay

You and me, tiny man, magi walu-galay

Do you see? No, no sabi

Caught in a bingayi yingu

Caught in a bingayi djampingu

The top lady to the bottom says:

An’ sting you bum yaynang-kay

¹⁵³ According to Lissarrague, personal communication, corroborated by the comments under *Baluwa* ‘very old woman, a great grandmother; suggest the highest level of seniority in Law as well as age: Lissarrague; *Dhanggati Grammar*, 120.

¹⁵⁴ Current examples of this usage can be seen referring to a senior Aboriginal public servant in *Alice Springs News*, 3 July 2002, <http://www.alicespringsnews.com.au/0922.html>, and by a Tiwi person referring to the non-Indigenous Governor General of Australia, Quentin Bryce, as the *top lady*, <http://www.abc.net.au/am/content/2010/s2900990.htm>; both accessed 19 Sept. 2014. The term *boss lady* can be seen in the name of a Sydney Aboriginal graphic art company, <http://www.bossladydesigns.com.au>, and in Kakadu as documented by Charles Darwin University, <http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/tourism/kakadu/values/pdf/ubirrartsite.pdf>; both accessed 19 Sept. 2014.

The first line is repeated once; lines three and four differ only in the last word; the first and last lines rhyme. Lines one, three, four and six begin in English and shift into traditional language, as though leading the young addressee into the traditional domain. The following line-by-line analysis shows the meanings of the non-English elements, and what they contribute to the meaning of each line.

- (1) You and me, tiny man, **magi walu-galay**
body one-all
 our bodies are the same.
- (2) Do you see? No, no **sabi**
know [Pacific Pidgin word sometimes used in lingo]
 No, you don't understand [yet].
- (3) Caught in a **bingayi yi-ngu**
brother be-THRU (i.e. place for passing through The Rules)
- (4) Caught in a **bingayi djampi-ngu**
brother cousin-THRU
- Gathered into young men's camp, in a cohort of brothers and cousins going through The Rules.
- (5) The top lady to the bottom says:
- (6) An' sting you bum **yaynang-kay**
2pl-together (i.e. all you mob)
 The senior woman (*buula*) directs [her underlings] to chastise you all.

This audio recording of a senior man, Mr. Lachlan Vale by Nils Holmer, recalling the initiation practices of his younger days, is sung in a gently loving and nurturing tone toward the 'tiny man' who is to be inducted into the next level of manhood.¹⁵⁵ The bilingual song text suggests it may be addressed to bilingual youngsters as a pedagogical strategy, drawing them gently into a greater understanding of the traditional language forms. The mention of

¹⁵⁵ Holmer, Field Tape (1964).

bodies in (1)-(2) evokes the way the young boys, having hitherto lived among the women and girls whose bodies are different from theirs, are now to be welcomed into the domain of men as befits their physical gender. Chastisement refers to the disciplining of young men into norms of mature male conduct, as they learn new skills of self-restraint to temper their hitherto unrestrained childish behaviour.

Returning now to the Bellbrook Cemetery project, Shoonkley was informed that the first burial took place in the early 1880s and the last about 1940, with many of the earliest burials carried out in manner that was considered tribal; using bark *coolamons* the deceased were tied in sitting positions, others were buried in blankets or bags and later still others were buried in modern coffins horizontally. From about 1920 onwards people were buried in coffins made up on the Mission from material at hand. Ralph Quinlan was the last person to be buried in the cemetery; he was the father of the two oldest men on the mission at that time: Joe aged 69 and John two years his junior, both of whom were fully initiated men having passed through the Law and achieving recognition of *Walanggurr* (mature person at a more advanced stage of cultural learning) status.¹⁵⁶

Howard Creamer, Shoonkley's partner on the project, reflected on the importance of the cemetery and of proceeding to work in a culturally appropriate and sensitive manner in engaging with the older knowledge holders:

This is not to say that it is impossible to involve the older people and our experience on the Survey has shown that in certain cases, attempts to do so may be quite successful. For example we decided early last

¹⁵⁶ Kelly, 'Report on Bellbrook,' 1.

year to involve the Bellbrook community in a project to fence in their mission cemetery. Several of the old men of the Thangetti [sic] tribe lived on the mission and had requested this action during our first discussions with them about the Survey. As an indication of our goodwill and willingness to produce positive, short-term results wherever possible, the effort quite obviously was essential. Interestingly enough, there is more to this operation than meets the eye for although fencing the cemetery had an intrinsic value in that it mobilised the abundant labour on hand at the reserve for a worthwhile community project, it also showed us that the old men were, in a certain sense, putting us 'on trial' and further, playing for time themselves. For these were men who had been fully initiated during the 1930's and carried with them an understanding of the sites and culture of the Thangetti which they were at first understandably dubious about sharing with us, even though Ray had lived among them for most of his early life.

Asking us to fence in the cemetery was a kind of decoy to lead us away from the real sacred sites and keep us busy while they thought things over.¹⁵⁷

¹⁵⁷ Creamer, "From the 'Cultural Bind'," 20.

4.4 Renewal and Education

In the course of his research, Shoonkley found that it was not just the kids that needed the information, and this required a new and revolutionary approach:

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Another group who already feel the lack of their own knowledge are men aged 30-60 who have shown signs of wanting to absorb the roles of the traditional system in a somewhat modernised form. We have plans on the Survey to feedback the results of our research to this group, by involving them in projects to protect the sites and also, maybe, by a revival of the initiations. A whole new education and 'feedback' system will have to be gradually built up, using all the old knowledge as a basis, together with a lot of new ideas coming from our thrashing out together the present-day realities that our people have to cope with. How to get this to happen? Maybe I'll be able to tell you in a few years from now, after I've graduated further in my own initiation!¹⁵⁸

This statement demonstrates how Shoonkley's thinking about education reflects the Aboriginal intellectual tradition of lifelong learning, as a person moves through successive stages or degrees of admission to greater knowledge, and through doing so gains power in dealing with the daily realities of a human life. Particularly noteworthy is his expression of a concept of graduating 'further in' an ongoing process, rather than graduating 'from' a place of instruction. In another of his distinctive phrases, he referred to the need to capture their 'positive intrigue', to engage people in ongoing learning. He also challenged both traditional purists and younger people who felt the past should be left behind, by asking: 'Would you rather be *sacredly dead*, or *significantly alive*?'

¹⁵⁸ Kelly, 'Report on Bellbrook,' 17.

Reflecting again upon my father's work, I feel that I too have begun a new journey, an exciting and fulfilling journey of discovery and intellectual re-evaluation. Tragically, the vision of a modern gathering or educational practice in the spirit of a *Keepara* is yet to be fully realised and the potential for us to draw upon the strength of this tradition to address the contemporary educational needs of our people is as yet untested. It is the fundamental right of all people to enjoy an education system that meets the needs of its people.¹⁵⁹ Yet my early educational needs went substantially unmet, as described in the last chapter; and too many of our young people still face precisely the same bind that Shoonkley described; struggling to absorb a white education that 'seems destined to fail them' and that treats their heritage and living cultural tradition as if it were an intellectual *terra nullius*. If the State of New South Wales is unwilling or unable to cater for our educational needs, then it is the responsibility of all Aboriginal people to take action and ensure that it does.

One approach to community education that Shoonkley often advocated for was community-based workshops, based on his experiences with community development practitioners in the 1970s. Perhaps this was the new setting for the *Keepara* that he had dreamed of. He spoke often of the 1970s technique of transaction analysis as an opportunity whereby everybody can put forward their own ideas and solution, where we can come together and agree or disagree, and where with strong debate and rigor we can find the solutions. We just have to believe we have the capacity to do so, and join together to bring this into a practical reality for our time.

¹⁵⁹ United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation(UNESCO), *World Education Report 2000, The Right to Education: Towards Education for All Throughout Life* (Paris, UNESCO Publishing, 2000), 39.

Chapter 5

Language and Cultural Meaning

‘Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with shades of deeper meaning.’

–Maya Angelou, in *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*¹⁶⁰

Languages of the world have long been a source of fascination for me, from the most basic core elements of words, to the combinations of prefixes and suffixes, their incorporation into larger meaningful phrases and sentences, their various uses in different contexts, and how they are co-opted into the vernacular of other language speaking groups; language is a bottomless fount of meaning and story. Growing up in a community that was at one time isolated from the broader Australian community, I have been inspired by those writers and storytellers who reach across boundaries to use their gifts of insight and understanding for the benefit of all communities. Words gathered together are cast by the storyteller; together these words can describe actions or events in the past, present or future; they may suggest broader cultural meanings and intentions.

In this chapter I present some of the language part of this investigation, drawing this together with the historical, cultural, and educational strands from the preceding chapters. These threads are inextricably intertwined in a living fabric of cultural meaning underlying song, story, memory, teaching, learning, and ordinary everyday talk, all of which form and shape the intellectual country and homeland that I seek to explore and share with my peers and succeeding generations.

¹⁶⁰ Maya Angelou, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, London, Virago, 26.

I will also argue for the development of a consistent approach to the analysis and description of Aboriginal languages in New South Wales, led and guided by Aboriginal language groups and encompassing funding agencies, university linguistic departments and related research groups. In Australia today the challenge for many people working with Aboriginal communities in the area of language revival, renewal and reclamation has been made considerably more difficult due to the lack of consistency in representing words and grammatical constructions. One language investigator might describe a word for fish as being *magru*, another may describe the word as *makaru*, and yet a third investigator may interpret the word as sounding like *ma-karru*, indeed one dictionary records 14 variations.¹⁶¹ These multiple interpretations create confusion and controversy and each camp asserts their rendition to be the ‘true’ version.

Moreover, without the ability or desire to adequately cross-reference recorded material in its various forms, much valuable and accurate material is not archived or made accessible to language inheritors and communities. Cross-referencing needs to include material that is neighbouring or at a distance from the source. Careful listening to sound files collected from traditional speakers from a number of distinct communities is required for a full understanding of each language variety in its natural context.¹⁶²

In closing, I will detail what these explorations have taught me so far about the language and culture that is still alive in our families and communities, despite two centuries of displacement and suppression, and what remains to be explored and re-valued.

¹⁶¹ Under *makurr* ‘fish’, the Gathang dictionary lists no fewer than fourteen variant representations of the word from different sources throughout the region; Lissarrague, *A Grammar and Dictionary of Gathang*, 246.

¹⁶² Kelly, “Who’s Lingo Is It?”

5.1 Language in Cultural Memory

The presence of two related but distinct Aboriginal languages was strong in the small Aboriginal community in which I was raised, as described in Chapter Three. Regular conversation by speakers of both Gumbaynggirr and Thangatti could be heard during the 1960s, with many Aboriginal people including me sharing an historical connection with both groups. The family names of Kelly, Campbell, Morris and Archibald provide me with ancestral roots into both tribal groups and I also associate with and honour a traditional connection on my mother's side with the McKenzie/Dixon family from the New England plains area.

The Thangatti and Gumbaynggirr languages share a neighbouring boundary that begins on the coastline along the Mid North Coast of New South Wales, and extends in a westerly direction many hundreds of kilometres to the most eastern aspect of the New England tablelands. The fact that these two groups have long shared the same set of kinship subsections and marriage rules demonstrates their close relationships. Historical records indicate the travels of these groups on foot along river courses and traditional pathways throughout the region, from coast to tableland along several well-travelled routes.¹⁶³ Thus the peoples and languages were in constant contact, multilingualism was widespread and stable, and exogamous marriage between members of different groups kept the population genetically healthy and culturally enriched.

¹⁶³ Some early written language sources come from well before 1900: K. M. Cobb, "Some Aboriginal Words and Songs of the Macleay River, NSW," *Mankind* Vol. 1, No. 8 (1934) 206 [from 1879]; Charles Spencer, "The Lower Macleay River," in *The Australian Race: Its Origins, Languages, Customs* Vol. 3, No. 185, ed. Edward M Curr, 334-337 (Melbourne: Government Printer, 1886); William T. Wyndham, "The Aborigines of Australia," *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales* Vol. 23 (1889), 36-42.

My primary sources for this language investigation were a number of sound files deposited with AIATSIS in Canberra, recorded during the 1960s and 70s, as described in Chapter One. Many hours have been committed to listening and transcribing the detail of the files over the past eight years. During this time, and with the technical advantage of digitally remastered recordings, I began to hear more sounds, as well as more participants, than previously identified by the original recorders, or linguists who subsequently analysed parts of the audio material. Due to the fact that I was not a trained linguist and could only enquire occasionally to another linguist about certain conventions and assumptions made previously by the original authors of earlier language descriptions, I used the transcription software that would allow me to isolate specific words and sentences. In addition to this, I found listening to and experimenting with reproducing the sounds in my own vocal tract a highly useful technique.

As I lived and worked with this audio material, my brain constantly came up with connections between what I was hearing, and remembered words and parts of words that I had learnt prior to attending school. Some of these early memories may have been prompted by hearing some of the same speakers in the audio files, whom I had heard in my family's and relatives' homes in the mid-1960s. Among the background noise on several tapes can be heard children of around my age; actively speaking in the languages (this may even have included me). As I listened, my experience was more a sense of reconnecting with my early childhood bilingualism, than of learning a language as an outsider. Another dimension of cultural insider knowledge that I brought to this task came through the traditional words and concepts preserved in Aboriginal English, or the 'Crossover Language' of which I write more in Section 5.5 below. Still another source of background knowledge was the oral tradition of stories and songs in my family, from which I was able to match particular words

and phrases to the subject matter of some of the audio files. These rich resources of intergenerational family and community cultural knowledge are what my father frequently referred to as ‘residual cultural memory’.

During the course of this research I have accumulated large quantities of additional historical and cultural material, including almost all of the language descriptions available in New South Wales, plus my own reanalysis that began to emerge as a consequence of my immersive listening. By mouthing what I was hearing whilst listening, I was increasingly able to isolate individual words, associate them with meanings, and gradually work out what sounds they contained. In turn I developed a method of writing to describe what I had heard. Patterns became recognisable and eventually a code was revealed. I intentionally chose not to attempt to write in the conventional linguistic phonetics in order not to over-complicate my listening, as well as ensuring my ownership of the newly transcribed material.

In the following sections, I detail the findings that this combination of investigative methods has yielded so far, and the lines of inquiry that could usefully lead on from here. Although my methods have been grounded in an Indigenous approach to language observation and learning in deep cultural and historical context, rather than through the filter of modern linguistics, I can now identify many meeting points between the two approaches. I am eager to build more skills in linguistics in order to further investigate these intersections.

The traditional language speakers, who were still living when I was young, and those who speak in the audio recordings, show much evidence of being keen observers of language structure and use. The formal structure of linguistic elicitation limits this part of their input, by focusing on a single speaker as the sole representative of a language, and on translation

of specific English structures rather than speakers' broader knowledge about the languages. However, in the conversations I personally witnessed as well as in the recordings, speakers clearly demonstrated how they themselves see language as existing within an interconnected cultural and intellectual landscape. They often make insightful comments on differences in pronunciation and word structure between different areas and groups of speakers. They do not treat language as a monologue or static, but as co-constructed with input from all participants in a speech event (sometimes to the frustration of the researcher wanting uninterrupted samples from a single speaker).

To function successfully in the traditional multilingual society of this part of Australia, where different language groups frequently met and interacted required great linguistic awareness; the more linguistically adept speakers developed a fairly high level of meta-linguistic awareness, and co-constructed among their intellectual peers a rich and detailed body of Aboriginal linguistic knowledge, some of which is still passed down today. My own intuitions about language were formed by this context, and this was the starting point from which I approached the tapes, much like listening to my grandparents' generation talking when I was young, and using all my background knowledge and skills to make sense of what I was hearing.

It is apparent that these methods have a good deal in common with contemporary qualitative research methods of categorising, linking, forming, interpreting and formulating explanations, as well as the grounded theory principle of allowing analytical categories to emerge from the data.¹⁶⁴ While from the viewpoint of formal linguistic research, my

¹⁶⁴ John W. Creswell, *Research Design: Qualitative, Quantitative, and Mixed Method Approaches* (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2014). Barney G. Glaser and Anselm L. Strauss, *The Discovery of Grounded*

approach might be regarded as limited, I think it is reasonable to claim a greater degree of scientific rigour achieved through triangulation, by drawing on audio recordings, oral and written historical sources, and cultural knowledge.¹⁶⁵ In making any assertion about language, I have tried to ensure that I have at least three pieces of corroborating evidence from these sources before formulating a hypothesis about sounds, structures, or meanings.

5.2 Shifting Sound Patterns

In this research, I set out to discover how (and indeed whether) I could directly represent Aboriginal language words that I heard, using symbols of the English alphabet. I was aware of the many and varied attempts by non-Aboriginal language observers and linguists to do this. Daunted by the lack of consistency between these representations of our languages by outsiders, I decided to set all that aside and see if I could form my own understanding from more of an insider or Indigenous perspective. I have worked hard to find a suitable combination of these alphabetical symbols to describe the language and the conventions of sound patterns and word formation contained within the sound files.

The first challenge in approaching this task was to step outside of the sounds and structures of English, and immerse myself in the sounds that I heard in the recordings. The major source of insight into this system of sounds was that these were the sounds that I had heard around me as a child, not only in the language of my grandparents' generation, but also in the everyday 'lingo' of our Aboriginal community, which encompassed our residual linguistic memory of the features of our original languages, mixed in with English. This

Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research (Chicago: Aldine, 1967); Glaser and Strauss, 1967. James H. McMillan, *Introduction to research in education* (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 2008).

¹⁶⁵ Paulette Rothbauer, "Triangulation." In *The SAGE Encyclopedia of Qualitative Research Methods*, ed. Lisa Given, 892-4 (Thousand Oaks: SAGE Publications, 2008); Creswell, *Research Design*.

mixture retained the vowels, consonants, and sound combinations of the traditional languages.

As an example of these traditional sound features, I recall my late father Ray Shoonkley Kelly pronouncing the word *strategic* as more like ‘trateedjick’, using the traditional lamino-palatal plosive [ɟ] in place of both the English cluster ‘str’ and ‘g’, and the traditional high front vowel [i] in place of both the second and third vowels (the English long ‘e’ and short ‘i’). Another traditional vowel was in our pronunciation of the word ‘plant’ with the traditional open-mid central vowel [ɐ] in place of the English open-mid front [æ]; particularly when used as a verb, as in ‘He planted himself there’, i.e. he took up a firm stance. An example of sound combination was the pronunciation of ATSIC (the then Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission) by some people as ‘ASTIC’ and by others as ‘atjik’ with the traditional [ɟ] consonant. By re-tuning my sound awareness to these traditional sounds and sound patterns, I was able to find my way back into the sound system of the speakers in the audio files.

To further determine the overall accuracy of the language transcriptions I felt it was important to listen as thoroughly to the non-Aboriginal interviewer as to the Aboriginal language speaker. The reasoning behind this strategy was the insight to be gained when the interviewer was not sure of the articulation of words as pronounced by the speaker. Seemingly playing sound ping-pong the interviewer would try to repeat the word and ask is that right? ‘No’ came the response, and the speaker would restate the word and the conversational ping-pong would continue, usually concluding with the speaker having a chuckle and agreeing that it was alright. By methodically checking the articulation of words by the speaker against that of the interviewer as well as the written description that was

produced as a consequence of these recordings, I was convinced that I was on to something original and significant.

The next phase of my investigation was simply about listening immersive, I would spend hours listening, and at the same time vocalising words and sentences in an endeavour to reproduce the words. It was at this point I began to have doubts about the accuracy of my own attempts at transcription. My listening perceptions seemed at odds with the written records by previous investigators and I considered forgoing this aspect of the research and concentrating solely on the written language material that seemed more readily available and in abundance.

During this immersive listening phase I received a copy of a sound recording of Worimi language speakers made at Port Stephens and Tea Gardens in 1930 from the collection of A.P. Elkin at the University of Sydney.¹⁶⁶ The recordings had been transferred from wax cylinder to tape at the University of Sydney in 1950 and the sound quality of the 1950s remastering was extremely poor with lots of crackle and noise throughout and almost inaudible. A major breakthrough and an achievement in itself for this study was the emergence of audible songs in the remastered files. The successful enhancement of the Worimi Tape left me anxious to see what could be made of the Thangatti and Gathang tapes, enabling me to be much more precise and more confident in my identification of sounds from the speakers. Questions asked and answered by interviewers and speakers from the recorded sound files, coupled with associated historical events that were captured in news sources from the time, have altered my perceptions of the key elements and structure of the language from the Mid North Coast of New South Wales.

¹⁶⁶ A. P. Elkin, Sound Recordings, 1930; Research Material, 1904-75.

This phase of discovery created a challenge that I could not avoid. How could I support the previous written language descriptions of the Thangatti if I was hearing something else? What was the extent of these differences and how could I explain to others why some people will hear a word differently? Eventually, I came to the conclusion that the issue affecting the hearing of words and sounds has far more to do with the placement of the tongue inside the mouth of a speaker than the ears of someone who is listening. During this phase I also began to vocalise the responses of the Thangatti language speakers and had even begun to employ certain voice characteristics of a number of the more prominent language speakers. Some people may see this as simple mimicry, but this exercise allows the language learner to understand that a sound variation even within a group of people who speak the same language is altered through a different placement of the tongue in the mouth.

Another tool for language investigation that I began to employ during this phase was to imagine myself in the role of interviewer, but re-casting the non-Aboriginal person's question into Aboriginal English, for example: 'What you reckon Unc? This young fella now! Over the hill say, he runs over the hill and down the other side? How do you say that in our lingo?' The major reason I employed this method was due to the amount of Aboriginal English being used by the traditional language speakers in their responses, as they tried to clarify their meaning for the non-Aboriginal interviewer. Ultimately I came to see that greater meaning and suggestion was being conveyed through the language responses than had been previously captured or understood and after transcribing a number of the tapes in this fashion I began to question the overall interpretation of many of the word endings and at times even the beginning of certain words. To overcome this quandary I simply chose to write the material that I heard each and every time. I did this with the view of building up a more complete data base that could be used by other investigators across all other language

groups within close proximity to that of the Thangatti. What soon became evident to me was that I could find these same word endings and word parts in the language sound files of Gathang and Gumbaynggirr.

This work is still ongoing. Having mapped out and produced initial transcriptions of a good portion of the spoken language material, I intend to proceed to a more systematic investigation of the sounds, variations and combinations using the tools of phonological and morphophonemic analysis. However, I am already in a position to share several findings.

Probably the main divergence of my perception and transcription was that I was hearing many more rhotics than any non-Aboriginal listeners had heard in the same recordings; the better the playback quality of the remastered tapes, and the better the quality of the headphones I used, the more rhotics I heard, particularly at the ends of words. One example of this is seen in the word for ‘boy’ in line (5) of the Train Song from Chapter Three, which I have transcribed as *birr* ‘yi. On first listening to the unimproved tapes, this line of the song sounded something like *bel bel bel bidji lel*. On closer listening to the remastered tapes, I discovered that the third word was not a repetition of *bell*; its final consonant was not /l/ but /r/ followed by a slight but discernible vowel, i.e. more like *be-ru*. Also, the ‘e’ vowel was longer than in the first two words, leading to the conclusion that this was in fact *bay-iru*, that is, the verb *bayi-* ‘rise’ plus Ergative (Doer) suffix *-iru*.¹⁶⁷ A similar analysis applies to the fifth word, which at first sounded like *lel*, however, turns out to be *-lay-iru*, i.e. two suffixes to the preceding word, ‘boy’. Grammatically this makes sense if *-iru* is the Ergative (Doer)

¹⁶⁷ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 119 has *baaya* ‘rise, arise’. There seems to be a suffixing (morphophonemic) process where the /i/ vowel of the suffix may trigger dropping of the same vowel from the base; this requires further systematic investigation.

suffix on both elements of the noun phrase, ‘boy’ and ‘rise’, i.e. ‘boy who rose up’ (where ‘rise-Erg’ is an adjoined relative clause modifying the head noun ‘boy’).

The word for ‘boy’, this is not listed in the written documentation for Thangatti, but the Wiradjuri language has a word *bitji* for a young man.¹⁶⁸ Moreover, Threlkeld’s 1834 account of the language of the Hunter River and Lake Macquarie repeatedly refers to *beert beert* as a young man at the time of initial passage through the traditional Law structures. This is the triangulated evidence for this word meaning ‘boy’ according to Frank Archibald’s self-translation, supported by the evidence from Wiradjuri and from Threlkeld. My hypothesis is that the sounds in this word are *birr’*, that is, it ends in the trilled rhotic /rr/ but this is unreleased at the end of the trill, producing what sounds to the English-attuned ear like a ‘t’ sound at the end. When the suffix *-yi* is added to this, the resulting *birr’-yi* sounds like a palatal *tj* or *dj* sound has entered in, forming something like *birtji*. If the rhotic is not strongly trilled, it can be missed, and the listener may think the word is *bidji*.¹⁶⁹

Further supporting evidence for this analysis comes from both Wiradjuri and Thangatti. In Wiradjuri the word for ‘friend’ is still in everyday use as *moodjie*, or in my orthography, *mutji*, which I understand as coming originally from *murr’-yi* through the same process of sounds influencing each other (which linguists call ‘assimilation’). It is somewhat presumptuous for me, as a non-Wiradjuri person, to speculate about that language, but I have an even clearer example from Thangatti, in the word *garrtji*, or in my analysis, *garr’-yi*. This is almost certainly formed from the same root as *garr’ garr’* ‘traditional Law’, as *garr’yi* refers to an upholder of the Law, or a true and sincere person. The same root form *garr’* is

¹⁶⁸ Stan Grant and John Rudder, *A New Wiradjuri Dictionary* (O’Connor: Restoration House, 2010).

¹⁶⁹ Another variant of the same trilled rhotic occurs between vowels, where it is fricativised; this has been noted by linguists: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 5.

also related to the meaning ‘cry’: a true and sincere person is one who does cry, in the appropriate circumstances. Our traditional Law, too, is so deeply felt that it connects with the same inner wellsprings of the spirit as the weeping of the sincere person. The *-yi* suffix on all these words has several grammatical functions and remains to be systematically analysed in all its occurrences in the sound files, but here it seems to have its nominaliser function, and can be thought of as akin to ‘one who’, as in ‘one who is young and male’ (*birr ‘yi*), ‘one who befriends’ (*murr ‘yi*), ‘one who upholds the Law’ (*garr ‘yi*).

My second detailed example of sound patterns also involves a rhotic, in combination with several other sounds, in the case of the third person pronoun (he, she, him, her), which is recorded by Lissarrague as *nuu*, and the same form in slightly different representations by both Holmer and Threlkeld.¹⁷⁰ Threlkeld also wrote another form, *pirru*, for this pronoun. It might be thought that these two forms belong to different language varieties. But in the remastered sound files, I found more than one example of what initially sounded like *nuu*, but on closer listening could be clearly discerned as *pirruu*, as in line (1) of the Train Song. In this form the first vowel is so short as to be hardly there, sounding more like *pruuu*. But how could this sequence of sounds ever be perceived as *nuu*? My hypothesis about the sounds is that there are other words in which the trilled rhotic */rr/* shrinks from a trill to a single tap, by the tip of the tongue on the alveolar ridge (just behind the top teeth). This seems to be the case with the non-future ending on verbs like *ya-n* ‘going’, which in some of the audio tapes can be clearly heard as *ya-rrri*, with the final vowel almost silent, i.e. devoiced after the rhotic, which is reduced to a tap, which can sound like */n/*. How can that be? Because of where these sounds are made in the mouth. The rhotic tap and the nasal */n/* are made in exactly the same place in the mouth: by the tongue tip contacting the alveolar

¹⁷⁰ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 21-9.

ridge. The only difference is whether a small amount of air comes out through the nose, which can easily happen whichever of these two sounds is made. Again, this phenomenon needs more systematic investigation, but we have a reasonable basis for hypothesising that the rhotic /rr/ can have a variant pronunciation (allophone) that is a tap, sounding like /n/.

Now, we can start to see how *pirruu*, or *prruu* could sometimes sound like *pnuu*. If this hypothesis holds up, then it could reasonably be predicted that with the weakening or dropping of the vowel between /p/ and /n/, the combination /pn/ could be awkward enough to lead to the dropping off of the initial consonant, leaving only *nuu* as an alternative form for *pirruu*. This is only a hypothesis, and it may seem somewhat stretched to people who are not used to looking closely at the way neighbouring sounds influence and reshape each other. But it is something that I discovered through my own listening and vocal reproduction of the words and it does account for the two written variants of the third person pronoun. The hypothesis is worth considering, at the very least.

I consider that sustained use of English by Aboriginal people in New South Wales since the last fluent speakers passed from our communities has made it difficult to hear traditional sounds; essentially we hear with the sound filters that have become common to us. To this end any Aboriginal language described with the letters of the English alphabet must be carefully arranged to help us connect with our traditional sound patterns. For most Aboriginal people of my generation, English is our first and main language, and it is difficult not to hear through the filter of its sound patterns. But many of us do have our community lingo, our Aboriginal way of talking. Despite (or because of) its lower status than Standard English, many of our traditional sounds, and even grammar, are preserved and maintained in this form, for us to rediscover and reclaim.

Interpreting the meaning of words and stories from a language other than your own requires certain skills; one must develop the ability to hear all elements of speech patterns. In particular, for the languages of New South Wales one must learn to hear initial consonants, vowels, and word endings. Patterns of sound are not readily evident to the outsider. In this instance I consider myself a partial outsider. I was a child raised in a period when older Aboriginal community members freely communicated in the long forms of traditional language with the full vocabulary, but younger people spoke what can best be described as a more rudimentary or basic form, root words with some extensions, but not the full traditional forms.

5.3 Deep Roots of Language

An additional discovery during my language investigation has been that each part of a word has meaning. This makes sense in the context of the simplified forms of words and phrases that I picked up as a child. Many of these involved dropping of the rhotics, which are difficult for young children to master; so we learned *bitji* for ‘boy’, *butji* for ‘small’, *buki* for ‘tired’, rather than the full forms *birr* ‘yi, *burr* ‘yi, *burrki*. Other shortened forms included the base forms of verbs without their full suffixes, such as *ma-* ‘do’, *ya-* ‘go’, and shortened question words like *mi-* ‘what, where’. While this could be seen as a form of baby talk, or Child-Directed Speech as educators call it, it was also an effective way of preserving and transmitting the roots of our language. So effective, in fact, that forty years later this enabled me to discern these same roots at the centre of the longer words used by the older speakers in the recordings, and piece together the meanings of the roots and, more gradually, some of the suffixes. In the simplified or condensed form of the language, some suffixes were also

used as words, such as *-ga* ‘there’ (locative), *-ba* ‘at that place’ (also locative) and *-guu* ‘to’ (allative). The *ba* element, seen in many placenames, such as *Mulubin-ba* ‘sea-fern-place’ (Newcastle) is intuitively related to *barrayi* ‘land, country.’¹⁷¹ The form *guu* we thought of as associated with the English words *go* and *gone*, but historical evidence shows it was a suffix dating back to our ancestors’ languages long before the arrival of English.¹⁷²

As most New South Wales Aboriginal languages have not been spoken in their full traditional form for two or more generations, and they are overlaid by such a strong dominance of English, many people tend to discount or fail to notice and value these remaining roots of language that are still used within families. When people start talking together about their memories of traditional language, more and more of these roots or language elements come into the conversation. There is not always understanding of how they can fit together into a grammatical structure, but they are still alive, and they may offer important points of connection for people with traditional language heritage.¹⁷³

I have come to think of these roots of language as the core meanings that link with our basic shared experiences as human beings living in interaction with their environment. People who live near the sea will form (non-core) words for things like saltwater and crabs, while those living inland would never need or develop words for such things unless they visited a place where crabs exist. The core words, however, represent more basic meanings of movement and action; position and location; time and place. The application and extensions of these core meanings are drawn together into a language by a group of people who have

¹⁷¹ Maynard, *Awabakal Word Finder*; cf. *mulumun* ‘coast, seaside’ in Thangatti: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 152.

¹⁷² Cf. the dative/allative inflection *-gu*: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 14.

¹⁷³ Raymond F Kelly, “Remembered Words,” in *Nelson Aboriginal Studies*, Allison Cadzow and John Maynard (eds), 64-72 (Melbourne: Nelson Cengage, 2011).

coexisted for a period long enough to understand, and communicate with each other by words alone.

5.4 Keywords and Cultural Meanings

It is apparent that both written and oral historical accounts of the cultural activities of Aboriginal people, although written in English, almost always contain some important words in the relevant Aboriginal language. Primarily, this is because there are no equivalent English words to use in translation of distinctively and uniquely Aboriginal cultural concepts. One of the earlier written examples of this that I uncovered is the 1916 newspaper mention of the ‘Kippara’ ceremony discussed earlier.¹⁷⁴ Anna Wierzbicka noted that in the field of crosslinguistic and crosscultural semantics is that it appears that every human cultural group has its own unique set of ‘keywords’ for their core cultural concepts.¹⁷⁵

These keywords, like *Keepara*, are highly complex and culturally-specific in their meanings, and understanding these complex cultural meanings is essential to understanding and membership of ‘a culture’ or cultural group. They are often regarded as untranslatable, because to adequately convey their meaning to someone from outside the cultural group requires a thorough explanation, more than a single word or phrase of translation.

Indeed, this unique set of conceptual artefacts and associated keywords may be identifiable as the linguistic core of culture; that is, the core of knowledge that is shared by members of a cultural group and that distinguishes them from other cultural groups. The Glossary section at the beginning of this thesis is, in effect, a list of keywords that I find essential to an

¹⁷⁴ *Australian Aborigines Advocate*, 30 September 1916

¹⁷⁵ Anna Wierzbicka, *Understanding Cultures Through Their Keywords: English, Russian, Polish, German, and Japanese* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997).

adequate discussion of the cultural perspectives and knowledge that are the subject matter of this thesis, some of those words I have already discussed and others that are relevant to this work are presented here.

Muyi (or Moy) is the Thangatti word for a type of stone arrangement that senior people would occupy during times of regional councils. I became aware of this detail whilst visiting a stone arrangement situated on a ridge line close to Lake Cattai (or Cathie) near Forster with my late father. The layout and construction was built to represent the spawning nest of the Australian catfish who build large nests up to a meter in diameter with small stones and gravel, within which the eggs are laid with one parent, sometimes both, guarding the eggs until they hatch.¹⁷⁶ In the contemporary setting I utilise the word *Muyi* to describe the framework for any gathering or formal speech event that supports communal interaction. These forums could include family and tribal gatherings, though to regional, state and national conferences and symposia. The cultural concept is that of a protected place where something valuable is generated.

The layers of meaning of this term became apparent one afternoon on the Nulla Nulla creek about ten kilometres from the Bellbrook reserve. My father had taken me and two of my brothers spearing and fishing for a feed of mullet and I recall seeing a catfish patrolling the waters around a stone circle in the water. My father explained to us that it was considered taboo for people to take a catfish whilst a *muyi* was present in the same stretch of water, built over a two or three week period, catfish nests can be found in most river systems in Australia. Dad recounted about a boy that had actually speared a catfish at the wrong time and was severely reprimanded by his elders about this cultural oversight, apparently

¹⁷⁶ Enright “The Kattang,” 77 mentions the catfish, but not the word *Muyi*.

the young boy hadn't noticed the stone circles in the water. He went on to say that all animals have this period of freedom and whilst they are mating you could only take the old males of the species. He said the old people called this period the 'time of making plenty' or *Gaiyiyai*, which literally means that there is something there, perhaps from *ga* 'there', *-yi* 'be', *-ayi* possibly a reduplication indicating an ongoing state of something being there.¹⁷⁷

My drive to probe into the deeper meanings, the conceptual and cultural semantics, of words like these comes from an intuition shared with, and perhaps shaped by, my father's intellectual thirst for our own Aboriginal cultural meanings and conceptual heritage. I intend to pursue this line of research in future language work, experimenting with the NSM (Natural Semantic Metalanguage) approach to unpacking complex cultural meanings into semantically simpler components.¹⁷⁸ It is possible that some of the 'roots' of language from my early experience may be key components of meaning. The NSM approach also offers useful tools for understanding words and grammatical elements that have multiple meanings.

Every nation and group of people in the world have established and maintained some form of arrangement for education and training of the younger people of their communities. This is historically true for the Thangatti. In traditional times these educational and teaching spaces were called a *Yingu*, or place of passing through (possibly from *yi* 'be', *-ngu* 'through', as seen in the song in Chapter Four). Each student after successfully passing through each phase of learning would be afforded a new sense of belonging and responsibility to family, clan and tribe. Each student would be assigned a *Thupara*,

¹⁷⁷ That is, what anthropologists refer to as totemic increase sites and ceremonies.

¹⁷⁸ Cliff Goddard, with Anna Wierzbicka, *Words and Meanings: Lexical Semantics Across Domains, Languages, and Cultures*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014; For highly abstract concepts, rigorous semantic analysis of this kind appears to be the only way around the 'untranslatability' problems tentatively explored in James Wafer, "Semantics of 'Soul' in the Hunter River-Lake Macquarie Language," (paper presented at Group for Religious and Intellectual Traditions (GRIT), University of Newcastle, 21 June 2011); Kelly, "Remembered Words."

champion or mentor, who would assist them through each phase of growth. This word is known to me only by hearing it from older men in my boyhood and I have not found it documented anywhere. Its structure appears plausible, if derived from *thupi* 'knowing, knowledgeable' plus *-ra* 'that one'. These words relate to the joining of people into a single grouping as *Keepara* 'together they are' (possibly from *kay* 'together', *-ba* 'at a place', *-ra* 'that one / those ones').

The reintroduction, maintenance and control of our traditional knowledge must be placed back into the hands of the Aboriginal community and educational institutions they control. Traditional educational words and concepts as explained above could form the basis for the leadership model of this modern day movement. The roles and responsibilities of non-Aboriginal academics in these newly formed cultural spaces should be decided by a peer review group that comprises an elders group and *Garrkung* senior Aboriginal academics. *Maraynggul Gurri* people should always retain majority representation in all facets of community working parties. The development of age specific language teaching programs is essential for all parts of the community, including younger learners and those who would be eligible for adult education programs.

These deep cultural words and meanings reflect a rich and complex set of intellectual and educational concepts that are still accessible to us today. I am convinced that Aboriginal people across Australia will in the future recapture the essence and the spirit of the *Keepara*. Together we must join forces across the various political landscapes. We must not allow ourselves to act as the cultural gate-keepers of each other's affairs. We must dare to dream and to share.

5.5 Language Contact and Change

The clues to this language description are derived in part from linguistic memory that existed in my community in the 1960s. Aboriginal people from communities across the state of New South Wales have a degree of this residual memory. It is maintained through a mixture of traditional language and English. Some refer to it as Aboriginal English:

Aboriginal English is the name given to dialects of English which are spoken by Aboriginal people and which differ from Standard English in systematic ways. The historical development of Aboriginal English is fascinating because it demonstrates how Aboriginal people have adapted their ways of communicating to English.¹⁷⁹

Rather than Aboriginal English I prefer to identify it as ‘Crossover Language’ and the people who retain knowledge of this phenomenon are a group of people I call ‘crossover speakers’. As sociolinguist Diana Eades asserts, ‘Aboriginal English plays an important role in the maintenance and assertion of Aboriginal identity’.¹⁸⁰ This hybrid language retained and preserved much of the traditional sound system, and some features of grammar and word order of the first languages of the country. Many traditional words were and still are part of this crossover language.¹⁸¹ I often recall the lingo or language being used around me when I was a child as being different English, which tragically would often be described by those interested in assimilation as being ‘poor English,’ ‘broken English’ or ‘backward talk’. Over the past eight years, my own memories have been supported through listening to the

¹⁷⁹ Diana K. Eades, *Aboriginal Ways of Using English* (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2013), 79.

¹⁸⁰ Eades, *Aboriginal Ways*, 81.

¹⁸¹ An Aboriginal linguist’s perspective on this is provided here: Jeanie Bell, “Linguistic Continuity in Colonised Country.” In *Language and Native Title*, ed. John Henderson and David Nash, 43-52 (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2002) and Robyn Ober, and Jeanie Bell. “English Language as Juggernaut – Aboriginal English and Indigenous Languages in Australia,” in *English Language as Hydra: Its Impact on Non-English Language Cultures*, ed. Vaughan Rapatahana and Pauline Bunce, pp. 60-75 (Bristol: Multilingual Matters, 2014). There is still concern over the marginalisation of these Aboriginal ways of talking in schools: Juanita Sellwood and Denise Angelo, “Everywhere and Nowhere: Invisibility of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Contact Languages in Education and Indigenous Language Contexts,” *Australian Review of Applied Linguistics* Vol. 36, No. 3 (2013), 250-66.

recordings of traditional speakers from various language communities across New South Wales, and have provided a powerful and unexpected set of tools for unlocking traditional language knowledge. There is a clear continuity from that time; this is the language that encodes residual memory. It is the language that was formed when a cultural impact occurred between two linguistic structures – in this instance the English of the invaders and the traditional Indigenous language(s) of the people and their homeland. In this case I am identifying the mutual impact of Thangatti and English.

Examples of how this crossover language would be conveyed are as follows: a question in my community about someone who has left town would be expressed this way: *Billy... where that fulla gone?* And the answer would be: *He went away downtown, he did.* Here we see some of the word order and grammatical structure transferred from the Aboriginal languages. The question begins not with the question word but with the topic of the question (Billy), with the noun phrase *that fulla* referring back to him. The verb *gone*, like traditional verb forms, indicates past time but has no auxiliary. In the answer, *away* makes the direction of motion explicit, as it would be in the traditional verb form. The second clause (*he did*) may reflect the traditional phrase *uwarr' uwa* 'he did do'.

Among the traditional words retained in crossover language is the word *dhukun*, an adjective that means poor or pitiable: we might say 'poor *dhukun* blackfulla can't get it right', which carries the internalised negative stereotype of Aboriginals as failures. Or more sympathetically, 'he's a real *dhukun* fulla that fulla' used to express empathy for someone who suffers bad luck or is clumsy.¹⁸² *Buki*, another adjective that means lonely, sad, weary

¹⁸² Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 133.

or tired, could be used as ‘You make me *buki*’ meant that you are sapping the strength from me, or ‘I am too *buki* to do it’ means that I am feeling lethargic or unmotivated.

There are many other traditional words that have survived the colonisation, dispossession and the fragmentation of families and communities. However, many of these words have undergone a metamorphosis (meaning they have changed from their original importance) to something not resembling its original form, whatever the circumstances for these changes. It is my firm opinion that we can never fully appreciate or understand that original cultural landscape that our ancestors created and live in until those words are reclaimed, reinstated or at the very least understood. Some still used words and meanings demonstrate a possible alteration to their original meaning, as recorded in archival sources. And whilst I cannot give a definitive answer of why these changes have crept in, I will share some theories on the changes. I will argue that these changes to language are directly associated with the loss of community and cultural structure.

The words *muna* and *duna* are used by some Thangatti speakers to describe females and males; a number of north coast families used *muni* for a little girl and a little boy was called *duni*.¹⁸³ Today a number of women aged in their late 40s who come from the Mid North Coast of New South Wales are still called *mun*. In my youth these words became distorted and often were used out of context and inappropriately, often as a highly disrespectful way of referring to a woman. This misuse has sadly resulted in a genuine fear that we would be immoral and corrupt by reintroducing these words back into our languages, a change that would not have occurred without the changes wrought by colonisation.

¹⁸³ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 152 has only *muna* girl, woman’.

As the current Thangatti database stands, *dhuni* is being used to identify the Sun.¹⁸⁴ I contend that this is due to promotion of a European view of the universe, in opposition to traditional portrayal of the sun as an old woman, *mayiyu*, and the moon as a young man, *girrthayin*.¹⁸⁵ A recent finding demonstrates that during the 1960s a senior woman of the Thangatti on being asked how she would say in her language ‘the sun is setting – the sun is going down’ replied, ‘*parrayi yayirri – duni* goes down’. I would argue that the first sentence is unadulterated traditional language, and the second sentence is an accommodation of English, and the translation means ‘Across the land, sun goes down’. The first clause has traditional grammar: a subjectless clause because the subject is understood; *parrayi* is ‘land’ and *yay-irri* is ‘going across’ (or ‘becoming gone’). The second clause is in English except for *duni*, which may have been substituted for *mayiyu* on the basis of the English homophone (*sun/son*). This kind of language mixing is not unusual in bilingual speakers, but it can be misconstrued by monolingualists.

Another example of a word used with changed meaning is *thupi* (knowledgeable) that is, one who knows. In the Dhanggati dictionary this is represented by *dhupiyn* ‘know, understand’ but many present-day speakers associate it with English words ‘dopey’, ‘stupid’, that is, the opposite of its real meaning.¹⁸⁶ This may have come about through a combination of sound association plus a tradition of antonymy in slang (as with ‘deadly’ and ‘wicked’ used to mean something good), but whatever the origins, it has an unfortunate negative effect for some.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁴ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 133 has *dhunuwi*.

¹⁸⁵ Lissarrague has these as *mayu* and *gitayn*: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 140; 143.

¹⁸⁶ Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 134.

¹⁸⁷ Cf. Hale, Kenneth L. “A Note on a Walbiri Tradition of Antonymy,” in *Semantics: An Interdisciplinary Reader in Philosophy, Linguistics and Psychology*, ed. D.D. Steinberg and L.A. Jakobovits (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1971), 742-82.

Further muddying the waters, some traditional words have come into English in a form that may be misinterpreted as slang. Many Australian children, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, during the 1970s and 1980s used the word *uwaa*. It usually followed an accident where a child might be worried about getting into trouble for doing something wrong, for example if a window was broken, another child might say: ‘Oohwa you did it... I’m telling mum or dad on you.’ My hypothesis is that this comes from the strong affirmative form *uwa* in several of the traditional languages; and that this is a shortened form of the verb *uwarr*’ in the sound files, the basic meaning of this verb being to do or to make something; the extension of meaning is to affirm that something can be taken as done. In this strong affirmative sense, something like ‘indeed’, it is more than simply *yuu* ‘yes’.

Finally, a discussion of language contact would be incomplete without recognition of how the coloniser language could be used as a potent cultural weapon. Words that are used to ridicule and discriminate can have drastic and long lasting consequences, when they are used by one group to separate, marginalise and discriminate against another group. Offensive and derogatory terms including Abo, boong, black savage and nigger were all too commonly used in the playground of the school that I attended during the late 1960s. Inside the classroom, descriptions and classifications such as ‘hunters and gatherers’ and ‘wandering nomads’ served to alienate Indigenous students like myself and position us on the fringe of the cultural landscape that White Australians were promoting as a progressive and modern Australia.

Direct and indirect verbal attacks of these kinds, coupled with belittling of ancient languages and complete silence on the subject of our intellectual traditions were weapons in a culture war: weapons that could do great harm, but also backfire by stimulating cultural resistance

and resilience. Some of the controversies and troubled feelings about language in our families and communities may be related to this kind of verbal warfare. These negative words and the attitudes they expressed encouraged feelings of inadequacy and defensiveness around matters of language, culture, and identity, coupled with the wrenching grief of dispossession and dislocation from land, livelihood, language, family members, and cultural activities, have rendered language contentious. Language seems to divide rather than unite us; many feel wary of looking deeply into the meanings of some of our traditional words. Yet at the same time, language and our people's interest in it has not gone away, and there are grassroots initiatives everywhere to reclaim and renew pride in our languages.

5.6 Re-Valuing NSW Language Heritage

It is evident based on the available language data, and the power of culturally informed listening to re-awaken dormant language knowledge and understanding that the previously accepted notion that traditional languages as dead or dying is unsustainable and inarguable. Those promoting that view have no comprehension of the will that Aboriginal people have displayed in efforts to maintain our inherent right to our country, our stories and our ways. I believe my work demonstrates that what Shoonkley Kelly called 'residual cultural memory' can be reclaimed and re-valued as our resilient cultural knowledge. To do this effectively, however, we will need to work together in ways that build unity rather than perpetuating fragmentation.

All language is communicated in a communal form. The statement I am making is clearly that the old people had said that the language spoken at the Macleay River area in the north reaching down to the southern side of Sydney is the same language. A number of people will

tell you that cannot be true based on comparisons of a very limited range of lexical material. Clearly, as the evidence reveals, I am not the first person to make this claim. The early missionary on the shores of Lake Macquarie, Reverend Lancelot Threlkeld, was an avid observer and recorder of Aboriginal language. Threlkeld in reporting to the New South Wales Legislative Council in 1837 stated that the language spoken between the Hunter River and Sydney was the same language.¹⁸⁸ Others like William Scott, Walter Enright, John Fraser and Robert Dawson supported Threlkeld's findings.¹⁸⁹ Dawson for his part went further, saying the language spoken between the Hawkesbury and Port Macquarie was one and the same.¹⁹⁰

These early observations were not based on any rigorous or broad scientific process of systematic comparison, and were subsequently downplayed for that reason. However, they were informed by what these inquirers were told by various Aboriginal people with whom they discussed language matters. These views were given some credence by the frequently observed travels of Aboriginal people throughout this region, including the reasonably well

¹⁸⁸ Lancelot E. Threlkeld, William Watson, and James Gunther. *New South Wales, Aborigines, Reports of the Mission to the Aborigines at Lake Macquarie, and at Wellington Valley* (Sydney: Colonial Secretary's Office, 1837); Lancelot E. Threlkeld, *An Australian Grammar: Comprehending the Principles and Natural Rules of the Language as Spoken by the Aborigines in the Vicinity of Hunter's River, Lake Macquarie, &c. New South Wales* (Sydney: Stephens and Stokes, 1834), xi.

¹⁸⁹ William Scott, "The Port Stephens Blacks: The Recollections of William Scott (prepared by Gordon Bennett)," *The Dungog Chronicle*, December 24th, 1928, 1; Enright, "The Initiation," "The language," "The Kattang," "Further Notes."; John Fraser, "The Aborigines of New South Wales," *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales for the Year 1882* No. 16 (1882), 193-233 and "Some Remarks on the Australian Languages," *Journal and Proceedings of the Royal Society of New South Wales for 1890* No. 24 (1890), 231-53. William Scott, born Port Stephens, 1844 was connected to the Australian Agricultural Company. Scott felt the need to record the relevant information on the Worimi clans and customs because he saw them as disappearing under the might and influence of Western colonisation. Walter John Enright was absorbed in the study of geology and the environment. In his youth, Enright was associated with some local Aborigines of the Hunter Valley and Port Stephens region of New South Wales, which generated the beginnings of a genuine curiosity in their traditional culture. Robert Dawson was the first Chief Agent of the Australian Agricultural Company and was also a keen observer of Aboriginal cultural practices around Port Stephens. John Fraser, a Fellow of the Royal Society of New South Wales, re-arranged, condensed and edited Threlkeld's earlier works as *An Australian Language as spoken by the Awabakal the people of Awaba or Lake Macquarie* in 1892.

¹⁹⁰ Robert L. Dawson, *The Present State of Australia: A Description of the Country, its Advantages and Prospects, with Reference to Emigration; and a Particular Account of the Manners, Customs, and Condition of its Aboriginal Inhabitants* (London: Smith & Elder, 1830), 336.

documented movements of people like Birabahn, Bungaree, Bennelong, Willemering and Pemulwuy, who were seen to communicate readily with various groups of Aboriginal people across a wide area.¹⁹¹ We do not know how much of this was due to the multilingualism and/or multidialectalism that were prevalent through so much of Aboriginal Australia, and how much was due to similarity or unity among the language(s) of this part of New South Wales. We do know, however, that the relationships among language varieties are viewed quite differently from the perspective of speakers themselves, than from the technical viewpoint of historical linguistics.¹⁹²

In this study I have provided another way of looking at the language material based on tapes recorded during the 1960s and 1970s combined with examining historical material. There is written evidence of large gatherings of Aboriginal people about 1850 in Singleton. There were over four hundred men attending a major *Keepara* and one of these groups is clearly identified as being from the Macleay Valley. Mr. H. O. White was invited by the Chairman of the Maitland Scientific Society, Mr. W. J. Enright, to read a paper that he had prepared entitled “Recollections of Aborigines of New South Wales in the years 1848-49-50.” In his opening address Mr. White stated that he had grown up, in the Hunter Valley and was born within two miles on the southern side of Singleton in November of 1831 and recounted his memories of sizeable gatherings:

¹⁹¹ Birabahn travelled as far north as the Port Macquarie, where he was known as *Bilabang*, meaning his totemic identity of Eaglehawk, but also ‘policeman’, possibly with reference to his role in tracking escaped convict: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 123; Niel Gunson, “Biraban (McGill),” *Australian Dictionary of Biography* Vol. 1, 102-4 (Carlton: Melbourne University Press, 1966).

¹⁹² For the latter, see Clare Bown and Harold Koch. *Australian Languages: Classification and the Comparative Method* (Amsterdam: John Benjamins, 2004); James Wafer and Amanda Lissarrague. *A Handbook of Aboriginal Languages of New South Wales and the Australian Capital Territory* (Nambucca Heads: Aboriginal Language and Culture Co-operative: 2008) give as clear and balanced account as possible of linguists’ current understanding of the historical relationships among the languages of New South Wales. A new computational method for assessing similarity across wordlists in Caroline Jones and Shawn Laffen, “Lexical Similarity and Endemism in Historical Wordlists of Australian Aboriginal Languages of the Greater Sydney Region,” *Transactions of the Philological Society* Vol. 106, No. 3 (2008), 456-86.

I remember them as a boy being very numerous about Singleton then known as Patricks Plains. They often visited my father's place, Greenwood. I have a distinct remembrance of a large corroboree taking place on the banks of the Hunter [river] in one of Mr. Howes paddocks, somewhere near where the bridge now stands on the Westbrook road, There must have been close to 400, if not, more present. They were not all Hunter blacks: the Macleay [river] and Manning [river] tribes helped to make up the number. It was a common occurrence in those days for adjoining tribes to meet, and make these demonstrations, some of them having the appearance of warlike exercises, while others partook more of the character of comedy. What was their object? I have never learnt.¹⁹³

People did not operate in isolation. Aboriginal people were very mobile both with trade and ceremonial obligations, and were clearly able to communicate effectively during these meetings and gatherings.

This original language investigation based on primary audio material will reveal a more unified language space than that recorded by ethnologists such as Norman B. Tindale who led the 1938-39 joint Harvard-Adelaide universities' anthropological expedition, conducting research over many regions across the Australian continent. In 1940 he produced a map

¹⁹³ White presented this paper to the Maitland Scientific Society on the 19th of August 1895 and was later published in *Mankind*: Henry O'S. White, "Some Recollections of the Aborigines of New South Wales in the Years 1848, 1849 and 1850," *Mankind* Vol. 1, No. 9 (May 1934), 223-27; Many observers of Aboriginal life in the region, both amateur and professional, commented on the vigour and importance of these gatherings, and the large numbers of participants who gathered for them; for just a few examples, see Enright, "The Initiation Ceremonies", Frederick A. Fitzpatrick, "A Week on the Macleay: The Early Settlement of the Upper Macleay," *The Port Macquarie News and Hastings River Advocate*, June 2nd 1928, 1- 3, the body of work of Robert H. Mathews (1893-7) and B. McKiernan, "Some notes on the Aborigines of the Lower Hunter River, New South Wales," *Anthropos* Vol. 6, (1911), 885-92. See also Valerie Attenbrow, *Sydney's Aboriginal Past: Investigating the Archaeological and Historical Records* (Sydney: University of NSW Press, 2010).

showing the distribution of the Aboriginal Tribes of Australia as he saw it.¹⁹⁴ With his mindset constrained by the system of political boundaries of the European nation-state, he produced a hugely influential image of lines on a map dividing Aboriginal ‘tribes’ off from one another, in place of the reality of adjacent groups with mutually permeable and constantly renegotiable areas of shared responsibility, meeting and exchange. This is at least partially remedied in the current AIATSIS Aboriginal Languages Map, with fuzzy boundary areas in place of rigid lines, but the damage was already done.¹⁹⁵ Our dislocated and dispossessed Aboriginal groups latched on to a European reimagining of their own country as like individual European principalities with defined and hotly defended borders and hostilities, both territorial and social. Thus was the reality of our shared multilingual/multidialectal heritage fragmented into disunity, just as our population was cast aside and dispersed.

It is a tragedy that such a position of dislocation exists around language today. Aboriginal groups currently suffer from harmful misconceptions about the nature and extent of their language heritage, haunted by the fears that our languages are lost to us forever, that there is little or nothing left to us – and little or nothing to stand as proof against the colonisers’ assertions that our languages and our thoughts were primitive, that we had little or nothing to begin with. The richness and depth of the language material in the sound files stand in absolute opposition to this view. If we can overcome our fragmentation and dislocation, and unite to embrace this wealth of our multilingual and multidialectal heritage, we could banish these fears for good, and hand on to our grandchildren a pride and confidence in the wealth

¹⁹⁴ Norman B. Tindale, *Tribal Boundaries in Aboriginal Australia* [Map], Tribal boundaries drawn by Winifred Mumford on a base map produced by the Division of National Mapping, Dept. of National Development (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1974).

¹⁹⁵ David Horton, *Aboriginal Australia Map*, 1996 <http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/culture/topic/language-map/>

and continuity of linguistic, intellectual and cultural achievement inherited from past generations.

I am convinced that the foundation and roots of all Aboriginal languages in New South Wales will in time be found to originate from a single ancestor language; it is the 'same language' in every sense that matters for communication and cooperation among Aboriginal people of this region, past and present. Another formulation by an older speaker is 'same language, different talk'. In the multilingual and multidialectal reality of traditional Aboriginal life, people were comfortable with recognising underlying unities in language and cultural practices, along with respectful recognition and honouring of each local group and clan's linguistic and cultural distinctiveness. There are perhaps some dialectal differences that we may never understand, but to reconstruct language on paper without consulting language databases within close proximity to the language under reconstruction would be improper and a disservice to Aboriginal people.

This viewpoint on language unity is controversial, but it is not intended to be divisive or to trivialise the valuable and distinct contributions of each distinct Aboriginal language group in this space; it is firmly based on the views of our forebears, and supported to some degree by historical records. I assert that it is also an Indigenous view, not to be confused with or necessarily in conflict with to the comparative method in modern linguistic research. Instead of wasting energy on unproductive arguments over language boundaries and differences, our Aboriginal educational groups, research institutes and community controlled language groups must continue to hold governments responsible for ongoing support of programs that support Aboriginal language renewal and revival. Local and regional educational forums delivering across a broad range of community activities and interests can support and be

supported by individual commitment to change: to re-value and re-engage with the full richness of our living and shared heritage.

5.7 Concluding Illustration

I conclude this chapter with a song text that illustrates and brings together many of the themes explored in the preceding sections. In the earliest extensive documentation of the language of this region, Threlkeld wrote down many of the traditional longer forms and their sounds as he perceived them, and yet people have moved away from his work because that wasn't what they were hearing, leaving an interesting space and in order for me to draw it together I am going to sing a song. This was a popular song among the Thangatti people of Bellbrook in the 1960s. It's actually a song that's been remembered and the old people all sang it. It is important because it's a song that speaks about the pass-out from initiation and celebrates the concept of a passage through an educational process. It also accords with some of Threlkeld's early observations about language, and illustrates the process of piecing together words and meanings in cultural context.

The song opens with '*Gurri Girri – Gurri* (people) *Girri* (gather) *gurri girri yayn gurri*' – all you people come together. Threlkeld identified the word *yan* which I represent as *yayn* (with the long *ay* making it sound like 'yen') meaning all or everybody (possibly from *ya-yi-n* 'travel-WHILE-NonFuture' giving a sense of everybody travelling to come together). *Maraywun*, in the next line of the song, means to be educated, sometimes translated as 'clever', but without any of the superficial connotations of that term. *Maraywun* relates to a concept of education, which I am investigating further, derived from *maray* which indicates something like the inner part of a person that can learn and progress intellectually and

spiritually; *-wun* is a suffix indicating an individual. The song celebrates the completion of a process of educational progression, and dissemination of information, incorporating the selection of singers and dancers, the selection of people to do things, to be the leaders, to be the instructors. Such a celebration can only exist if people actually uphold the concept of education, so traditional Law has to be put into its right context. It's not a mythic spiritual journey, even though there is an element of this in its process of transmitting information.

This connects with one of the things that my father often spoke to me about in the early 1970s, when I was just entering my teens, he'd argue that "we need these processes like transaction analysis" – transaction analysis and consciousness-raising were catch cries of enlightened thinking in the 1960s and 1970s. Frankly, this talk terrified me as I was unready at that point in my life to engage with any intellectual or educational notions. At the time I had no idea of what he meant by transaction analysis and my disastrous experience of school at that time only intensified my resistance. But I know full well today what he meant in terms of honest communication of feelings and ideas, and openness to the fullness of our human potential. My study involves analysis of communication, guided by a need to find an Indigenous basis and methodology for the transfer of knowledge.

I am going to present this song *Gurri girri* as a celebration of the educational process, traditional and contemporary. It is as if I need to sing this, to mark this stage in a journey of learning. I need to present a young man to his community; he's just returned from out in the bush. He is painted with a white mark and has a feather in his headband. Whatever it is, that describes his matriculation by those senior people around him and they are celebrating. In the documentation of this song from material made available to me by Amanda Lissarrague, this is clearly designated as a public song that was still well known and sung in the 1960s. It

is a public welcoming of young ones on their return from their passage through The Rules.¹⁹⁶

Passing-Out Song (full text)

Gurri girri yayn gurri, yayn gurri
Buurri gan girr' thuwun gayi gan maraywaa-aan
Gurri girri yayn gurri, yayn gurri
Buurri gan girr' thuwun gayi gan maraywaa-aan
Woo oo! Girr' thuwun gayi yan maraywun
Gurri girri yayn gurri, yayn gurri
Buurri gan girr' thuwun gayi gan maraywaa-aan

My current understanding yields the following line-by-line analysis. The first two lines are repeated before line (3), and again after it.

(1) **Gurri girri yayn gurri, yayn gurri!**

people gather all people all people

People, come together, all you fullas, all you fullas!

(2) **Buurri ga-n! Girr'thu-wun gayi ga-n maray-waa-aan.**

paint be-NonFut man knowledgeable-one something.there be-NonFut educated-one

Style up! This man here has been passed through The Rules.

(3) **Woo-oo! Girr'thu-wun gayi ya-n maray-wun.**

(chorus) man knowledgeable-one something there go-NonFut educated-one

Rejoice! This man here has gone through The Rules.

¹⁹⁶ Holmer, Field Tape , 1964.

The free translations contain some Crossover Lingo or Aboriginal English to more clearly convey a fuller sense of the cultural meaning. In the first line, *girri* may derive from *gi* ‘like’ (i.e. similar) and *-irri* ‘become’, that is, come together in the same place; *yayn* has been discussed above. In the second line, painting up or ‘stylin’ up’ is an important part of preparing for celebration. *Gayi* was discussed in the section on cultural keywords. The extension at the end of *maray-waa-aan* is a metrical feature following from the melodic structure. The parallel structure of lines 2 and 3 are noticeable, with small variations adding stylistic interest.

In analysing recorded tapes and songs I have come across many deeper aspects of culture, including language, delivered through stories. One such story when first recorded was called *Goorakin* and it was described by Mr. Len Duckett as being about a stick insect. So on first hearing *Gurri girri* on a poorer quality tape, I assumed this was *Goorakin*, and identified it in my database as the word for stick insect.¹⁹⁷ This was partly because the rhotic in *girri* was pronounced so rapidly that it sounded like the alveolar nasal /n/, as in the process described above in the section on sounds. Initially I had no real sense of what the story was about, other than it was a dance performed made famous by Mr. Gilbert Duckett. The song was produced in two distinct recordings sung by Mr. Tim Holten. During a recording session Mr. Len Duckett, tells the recorder, Janet Bolt, that he knows the dance but not the song, because he ‘couldn’t catch it’. The song was also recorded by Nils Holmer, around 1964 at Bellbrook.

¹⁹⁷ I remember from childhood a word for stick insect sounding like *piranya*, but have not yet found this word documented anywhere.

There are two distinct versions of this *Gurri girri* song, including one by Mr. Lachlan Vale, and there is much more to be investigated in the sound files. Because the stick insect or praying mantis is of great traditional significance, cultural caution and has caused some to practice avoidance around even the ‘open’ or public oral traditions associated with it. For now, I would argue that the significance of one senior man holding the knowledge of the song, and another holding knowledge of the dance, needs to be recognised as evidence that there are clearly defined roles and responsibilities in the cultural presentations of dance and song.

Returning to the word *maraywun*, we can see the difficulty in recapturing its proper cultural meaning. Tracing its occurrences in the broader language database demonstrates the usefulness of considering all available sources. This word is clearly important among the Thangatti and a lot of those people who are recorded as being members of the *Keepara* in 1935 are identified as being ‘*Marawun*’, and the old people, my great-grandfather and others would say that means they were ‘put through The Rules’. When I was thirteen I was put through a process and received knowledge of my passage through. The only other written example of the word I have found is from Threlkeld. He writes of a ‘*midji murawin*’ which is recognisable as what I would transcribe as *mirri maraywun*. This means a domesticated dog, as contrasted with a wild dingo. *Mirri* is the word for ‘dog’ throughout much of this region, and *maraywun* indicates having gone through a process of education, that is, a trained or educated dog. There are some intuitively accessible semantic links here, but further research into the conceptual structure of these complex cultural concepts, using the kind of triangulation suggested above together with a semantic methodology for unpacking meanings, seems to be the only way to get at the true cultural meaning.

So when we look at this example we see differing perceptions, spellings, and representations of the language material, but we can also see the connections that suggest an underlying conceptual unity. I am hoping through this study to make a clear and sound effort to bring these varying perceptions together; to point the way to bringing these separate language sources and groups of people back together so that the material can not only be shared but can be cross-referenced. Following on from this study I propose to make a secondary deposit with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS), so that my transcriptions will go back with the remixed audio files to be made available for future research through AIATSIS, along with cross-references drawing Threlkeld's material and other relevant sources into the mix.

Chapter 6

Conclusions

The study as stated at the outset encompasses three interlocking forms: an exegesis, an oral presentation and a performance drama. They are all different in their different ways and yet argue for a language and cultural revival that is cross-referenced and integrated across the state of New South Wales and ultimately the whole continent, directed primarily by Aboriginal elders and seniors with an articulated knowledge of Law, custom and the traditional educational process as a whole.

6.1 Displacement and Continuity

Prior to contact with other people's worlds, Aboriginal people had for many thousands of years developed and practised a highly sophisticated form of citizenship, leadership and governance. These structures of authority extended through family kinship, which could extend for thousands of miles. The detail of this intricate knowledge was embedded within traditional songlines and stories. In the period or dimension called the Dreamtime, Ancestral Beings travelled across every valley and plain, every mountain and every river. The intimate details of historical journeys were honoured and protected by those senior men and women who in their youth would have travelled along aspects of each traditional pathway. Understanding the implication and power behind the ideology that occurs when these songlines intersect would only be shared with those who were deemed ready to uphold the values and principles that originated at these points of contact.

The lack of freedom and movement for Aboriginal people to continue engaging with and participate in the retelling of these cultural pathways, has led to a powerful sense of isolation and deprivation from our basic human rights. We have been bound by the policy of White Australia and denied equity when it comes to the recasting of an Australian Identity. The image of Bullroarers and the hair-pin has been completely overshadowed by the stockwhip and the Akubra hat and *Garr'yi*, the act of behaving appropriately, fairly and honestly has now been voiced by contemporary Australians as being 'True Blue' or 'fair dinkum.'

Intellectual freedom is an ideal that Aboriginal people must continue to strive for. We must be the determiners of our own destiny and half measures will not do. We cannot allow ourselves to be stereotyped and treated as objects for display or entertainment. Cultural expression and the intellectual property that it provides must be protected against misuse and abuse. Within the meta-database comprising the many and varied documentations and representations of Aboriginal languages in New South Wales are the valuable tools for much broader and deeper anthropological, linguistic and other cultural studies. Defining and detailing the potency and properties contained within the data is the responsibilities of Aboriginal people. Drawing from and building upon our history we have to reinvigorate the political voice of Aboriginal people in New South Wales. Ours is not a campaign for land rights alone, we need language rights: without language how can we truly fight for land?

Our surviving elders and those who have gone before us witnessed the horrors and misery that followed the invasion of our traditional lands. Displacement, control and degradation are the by-products of the ethnocentric colonial mind. Many of these forebears have been our greatest champions. Their spirited and determined campaigns carried out over prolonged periods of time gave rise to the attitudinal change of Governments and delivered the

opportunities that we enjoy today. It is our responsibility to seek out and forge new political platforms and assemblies at all levels of community – locally, regionally, state and nationally. We must lift each other up and celebrate our survival.

However, some important questions remain: How do we rediscover the historical pathways that carried language to every corner? What are the influences that have altered and changed our perception of the strength and power that at one time held our communities together? *Keepara* embodies and enacts this coming together. Where today are the gatherings that were formed during the 1960s and 70s, leading on from those of the 1930s and before? Are we accepting that we have everything we need to maintain a cultural presence and future, or are we accepting assimilation as a *fait accompli*? Co-existence does not mean separatism; it means that we can become our own leaders, scholars, doctors, engineers and inventors, standing as equals among our peers throughout the world.

6.2 Reviewing the Journey

This research has been a long and winding road through a rich and varied terrain of historical, personal, family, political, cultural and linguistic dimensions, in search of an understanding of intellectual heritage through language and ways of carrying that forward. It is worth reflecting here on what each part of the foregoing has contributed to this quest.

After sketching out the nature and framework for this inquiry in the first chapter, I provided in Chapter Two a review of those works that calibrated against my own life experiences, research and reflection, including the Thangatti and Gathang language scholars, in particular Mr. Doug Scott, Mr. Len Duckett and Mr. Eddie Lobban, whose memories and language

skills have provided the scaffolding that has allowed me to develop an overall understanding of language coverage and distribution. Ray Shoonkley Kelly wrote with honesty, dignity and determination and his straightforward approach set out to challenge the white authority in the ivory tower to reconsider their methods and their findings. He fulfilled a commitment to working with Elders to preserve traditional knowledge of Aboriginal sites of significance in New South Wales, as well as making a lasting contribution to the maintenance of traditional Aboriginal knowledge and its return to the people who rightfully own it. In addition, Howard Creamer gave exceptional insight into the tremendous work of those involved in the preservation of Aboriginal cultural knowledge.

Historian Heather Goodall's careful research brought together a hitherto scattered body of knowledge that provided the means to break free of the isolation created by Government-led division of Aboriginal communities. She demonstrated to me that land rights was not just a popular movement of the 70s, but that Aboriginal people had been agitating for equity and opportunity for generations. Barry Morris provided a powerful and detailed description of the challenges facing Thangatti people over a sustained period of time. His work allowed me to see that external market forces could and did have a major influence on the livelihood of Aboriginal workforces in the Macleay Valley. I also learnt that Thangatti people had developed and maintained friendly relations with many non-Aboriginal land holders in the area. Additionally his work provided strong evidence of kinship and traditional obligations maintained by Thangatti people living at Bellbrook.

John Maynard through his many books and direct communication about the political activism among Aboriginal people since the 1920s has further strengthened my belief that Aboriginal people are a proud people; we have had many champions who deserve to be

recognised; we must place the word on the page, we must tell of their deeds and we must sing their deeds.

Chapter Three provided a personalised historical study of the Aboriginal community called Silver City and the journey of my family at times to different places across New South Wales. These several relocations were driven by the will to seek a better opportunity for the family. At other times the intervention and authority of the Aborigines Protection Board had removed family members and created long lasting emotional trauma and pain. The return to Armidale of the Archibald clan and the marriage and descent lines of this one family now provide a kinship network extending to hundreds of people.

The opportunities for community acceptance and advancement for the Aboriginal people of Silver City came as a consequence of agitation and advocacy played out by its members, and the working relationships that they created with non-Aboriginal people who were appalled by the failure of the Government of New South Wales and the civic leaders of Armidale to provide for those of us who were living on the margins. Former residents of Silver City still fondly reflect on the early days of our home environment where our great-grandparents and our seniors to teach us. We had our champions who bravely took a stand and made a lasting impression in the fight for our human rights. We were strengthened by a strong close knit kinship and united in cultural heritage.

In Chapter Four I traced in more detail the thought and work of my late father Raymond Shoonkley Kelly, and the importance of striving and fighting for cultural knowledge. His strikingly original thinking and unique intercultural perspectives on knowledge and education opened up new ways of understanding and taking action at the interface between traditional knowledge and modern life. Many of his hopes and aspirations have yet to be

fully realised, and are still key points of cultural and political struggle. These embrace recognition and preservation of our cultural meanings, knowledge and connections with land; intellectual equality and mutual respect between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge workers; return of the benefits of research to communities; and renewal of our *Keepara* traditions in a form that will sustain and empower us for the future.

The important place that Aboriginal language holds in our future cannot be emphasised strongly enough. All of these lines of inquiry, from the perspectives of family and community history, archival research, oral history, and cultural investigation, converge on the central role of language as the deepest resource of cultural knowledge and meaning. I have no hesitation in stating that the preliminary exploration of language in Chapter Five is only the very beginning for what I see will be a lifetime project. My hope is that it will also become an intergenerational project; that my work may encourage younger people to engage in revaluing and renewing our living cultural heritage, to keep and pass on to each new generation.

6.3 *Yaparri Gurraarra*: Extend the Pathway¹⁹⁸

Aboriginal people have long travelled the pathways for cultural enrichment and intellectual freedom. It was incumbent upon *Gurri-yayn*, everybody, to gather in large numbers at appropriate times for learning and celebration; and on young men and women to journey to far distant communities and landscape to seek out knowledge and to expand their personal world views.

With the institution of the Aboriginal Protection Board and the constructions of Aboriginal reserves and missions came also the imposed power, authority and control that effectively forbade Aboriginal people from such pilgrimages. The collapse of these pathways for intellectual and spiritual growth of Aboriginal people began to have a demoralising effect, so much so that when the agents of colonisation began to mouth the words of dishonour and destruction, we began to see these fictions in ourselves. We saw ourselves as half caste, quarter caste, part aborigines – less than whole in ourselves.

Without the freedom to regularly gather together to share our experiences we began to withdraw even further from the fringe of white society; turning inward on our own community, creating fractures and divisions that continue today. There can only be one answer to these challenges and that is the re-establishment of common communication spaces, whether they are formed within spiritual spaces or political forums or educational institutions.

¹⁹⁸ *Yapa-rri* has the same root as in Lissarrague, *yapa-ng* ‘path, road’ but with a different ending; *gurraarra* appears to be *gurraarr* ‘long, tall’ with a verbal ending: Lissarrague, *Dhanggati Grammar*, 168; 145.

It is through language – **all** our forms of language – that we reclaim our ways of talking with each other to this end. The creation of speaking circuits and yarning circles must be given due consideration if we are to overcome the years of cold-hearted and dismissive treatment at the hands of Governments and their agents.

The stone arrangements known to my people as *Muyi* are today still littered across the entire Australian landscape. Known by various names they are the traditional spaces that allowed for and supported independent Indigenous governance and leadership. The development and maintenance of a healthy family network can assist us with our future plans; we must look to ourselves for leadership and governance. We must be open-minded and be willing to acknowledge and celebrate the achievements of others, in particular those who uphold the values and principles that best demonstrate our will to survive, our fight for justice and our recognition of our sovereign rights.

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KEE PARA DREAMING

A treatment for theatre in education

**Written by Ray Kelly
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KEEPPARA DREAMING

A dramatic script integrating archive material from the research by Ray Kelly into language tapes recorded predominantly in the 1960s and 1970s from Aboriginal communities in and around the Mid- North Coast extending to the New England Tablelands of NSW.

The following materials form the basis and framework for a full length theatre piece, attached are scenes 1-5 as well as scenarios for scenes 6-11. These descriptions will ultimately be applied and enacted in a dramatic context.

Certain Names of individual have been retained within the play this is to honor and promote their legacies. Archibald, Duckett, Bolt and Holmer will be introduced alongside fictional characters such as Harry Halfpenny, Campbell and Terrence.

A critical area of research for my PhD research has been focused on the transcription and analysis of a series of audio recordings of Aboriginal elders from North Coast of New South Wales. A key area of interest to emerge from the initial study was an overall comparison of language speech across a broader area, in particular those recorded languages deemed to be different and distinct.

Keepara Dreaming will be a play written specifically for Aboriginal and other people interested in Indigenous languages - highlighting elements and aspects of the new material uncovered and the knowledge derived from the investigation. I have explored a number of options for the transmission of these new details back into community that it will serve. Any writer or playwright seeks to find the 'right story' or a sound narrative framework that best communicates all the facets that one wants to include in a script.

Due to the nature of the source material this work needs to reflect a diversity of script forms - documentary, verbatim and dramatic character driven script. The play will use archive material in the forms of songs and verbatim interviews which have ultimately proven crucial in my deconstruction of the language structure, word meaning and syntax essential to word building.

It is envisaged that this work will prove valuable in terms of comparative studies for Aboriginal languages in Australia and elsewhere in the world, as well as to demonstrating cultural history and knowledge. Incorporating this new material into a script means using a musical and dance paradigm for the final script alongside the more conventional dramatic forms. The finished script will be a multi-form work or patchwork experience. The following scenarios and scenes will form the bases for an interactive theatrical experience geared for indigenous communities and other groups interested in the revival, renewal and return of Aboriginal language.

Scene 1 – submitted

1964/5 – Nth Coast Country Town

A group of school students jiggling school come across Harry Halfpenny in his 50s; he is singing in language and also randomly recounting stories and descriptions of the past. All but one of the boys make fun of him, one shows interest in his song.

Research application

Uses direct verbatim text, both song and direct transcription from language tapes integrated into a dramatic context.

This scene establishes the premise of stories and the idea of overlooked knowledge in daily community life.

Scene 2 submitted

1964/5 – Nth Coast Country Town

A community center activities room.

A language ethnologist is recording Len Duckett while another elder Harry Halfpenny is present – they discuss.

Research Application

Direct verbatim use of language tapes with added dialogue between participants.

Exploration of language research and interpretation.

Scene 3 submitted: Brass Plate Ceremony

Monologue with satirical delivery of contemporary journalist coverage from 1800s period addressing the role of Aboriginal Leaders and imposed ceremony from Colonial government onto Indigenous tradition.

Research application

Investigation of race relation through media print late 1800s period New England region - New South Wales and Queensland.

Scene 4 submitted

1970s – Nth Coast Country Town

Terence Howard (non- indigenous) and Lewis Campbell (indigenous) are recording Harry Halfpenny regarding knowledge of historical sites of significance.

Process used for documentation and creation of the audio tapes. Introduction of alternative or unknown histories contained within sound files

Research Application

Direct use of Songs from sound files.

Following Scenes are to be written but scenarios are included along with explanations of their relevance to this research.

Scene 5

Song: ‘Kulawarri birri’ yuu’ ‘Here he comes again (with) a bad thing’ (rifle)
1937 Burnt Bridge Aborigine reserve Kempsey.

The Archibald Family – Talking about family relations and King Robert and the relocation of the family to their present location.

Research Application

Introduces individuals who were a part of the documentation of Aboriginal languages in the 1960s at an earlier stage and the information from the tapes is shown as part of an oral tradition 30 years earlier.

Scene 6

1964/5 – Nth Coast Country Town.

The old men gather and talk – Harry Halfpenny, Len Duckett and Frank Archibald are found discussing the recent arrival of ethnologist (Janet Bolt) she is in the area recording them. This scene highlights their self-consciousness and sense of responsibility. Archibald and Duckett eventually encourage Halfpenny to go see the researcher and record language and culture with her.

Research Application

Uses some elements of the stories recorded, in particular ceremony descriptions, as the basis for importance placed on being respectful and having to share knowledge, while changing it a little to be respectful and to not offend. Explore the etiquette and politics of cultural recording.

Scene 7

1964/5 – Nth Coast Country Town

The young boys from Scene 1 have seen the old men talking and have their own conversation about what are those old men talking about. They discuss where their knowledge comes from and how this contrasts with what they are taught in school and how Aboriginal stories and perspectives are absent. What is modern knowledge initiation?

Research Application

Uses direct verbatim transcription of tapes along with oral stories from writer's own past and personal experience at school.

Scene 8

1937 Burnt Bridge Aborigines reserve Kempsey. Song: Warrikana ngarri 'Travelling along the Main Road Ebor'

The Archibald family is discussing boys/men going off for a corroboree and knowledge sharing portrayed in dance and song enactment.

Research Application

Use direct transcription of song and description of ceremony from the tapes as text.

Scene 9

1974 North coast Town.

Funeral of Frank Archibald

Deals with the loss of knowledge as people pass.

Research Application

Song from tapes and choreography from description on tape of ceremony are both used as integral to scene.

Scene 10

Dance scene: An extended choreography derived from previous scene that tells story of hunting and living and historical change.

Research Application

Based on description of ceremony dance is recreated.

Embodies how knowledge is enacted in performance of dance/action not just in stories that are communicated orally.

Scene 11

1982 North Coast Town: Harry Halfpenny oral recording are now safely stored with AIATSIS. The young boy Gudge from first scene has now grown and is studying a recording of Harry Halfpenny as part of his research into oral history and languages of his people (reflecting my own journey in research).

Research Application

Direct use of William Morris/Harry Halfpenny tapes, which provide both detailed description of his life but also, integrates language and song knowledge.

‘Warrikana ngarri’ Main Road Ebor the song from scene 8 is now examined and unpacked as language and knowledge for the audience.

SCENE 1

WARRI NGANKAY NYII'UURRA

1967 - Mid North Coast Country Town.

Three Aboriginal boys Gudge, Bingay and Wuli aged 11 and 12 are playing amongst the willow trees in the Towns Central Park. Harry Halfpenny is walking past singing and talking to himself as he usually does.

HALFPENNY

Ngayya ngarri mayirri ngayya. Gimbirrigu marrinay. Gaa'ra marrinayn.

Rode that beautiful little horse of my all the way down the Valley.

Showna nigarray. Mang wun nga irra Gimbirrigu marrinay.

There were a lot of my own people at the showground at Kempsey. Mang wun. Gurri Mang wun.

Ngay Angul ngarri dinner tharrimayn

Come in he said, come in and grab something to eat, It's a long rode all the way down to Kempsey.

A'arri gaa'ra ngurri'arri. He was a smarty horsey, beautiful little thing he was.

BINGAY

Uncle Harry. Got any money? We hungry want to buy a feed.

GUDGE

Where you going now Uncle? Every time we see you you're always going somewhere.

HALFPENNY

Where am I going? I can say the same thing about you boys. Where you going?

WULI

We're waiting for bus. We'll be going home then.

GUDGE

Aye, Uncle Harry you still looking for a new girlfriend?

HALFPENNY

Don't you worry about me and my Girlfriend mate! What about you and your Girlfriend?

BINGAY

He ain't got no girlfriend Uncle and he ain't got one either. The only one with a Girlfriend is me.

HALFPENNY

Is that right... you've got yourself a girlfriend?

BINGAY

Yep, she's girl and she's my friend. That makes her my girl friend, See?

HALFPENNY

I can't argue with that arithmetic. I suppose one and one do make two.

GUDGE

He hasn't got a girlfriend.

WULI

Yeah but he's getting ready though, cause he's been practicing kissing himself on a mirror.

BINGAY

I have not... you a liar.

HALFPENNY

So we got three guramayn and no girlfriend is that right? What a sad bunch of Gurri's you boys are.

WULI

One day we are all going have Girlfriends. And I'm going marry my Girlfriend.

HALFPENNY

Are you just? And are you going to have kids? Kids just like you?

WULI

No. I'll just get married.

GUDGE

Yeah. Then you'll have to call her Thalang and she can call you Thalang.

BINGAY

Don't be stupid.

HALFPENNY

Boys! When I first come by this morning I saw you Guramayn hanging about these trees. I'm thinking to myself these must be them clever fellas, seems like they don't need to go to school.

BINGAY

I don't need to go to school. Stink school I say. The only thing you get out of school is headache from thinking too much.

HALFPENNY

I don't believe you get a headache from thinking too much.

GUDGE

What school did you go to Uncle?

HALFPENNY

I went to a little bush school, built for Aboriginal kids on the reserve. We was only allowed to go as far as third class.

WULI

What third class in Primary?

HALFPENNY

Yep, third class.

WULI

We already passed that level. Me and Wuli in fifth class and Bingay is in six class he goes off to go to high school after the Holidays.

BINGAY

Yeah, and he has to wear a necktie and everything.

HALFPENNY

When I was your age our people made all us boys live in the same camp. That was the old rules then. You could go up and visit your mother and father anytime you wanted to of course. All our other people camped on the top on the reserve. That was our traditional school.

BINGAY

I heard that, but never heard what it was like.

GUDGE

What stuff you learn at that school Uncle?

HALFPENNY

That was special knowledge; you have to be ready for it.

BINGAY

You should tell us now Uncle Harry, we're ready.

HALFPENNY

Not up to you to decide when you're ready.

WULI

You must have lots of stories Uncle, you're always singing songs. We hear you.

HALFPENNY

Mmm I know things.

GUDGE

What do they mean them songs, gotta share it Uncle – so we know too.

HALFPENNY

It'll be waiting for you, when you're ready.

BINGAY (teasing him)

You should tell us now; you don't want to get so old you'll forget.

HALFPENNY

Careful with your tongue boy, don't you worry, I won't forget. Anyway they got it all recorded on their machines, my stories and my songs.

GUDGE (getting into teasing)

You got a record Uncle? Who's got it, we never heard it.

HALFPENNY

Cheeky buggers! You all get yourself to school and learn some respect before you learn my songs.

GUDGE

Just playing around Uncle!

HALFPENNY

Mm, when you're ready then I'll tell you.

He walks off singing the song from the beginning of the scene.

HALFPENNY

Ngayya ngarri mayirri ngayya. Gimbirrigu marrinay. Gaa'ra marrinayn.
Showna nigarray Mangwun. Ngayirra Gibirrigu marrinay.

Mang wun. Gurri Mang wun.
Ngay Angul ngarri dinner tharrimayn
A'arri gaa'ra ngurri'arri.

The boys are listening closely.

BINGAY (*To Gudge*)

You upset him now, let's go.

They leave and Halfpenny starts singing.

SCENE 2

PUNGARRI BARRARI BALAY

A Screen Projection: Due to the nature of the content contained within drama piece images and language descriptions will be projected to establish time and place.

September 1966. Nulla Nulla Aboriginal reserve upper McLeay River. An image of Mount Anderson looms large against the backdrop.

Janet Bolt from the University of New England is interviewing Len Duckett and Harry Halfpenny. Both Len and Harry are in their late 60's.

HALFPENNY

Pungarri barrari balay, that's means that's that mountain over there.

JANET BOLT

Oh yes, Barabalay.

HALFPENNY

Barri thalay irra. pirriyuu arri barrari thalay, that means 'that's my mountain'. Anderson's they call that mountain in English.

JANET BOLT

Oh yes, somebody else was telling me about this mountain. Is there a story about it?

HALFPENNY

Yeah, there's a story about it, but I forgot all about it now.

JANET BOLT

You couldn't remember? Perhaps if you thought about it hard you might remember something?

HALFPENNY

I don't believe I can.

JANET BOLT

Oh, that's shame, never mind you might remember it later.

HALFPENNY

Yeah I might. (*Bolt turns her attention to Duckett*)

BOLT

Now Mr. Duckett, what's the name of the song you're about to sing to us?

DUCKETT

It's a song about a Corroboree.

BOLT

Well when you're ready, right into the microphone please!

DUCKETT

pirruuri yayn guurrigan buurrigan
yirri uwurrang gayi maray wayn .

pirruuri gan buurri yayn thuuwiwayn
yirru barrandha maray wayn.

bingaiyawu yirrawang gay ngayiawayn
tiruurri yayn guurrigan buurrigan guurrigan.

yirru wurranggayi marawayn
parrayirra uwu yirrawang gayirri mariwayn.

tirrul yayn guurrigan buurrigan guurrigan
yirra warrandhayi marawayn.

bingaiyawu yirra wurranggay marrawayirri
ngaiyarru girra warran ngayi marrawyirri .

BOLT

That's very good. That's a very nice song, isn't it?

HALFPENNY

He's the only one who can sing that song.

BOLT

Are you? You are the only one?

HALFPENNY

He can.

BOLT

Where did you learn to sing it Mr. Duckett?

DUCKETT

Oh' his father learnt it to me.

BOLT

That was nice of him wasn't it? I understand Mr. Halfpenny that your father was known as King of the Keepara is that right?

(Bolt senses a disquiet and changes the subject)

Was he a good singer?

(Both men nod in agreement)

He should have taught you as well Harry?

HALFPENNY

Yeah, I just couldn't catch it. *(Furtively concealing his discomfort)*

DUCKETT

I used to go about it, working with him out the bush.

BOLT

Perhaps you can tell me what some of the words mean? You know what the words mean?

DUCKETT

He can do the dance. (*Referring to Halfpenny*)

BOLT

Can you? You should have been doing it!

HALFPENNY

Yeah. (Sheepishly)

DUCKETT

All the other mobs standing in a round, painted up, big fire in the night,
he's going got to come through the middle then.

BOLT

And then you do you do the main part! Is that right?

HALFPENNY

It's a good Dance.

BOLT

What was the corroboree about can you tell me?

DUCKETT

It's a ghost corroboree.

HALFPENNY

Gurri girri is a stick insect, we call it.

BOLT

A Praying Mantis?

HALFPENNY

What they call a Gurri girri.

DUCKETT

He's dancing you see.

BOLT

A praying mantis is dancing. What were the first words? If you tell me I can write them down perhaps a line at a time.

DUCKETT

He wouldn't know. You wouldn't know aye?

HALFPENNY

I just can't remember properly.

DUCKETT

The old people might know something.

BOLT

Yes perhaps I should ask some of the elders. Do you know any more songs?

DUCKETT

That's all I knew. A Corroboree.

SCENE 3

BRASS PLATE MONOLOGUE

Image of an elder wearing a Brass plate is projected up stage. A photographer's flash. Harry Halfpenny appears on stage. He reads from a newspaper. The Image of King Robert is projected large across the backdrop.

HALFPENNY

"In presenting to you this piece of plate, we do so to remind you that you are descended from a long line of ancestors who, tho' not lost, are gone before.

They who delighted in their nakedness and cannibalism; and you in your blankets and bulling rum casks.

The very yellow ring around your neck will put you in mind of the yellow ring of glory that will truly shine around your head when you make your final journey to the far away hunting grounds.

Each link will remind you that you are the last link of a chain of men who have been alike useless to themselves and others.

You will notice a lot of metal, of which this plate is composed, in the faces of many of those now around you, who have not contributed one penny towards this object.

We hope you will have the pleasure of wearing this plate for many years, and it will indeed be a sign to others that by walking erect and living many years not doing today what can be done tomorrow, you will at last be recognized in a substantial manner.

We feel sure that having this plate with you in your daily walk, during the coming sever winter, will amply make up for any neglect, hunger and nakedness, we your white brothers might permit you to endure; and you will be thankful, when looking back to your merry days with your tribe, that you have been permitted to live amongst us.

Wishing you long life, health and happiness, while doing all we can to prevent it, we remain your Friends."

Harry turns and looks at the image of the elder with the name plate. He shakes his head and walks slowly offstage

SCENE 4.

‘Maraywun’

Harry Halfpenny is sitting on a chair while at an adjacent table two men are setting up a tape recorder and microphone.

TERENCE

It's good of you to agree to the recording today Harry.

HALFPENNY

That's alright. I've done this once before.

TERENCE

Right, set up! We can start. The date is March 6th 1974. My name is Terence Howard and with me today is...

CAMPBELL

Lewis Campbell.

TERENCE

Today we are speaking with Harry Halfpenny today about Aboriginal sites of significance. Harry firstly could you please tell us where you were born?

HALFPENNY

I was born at Hillgrove the mining town.

TERENCE

In what year were you born Harry?

HALFPENNY

1890.

TERRENCE

And that would make you 84 years of age.

HALFPENNY

Pretty much 84 years old. Bush people you know miners, they can't be too exact on any dates.

TERRENCE

How old were you when you first began mining Harry?

HALFPENNY

I began working at fourteen. My mum and dad were living at Oban. White fullas back then called that country 'The northern diggings' (Digressing) Years later I got away out of it. I went up to Emmaville in Queensland. I stayed up there for ten years. I had a white boss there, I couldn't fault that man?

CAMPBELL

Things were working out well for you back then were they Harry?

HALFPENNY

Times I could work ten hours a day, seven days a week. Shilling an hour!

TERRENCE

Now, Harry. Lewis and I wanted to speak to you today about anything you might remember about the old ways, including any information about important sites that you might know about. Do you know what we mean?

HALFPENNY

Yeah I know what you mean.

CAMPBELL

Maybe you can think about community sites where everybody was allowed to go?

HALFPENNY

Maybe I should talk to you about Oban first. I was first put through the rules there you know?

CAMPBELL

It is important for us to get these details from the people with that lived knowledge Harry, but anytime you feel you don't want to say anything about a particular site, then don't say anything.

HALFPENNY

I truly think it would be something for you two to see that Bora ground there. The tree's all marked and decorated, some standing twenty feet high. Around was all these little mounds containing crystals some weighing a hundred in weight.

This was where I tasted the sacred honey, girra girra they called it. It came from a native hive in a tree that had been down for 50 years the old people told me later.

Time and time again we'd go back there and have a good feed. it was beautiful that honey.

There were some real champion old people living at Oban when I was a Guramayn.

All very well-known right throughout the tablelands... men like Oban Tommy, Reuben Swan and Albert Dunn. They were great old people, clean and decent, not touched by the white civilization so much.

The oldest person there in the camp was Jackie Nelson; he was a very old man. I always used to go and have a yarn with him.

He told me once that one time ago, if the old people found a Dingo that had pups, they might eat those pups. He said they was choice meat. Well I guess that's just how things were working in their earliest days.

Kupu tharralpa was the company name for new dig opening up in the mountains just out from Gloucester. There was a travelling stock reserve there on a flat just out of Barrington.

They were all miners these Goori's in them days. All digging for tin and gold, copper and zinc.

They need us black fellers then, when all the white fellas took off for Queensland.

The manager wanted me to travel out there to work, bloody near impossible to drive through those mountains in them times. So I told him to forget about.

TERENCE

Harry I wonder if I can just take you back to Oban for one more minute and ask what else can you tell us about the Bora Ground.

HALFPENNY

The Government put up 3 tin huts and others Gurri's put up bark humpies in and around them.

Finally when I turned 14 they took me. They told me they teaching me how to feed and keep myself.

They all had a performance you had to go through. They'd put up Keepara dance and you'd have to go through a lot of different parts, they carried it out to the letter T, with the wurra wurra, you know?

He makes a gesture of twirling something in the air.

CAMPBELL

Wurra wurra is that the word you used for a bull roarer Harry?

HALFPENNY

That's what we called them. I heard them called by other names. You'd hear them coming along and you could say hello someone is being put through the rules. Sure enough, you'd see all the women taking to the camp, getting away out of it.

Once you were put through the rules you were considered Maray wun. You had to make all your own kuturrawarri, boomerangs and throwing sticks and spears. If you couldn't make them then your Thuupara would teach you how.

CAMPBELL

How many times did you go through Harry?

HALFPENNY

Twice! I went through a form down here, over on the coast, but you only had to go through once. You could go through for 6 weeks - 3 months - 6 months - 12 months or 18 months. It was just like going to University to learn medicine or something else like that.

TERENCE

What do you know about the rules for women Harry? Were you told anything?

HALFPENNY

The women had their own way. We were always told to mind our own business and stay out of it. They told me that the law once belonged to women altogether. Old men used to say they know everything about us but we know nothing about them.

TERENCE

Thanks Harry you've been very helpful.

Terence and Campbell start taking apart the recording equipment, not paying attention to Harry who moves his chair to forestage and addresses the audience)

HALFPENNY

A Chinaman owned the store at Oban. That's where the Archibald mob was living. Old King Bob, his two daughters and his wife. That was a real walkabout spot for them.

They'd come across to Ebor. Back to Wollomombi and back over to Rockvale and kangaroo hill.

King Bob! He was a King alright! He had long whiskers down to his belt.

He was an old man, he lived a long time. We called them old people Garr'ara. People like King Bob they knew just about everything.

The very last time I saw King Bob. I was going home to Armidale. Coming along the New England highway I seen Dick Gower, Frank Archibald, King Bob and the three women at the Dingo fence at Ebor they was making their way onto Wollomombi.

At night we were catching eels with a lantern. Made an eel trap using an old Hessian bag. Dropped some bait into it, come back later, in no time you could get twenty or thirty eels in about that many minutes.

You move your light around the water's edge and you could see all the eels laying up together.

Ngayiyirru thalu ngarriyi galam

Our people were all related in lane ways. Now your family and my family, they might not be allowed to marry into one and another. But that next lane way of family, they could marry the old garr'arra people kept it the proper way.

CAMPBELL (*Hears Harry talking*)

What was that Harry?

HALFPENNY

Mr. Ogilvie. He comes up here first. He was the first white man to come up here.

CAMPBELL

That's around here?

HALFPENNY

He took up this land down at Baiyugarra. He got amongst Aborigines there and he tamed some of them down, some of them still wild in different places.

He had a lot of sheep and cattle this man. Some of them black fullers went and killed his sheep.

Terence and Campbell exchange glances realizing the nature of the story that is emerging.

Another time, those Gurri there was said to have stolen flour.

Story goes Ogilvie and other land holders put their guns to them at a place called Kanggi.

Terence and Campbell decide to start recording again.

TERENCE

One Minute Harry I'll just turn the Recorder back on

Harry doesn't stop but keeps telling his story and starts to sing as they set up the microphone

HALFPENNY

One man that got away, He made this song up about old Ogilvie.

Harry begins sing.

Kulawarri Song

Kulawarri birriyuga Dhululbi yurra bayi wayi uwayi

Wayi wayi wirrerru barri dhagamili buu

Barri ngirri yuurra ngirri yuurra guwa nyirri yungguwa

Thawurra yarrayirra yuugawu banyi gurri ngirri yirra

Buwayi thurri yigurra ngirri biyayirri

Birin yarri nyin yarri nyinyarru uwungguu

Birin yarru bu uwa

Pirruu yarrayirra yuurra uuwa uurra gawu

Ban yirra Guurri ngirri yuurra wayiyu wayi wayirra

Dharagarrii wamili buyi Wayi wayi wayi wayi wirri bayi wayi wayi wirri

Kuluwarra birriyuga Dhulul biyuga

Kuluwarra birriyuga Dhulul biyuga wayi wayi wayi

Wayi wayi tirru barri dharaga miliiru.

TERENCE

Is that a song about what happened?

HALFPENNY

Kuluwarri birriyuu, means a bad thing. Up in the water at Kanggi

CAMPBELL

They were shot.

HALFPENNY

Dhululbi, Means to point - the pointing: a rifle.

Nyirriyuung bawuyirrayi -A white man has a gun.

Now Terence and Campbell know the meaning of the song

This Gurri he found this blanket. Our people had no blanket them times.

Wanyigurri ngirrariyayi

Well, he knew that the Whiteman was laying down there, wrapped up in that blanket.

Ogilvie was good to a lot of people, but that's what he done to lot of them.

CAMPBELL

Do you know who made the song up Harry?

HALFPENNY

I think it was old King Bob himself. King Bobby.

Terence and Campbell look at one another realizing they have not got the whole story

TERENCE (slowly)

Who was King Bobby?

Lights fade slowly on the scene.