

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander readers are warned that this thesis may 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
Doctor of Philosophy, Wollotuka Institute of Aboriginal Studies, The University of
Newcastle, Australia**

2015

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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Acknowledgements

This work would not be complete without making due acknowledgement of past generations of traditional knowledge holders, who have handed on to their descendants an intellectual heritage of great power to inform, inspire and guide us today in our research and educational endeavours. The following Aboriginal knowledge holders and gifted language speakers have contributed greatly to my comprehension of the keys and arrangements to a number of Aboriginal languages spoken on the east coast of New South Wales:

Thangatti

Mr. Doug (Bubba) Scott
Mr. Victor Shepherd
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

Gumbayngirr

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.

I wish to thank my supervisors, Professors John Maynard, Emeritus Professor John Ramsland and Dr Jean Harkins who have provided outstanding support and guidance across the duration of the project; and my colleague Brian Joyce for dramaturgical advice.

In 2006 I received an honorary Doctorate from the University of Newcastle and at the prompting of John Maynard and others I chose to enter the University as a research higher degree candidate. I wish to acknowledge the ground-breaking work of Heather Goodall whose work on the long standing fight for land rights in New South Wales has greatly assisted my study.

To my immediate family, in particular my wife Mandy who has been a tower of strength from beginning to the end, without whose unwavering support and encouragement this work could not have been realised. My children Kumarah, Sarah and Ray Jnr, my daughter in-law Kimberley and son in-laws Matthew and Peter and my grandchildren Bilum, Aliah, Djarayi, Alyssa and Amiia Lee: you are my greatest inspiration. The two most influential people in my childhood: my mother Alice McKenzie Rankin I give thanks for her love, strength and determination, and my late grandmother Ethel (Mckenzie) de Silva for the precious gifts of good stories, open arms and a warm heart.

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, *Dhangu Grammar*, 134 has *dhupiyn* ‘know, understand’.

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

²⁰ Lissarrague, *Dhangu Grammar*, 162.

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