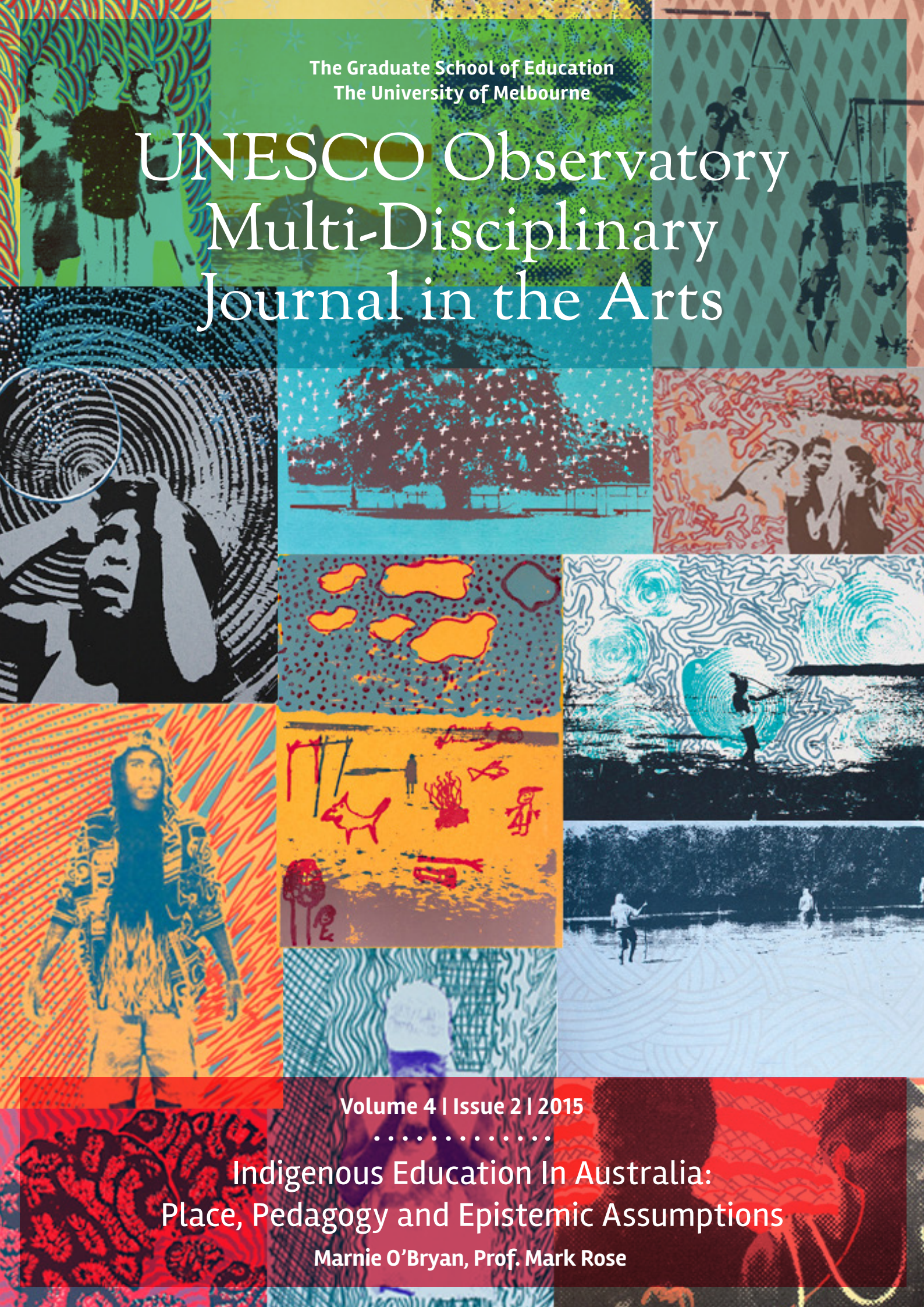


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Indigenous Education In Australia: Place, Pedagogy and Epistemic Assumptions

Marnie O'Bryan, Prof. Mark Rose

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The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is based within the Graduate School of Education at The University of Melbourne, Australia. The journal promotes multi-disciplinary research in the Arts and Education and arose out of a recognised need for knowledge sharing in the field. The publication of diverse arts and cultural experiences within a multi-disciplinary context informs the development of future initiatives in this expanding field. There are many instances where the arts work successfully in collaboration with formerly non-traditional partners such as the sciences and health care, and this peer-reviewed journal aims to publish examples of excellence.

Valuable contributions from international researchers are providing evidence of the impact of the arts on individuals, groups and organisations across all sectors of society. The UNESCO Observatory refereed e-journal is a clearing house of research which can be used to support advocacy processes; to improve practice; influence policy making, and benefit the integration of the arts in formal and non-formal educational systems across communities, regions and countries.

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Volume 4, Issue 2

Indigenous Education In Australia: Place, Pedagogy and Epistemic Assumptions

Guest Editors

Marnie O'Bryan

Prof. Mark Rose

THEME

This special edition of the UNESCO Observatory E-Journal focuses on education for and about the First Peoples of Australia and bears witness to the many faces of Indigenous education in Australia. It testifies to a complex landscape; places on a map, places in minds and places in spirit that taken together present a snapshot of the tone and dimension of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander education in early 2015.

Indigenous education policy is framed by a bi-partisan commitment to 'closing the gap'. In some instances, Indigenous leaders are framing the debate over how this is best achieved. At the same time, non-Indigenous educators are increasingly becoming aware that equality and mutual respect can only be established once the Australian community opens its mind to the ancient wisdom and the true stories of this place. Many of the articles in this publication identify the 'gap' as an epistemological divide and argue that, like any bridge, education measures aimed at 'closing the gap' need to be constructed simultaneously from both sides. To that end, a number of papers focus on initiatives being developed and explored by mainstream schools to give authentic voice to the perspectives of First Australians for the benefit of non-Indigenous students.

COVER ART

Yirrkala Collage

Various Artists,

Yirrkala Art Centre

*Courtesy of the artists
and Yirrkala Art Centre*

The papers in Volume One, '**Indigenous Education in Australia: Policy, Participation and Praxis**', are all concerned with how Western educational structures and institutions work for and with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Volume Two of the Journal is entitled '**Indigenous Education In Australia: Place, Pedagogy and Epistemic Assumptions**'. Each of the articles in this volume pertains to the education experiences of people living in remote Australia.

The articles in this publication take the reader through a rich multidisciplinary tapestry that points to the breadth and complexity of the Indigenous education landscape in Australia today. The papers are honest and true to the heterogeneous communities that are the First Peoples of Australia. Similarly, the poetry and artworks that appear here bear witness to the breadth, depth and diversity of artistic talent and tradition in this country. Taken together, they challenge the reader to move beyond a simplistic quest for 'the silver bullet' to redress disparity in education outcomes between Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians. They encourage reflection, innovation, reciprocity, respect and empowerment through education.

We recommend each and every article.

Prof. Mark Rose & Marnie O'Bryan

Guest Editors

Accompanying Piece



Blue Ringed Octopus
Amy Friday a-Bajamalanya

Courtesy of the Artist

“Those old men who sing
are our professors”.
Songlines: esoteric knowledge
or empirical data.¹

John J. Bradley
(Monash University)

Stephen Johnson
(Independent Anthropological Consultant and
consultant to li-Anthawirryarra Sea Rangers Unit, Borroloola)

ABSTRACT

For many Indigenous peoples world wide the colonial process is not a historical “blip” in a moment of time. Western ways of knowing and viewing the place that Indigenous people might call home still contest and reduce complex ways of knowing to myth and so called subjective knowledge. Western ways of knowing are so strongly orientated towards the linear and the “empirical” and this helps support the hegemony of what might rightly be called scientific materialism. In this paper we explore how what the west might call the subjective experience is for the Yanyuwa people a powerful way of knowing and finding their place in their country and suggests that even now the West has not developed a skill set to really approach the kind of knowledge that is being discussed in this article.

KEYWORDS

Yanyuwa, song, epistemology, knowledge, country, scientific materialism

1.
This article has been written with the support and editorial rights of the Yanyuwa people of the south west Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory. The authors have worked with and for the Yanyuwa people over the last 37 years and in particular with regard to this article, wishes to thank Dinah Norman, Jemima Miller and Annie Karrakayny for their support, teaching and assistance. There are also many other men and women who the author wishes to thank but listing them would be beyond this paper. However he does acknowledge the teachings and time of Johnson Timothy, Steve Johnston, Ron Rickett and Tim Timothy Rakuwurlma and their permission to reproduce a small section of their clan’s song line.

Throughout history, anthropologists have confronted a number of uncomfortable truths around the supposed nature of reality (Evans Pritchard 1937). The anthropological maxim, “through the study of others we learn more about ourselves” has been sorely tested en route. Arguably, this challenge reached culmination during the 1970s and 80s, with several prominent social commentators from Geertz (1976) to Clifford (1986) suggesting that anthropologists had, in both past and present, been much more concerned with the study of ‘others’ than of ‘ourselves’ (Nader 1972:289). In essence, this reflexive critique suggested that ethnographers were in the business of writing fiction and more insidiously came to the field equipped with a set of assumptions and presuppositions about the world in all its variety. These universal verities functioned to reduce all subjects of study into conformity with the observer’s sense of what was real and of import and what was not and inconsequential.

In contemporary contexts, many would argue that these arguments are “done and dusted”. Anthropology has moved on. Where there were ethical, epistemological, philosophical and even ontological questions around practice, these have been resolved. Or where there may indeed have been alternative and legitimate renderings of reality, or actuality, these have been lost in the relentless processes of industrialisation and “free market” progress. As many who work in Aboriginal Australia will attest however (and especially those perhaps in less “settled” and more “remote” parts of the continent) these questions have not been put to rest and alternative actualities still enliven and inform everyday existence for many Indigenous Australians. Thus, the issues raised are more than merely academic and their arbitrary dismissal seems more in the interests of outside observers than of the people purportedly represented.

In the following article, such questions are explored through reference to the Yanyuwa people who call country in and around the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria, home. After a brief excursion into the realm of objective truth – its prominent points of origin and articulation – the authors have focussed on an abiding element of Yanyuwa cultural expression, the *kujika*. These songlines resonate cross-generationally for many Yanyuwa people, from those who hold them closely to those less intimate but still profoundly aware of their significance and power. This comparative analysis throws many of those questions posed around reality, the nature of being and of relatedness and relationship, into sharp relief. What also emerges over the course

of enquiry is a deeply felt frustration on the part of the Yanyuwa at the reductive tendencies implicit in many attempts to describe their experience in and of the world. This ongoing frustration and the contemporary relevance of *Kujika* both suggest that far from “done and dusted” the arguments of decades ago remain unresolved and bear practical consequences in contemporary contexts.

“That song is everything, it is the only way to know this country, really deep inside, not like scientist side, they are outside, on the top. We women listen, listen to that song, we know what is there, where it is going, and the old men who sing they are like...like the professors where you work, you know at a university...yes those old men are the professors.”

(Annie Karrakayn 2000)

Our western civilization sees itself as heir to the Age of Enlightenment or Age of Reason, a movement of intellectual thinking that began in the late 17th century and early 18th century. As heirs of this tradition it profoundly influences the way in which we might come to know, understand and interpret Indigenous ways of knowing and understandings of Australian land and sea. The age of the European enlightenment created an underlying assumption and debate, that science would replace religion as the source of normative judgement. In a very strict view science then was not directly concerned with issues of ethics or morality- it was, and still is, in many instances about measurement, prediction and exploration of the natural world. The scientific attitude has generally been associated with the tendency towards positivism in philosophy, which is the rejection of a metaphysical worldview and many other facets of traditional philosophy and religious traditions more generally.

Positivism was a term devised to differentiate the empirical and natural sciences, the so-called positive sciences, from the prevailing religious and metaphysical philosophies of the Enlightenment Era. August Comte, who gave currency to the word (Giddens 1974), saw a progression in the development of society from the ‘theological’ to the ‘scientific’ phase. Thus data derived from empirical experience, and logical mathematical treatments of such data, provided the exclusive source of all authentic knowledge. The general consensus then was that it would lead to the evolution of a society from one based on theology and spirituality to one based upon science and thus was born what might be best described as a historical positivism, which has remained a very important component of the way knowledge is constructed in the 21st century.

In such a view, the world becomes mechanistic and Cartesian dualisms such as mind and world, nature and culture became even more pronounced. In all important respects, science was seen to, and still seeks to assume the role that was previously occupied by religion and, this tendency has increasingly led to what might be labelled a ‘religion of scientism’. Issues arise, not so much with implied reductionism, for this is what science is, but when that reductionism - essentially a method - is turned into a metaphysical standpoint whereby many aspects of the human endeavour can be and are reduced to nothing more than biological imperative. .

Secular thinking, conceived of as a systematic philosophy does not make recourse to anything metaphysical, accepts the natural sciences as a form of umpire on the nature of reality, any understanding of which is always to be sought in objective terms.

Within this view individuals are free to practice within any religious or spiritual tradition of their liking, with the proviso that it ought not be harmful to others. But this stance radically subjectivises questions regarding the validity of claims to truth in any such traditions, and this is a problem for western knowledge where the term enlightenment implicitly entails a greater leaning towards secular knowledge. In practice it is impossible to differentiate such claims to truth from matters of opinion, because they are basically subject to individual conscience and seemingly beyond the purview of the objective sciences.

Arguably, what needs to happen, especially in regard to our understanding of the way Indigenous people in Australia might wish to understand knowledge, is to recast the term enlightenment. Within the western canon of knowledge there is no real idea (even within the ecclesiastical traditions) of an “enlightenment” as it might be seen in an eastern sense, and generally such a view has been until quite recently the subject of ecclesiastic censure and persecution. It was William James (1985) who coined the term ‘varieties of religious experiences’ in an attempt to discover the outlines of ‘spirituality’ across different cultural traditions and how they might still speak to us.

In 21st century Australia this is a very important and contemporary challenge. Science seeks to objectify, rationalise and lay claim to universal understandings of knowledge which transcend all cultural and philosophical boundaries. A classic example of such claims is found in the use of grand generic terms such as Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge, Traditional Ecological Knowledge and so on (Berkes et al. 2003, Patrick et al. 2008, Johnson 2006, 2010, Weir 2012). These are considered value free or objective terms. However, the knowledge traditions to which they purportedly refer, are embedded in deep and particular ontological and epistemological understandings of the world, and in these contexts the terms make little sense. Indeed, in many instances such “matter of fact”, generic labels serve to altogether trivialise the knowledge and traditions that support it as well as undermining the claims of people to a different, but equally legitimate, understanding of the places they call home. An additional layer of complexity is also evident where knowledge is assumed to be freely accessible, when in truth and accordance with cultural protocol, it frequently belongs to particular groups and individuals, an important observation in counterpoint to western notions of knowledge as abstract, universal and apparently value-free. Perhaps more significantly, these terms, with which the west has chosen to label the knowledge of Indigenous peoples globally, now enjoy increasing currency and economic value in the “market place” of government and non government agents and agencies. An important outcome of this trend sees the abstraction of what is called Indigenous knowledge out of the social, cultural and family contexts that hold it with only the “bits” that fit a preordained research agenda perceived to be of value. Invariably, the “bits” attributed such value are argued to be those producing demonstrable, that is, tangible outcomes and benefits. Frequently however, the end result of such attribution is to reduce the rich and varied knowledge of Indigenous peoples to quantifiable lists, in accordance with a superimposed, bland and general set of principles entirely lacking in substantive detail or contextual relevance. Consequently, a question emerges out of this discussion that moves beyond the scope of the paper but informs its authorship and must be posed here. Simply stated; whose vision or version of Indigenous knowledge do external experts and agencies of this persuasion/ilk purport to represent?

In regard to developing a response to the reality of Indigenous ontologies in relation to their places and being able to see clearly the limitation embedded in the western terms used to describe what might very generally be called Indigenous knowledge, it is important following on from Tilley (1994) and Thomas (1996), to explore phenomenological understandings concerning the experiential nature of place and what is contained within it. Drawing from Heidegger (1972), with particular reference to his understandings of “being-in-the world” it is possible to locate a position for understanding where both the mind and body are “being” in a relationship with place and not cast as separate dualities.

It follows then, if we are to attempt a cross-cultural or transcultural rendering of place and knowledge or even attempt to understand the intersubjective position of an Indigenous view of place, space and associated knowledge we must be prepared to challenge the very essence of the western academic tradition; the so called objective premise. The premise of objectivity is predicated on the understanding of an unknowing subject and a social authority, an authority derived from Western ways of knowing. Moreover, because of the power of the Western gaze and ways of knowing language and knowledge arrives as a “...closed and already constituted system” (Idhe 1974:xi). The historical development of Western modes of thought – those patterns and processes that construct our knowledge in the first instance – is concealed from view and unavailable for critical comment. “Our” knowledge exists independently of social and historical definitions and processes and its very authority is derived from this separation (Scholte 1972, Bourdieu 1979, Johnson 2000).

The Western observer is trained to direct their gaze outwardly with very little thought for the underlying structures and unconscious presuppositions that construct our own ontological and epistemological “truths” let alone the role that other senses may play in determining how a person may understand any given experience. For far too often the West presumes that these are known and having been considered are fixed and given. It is Ricoeur (Ricoeur in Ihde 1974:xii) that points to this in a critique of the Levi-Strauss school of structuralism where he argues that it represents “...yet another triumph of a “Cartesian” science”. Words such as landscape, that we use as the markers of structure then subsume history and more significantly the “...speaking subject...” and history is then “...read out of consideration” for people often cast as “other” (Idhe 1974:xi). What is important to note here is that the very elements Western thinking may render as inconsequential are in fact integral components of Indigenous ways of knowing: what the West calls history other people may call something different altogether. .

The Yanyuwa people of the south west Gulf of Carpentaria in the Northern Territory of Australia who provide the case study for this paper, have no word that can be translated as history, because in and of itself history is a western way of knowing. The Yanyuwa do use the term *linginmantharra* remembering and being mindful - and this allows for much discursive discussion where no one view has to prevail, and indeed it would be considered presumptuous if this were to be the case.

Commonly, Western forms of enquiry into knowledge not of the west, consign the act of speech, or in some instances no speech but body language and unvoiced emotional responses, to subordinate status – as mere secondary expressions of a deep and universal structure, available for reading by the appropriate social authorities.

The perceptions of the participants are reduced to fit this predetermined conceptual schema, while the subjective cultural, ontological and epistemological interests of the observer are concealed from view. The direct result of this exclusion, of the vital link between culture and place, raises serious questions regarding the relevancy of these explanations for the people they purport to describe (Bielawski 1996). In my own work with Yanyuwa people such research methodologies lead to exasperated comments of “we don’t speak like that” or “that’s a whitefella way of thinking we don’t think like that”(see also Johnson 2000, Bradley 2010).

Nine hundred and seventy kilometres south east of Darwin, in the Northern Territory of Australia, is the small township of Borroloola. It has been home to the Yanyuwa people for the past 120 years as successive waves of colonialism and enforced, institutionalised removal from their homelands has taken place. They are really “saltwater people, and their homelands are the Sir Edward Pellew Group of Islands and immediately adjoining coastal regions. While resident at Borroloola they have never forgotten about their country, and have fought through the long process of successive land claims to win back large portions of it over a journey of thirty or more years of intense court hearings and government negotiations. The island and sea country has over all of these periods been constantly visited, talked about, danced and sung about; it is the sea country that has been at the heart of their emotions even while living in the diaspora of Borroloola. The Yanyuwa people refer to themselves as *li-Anthawirriyarra*, or the “people whose spiritual origins are derived from the sea”.

In this paper I will explore an understanding of song lines, paying reference to one particular song line that moves through the sea. I do this with the intention of demonstrating the complexity of knowledge that can exist beyond land and encompass an area that for many Australians is still largely a *marae nullius*, a sea with out owners. I intend to allow Yanyuwa voices to sit alongside of my own and in regards to the sea it is fitting that a senior Yanyuwa elder Dinah Norman Marrngawi describe what this relationship may entail:

Let me tell you something, the sea, the saltwater, the waves, they are my mother, the sea is my mother, it is my mothers Ancestor. I know this, I have known this since I was small. Further I will tell you the sea has names, many names, names for the reefs, names for the sea grass beds, names for the sand bars, and the sea has boundaries, we know these boundaries, they did not come here recently. From the time of the Ancestral beings and our human ancestors they have been here. Our songs and ceremony are also in the sea, they are running through the sea, both along the bottom of the sea and they also rise and travel on the surface of the sea. White people think the sea is empty that it has no Law, but the Law and the ceremony is there in the salt water, in the fish, in the sea birds the dugong and the turtle, it is there and we knowledgeable people are holding it.

When Dinah speaks of the sea being her mother she is not speaking in some vague, over-arching spiritual sense, she is speaking in the sense that her actual biological mother life spirit came from the Ancestor which is the sea. As a result Dinah is *jungkayi*, guardian for the sea, for her mother, for its physical reality and for the Law and knowledge that is derived from it.

In the Yanyuwa language the sea, *antha*, is masculine, while the waves, *a-rumu*, are feminine, male and female combined, no separation. The waves are feminine because they were created by the female Sea Snake Ancestress, *a-wirininybirniny*, thus the

foaming white crest of a wave is called *nanda-rayal*; her spit, the fine sea spray from wave, *nanda-minymi*; her condensation, the external arch of the wave is *nanda-wuku*; her back, and the concave interior, *nanda-wurdu*; and her stomach, the Wave and the Sea Snake are one and the same, there is no separation. Today the Wave and Sea Snake are embodied both as the physical phenomena of the wave, a biological entity the sea snake, *a-wirninybirniny* (Spine-bellied Sea Snake, *Lampemis hardiwckii*) and as a massive wave-shaped sand dune on the northern most tip of Vanderlin Island, the largest island in the Sir Edward Pellew Group. This sand dune is located at a place the Yanyuwa call Muluwa, and that subsequent colonial overwriting has named Cape Vanderlin. The sand dune is the source of the power of the Sea Snake and Wave.

The Sea Snake is but one of many Ancestors that travelled Yanyuwa country, giving it meaning and imbuing all of the land and sea with an essence or thick substance: in Yanyuwa this is called *ngalki*. The *ngalki* is still there on and in the sea, on the islands, on the coastal lands of the Yanyuwa and in every living and non-living thing including Yanyuwa people. There are four different types of this substance, which now equate with the four clans that now comprise the Yanyuwa people - Rrumburriya, Mambaliya, Wuyaliya and Wurdaliya. Each original Ancestor carried one of these distinctive essences. The Sea and the Waves are Rrumburriya, it is the clan of Dinah's mother, but her own clan and that of her siblings, the clan of her father and paternal grandfather also, is Wuyaliya and their ancestor is the large fish, *a-kuridi*, the Groper (*Promicrops lanceolatus*). Descent in Yanyuwa country is paternal and spouses must be found outside of one's own clan; however, children have important rights of guardianship to the clan sea and lands and living things which belong to their mother. The four clans also represent other relatives, so for Dinah the Ancestral beings of her own Wuyaliya clan she calls, *ja-murimuri*, my most senior paternal grandfather, the Rrumburriya clan calls *ja-yakurra*, my Ancestral mother, Wurdaliya, *ja-wukuku*, my most senior mother's mother and Mambaliya, *ja-ngabuji*, my most senior father's mother. Thus Dinah is related to all things in Yanyuwa country; she is a part of a multitude of invisible threads of connection; she stands in a matrix that sees her able to call all people and all animate and inanimate things in Yanyuwa country as kin; thus, if they are kin there can be no non-animation, thus all things, the sea included, are sentient. In the same way all other Yanyuwa men, women and children, depending on their clan stand in similar webs of relationships.

It is common in much of Australian literature in reference to Indigenous people to call the relationships described above, the Dreaming. The Yanyuwa people use this term also, but they also use their own word *Yijan*. Both the English word and the Yanyuwa word have nothing to do with sleep, but are rather terms that refer to the relationships between people, their country and the Law, *narnu-yuwa*, that is embedded in that country., And it is this Law which sets out the realm of Yanyuwa experience. It is the Law which embodies beliefs, and the Law in Aboriginal English is said to be derived from the Dreamtime" or the Dreaming". This English term however is misleading because it carries connotations of an imaginary or unreal time. Despite its popular currency amongst both Indigenous peoples such as the Yanyuwa and non-indigenous people, the term Dreaming and Dreamtime carries a series of ideological and political connotations stemming from colonial discourses of conquest and dispossession and these terms are discussed and highlighted by Wolfe (1991).

In much of the discussion that centres around this term Dreaming and Law there has always been the tendency in the west to construct binaries of the sacred and the secular, or non-sacred. This binary does a huge disservice to the way in which the Yanyuwa people see their place, and the place of all living and non-living things in their country (Tamisari and Bradley 2006). All things that belong to Yanyuwa country have Law; Law can be observed in biological behaviour, or it can be embodied in songs, rituals and important body designs and objects as well as the powerful places in the land and sea associated with them. Because of the images of relatedness that have been described above, there can be no separate boxes” for the sacred and secular; there exists rather the potential for all living and non-living things to carry their more normative forms and the potentiality to become something else, and this potential is omnipresent. Thus, the Yanyuwa place themselves and the inhabitants of their country into a system of classification which is primarily based upon having or not having Law and there is in this system a flexibility based on the notion of relatedness which is in turn articulated in terms of human and non-human, intention and non-intention, social and non-social, moral and amoral, poetic and non-poetic in particular socio-political instances and circumstances.

These distinctions, however are not the polar opposites of a dichotomy but two points where the oscillation between vitality and super vitality of species, people and things can be observed in action. This breaking down of binaries and the replacement of terms such as sacred and secular, allows for endless re-interpretations of vitality and super vitality characterising the living world as known by the Yanyuwa to a point where it is important to state that such classification of relationships not only encompasses different logics or ways of reasoning, but, more importantly, is grounded in constant social action.(cf. Povinelli 1995, Tamisari and Bradley 2006).

An illustration of the above concepts can be given by seeing Yanyuwa land and sea as a whole; it is both vital and supervital. Its vitality is demonstrated by its ability to give and sustain life; its supervitality is demonstrated by the places of power that are scattered over the land and through the sea, but also importantly by the way people can interact with it on a daily basis. The most powerful demonstration of knowledge that relates to country and a Yanyuwa persons relationship to it is through the singing of *kujika* that have come to be known in popular imagination and literature as ‘song lines’ or song cycles’. While Strelhow’s (1971) mammoth work *Songs of Central Australia* created an awareness of ‘songlines’ and their importance, his intense effort to tie their significance to western literary genres silenced the voices of the Arrente people with whom he worked and these issues are well discussed and analysed in Hill’s (2002) work *Broken Song*, which is a detailed discussion of the life and scholarship of Strelhow and of one particular issue, the silence of Strehlow in regard to the people who are still singing the songs that he said were silenced. Chatwin’s (1987) *Song Lines* while introducing a general reader to the concept of the *song lines* is totally dependant on Strehlow’s understanding of them and fails in anyway to address the critical issues of land as sentient and moving in response to kin and while these notions have become somewhat axiomatic in a wider general readership the understanding of how song, land and kin are precisely connected via the medium of song is not as well understood.

For the Yanyuwa, *Kujika* are multi-versed sung narratives that travel through country. They are songs that the Yanyuwa describe as ‘bringing everything into line’,

all living and non-living things, peoples' names, the names of the land, the winds and other seasonal events are all given a place in these songs, and the narratives that are presented within these pages are spoken forms of these journeys which are at their most powerful when they are sung. Understanding Yanyuwa song cycles' is not simple when many contain in excess of 200 to 300 verses that must be sung in order. The feats of memory and knowledge are formidable considering that an older Yanyuwa man or woman may have knowledge of four to five song lines, sometimes more, and this then could mean that they have knowledge of over 400 kilometres of song.

At one level it is possible to call these songs environmental and biological narratives but that is underestimating their purpose and content. The term environment or landscape are terms that the teachers of western knowledge use to describe the places in which we find ourselves living and working and spending our lived existences. In Yanyuwa, the same word would be *awara* a term that can mean earth, land, place, soil, possessions, sea, sand bar, mud bank reef and home. *Awara* is summarised as meaning country', but again the meaning is much different from what it might be expected to mean in English. Country which is also the sea, is spoken about in the same way that people talk about their living human relatives; people cry about country, they worry about country, they listen to country, and they visit country, and long to visit country. In return, country can feel, hear, and think; country can also accept and reject, and be hard or easy, just as living people can be to each other, so it is no surprise that sometimes people will also address each other as country', that is, as close relatives who bring to that relationship all of their past experience, their present and their future. So when people talk about singing their country, all of these relationships are present. It is not just a song about the environment.

However, the term environment' is still a useful starting place to try and understand a Yanyuwa understanding of country and the powerful link that song has to this relationship of people and country. What needs to be first understood is that the verses of the song lines', the *kujika*, are a distillation of not only the potential to negotiate and influence the *environment* but also a rich imagery that expresses qualities that are seen as indicative of the health and vitality of all the living and non-living things on the land and in the sea and river systems.

A study of the etymology of the word *environment* demonstrates that it originally also contained ideas of vitality. In old French the word *viron* refers to surroundedness and comes from a verb, *vire*, meaning to turn and transfer which in modern times has come to mean to change colour. The two Latin relatives of this word are *virero*' and *vibro*': the first word expresses notions of flourishing and vigour while the other expresses curling, dynamic or tremulous movement which causes shimmering effects and images of gleaming and glimmering. The linguistic history of the word environment' suggests that originally western perceptions of the environment came from the idea of being surrounded by a flourishing world full of movement and brightness (cf. Cousin et al 1994, Lewis 2000).

For the Yanyuwa people this is the ideal that the song lines' celebrate, a country that contains images of brilliance and brightness that signify the physical, emotional and spiritual health of the country, and it is these images that are contained in the verses of the song lines. There are verses that speak of the bright white flanks and

2.
These illustrations were drawn by the author with the permission of the “li-Yanyuwa li-Wirdiwalangu” or Yanyuwa elders group. The drawing of creatures of Law, was until quite recently in Yanyuwa society, associated with actions of sorcery and the breaking of Yanyuwa Law more generally. The drawing of species by the author with the permission of the elders has been seen as a way of avoiding some of these issues. The drawings are taken from a much larger work-in-progress that has mapped and drawn over 400 kilometres of song lines.

muzzle of the Dingo, the shark rich in flesh and fat, the Seven Sisters or Pleiades star constellation shining brightly or the glistening of the sea spray on the head of a shark. Thus song is not just restricted to land but also speaks of the sea and sky. The songs become a way of engaging through sight and sound and human emotion with the essence of the creative power, vitality and nourishment that still exists in the country because of the Dreaming, the original Ancestors of the Yanyuwa.

When the country is well, when it is content, the animals that call that country home are fat. Animals without fat are not healthy and it indicates that something is wrong with the land and, consequentially, the Yanyuwa people begin critical self-examination of their actions in relation to each other and country to try to discover the source of such unhealthy beings. Fat too has a quality of shiny-ness and many song line’ verses talk of things being fat’. Conditions of fat speak also of displays of brilliance, where each species and its health indicates the strength and well being of country and of its ability to nourish and be nourished in return.

There are two examples of song cycle portions in this article (Fig 1 and 2) ² and at first viewing and reading these may appear to be superficial and descriptive; however the process of singing just one verse, let alone the many others, draws both the singer and the listeners back to the original time of beginning, to the original text of creation. The songs, however, create a powerful repetition of ongoing dialogue between the past and the present whereby each singing, even of one verse, is an interpretation of Ancestral events, of country, Law and kin, as well as knowledge of the rituals associated with each Ancestral being and the narratives that surround them. Each song verse then is like a key-hole, that, when peeped through, leads to another room full of understanding about the Law, that then leads to another door with another keyhole. The song cycle’ verses are keys to the ongoing accumulation of knowledge about the specifics of the Ancestral beings, their country and of the living kin that call that country home. Thus song is a fabric constructed of many, many webs and as knowledge is acquired, a multidimensional structure is built, but it is a structure of the mind, drawn from the land and sea, that is brought into being and articulated through speech, song, ritual action and moving through country and over sea.



From Lingambalnganbal the kujika turns north west for a short way and comes to Kiwirnyibarnku, and then the kujika turns east comes to the reef of Nungkariwurra.

Jalbarramba
 Ngangka kumindini
*White-bellied sea eagle
 calls out
 over the surface of the sea*

Jalbarramba
 Bularrku mindini
*White-bellied sea eagle
 white chest feathers shining*

Ngarraburna
 Yuluyu
 Nguyunguyu
*Blue bone fish swimming
 through the sea*

Ngarraburna
 Yuluyu
 Nguyunguyu
 Murningurna
*Blue bone fish swimming
 through the sea
 they gather on the reef*

Warrngandungandu
 Lhambiji kundururu
*Storm winds from the north
 bending all before them*

Wirrarra bakabuluji
 Darridarri

*Rainbow Serpent from
 Centre Island
 (Munkumungkarnda)
 rising from the water, it is
 clearly visible*

Nganjarr budarni
 Nganjarr bunda
*From the country of
 Kuwirnyibarnku
 the tongue of the Rainbow
 Serpent can be see,
 tongue flashing like
 lightning*

Walaya libirrku
 Ngarda
 Yulurryulurrun badi
*The heads of the whales'
 surface,
 as they travel side-by-side*

Bayalmakurra
 Dijanynyngkurr
 Mulamburrburrandi
*Large Tiger Shark
 stripes on its body
 show clearly*

Ayababaraku
 Kiyangurr amarr
 Kararramina

*Large Tiger Shark,
 His dorsal fin rises
 clearly from the water*

Wukuwarrba
 Ngarda ni-ngarda
 Bulmanjimanji
*The liver of the
 large Tiger Shark is rich in
 fat*

Nungkarinja jangu
 Nungkariwurrunguyul
*The reef Nungkariwurra
 in the midst of the sea*

Nungkarinjajangu
 Nungkari wurrunguyu
 Birlimbirlima
*The reef Nungkariwurra
 in the midst of the sea
 tidal currents swirl around
 the reef*

Jalbarramba
 Bularrku mirndini
*White-bellied sea eagle
 white chest feathers shining*



Around and around the kujika circles the reef at Nungkariwurra, it is here that the Manankura Rrumburiya men hand over the kujika to the Rrumburiya men of Vanderlin and North Island. The kujika circles and then moves eastwards to Yulbarra.

Jalbarram ba
Ngadurru ngadurru

*White-bellied sea eagle
glides, wings outstretched*

Marnkalha nyambu
Daridarilanya

*Spotted catshark
swims the bottom of the sea*

Ngarribarringki
Dijidiji ngamba

*The Wobbegong shark
rests on the bottom of the
sea*

Kiyirri dinibanji
Muluja mulujarru

*Leopard shark
swims near the reef
searching for food*

Nya-marinari burly
Kilirri bumanirri

*Eagle ray swims the
surface of the sea*

Nya-marinari burly
Kilirri bumanirri
Jalamanumanu

*Eagle ray swims the
surface of the sea
it breaks the surface*

Kambumba
Bamburrwalawala
*Large black stingray
with strong tail barbs*

Murrbundungularna
Birriji warumala

*Shovel-nosed ray
swims close to
the bottom of the sea*

Ngulku bamburrirri
Bilandayarnani

*Stingrays swimming
together
in large numbers*

Arlalaarlala
Nyamburr mijindaya

*Suckerfish cling to
the Tiger Shark*

Nukanuka
Bilara nuka
Ngabalirra burru

*Moonfish swim
flat bodies shining in
the sea*

Ngarinba ngariyangka
Dijaynyngka barra

*Red spot crab
rests near the reef*

Lambarrijinda wurru
Ma-wurrangkayi wurru

*Blue swimmer crab
swims through the sea*

Li-wurniwurni
Mi yalimbayanba

*Mullets
swim the shallow waters
of the beach country*

The song cycles' are the primary structures upon which relationships and ritual are built, many of these rituals being powerful and the knowledge they encode, restricted. However, it can be said here that ceremonies become the most intense and practical demonstration of Ancestral power and authority, of origins in country and how people are related and inseparable from ceremony and country.

The actual songs are of course at their most powerful when they are being sung; however, certain Yanyuwa men and women are also skilled at describing the path of the song using the spoken word. The following example describes the path of the Tiger Shark song line, as told by a senior owner of that song, Ron Ricket Murundu. In this text the understanding of the *kujika* rising up from the fresh water well, travelling through the river and then out to the sea and islands before eventually being "put down" into the fresh water lake named Walala is dramatically told.

The eye, the fresh water well of the Tiger Shark is there at Manankurra; it is there that the Tiger Shark climbed up singing: the shark was at the well singing, he was sending his song back to the country where he had travelled, we are naming the well Dungkurrumaji, my father's name. The Tiger Shark was at the well singing and so it is we are singing the well and the trees that surround it, then we are singing the double-barred finches and the bar-shouldered doves that come to drink at the well. Onwards then we are carrying the song and we are singing the very tall cycad palms which have as their personal name Yulungurri, the same as the shark, then we are singing the white barked gum tree which is named in the song as Karrijiji, the same name as my father's brother.

We are singing northwards, and we descend down into the depths of the river. We are singing the mouth of the shark. Down in the depths of the river we are singing, we sing the bundle of soaking cycad and we follow the high tide when the current is flowing strongly downstream. We continue singing northwards and then we are climbing, up onto the riverbank, onwards now along the riverbank we are singing. We are singing the tall steep sides of the eastern riverbank, it is the mainland, yes we are still singing on the mainland, we are singing the camps for the old people. We are singing the children who will not stop talking, we sing the bark canoes and the old man making the fishing net, the cycad bread and the footpaths along the top of the riverbank.

Onwards and northwards we follow the path of this song; in its fullness and completeness we are singing it. We are getting to the bush cucumber as it grows on the savannah grasslands, and we are singing the brolgas as they gather at the lagoons and stand on the plains.

We are leaving the savanna grasslands and are coming back down to the riverbank; we are singing the black flying foxes in the camps, and we are singing the pink-eared duck, then on, northwards, ever northwards we are singing the tiger mullet. Then we are singing the high tide as it is washing ever downwards and northwards. In the midst of the tide we are singing the salt-water crocodile as it floats on the high tide, and further northwards, in the river, in its depths we are going, northwards ever northwards we are travelling, and we come to that place that we call Nungkayiyirrinya, it is at the mouth of the river, the east bank. At this place we are singing the saltwater crocodile floating on the high tide, and then we go down into the broad expanse of the river, and on the east bank we are singing the nest of the white-bellied sea eagle and then in the depths of the river mouth we are singing the sea mullet and the mud crab and the eagle ray.

Ever northwards we are singing, the tide is pulling and swirling ever northwards. We sing the immature Tiger Shark, we are singing the sand bar at the river mouth which we name Limabinja and then we are singing the fully grown Tiger Shark, yes we are naming him, my senior paternal grandfather. We are singing in the depths of the river channel, ever downwards and northwards and we are singing the manta ray and then we are singing the black kingfish and then again we are singing the Tiger Shark.

Now we are in the depths of the sea and it is open before us, and we are singing the bottle nosed dolphin and the irrawaddy dolphin. Ever northwards we are singing the sea grass beds, the dugong cows and their calves, the bull that strikes the water with his flukes, we are singing all of the other kinds of dugong. Ever northwards and onwards, onwards we are singing the wide expanse of the open sea, we sing the point where sea and horizon meet, we are singing the wind, the storm wind from the north that comes from the islands, we are moving through the country of Wurlaburla and Lingambalngambal, they are in the depths of the sea, onwards we go, through the sea and then se come to the that reef, we are singing the reef that we are naming Nungkariwurra, (note see illustrations above for kujika at this point) we sing the sharks, all kinds of sharks, the wobbegong, the leopard shark and the cat shark, the manta ray, and then the parrotfish.

We are climbing upwards now, we are coming out of the sea and we are giving this song to those other people, to the island dwellers, we give it to them, but still we sing with them, they are our kinsmen, we are all Rrumburriya, we have carried the song to that place, to that reef called Nungkariwurra, we are still singing however, but the island dwellers are in the lead now, we who have carried this song from the mainland, through the sea, the song that has its true beginnings at Manankurra, we stand behind now, but still we are singing.

We are climbing up into the shallow sea and we are singing the saltwater crocodile and the sea spray as it splashes on the rocks, we are singing the tidal currents as they swirl near to the land, we are singing my sister, her name is there, her name is Malarndirri, there in the north as we come out on the land at Yulbarra.

We are climbing up out of the sea and we are singing the saltwater crocodile in the swamp with the paperbark trees. Up and ever onwards and northwards we are singing the messmate trees and we are singing the children and people carrying water from the spring waters that are there. We are singing the cabbage palm and northward and further inland. We are climbing upwards and we are at Ruwaliyarra and we are singing the blue-tongued lizard and then the death adder, we climb up onto the high sandstone ridges, high up on to the back of the land and there we are singing the spotted nightjar and the quoll, and then her, that one that remains alone, the rock wallaby, we are singing her, and then north-eastwards and onwards we are singing and descending and singing the paperbark trees and the white berry bush and then again we are singing the paperbark and messmate trees.

We are going north-eastwards, then for a little while we are turning east, and we come to the creek we are calling Wurrkulalarra, we are there in the waters of the creek and we are singing the blind Rainbow Serpent, it belongs there, we go to the mouth of the creek and we are singing the sea, the seagrass that is growing there and the flying fox camps in the mangroves and the rubbish that floats on the tide and the spotted eagle rays, then we are turning away from the sea and we are heading northwards, twisting and turning but always climbing up and going northwards but we are merely singing

the cabbage palms and the messmate trees, then are getting to the parrot, the little corella and we are singing that bird and then spring waters, we are singing the file snake and the brolga and then into the west we travel and then northwards we come to Walala (Lake Eames) we come to it on the west side, yes we are meeting that place we call Walala.

Round and round the waters of this place we are singing and from the north we come into the waters of this place, we are singing the dolphin and then the Rainbow Serpent that is there, we are singing his head, his tongue, back and tail, we are singing the Rainbow Serpent that only belongs to this place. We are singing we are carrying this song and it is nearing daylight. We are descending into the depths of the water; we are singing the side of the lake that is named Walala. It is near to daylight, and we are placing this song down, we are putting it down into the depths of the waters at Walala, we are leaving it here, at Walala, we are placing it down, we are putting it down we are leaving it, it is finished.

This description of the path of the Tiger Shark song line' is thick with meaning: there are statements of kinship and politics and the nature of shared responsibilities of the song by kinsmen; there are names of both kinfolk and names of country mentioned in the text, which reinforce the understanding of the human/country relationship; there are many species of birds, plants and animals mentioned all of which are also considered to be kin to the owners of this song. Thus a Tiger Shark, a wave, the open expanse of the sea can be seen for what it is, in the way that most of us would apprehend it, but for the Yanyuwa such things are also ancestors and have ancestral Law, they are kin. By the singing of the songs the shift from vital to supervital is carried out according to context. There are times when the sea is just the sea, the tiger shark just the tiger shark but at other times they are relatives and the action of singing brings forth their immediacy – saliency?.

However, perhaps the most vivid impression that can be drawn from this text is the sense of constant movement or engagement with that which is already there embedded in the land and sea. These song cycles' were placed into the earth and sea by the original Ancestral beings, so it is as if the land and sea themselves have become a recording device and the song is still there constantly moving, only waiting for human kin to give it voice. These songs it could be argued are Australia's oldest music, a most ancient libretto embedded in the country, which speak of origins and beginnings, and ways of understanding the richness of this continent. Indeed, with songs such as this there can be no *terra nullius* or indeed *marae nullius*; neither land nor sea is uninhabited.

On reading the above text it also becomes clear why the Yanyuwa often refer to 'song cycles' as *a-yabala*, a path or road and, to sing a song cycle' is called *wandayarra a-yabala*, following the (pre-existing) road. In the Yanyuwa language it is possible to talk about the act of singing as an activity of the past, present or future, however the 'song cycles' that move through the earth and sea can only ever be spoken about in the present tense, they have their own agency, they can exist for all time, even without being sung, they are moving (*ja-wingkayi*), they are flowing (*ja-wujbanji*), they are running (*ja-wulumanji*), they are in the earth, they are in the sea, they are ever present, even if there is no one left to sing the song line and people remember that the song line moves through a particular stretch of country or sea, then that song line still exists, it cannot be erased or dug out of the earth.

It is wrong and demeaning to the authority of the 'song cycles' to see them merely as road maps to survival in the land, as having only a life-saving function as part of a structuralist, functionalist attachment to culture. While many of the songs name lagoons and freshwater wells, many of the songs also travel through the depths of the sea or through thick impenetrable mangrove forests. They travel as the Ancestral beings travelled, and they did not always travel with human kin in mind. Furthermore, from a Yanyuwa perspective, clear understandings of these songs can only be truly understood by knowing the country they are moving through. This does not mean that a singer has to travel the route of the song; rather, the singer has ideally had enough of life's experience on country to actually know the physical characteristics of the land that he is singing. People can sing *song lines* many kilometres from their source but still have an active engagement with the country being sung. Song functions as a compendious mnemonic and encyclopaedia of knowledge of country that begins to explain to outsiders how much knowledge of country is required for survival. Survival not just in the physical sense but also in a spiritual and emotional sense as well.

The *song lines* are like a conduit of power posited in country by the Ancestral beings and to sing these songs is to reveal original creative energy and potency. It is for this reason that these songs are sung carefully, and in order, and then placed back into the earth or lagoons or parts of the sea with particular care. The power that is awakened must also be put back to rest. The following words belong to the chant that is sung at the conclusion of singing *song lines* and demonstrates most clearly the idea of returning the song carefully back into the country.

Yarrbada yarrbayarra
Dunanajada wijka rarra
Bardiyu wijka rarra
Bardiyu juju
Balya juju
Balyu!

Song of our Law,
We have carried you
And now we put you back
Into the depths of the country
A long way down into the depths of the country
A long way down we put you to rest!

When people sing these songs, the country in all its wealth and vitality opens up in the singers' minds. They are seeing the land anew as it once was and they hope it will always be. A distillation of the power and sentience of the country is being revealed once more, and it is as if the singers are the loud speakers for what they know already exists in the country. The country and sea sings and reveals itself through its human kin. Yanyuwa 'song cycles' enact a celebration of the specificity of their country and knowledge (see also Yanyuwa families et. al 2005, Bradley 2011).

The learning of these 'song cycles' requires true scholarship, thus they are objects of high value and consequently must always be carefully negotiated with due respect in order to maintain the balance between both the country and its living and non-living kin. It is the words of the 'song cycles' that provide the means to unify and extend the social community, and enable people to understand the various species and parts of nature and thus to see time and space as a continuum and not a series of separate events. Songs such as *kujika* become the beginning of Law rather than a product of it. The very sounds of the 'song cycles' are also the sound of the subject being sung, *warlamakamaka*, the broad open sea, or *wariyangalayawu*, the hammerhead shark. The very syllables resonate with the super vital; the sounds combine to make up words that give meaning. But at one level meaning is also seen to be secondary because the very words are seen to be building blocks of Yanyuwa country. Song, to use an analogy is a repetition of the country's DNA strand and to sing is to bring forward all of a country's biology, geography, meteorology, its phenomenology, indeed the very biography of place. Song is a way in which Yanyuwa people negotiate with their country. Often in the context of western meeting structures and negotiations, the people meeting are urged to strive for a 'win-win situation', so that all parties will walk away satisfied with the negotiations. In a comparable way, when Yanyuwa people sing and discuss the country they sing, they are striving to understand and accommodate its needs, so that country will in turn continue to meet theirs. There is an intense specificity about each song line that the Yanyuwa people possess and there are many questions in regards to what distinguishes one song line from another, and what each is used for. *Song lines* detail many, many biological species as well phenomena, their own natural history of ecology and a detailed knowledge of taxonomy is required to place these songs in the environment they travel through. It is important however to understand that all of this detail is bound to a specific tradition, a Law, that old men and women work hard to sustain, well aware that once removed from cultural constraints the interested outsider may twist the original source material to conform with preconceptions that are inconsistent and well outside of original intent.

The slow passage of the foot and the dugout canoe have been replaced by the speed of the car and motor boat, things once learned only by stopping and at an easy pace within the world, are passed by. As Annie Karrakayn a senior Yanyuwa woman, once said: the world moves too fast for all of us now". How then can the world be slowed down? To slow the pace and reveal the detail in spaces that today are quickly passed by the birds, fish, dugong, the nature of the sea and other animals all seldom seen and the chest-nut rail that "lifts up" the mangroves, the call of the red-capped plover that guards the sea, the sea snake that is a wave. The intention is not to overromanticise but to note that for the old people, , as with so many memories, there is nostalgia and love for what can be remembered. *Kujika*, the singing of country and sea is about love and the lifting up of space and place, of the only home that people have ever known. The songs also now are about loss, containing verses that sing of animals, plants and birds that no longer exist on Yanyuwa country. In this instance those songs speak about the impact of colonization not just on people but on the species that once inhabited the land and sea.

Constantly, these songs are about memories as well. They become distilled with commentaries, and as new commentaries are added, old ones may be forgotten or absorbed, and in doing so the meanings are redefined and shaped to make sense to

the meaning of the lives of the present generation. When sung in the proper manner *kujika* becomes an invocation, a conjuration of the enchanted that brings with it the experience that it describes; it is never 'history' or just memory, nor a metaphor for something else. *Kujika* is of the now, of the ever being. When performed with full knowledge and enthusiasm, it becomes actual re-creation. *Kujika* includes the experience itself. Yanyuwa country is not a wilderness, not even the sea is unknown space: it is only wilderness if there is no knowledge. Wilderness, in a Yanyuwa sense, is a place that is devoid of reverence and revelation.

The tragedy that is now occurring on Yanyuwa country can be likened to a radio or television that is turned right down: technically the sounds, the music, the conversations are still there, and there is a generation who have chosen not to hear them any more, or have not been given the gift of, or tools for knowing how. Country is critical for educating people about song. Without the links the relationship becomes strained, segmented and eventually non-existent, song without country, country without singing and hunting, without dance, without language makes country weak, 'low down'. There is no emotional engagement, it is not being 'lifted up' by the constancy of people and their presence and their emotional need to be on country.

In a quite strict Yanyuwa view of cosmology if something is connected to absolutely nothing, then symbolically, linguistically, physically, psychologically it is literally meaning-less. And in the same way, if something is connected to everyone everything is totally meaning-full. To be meaning-full however, there are rules, there is the Law, it is the Law that speaks of how country works, if the Law, or the rules are followed, if we 'play-by-them' then there is a reward, which is an understanding of why people inhabit country and just what potential that belonging can offer to any one individual. The ultimate potential is to know how and why everything in Yanyuwa country is connected to everything else, to reach the point where life is supercharged, permeated and over-brimming with a purpose and meaning.

On a day-to-day basis, it is possible to be oblivious to these things and then there are moments, when something happens or events demand that we see the connection. We are astonished that we couldn't see them until that moment. These are often the revelations of the sacred, the super vital in our lives and in the country. Just beneath the surface, each person is linked to every other person and to every other organism, and there is a responsibility to preserve these invisible threads of connection. Knowledge of *kujika* and country is a way of sensing the presence of a network of mutual interdependence that binds us to others both human and non-human, both animate and non-animate'.

It perhaps is a 'common sense' western understanding that would accept that it is impossible for a person to imagine his or her conception. However I have met and traveled with people who tell in extraordinary detail the events that surrounded their conception and ultimate birth and there are people who relate to each other as *wurranganji*, kin derived from the depths of the water, people who shared the same site, the same freshwater well, or stretch of sea, from which their *ardirri*, conception spirits were derived, and it is *kujika* that celebrates these relationships. For people who know such things a single verse of *kujika* is a potent recreation of the event, a tangible and sometimes overwhelmingly emotional linkage, that speaks beyond the

humanness of physical conception and birth to a conception from country and its super vital energy and authority.

The consciousness of the Yanyuwa world is dependent on the continued fabric of kinship, country and Law regardless of contemporary, radical and all too often tragic changes. The older generation knew, and there are those that still know that their bodies and minds are composed of this fabric and that the meaning of life and death is inherent in it, and perhaps, just perhaps, the deepest knowledge they possess is to know what life is really about. *kujika* is about the very beginning pulses of Yanyuwa time.

The oral tradition surrounding the *kujika* means that there is never one editorial. So-called mutually exclusive accounts are woven in together and this allows for an understanding of a multifaceted nature of reality, and in this there is the wisdom that brilliantly conveys the message of country leaving the listener, the learner and the singer in the same state of confusion about what 'really' happened (as if reality were only one thing at a time). For the men and women who know *kujika*, everything happened and it all happened at once, and everything and everyone is there and distilled, nothing is nothing, and everything is everything, it is all the same but different. It is people and country and all that it contains are needed to make clear the way these things are learned. It is too hard to explain, it needs to be experienced, needs to be sensed and then once the experience has been had, it is possible to move onto a situation that begins with, alright, I'll tell you a story...." The issue however is whether we will ever hear the story that needs to be told. It was Stanner (1968) who suggested to white Australia that we were going to have to find new ways to talk and write if ever we were going to come close understanding the depths of Indigenous ways of knowing and that the more complex the knowledge the harder this was going to be.

Kujika are texts of the sacred, of the super vital that conceal myriad meanings, ordinary everyday words cannot contain them, thus they require the special language of the Dreamings themselves, the language of the plants, fish, dugong, waves, birds, rainbow serpents and all the other human and non-human entities that are embraced in country. The commentary surrounding the words is necessarily fluid because each singing redefines the meaning of all the previous stories. The 'new' singing ripples backwards and forwards through all the previous singings and thus new stories about ancient songs are constantly being invented.

Our Yanyuwa teachers have constantly taught us that all the things in their country are just the way they are supposed to be (leaving modern encroachments aside), the way they must be, however to completely understand this there must be a surrender of ego, a submerging in the flow of song and narrative on, in and through country, and in doing so we also learn that much of what is called Law. The merging of the sacred' with the secular' is all dependant on relationships of affection and shared purpose as well as continuing unashamed accounts of biography and autobiography.

Ultimately, however, *kujika* lived constantly in the minds of those that are now deceased and it lives in the memories of those still alive, and for those that cannot sing, the word *kujika* still conjures important issues and moments of introspection of the wealth that still courses through country. The value of *kujika* was probably best summed up by the Yanyuwa senior Law man, Jerry Brown, when he said, at the end

of an important land claim meeting in 1993:

It is the kujika that holds us Yanyuwa speakers as one, it is the most important thing for us. White people do not know this, they do not understand, they have no ears to hear the country, but for us Yanyuwa speakers it is the Law, the kujika is the road in the country that we follow with a single intensity, it is for us and it holds us tight”.

This last comment speaks to a way of knowing that this paper has tried to address, it speaks to an intimate way of holding knowledge, of numinous connections of genealogy that are not just of the human, in which the affect is as important as the details a song may hold. It is unfortunate that there is still a tendency amongst people who may have an interest in such knowledge to hold it and measure it against western science as the standard against which all other forms of knowledge should or could be measured. Of greater concern however is the constructing of knowledge in regards to what people know, the form, rather than how, the substance or process.

For Indigenous people such as the Yanyuwa, the practice of western science to censor out the intuitive, as the ideas and traditions of “uneducated people” and to confine themselves with purely empirical data at times causes great distress. The hard edge of western ways of knowing that refuses to admit anything but hard data, gives rise to mechanistic models of the world in which human emotions and relationships are considered irrelevant. Thus singing country, and all the species and phenomena that the verses carry, is not just something to be voiced or seen with the eyes alone, the song is also about the heart, relationships as well as the intellect.

A Yanyuwa engagement with country is about understanding a particular system of logic, which is constrained and informed by factors as diverse as authority, language, utility, aesthetics, ecology, habitat, ownership and a deeply embedded system of relationships. For the Yanyuwa the aim of their relationship with country is not to arrive at knowledge of a particular system but rather to explore and understand the various relationships that exist within their knowledge system. Therefore one of the most defining points about knowledge of country is context and the inclusion of empirical knowledge with what the West would class as subjective and emotional states, through which is exposed a system of relatedness which is presented via a system of countries that are an ecological model of complex internal relations and understandings. An openness to other epistemological positionings and other rationalities and a critical understanding of the assumptions built into Western epistemologies and linguistic comprehension is at the heart of many of the issues embedded in words such as landscape and knowledge.

Thus the argument comes full circle and questions from decades ago remain relevant and unresolved. Do the terms Indigenous Ecological Knowledge, Indigenous Knowledge (or the many other variations on the theme) adequately encapsulate the *kujika*? Or are they instead, poor substitutes, misnomers even, for *narnu-Yuwa* (the Law) which is a much more encompassing term? If not, is *kujika* to be dismissed as a relic from a bygone era or the simple nostalgic ruminations of an old world gerontocracies? Certainly, in the experience of the authors, the *kujika* retains relevance across generations in contemporary contexts and will not be so readily consigned to the dustbin of history.

The evidence of this relevance as represented above, suggests considerable ramifications and altogether practical consequences for the Yanyuwa and those who work with them today. If the legitimacy of one's voice is denied or reduced into conformity with another's superlative truth, it must prove difficult to sustain a sense of self-possession or even worth. Indeed, the plight of many Aboriginal Australians today may be attributed to some degree at least, to this cause. In that case, it would seem beholden on anthropologists (and all social commentators for that matter) to give careful consideration to the more qualitative aspects of any given human experience especially if purporting to represent that experience meaningfully. Without this consideration, those enquiries may be justly relegated to the realm of fiction dressed up as objective truth. Such an approach however, should not necessarily entail literal belief but instead demand a studied appreciation of another's sense of "being". Some concession in this regard, may even go a little way towards addressing an eternal question within the Western philosophical canon, a question that predates Hume and travels beyond Kant. Simply stated, can we adequately apprehend and define the world in entirety, and our place in it, through sole reference to sensory derived data, the foundation and bulwark of empirical, rational enquiry? For many Yanyuwa people at least, the question itself appears childlike and the answer is a resounding no.

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Dr. Stephen Johnson was born and brought up in Australia's Northern Territory. He completed a doctorate in anthropology at the University of Queensland in 2012. Primary research and work interests revolve around how people perceive their place in any given landscape and how this perception informs social and cultural expression and ultimately the construction of knowledge itself.

For the past 16 years Stephen has worked in remote Aboriginal communities across northern Australia in a variety of roles mostly based around these or similar themes. He has worked with the North Australian Indigenous Land and Sea Management Alliance (NAILSMA) out of Darwin, li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Ranger Unit (SRU) in Borroloola and the University of Queensland (UQ) on Native Title matters in the Pilbara and Goldfields regions of Western Australia. Currently, Stephen is working with the SRU and Yanyuwa families (with whom he shares a long family history) on a series of enterprise developments in and around Borroloola in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria.

Associate Professor John Bradley began research at Borroloola in 1980. Since that time he has spent the last 37 years bouncing around in boats on the rivers and sea country of his Yanyuwa mentors and teachers. He he has acted as senior Anthropologist on two historical land claims over Yanyuwa country, worked on issues associated with language and cultural management with Yanyuwa elders and the li-Anthawirriyarra Sea Ranger Unit. He has also sat on a number national and international committees associated with the preservation of Indigenous knowledge. His research is directed towards issues associated with Indigenous ontologies and epistemologies and ways that "epistemological bridges" might be created with Western ways of knowing. He is working with colleagues at Monash University in using animation as a way to facilitate cross-generational learning. He is the author of the prize winning *Singing Saltwater Country* and more recently the winner of the 2014 Future Justice Prize.

ART PIECE

Blue Ringed Octopus

Amy Friday

a-Bajamalanya

Courtesy of the artist



This is a painting by Yanyuwa elder Amy Friday a-Bajamalanya, it is a Blue Ringed Octopus, also it is the Seven Sister Star Constellation (the Pleiades) li-Jakarambirri in Yanyuwa. The Seven Sisters/Blue Ringed Octopus is an important Ancestral being for Amy's mothers clan. Amy is jungkayi or guardian for this creature and the stars. The Pleiades/Blue Ringed octopus features in the Dingo song line (kujika) of the Wuyaliya clan. The Pleiades are most visible in the middle of the cold season and in Yanyuwa Law are associated with fertility and the renewal of life on Yanyuwa country.

The painting makes reference to this association with the cold weather. Above the head of the octopus is a windbreak to block the cold season south easterly winds (a-mardu) and below the octopus is a small fire. The wind break in particular is significant and is sung in the song line verses associated with this creature.