

Holistic Cultural Immersion Programs as Diversions for First Nations Offenders and those on Remand

by Brett Sentance

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the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

under the supervision of Professor Teresa Libesman, Professor
Christopher Cunneen and Professor Larissa Behrendt.

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Certificate of Original Authorship

I, Brett Sentance, declare that this thesis, is submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the award of Doctor of Philosophy in Faculty of Law at the University of Technology Sydney.

This thesis is wholly my own work unless otherwise referenced or acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

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Please note, the format of this thesis is conventional.

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Glossary of First Nations Words and Phrases

Language is central to this thesis, it is the nexus of Culture, Community and *Ngurambang* (Country). As such, a glossary of language is the place where the journey of it begins and it is the guide that takes the reader through Culture. For these reasons, I have purposefully placed it up front. Throughout this thesis, I have utilised the *Wiradjuri* dictionary of Uncle Stan Grant Senior and Dr. John Rudder titled, *A new Wiradjuri dictionary* (Grant & Rudder 2010), coupled with the inspirational language insights of Aunty Flo Grant. I have also relied upon my daughter Gemma Sentance for her language knowledge. I thank Uncle Stan for his continuing dedication with the *Wiradjuri* language. I also acknowledge his work with Aunty Flo Grant, and other *Wiradjuri Mudyigang* (Elders) Ray Woods, Sandy Warren Lorraine Tye and Letetia Harris in collaboration with Bernard Sullivan in the poetry book, *Yindyamarra Yambuwan: Respecting Everything* (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016), which provided the *Wiradjuri* phrases listed below. The *Wiradjuri* compiled in the following glossary and list of phrases was made possible because of these invaluable dictionaries, books and projects. I have also included a word list for other First Nations language words, Nation groups and place names from across our unceded sovereign continent that feature in this thesis.

Wiradjuri Words

<i>Wiradjuri</i>	Meaning
<i>babiin</i>	father
<i>babiinbal</i>	paternal grandfather
<i>babiinbang</i>	uncle
<i>babirra</i>	sing
<i>badhiin</i>	paternal grandmother
<i>bagaray bang</i>	restored, comforted, healthy, comfortable, healing, rebalancing
<i>bagaraygan</i>	mob of natives, advisory mob, mobs, Aboriginal peoples

<i>bali</i>	baby or babies
<i>balima</i>	north
<i>Balumbambal</i>	Ancestors, the Old People
<i>balugan</i>	animals
<i>bamali</i>	aunty
<i>bangalngaarran-gaarra</i>	the whole earth
<i>bila</i>	river
<i>birr / birrang</i>	sky
<i>budyaan</i>	birds
<i>bugurr</i>	plants
<i>bula</i>	two
<i>bulabu bulabu</i>	four
<i>bulabu marrabu</i>	seven
<i>bulabu marrabu murrabu</i>	twelve
<i>bulangumbaay</i>	three
<i>bundharry</i>	kangaroo
<i>burrindin</i>	pee wee, magpie lark
<i>burrurgiyan</i>	ibis
<i>buyaa</i>	law
<i>coolamon</i>	container for carrying made of bark or wood
<i>Cudgegong</i>	Cudgegong River
<i>dhaagun</i>	earth/soil
<i>dhangaang</i>	food
<i>dhawura</i>	wind
<i>dhulubang</i>	spirit, soul
<i>dhundhu</i>	black swan
<i>dhurbuwunhanha</i>	west
<i>dinawan</i>	emu
<i>durrawan</i>	currawong

<i>dyirribang</i>	man or men
<i>dyirridyirri</i>	willie wagtail
<i>dyuri</i>	flock
<i>gaagang</i>	brother
<i>gadi</i>	snake
<i>gagamin</i>	brother
<i>galang</i>	many, tribe
<i>Galari</i>	Lachlan River
<i>galin</i>	children
<i>galing</i>	water
<i>gambang</i>	brother
<i>gandhalwurr</i>	turtle
<i>garru</i>	magpie
<i>gawuraa</i>	feather or feathers
<i>gidyira</i>	Animals
<i>giranggawu</i>	east
<i>Girawu</i>	goanna
<i>girinyalanha</i>	talking together
<i>gudhi</i>	song
<i>gudyiin</i>	ancient time, the time of our ancestors
<i>gugaa</i>	goanna, lace monitor
<i>gugug</i>	owl
<i>gugubarra</i>	kookaburra
<i>gunhi</i>	mother
<i>gunhinarrung</i>	mother's mother
<i>gurragayarra</i>	conclusion, finish speaking
<i>guulany</i>	trees
<i>guya</i>	south, or fish
<i>maliyan</i>	wedgetail eagle
<i>mandaang guwu</i>	thank you
<i>marra</i>	five
<i>marrabulangum-baay</i>	eight
<i>marradir</i>	rock or rocks

<i>marramarra</i>	a tree with spreading branches, also number ten
<i>marramarrabulangumbaay</i>	thirteen
<i>marramarradhina</i>	fifteen
<i>marramarrabulabula</i>	fourteen
<i>Marrambidya</i>	Murrumbidgee River
<i>marrumbang</i>	kindness, love
<i>marrung</i>	eggs
<i>mayiny</i>	people
<i>miimi</i>	sister
<i>mingaan</i>	elder sister
<i>mirri</i>	dog
<i>miyagan</i>	family
<i>Mudyigang</i>	Elders
<i>murru</i>	journeys
<i>Murrumbidjeri</i>	Murrumbidgee River
<i>murruway</i>	tracks, way, path
<i>murruway marambul</i>	proper way
<i>ngaa-bi-nya</i>	examine, try and evaluate
<i>ngabun</i>	mother's father
<i>ngama</i>	mother
<i>ngamurr</i>	daughter
<i>ngarriyaurn</i>	kite bird
<i>ngiyanggarang</i>	beginning of a conversation in the morning to awaken others
<i>ngumbaay</i>	one
<i>ngumbaaybu marrabu</i>	six
<i>ngumbaaybu marrabu</i>	eleven
<i>marrabu</i>	
<i>Ngurambang</i>	Country
<i>waagan</i>	crow
<i>Wambuul</i>	Macquarie River
<i>wambuwuny</i>	grey kangaroo
<i>waringinali</i>	cousin

<i>warunarrung</i>	grandson
<i>wayal duhn</i>	kangaroo tail
<i>wayamiilbuwawanha</i>	turn around and look at yourself
<i>winhangadilinya</i>	knowing oneself, to feel your own spirit, to know yourself
<i>winhangadurinya</i>	to reflect, to meditate
<i>winhangagigilanha</i>	care for
<i>winhangarra</i>	listening, hearing, thinking
<i>Wiradjuri</i>	the people of the three rivers
<i>wumbany</i>	father's brother
<i>wundayan</i>	niece
<i>wurrumany</i>	son
<i>yanhadhuray</i>	infant
<i>yarra</i>	talking
<i>yinaa</i>	wife
<i>yinaagirbang</i>	women
<i>yindyamarra</i>	honour and respect
<i>yiradhu marang</i>	good day
<i>yowi</i>	a human being with no kinship or relational accountability
<i>yurung</i>	rain

Wiradjuri Phrases

Wiradjuri Phrase	Meaning
<i>buyaa yarran ga-nhalmurun-wi-gi-nya</i>	lore tells me that living a <i>yindyamarra</i>
<i>yindyamarra murun-murru ngurambang</i>	way of life cares for Country
<i>wirimbirra</i>	
<i>dhulu-ya-rra-bu wudha-gar-bin-ya-bu</i>	talk straight, listen deeply and act
<i>yindyamal-dhuray-bu</i>	respectfully
<i>gariya yaambul yala</i>	speak truth
<i>giwang gadhang-ga</i>	moon over ocean
<i>marra marra bunma-bunma-rra yindyamarra</i>	experiencing makes a part of <i>yindyamarra</i>
<i>mawbuwarra ngaa-mi-nya-gu</i>	looking to see

<i>mayiny yindyamarra nga-dhu</i>	respecting <i>Wiradjuri</i> people
<i>mununbul waybarra mawam-bul bala</i>	everything weaving together is
<i>yindyamarra</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i>
<i>murruway dhulubang</i>	soul or spirit path
<i>ngadhu ngurrigiilang Wiradjuri gibirr</i>	I am a proud <i>Wiradjuri</i> man
<i>ngaligingu murru</i>	our journey
<i>nginha gudhi bala gudhi-maradhal-bu gudhi-</i>	the song is the song of the past, and the
<i>giyira-bu</i>	song of the future
<i>nginha-guliya-laa yindyamarra wurrugan</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> connects all that we have
	spoken about
<i>yindyamarra giilang ngiyawaygunhanha</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> is always the story that the
<i>giilang giilangyald-haany murun-wi-gi-</i>	storyteller lives and breathes
<i>nya</i>	
<i>waybarra-bu ngiyambalgarra-bu</i>	weaving and yarning together
<i>waybarra gulbanha</i>	weaving knowing
<i>waybarra marramarra</i>	weaving making
<i>waybarra winhangarra</i>	weaving learning
<i>wingangarra gulbali -gu</i>	learning to understand
<i>winhangarra bunma-bunma-rra yindyamarra</i>	learning makes a part of <i>yindyamarra</i>
<i>winhanga-nha bunma-bunma-rra yindyamarra</i>	remembering makes a part of <i>yindyamarra</i>
<i>Wiradjuri buyaa yindyamarra nga-dhu</i>	respecting <i>Wiradjuri</i> law
<i>Wiradjuri muyulung-ngin-guyliya yindyamarra</i>	respecting <i>Wiradjuri</i> Elders
<i>nga-dhu</i>	
<i>Wiradjuri ngiyang yindyamarra nga-dhu</i>	respecting <i>Wiradjuri</i> language
<i>Wiradjuri ngurambang yindyamarra nga-dhu</i>	respecting <i>Wiradjuri</i> Country
<i>wudhargarbinya wudha-dhuray-gu</i>	listening to hear
<i>yindyamalagirridyu mingaangaland-hibu</i>	I respect my brothers and sisters
<i>gaagang galandhibu</i>	
<i>yindyamarra bala bagaray-bang bimbarra</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> the healing fire that dances
<i>waganha wuurrawin buguwindya</i>	through the grass in the Country
<i>ngurambang-ga</i>	
<i>yindyamarra bala bila-dha birra-bina-birra</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> is in the rivers moving
<i>wuurrawin Wiradjuri ngurambang-ga,</i>	quietly through <i>Wiradjuri</i> Country,

<i>yindyamarra, guwiiny murin gaang-a-dhaanyl ngiyanhinya, birra-bina-birra, baalmanha bila-dha</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> , it is the canoe carrying us, moving quietly, floating, on the river.
<i>yindyamarra bala dyilmang ngurunggal galing-ga, guwiiny yabun-dha wiray yarra</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> is in the silence on the water in the early morning, it is in the word not spoken
<i>yindyamarra bala gudhi-dya</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> is in the song
<i>yindyamarra bala mugumnawa yanguu</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> is inside the song of running water
<i>yindyamarra bala-yindyang</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> is patient, slow and soft
<i>yindyamarra bala yambuwan</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> is everything
<i>bunba-y-marra-nha yindyamarra dumba-l-girri ngulung-ga-girri</i>	longing for respect, honouring, and listening to be shown in return
<i>yindyamarra bungany ngu-ng-gilanhi</i>	giving the gift of honouring, respecting and listening
<i>yindyamarra burambabirra wayba-yi</i>	sharing what has been woven
<i>yindyamarra buwurr gurrugambirra bangal-ngarra-ngarra</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> is the possum skin cloak that shelters all
<i>yindyamarra dhurang-ga marru-wa-nha gulaman</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> is in the bark that forms a coolamon
<i>yindyamarra giilang ngiyawaygunhanha</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> is always the story that the storyteller lives and breathes
<i>giilang giilangyaldhaany murun-wi-gi-nya</i>	I will respect my sisters and brothers
<i>yindyamalgirridyu mingaangaland-hibu gaagang galandhibu</i>	
<i>yindyamarra ngalan-guranha giilang</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> lights the stories
<i>yindyamarra winhanganha</i>	respectful thinking
<i>yindyamarra Wiradjuri murum-wi-gi-nya</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> , the Wiradjuri way of life,
<i>dumbarra widyungga maldhan-u murun-bu mayiny-dhiyala</i>	shows how to work and live with people
<i>yindyamarra wudhagarbinya gulgandarra yarra</i>	<i>yindyamarra</i> listens before speaking
<i>yindyamarra yambuwan</i>	respecting everything

Other Language Words, Nations and Place Names

Word	Meaning	Nation or Language Group
<i>Anmatjere</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is north of <i>Mparntwe</i> Alice Springs	<i>Anmatjere</i>
<i>Arrernte</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is Central Australia with its centre around <i>Mparntwe</i> Alice Springs	<i>Arrente</i>
<i>bah</i>	place	<i>Yugambeh</i>
<i>Bimara</i>	the Rainbow Serpent	<i>Yawuru</i>
<i>Boorloo</i>	Perth	<i>Whadjuk</i> (dialect of <i>Noongar</i> language)
<i>Bundjalung</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country spans northeastern New South Wales and parts of southeastern Queensland	<i>Bundjalung</i>
<i>Bunuba</i>	First Nations people whose Country is in the central west Kimberley region of Western Australia	<i>Bunuba</i>
<i>Barunggam</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country encompasses the Western Downs area of Queensland	<i>Barrunggam</i>
<i>dadirri</i>	inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness	<i>Ngangikurungkurr</i>

<i>Dharug</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is Cumberland Plain, Blue Mountains and regions of the Hawksbury River and Georges River, New South Wales, Australia	<i>Dharug</i>
<i>Djukun</i>	First Nations peoples of the Kimberley, specifically <i>Jirr-ngin-ngan</i> , Broome	<i>Djukun</i>
<i>Euahleyai</i>	First Nations peoples of northwestern New South Wales and into southern Queensland	<i>Euahleyai</i>
<i>Gamillaroi</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is northwestern New South Wales and southwestern Queensland	<i>Gamillaroi</i> (also <i>Kamilaroi</i>)
<i>Garramilla</i>	<i>Larrakia</i> name for Darwin	<i>Larrakia</i>
<i>Garrwa</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is in the southwestern region of the Gulf of Carpentaria, spanning from Borrooloola, Northern Territory to Doomadgee, Queensland	<i>Garrwa</i>
<i>Gooniyandi</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is in the Kimberley region along the Fitzroy River in Western Australia	<i>Gooniyandi</i>
<i>Gubbi Gubbi</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is South East Queensland, from the Pine River in the south, up to the Burrum River near Maryborough in the	<i>Gubbi Gubbi</i>

	north, and extends inland to the Conondale Ranges	
<i>Gulan</i>	Place name for a site on <i>Bardi Jawi</i> Country, their Country is the lands and waters on and around the Dampier Peninsula, in the Kimberley region of Western Australia	<i>Bardi Jawi</i>
<i>Jakamarra/Jupurulla</i>	Skin kinship groups for the <i>Warlpiri</i> peoples of the central desert (men)	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>Jambinu / Jambinbirri</i>	Geraldton	<i>Yamatji</i>
<i>Jangala, Joongoorra, Jawandi and Jawalyi</i>	<i>Jangala</i> (north), <i>Joongoorra</i> (east), <i>Jawandi</i> (south) and <i>Jawalyi</i> (west), the four snakes which bring rain, wind and storms from the four different directions. Also four different skin kinship groups for the <i>Gooniyandi</i> peoples	<i>Gooniyandi</i>
<i>Jangala/Jampijinpa</i>	Skin kinship groups for the <i>Warlpiri</i> peoples of the central desert (men)	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>Jiman</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is in eastern Central Queensland	<i>Jiman</i> (also <i>Yiman</i>)
<i>Jukurrpa</i>	Dreaming or creation story, law	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>Karadjeri</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is from Eighty Mile Beach to Roebuck Bay, then stretches inland, into the Great Sandy Desert in Western Australia	<i>Karadjeri</i>

<i>Komumberri</i>	<i>Komumberi</i> peoples of the <i>Yugambah</i> Nation group	<i>Komumberri</i>
<i>Larrakia</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is centred around <i>Garramilla</i> (Darwin) area including both land and waters	<i>Larrakia</i>
<i>Larrkardiy</i>	boab tree	<i>Yawuru</i>
<i>Maroowarra</i>	Fitzroy River	<i>Gooniyandi</i>
<i>Martuwarra</i>	Fitzroy Crossing, also a name for Fitzroy River	<i>Gooniyandi</i>
<i>Mibbin</i>	Eagle or man	<i>Yugambah</i>
<i>Mibbinbah</i>	eagle or men's place	<i>Yugambah</i>
<i>Mina Mina</i>	Place name for a significant site on <i>Warlpiri</i> Country	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>Mparntwe</i>	Arrernte place name for the site where Alice Springs is located in the Northern Territory	<i>Arrernte</i>
<i>mulgoa</i>	black swan	<i>Dharug</i>
<i>Murujuga</i>	The Dampier Peninsula	Ngarluma-Yaburara
<i>Muthi Muthi</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is in the Northern Riverina and far west of New South Wales	<i>Muthi Muthi</i>
<i>Naarm</i>	The <i>Wurundjeri</i> name for the land on and around which the city of Melbourne is located, belonging to the <i>Kulin</i> Nation, which includes the <i>Wurundjeri</i> peoples	<i>Wurundjeri</i>
<i>Nakamarra/Napurrurla</i>	Skin kinship groups for the <i>Warlpiri</i> peoples of the central desert (women)	<i>Warlpiri</i>

<i>Nangala/Nampijinpa</i>	Skin kinship groups for the <i>Warlpiri</i> peoples of the central desert (women)	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>Ngangikurungkurr</i>	deep water sounds, name for the First Nations peoples of the Daly River, Northern Territory	<i>Ngangikurungkurr</i>
<i>Ngaringman</i>	First Nations peoples of northern Victoria River District in the Northern Territory	<i>Ngaringman</i>
<i>Ngarilikurlangu</i>	Place name for a significant site on <i>Warlpiri</i> Country	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>Noongar</i>	First Nations peoples in southwestern Western Australia	<i>Noongar</i>
<i>puit puit chepetch punyu</i>	the good spirit encompasses person and Country and is associated with being strong, happy, knowledgeable and socially responsible (to ‘take a care’), beautiful, clean, safe - both in the sense of being within the lore and in the sense of being cared for (Atkinson 2002, p.44)	<i>Gunditjmara Ngaringman</i>
<i>Puyurru</i>	Place name for a significant site on <i>Warlpiri</i> Country	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>Quandamooka</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is around the Moreton Bay region of Queensland	<i>Quandamooka</i>
<i>Rubbi</i>	Broome	<i>Yawuru</i>
<i>Wandjina</i>	rain making spirits of the land	<i>Wanjina Wuggurr</i>
<i>Wanjina Wuggurr</i>	First Nations peoples of the <i>Worrorra</i> , <i>Wunambal</i> and <i>Ngaringnya</i> whose Countries are in	<i>Wanjina Wuggurr</i>

	the Kimberley of northwestern Australia	
<i>wardilya</i>	bush turkey	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>wardung</i>	crow	<i>Whadjuk</i> dialect, <i>Noongar</i> language
<i>wardungmaat</i>	male ceremony, moiety	<i>Whadjuk</i> dialect, <i>Noongar</i> language
<i>Warlpiri</i>	First Nations people whose Country is in the Tanami Desert in Central Australia	<i>Walpiri</i>
<i>Warlu Kurlangu</i>	Fire Country	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>warna</i>	snake	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>Wagyl</i>	water python	<i>Whadjuk</i> dialect, <i>Noongar</i> language
<i>We-al-li</i>	fire and water	<i>Woppaburra</i>
<i>Whadjuk</i>	dialect of <i>Noongar</i> language	<i>Noongar</i>
<i>Wirnparrku</i>	Place name for a significant site on <i>Warlpiri</i> Country	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>yankirri</i>	emu	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>Yugambeh</i>	First Nations peoples of southeastern Queensland and Northern Rivers region of NSW	<i>Yugambeh</i>
<i>Yamatji</i>	First Nations peoples of the Mid West of Western Australia	<i>Yamatji</i>
<i>Yarripiri</i>	Ancestral Snake for <i>Warlpiri</i> peoples of the central desert	<i>Warlpiri</i>
<i>Yawuru</i>	First Nations peoples of <i>Rubbi</i> (Broome) Western Australia	<i>Yawuru</i>
<i>Yuin</i>	First Nations peoples whose Country is the South Coast of New South Wales, from Nowra to the Victorian Border	<i>Yuin</i>

Yolgnu

First Nations peoples whose
Country is in northeast Arnhem
Land, Northern Territory

Yolngu

Note on Language and English Terms Referring to First Nations Peoples

This thesis uses interchangeably the terms of Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and First Nations. I do this because there is no one term which every First Nations, Indigenous, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander person uses to describe themselves. I do this as a rejection of the settler colonial orientalist views that we are one homogenous culture, such views refuse to recognise our diversity, the most basic of facts. The use of multiple terms for us is, rather, a recognition that we are all separate nations, a celebration of our diverse cultures. I have a preference to recognise our agency as part of the agency of *Ngurambang* (Country), by referring to nation or language groups, for example *Wiradjuri* (the people of the three rivers). When that is not possible, I prefer to use the term First Nations to signify our connection to *Ngurambang* (Country) and the sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country). For me personally, the term Aboriginal carries a connotation of the primitive and is the root for racial epithets, something which this research resoundingly rejects. In the same vein, Indigenous is too closely allied to Indigenous plants and animals - recognition of our humanity was hard fought and won. First Nations, although borrowed from North America, aptly fits our aspirations and realities more comfortably.

This project also uses *Wiradjuri* language where possible (with English translations), such as respectfully using the *Wiradjuri* word for peoples, *mayiny*, as to do so is a statement of sovereignty, not my sovereignty but the sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country). Language connects us to *Ngurambang* (Country), language is the voice of ceremony. Place names and the cultural terms *yindyamarra* and *dadirri* will be translated to English in the first instance however, thereafter they will only be referred to in language as a sign of respect and recognition of the sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country) as this is how *Ngurambang* (Country) hears them.

This thesis approaches the translation of language in its own unique way. The use of English translations after each *Wiradjuri* word or phrase is a purposeful decision. My reasons for this are woven with a few intentions - I want the thesis to be an

invitation, not a challenge, and to reflect *yindyamarra*, to be respectful and to honour. As a result, I display a respect to the English language, a respect which was never given to our languages. This is *yindyamarra*, a lesson about *Wiradjuri* Culture for the reader - its gentleness is a counterpoint to the colonial manner. I also want the reader to soak up and concentrate on what I am saying. I don't want them to be distracted by scrambling to look up the First Nations glossary of terms, or even risk that they may not refer to it at all and so lose that meaning and connection. Lastly, I view the repetition of translation as part of First Nations deep memory process - the constant reminder fixes that translation, thought, meaning, way past the duration of reading the thesis for the reader.

A further note that throughout this thesis, to differentiate between traditional Songlines and songlines/storymaps as part of the research process, I have capitalised the former and not the latter.

Abstract

This research project investigates alternatives to the settler colonial legal system for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), a system which has failed and continues to fail First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and our communities. These alternatives are First Nations derived justice and healing programs which are founded in First Nations worldviews, privileging First Nations experiences, realities and perspectives (Minniecon, Franks & Heffernan 2007). This project responds to a gap in the research with relation to the efficacy and applicability of these programs in providing justice solutions by adopting First Nations methodologies which centre First Nations voices. In utilising First Nations methodologies, this thesis rejects a reliance on research which has privileged western world views producing deficit narratives of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and communities (Nakata 2007; Smith 2012; Walter & Anderson 2013; Walter & Suina 2019). Instead, this project weaves together Indigenous standpoint theory, storying, songline/storymaps, yarning, *dadirri* (inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness in *Ngangikurungkurr*), *yindyamarra* (respecting, listening, slow gentle honouring in *Wiradjuri*), Aboriginal Participatory Action Research (APAR), reflective practices of journalling and First Nations deep memory reflection, thus creating an original research process called the *budyaan galang* (bird mob). Integral to the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process is the use of *Wiradjuri* language where possible. This is a statement of sovereignty - not my sovereignty but the sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country) – using language that *Ngurambang* (Country) hears and understands. The adoption of this process follows *murruway marambul* (proper way) and creates relationality and relational accountability between researcher and storytellers/participants. *Budyaan galang* (bird mob) ensures that through the sharing of deep, nuanced knowledge, the agency and sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country) is respected and honoured.

***Ngiyanggarang* / beginning of a conversation in the morning to awaken**

others

Foreword

I walk on my *Ngurambang* (Country)
I breathe in the particles of *Ngurambang* (Country)
I breathe out *Ngurambang* (Country).

My skin falls onto *Ngurambang* (Country),
becomes *Ngurambang* (Country).

I feed *Ngurambang* (Country)
and *Ngurambang* (Country) then feeds me.

I inhale *Ngurambang* (Country).

At times, I bleed into *Ngurambang* (Country).

This is my connection.

This is the connection of my *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) over the millennia,
imprinting in my DNA,
my genome.

I am *Ngurambang* (Country).

Gugubarra / Kookaburra

Chapter One

Waagan Dyirribang / Crow Man

Ngadhu ngurrigiilang Mowgee Wiradjuri gibirr (I am a proud *Mowgee Wiradjuri* man). The *Wiradjuri* are the people of the *bulangumbaay bila* (three rivers); the *Galari* (Lachlan), the *Wambuul* (Macquarie) and the *Marrambidya* (Murrumbidgee). *Mowgee* is my clan, we are *waagan* (crow) and *maliyan* (wedgetail eagle) people. We are *budyaan galang* (bird mob). My sovereign bloodlines run through my *babiin* (father), Brian. He was born on the land of the Gadigal *mayiny* (peoples) (aka Sydney), returning continuously to *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country) and eventually staying on *Ngurambang* (Country) for the last twenty years. His *dhulubang* (spirit) remains ever in *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country), his *ngama* (mother) Kitty, born in Dubbo on *Ngurambang* (Country). Her *babiin* (father) Charles, born in Mudgee on *Ngurambang* (Country), his *ngama* (mother), Jane (Jane-ah) born in Grattai/Mudgee on *Ngurambang* (Country), and her *ngama* (mother) Emerjilli (Diana Mudgee), born in Mudgee on *Ngurambang* (Country).

My *miyagan* (family) are no strangers to settler colonial violence and frequent intersections with its legal system. My knowledge and Culture were interrupted by massacre during the *Wiradjuri Wars* by the nonchalant brutality of colonial power (Gapps 2021). My family's loss of cultural knowledge through dispossession and genocide inform my research and methodology. I acknowledge that I also have roots in Northern Europe by way of the Netherlands, through my mother Adrianna. I acknowledge this heritage stretching back, continuously connected to the North Sea. I acknowledge her personal journey living in Nazi occupied Holland, a traumatising experience leaving scars which followed her through her life as a migrant in a foreign land, with a foreign culture and foreign language. However, my values, relationships and knowledges flow through the *dhulubang* (spirit) of the *Wiradjuri*.

The journey of this research - the identification and impact of the problematic relationship between First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and the settler colonial legal system - and subsequent development of a methodology to investigate this issue did not begin

with the research proposal, rather it was influenced by my own life experiences and perspectives. My standpoint is influenced by my Indigeneity and its clash with western knowledge systems. However, other life experiences have also resounded in my development as a researcher.

My family are, and have forever been, storytellers. My memories of my early life are sitting and listening to stories told by my *babiin* (father), *babiinbal* (paternal grandfather), *badhiin* (paternal grandmother), *Balumbambal badhiin* (great grandmother), *bamali* (great aunties) and *wumbany* (uncles). Quietly listening to wisdom and knowledge, told with humour and human feeling. This tradition of storytelling is still alive and well, we still pass our knowledge through our stories to our new generations, and through this we guarantee its continuation. I spent thirty-five years in the commercial sphere operating a family business where skills of negotiation, resilience and persistence were taught and learnt. Fallacies were also exposed. Rather than business being “cut and thrust”, it was for me family based - a collaboration, learning the importance of working with people, requiring deep listening to their knowledge, expectations, aspirations and needs to achieve a shared outcome.

My further work experiences through a government agency, delivering legal advice and education to an exclusively Aboriginal client base in prisons and in remote Aboriginal communities across New South Wales, helped to expand, hone and develop the imperative for collaboration, relationship building, deep listening and an understanding that First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) are the experts in their own lived experiences. This work also provided an opportunity to build meaningful reciprocal and mentoring relationships with my First Nations colleagues in which we provided holistic support to each other and worked collaboratively to assist our clients grounded in First Nations ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. Through this work, I was exposed to the many intricate ways western legal processes block and silence First Nations values and experiences. This highlighted the negative impact of western legal processes on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and my inability to achieve significant outcomes within a western legal framework, indeed the soul-defeating futility of engagement.

Even my hobbies created a polarising of experience. I enjoyed rugby coaching and the constant learning, listening and teaching to produce mutually beneficial outcomes, meeting multiple needs. As part of coaching, I became involved in First Nations sport, working within a framework based on First Nations cultural norms of relationality, respect, listening and honouring of *Ngurambang* (Country), Elders, family

and Community. The goals of the rugby organisation were multiple and namely involved creating initiatives in response to the under-representation of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in the sport. Programs were centred on strength, resiliency and Indigenous excellence and were designed to encourage staying in school, to reaffirm cultural identity as well as the strength of culture. However, during these program initiatives, there were also stark instances of the direct, overt and institutional racism and marginalisation experienced by First Nations mob due to ongoing colonial policies which permeate across society. Importantly, the counterpoints to these policies were the resilience and cultural strengths that Community developed to combat the ever-present destructive spectre of colonialism. This interaction with racism, violence and the colonial mindset had profound effects on me personally and on my vision of society.

Attending university and studying law were challenging experiences for me. Ignorance and hostility to First Nations identities and cultures were present, and at times pervasive. This wasn't only my perspective, but a common experience expressed by other First Nations law students, usually at our Indigenous student centre through yarning and mentoring. It gave me the opportunity to witness and understand the operation of the legal system from within *the belly of the beast*, to understand how both education and legal institutions were positioned towards First Nations knowledges. The processes and impacts of the legal system on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) were reiterated and reinforced by my engagement with Grandmothers Against Removals, a group committed to fighting against the removal of First Nations children from their families. The harm perpetrated by colonial institutions against First Nations families through the initial removal of their children and then exacerbated by their subsequent treatment when attempting to regain custody through the legal system, will be forever imprinted upon my *dhulubang* (spirit). Studying and working in law became a situation of necessity for me given how important it is to understand and know one's enemy in order to defeat one's enemy. Make no mistake - my *Ngurambang* (Country) was invaded - and that invasion and its methods of subjugation are ongoing.

University provided a platform for me to develop my own position by exposing me to new concepts and ideas. My honours thesis was the first instance in which I could research and explore alternatives to First Nations interactions with the colonial legal system. During this time, I had the opportunity to work on a project with a First Nations community in the Peruvian Amazon. This involved intensive linguistic study to learn enough of the language to be respectful in our interactions, living in the community to

form relationships and develop accountability as well as a passing of knowledges and stories across First Nations pathways. It was a profound lesson in the nexus of language and *Ngurambang* (Country). The learning of language and the nuances it contains, the sovereignty language expresses, was integral to this project. In utilising a methodology whereby through listening, contemplating and privileging the knowledge and needs of the community, we were able to collaboratively develop the project to meet and deliver on their collective aspirations. University provided one further experience which had a significant impact on my research - I had the opportunity to attend a seminar with Linda Tuhiwai-Smith and other Māori scholars which was conducted as a yarning circle. This scenario allowed the sharing of ideas, knowledge and experiences, concentrating on discussing decolonising research, its applications and outcomes for projects, in both theoretical and practical ways. This interaction with a pre-eminent First Nations scholar and champion of decolonising research profoundly affected my approach to research and distillation of potential methodologies.

Research Questions

Through my experience over many years, I developed an understanding that change was needed and indeed demanded. It was evident that new questions required answering, new approaches must be taken to stem the deluge of harm inflicted on First Nations communities. The question was not how to make the legal system accommodate First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) but rather, what are the alternatives to a legal system which is mired in western epistemology, intent on continuing the colonial project?

There is a fundamental inability of the settler coloniser to see value in First Nations knowledges, a reluctance to accept the proposal that after sixty-thousand years of cultural continuity First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) may be the experts in our own lives! There is a shutter which seems to come across settler colonial minds clouding their comprehension that other systems of justice and knowledge not only exist but may be more efficacious than their own. Systems which are not carceral but operate on healing, a *bagaray bang* (rebalancing) of self with *Ngurambang* (Country). Systems which do not have punishment and retribution as their *raison d'être*.

To examine alternatives, it was necessary to find, form and develop a relationship with an organisation operated by First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), with programs developed and delivered by and for mob with healing as their base. The organisation I came into connection with was *Mibbinbah Spirit Healing (Mibbinbah)*. *Mibbin* means men or eagle in the *Yugambeh* language, and *bah* means place, so *Mibbinbah* signifies men's place. *Mibbinbah* is a First Nations organisation which offers First Nations designed and delivered healing programs to a wide range of First Nations communities across Australia. These programs are based in Culture, utilising *murruway marambul* (proper way) and focusing on respecting and listening to communities, ensuring that programs are relevant and appropriate. My journey with *Mibbinbah* and its Chief Executive Officer (CEO) Jack Bulman and Chief Facilitator Lisa Bulman, is chronicled in detail later in this thesis. My standpoint in this research, and thus to the research questions, is shared with *Mibbinbah* and the storyteller/participants as we have become culturally connected by our relationality with each other through the research process. The questions that this research poses are:

1. *How do First Nations led on-Country programs address the cultural, emotional and psychological needs of men?*
2. *How has the Mibbinbah Men's program used cultural continuity and revival to respond to the experiences of Aboriginal men?*

In beginning this project, I firstly read - to inform, absorb, meld, develop ideas, beliefs and information. I started holding a deep dissatisfaction with not only the "who" of researchers but the "way" of research. This quickly transitioned into my being angered by research and resultant "facts", "representations", "knowledges" and "findings" "on" First Nations communities and *mayiny* (peoples). Central to this project has been methodology, which initially developed through conversations with fellow PhD student and my daughter, Gemma, academics and *Wiradjuri* community members. This then continued into an investigation of basic research methodology tomes, which contained the first inklings of Indigenous methodologies and decolonising research. My writing will chronicle that investigation. Quite quickly I came to the realisation that I wasn't only decolonising the research but also myself. I recognise that I am the product of a continuing assault by western education and knowledge systems. However, I also

recognise that through my family connection and community connections I am the recipient of a different set of knowledges. This has created a complex, and at times jagged, collision of knowledges - not so much an “interface” which connotes a gentle process of interconnection (Nakata 2007). This research project is not static nor mired in academic dogma, it is rather adaptive as is First Nations Culture. As new truths have been learnt and new knowledges exposed, this research has adapted, decolonised, re-indigenised. The journey of this research and of this researcher can be evidenced in its reading, chronicling the powerful influence of *Ngurambang* (Country), *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) and storyteller/participants.

For this project to examine alternatives based in First Nations knowledges, there was an imperative for First Nations methodologies to be used. To be truthful to my own roots and follow *buyaa* (law), a *Wiradjuri* methodological base was needed. The academic process of methodology development was itself a western concept. It was only by accepting the agency of *Ngurambang* (Country) and the role of *Balumbambal* (Ancestors), that I was able to come to a process grounded in *Wiradjuri yindyamarra* (respecting, listening, slow gentle honouring) which fulfilled my responsibilities to *Ngurambang* (Country) and story tellers/participants. In his work *Research is Ceremony* (2008), Shawn Wilson articulates that:

The purpose of any ceremony is to build stronger relationships or bridge the distance between aspects of our cosmos and ourselves. The research that we do as Indigenous people is a ceremony that allows us a raised level of consciousness and insight into our world.
(p.11)

Culture is relational. My whole research quest has been about forming relationships, not only for current and ongoing research but at a visceral personal level to reconnect the gossamer threads of Culture, allowing myself to be drawn into projects which Community feel are important. Wilson (2001) refers to this axiology as ‘relational accountability’ where the research methodology needs to include questions of the researcher’s role in fulfilling all relationships as integral to an Indigenous methodology (p.177). To be successful, relationality requires respect for the uniqueness of the individual members of a community, and respect for the community as a whole, to ensure that community maintain control over decisions which affect them (Prilleltensky 2008; Wilson 2008). Karen Martin (2006) has stated relatedness as ‘Ways of Knowing

– our stories of relatedness, Ways of Being – respecting our stories of relatedness, Ways of Doing – renewing and living our stories of relatedness’ (p.2-3). As Atkinson (2007) reminds us:

Stories are our law. Stories give identity as they connect us and fulfill our sense of belonging. Stories are grounding, defining, comforting and embracing. Stories vary in their purpose and content and so stories can be political and equally healing. They can be shared verbally, physically, or visually. Their meanings and messages teach, admonish, tease, celebrate, entertain, provoke and challenge. (cited in Altman 2015, p.8).

Research Aims

This research examines First Nations derived justice and healing solutions from a point of inquiry that is informed by First Nations experiences, realities, perspectives, understandings and critiques surrounding the formation of “knowledge” production through colonial discourse (Cunneen et al. 2013; Nakata 2007). Importantly, First Nations programs have been formed through a particular point of enquiry in which “problems” are identified and approached differently, responses formed differently, outcomes and aspirations seen through a different lens and with First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) participating on different terms (Minniecon, Franks & Heffernan 2007). Ultimately, producing programs of justice which do not seek to criminalise and disempower First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), but rather provide intersectional and holistic responses to issues such as family violence and criminal offending, which acknowledge and respond to all relevant and contributing factors such as the impacts of colonisation, socio-economic marginalisation, racism and substance use (Australia’s National Research Organisation for Women’s Safety [ANROWS] 2019; HRLC & Change the Record 2017; Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission 2013).

In doing so, this research argues that it is vital to the achievement of justice and the aspirations for First Nations self-determination that programs be situated within evidence-based healing frameworks, as strongly advocated by Indigenous and non-Indigenous researchers (Atkinson 2002; Cox, Young & Bairnsfather-Scott 2009; ;

Cunneen & Tauri 2017; HRLC & Change the Record 2017). This necessarily provides a platform for First Nations communities to exercise decision-making power and control over these processes. This research challenges the settler colonial legal system of punishment and incarceration and the threat it presents to First Nations wellbeing (Sherwood et al. 2015). Sharmil et al. (2021) referred to Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1970) when stating, 'Freire argues that marginalised people's wisdom and knowledge is the best resource for achieving realistic solutions to the issues they encounter in everyday life' (p.7). This resonates with processes of self-determination that give voice to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, rather than having others talking on their behalf (Liu et al. 2016).

This project rejects reliance on western research which has been quantitative and statistically focused, ignoring the possibilities of Indigenous worldviews and thus producing harmful state driven deficit narratives (Walter & Anderson 2013; Walter & Suina 2019). It recognises the role western research has played in continuing the colonial project through privileging western research methods and worldviews (Nakata 2007; Smith 2012). This project has instead relied upon and centred the voices of First Nations communities to identify problems and solutions as shaped through our priorities and experiences (Dawes et al. 2017). Grounded in the recognition that First Nations programs and processes can be effective in achieving justice for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and their communities (Blagg et al. 2018), this research has utilised Indigenous research paradigms and strength-based approaches drawing upon the work of First Nations researchers such as Linda Tuhiwai-Smith, Juanita Sherwood and Lester Rigney. It centres First Nations voices, experiences and priorities and rejects research which is positivist in its approach to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and fails to encompass First Nations worldviews. Therefore, this project has been developed on the grounds that research is political and the research participants who engage in the research are the experts (Rigney 1997).

Further, in this project I have sought and utilised the wisdom and knowledge of other First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) from across Turtle Island (Canada and the United States of America). This knowledge is their knowledge. I have referenced it as guidance and with *yindyamarra* throughout my journey. I affirm that in no way is this an appropriation of their knowledge, it is rather a celebration and acknowledgement of their hard work. It is also recognition of their relationship with their *Ngurambang* (Country), the agency and sovereignty of their *Ngurambang* (Country).

The aim of this project was to come to storyteller/participants without an agenda, without a goal of fulfilling and reinforcing that set agenda. This allowed for the privileging of the knowledge held by storyteller/participants. Each individual yarn required developing relationality, achieved through *yindyamarra* (Grant Snr & Rudder 2010; Wilson 2008). This invited yarning which was both unrecorded and recorded and relied upon First Nations methods of storing and relaying knowledge through memory based in story. Grounding interactions with storyteller/participants in *yindyamarra* ensured the privileging of storyteller/participants voices, respecting that these voices contain their stories and thus their knowledges.

The data analysis is contained within the songline/storymaps of the storyteller/participants – a three-dimensional format using symbolic objects to reflect on the knowledge, themes and data shared throughout the research. I have then translated each visual map into writing through an accompanying guide. What is important in this project is the process rather than the product. This process involved the relationships formed between myself and storyteller/participants; between myself and *Ngurambang* (Country); the interconnection between storyteller/participants, myself and *Ngurambang* (Country); and all things connected to *Ngurambang* (Country), including my connection to *budyaan* (birds). Jessica Russ-Smith (2019) in *Our Voices: Aboriginal Social Work* has expressed this as:

My story is connected to Wiradyuri Country, whether I live on or off Country. My body is not colonised. My spirit is not colonised. As long as Country is my story, and it is never removed from my story, I am sovereign. Country sustains us, guides us and absorbs us. When we die, we become part of Country. Thus, our sovereignty becomes stronger as our spirits are transformed into the land. (p.240)

This process is not focused on the colonised or colonisation as I am not colonised nor do I seek to centre colonisation. Rather, it is the restoration of our *murrurway marambul* (proper way) - a grounding in my Being and Knowing as a *Wiradjuri* man with responsibilities that extend to *Ngurambang* (Country), *miyagan* (kin) and all my relations. This includes the individuals who shared their stories in this research and by extension their relationships to their families, Communities, Country, Culture, hopes, visions and stories. This process is relinquishing the personal control of the western academy and ceding agency to *Ngurambang* (Country). My process is not

“new”, it is born of sixty-five thousand years of knowledge, a process of journeying with my *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) and making ceremony with *Ngurambang* (Country), committing to accountability, relating with all (Tynan 2020; Wilson 2008). In my process, I walk on my *Ngurambang* (Country), I breathe in the particles of *Ngurambang* (Country), I breathe out *Ngurambang* (Country), my skin falls onto *Ngurambang* (Country), becomes *Ngurambang* (Country). I feed *Ngurambang* (Country) and *Ngurambang* (Country) then feeds me, I inhale *Ngurambang* (Country). At times, I bleed into *Ngurambang* (Country), this is my connection. This is the connection of my *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) over the millennia, imprinting in my DNA, my genome. I am *Ngurambang* (Country). Songlines are a part of my journey; they are our journey. This concept is integral, indeed a visceral part of our Cultures, we are forever journeying in our lives. The journey, the process, is forever more important than the destination because knowledge becomes known or revealed in the journey not at the final point. Our Cultures are cyclical, there is no start and finish, the circularity of our lives are a part of the continuum of *Ngurambang* (Country). As Wilson (2008) notes:

The concepts or ideas are not as important as the relationships that went into forming them. Again, an Indigenous epistemology has systems of knowledge built upon relationships between things, rather than on the things themselves. Indigenous epistemology is more than merely a way of knowing (Meyer 2001). It is important to recognize that the epistemology includes entire systems of knowledge and relationships, these relationships are with the cosmos around us as well as with concepts. They thus include interpersonal, intrapersonal, environmental and spiritual relationships and relationships with ideas. Indigenous epistemology is our Cultures, our worldviews, our times, our languages, our histories, our spiritualities and our places in the cosmos. Indigenous epistemology is our systems of knowledge in their context, or in relationship. (p.74)

This research is my regeneration as a *Wiradjuri* man and in this is my contribution to the regeneration of Indigenist research. The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process is reciprocity between me and storyteller/participants, a *bagaray bang* (rebalancing, healing) within our shared knowledges. *Ngurambang* (Country) plays its role through its own agency as all yarns/interviews were on *Ngurambang* (Country), not inside formal settings. We are *Ngurambang* (Country) and we share relationality with all things which are themselves part of *Ngurambang* (Country). The songline/storymaps

are a part of a journey, our journey together on and with *Ngurambang* (Country). Wilson (2001) reflects:

An Indigenous paradigm comes from the fundamental belief that knowledges are relational. Knowledges are shared with all of creation. It is not just interpersonal relationships, not just with the research subjects that I may be working with, rather a relationship with all of creation. It is with the cosmos, it is with the animals, with the plants, with the earth that we share knowledge. It goes beyond this idea of individual knowledge. Who cares about these ontologies? It's not the realities in and of themselves that are important; it is the relationship that I share with reality. (pp.176-177)

Chapter Overview

The chapters of this thesis are named in *Wiradjuri* language after *budyaan* (birds), this is an expression of *Wiradjuri* sovereignty, a privileging of our ways. *Budyaan* (birds) carry the message of each chapter, allowing more nuance than mere numbers. Each chapter is also marked in English as a recognition that there is more than one epistemology, more than one knowledge present. This intends to provide *yindyamarra* by creating familiarity and ease for the reader, something denied to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). In this chapter overview, I offer an explanation of each *budyaan* (bird) and their message or role as they appear throughout this thesis. When *budyaan* (birds) speak to me, they speak as men - this is how I hear them as a *Wiradjuri Waagan Dyrribang* (Wiradjuri crow man). *Gugubarra* (kookaburra) is the first bird of the morning and signals it is time to get up and start talking. Next is *garru* (magpie), he looks at you and sees your truth. Then comes *waagan* (crow), he is law giver and a deep thinker and listener. *Durrawan* (currawong) follows, and he means change is coming. The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process chapter is the exegesis, offering an explanation of where everything fits. Then comes *burrurgiyan* (ibis), a valuable member of Community, an ally of *Ngurambang* (Country) and a great adapter. *Dyirridyirri* (willie wagtail) - the messenger of good and bad - carries the voices of the storyteller/participants. *Dhundhu* (the black swan) reminds us of the proper way to do things, reciprocity and relational accountability. Lastly, the final chapter is *burrindin*

(pee wee) the great urban adapter, he is drawn to his reflection and is either comforted or enraged by it. There are nine chapters in this thesis including the introduction.

Garru (magpie) is an examiner of truth, looking deeply to discover the truth within. His chapter is a literature review in two parts, a presentation of two views of law, two worldviews at odds - western law and First Nations laws. Firstly, the historical context of First Nations incarceration is examined and the development of a particular brand of settler colonial racism which permeates and dominates colonial policy making, framing First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) as savage and so diminishing First Nations Culture, knowledge systems and knowledge production (Langton 2020; Maddison 2021). This includes institutions of the colonial project and the instruments which are used to ensure First Nations subjugation and resultant harm against First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) (Day et al. 2008; Maddison 2021; Schlink 2009). The mechanisms of western law are examined with attention directed to bail, remand and risk assessment tools (crucial for parole, custodial program admission and bail) (Day et al. 2018; Gillies 2013; Harcourt 2015; Raudino et al. 2019; Shepherd & Lewis-Fernandez 2016; Xie et al. 2018). Sentencing, most especially mandatory sentencing, is also examined as well as problematic Koori/Murri Court initiatives (Law Council of Australia 2014; Law Society of Western Australia 2020; Productivity Commission 2020; Roth 2014). The harmful impacts of these policies on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), with the resultant degradation of First Nations Social and Emotional Well-Being (SEWB) and intergenerational trauma, are highlighted (Atkinson 2002; Behrendt, Cunneen & Libesman 2009; Berger, Juster & Sarnyai 2015; Berger et al. 2019; Cunneen 2001; Cunneen & Robb 1987; Reay 1945; Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody [RCIADIC] 1991; Sarnyai, Berger & Jawan 2016; Yehuda et al. 2016).

The second part of the *garru* (magpie) chapter draws upon the literature to define and explain First Nations SEWB, its visceral importance to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), communities and Culture and the harm which results from its degradation (Braveheart-Jordan & DeBruyn 1995; Duran 1990; Simpson, Abur & Charles 2020). *Garru* (magpie) explores concepts of healing which are integral to SEWB (Atkinson 2002; Dow 1986; Moerman 1979; Waldram 2013). Looking at the efficacy of First Nations programs which offer cultural strengthening, cultural immersion and healing for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and communities, this chapter examines how these modalities contribute specifically to SEWB (Caruana 2010; Day & Francisco 2013; Delgado et al. 2018; Department of Justice Canada 2016; Healing Foundation 2009;

Minniecon, Franks & Heffernan 2007; Wanganeen 2008). There is a paucity of research in Australia on the significance of cultural engagement to wellbeing/healing and positive outcomes in the criminal justice sphere. This research will investigate that gap, privileging the voices of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and communities, recognising their lived experiences and their knowledges.

Waagan (crow) chapter is my journey in developing a methodology to undertake the research. *Waagan* (crow) is a law giver, a watcher, a listener, a teacher. As previously mentioned, he is my totem. He signifies the importance of methodology to this project, central to developing my personal ceremony with this research. However, this methodology is fluid. Like First Nations Cultures it has an adaptability, it is not rigid nor chained to academic dogma, rather it follows the direction of *Ngurambang* (Country), acknowledging the agency of *Nguramabng* (Country) in all things. *Waagan* (crow) chapter is the exploration and combining of First Nations methods and methodologies to form a distinct research methodology to ensure privileging of First Nations knowledges (Kana'iaupuni 2004; Smith 1999; Tsey et al. 2007). The methods of *yindyamarra* (Jones 2018), Aboriginal Participatory Action Research (APAR) (Dudgeon et al. 2017; Dudgeon et al. 2020; Oxenham 2017) and *dadirri* (Atkinson 2002; Ungunmerr-Baumann 1993) are melded to create a deep respect and honouring of storyteller/participants. These methods create an atmosphere where Storywork, as expressed by Archibald (2008), can be intertwined with yarning and knowledge sharing with storyteller/participants, creating reciprocity and relational accountability (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Doyle et al. 2017; Fredericks et al. 2011; Geia, Hayes & Usher 2013; Gorman & Toombs 2009; Lambert 2011; Leeson, Smith & Rynne 2016; Ober 2017; Wain et al. 2016). These methods created a reflective research process which was also my *murruway dhulubang* (soul or spirit path), participating in cultural oral traditions and using deep memory reflections to centre First Nations knowledges (Lincoln & Guba 1982; Magnuson et al. 2016; Malacrida 2007). These reflective deep memory processes are carried into the creation of the songline/storymaps, which then form part of greater Songlines, our knowledge archives and knowledge sharing tools. This is *murruway marambul* (proper way). The selection process of *Mibbinbah* as the organisation for this research is explained as well as the relationality and resultant relational accountability formed over time between *Mibbinbah* CEO and Chief Facilitator - Jack and Lisa Bulman respectively - and this researcher. The *Mibbinbah* 'Be the Best You Can Be'

(BTBYCB) program is the focus of the research and is discussed in detail in this chapter.

Yindyamarra is an ethos by which *Wiradjuri* people live - it means to honour, respect, do slowly. This research implements *yindyamarra* as its core. It is part of my *buyaa* (law) to treat all with *yindyamarra*. Its use in this project ensures not only that the knowledge of storyteller/ participants is privileged, but that it is passed back to them and remains in their hands (Jones 2018). *Yindyamarra* is discussed in more detail in the *durrawan* (currawong) chapter. APAR has been especially designed to centre the voices and knowledges of Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) and is predicated by ‘research protocols, principles and ethics’ which are located within an ‘Indigenous knowledge framework’ (Dudgeon et al. 2017; Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.25; Oxenham 2017). The clear aim of APAR is to assert the ‘epistemic self-determination’ in Indigenous research garnered by the privileging of Indigenous knowledges, which are contained within the voices of Indigenous communities (Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.1). *Dadirri*, as expressed by Aunty Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann (1993) of the *Ngangikurungkurr* people of the Daly River and utilised by Aunty Judy Atkinson (2002), will be used as a companion to *yindyamarra* in this project’s methodology. It is a process of deep listening and contemplation which privileges the knowledge of the storyteller/participant (Ungunmerr-Baumann 1993).

Storymaps, in conjunction with Storywork, are utilised as a method to ensure that the stories as told by storyteller/participants are privileged. Storymaps, as articulated by Lapum et al. (2015), have the ability to not only illuminate and depict the individual but also collective experiences through ‘providing a collaborative and place-based storytelling’ (Kelly 2016; Roth 2021, p.97). Visual stories also allow for deeper nuances and context, rather than words alone (Roth 2021). Storymaps also represent a method by which First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in Australia have stored and passed knowledges in the form of Songlines, which is discussed in detail in the *durrawan* (currawong) chapter. Storywork is included in the methodology of this project as a method of disseminating and storing knowledge, acting as a companion to the songline/storymaps (Archibald 2008; Wilson 2008). This research adheres to the seven research principles articulated by Archibald (2008) in her book, *Indigenous Storywork: Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Reverence, Holism, Interrelatedness and Synergy* (p.129). Yarning has been chosen as a method in this research as it is a First Nations way to pass on knowledge, it continues our oral traditions, it is respectful and allows for

nuances and cooperation (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Doyle et al. 2017; Fredericks et al. 2011; Geia, Hayes & Usher 2013; Gorman & Toombs 2009; Lambert 2011; Leeson, Smith & Rynne 2016; Ober 2017; Wain et al. 2016). Yarning creates relationality and relational accountability and it is the way we are taught to listen, the way we are taught our stories and thus our knowledge (Wilson 2008). Reflective journaling is also an integral component of this project. After yarns and during songline/storymap creation, a reflective process is vital to consider and privilege the stories of the storyteller/participants, it is *murruway marambul* (proper way) (Lincoln & Guba 1982; Magnuson et al. 2016; Malacrida 2007).

The durrawan (currawong) chapter details the process of refinement of my methodology and the adaptations that were needed to accommodate the changing realities around conducting the yarning. The arrival of *durrawan galang* (currawong mob) on *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Wiradjuri Country) signifies a change of season so *durrawan* (currawong) for me means change. This chapter reflects a change in my personal approach to the research and my journey in Indigenisation. It discusses *yindyamarra* in depth, its meaning and impact on this researcher and research process. This chapter also reflects upon the 'Wètiko Disease', as articulated by Forbes (1992) in *Columbus and Other Cannibals*, with the attendant pit falls which must be navigated and avoided as a *Wiradjuri* man conducting First Nations research (Wilson 2008). Key to this research and methodology is firstly repatriating First Nations knowledges from institutions to communities and then ensuring future knowledges remain in First Nations community control (Colwell 2017). This is achieved through the utilisation of First Nations methodologies. This chapter will explain and elaborate on the nature and meaning of songlines (Neale & Kelly 2020). The place and importance of songlines as repositories of knowledge as well as methods of knowledge dissemination (Jorgenson and McLean 2017). There is a focus on how songlines are created and revitalised through and within this project. Storywork is discussed and demonstrated in the literature, then reflected through my personal lens, especially in the ways it has changed this research (Atkinson 2002; Archibald 2008). The process of selection of communities and storyteller/participants throughout the Kimberley and Derby is outlined and importantly the impact and agency of *Ngurambang* (Country) on this research and the role that it played in changing and refocusing the methodology.

Following *murruway marambul* (proper way) with the guidance of *Ngurambang* (Country) has led to *bagaray bang* (a rebalancing) of the researcher and research,

ensuring a privileging of First Nations worldviews. Critically, the difficulties of “fieldwork” are explained and how they created an imperative for the adaptation of the research methodology and then how relationality and relational accountability emerged through these adaptations (Archibald 2008; Gay’wu Group of Women 2019; Neale & Kelly 2020). Time has been an ever-present stress point throughout this research, felt both in the project process and personally by the researcher. There has been a divergence of worldviews, pitting western notions of strict time frames against the First Nations importance of taking your time. Ultimately, time issues were decided upon through the intervention and agency of *Ngurambang* (Country). Storymaps explain the reasons for an adaptation to the methodology, most especially concerning the inclusion and creation of storymaps. This adaptation became ceremony. It was *murruway marambul* (proper way) and led to more nuance and depth throughout the research and more control of knowledge to community.

Budyaan galang (bird mob) process, the exegesis chapter, is an explanation of the process undertaken in this research. Each *budyaan* (bird) is explained, their story privileged, their knowledge shared, their roles and impact on the research process detailed. Ultimately, the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process is an accounting of the collaboration, the personal ceremony, which is created between storyteller/participant, *Ngurambang* (Country) and myself. The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process is *murruway marambul* (proper way) and it affirms First Nations worldviews, knowledges, identities and sovereignty. This affirmation allows for deep knowledge transfer, nuanced knowledge to answer the research. Songlines are explained, and then how songlines are adapted and reimagined in the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process to create the storyteller/participants storymaps. This process of collaboration and ceremony between researcher, participant /storyteller and *Ngurambang* (Country), ultimately creates rigor in the research.

The songline/storymaps are both a pictorial and narrative resilience and resistance, an embodiment of our sovereignty, ‘we listen to hear and look to see, there is no deficit, there is Country, there is our sovereignty’ (Russ-Smith 2019, p.240). *Bagaray bang* (rebalancing, healing) speaks to the power and role of Culture and Country, the healing and rebalancing provided to the researcher through immersion in Culture in this project, producing a statement of the efficacy of connection to First Nations Cultures and healing. Ultimately, songline/storymaps provide a method of archiving where knowledge and control of that knowledge is held securely by

storyteller/participants and their Communities. Finally, this chapter tells a personal story, the storytelling of the researcher, which seeks to explain the circularity of Culture, its holistic nature, its healing properties, its synergy, its ceremony and give meaning to the *budyaaan galang* (bird mob) process as my method.

Burrurgiyan (ibis) chapter is songline/storymap data analysis and details the processes of collecting material, deep contemplation and then the creation of songline/storymaps. The storymap of each storyteller/participant in the research is provided, accompanied by a guide which explains the journey/data analysis in narrative form. Figures 1.-3. are the storymaps of the individual storyteller/participants from *Rubbi*, with Figure 4. being the collective storymap for the *Rubbi* Group. Figure 5. is the storymap of *Mibbinbah* principals, Jack and Lisa, with Figure 6-8 being the storymaps for storyteller/participants from Derby. The name of this chapter was chosen because *burrurgiyan* (ibis) is native, reviled as an interloper on his own *Ngurambang* (Country), yet is the adaptor who thrives and overcomes in a created alien environment.

Dyirridyirri (willie wagtail) is a messenger, and he brings a message which may be good or bad. This represents the message of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) - the storyteller/participants of this project - which must be listened to whether it is good or bad. *Dyirridyirri* (willie wagtail) is the first discussion chapter outlining the process of data analysis and theming, a restatement of the relationality formed and the relational accountability expected. *Dyirridyirri* (willie wagtail) addresses the first research question posed in the thesis: how do First Nations led on-Country programs address the cultural, emotional and psychological needs of men? The overview contains a reiteration of the journey and my responsibilities within that process. The process is ever more important than the destination as it is in our First Nations journeys that the deep truth and knowledge is revealed. The journey and the process are the circularity of our lives, no start or finish. The interconnection of the themes detailed in the chapter are a restating of the holistic nature of First Nations Culture. Each theme is firstly represented in pictorial form by a songline/storymap, this is purposeful as this is our First Nations way, this is how our knowledge is stored, shared and disseminated. Each theme is then expressed in narrative form by the voices of the storyteller/participant, as the knowledge is theirs to tell and share. The four themes identified, with accompanying songline/storymaps were; Funding and Control (Figure 9); Listen, Consult, Take Your Time (Figure 10); Sovereignty, Strength, Resilience (Figure 11); Adaptability and Holistic (Figure 12).

Dhundhu (black swan) chapter eight, *Mibbinbah-bagaray bang dhulubang murruway marambul* (rebalancing spirit proper way). *Dhundhu* (black swan) represents the reciprocity, healing and circularity that is at the core of First Nations Cultures. It is the second discussion chapter and responds to the second research question: how has the *Mibbinbah* Men's program used cultural continuity and revival to respond to the experiences of Aboriginal men? *Dhundhu* (black swan) identifies and discusses two more major themes; 1) Colonialism and Trauma; and 2) Rebalancing, Healing. It begins with a songline/storymap of colonialism and trauma (Figure 13) and then there is a discussion of the harmful impacts of colonialism upon the lives of the storyteller/participants told in their own words. This is followed by the songline/storymap of *bagaray bang* (rebalancing and healing) which the storyteller/participants storied (Figure 14). The chapter then chronicles what was shared about experiences of *Mibbinbah* and the BTBYCB program - firstly from the *Rubbi* mob, Jack and Lisa and later separately the experience of the Derby mob. The storyteller/participants recount their experiences of working in the prison environment delivering the program and this is then compared to the experience of working in Community delivering the program. This includes reflections on the effects of the BTBYCB program on storyteller/participants personally and then as facilitators. The narrative then switches to the nuanced reflection of the Derby mob, a multi-layered reflection as the researcher took part in the program with these storyteller/participants. This created a special bond, a relationality, which was evidenced in our yarns, a sense of familiarity and ease of yarning. The yarns took place immediately after working for three days together in the program, creating a considered rawness in our exchange. *Dhundhu* (black swan) finishes with a collective storymap (Figure 15) and guide of the themes of this chapter as well as *dyirridyirri* (willie wagtail).

Burrindin (pee wee) chapter nine involves a summation of the outcomes of the research, my personal reflections on the research journey and my processes of adaptation and *bagaray bang* (rebalancing, healing). I also include a reflection on the supervisor relationship and its subtle changes over four years.

Flowing like a river over obstacles, exploring ways to move forward

As I have become immersed in this research, I have felt the gentle touch of my *badhiin* (nana/grandmother), a *maliyan Wiradjuri* (Wiradjuri wedgetail eagle) woman. I feel her hand slipping into my hand, the gentle warmth, the gossamer lightness of touch, feathers on skin, for my *miyagan* (family) are *budyaaan* (bird) people. I also feel her strength, coursing in her grip, the strength of *maliyan* (wedgetail eagle), her strength and resilience through her life overcoming the obstacles placed by settler colonialism. As I walk along this path dividing cultures, dividing epistemologies, I feel the flow of knowledge coursing through our stories, I hear the voices of the storytellers, I remember their faces as they have in turn remembered the faces and voices of those who told them stories. This is my ceremony with my *Balumbambal* (Ancestors), with my *badhiin* (nana/grandmother), this is how our knowledges are passed, the flow ebbs then gathers itself and strengthens as the stories are retold, as we remember.

Garru / Magpie

Chapter Two

The white people came to the *Murrumbidjeri* (Murrumbidgee River) at Gundagai and started to build their town, the *Wiradjuri* came to the white people and warned them that they should not build there as this was where the *Murrumbidjeri* floods. The white people replied, ‘this is where we need to build for profit, we can build tall houses, what do you natives know’. The *Murrumbidjeri* flooded as it always had, since *Girawu* (goanna) stuck her yam stick into the mountain creating the river and its first flood. Many white people drowned, many were rescued by the *Wiradjuri*. The white people rebuilt on the same place and the *Murrumbidjeri* flooded again as it always did, still the white people rebuilt. The *Murrumbidjeri* still floods (National Museum of Australia 2025).

This literature review presents in two parts; the first part is a critique of the western legal system. This system is focused on punishment and was transported along with its victims to this continent. Once ensconced, it was refined by the needs of settler colonialism. This is the historical context of the why and how of incarceration. The focus of this review is the mode by which First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) become criminalised by a colonial system which is alien to our own belief systems and then the operation and impact of that western legal system upon First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). The second part considers First Nations notions of justice founded in healing and programs aimed at creating that healing, producing a contrast of systems - one based in disempowerment, imprisonment and punishment, the other in the healing and *bagaray bang* (rebalancing) of *dhulubang* (spirit). This chapter chronicles the the repetitive harm of western systems, harm that has led to ever increasing cataclysmic trauma and cultural degradation. However, this chapter points the way to providing solutions based in First Nations Cultures.

Reasons for incarceration

The invasion of this country began as a carceral solution to a social problem in England, a solution which was indeed not a solution but merely the exporting of a

problem. The result was the creation of the world's largest prison, where punishment was exalted and human beings seen as expendable commodities. If these invaders could treat their own this way, then to expect more for those that resisted and stood in the way of the invasion was folly. As stated in the *Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody: National reports [Vol 1-5], and regional reports* (RCIADIC) (1991):

Aboriginal people have experienced an anomalous position in relation to British and Australian law. Prior to and after contact, Aboriginal communities had their own system of law, with its logic and rationale tied in with the holistic philosophy of the Dreaming. Rather than abstract principles of 'justice ', their laws were evoked more directly and on a more personal basis to maintain or regain community harmony. (10.6.1)

Indigenous intersection with and subsequent subjugation by English law began with the notion of *terra nullius* and continues to the present (Behrendt, Cunneen & Libesman 2009; Cunneen 2001). Initially, the legal system was a tool for dispossession and the method to perfect this legal dispossession was to portray First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) as being outside the law, thus ensuring their criminalisation (Baldry & Cunneen 2014; Blagg 2008). RCIADIC (1991) found that 'Aboriginal styles of resistance, such as attacking isolated shepherds or killing livestock, were usually classed by colonial authorities as breaches of the law rather than acts of war' (10.5.5). This was enhanced by the colonial mindset of racial supremacy and the Darwinian notion of natural selection (Reynolds 1987). Resistance was characterised as criminal not political, which still permeates in the present relationships with police and the colonial legal system today (Cunneen 2001). This has been succinctly stated by RCIADIC (1991):

As far as the whites were concerned, the general view by the end of the eighteenth century was that there was a direct relationship between colonial progress, the fulfilment of their mission and the destruction of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander societies. This destruction was considered, in and of itself, proof of progress. (10.4.6)

Protectionist policies further cemented the ability to control First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and continued the previous period of genocidal action which had occurred through dispossession of Country, massacre and criminalisation (Behrendt,

Cunneen & Libesman 2009; Finnane 1997). Protectionist policies controlled marriage, work, movement and forbade the practice of Culture (*Aborigines Protection Act* 1909 [NSW]; *Aborigines Protection Amendment Act* 1915 [NSW]; Behrendt, Cunneen & Libesman 2009). These policies also saw the introduction of public order offences to control Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples), including criminalising drunkenness which became the introductory method for Indigenous criminalisation (Cunneen 2001; Cunneen & Robb, 1987; Reay 1945). These laws enabled forced child removal, dissipated Culture, dispossessed Country and forcefully manufactured and spread narratives of Indigenous worthlessness, ensuring marginalisation. As noted by RCIADIC (1991):

These police were not supposed to manage existing relationships, but to play a “civilising” role - that is they were not only trying to impose authority and perhaps prepare for the rule of law but also to change Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples culturally. This meant they were to encourage them to become malleable employees and settle in one place, rather than travel freely over Country which Europeans now wanted to exploit. (10.5.4)

The era of assimilation brought more contact and resultant conflict between Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) and the dominant white society (Hogg 2001). Marginalisation became more pronounced as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) became isolated through urbanisation (Hogg 2001) and conflict arose out of competition for employment and housing (Anthony 2013; Morgan 2006; Taska 2000). First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), initially separated by policy from “mainstream” society, were then forced to attempt an unwanted co-existence with the dominant society. This period is epitomised by an escalation of forced child removals, the survivors who have become known as the Stolen Generations (Behrendt, Cunneen & Libesman 2009; HREOC 1997). As showcased in the *Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, the Bringing Them Home Report* (1997) and subsequent government reports, these genocidal colonial processes of the past are the root cause of many ongoing injustices against First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) today. This includes, but is not limited to, systemic and institutionalised racism including the continuing forced removal of First Nations children from their families, homelessness and socio-economic marginalisation,

complex needs and experiences of intergenerational trauma (Allard 2010; Australian Law Reform Commission [ALRC] Report 2017; Stubbs 2011). RCIADIC (1991) offers this summary:

As can be seen from this brief review, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences of the colonial court system were ones of discrimination and repression. The courts were seen to be acting on behalf of other interests and to be imposing a foreign culture. That historical experience remains very much the perception of the courts held by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples today. (10.6.7)

RCIADIC (1991) extensively examined the historical impacts of colonialism on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) across Australia. This resulted in telling commentary on the treatment of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) from invasion in 1788 to 1991. However, the situation now is even more dire than in 1991. Dr. Amanda Porter (2023) has posited that even the definition of what is an “Aboriginal Death in Custody” is contested. She has contended that ‘there is nothing natural about dying in custody’, dismissing notions that First Nations deaths in custody can in some manner be “written off” the ledger by alleging some underlying medical condition (Porter 2023). Instead, Dr. Porter suggests that rather than diminishing the criteria for a death in custody, it should be expanded to include deaths in childcare and child protection, protective custody, psychiatric care, health care facilities and even racially motivated hate crimes. There is argument to suggest that the destructive genocidal nature of invasion and colonialism has rendered all premature deaths of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in Australia as a death in custody (Porter 2023).

In a time that has seen the rise of the Black Lives Matter movement and the Voice Referendum, it is important to note that racism in Australia at all levels is operating in service to ongoing colonisation (Langton 2020; Maddison 2021). Colonialism in Australia and its shaping of settler-Indigenous relationships is not solely premised upon classic racism that centres skin colour, but rather about the quest to control and access Indigenous land (Langton 2020; Maddison 2021). It is in this pursuit of land and resources that the colonisers have committed the most heinous atrocities aimed at the destruction of whole Cultures. The failure of these colonisers to negotiate with First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to live in a stolen land, has given rise to a particular and unique hatred towards First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), developing from the

dilemma of legal and moral illegitimacy found in the coloniser's own rules (Langton 2020; Maddison 2021). How then can First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) be held to account to a system which by its own definitions is morally corrupt and illegitimate, a system developed to control and dispossess First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and communities? As observed by First Nations researcher Amy Thunig (2021), this is a system which is not broken, it is rather a system operating exactly how it is intended to operate.

Langton (2020) has posited that this refusal to admit the illegitimacy of the possession of Australia, indeed the criminality of this action, and the imposition of a morally bereft legal system has created a form of settler-colonial psychological disturbance founded in guilt (Maddison 2021). Maddison (2021) has extrapolated this notion, suggesting that the psychological disturbances arising from past crimes infect present generations, similar to post WW11 Germans suffering from an associative guilt, a responsibility borne of the collective guilt from the actions of their forebears (Maddison 2021; Schlink 2009). In failing to denounce past colonial atrocities and wrongs, despite ample evidence, the present settlers are bound inexorably to the past perpetrators. The fallacy and fantasy of *terra nullius* - an empty land peacefully settled - is predicated on the denouncement of the sophistication of First Nations societies and cultures and the assumed benefits of a superior settler civilisation to "primitive" *mayiny* (peoples). To justify ongoing occupation and dispossession, it is a necessity that this fallacy is maintained (Langton 2020; Maddison 2021).

The disdain and contempt for First Nations Cultures is still very much in operation as can be recognised by the reckless destruction of sacred sites across the continent by extractive industries and farmers. For example, the blasting of the forty-six-thousand-year-old sacred rock shelters of the *Puutu Kunti Kurrama* peoples in Juukan Gorge (Western Australia) by Rio Tinto in 2020 (Kemp, Kochan & Burton 2023). Or the unforgivable attempt by the Tattarang Agriculture Company (owned by Andrew Forrest) to build weirs on the Ashburton River (Western Australia) which would destroy the sacred sites of the *Thalanyi* peoples (Weber 2021). In Lake Bolac (Victoria), a farmer was found guilty of destroying a 1500-year-old stone eel depiction in 2025 (Brennan 2025; Johnson 2021). It is difficult to perceive a situation where a local landowner in England would be able to move the stones of Stonehenge without community outrage and serious repercussions. The coloniser is thus in a precarious position, to admit their wrongdoing they must admit that they do not actually belong here which then forces the question: where do I belong? This creates a deep internal

rejection of “recognition and reconciliation”, a bond with past occupiers requiring constant rejection of the reality of the past and reinforcement of the dominance of western knowledges, most importantly in the legal sphere.

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to examine the Voice Referendum and its public “debate”, it is worth noting the tenor of the “debate” and “arguments” which took place in the media. The othering of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) escalated, racism escalated, it took but a brief period to see emboldened settler colonists resurrect and escalate their submerged hatreds, it was their call to arms. The Voice saw First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) again marginalised and objectified, this time as an election commodity, a tool to garner votes by political parties which only succeeded in demonising First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). The Voice also saw a practical demonstration of the ‘*Wétiko* Disease’ playing out (Forbes 1992). *Wétiko* is a concept from the *Cree* First Nations peoples in Canada describing a ‘disease of aggression against other living things and, more precisely a consuming of other creatures lives and possessions’ (Forbes 1992, p.xvi) creating schisms in First Nations communities and compounding lateral violence. The period after the “debate” has seen a targeting of First Nations Culture and *mayiny* (peoples), creating a feeling of unease amongst First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). It is at this time that the starkest differences can be seen in cultures, in epistemologies.

Western hubris and carceral disposition

In his seminal work *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, Foucault (1975) made a statement that has profound relevance for the mainstream response of western government ideology to Indigenous incarceration:

If [the prison model] had been no more than an instrument of rejection or repression in the service of the state apparatus, it would have been easier to alter its more overt forms or to find a more acceptable substitute for it. But, rooted as it was in the mechanisms and strategies of power, it could meet any attempt to transform it with a great force of inertia. (p.305)

The response of state, territory and federal governments in Australia - and as their surrogate, corrective services - to Indigenous incarceration can be seen as a colonial discourse designed to serve continuing hyper-incarceration. Alexander (2012) in her book *The New Jim Crow*, succinctly stated that ‘in each generation new tactics have been used for achieving the same goals’ (p.1), when referencing hyper-incarceration as a preferred control method of African Americans. In much the same way, there has been a shift in Australia from the overt policies of assimilation and annihilation to now incarceration. Incarceration allows discrimination and in fact normalises it, ensuring through its post carceral “gifts” of employment bias, housing loss and family breakdown, that racialized power imbalances remain in Australia. Prison operates more efficiently in breaking down Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Cultures, families and communities than any flour poisoning or mounted police frontier action or massacre of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

There is strong evidence that Australia’s legal system is becoming increasingly punitive. The ratio of prisoners to offenders proceeded against by the police has increased from 8 per cent in 2009 to 11 per cent in 2020 (ABS 2020a, 2020b; 2021; Productivity Commission 2021). In comparing the first quarter of 2022 to the first quarter of 2024, First Nations adults in prison has risen from 31% of total prisoners to 36% of total prison population, representing as 12,556 persons to 15,070 persons (Gibson 2024). In the breakdown of states and territories, these percentages are even more alarming. First Nations adults are 43% of the total population of Western Australian prisons and 88% of the total of Northern Territory prisons (ABS 2024a; 2024b). These figures are to be contrasted against the ABS (2004) figures in which one in five prisoners or 20% identified as being First Nations (ABS 2024). The figures from the Northern Territory are startling and alarming. The North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency stated that in December 2024 that an average of forty-one Aboriginal people were taken into custody every day, an increase of 123% since 2019 (Garrick 2025). This is consistent with changes which have occurred in recent times to reduce and limit the discretion of police, courts and parole boards on matters of bail, sentencing, parole and a reduction in funding for organisations such as Legal Aid, the Aboriginal Legal Service and the North Australian Aboriginal Justice Agency (Dick 2024). There has been an increasing emphasis on risk management and an explicit elevation of community safety and victims’ rights as goals of criminal justice policy

(Auld & Quilter 2020; Bartels et al. 2018; Freiberg et al. 2018; Productivity Commission 2021).

Risk Assessment Tools

There has been an ever-increasing use and reliance on risk assessment tools, not just in Australia but world-wide to manage offenders (Auld & Quilter 2020; Bartels et al. 2018; Freiberg et al. 2018). These assessments are used in a range of decision processes which include parole, offender classification in prison, treatment options and even in some jurisdictions to access to bail or diversion (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019; Wong & Olver 2015). Harcourt (2010) has posited that we are in an age of ‘governing through crime’ and that the use of risk assessment tools ‘protect[s] political actors and serves[s] to de-responsibilize decision-makers’ (p.2). The use of Actuarial Risk Assessments (ARAs) has been highlighted as problematic by courts and the literature for their propensity and susceptibility towards cultural bias for Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019; *Director of Public Prosecutions for Western Australia v Mangolamara* 2007; *Ewert v Canada* 2018; Haag et al. 2016; Hart 2016; Harcourt 2010; Shepherd & Lewis-Fernandez 2016). *Director of Public Prosecutions for Western Australia v Mangolamara* (2007) is notable as one of the first court instances where ARAs veracity and applicability were questioned. When discussing the use of ARAs for assessment, the judge stated that they ‘were not devised for, and do not necessarily take account of, the social circumstances of Indigenous Australians in remote communities’ (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019; *Director of Public Prosecutions for Western Australia v Mangolamara* 2007; McGlade & Hovane 2007).

The Canadian case *Ewert v Canada* (2018) called into question the Canadian Correctional Services use of ARAs and their efficacy, validity and appropriateness in determining levels of risk for Indigenous people (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019; Haag et al. 2016). The Supreme Court of Canada held (7-2) that the Correctional Services of Canada breached its statutory duty to Jeffrey Ewert, an inmate of Métis heritage, in assessing his risk of recidivism using actuarial risk assessment tools that had not been proven to be accurate when applied to Indigenous offenders (*Ewert v Canada* 2018). It is pertinent to note that the very ARA tools used in Canada to assess interpersonal and sexual

violence are utilised by Australian corrective services and in court by professionals to assess future violence risk. These include the Hare Psychopathy Checklist–Revised, PCL–R; the Violence Risk Appraisal Guide, VRAG; the Sex Offender Risk Appraisal Guide, SORAG; the Static 99; and the Violence Risk Scale–Sex Offender version, VRS–SO (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019). The question which arises from these two cases in these two countries is that both countries have procedures which require the consideration of social circumstances for Indigenous offenders in sentencing, Gladue provisions and Fernando principles. Despite this, both countries continue to apply ARAs which don't address the impacts of colonisation, intergenerational trauma, marginalisation and dispossession nor the positive affirming nature of family and community on social circumstances once sentenced (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019).

The reasons for the inappropriateness of the use of ARAs for Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) are varied and numerous. These include the use of socio-economic factors, which produce ethnic, racial and gender biases as well as relations and attitudes to police, which historically are problematic for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). It raises the risk score for groups who are more often deprived of resources compared to incarcerated white males (Goddard & Myers 2017; Hannah-Moffat 2016; Harcourt 2015; Tonry 2014; Van Eijk 2020). It may also be argued that these tools make colonial assumptions regarding the diversity of Indigenous Cultures, wrongly assuming the same community circumstances which apply in Redfern will apply in Wilcannia (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019). The colonial discourse refuses to acknowledge that Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) have multiethnic cultural identities and realities (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019; Nakata 2007).

Gillies (2013) has noted a further issue that by assuming a perceived culture neutral, the data framework when assessing Indigenous clients does not acknowledge risk from a cultural perspective and therefore an assimilationist standpoint is adopted and created (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019). “Western science”, in requiring data to be objective and relevant, takes a culturally “neutral” position, discarding culturally relevant data (Day et al. 2008; Gillies 2013). Gillies (2013) argued that for Indigenous offenders this amounted to institutional racism, ‘unintentional racism resulting from inadequate resource development and practitioners having no alternatives but to adopt an assimilationist stance’ (p.15). This illusionary neutrality is best summarised by Paulo Freire (1985) as ‘washing one’s hands of the conflict between the powerful and the powerless means to side with the powerful, not to be neutral’ (p.122). Gillies (2013) is

not alone in this view as Shepherd and Lewis-Fernandez (2016) have held that ARAs content are formed through the perspectives of the dominant culture, causing disadvantage to Indigenous offenders (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019). They have highlighted an example of the inappropriateness and potentially damaging nature of ARAs, in the use of risk factors which emphasise family factors. These include questions which refer to “family disruption”, “childhood supervision”, “caregiver separation”, “parental and peer criminality” and “intimate partner characterisations” which fail to comprehend the different familial responsibilities and relationships which exist in Indigenous Culture (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019; Shepherd & Lewis-Fernandez 2016).

This constant quest for “scientific objectivity” creates the craving for “best practice”, however “best practice” can create potentially dangerous and simplistic assumptions which ignore the diversity of First Nations Cultures, which can easily morph into racial profiling (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019; Gillies 2013; Harcourt 2015; Shepherd & Lewis-Fernandez 2016). Further danger arises for Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) from ARAs as they are used in the prison setting to determine the allocation of resources, such as when an individual is deemed to be from a group with a high propensity to inflict further community harm, however then conversely concentrating efforts on the individual rather than considering the role of environment in the offending (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019). This impacts Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) as it attempts to separate the individual from community and family, ignoring - as evidenced previously in the literature - the cultural nexus of familial and community interconnectedness, producing cultural discrimination (Day, Geia & Tamatea 2019). Tamasese et al. (2005) has held that western health professionals and therapists are in fact themselves perpetrating colonial violence by treating Indigenous clients with individualist therapies that ignore language, Culture, place and the very real difficulties of colonial abuses of power, poverty and discrimination.

It is important to note that this development of ARAs with flawed and discriminatory assumptions are still being used and developed in jurisdictions across Australia. NSW Corrective Services currently uses the Custody Triage Risk Assessment Scale (Custody TRAS) as a risk assessment tool (Raudino et al. 2019). Custody TRAS is defined as ‘an actuarial risk prediction tool for quickly and accurately assessing custody-based offenders’ probability of return to custody with a new sentence within two years’ (Raudino et al. 2019, p.10). The model is based on the literature which states

that static variables related to an inmate's criminal history and their demographics are predictive of the risk of reoffending (May, Sharma & Stewart 2008; Raudino et al. 2018; Raudino et al. 2019; Smith & Jones 2008; Xie et al. 2018). In its variables TRAS utilises an offender's age, the most serious offences, non-custodial offences, 'density of custodial episodes' and the most recent incarceration (Raudino et al. 2019, p.1). Custody TRAS determines that Indigenous status is a significant predictor of recidivism (Raudino et al. 2019; Xie et al. 2018). This assumption of inherent criminalisation of Aboriginality is sought to be alleviated by the statement that the use of Indigeneity is for statistical variance and not as a comment on a link between 'cultural background and criminal justice outcomes' (Raudino et al. 2019, p.10). This notion of Indigeneity itself as a risk factor is, at its least, problematic (Cunneen 2018). There is a danger in using "cultural" factors to predict criminal activity and resultant targeted policy (Anthony 2013; Cunneen 2007). Van Eijk (2020) argues:

There is a tendency among policymakers and practitioners to insist that risk-based justice is inevitable for safeguarding public safety and to emphasize that risk/needs assessment models are evidence based and, therefore, neutral. However, assessing 'risk' based on an individual's socio-economic situations is never neutral. (p.1093)

It may be posited that alleviation of risk, rather than rehabilitation, has become the goal of governments. Rather than improve safety and wellbeing for First Nations communities, this has rather led to maintaining the colonial quest of marginalisation, discrimination, dispossession and disenfranchisement.

Bail Policy

Historically, bail has been a tool to ensure court attendance and the discretion to grant bail has been in the hands of the police and the courts with the presumption in favour of bail (Productivity Commission 2021; Steel 2009). However, the new mantra of risk assessment and risk mitigation has led to a shift in bail presumption contained amongst changes to bail laws in Australia since 2010 with New South Wales and Victoria making the most strident changes (Auld & Quilter 2020; Bartels et al. 2018;

Productivity Commission 2021). Depending on the offence, new laws require a new ‘show cause’ element, creating a presumption against bail (*Bail Act* 2013 [NSW], ss 16A-16B; *Bail Act* 1977 [Vic], Schedule 1 & Schedule 2). In their analysis of bail amendments in New South Wales, Victoria and Queensland between 2009 and 2018, Auld and Quilter (2020) reported that ‘52 per cent of amendments had decreased access to bail, 14 per cent increased access to bail and the remainder were administrative changes’ (p.648; Productivity Commission 2021). Breach of bail itself has been a key component of Indigenous incarceration (Bartels, Easteal & Westgate 2019; Goddard & Myers 2017) as bail conditions fail to recognise the collective, integral nature of family, Community and Country to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) let alone the harmful impacts of ongoing colonisation and dispossession (Bartels, Easteal & Westgate 2019; Radke 2018; Sanderson et al. 2011). It would seem colonial governments are unable and unwilling to comprehend the familial connections and responsibilities of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples).

Sentencing

Traditionally in Australia, sentencing has been at the discretion of the individual court officer, following guidelines based on any mitigating circumstances, or indeed aggravating circumstances (Gray 2017; Roth 2014; Productivity Commission 2021). However, in some jurisdictions, notably the Northern Territory and Western Australia, there has been a rise over the past twenty years in mandatory sentencing which sets fixed penalties for particular offences (Law Council of Australia 2014; Law Society of Western Australia 2020; Roth 2014; Productivity Commission 2020). This is problematic for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) as some of these mandatory laws include those for repeat offenders (Roth 2014; Productivity Commission 2020), seemingly ignoring the widely evidenced effects of colonial harm and resultant hyper-incarceration. It may be argued that the most serious implication is the removal of judicial discretion, which at the least had the nominal ability to consider some of the causal effects of colonial induced socio-economic marginalisation. Worryingly this trend has also been evident in the introduction in other jurisdictions of mandatory sentencing such as ‘one punch laws’, terrorism laws, criminal organisation laws and

people smuggling legislation (Law Council of Australia 2014; Quilter 2014; Productivity Commission 2021). New South Wales, Victoria and Tasmania have also abolished or are phasing out the use of suspended sentences which has the potential to further increase incarceration (Freiberg et al. 2018). In the June quarter of 2023, on average 63% of all young people aged between 10-17 in detention were First Nations, First Nations youth being 29 times more likely to be in detention than non-First Nations youth (Australian Institute of Health and Welfare [AIHW] 2023). The rate of First Nations youth in detention has been rising since 2020 whilst the non-first Nations youth detention rate has been declining (AIHW 2023). In 2025, the newly elected Queensland government implemented a range of new youth sentencing laws, 'The Making Queensland Safer Laws' (*Making Queensland Safer Act 2024*). The new laws will no longer view detention as a last resort for youth offenders, instead youth offenders will now 'face adult time for adult crime' (*Making Queensland Safer Bill 2024*, Explanatory Notes, p.1). It is difficult to see how this will not adversely exacerbate conditions in a youth detention system which has already been described as perpetrating 'a cycle of incarceration' by the Queensland Child Death Review Board in their *Annual Report 2022-2023* (Queensland Child Death Review Board 2023, p.40). As stated, First Nations youth make up 63% of youth in detention and this new approach to sentencing will foreseeably cause significant harm, increase hopelessness, disconnection from family, Community and Culture, resulting in degraded mental health and SEWB.

A further problematic issue has arisen in the form of Koori Courts, Murri Courts, Circle Sentencing Courts and the NSW Youth Koori Court. There is a fundamental problem in these courts as they are sentencing courts and may encourage First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to accept a guilty plea in order to have more access to a greater range of non-custodial options and even more consideration of their personal circumstances. Ultimately, this acceptance of guilt may have detrimental effects on other issues in the future such as housing applications and employment. In the case of the Youth Koori Court, it currently only sees a minuscule number of alleged offenders due to numerous issues such as a strict referral criteria and the logistical costs (NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research 2022). A study by NSW Bureau of Crime Statistics and Research (2022) examined 3,034 Aboriginal young people who qualified for the Koori Youth Court between 2015 and 2021, finding only 151 had their matter heard before the Koori Youth Court. The remaining 2,883 went before the Children's Court. The effectiveness of Youth restorative justice programs (acknowledging there are

some differences between this and Youth Koori Courts) on reoffending is at best minor, if not negligible (Livingstone, Macdonald & Carr 2013; Wilson, Olaghere & Kimbrell 2018). The case for Circle Sentencing Courts is equally mixed with some studies finding no differences in reoffending of those going before a Circle Sentencing Court and those before a standard court (Fitzgerald 2008) and some studies found evidence of significant benefit on limiting reoffending (Yeong & Moore 2020). There is also a question of whether these courts truly represent First Nations worldviews, which are based in healing and rebalancing, or if they are another western interpretation of “what First Nations Culture is”.

Remand

Remand is a particular issue for Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples). The Australian Law Reform Commission (ALRC) Report 133 (2017) noted that Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) account for 27% of the remand population in prisons (ABS 2017; ALRC 2017). The rate of over representation, both in prison and on remand, has continued to increase for Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) in Australia (ALRC 2017). In 2024, the proportion of unsentenced prisoners increased from 38% to its new highest level of 41% (ABS 2024a; 2024b). The average time on remand has increased from 4.5 months in 2001 to 5.8 months in 2020 (Productivity Commission 2021). Changes in criminal justice policy in a number of states and territories have made bail harder to access and remand the default position (Productivity Commission 2021). A presumption of innocence applies to those on remand, however, remand itself may cause remandees to come into contact with negative effects from the prison system, such as mental health, social and family disconnection, violence, loss of housing and unemployment (Corrective Services South Australia 2016; Day et al. 2008; Peters, Bartoi & Sherman 1997). This itself may increase the risk of remandees offending or reoffending when released (Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service 2018). These issues are covered in programs for sentenced prisoners, however Indigenous prisoners on remand who are later convicted (a large cohort) are either given a sentence less than time served on remand or a sentence that only exceeds their time on remand by a short amount (ALRC 2017).

There may be an argument on the ethical nature or efficacy of delivering standard prison programs to those on remand because of the assumption of innocence and inapplicability of offence-based programs (ALRC 2017; Jones & Guthrie 2016). A further issue is that those remandees who are later convicted miss the opportunity to begin vital programs to address their needs when they are first remanded (Galouzis & Corben 2016). However, it has been recognised that there exists a gap in programming and program access which must be addressed to ensure that remandees are not significantly disadvantaged (Legal Aid ACT 2018). At present, there are only two programs offered to remandees in New South Wales; an addiction program, the Remand Addiction Intervention program and a domestic violence program, the Remand Domestic Violence Intervention program (NSW Communities & Justice 2021). It may be noted, however, that both these programs have eligibility criteria which include exclusion ‘if suffering from alcohol or drug intoxication or withdrawal symptoms’ (NSW Communities & Justice 2021, p.10) which may be problematic when offering an addiction program.

Invasion established a colony - an expression of a legal system with penal servitude and punishment at its core. This system was ultimately used to solve the “inconvenient truth” of the existence of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). The colony still exists and its system of penal servitude and punishment still exists. However, inconveniently for the colonial project, so do First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and Culture.

Effects of policies and incarceration

A litany of government and non-government reports and inquiries have investigated First Nations incarceration and its effects (AIHW 2018; ALRC 1987; ALRC 2017; Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission [HREOC] 1996; HREOC 1997; RCIADC, 1991; Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory 2017; Price Waterhouse Coopers 2017). These reports and inquiries overwhelmingly evidence the harmful impacts of colonisation on First *mayiny* (peoples) - past, present and ongoing (Cunneen 2001; Davis 2006). These government policies implemented and continued by colonial institutions, most tellingly

the legal system, perpetrate the calculated attempted destruction of Indigenous Culture with the intent to harm Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) across generations. As evidenced in the 1997 *Bringing Them Home Report*, this was enacted and achieved through policies which forcefully removed Indigenous children, effectively seeking the breakdown of the holistic cultural links of family, Community, Country and language. (HREOC 1997) In recognising the crucial significance and importance of this continuous connection, the words of Ambelin Kwaymullina (2005) are fundamental:

The Ancestors taught the *mayiny* (peoples) the way of living in country, and these ways were called Law. It was Law that sustained the web of relationships established by the Ancestors, and the web of relationships formed the pattern that was life itself. (p.1)

This forced removal and subsequent breakdown in connection, implemented through government policies and institutions, has caused immense harm and contributed to experiences of hopelessness, powerlessness, loss of control over lives. This can lead to or compound poverty, homelessness and unemployment as well as lack of access to education opportunities, health and/or support services, effecting further marginalisation (Berger et al. 2019). It is important to note that these policies are not restricted to the past, they are ongoing as evidenced by the Northern Territory Intervention in 2007 and documented by Anthony (2015), Gibson (2015) and Triggs (cited in Kerin 2015) as well as in the *Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory* (2017). The 1991 RCIADIC and the 1997 *Bringing Them Home Report* strongly evidenced the destructive and harmful treatment of Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) through government policies, enforced through legal mechanisms, and their long-term impacts across communities and future generations (HREOC 1997; RCIADIC 1991). As demonstrated by more recent inquiries, the same destructive practices continue to be repeated and to manifest today as systematic problematic police interaction and a criminal “justice” system which guarantees First Nations incarceration through the continued and preferred use of ‘imprisonment as a frontline criminal strategy’ (Cunneen et al. 2013, p.18) and making Aboriginality itself a criminalising factor (Cunneen 2018; Royal Commission into the Detention and Protection of Children in the Northern Territory 2017).

The continuing effects of intergenerational trauma have been documented by the AIHW 2018 survey produced by the ABS, tracking outcomes for the descendants of the

Stolen Generations. This data found that Stolen Generations survivors are 3.3 times more likely to have been imprisoned in the last five years and 2.2 times more likely to have been formally charged by police in their lifetime, as well as accelerated health, income and housing problems. It is important to note that this data is not measured against the general population, but rather against the population of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) over eighteen years old, a population that has been systematically under-resourced and neglected by successive governments. As at 2014-2015, there were approximately 114,800 descendants of the survivors of the Stolen Generations and the research conducted by ABS suggests that this group is 1.5 times more likely to have been arrested and 1.9 times more likely to have experienced violence, twice as likely to feel discriminated against as well as experiencing other substantial adverse outcomes (AIHW 2018). This research highlights the long-term and intergenerational impact of these harmful policies, particularly on accessing justice.

In exploring the impacts of colonisation on long-term health, research suggests that events in childhood, especially negative events such as socioeconomic stress and poverty, increase the probability of mood disorders in adulthood (Danese et al. 2009; Green, Billy & Tapim 2010; Kessler et al. 2010). Furthermore, continued exposure to the stress and sustained adversity of living under colonisation has been shown to ‘affect areas of the developing brain relevant to depression’ (Anacker, O’Donnell & Meaney 2014; Berger et al. 2019, p.312; McEwen 2000). Colonisation is an evidenced determinant of health for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) worldwide (Berger, Juster & Sarnyai 2015; Sarnyai, Berger & Jawan 2016), particularly significant are the harmful impacts and chronic stress caused by the continuous colonial practices of dispossession, discrimination, separation from Culture, family and Community and socio-economic marginalisation (Berger & Sarnyai 2015; Berger et al. 2019; Sarnyai, Berger & Jawan 2016). Studies have indicated that First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in Australia experience higher rates of both common and severe mental illness than non-Indigenous people, a direct effect of colonisation (Anderson et al. 2016; AIHW 2015). Depression is estimated to affect up to 23% of the Indigenous population (Luke et al. 2013; Paradies & Cunningham 2012) and the figure of Indigenous youth with severe depressive symptoms is estimated at 18% (Harris et al. 2018). Almost 33% of Indigenous adults and youth self-report high levels of psychological distress (AIHW 2015; Azzopardi et al. 2018), with hospitalisation for mental illness double that of non-Indigenous people (AIHW 2015).

In understanding the significance and impact of ongoing colonisation and the long-term effects of specific historical policies on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and communities, it is useful to briefly consider a study undertaken into the intergenerational trauma experienced by Holocaust survivors and their descendants (Yehuda et al. 2016). In this study, it was found that the traumatic experience of the survivors had altered the stress hormone profiles of their descendants as compared to their peers, predisposing them to anxiety disorders, stress, post-traumatic stress disorder, hypertension, insulin resistance and obesity (Yehuda et al. 2016). A study conducted at James Cook University sought to replicate this research with First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in Australia, examining the stress hormone cortisol and allostatic load and their relationship to symptoms of depression (Berger et al. 2019). Ultimately, this study found that in Indigenous populations affected by considerable social and environmental stressors multisystem dysregulation plays a role in severe depression (Berger et al. 2019).

Despite First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) self-reporting their trauma, and despite the recognition that this is the culmination of genocidal colonial actions, successive governments persistently ignore First Nations voices and continue to incarcerate First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) at ever increasing rates. This carceral predisposition of Australian governments succeeds in exposing First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to even more harmful impacts on their health and wellbeing through incarceration which increases separation from Culture, family, community and Country. International research is adamant that there are significant mental health issues for those who are incarcerated (McCausland & Baldry 2023; Peters, Bartoi & Sherman 1997). In an international study conducted by Fazel and Danesh (2002) of 19,000 prisoners, it was found that 11% experienced major depression and 4% major psychotic illness. These alarming results are borne out in Australian research conducted on incarcerated persons (Indig et al. 2010). When this is considered in the context of First Nations sentenced and non-sentenced “inmates”, who are already presenting with a significant need for mental health support arising from experiences of intergenerational trauma, the effect is catastrophic (Butler et al. 2007).

A study undertaken by Jones and Day (2011) examined the mental health needs of First Nations incarcerated persons utilising the work of Mullen (2001) to link under-supported mental health and vulnerability to crime. In doing so, the Jones and Day (2011) study utilised First Nations specific experiences, such as the Stolen Generations

legacies of trauma and loss, the impact of family and community separation on mental health and the higher likelihood for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to lack access to culturally safe supports and services for their mental health needs. This study found that these factors contributed to extra stress experienced by First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in prison. Further work on the relationship between colonial harm, discrimination and anger found a higher incidence of anger in First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in prison in relation to historical trauma and experiences of discrimination (Day et al. 2008).

Government inquiries have repeatedly identified the trauma experienced by Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) as a result of harmful government policies and their impacts on mental health including anxiety, stress and depression. The criminogenic and marginalising effect of these policies on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) has also been strongly evidenced. Recognition has been made of the significance of Culture, family, Country and Community to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). However, despite their own evidence, governments are unwilling to discern that the holistic nature of First Nations Culture itself presents a methodology to treat intergenerational trauma and produce healing. This is because this evidence has been presented through a western paradigm which is unable to value First Nations knowledges (Nakata 2007). In fact, as stated by Cunneen (2018), rather than recognise the value of cultural differences and diversity of knowledge, a rise in neoliberalism has seen a rise in the paramountcy of punishment for Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples), emphasising ‘deterrence, retribution and accountability’ (p. 2; Cunneen 2014; Strakosch 2015; Wacquant 2009).

The harm of colonisation experienced by First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) cannot be assuaged by a people who not only perpetrated the acts which have caused this harm but, in so doing, have harmed themselves by their past and ongoing violence - unwilling and unable to acknowledge the existence of First Nations knowledges. Aunty Judy Atkinson’s work on intergenerational trauma points to a way forward. In her instrumental healing work with First Nations communities, Atkinson (2002) evidences the importance of building interrelated relationships between personal and professional, recognising that building strong relationships centred on community and family is pivotal to healing. Further, Atkinson (2002) highlights that for healing to occur, safe places must be created, noting that prisons are not safe places. Safe places for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) are Community and Country, integral relationships exist within family and Community. Culture and Country give and create knowledge which in turn precipitates a rebalancing, a healing, which is the panacea for intergenerational

trauma. This *bagaray bang* (rebalancing, healing) must occur on and with *Ngurambang's* (Country). This is *murruway marambul* (proper way), it is our First Nations way. Institutional colonialism has created and creates trauma, which it is unable or unwilling to address - it is time for our First Nations ways to take the lead.

Social and Emotional Wellbeing (SEWB)

To understand and negotiate different programs which seek to offer healing as a response to intergenerational trauma, it is necessary to understand intergenerational trauma and its subsequent effect on SEWB for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). Maria Yellow Horse Brave Heart of the Hunkpapa/Oglala Lakota peoples, a social and mental health worker, was the first to indicate the existence of a particular type of trauma which was manifesting in the Lakota people in the 1980s (Braveheart-Jordan & DeBruyn 1995). Brave Heart (2003) described this historical trauma as ‘cumulative emotional and psychological wounding across generations, including one’s own lifespan’ (p.1; Simpson, Abur & Charles 2020). This was further extrapolated by Evans Campbell (2008) into what is now termed intergenerational trauma, described as:

...a collective complex trauma inflicted on a group of people who share a specific group identity or affiliation... It is the legacy of numerous traumatic events a community experiences over generations and encompasses the psychological and social responses to such events. (p.320; Simpson, Abur & Charles 2020)

This may be better understood by Duran (1990) as a ‘soul wound’, that unless healed will generationally pass further pain and turmoil (p.10). The proposition is that the descendants of those that have experienced this trauma are, notwithstanding of any trauma personally visited upon themselves, predisposed to increased pathological dysfunction because of this past ancestral trauma, a transgenerational transmission of traumatic oppression and all its consequences (Braveheart-Jordan & DeBruyn 1995; Evans-Campbell 2008; Gagnè 1998; Gone 2013; Simpson, Abur & Charles 2013).

Braveheart has maintained that once trauma is transmitted across generations it becomes institutionalised within the family unit and by osmosis the community - this

may then lead to devastating personal impacts as it is ‘cumulative and psychological’ (Brave Heart 1998; Brave Heart 2003 p.1; Simpson, Abur & Charles 2020). As recognised by Butler (2017), this intergenerational trauma is universal amongst colonised *mayiny* (peoples). Colonial harm and the resultant intergenerational trauma are the nexus for the erosion of SEWB in First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) (Davis & Brands 2008; Grieves 2009; Kidd 2007; Reynolds 2006). Whilst purposeful colonial government policies and institutions have attempted to create a wasteland of cultural genocide for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) with land acquisition as the endgame, Indigenous Culture is holistic and enduring. It is forever intertwined with familial and community relationships, language and connection to Country, relating to wellbeing of both spirit and health (Atkinson 2002; Grieves 2009).

Definitions of SEWB for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in Australia have been mired in western concepts of “quality of life”, itself a problematic concept even when applied to western society given the limited focus on socio-economic and ‘Health Related Quality of Life’ (Barcaccia et al. 2013; Karimi & Brazier 2016; Le Grande et al. 2017). This ‘Health Related Quality of Life’ focuses solely on health status and how this relates to the experiencing of a health condition or ailment (Karimi & Brazier 2016; Le Grande et al. 2017). This is expressed as ‘the value assigned to duration of life, functional states, perceptions and social opportunities that are influenced by disease, injury, treatment or policy’ (Patrick & Erikson 1993, p.22). Further, the ‘extent to which one’s usual or expected physical, emotional and social wellbeing are affected by a medical condition or its treatment’ (Patrick & Erikson 1993, p.73). As proposed by Haas (1999), there is an imperative for any understanding of First Nations SEWB to expand upon these narrow notions and recognise:

A multidimensional evaluation of an individual’s current life circumstances in the context of the culture in which they live and the values they hold... a subjective sense of wellbeing encompassing physical, psychological and spiritual dimensions. (p.219)

First Nations SEWB does not have an individualistic emphasis, rather it is collective and focussed on Community dynamics and stressors, connections to ancestry and Culture, encompassing physical, spiritual and social realms (Shepherd et al. 2018). This First Nations SEWB has been defined by Dudgeon et al. (2025) as:

Social and emotional wellbeing (SEWB) is a term that has been utilised to broadly represent a culturally grounded holistic and relational aspects of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander health and wellbeing. SEWB is distinct from non-Indigenous conceptualisations of health and wellbeing to the extent that it is specifically intended to reflect related Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander ways of knowing, being, and doing. (p.8)

However, a better understanding is that which allows for the recognition of external stressors which may impact SEWB, ‘a multidimensional concept that includes mental health and wellbeing, such as connection to land or ‘country, culture, spirituality, ancestry, family and community’ (Gee et al. 2014, p.55). For First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in Australia the emphasis moves from the westernised concept of individual (Neumayer 2013) to the collectivist experience of kinship of family and Community where the individual cannot be well if the Community is unwell (Browne-Yung et al. 2013; Gee et al. 2014; Kagawa Singer et al. 2016; Le Grande et al. 2017).

First Nations SEWB once degraded has been linked to dispossession, cultural dislocation, racism, intergenerational trauma and poor mental and physical health (Atkinson et al. 2014; Maxwell, Day & Casey 2013; Shepherd et al. 2018; Zubrick et al. 2010). Internationally, the destructive intergenerational nature of colonisation upon First Nations Culture and its systematic destruction of familial ties of kinship and marginalisation is well documented (Goodman et al. 2017; Kirmayer, Gone & Moses 2014; Morton-Ninomiya & Pollock 2017; Le Grande et al. 2017; Paradies 2016). SEWB is dependent upon the bonds of kinship, family, interconnectedness to Country and Cultural knowledge (Kilcullen, Swinbourne & Cadet-James 2016; Kingsley et al. 2013; Le Grande, et al. 2017; Swan & Raphael 1995). Incarceration by its isolating nature increases the stress related to negative SEWB outcomes. However, this is further exacerbated when considering the cumulative impacts of colonial harm on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in prison including racism, limited access to support services and educational opportunities and other physical and psychological manifestations of oppression (Maxwell, Day & Casey 2013; Shepherd et al. 2018). Significantly, there is evidence that connection to Culture, family and self-determination can bolster SEWB. Indeed, engaging in cultural activities is an indicator of positive cultural identity that is associated with better mental health amongst Indigenous Australians (Dudgeon et al. 2014; Shepherd et al. 2018). This cultural engagement provides not only identity, but

resilience and empowerment combating feelings of powerlessness, lack of control and nihilism (Battiste 2013; Le Grande et al. 2017; Morrissey 2006; Tsey et al. 2007; Tsourtos et al. 2015).

Evaluation

Acknowledging that poor SEWB has devastating outcomes for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and that that cultural engagement provides a panacea through the processes of *bagaray bang* (healing and rebalancing) of Community, kinship, *Ngurambang* (Country) and self, there is a question of what programs work for SEWB, healing and cultural engagement, and indeed how to evaluate these programs. There is a paucity of literature in law examining this issue and this research project strives to address that gap. However, there are examples of the efficacy of the role of *bagaray bang* (healing and rebalancing), cultural connection, engagement and immersion for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in dealing with trauma and stress in other fields.

A research project by Keevers et al. (2024) undertaken in partnership with Waminda South Coast Women's Health and Wellbeing Aboriginal Corporation yielded important data on the effect of engagement with Cultural knowledge and protocols for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) exposed to trauma-inducing events. The research examined the response of Waminda to their Communities trauma in the face of the confluence of floods, bushfires and COVID-19 in a short time period across Yuin Country in the South Coast of New South Wales. The study found that Waminda had:

A Country centred conception of community connections and local communities that encompass the land, other- than -humans, humans, and the entangled relations amongst them... This inseparability of Country and community means practices such as connecting to Country, caring for Country... are key resources for healing body, mind, spirit and heart's pain. (Keevers et al. 2024, p.7)

Keevers et al. (2024) continued:

At Waminda care is not a transaction, a quality or a dyadic relationship between carer and those being cared for. It is caring as an ongoing, sophisticated collective, sociomaterial accomplishment. (p.12)

The study also found that engagement with Country had immense healing power. For responses to traumatising events to be effective, they must be community led, involve deep listening to local people with local knowledge and that organisations must be adaptable. Ultimately, deeply traumatising and stressful disasters require responses which are ‘community-led and culturally situated’, rather than ‘relying on mainstream system wide interventions’ (Keevers et al. 2024, p.15). These community responses are built on connection to Country, Culture, Community and working with community organisations - this is what enables ‘recovery, healing, health and wellbeing’ (Keevers et al. 2024, p.15).

Further evidence is provided in a scoping review by Gupta et al. (2020) which analysed SEWB programs for First Nations youth to determine best practice, providing a set of guideline principles then measuring programs for their efficacy in adhering to these principles. The review considered which SEWB frameworks were the most comprehensive, and potentially best in reflecting First Nations Culture (Davy et al. 2017; Dudgeon, Milroy & Walker 2014; Healing Foundation 2015; Hinton et al. 2015; Victorian Government Department of Health 2012; Western Australian Drug and Alcohol Office 2011; Swan & Raphael 1995). After examining common threads in these potential frameworks, the principles utilised were those of the *National Strategic Framework for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People Health and Social and Emotional Wellbeing*, which had been developed over many years. The principles are 1) health as a holistic concept; 2) the right to self-determination; 3) the need for understanding; 4) the impact of history in trauma and loss; 5) recognition of human rights; 6) the impact of racism and stigma; 7) recognition of the centrality of kinship; 8) recognition of individual and community cultural diversity; and 9) recognition of Aboriginal strengths (Australian Health Ministers Advisory Council 2017).

The method for the scoping review included quantitative, qualitative and mixed method studies as well as articles in English from between 2003 and 2017 that were focused on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *mayiny* (peoples) and interventions. Using a multidisciplinary search of electronic databases, it initially retrieved 721 potentially relevant articles, eventually trimmed down to 26 which met the full criteria

(Gupta et al. 2020). The review found that all programs contained some of the principles, but the most efficacious contained all nine such as Youth Link (Sabbioni et al. 2018). Most significantly, the review highlighted a serious issue in the evaluation of programs given evaluation processes prefer evidence- based approaches. Gupta et al. (2020) found that this approach was potentially ‘conceptually dissonant with Aboriginal knowledges and practices, which can raise concerns about cultural and social appropriateness of mainstream outcome measures’ (p.16; Markiewicz 2012; Muir & Dean 2017; Sabbioni et al. 2018; Swan & Raphael 1995). In fact, Gupta et al. (2020) noted that less than 10% of First Nations programs were even evaluated (Hudson 2016). There is undoubtedly a need for valid methods for determining evidence of the efficacy of programs and approach, however what counts as evidence and what is valid is contested in this research. This research project discusses this issue and provides direction as a First Nations centric evaluation methodology.

This theme was further recognised by Murrup-Stewart et al. (2018) in a systematic review of the assessment of SEWB programs utilising Aboriginal perceptions. The aim of this review was to provide an evaluation of SEWB targeted at First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) from the participants view of success or failure (Murrup-Stewart et al. 2018). The review examined 33 articles using a similar methodology as the Gupta et al. (2020) review to determine relevance. It found that Aboriginal participants valued holistic approaches, capacity building, the inclusion of yarning, story-telling and shared experiences, relationships with individuals and community of respect, cultural appropriateness and safety. However, it also flagged the negative impacts of discrimination, misunderstanding and intimidation (Murrup-Stewart et al. 2018). Significantly, participants also stressed the importance of Aboriginal developed, designed, governed, led and owned programs. The participants listed that successful engagement emotionally returned empowerment, hopefulness and calmness and resilience.

It is, however, arguable that the most important aspect of this review was the finding that problematically most programs evaluated success using a western set of pre-defined outcomes, such as attendance, reduction of harm and mental health standard measurements (Murrup-Stewart et al. 2018). In fact, the research methodologies utilised were mostly western traditional, omitting the use of First Nations methodologies or even considered melding Indigenist approaches into research. It is difficult to imagine how programs, which deliver at their core First Nations SEWB programs based on First

Nations holistic principles of Culture and healing, can be evaluated for success for First Nations participants whilst dismissing First Nations perspectives and knowledges. This point is reiterated in the Healing Foundation research undertaken by McKendrick et al. (2014) which conducted a comparative literature review of healing programs and their evaluation from the USA, Canada, New Zealand and Australia. This review concurring with the themes found in the reviews of Gupta et al. (2020) and Murrup-Stewart et al. (2018). McKendrick et al. (2014) found that successful healing programs respond to needs identified by the local community, incorporate local cultural practices, values and spirituality and were developed in the local context. Furthermore, such programs are supported by the local community and work beyond the individual to family and Community, providing positive impacts for individuals, families and communities at large through empowerment, self-esteem and a sense of identity. This review concurred that programs in Australia have not been well evaluated and therefore recommended the use of appropriate methodologies such as Participatory Action Research (PAR).

There has, however, been some initiatives which seek to focus on the input provided by First Nations individuals and communities to provide a culturally responsible tool for assessment. The National Empowerment Program, for example, was conducted at nine sites around Australia utilising community consultation and it reached three overarching recommendations for SEWB healing programs. These included: 1) Programs need to be community owned and culturally appropriate; 2) Programs should be flexible and delivered on Country; and 3) The content should address cultural, SEWB, healing and self – empowerment (Gupta et al. 2020; Healing Foundation 2015). The National Empowerment Program further found eight critical elements for the content of healing programs. These included: 1) Proactive; 2) Incorporate strong evaluation frameworks; 3) Developed to address issues in the community; 4) Driven by local leadership; 5) Have a well-developed evidence and theory base; 6) Combine western methodologies and Aboriginal healing; 7) Understand colonisation, intergenerational trauma and grief, this understanding must be based on First Nations experiences of these issues garnered from ‘real people’, not from cursory texts; and 8) Build community, family and individual capacity (Healing Foundation 2013).

There is a further, and potentially best practice, method which can be offered when considering the evaluation of SEWB and healing programs. This method was posited by Dr. Megan Williams and utilised in her evaluation of the Civil Law Service for Aboriginal Communities team from NSW Legal Aid (Williams & Ragg 2019). This

method is the Aboriginal evaluation framework of *ngaa-bi-nya*, meaning ‘examine, try and evaluate’ in the language of the *Wiradjuri* Nation, to which Megan Williams belongs (Williams 2018, p.2). This framework for evaluating health and social programs, utilising prompts to aid the collection of data and analysis of success factors, was developed from ‘reviews of evidence about success from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander perspectives, as well as human rights instruments and insights from program evaluations by, with and for Aboriginal and Torres Strait *mayiny* (peoples)’ (Williams & Ragg 2019, p.14). The four evaluation domains are as follows:

- 1) Landscape: what are the ‘landscape’ factors that influence program development? For example, history and policy and First Nations roles.
- 2) Ways of working: to what extent do processes of the program reflect First Nations peoples values, priorities, needs and practices?
- 3) Resources: what were the range of financial, human and material resources drawn on, including informal supports and in-kind contributions?
- 4) Learnings: what outcomes and impacts were notable, as well as critical insights and progress achieved towards goals? (Williams & Ragg 2019, p.14).

The last three domains occur in the overall context of the first landscape. The prompts developed for each of these domains helps to discover, ‘the complexity, local cultural protocols, needs and aspirations, and stimulate us to understand where power for decision making is located’ (Williams & Ragg 2019, p.15). The prompts themselves reflect First Nations ‘evidence, values, processes and aspirations’ (Williams & Ragg 2019, p.15). As explained by Williams and Ragg (2019):

They represent an Aboriginal Standpoint from which to examine the likely relevance and beneficence of programs and their activities for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, communities and/or services. (p.15)

Healing

The literature on healing poses the following three questions. Why is cultural healing necessary? What is healing, in particular, cultural healing? How is the efficacy

of this healing measured? Salmon et al. (2019), when quoting Phillips and Bamblett (2009), stated that ‘healing is a spiritual process that includes addictions recovery, therapeutic change and cultural renewal’ (p.14). This has then been extrapolated by the Healing Foundation (2009) to be ‘therapeutic change means dealing with trauma in a safe and culturally appropriate environment. Cultural renewal means strengthening and reconnecting with identity, which may include language, dance and song’ (p.4). Healing as recommended by the *Bringing Them Home Report* was seen as a response to the trauma of removal and as a mode of mitigating the transfer of that trauma intergenerationally (HREOC 1997). As discussed previously, SEWB for Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) has been eroded by the effects of intergenerational trauma, which should be viewed not just in an historical context but as a traumatising effect which is still ongoing, layering past trauma with the current traumas of racism, marginalisation and dispossession. This is particularly important when considering the essence of First Nations Culture where the past present and future are interwoven, in a ‘living cultural continuum’ (Sherwood 2010, p.61). Thus, enculturation serves not only as a remedy for past trauma but also as a positive factor for SEWB and as a protection against the present continuing perpetration of colonial violence. Healing should be seen as a process, not just restricted to a singular event but rather a journey (Blignault & Williams 2017; McKendrick et al. 2014).

The wellbeing of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) has been described as a holistic combination and balance of physical, mental, spiritual and cultural aspects of self in the context of environmental, political, social and economic factors which influence wellbeing (Bourke 2020; Colquhoun & Dockrey 2012; Swan & Raphael 1995). The resultant literature produced from research undertaken in North American, Australian and New Zealand jurisdictions with First Nations populations have emphasised the positive connection which exists between culture, health and wellbeing for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) (Bourke 2020; Bourke et al. 2018; Salmon et al. 2019). These connections stress that cultural identity and cultural activities present as a bulwark, affecting ‘physical, mental and social health and reducing risk taking behaviours’ (Bourke 2020, p.286). Enculturation then presents as a process to counteract the settler colonial policy initiatives of acculturation (Sam & Berry 2010) and is recognised in the literature contained in the disciplines of psychology, health and education (Bals et al. 2011; Bourke 2020; Currie et al. 2011; Whitbeck et al. 2001; Whitbeck et al. 2004; Yoder et al. 2006; Zimmerman et al. 1994). Indeed, these studies ‘suggested that

enculturation leads to greater resilience for Indigenous peoples, and that this can be reinforced by people actively seeking and engaging in cultural activities' (Bourke 2020, p.122).

Cultural healing is based on the interconnectedness of Culture and the centrality of spirituality to that Culture which has influence over lore and Country (Dudgeon & Bray 2018). Traditional healing itself is described as 'the most efficacious way to assist distressed First Nations individuals due to the inherent potency of these traditions achieved through long pre-contact histories of therapeutic refinement' (Dudgeon & Bray 2018; Gone 2013 p.697). The Dreaming is central to our Cultures, it is where all connects, and so it is central to healing. I use the phrases Dreaming and 'Everywhen' (Mc Grath et al. 2023, p.14; Stanner 1990) and it is important to note that whichever word is used, it is still a coloniser word in a coloniser language. The Dreaming is often dismissed by western knowledges as creation stories. The coloniser would argue that it has a connotation that First Nations Cultures are static and mired in the ancient past (Dudgeon & Bray 2018). However, the opposite is true. The Dreaming is the Everywhen which is a 'continuous becoming - a self-aware life force that exceeds time and space, the boundaries between life and death, and builds thought' (Dudgeon & Bray 2018, p.9; San Roque 2006). As stated by Stanner (1990), the Everywhen is the life force which enables not only communication, but interaction with everything across 'space, and time life and death', resulting in the melding of 'human and country' (cited in Dudgeon & Bray 2018, p.9). This Everywhen allows for Culture to develop and adapt as it responds to the dynamics of change, allowing the inclusion of modern phenomena such as sport to imprint upon Culture. Culture and its 'continuity incorporates connection to Country and community, respect for Elders, kinship and family connections, gender and age roles, identity, language, art and ceremony, music and dance, sport, spirituality, and storytelling' (Bourke 2020, p.47; Norman 2006). An example of the ability of Culture to change and adapt is the mixing of sport, culture, art, kinship relations and totems, which occur in major First Nations sporting events. In these events, guernsey art is combined with family participation in teams, team and Nation names, the creation of memorial teams, the importance of place and community in the staging of the carnival - this is exemplified in the Koori Knockout Rugby League Carnival (Norman 2006).

The Dreaming Everywhen unites people with Country. Importantly, it also unites *mayiny* (peoples) across different nation groups with a commonality of spiritual

experience. Cultural spiritual healing becomes a reconnection to Country achieved through the stories and narratives of the Everywhen, a process described by Préaud (2009) as a ‘healing spiritual process’ that ‘gradually builds the young people as Country itself’ (p.9; Dudgeon & Bray 2018; Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture Centre 2000). This becoming Country becomes itself a journey which culminates in a transformation through healing, at the very fundamental level of being (Dudgeon & Bray 2018).

The evolving nature of Culture and the Indigenous universality of Everywhen experiences means that healing does not have to conform or be restricted to western notions of First Nations Culture and cultural healing, which then undermine First Nations knowledges when Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *mayiny* (peoples) shift from their perceived “place”. It is important to note the diversity of healing practices and traditions which exist in Australia. In fact, the literature stresses this diversity as each Community will have its own traditions and tailored responses which are dependent upon both the needs and capacities of each Community (Centre for Suicide Prevention 2003; Chandler & Lalonde 2008; Smith 2009; Williams, Guenther & Arnott 2011). Further, colonialism and its genocidal effects have impacted upon the transmission of healing knowledges and practices disproportionately across Australia. Some communities, such as the *Yolngu* people, retain strong traditional healing practices which require extensive specialised ‘training and experience’ (Wearne & Muller 2009; Williams, Guenther & Arnott 2011, p.9). Whereas others may have lost some of these knowledges, although there is evidence that they may not be as lost as western researchers believe (López & Tascón 2003; Phillips 2003; Williams, Guenther & Arnott 2011) and that an ‘experiential approach’ exists (Williams, Guenther & Arnott 2011, p.9). This experiential approach exists in these impacted communities through ceremonies of *mutual care* which are interwoven with First Nations elements of ceremony utilising experiences of the healer in overcoming their own traumatising experiences (Atkinson 2002; Williams, Guenther & Arnott 2011).

The literature is clear that successful programs are First Nations led and developed, centred in local community initiatives, recognising that health, wellbeing and trauma are felt differently from place to place and which operate on the multilayers of the individual, interpersonal, community and societal levels (Blignault & Williams 2017; Chandler & Lalonde 2008; McMurray 2007). The literature demonstrates that healing which is strength-based, notably on the strengths of First Nations cultural

traditions, have been most successful as they are designed to ‘empower individuals, families and communities; strengthen connections to culture; and reduce the damaging effects of colonisation and government policies such as the forcible removal of children’ (Blignault & Williams 2017, p.1; Brough, Bond & Hunt 2004; Haswell et al. 2013; Milroy, Dudgeon & Walker 2014). A review of twelve collective healing programs conducted by Blignault and Williams (2017) noted the success of yarning circles, workshops, healing camps and day trips to Country for storytelling. These results were a replication of the themes from the *National Workshop on Collective Healing for Members of the Stolen Generation 2015*, which comprised of locally tailored responses, community partnerships, trauma informed and culturally appropriate programs and connecting to Country and Culture (Blignault & Arkles 2015).

A further evaluation of three pilot men’s healing programs by the Healing Foundation in 2015 found similar themes. The ‘Our Men Our Healing’ program was designed to ‘strengthen, support and empower Aboriginal men through cultural, education and therapeutic healing activities’ (Healing Foundation 2015, p.4). The evaluation found strong evidence of the efficacy of the program for creating ‘significant and sustained change at the community, family and individual levels at each site’ (Healing Foundation 2015, p.4). Some of the reported changes included a decrease in family and domestic violence and less violence in general in the community, reduced suicides and self-harming, stronger feelings of safety for women, increased SEWB among participants and increased cultural reengagement (Healing Foundation 2015). Critical success factors included focus on holistic wellbeing, connection to Country, Culture and identity, community engagement and co-design of the program. By following this roadmap of First Nations cultural efficacy, it was found that through the men’s strengthening and healing, the families and communities were also healing, with expectations of sustained healing.

Determining the efficacy of cultural healing is discussed by Waldram (2013) who considers two different approaches to healing: transformative and restorative. Transformative healing is anchored in the journey to achieve the transformed individual whereas efficacy is concerned with the ‘incremental changes towards this goal’ (Waldram 2013, p.191). Restorative healing is concerned with extinguishing the sickness and returning the individual to the ‘pre-sickness’ state (Waldram 2013, p.191). Determining efficacy for restorative healing can be much more readily ascertained as it involves determination of the elimination of a particular pathology and a return to the

pre-pathology position, then typically the patient-healer relationship is terminated with the success of the cure (Waldram 2013). It may be posited on historical evidence that prior to colonisation, healing was restorative with some transformative healing (Vogel 1970; Waldram, Herring & Young 2006). However, colonisation has seen the decline in restorative healing as a result of state policies to destroy cultural knowledges and a rise in forced contact with western biomedical science, brought about by assimilation imperatives (Waldram 2013; Waldram, Herring & Young 2006). Transformative healing has thus become the healing most at use in First Nations communities and programs, a 'healing journey' (Waldram 2013, p.197). It is important to note that transformative healing journeys initiated by traditional spiritual healing practices are significantly different from the kind of clinical psycho-pharmaceutical interventions made by the prescription of Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors, medications or western cognitive behavioural behaviour (Dudgeon & Bray 2018).

Due to the impacts of colonisation on Indigenous Cultures to varying degrees across Australia, forcing an evolution of Culture, it may be said that cultural healing is cultural education, reconnecting participants to Culture so as to make them understand in order to be healed (Dow 1986; Moerman 1979; Waldram 2013). A critical view would acknowledge the paradox presented that Culture and traditional knowledge is seen as the panacea for trauma, but this Culture has been altered by cultural loss from colonialism and contemporised. However, this critique only applies if the goal were restoration, but that goal may not be possible after 233 years of colonialism which continues to oppress and subjugate. Because of the continuity of colonialism, the healing method required is a continuing journey of transformative healing. It becomes not a matter of being 'cured' but rather a matter of giving a participant the tools to meet ever evolving challenges and to adapt. This may involve an avoidance of triggering situations and behaviours and 'the reparation of relationships, leading to the intended re-integration of the patient into the family and community' (Waldram 2013, p.198).

Efficacy for healing cannot be then measured on the return to the pre-sickness state or cure, in this case pre-invasion, as this may not be possible. 'Rather the benchmark for assessing efficacy is the pathological or traumatised condition deemed to be the product of colonialism' (Waldram 2013, p.198). Healing is relational to behavioural changes which 'are subjective and intersubjective and not quantifiable, and as they are process related there is no logical point in time where a judgement of efficacy can be easily rendered' (Waldram 2013, p.199).

The Nexus of Social and Emotional Wellbeing and Cultural Strengthening/Immersion

Colonialism has privileged European knowledges, creating assumptions and beliefs which champion their superiority, most especially in scholarship, opinion and the law (Battiste 2013). As has been shown extensively in the literature, the colonial criminal “justice” system and more widely non-Indigenous institutions, policies and worldviews are ineffective and cannot provide justice for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and communities. These colonial structures have not and do not reflect First Nations histories, experiences, worldviews, priorities and visions for the future. In responding to both the intergenerational harm inflicted on First Nations communities by colonial systems and the ongoing hyper-incarceration of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), it is pivotal that First Nations knowledges and priorities be the foundations on which to build and ground solutions. As a starting point, it is important to draw on and centre First Nations meanings of wellbeing as observed by Atkinson (2002):

The closest word for health within the Aboriginal languages is wellbeing. The word *punyu* from the language of the *Ngarinman* from the Northern Territory, sometimes translating as wellbeing, explains the concept and functions of wellbeing. *Punyu* encompasses person and Country and is associated with being strong, happy, knowledgeable, and socially responsible (to ‘take a care’), beautiful, clean, safe - both in the sense of being within the lore and in the sense of being cared for. (p.44)

Health does not represent for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) the simplicity of the dominant eurocentric definition of ‘good diet and prudent lifestyle’ (Reid 1982, p.xv-xvi). As Grieves (2009) recognises, the holistic nature of First Nations Culture health is linked to wellbeing and wellbeing is spiritual, however wellbeing can exist independently of health, but health cannot exist independently of wellbeing. First Nations wellbeing relies on a belief system, ‘that philosophical basis of ontologies and epistemologies known as Spirituality’ (Grieves 2009, p.43).

The importance of SEWB as a reflection of First Nations holistic philosophies to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) is well documented (AIHW 2009; Day & Francisco

2013; Garvey 2008; Gorman 2010; Larsen & Prizmic 2008; Productivity Commission 2011; Wilczynski et al. 2007). To improve SEWB for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) then First Nations knowledges, philosophies, ways of doing and spirituality, in other words First Nations Cultures must be privileged (Grieves 2009). To heal the damage inflicted on First Nations SEWB by colonialism there are core elements that must be addressed. Initiatives must be First Nations owned, designed and evaluated to ensure First Nations knowledges and worldviews are paramount and they must be holistic addressing connectedness to family, community, environment and spirituality (Caruana 2010; Day & Francisco 2013; Healing Foundation 2009; Wanganeen 2008). Cultural renewal, cultural immersion and cultural strengthening should be ‘the precursor to healing’ (Day & Francisco 2013, p.354), recognising that culture is treatment (Day & Francisco 2013, p.354; Hunter & Garvey 1998; Phillips 2003).

Cultural immersion and strengthening programs have been utilised in education spheres with success, these programs include the Aboriginal Girls Circle (Dobia et al. 2014) and Seeding Success (Munns, O’Rourke & Bodkin-Andrews 2013). Both of these programs relied upon both local and international studies which promoted a link between increased educational engagement and cultural identity (Castagno, McKinley & Brayboy 2008; Dobia & O’Rourke 2011; Harrison & Greenfield 2011). Importantly, the evaluation of the Aboriginal Girls Circle was partly undertaken by the Community, this was particularly relevant as Community and Elder involvement in delivery and design was integral to the program and ensuring a connection between cultural identity and wellbeing. The significance, impact and purpose of this program is established in the following statement made by an Elder involved with the program; ‘they need to know where they come from, what areas they’re from, and that gives them more sense of who they are’ (Dobia et al.2014, p.30).

There is research which finds strong cultural engagement leads to increased resilience, self-esteem and developing protective mechanisms for SEWB against trauma (Delgado et al. 2018). Unfortunately, there is a paucity of research in Australia on the significance of cultural engagement to wellbeing and positive outcomes in the legal sphere. However, one study which did undertake this link was by Delgado et al. (2018), examining the relationship between cultural identity, cultural engagement and violent recidivism. The research was undertaken with First Nations “inmates”, self-reporting on a questionnaire created by First Nations psychologists. Significantly, the research found that cultural identity in itself did not impact upon recidivism, however a strong cultural

identity led to increased cultural engagement and those inmates who had strong cultural engagement experienced significantly longer periods before reoffending. The study ultimately concluded that strong cultural engagement can reduce recidivism and that cultural strengthening initiatives should be considered as a base for rehabilitation (Delgado et al. 2018). This research seeks to explore this gap in the literature, privileging the voices of the Community, recognising that the storyteller/participants are the experts in their own experiences.

Significantly, international research and programs have not only investigated the benefit of cultural engagement and healing as an alternative to prison but have instituted holistic programs to achieve this goal. The *Final Report 2010-2011 Evaluation of the Effective Corrections and Citizen Engagement Initiatives* delivered by Public Safety Canada (2011) noted that the major contributors to the success of Aboriginal “offenders” upon release is participation in spiritual and cultural activities delivered by Aboriginal people and with the support of family and community (p.8). Some programs, such as the Hollow Waters Community Holistic Healing Program, United Chiefs and Councils of Mnídoo Mnísing Community Justice Program and the Kwalin Dun First Nation Social Justice Program, form part of the Canadian Aboriginal Justice Strategy Program, which was evaluated in the *Evaluation of the Aboriginal Justice Strategy* report by the Department of Justice Canada (2016). The primary focus of these programs is that they are community based and a diversion from the mainstream colonial “justice” system. In its evaluation, one of the most significant identified problems of the Aboriginal Justice Strategy Program was that the referral of sentenced “offenders” to the program was via the police and the crown, which was deemed to give too much power to those colonial officials (Department of Justice Canada 2016). The long-term goal of the strategy is for healthier and safer communities, addressing the needs of First Nations groups through community-based programming. These programs sponsor community ownership of problems, the community working together to heal the person, it is a holistic collective based approach, delivering culturally relevant community-based alternatives reflecting the values of healing and reconciliation (Department of Justice Canada 2016, p.32-54). Aboriginal Justice Strategy programs address cultural and spiritual aspects of participants’ lives with a view to address root causes and helping individuals to a healthier path, including family, community and victims in solutions. Success has been noted in the ability to generate improvement in the community, healing the community as a whole, with participants 40% less likely to

reoffend and a 54% increase in community safety and health (Department of Justice Canada 2016, p.50).

The success of international cultural engagement programs makes it an imperative to undertake research into the use of these types of alternatives to heal First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and communities in Australia. Whilst it is important to acknowledge the international experience and effective approaches adopted in these jurisdictions, it is also essential to understand that it is not a “one size fits all” solution, as forcefully stated by Blagg (1997) on critiquing the introduction of a Māori Youth Conferencing model being implemented on *Wiradjuri* Country in Wagga Wagga New South Wales:

Orientalist discourses are, primarily, powerful acts of representation that permit Western/European cultures to contain, homogenize and consume ‘other’ cultures. It is through such techniques of representation that we identify what is essentially ‘knowable’ about them: and our knowledge of them then becomes a kind of cultural capital, the accumulation of which serves to reinforce our nascent cultural superiority. (p. 483)

Importantly, programs already exist in Australia which seek to address healing, including, but not limited to Red Dust Healing located in New South Wales and Queensland, *Baabayn* located in Western Sydney, *Willum Warrain* in Victoria, the *We al-li* training program, the Darwin Aboriginal and Islander Women’s Shelter, the Mudgin-gal women’s group in Redfern, Waminda South Coast Women’s Health and Welfare Aboriginal Corporation located on the South Coast of NSW, and Deadly Connections based in Sydney. Significantly, *Mibbinbah* offers programs Australia-wide, travelling to Country to ensure programs are delivered on Country, using *murruway marambul* (proper way). These *Mibbinbah* programs are First Nations designed, based in First Nations principles and First Nations facilitated. They resonate with the powerful words of Olli (2013) in the opening address presented at the *Global Indigenous Preparatory Conference for the World Conference on Indigenous Peoples*, ‘nothing about us, without us’ (cited in Laird et al. 2021). This was expanded powerfully and eloquently by First Nations scholar Aileen Moreton-Robinson (2007):

The goals of Indigenous women's self-determination and men's self-determination are underpinned and informed by the inter-substantiation of relations between Indigenous land, spirit, place, ancestors and bodies. (p.162)

The *Wiradjuri* are the people of the three *bila* (rivers); the *Galari* (Lachlan), the *Wambuul* (Macquarie) and the *Marrambidya* (Murrumbidgee). *Yindyamarra bala bila-dha birra-bina-birra wuurrawin Wiradjuri ngurambang-ga, yindyamarra, guwiiny murin gaang-a-dhaanyl ngiyanhinya, birra-bina-birra, baalmanha bila-dha* (*yindyamarra* is in the rivers moving quietly through *Wiradjuri* Country, *yindyamarra*, it is the canoe carrying us, moving quietly, floating, on the river) (Sullivan, 2016, p.33; p.60). Life is provided and sustained by those rivers. The *bila* (rivers) are life, they have currents, hidden depths, they twist and turn, as do our lives. The question is: how do we negotiate these challenges?

For First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), Culture not only provides a canoe to traverse the river, but also a compass for navigation. We as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) are the experts in our lives, in our lived experiences and we know the power of our Cultures, the powerful *bagaray bang* (rebalancing, healing) of *Ngurambang* (Country). This research seeks to provide evidence of the profound efficacy of our ways of Knowing, Being and Doing in answering the issues which we identify as important, issues not created by us but thrust upon us by colonisation.

Waagan / Crow

Chapter Three

This research will utilise decolonising methodologies, Indigenist principles of research, Indigenous standpoint theory, APAR, *yindyamarra*, and *dadirri*. The practices of storymapping, storywork, yarning and reflective journaling combined with First Nations deep memory are explained in in this chapter. I made the decision to integrate APAR with *dadirri* and storymaps to both honour and to create an atmosphere of sharing of knowledge in a non-western research paradigm. The main principle adopted is one of *yindyamarra* of the storyteller/participant, the Community and the knowledge that both have. In the yarning circle, the method of deep listening contained within *dadirri* is to facilitate the transfer of knowledge. This complements the use of songline/storymapping as a way for storytellers/participants to articulate their knowledge in a healing atmosphere, especially as their stories will contain trauma. The songline/storymaps will be made available and utilised with storyteller/participants to enhance their stories, their knowledge and place them in control of those stories and knowledge, forming a point for reference and reflection. As Chilisa and Tsheko (2014) have posited, ‘there cannot be Indigenous research without mixed methods’ (p.224). In other words, when Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) actively contribute to the research in a meaningful way, this constitutes a mixed methods approach (Chilisa & Tsheko 2014; Liu et al. 2016). The purpose of a mixed Indigenous methodology is to *re-indigenise my research*. Reflecting on the development of her ‘Quandamooka Ontology’, Martin (2003) stated that ‘Indigenist research occurs through centring Aboriginal Ways of Knowing, Ways of Being and Ways of Doing in alignment with aspects of western qualitative research frameworks’ (p.12; Jones 2018). Dr. Jonathon Jones (2018) has aptly summed up the approach I have taken in developing my methodology when he quotes *Wiradjuri* scholar Aunty Christine Evans (2014) who posits:

It is Indigenous academics internationally who, in showing respect for their own cultural affiliations, are increasingly choosing to customise research methodologies to represent the customary paradigms of their own clans, bands or tribes in the methodological approaches that they advocate. (p. 51)

My approach to mixed methods is different to those who define it as a melding of western and First Nations methods. My approach is to utilise different First Nations methods and then combine them, re-creating and re-imaging them, creating a process which forms into a unique methodology. By utilising First Nations frameworks, this research seeks to challenge systems which continue to privilege western knowledge and ways of doing, such as academia and criminal “justice”, by identifying them as a threat to Indigenous well-being. This simultaneously affirms Indigenous sovereignty through practicing Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing (Moreton-Robinson 2014). Marcia Langton (1993), as quoted in Jones (2018), refers to ‘processes that perpetuate Aboriginalism: “Increasingly, non-Aboriginal people want to make personal rehabilitative statements about the Aboriginal “problem” and to consume and re-consume the “primitive”’ (p.10). Jones (2018) further references Kovach (2010), ‘western science in particular has worked to first subjugate and then discredit Indigenous knowledge systems and the people themselves’ (p.77). This research refutes the western processes which seek to investigate a “wormhole” into their past by re-creating the “primitive native” and that “curiosity of nature” which are First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) (Hart & Whatman 1998; Jones 2018).

There are three principles of Indigenist research which have been identified by Rigney (1999): ‘resistance as the emancipatory imperative in Indigenist research, political integrity in Indigenous research and privileging Indigenous voices in Indigenist research’ (p.116). The use of Indigenist research principles is itself an act of self-determination, a decolonising methodology, a rejection of positivist traditional approaches to research “on” rather than “with” Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples), which continues to inflict harm on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and communities (Smith 1999). This research will listen to the voices of the storyteller/participants, privileging and being informed by the experiences, realities, perspectives and understandings forming their collective knowledges (Sherwood et al. 2015). In conducting this research, the researcher adheres to two basic principles of Indigenous research – relationality as ‘relationships do not merely shape reality, they are reality’ and ‘accountability to relationships’ (Wilson 2008, p.7).

Indigenous Standpoint Theory

As has been argued in this thesis, Indigenous processes which are founded within an Indigenous standpoint are the starting point for Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) and communities being able to access meaningful justice. The adoption of an Indigenous standpoint provides a particular method of investigation (Nakata 2007). The aim of this research is to explore the privileging of Indigenous knowledges from the perspective of an Indigenous researcher working with Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) in Indigenous communities to allow the ‘researcher to enter into the world alongside Indigenous experience rather than framing the Indigenous worldview from a distance’ (Cameron, Bertenshaw & Sheeran 2014; Dawson, Toombs & Mushquash 2017, p. 13). Therefore, this research has adopted Indigenous standpoint theory, which is founded on Indigenous ways of Knowing, Being and Doing encompassing Indigenous experiences, perspectives, histories, spirituality, customs and traditions. As Nakata (2007) defines Indigenous standpoint:

Standpoint theory in my mind is a method of inquiry, a process for making more intelligible ‘the corpus of objectified knowledge about us’ as it emerges and organises understanding of our lived realities. I see this as theorising knowledge from a particular and intersected position – not to produce the ‘truth’ of the Indigenous position but to better reveal the workings of knowledge and how understanding of Indigenous people is caught up and implicated in its work. (p.215)

In utilising Indigenous standpoint as articulated by Nakata (2007), it is useful to remember that it is not just a “cultural interface” that is produced by exposure to western invasion but sometimes a rather more problematic view. Little Bear (2000) reflects:

Colonisation left a heritage of jagged worldviews among Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples). They no longer had an Aboriginal worldview, nor did they adopt a Eurocentric worldview. Their consciousness became a random puzzle that each person has to attempt to understand. (p.84; Linklater 2014)

This research has a goal of not only utilising First Nations knowledges, but in that process to also contribute to repatriating and revitalising our epistemologies, to accept the agency of *Ngurambang* (Country) and to reaffirm the sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country).

Yindyamarra

In the *Wiradjuri* language, *yindyamarra* means to ‘respect, be gentle, polite, honour, do slowly’ (Grant Snr & Rudder 2010, p.485). *Yindyamarra* is our way-*murruway marambul* (proper way). *Yindyamarra* was first mentioned as a potential methodology by *Wiradjuri* colleague Dr. Meghan Williams in a yarn about my research, its direction and potential. This first kernel planted by Meg grew and it created a thirst to connect more deeply with Culture, to seek out more information, both oral and written. In my search I came across the work of Dr. Jonathon Jones and I thank and acknowledge Dr. Jones for his examination, articulation and use of *yindyamarra* in research. I also acknowledge his generosity of spirit in stating ‘my research builds on local NSW Aboriginal histories and studies, and provides a platform for future research’ (Jones 2018, p. 87). He expands:

Yindyamarra Winhanganha [respectful, thinking], does not speak for or represent all Wiradjuri. It is hoped, however, that it can contribute to a communal Wiradjuri methodology, or at least inspire other Wiradjuri and south-east methodologies to grow and develop. (p. 68)

In an interview with Dr. Larissa Behrendt (2017) featured on the ABC radio program *Speaking Out* and titled, *Bayala-Talking Culture*, a group of *Wiradjuri* Elders reflected on the meaning of *yindyamarra*. Professor Michael McDaniel related a story, ‘One Elder, Uncle Stan, said ‘it means honour and respect and it means to be respectful’. Then another Elder said, ‘it means more than that. It means doing things in a thoughtful, human way, in a kind way, doing things slowly and taking everyone with you’. Then another said, ‘oh no, it means more than that. It means gently living in the world and understanding that all of your actions and all of your words have impact beyond the immediate and even your own life’ (Behrendt 2017).

Yindyamarra is central to all *Wiradjuri* knowledge and governs *dhulu-ya-rra-bu wudha-gar-bin-ya-bu yindyamal-dhuray-bu* (talk straight, listen deeply and act respectfully) (Jones 2018, p. 68). In order for me to conduct this research and to adhere to *Wiradjuri buyaa* (law), it is necessary that I follow *murruway marambul* (proper way). I must seek out advice and be guided by that knowledge. This is First Nations way. I determined I would form a personal advisory group, a *bagaraygan* (advisory mob), not so much a formal group sitting around a table but a group who I could turn to one on one to seek direction when needed, becoming a vital part of my research journey. My first step was to use my personal knowledge and consider who would be suitable from my perspective, people with good connections to communities and who had experience with research. Next, I made contact with those potential advisors and that group was diverse and grew. Some members I had a few yarns with, some I had multiple yarns with - all contributed to this project as all yarns were deeply important and informative. I would like to acknowledge and thank the mob who were part of this advisory group - Larissa Behrendt (*Euahleyai/Gamillaroi*), Jack Bulman (*Muthi Muthi*), Lisa Bulman (*Gunditjmara*), Megan Williams (*Wiradjuri*), Aunty Bronwyn Penrith (*Wiradjuri*), Lynn Carriage (*Yuin*), Aunty Judy Atkinson (*Jiman/Bundjalung*), Jason De Santolo (*Garrwa/Barunggam*), Nathan Sentance (*Wiradjuri*), Robynne Quiggin (*Wiradjuri*), Lachlan McDaniel (*Wiradjuri*) and Thomas ‘Tom’ Evans (*Wiradjuri*).

This group also provided important links to community organisations which delivered healing/cultural immersion programs, many times offering a personal introduction to those organisations. Forming relationality with a community organisation was an integral step in this project. This process is part of *yindyamarra*, respecting communities and honouring a First Nations process, affording and allowing communities and organisations to check bona fides of both the researcher and the initial proposed research process, allowing the organisation time to consider their role, benefits to them and their communities. Dr. Jonathon Jones (2018) has initiated a challenge and a guide for *Wiradjuri* research and researchers:

Use your research process and outcomes to actively contribute to the cycle of knowledge. Retrieve *Wiradjuri* knowledge by honouring the work of your ancestors; revive *Wiradjuri* knowledge by being an active participant; and contribute knowledge back to the *Wiradjuri* community for future generations through education. Always acknowledge where knowledge comes from and never use knowledge without

permission or without returning it back to community and individuals. Support and assist other researchers and community members and become an active advocate for younger researchers. Understand that knowledge is not owned by an individual or an institution but by the community, to be handed on to future generations. (p.74)

This project seeks to rise to that challenge and adhere to his created research approach, and in doing so, to revitalise, reconnect and create Songlines.

Storywork

This research will use Indigenous storywork as a central component of its methodology, as stories play an essential and pivotal role in First Nations Cultures. Stories are a way of knowledge production, knowledge sharing, a part of our oral tradition, a part of our memory archive and a part of our songlines. Stories are an exercise of sovereignty. Q'um Q'un Xiiem (Strong Clear Water) of the *Stó:lō* Nation (people of the river), also with *St'at'ime* ancestry, known as Jo-ann Archibald, in her PhD research developed a term for the use of Indigenous stories in research which she called Indigenous storywork (Archibald 2008). This is developed from her cultural roots. Q'um Q'un Xiiem has stated that when we as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) say we are beginning storywork, it is in a sense a time to engage 'the three ears': 'we have three ears to listen with, two on the sides of our head and one in our heart' (Archibald 2008, p.76). It is a time to bring all your attention to what is being said, a time of deep listening (Archibald 2008). This is a central tenet in my methodology, the privileging of storyteller/participants stories told in their voice, deep listening as a mode of respect and paramount to committing their knowledge to the memory archive. Storywork is a term which can mean the telling of cultural traditional stories or stories which chronicle life experiences. Stories can happen in many different settings or places and stories can be told in many ways and in many diverse formats, however in all First Nations storywork there is a time of meaning making of the story (Archibald 2008). Q'um Q'un Xiiem has posited that there are seven principles of Indigenous storywork: *Respect, Responsibility, Reciprocity, Reverence, Holism, Interrelatedness* and *Synergy* (Archibald 2008).

These seven principles resonate with, and in this project. Through *yindyamarra* and *dadirri* respect is shown for the storyteller and their story through honouring and deep listening. *Responsibility* exists by privileging the voice of the storyteller/participants and their stories, understanding that some of the stories and their knowledge may be sensitive, both culturally and personally. *Reciprocity* exists through the time taken to form relationships which creates relational accountability to the storyteller/participants and their communities. There is also an onus on me as a researcher to privilege the shared knowledge and then truthfully pass on that gift of knowledge with others. This is the process of First Nations Cultures to tell stories of knowledge and re-tell those stories, and when appropriate, add knowledge to those stories. *Reverence* in understanding the place that story holds with *Ngurambang* (Country), their interaction and the use of language to honour that relationship. *Holism* occurs in this project through my journey of indigenisation, immersing myself in my Culture, feeling the connection develop between the story, *Ngurambang* (Country) and myself, experiencing the *bagaray bang* (rebalancing, healing). Not just listening to the stories of the storyteller/participants with my ears but in a First Nations way using my whole body to experience knowledge as the ‘listening requires the concomitant involvement of the auditory and visual senses, the emotions, the mind and patience. The act of story listening occurs in relation to using our other senses’ (Archibald 2008, p.76). This process then aids in my becoming a better listener and better chronicler of the knowledge stories shared by the storyteller/participants. *Interrelatedness* will form in the connection created with the storyteller/participants personally, but also as a *Wiradjuri* man in the content of their stories and in the knowledge shared. *Synergy* will form in the journey of the research through the knowledge that it will inevitably adapt and change, and this in part will arise from challenges that require adaptations. However, and most importantly, the point of research is to create new knowledge, to seek answers. This researcher and this research will adapt and change through being exposed to new knowledge and when new ideas are formed in the collaboration between researcher, storyteller/participants, stories and *Ngurambang* (Country). *Synergy* is already occurring amongst the *bila* (river) people of this project: the *Wiradjuri* (the people of the three rivers), the researcher from the *Mowgee* of the *Cudgegong bila* (river), the gift of *dadirri* from the *Ngangikurungkurr* (deep water sounds) people of the Daly River and the gift of First Nations/academic guidance by Q’um Q’un Xiiem (Strong Clear Water) of the *Stó:lō* Nation (people of the river). Storywork will

complement yarning and storymaps to give depth and richness to the voices of the storyteller/participants.

Storymapping

A story map visually displays data in relation to places, location, or geography, and story mapping is the process of finding and analysing the connections among human experience and place. Story maps can be simple or complex, low or high tech, and story maps help in analysing complex social issues such as human rights, climate change, refugee resettlement, student transience, and community integration. (Mathison 2018, p.1)

In her work on art therapy, Altman (2015) cited Chalmers (1973) saying, ‘the way art functions is to identify cultural values, belief systems, status and roles, ways of making order’ (p.3). The use of storymaps has been recognised as both a therapy and theory as well as method of qualitative research (Altman 2015; Lapum et al. 2015). ‘Art Therapy theory recognizes that art has been a form of knowledge, communication and therapy since the beginning of human time’ (Altman 2015, p.2). As expressed by Miller (2009), ‘tribal cultures have ordered the understanding and meaning of human existence through their remembrance and enactment of stories in ritual, song, dance, and other forms of art’ (quoted in Altman 2015, p.2). Altman (2015) continues:

Art therapy theory is pluralistic, interdisciplinary and not defined specifically by either psychology or psychotherapy. It could be said that the philosophy of phenomenology is foremost a distinct school of thought where focus is placed on a lived subjective experience, emotion, imagination and meaning. (p. 5)

Importantly I don’t assert this research project is designed as a therapeutic process for the participants, rather this research seeks to use storymapping as a method to assist participants to engage with their own life knowledges, experiences and understanding. However, I do acknowledge that the subject matter of the participants stories may be traumatising for them, so in this way the use of storymapping may combine in yarning sessions to be both reflective and healing. Reflexive practice can be

a way of Knowing, Being and Doing through ‘examining our decisions, our judgements our diagnosis at times in the midst of action’ (Altman 2015; Howard 2015, p.404; Yanow 2009).

Lapum et al. (2015) investigated the use of Pictorial Narrative Mapping (PNM) as a qualitative annalistic method, finding benefits not only for deeper and richer data but also for increasing critical analysis. The actual process of PNM aided qualitative inquiry by providing more engagement through contemplation triggered by the aesthetic process of creating a storymap. PNM used an analytical tool, can ‘extend the inquiry process and enhance[s] rigor’, to build, refine, and improve the ‘critical dialogue’ (Lapum et al. 2015, p.11). ‘Personalized storymaps collapse the distinction between designer and user – storyteller and audience – inviting non-designers to create visual accounts of their lived experiences and to share these stories collectively’ (Caquard 2014; Roth 2021, p.97). By creating this atmosphere of sharing experience and knowledge, ‘they embrace pluralism, empowering individuals to voice their situated perspectives’ (D’Ignazio & Klein 2016; Hermann & Pearce 2010; Roth 2021, p.97; Warf & Sui 2010). Indeed, storymaps have the ability to not only illuminate and depict individual but collective experiences, ‘providing a collaborative and place-based storytelling’ (Kelly 2016; Roth 2021, p.97). As Roth (2021) has observed, ‘visual stories also are a more meaningful way to communicate a message, offering a deep, contextualized account versus a superficial, sanitized overview’ (p.85; Macfarlane 2007).

This collaborative, collective place-based method is particularly pertinent to Indigenous knowledges and conducting research within an Indigenous epistemology. As stated within the literature review by Dudgeon et al. (2020):

[Indigenous Knowledge Systems - IKS] are dynamic, constantly evolving, influenced by a community’s pragmatic, creative and experimental responses to the internal and external social, political, cultural and environmental stressors they experience, as well as the information and inputs into existing processes and practices they receive within a community. (p.7)

Tharakan (2015) expands:

IKS are always local – based in and rooted to a particular place and set of experiences and generated by the people living in those places. IKS is often transmitted orally, or through imitation and demonstration [and] based on practice and has results that are beneficial to the community IKS are local and community-based, they serve to facilitate community communication and decision-making. They provide the socio-cultural information necessary for community survival and flourishing within the community's local environmental, geographical, and cultural context. (p.53)

In keeping with the holistic, collective nature of Indigenous Culture contained within IKS, PNM has the ability to provide a 'holistic account of the phenomenon under study and assist researchers to make meaning of nuances within complex narratives' (Lapum et al. 2015, p.1). Altman (2015) posited on Montgomery's essay that it suggests 'at a rudimentary level phenomenology seeks to unite activity, event, and space and is therefore engaged with practice theory as well as issues of memory, place making, and agency' (p.3). She continues that Montgomery's commentary on 'Hiedigger's theory of 'being' highlights the importance of the 'relationship between people, landscape and their universe', as a matter of 'thereness' suggesting that 'consciousness or cognition is not an "abstract dimension" but a "total social fact" that links place, praxis, cosmology, and nature' (Altman 2015, p.3). This research has made it a priority to honour and adhere to the principles of *yindyamarra* and APAR, which are respect, relationality and reciprocity and thus PNM presents a way to achieve these principles. IKS are not textual, but rather oral and pictorial and as Lapum et al. (2015) express:

It can be helpful to think about research and represent findings in ways that are non-textual, such as images, to expand one's way of knowing. It has been suggested that images can extend and [en]richen our understanding of the social worlds of research participants. (p.2; Meo 2010)

PNM is not a new phenomenon in research, nor radical, in fact it has been utilised to 'enhance the extraction, analysis, and representation of study data' (Lapum et al. 2015, p.2). Its use has been utilised 'in the health sciences, the visual mapping of stories has been used as a qualitative technique to aid data analysis, in which the temporal flow of study participants narratives is highlighted' (Beck & Sznaider 2006; Lapum 2009; Lapum et al. 2010; Lapum et al. 2015, p.2). PNM is also prevalent in chronicling the personal and performance journeys of athletes in the disciplines of sport

psychology and health (Lapum et al. 2015; Partington et al. 2005; Phoenix & Sparkes 2007; Sparkes, Perez-Samaniego & Smith 2012). PNM has emerged as a ‘methodological tool in representing data and identifying connections, benefiting fields such as psychology, sociology, and anthropology’ (Lapum et al. 2015, p.2; Powell 2010).

The efficacy of storymapping as a method in qualitative research has been lauded and its applications to the different areas of the research process are numerous (Lapum et al. 2015; Wheeldon & Faubert 2009). These include aiding facilitation of transcription and analysis of interviews (Tattersall et al. 2011), enhancing group discussions (Ureda et al. 2011) and ‘concept mapping as a form of visual dialogue to deepen the analytic process and communicate findings’ (Butler-Kisber & Poldma 2010; De George-Walker & Tyler 2014; Lapum et al. 2015, p.2; Pollner & Stein 1996). Indeed, collage making, which has undergone increasing use, ‘has been shown to enhance researchers’ understanding and representation of participants’ stories’ (Gerstenblatt 2013; Lapum et al. 2015, p.3) and proven its efficaciousness to facilitate analytic processes (Butler-Kisber 2008; Butler-Kisber & Poldma 2010; Lapum et al. 2015). There is further evidence that collage, ‘as a form of qualitative inquiry is an accessible format that can enable a deeper and nuanced understanding of research phenomena’ (Butler-Kisber & Poldma 2010; Lapum et al. 2015, p. 3). It may be said that PNM makes a place in the qualitative research process for the use of imagination. If, as suggested by Greene (2001), imagination is ‘the capacity to see and appreciate another person’s social world, their experiences, and perspective’ (cited in Lapum et al. 2015, p.11), then its use within analytical qualitative inquiry for the researcher is potentially critical, ‘considering that one of the aims of social and health science research is to understand another person’s experience while providing rich and contextualized descriptions of phenomena’ (Lapum et al. 2015, p.11). Sandelowski (1993) has also stressed the paramountcy of imagination as an integral, vital part of diligent research. It may be that the stimulation of imagination through PNM promotes ‘researchers’ critical and creative engagement with the data’ (Lapum et al. 2015, p.11). PNM has the ability to expand ways of knowing, as the visuality stimulates our senses, which is how humans ‘encounter the world’ (Dewey 1934; Foster & Lorimer 2007; Greene 1995; Lapum et al. 2015, p.11). Lapum et al. (2015), have suggested that at the very least PNM may be used as an ‘elicitation device’ to ‘probe and prompt further dialogue with participants’ (Lapum et al. 2015, p.13; Mughal 2014). Lapum et al.

(2015) have also called attention to Sandelowski (1993) who warned that ‘rigor is at risk of rigor mortis if we merely apply qualitative techniques’ (Lapum et al. 2015, p.12) and neglect ‘artfulness, versatility, and sensitivity to meaning and context’ (Sandelowski 1993, p.1).

In their investigation and discussion of PNM as a qualitative analytical technique, Lapum et al. (2015) concluded:

The art-mediated dialogue extends the inquiry process because it prompts one to move back and forth between the data and the mapping process as well as probe further into participants’ narratives. As such, the use of non-textual forms of analysis (e.g., Pictorial Narrative Mapping) to enhance the textual analysis can act in ways to avert rash interpretive decisions by researchers. Reflexive and critical questioning were salient elements of this dialogical approach, allowing us to explicate our positionality by questioning each other’s interpretations and justifying analytic and design decisions. Thus, the process not only pushed us to explicate our assumptions and values and how they shaped our interpretations (Cresswell, 2007), but also ensured a reflexive development of the maps. Similar to Weber (2008) and Foster and Lorimer (2007) we found the use of visual images facilitated reflexive dialogue in which team members’ assumptions were challenged. (p.11)

It may be said that stories share a commonality as a method with maps, as they are ‘documenting and explaining, for meaningfully abstracting our experiences, for communicating and sharing, and for asserting a particular worldview’ (Roth 2021, p.83). Indeed, visual storytelling via PNM:

...combines the primarily quantitative and analytical approaches developed from journalism, information visualization, and visual analytics with the primarily qualitative and reflexive approaches developed from critical cartography, Indigenous mapping, and participatory [Geographic Information Systems]. (Roth 2021, p.83)

Geographic Information Systems can be explained as a social learning tool that uses visual representations to aid facilitation (Roth 2021). Roth (2021) has posited that according to Caquand and Cartwright (2014) there are three forms of storytelling: ‘oral, written and audio-visual’ (p.84). Within these forms, maps ‘provide spatial structure to enhance the storytelling experience’ of oral storytelling drawing from anthropology,

folklore, and history and taking shape in Indigenous (Chapin, Lamb & Threlkeld 2005; Pearce & Louis 2008; Roth 2021, p.84) and participatory cartographies (Elwood 2006; Miller 2006). Visual storytelling provides a different experience and critical nuances which create empathy and ‘present meaning from a grounded perspective’ (Pearce 2014; Roth 2021, p.86) and ‘tie seemingly unrelated information together in a memorable way through logical continuity’ (Roth 2021, p.86; van Elzakker 1993). The use of visual storytelling through PNM asks not only the creators but also the researcher to be ‘reflexive about their positionality and subjectivity’ (Kelly 2019; Ricker 2017; Roth 2021, p. 86). ‘That visual stories are partial, situated, and persuasive also means they are inherently political, exercising power by promoting particular voices and interpretations while obscuring others’ (Cronon 1992; Roth 2021, p.86) – this is pertinent as Indigenous research is itself inherently political (Rigney 1997). Additionally, visual stories as well as oral stories privilege the voice of the storyteller and thus become more authentic, which make them both more ‘compelling and relatable’ (Gould 1981; Hermann & Pearce 2010; Roth 2021, p.86). PNM give rise to fluidity in interpretation and has the ability to cross cultural boundaries (Pearce 2014; Roth 2021). Visual stories also remain alive, not mired in the static sense of “western time”, something pertinent to Indigenous stories which are visually displayed across both this continent and millennia. Combining yarning and storywork with PNM will provide a more practical and culturally attuned form of reflection than the use of written dairies which are prevalent in western research. Sarah Moore (2020) in her writing has reiterated the words of Karen Martin (2006):

Stories are our law. Stories give identity as they connect us and fulfill our sense of belonging. Stories are grounding, defining, comforting and embracing. Stories vary in their purpose and content and so Stories can be political and yet equally healing. They can be shared verbally, physically or visually. Their meanings and messages teach, admonish, tease, celebrate, entertain, provoke and challenge. (p.99)

The storymaps are to provide an individual resource for storyteller/participants to reflect upon their story and knowledge, understanding their journey and the potential for their future story. The storymaps will also become a resource for the Community, knowledge which can be shared as a visual representation of the individual, however also where that individual is placed in the Community and thus the role of Community

in each participant's life. This reflects the holistic nature of First Nations Culture. The maps then become an archive, a resource for the Community to draw upon, not just to understand problems but also a method to discover solutions and chronicle their success. The storymaps become maps for the future. Throughout the research period, unforeseen challenges and immersion in Culture created change and adaptation and this is particularly true in relation to the creation process of the storymaps. Storymaps became songline/storymaps and my process of collaboration to create them is chronicled in detail in the *durrawan* (currawong) and *budyaan galang* (bird mob) chapters. It is important to understand that this methodology adapted and changed to meet challenges in much the same way as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) have adapted and changed over sixty-five thousand years.

Yarning Girinyalanha (Talk Together)

The selection of yarning as a method is purposeful and its use by this researcher is as a decolonising process and tool. The English language gives two meanings for *yarn*. Yarn has a connotation as a "tall tale", a story so incredible it is implausible. I reject this English word and its association with First Nations storying and speaking in this context, and I do so as I consider its potential to be applied as a violent form of colonisation to First Nations knowledge and knowledge processes. Yarn does however have a second meaning, that of continuous separate fibres spun into thread to create a whole - this is the definition which closely resembles First Nations knowledge dissemination. This project will consider this process as the *girinyalanha* (talk together) in *Wiradjuri*. In the first instance, it will be referred to as yarning to prevent confusion and ensure recognition by western academics, so that any knowledge produced will not be undermined nor discarded due to the continuing effects of settler colonialism on the academy (Smith 1999). This is vital as First Nations knowledges are linked to *Ngurambang* (Country), Culture and Community whereas settler colonialism is 'premised on destruction to replace, to obtain territory at the expense of Indigenous lands and livelihood' (Atkinson, Baird & Adams 2021, p.1; Tuck & Yang 2012; Wolfe 2006).

As previously discussed, relationality as articulated by Shawn Wilson (2008) and Margaret Kovach (2010a; 2010b) and resultant relational accountability, are the dominant aspects of an Indigenous research methodology. Yarning plays a central role as a method within this Indigenous research paradigm as it ensures relationship building and community accountability (Atkinson, Baird & Adams 2021; Dean 2010). My standpoint, as articulated earlier, is through my bloodlines from my *babiin* (father) and from the sharing of knowledge from my extended *miyagan* (family). Listening to and yarning with *babinnbaal and badhiin* (paternal grandfather and grandmother), *wumbany* (uncles), *bamali* (aunties), *waringinali* (cousins), even *Balumbambal badhiin* (great grandmother), around tables and campfires. This has been reinforced by yarning circles through communities, community organisations and work. Yarning occupies a centrality in my standpoint and worldview and thus important as a method of continuing learning and acquisition of knowledge (Atkinson, Baird & Adams 2021; Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Datta 2018). It is relevant to emphasise at this point the difference between having a yarn with non-Indigenous people, which may constitute a *chat* and a yarn with Indigenous people which involves a deeper sharing and relationality. As stated by Atkinson, Baird & Adams (2021) in their analysis of yarning:

Do Aboriginal people say, “Come sit, tell me a narrative”. Good go! The term narrative would be ridiculed and mocked as yet another white concept that has snuck its way in, to colonise, to reconfigure the freedoms inherent within Aboriginal talking spaces. (as cited in Phillips & Bunda 2018, p.4)

Yarning due to its reciprocity becomes a point of collaboration and *contract* between researcher and storyteller/participant, privileging voice and thus sharing knowledge through storying of lived experience (Atkinson, Baird & Adams 2021; Dean 2010; Walker et al. 2014). The flexibility and familiarity which is offered by yarning as a method is conducive to this project as the storyteller/participants will not be from one community but made up from participants from potentially disparate communities (Atkinson, Baird & Adams 2021; Datta 2018; Dean 2010). Yarning is, in and of itself, a decolonising action – its relational reciprocity works to neutralise, re-shift and realign power imbalances in the research relationship (Geia, Hayes & Usher 2013). As Bessarab and Ng'andu (2010) affirm:

Both the researcher and participant journey together visiting places and topics of interest relevant to the research study. Yarning is a process that requires the researcher to develop and build a relationship that is accountable to Indigenous people participating in the research. (p.38)

For First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), yarning represents a natural way to pass knowledge, a continuation of oral traditions that carry many nuances and are respectful (Gorman & Toombs 2009). As a method of storytelling, its communication and exchange of ideas is both culturally embedded and co-operative (Bargallie 2020; Fredericks et al. 2011). Its efficacy as a research method has been widely utilised and lauded (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Doyle et al. 2017; Fredericks et al. 2011; Geia, Hayes & Usher 2013; Gorman & Toombs 2009; Lambert 2011; Leeson, Smith & Rynne 2016; Ober 2017; Wain et al. 2016). Yarning is a method to ensure that First Nations ontologies, epistemologies and axiologies are prioritised and privileged in the research (Leeson, Smith & Rynne 2016; Smith, Devine & Preston 2020). Yarning is culturally secure, supportive, provides the opportunity for in depth discussion, incorporates First Nations ways of working and knowledge sharing and 'assists in decolonising, repositioning and supporting Indigenous knowledges and research methods' (Fredericks et al. 2011; Geia, Hayes & Usher 2013; Smith, Devine & Preston 2020, p.101).

A study by Atkinson, Baird & Adams (2021) posited an interesting and pertinent examination of yarning as a research method, finding there have been multiple disparate uses of yarning at different stages of the research process. This has included a wide range from the initial connection phase (Walker et al. 2014) to topic and question design (Gibson et al. 2020; Reilly & Rees 2018). It may be used in varying ways in recruitment for research (Jennings, Spurling & Askew 2014; Lukaszyk et al. 2017; Meiklejohn et al. 2019; Priest et al. 2017; Vujcich et al. 2018; Walker et al. 2014) as well as through to data collection and analysis. Collection riding the gamut from individual and circle to group (Atkinson, Baird & Adams 2021; Bovill & Woolmer 2018; Chapman, Smith & Martin 2014; Coombes et al. 2016; Dean 2010; Gibson et al. 2020; Goulding, Steels & McGarty 2016; Lukaszyk et al. 2017; Meiklejohn et al. 2019; Rogers 2017). Importantly, Atkinson, Baird & Adams (2021) identified six types of yarning: social, family, cross cultural, research topic, therapeutic and collaborative. Social yarn occurs between researcher and participant, acting towards building a relationship. Family yarning explores the relationality of the Indigenous researcher and Indigenous

participant and any connections across family, community and Country. Cross cultural yarning is typically engaging with western research and institutions while research topic yarning is a purposeful directed yarning to gather and produce information. Therapeutic yarning refers to when yarning is sensitive and personal and the researcher acts as support in understanding the story of the participant and collaborative yarning involves the identification of priority, topic, analysis and design of research (Adams & Faulkhead 2012; Atkinson, Baird & Adams 2021; Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010; Gibson et al. 2020; Reilly & Rees 2018; Walker et al. 2014).

Following from the work of Atkinson, Baird & Adams (2021), this researcher utilised all the identified forms of yarning. Social and family yarning occurred forming threads of connection through *miyagan* (family), *Ngurambang* (Country) and organisations including sporting and social. Collaborative yarning from interactions with community and storyteller/participants was instructive in forming the research priority and direction. This was done in companionship with *dadirri*, storymapping and storywork to generate deeper analysis and 'provide enhanced opportunities to explore and explain concepts, resulting in new understandings about the research' (Atkinson, Baird & Adams 2021, p.3). Therapeutic yarning in conjunction with storymapping was used to explore lived experiences, at times traumatic, whilst also to provide support, better create understanding and sense of story for both researcher and storyteller/participant. It was also necessary to engage in cross-cultural yarning to explain the research to non-First Nations audiences. Yarning when used in conjunction with 'empowerment strategies, can be adopted in part to suit Aboriginal liberation struggles for broader empowerment, self-determination, self-management and sovereignty' (Fredericks et al. 2011, p.21). This is what underpins and informs the yarn and creates relational accountability as 'yarning is reliant upon relationships and thus the integrity of the process requires responsibility and accountability among the researcher, participants, Country, culture, and Knowledges' (Barlo et al. 2021, p. 42). The existence of relational understanding and accountability presumably deepened the yarn and created thicker data, with this aiming for strengthened authenticity rather than validity (Wilson 2008) and allowing for more informed data analysis. In contrast, the presence of limited connections would indicate low-shared experience, including tacit and explicit knowledge, inevitably diminishing the quality of the yarning research (Atkinson, Baird & Adams 2021).

Dadirri

Many Australians understand that Aboriginal people have a special respect for nature. The identity we have with the land is sacred and unique . . . there are many Australians who appreciate that Aboriginal people have a strong sense of community. All persons matter. All of us belong . . . What I want to talk about is another special quality of my people. I believe it is the most important. It is our most unique gift. It is perhaps the greatest gift we can give to our fellow Australians. In our language this quality is called *dadirri*. It is inner, deep listening and quiet, still awareness. *Dadirri* recognizes the deep spring that is inside us. We call on it and it calls to us. This is the gift that Australia is thirsting for. It is something like you call contemplation . . . and I believe that the spirit of *dadirri* that we have to offer will blossom and grow, not just within ourselves, but in our whole nation. (Ungunmerr-Baumann 2002, p.1)

I have used *dadirri*, as expressed by Aunty Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann, to conduct yarning/interviews. *Dadirri* offers the researcher a First Nations way of Knowing, Being and Doing, to listen to the voices of the participants, to listen and contemplate their stories, rather than make the mistake of western research, potentially interrupting and forcing conversations “back on track” and thus missing pertinent and contextual ideas (Bessarab & Ngandu 2010). *Dadirri* has been used by Aunty Judy Atkinson in her work on healing with First Nations communities. *Dadirri* has also been chosen for this methodology as it works alongside and as a companion to the *Wiradjuri yindyamarra*, noting ‘the activity or practice of *Dadirri* has its equivalent in many other Indigenous groups in Australia’ (Atkinson 2002, p.15). The combining of *yindyamarra* and *dadirri* will compliment and expand the privileging of storyteller/participant voices, ensuring the practice of deep listening, contemplation and honouring of story. Aunty Miriam-Rose Ungunmerr-Baumann (2002) relates:

Ngangikurungkurr, means ‘deep water sounds’. Ngangikurungkurr, is the name of my tribe. The word can be broken up into three parts: Ngangi means word or sound, kuri means water, and kurr means deep. So, the name of my people means ‘the Deep-Water Sounds’ or ‘Sounds of the Deep. (p.1)

As previously stated, the *Wiradjuri* are the people of the three rivers and the *Ngangikurungkurr* people are of the Daly River, so it is appropriate to create a methodology melding the processes of these river people. Aunty Miriam-Rose explaining, ‘we are the river people; we cannot hurry the river. We have to move with its currents and understand its ways’ (Ungumerr-Baumann 2002, p.36). This research seeks to encourage and accept the flow of knowledge which is contained within First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and their communities, utilising respect, honouring and deep listening. The naming of the research process in language is deliberate, it is both decolonising and it carries great benefit, both for the participants in the research and those who are the recipients of that knowledge (Elder & Kersten 2015; Sharmil et al. 2021). In designing this research, I have rejected the notion that research in a western paradigm must be located within the ‘needs and priorities of the PhD student’ (Sharmil et al. 2021, p.8). I have chosen to follow a research path which will enable me to be ‘focus[ed] on the needs and priorities of Aboriginal community members’ (Sharmil et al. 2021, p.8) and respond to the challenges which they identify. Aunty Judy Atkinson, as stated by Stronach and Adair (2014), defined and delineated *dadirri* as a philosophical stance and an overarching set of principles for research practice and methodology:

Dadirri brings a knowledge and consideration of community and the diversity and unique nature that each individual brings to community; ways of relating and acting within the community; a non-intrusive observation, or quietly aware watching; deep listening and hearing with more than ears; a reflective non-judgemental consideration of what is being seen and heard; and, having learnt from the listening, a purposeful plan to act, with actions informed by learning wisdom and the informed responsibility that comes with knowledge. (Atkinson 2002, p.16)

Indigenism, as related by Rigney (2001), is the act of challenging the traditional forms of research contained within western knowledges by Indigenous scholars (West et al. 2012). Indigenism has been conceptualized as a methodological reform using a variety of approaches that advocate research compatible with Indigenous experiences, interests and aspirations (West et al. 2012). Indigenism requires relationality, reciprocity and reflexivity and *dadirri* provides these. Relationality is expressed through ‘listening to and observing the self as well as, and in relationship with, others’ (Atkinson 2002,

p.19; West et al. 2012). It practices reciprocity through sharing between participant and researcher, while reflexivity is achieved when ‘the researcher critically examines their actions through each stage of the research process’ (Usher, Foster & Stewart 2008, p.284; West et al. 2012). *Dadirri* as a form of research practice can be described as ‘a process of listening, reflecting, observing the feelings and actions, reflecting and learning, and in the cyclic process, re-listening at deeper and deeper levels of understanding and knowledge-building’ (Atkinson 2002, p.19; West et al. 2012).

Utilising *yindyamarra-dadirri* through yarning and PNM (songline /storymapping) allowed a process where ‘participants engaging in a rich and meaningful communication with each other, [were enabled] to better understand themselves’ (West et al. 2012, p.1584) and for the researcher ‘to appreciate how and why Indigenous people function in their own cultures and environments’ (Sharmil et al. 2021; Stronach & Adair 2014, p.123). West et al. (2012) have given a definition of *dadirri* as a research methodology. They outline the principles and functions of *dadirri* as follows:

(a) *Dadirri* involves knowledge and consideration of the community and the diversity and uniqueness each individual brings to the community; (b) it encompasses ways of relating and acting within the community; (c) it is a nonintrusive observation, or quiet, aware, watching; (d) it is deeply listening; (e) it is a reflective, nonjudgmental consideration of what is, and what is heard; and (f) based on what is learned from listening, it is a purposeful plan to act informed by wisdom and the responsibility that comes with knowledge. (p.1586)

To place *dadirri* within the traditional western methodological process it may be said that it ‘advocates an interpretive qualitative approach to research that links with traditional phenomenology; this allows investigators to understand and describe the ways in which individuals reflect on and experience their lifeworld’ (Langdridge 2008; Stronach & Adair 2014, p.126). *Dadirri* presents then as a rich reflective methodology which allows a place for the researcher to become connected, not entrapped in the continuing banality of western research, but rather present within Indigenous relationality on a more profound level to themselves, their environment and thus creating a space for the forming deep relationships (Atkinson 2002; Atkinson 2008; Ungunmerr-Baumann et al. 2022). By its very nature, *dadirri* creates spaces where the researcher forms symbiotic relationships with the storyteller/participants, where

knowledge is passed and shared, ensuring that Indigenous voices are heard and privileged (Atkinson 2002; Atkinson 2008; Ungunmerr-Baumann et al. 2022). *Dadirri* acts to further garner a deeper vein of meaning from yarning as its reflective nature not only allows for deeper consideration of information from storyteller/participants but also the researcher themselves. *Dadirri* gives the researcher pause and space to consider ‘beliefs, influences, assumptions’ and choices (Atkinson 2002, p.19; Atkinson 2008; Stronach & Adair 2014; Ungunmerr-Baumann et al. 2022).

This deeper richer meaning is facilitated by the nature of *dadirri* itself, deeper re-listening equates to the researcher having to contemplate repeatedly the information that has been shared with them (Atkinson 2002; Ungunmer-Bauman 2002; Ungunmerr-Bauman et al. 2022). The result translates into a more thorough and complete consideration of the storyteller/participants knowledge, pausing the researcher in deep concentration, preventing situations where the researcher instead concentrates on their next question, query or statement, missing nuances of knowledge (Kurtz, Silverman & Draper 2016; Merriam & Tisdell 2015; Ungunmerr-Bauman et al. 2022). This is vital in this project, as stated previously, because this is a personal decolonising process situated relationally to honour Indigenous epistemologies, *Ngurambang* (Country) and *Balumbambal* (Ancestors). *Dadirri* provides the process which can counter the adverse effects of colonisation (Ungunmerr-Bauman et al. 2022). *Dadirri* achieves relationality between researcher and community thus providing a power balance which facilitates the understanding that communities hold the knowledge to change their circumstances not the colonisers (Ungunmerr-Bauman et al. 2022; West et al. 2012).

In our Aboriginal way, we learnt to listen from our earliest days. We could not live good and useful lives unless we listened. This was the normal way for us to learn – not by asking questions. We learnt by watching and listening, waiting and then acting. Our people have passed on this way of listening for over 40,000 years... There is no need to reflect too much and to do a lot of thinking. It is just being aware. (Ungunmerr-Bauman 2002, p.2)

Reflective Journaling / *Murruway Dhulubang* (Soul or Spirit Path)

Throughout the research, including during the phases involving yarns, storytelling and storymapping, the method of reflexive journaling was utilised (Lincoln & Guba 1982). The subject matter was, at times, stressful and emotional and the researchers own standpoint was both tested and reinforced by the material (Malacrida 2007; Magnuson et al. 2016). The journaling provided an opportunity for the researcher to reflect upon their own thoughts and opinions, enabling mapping of trails of thought, helping to maintain transparency of the research process (Jasper 2005). To keep a reflective journal, it is necessary to understand reflexivity as practiced in a First Nations research paradigm. Reflexivity is a process whereby you examine your own judgments, practices and belief systems, with the goal to identify any personal beliefs that may have incidentally affected the research. It requires the researcher to question their own assumptions, understanding the pivotal role of the researcher in data collection. It requires acknowledgement that researchers are an integral and influential part of the research process and have the potential ability to exert a major impact on project outcomes (Ho & Limpaecher 2022).

In this project, I have made my positionality clear and in the understanding that qualitative research is inherently subjective, the use of a reflective journal is to provide, not just for myself but also for the reader, a transparency of research. As described by Ortlipp (2008), ‘my aim was to make my decisions, and the thinking, values, and experiences behind those decisions visible, to both myself and to the reader’ (p.697). The purpose is to utilise ‘my reflective journals as a way of making my history, values, and assumptions open to scrutiny, not as an attempt to control bias, but to make it visible to the reader’ (Ortlipp 2008, p.698; Scheurich 1997). This critically self-reflective aspect of reflective journaling has already led to changes in methodology from my original research proposal, a move from PAR to APAR, the use of *yindyamarra* and the inclusion of storymapping. These changes were made to aid the decolonisation of the research, to acknowledge my own Indigenous standpoint and to provide better relationality, reciprocity and accountability.

Lincoln and Guba (1982) have listed what should be included or recorded in a reflective journal as evolving perceptions, day to day procedures, methodological decision points and day to day personal introspections (Ho & Limpaecher 2022).

However, it may be better to consider the journal as a method for the researcher to understand their own role in the research through reflection, better understand the voice of the participant, and ‘as a type of connoisseurship by which individuals become connoisseurs of their own thinking and reflection patterns’ (Ho & Limpaecher 2022; Janesick 1998, p.506). Taking this into account, my journal has included my positionality and its impact on research, relationality to my participants, a record of my decision making (what, when and why), questions of internal conflict and my thought process on making meaning of data. The research journal itself becoming ‘a place for ‘writing as a method of inquiry’ (Ortlipp 2008; Richardson 1994, p.516). Further, it is an essential method of providing accountability to the participants, families, communities and organisations who are part of this research.

It is most important to understand that First Nations Culture has an oral tradition, a tradition where memory brought on by deep listening and honouring, plays a crucial role. This is my *murruway dhulubang* (my soul or spirit path). It is integral to understanding and honouring story and therefore integral to my methodology. The use of *yindyamarra* and *dadirri* fostered relationality with storyteller/participants, forming relational accountability, prompting deep memory reflection. Deep memory reflection was a crucial part of this methodology, placing it in alignment with decolonising research methods, privileging First Nations knowledges. Most importantly, following *murruway marambul* (proper way), acknowledging *buyaa* (law), placing agency with *Ngurambang* (Country).

Aboriginal Participatory Action Research (APAR)

To understand our law, our culture and our relationship to the physical and spiritual world, you must begin with the land. Everything about Aboriginal society is inextricably woven with, and connected to, the land. Culture is the land, the land and spirituality of Aboriginal people, our cultural beliefs or reason for existence is the land. You take that away and you take away our reason for existence. We have grown the land up. We are dancing, singing and painting for the land. We are celebrating the land. Removed from our lands, we are literally removed from ourselves. (Dodson 1977, p.39; Dudgeon et al. 2020).

PAR's lineage has its roots in the 1970's in - what was called at the time - the "developing" world, particularly Indigenous communities in South America and India. It arose from strategies to aid decolonisation and indeed the emancipation of these communities (Denzin & Lincoln 2007; Dudgeon et al. 2020). Hall and Tandon (2017a) have noted that the Indigenous development of PAR is often ignored, 'it is forgotten that participatory research came most powerfully from the Indigenous communities, from women working against violence, and injection drug users, all doing their own research' (p.7). PAR is not just research which is hoped will be followed by action, rather PAR is action which is researched, changed and re-researched, within the research process by participants (Dudgeon et al. 2020). PAR creates a scenario where the researched determine the purposes and outcomes of their own inquiry (Wadsworth 1998).

Dudgeon et al. (2020), in conducting a literature review and discussion of PAR, have recognised the assertions of Freire (1973) that 'epistemology and 'critical consciousness is a manifestation of critical reflection and action on the world - creating a praxis where individuals recognise their situation as "an historical reality susceptible of transformation"' (p.14). This resonates comprehensively in practices of PAR (Dudgeon et al. 2020). PAR has thus become a form of methodology which has been declared the most appropriate for research with First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), due to its ability to connect research to practice (Evans et al. 2014; Dudgeon et al. 2020). PAR is lauded as 'best practice' in its ability for First Nations communities to 'facilitate Indigenous control and empowerment' (Baum et al. 2006; Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.14; Hecker 1997; Israel et al.1998). PAR and Community-Based Participatory Research (CBPR) as well as other participatory approaches have been praised by respected First Nations bodies as efficacious and appropriate methodological approaches within Indigenous research - sharing an 'underlying goal of collaboration, research equality, and community control' (Drawson, Toombs & Mushquash 2017, p.6; Dudgeon et al. 2020).

There is, however, critical analysis of PAR which questions its appropriateness for Indigenous research and in fact draws attention to its westernism as a methodology. The basis for the criticism can be found in commentary from those expounding PAR, such as Caxaj (2015) who stated that Indigenous knowledges 'compliment or enrich' PAR methodologies (p.1-2; Dudgeon et al. 2020). Further, PARs flexibility is 'quite significant to the "inclusion" of indigenous epistemology in the discourses of research'

(Sinclair 2007, p.27). Most significantly, Dawson, Toombs & Mushquash (2017) undertook a review of Indigenous research methodologies and posited that PAR is in fact a western approach to researching with Indigenous communities which minimises the ‘distinctive elements that comprise Indigenous knowledge systems’ (Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.15).

There are further criticisms and questions asked of PAR. For example, Kendall et al. (2011) found there is a significant lack of training in this type of research and, indeed, a failure by universities to comprehend, ‘the additional time and effort required on the part of PAR researchers’ (Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.6), ‘leading to tokenistic engagement and poor implementation’ (Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.15). Dudgeon et al. (2020) also note an assertion by Israel (1998) of a lingering scepticism amongst the ‘scientific community and funding bodies’ concerning the validity, reliability, and objectivity of community-based research and evaluation findings (Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.15). Dudgeon et al. (2020) have raised an alarming spectre:

It is prudent — given the oppressive historical relationship between Indigenous people and Western knowledge systems (Moreton-Robinson 2014; Nakata 2007a) — to consider how the assertion of PAR as a best practice approach for researching with Indigenous communities, without a conscious acknowledgement of the distinctive elements of [Indigenous Research Methodologies], risks a subtle colonisation of Indigenous knowledge systems. An epistemological hierarchy (between a benevolent but more powerful and legitimate Western research paradigm and less powerful and less valid Indigenous knowledge. (p.15)

Despite the noted problems associated with PAR, Israel et al. (2017) have drawn attention to its efficacy in linking ‘theory, research, and practice’ for communities who have little control of policy or even access to resources (p.194). Despite this, Dudgeon et al. (2020) maintain that it would seem almost insurmountable for PAR to mitigate:

...social and economic inequalities, differences in beliefs, racism, and the unquestioning legitimisation of dominant knowledges [as] all have implications for the research process, including the construction and dissemination of Indigenous knowledges and the identification of effective strategies for change. (p.15)

This is further construed given that ‘knowledge partnerships and attempts at hybridity often carry the implicit presumption that Western knowledge systems are superior to Indigenous knowledge systems’ (Stocker, Collard & Rooney 2016, p.861). The potential challenges alluded to by Dudgeon et al. (2020) allow for a new incarnation – APAR - to fill this contested space ‘by asserting the validity, utility and efficacy of utilising an [Indigenous Research Methodology] to privilege Indigenous knowledges and experiences to inform policy and practice’ (p.16). Dudgeon et al. (2020) seeing it as thus:

APAR is positioned here as a transformative and critically self-reflexive [Indigenous Research Methodology] rather than simply a Western PAR which can accommodate Indigenous knowledge systems (although this has been a useful and important aspect). This difference is important for several reasons, not the least being that APAR aligns with the guiding principles of Indigenous self-determination, empowerment and cultural recognition delineated in a founding text of the Australian Indigenous mental health movement, the Ways Forward report (Swan & Raphael 1995). (p.18)

The literature review and discussion by Dudgeon et al. (2020) conclude that to meet the challenges and restrictions of PAR, it needs to be followed within an Indigenous research methodology. APAR has been specially designed to privilege the voices and knowledges of Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples), it is predicated by ‘research protocols, principles and ethics’ which are located within an ‘Indigenous knowledge framework’ (Dudgeon et al. 2017; Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.25; Oxenham 2017). The clear aim of APAR is to assert the ‘epistemic self-determination’ in Indigenous research garnered by the privileging of Indigenous knowledges which are contained within the voices of Indigenous communities (Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.7). These protocols encompass human rights and social justice; community ownership; community capacity building; resilience focus; building empowerment and partnerships; and respect for local knowledge. ‘The Indigenous knowledge framework is underpinned by (a) a community- based approach, (b) holistic perspectives, (c) Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander diversity, (d) self-determination and (e) acknowledging a history of colonisation’ (Dudgeon et al. 2017, p.318; Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.25). According to Dudgeon et al. (2020) there are four interconnected components of APAR:

1. Indigenous Research Methodology – a distinctive Indigenous research approach developed by, with and for Indigenous peoples to decolonise research
2. Indigenous Epistemology - Indigenous knowledges and ways of knowing
3. Indigenous Ontology - Indigenous ways of being related to SEWB, an emerging health/mental health discourse/paradigm affirmed through APAR
4. Indigenous Axiology - Indigenous ways of doing research encompassing Indigenous values, ethics, protocols and guidelines (p.24)

Dudgeon et al. (2020) have explained the interaction and inter-relatedness of the four components as an important point of difference between western and Indigenous research paradigms, with the western research ultimately centred on ‘individuality’, contrasted by the Indigenous ‘relationality’ of practice (Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.24; Wilson 2001; Wilson 2008) ‘Extending and Indigenising conventional PAR principles, protocols and practice, APAR has been successfully applied to achieve Indigenous voice and epistemic self-determination, strengthen community SEWB and contribute to the development of a distinctive Indigenous psychology’ (Dudgeon et al. 2020, p.25). This research project, as an integral component of its methodology, has used APAR following the principles outlined by Dudgeon et al. (2020). As a result, this research has ensured sovereignty over knowledge production and archiving, placing agency in the hands of storyteller/participants and their communities.

Organisation and Program Selection

Mibbinbah

I hesitate to chronicle the process of program and organisation “selection” through *yindyamarra*, worrying that in its articulation I somehow diminish it. However, to follow Culture and law respectively, this research journey/process must leave a starting point and guide for the next researchers to follow and subsequently add to their knowledge. My introduction to *Mibbinbah* was through *Wiradjuri* woman Dr. Megan Williams. Dr. Williams explained the work that was undertaken by *Mibbinbah* and a description of their programs. The main point that Dr. Williams made was that the

Mibbinbah's approach was thoughtful and gentle. I was struck by this description as it formed a counterpoint to colonialism which is dismissive, violent and traumatic. I had by this time in the research process had preliminary contact and meetings with various organisations in New South Wales. However, I struggled to feel a holistic connection with an organisation - whether through programs, approach or personally. This is in no way a criticism of those programs or people who do committed tireless work in communities, but for this project and methodology personal connection and relationality were of importance. The essence of *Mibbinbah* is to conduct programs on *Ngurambang* (Country), recognising the importance of *Ngurambang* (Country), its significance to Community and the role it plays in healing processes. In much the same way, it is vital for First Nations integrity and for *yindyamarra* that this research, that this yarning, took place on *Ngurambang* (Country). *Mibbinbah* and their processes represent *murruiway marambul* (proper way) offering a way for the researcher to pay homage and adherence to *Wiradjuri buyaa* (law). As Clarke and Fewquandie (1998) express:

Land has recuperative aspects that are essential to Aboriginal well-being, our land also has an important role to play in healing. The land is a powerful healer, as is the sea. When your ancestors have walked these places for millennia, they hold an energy of timelessness that invokes serenity and the feeling that one is not alone, but in the presence of these ancestors, who are able to communicate via the senses and convey the feelings and thoughts that are most conducive to healing. When we are able to sit on our land in contemplation and hear, feel or see the spirits of our old people, then we have been in a place within ourselves of great depth and connectiveness. It is this place that we need to go to in order to truly heal ourselves; and once we have learnt how to do that we can move forward. (as cited in Atkinson 2002, p.31)

I initially contacted the CEO of *Mibbinbah*, *Muthi Muthi* man Jack Bulman, by telephone. We had a brief phone call and I introduced myself and explained that Dr. Williams had spoken of *Mibbinbah* as a possible organisation who may be interested in the research project. I outlined the project and Jack said Dr. Williams had spoken to him and he was interested to learn more. I replied that I would send a proposal via email. It was important that accompanying my proposal was my resume, specifying my suitability - my "western" credentials - to carry out academic research. However more importantly, I attached a statement of who I was, who my mob were, where they were

from, how I had arrived at this point and what my purpose was as a *Wiradjuri* man in conducting this research project - in other words my First Nations credentials.

Over the next months I corresponded with Jack via SMS messaging and email, allowing time for me to explore the programs offered by *Mibbinbah* as well as for *Mibbinbah* to thoughtfully consider my positionality and research proposal. After corresponding for some time, we made the decision to meet face to face and yarn. I met with Jack and *Gunditjmarra* woman and Chief Facilitator for *Mibbinbah*, Lisa Bulman for a “quick coffee” which resulted in a three hour yarn discussing *Mibbinbah*, the proposed research project and our philosophies on First Nations potential, Culture, knowledges and identities, crisscrossing between personal, Community and spiritual connections. We established a strong basis for relationality, built upon the proceeding months of contact - forming relational accountability between Jack, Lisa, *Mibbinbah* and this researcher.

I was invited to attend a fundraising event for *Mibbinbah* which was both personally interesting and an opportunity to observe some of *Mibbinbah*'s work and connection to Community. During this event, we solidified our relational accountability. This relationality required the acceptance of responsibility on the researcher's part, this responsibility translating then as accountability. This process is repeated in our lives as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) - we are accountable, responsible and active participants in our interactions with each other, with Community, with Culture and with *Ngurambang* (Country). This participation also involved bringing my own *miyagan* (family) into this process because *miyagan* (family) is integral to our lives, identities, *winhangadilinya* (knowing oneself) and relationality to our world as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). This was not some western *Prid Quo Pro*, rather an Aboriginal way - *yindyamarra*, honouring one another, respecting one another, listening to one another, helping one another. It was the embodiment of my methodology; in essence I was becoming part of a Community. As said by Uncle Bob Anderson of the *Quandamooka*, ‘it is important to be polite and courteous, to be unselfish in what you do and have and to be helpful. If we identify as Aboriginal, we should accept responsibility to live by Community protocols’ (as cited in Atkinson 2002, p.29). This process for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) involves feeling and connection. Relationality is tactile and we viscerally feel and participate in our Culture, contrasted by the ways that western museums place First Nations Culture behind barriers and glass. First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) touch and feel each other physically and spiritually. By becoming part of the

Community, this researcher *observes* but also participates, offering more detailed and nuanced insights. This may be contrasted against western positivist research methods which attempt a so-called “objectivity” by distancing and “walling off” the researcher from the participants, ultimately only succeeding in objectifying them.

First Nations Culture and by extrapolation First Nations research methodologies are built on personal relationships that require and almost *demand* face to face contact (Wilson 2008). First Nations oral traditions interact with this personal contact - your words and thus truths are judged - not your written proposals or agreements. This process of acceptance and reciprocity is a whole of life process, not just for this researcher but for other First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) as well. This reciprocity develops trust, research *is* ceremony, process becomes as important as the outcome (Williams 2018; Wilson 2008). Ceremony is central to First Nations life, it establishes connection to Country, to each other, it is the communication tool to *Balumbambal* (Ancestors). As Atkinson (2002) expresses:

Ceremonies were used to re-establish the sense of creative power after being made to feel powerless, and to help heal the distress that accompanies natural disasters and as a consequence of human conflict. (p.32)

In the process of ceremony, First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) become both storytellers and teachers (Atkinson 2002). If First Nations research is indeed ceremony, then the dynamics of communicating and tactile storymapping in the ceremony of this project will hopefully encourage storyteller/participants to become the *storytellers and teachers* to create and articulate their knowledge. As Forbes (1992) reflected, ‘what is a wisdom seeker? A man or a woman who fearlessly seeks to be truly authentic as he or she travels onward in beauty, and humility seeking knowledge’ (p.187).

Mad Bastards: a film, a program, a reflection

Mibbinbah use the film *Mad Bastards* (2011) as part of their BTBYCB program which is their entry level program. It has been designed to create conversations within communities but also as an internal conversation starter for individuals. The film, and

by extension the program, asks questions of our position in our own life as well as our position in our *miyagan* (family) and Community. It raises questions of responsibility in a western sense but also our First Nations responsibilities. This program was first designed in 2010, a testament to its ongoing and compelling relevance for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). It has been used in many settings but most importantly in situ communities. The film has a relevance, not only as starter for *Mibbinbah*'s programs, but for this project as well as its key themes align with the criteria of the research questions. The film broaches intergenerational trauma brought on by cultural loss and destruction, with loss of *Ngurambang* (Country), loss of identity and hyper incarceration as harmful determinants of mental health, substance use and other aspects of SEWB. It also evidences the immense power of healing. Dr. Mark Weitong (*Gubbi Gubbi*), reflecting in an article in *Croaky Health Media* stated:

The movie 'Mad Bastards' speaks to all of the key issues facing Aboriginal men and their relationships, as sons, uncles and partners... as well as the usual social issues of incarceration, violence and alcohol abuse. Most importantly, it brings a message of hope, an inspiration that they can break cycles and be the men they want to be. (McInerney 2016, p.2)

The initial design of the program emerged from a Mad Bastards Working Group focused on identifying themes within the film. These were listed as: Deciding to Change; Relationships; Identity; Transformation; and Taking Responsibility. The working group included Dr. Williams, Dr. Weitong, Jack Bulman and the non-Indigenous writer and director of *Mad Bastards* (2011), Brendan Fletcher. Activities were developed for use in group settings including matching themes with action cards which contained direct quotes from the film and/or matching them with photographic stills and actual video excerpts. The themes were then investigated through the literature and existing theories for health promotion, with the aim of developing a narrative and question process which could prompt group discussion of the themes. This also allowed an approach consistent with APAR whereby there was flexibility within the programming, to follow those themes which group participants had indicated were most important. This also allowed the participants to see the themes either through the film's characters or to choose to use their own lives as the canvas. Further development led to

an extension to the program to train facilitators to continue program delivery once *Mibbinbah* had left the Community (Adams, Ellis & Jones 2017).

‘Mad bastardry’ is a term coined by the director which describes a masculine energy that is often expressed in violence, fuelled and numbed by alcohol (McInerney 2016). This not only resonates with me on an academic level but is an energy which I have experienced personally. The film chronicles the journey of TJ, the *mad bastard* who has experienced the aggression, violence and substance abuse of the *energy* engendered by colonisation. It chronicles his journey to reconnect with his family, most importantly his son Bullet. His son is on the tipping point, enmeshed in the initial stages of conflict with the colonial legal system. The film then traces Bullet’s journey through a young offender’s program initiated by the Community which involves a reconnection to Culture. Interestingly, the film also spends time examining the initiative of creating community men’s groups through TJs father-in-law and local policeman, Texas. This relates to the themes of the program itself around diffusing anger through engagement.

The film is relevant to my own life and requires reflection as the journey is twofold. It is both a journey in physical movement and in spirituality, a move home towards *miyagan* (family), Community, *Ngurambang* (Country) and responsibility as well as a journey of personal decolonisation. A move for men, but also a move more generally for all First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) away from the world of *wétiko* (unsatiated consummation or greed in *Cree*). The personal journey is because I am a member of the first Stolen Generations, the survivors of the Frontier Wars from the original combatants of the *Wiradjuri* Wars. Our land was taken, our lives were taken and ultimately, we were taken. They killed my *miyagan* (family), removed my culture, took my *badhiin Balumbambal* (grandmother ancestor) as a *yanhadhuray* (infant) placed her with the murderers of her *miyagan* (family). They took my *dhulubang* (spirit). The trauma of this loss reverberates down the generations of my *miyagan* (family), begetting dispossession and disenfranchisement, breeding violence and aggression. However, it has also fostered *miyagan* (family), strength, resilience and ultimately a deep connection to Culture and cultural ways that were enveloped within the *miyagan* (family), permeating our lives.

The process of this research as a decolonising journey, is not just of the academy or of the Indigenous research space, but of my own mind. I am the product of western education, immersed in the western scientific paradigm and indoctrinated in western epistemologies. This research allows me time and space to immerse myself in my

Culture, with people of my Culture and other First Nations Cultures. It has given me the opportunity to reposition my world view, to re-examine our knowledges - the ways of Knowing, Being and Doing taught by my *miyagan* (family).

Original Research Outline

This research was premised on the following research questions:

1. *How do First Nations led on-Country programs address the cultural, emotional and psychological needs of men?*
2. *How has the Mibbinbah Men's program used cultural continuity and revival to respond to the experiences of Aboriginal men?*

The research aims to explore an alternative to incarceration for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) based upon First Nations holistic knowledges of healing through Culture. In doing so, it seeks to provide future implications for policy change and a resource for First Nations communities to utilise on emerging issues and to support the funding of ongoing and emerging programs. The stated methodologies were designed to allow flexibility to both ask and investigate real-time questions raised by emerging thinking and to enable a deeper and more complete inquiry throughout all research phases. By yarning with individuals and communities, the collective nature of First Nations society was acknowledged and this community focused perspective is an integral component for holistic cultural healing (Eckermann et al. 2010; Jamieson, Mendes & Nock 2012; Williams 2015).

In commencing this research, as noted previously, the first phase was to identify and approach a group of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) with links to First Nations communities and organisations which provide healing/cultural immersion programs. This advisory group became my *bagaraygan* (advisory mob), providing advice and guidance on the research project. This was an important part of following APAR and ensured the privileging of the perspectives of Community, acknowledging them as the experts in their own lives and in their knowledges (Braun et al. 2014; Doyle et al. 2017; Fredericks et al. 2011; Nicholls 2009; Smith, Devine & Preston 2020). From this

empowerment, brought on by self-determination and control of research, flowed opportunities to build on the strengths and resources of individuals and communities (Fredericks et al. 2011). The involvement of *bagaraygan* (advisory mob) provided valuable oversight to the relevance of the research, cooperation in data collection, implementation and dissemination of results (Braun et al. 2014).

This research sought to engage First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) who have been criminalised and/or who have had experience engaging in the criminal “justice” system. This included having been charged, sentenced and/or detained in a correctional centre, having family members who have intersected with the criminal “justice” system, participated in the administration of the “justice” system and/or have engaged in an urban community led cultural strengthening or immersion program. This required extensive consultation with *bagaraygan* (advisory mob) to ensure appropriate protocols were in place to deal with the mental stress inflicted by imprisonment. Lloyd et al. (2015) noted that ‘for Aboriginal former inmates and family members, release from prison was a period of significant emotional stress and commonly involved managing complex needs’ (p.9).

With the assistance of Elders and the *bagaraygan* (advisory mob) as well as conforming with the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Code of Ethics for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Research, the original research plan was designed for a group of 8-10 individuals to be identified and invited to participate in phase two, an initial one on one unstructured interview or yarning (AIATSIS 2020). This was intended to facilitate the development of a trusting relationship, reinforcing that the researcher is accountable to the storyteller/participant (Bessarab & Ng’andu 2010). This yarning, based in *yindyamarra*, was to include the use of *dadirri* and storymapping to provide a richer and deeper knowledge sharing. After phase two yarns/interviews, a preliminary analysis would be undertaken to identify major themes, core and sub- categories (Glaser & Strauss 1967). It was originally anticipated that phase three would take place approximately two months after phase two yarns/interviews. It was designed as a follow up yarning circle with the storyteller/participants to create a collaborative atmosphere for the sharing of ideas and a more in-depth exploring of the emergent themes which were uncovered in phase two (Bessarab & Ng’andu 2010). It was intended that this would include the consideration of individual knowledge and then the creation of a group storymap to explore emergent themes. The two month time period between phases two and three was imagined as a

period of reflection for storyteller/participants on the data they produced as well as a time for consideration of the storymaps to be created by this researcher for storyteller/participants. The original research plan also included proposed yarning circles and storymapping opportunities with First Nations Elders, community spokespeople, leaders and service providers as identified by the *bagaraygan* (advisory mob).

Ultimately, the core priority of this original research plan was to produce an alternative to positivist Eurocentric research which only succeeds in dismissing and diminishing First Nations knowledges by interpreting them against colonial ideologies and settler standards (Braun et al. 2014). This research was designed to give voice to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), recognising that ‘Indigenous peoples think and interpret the world and its realities in differing ways to non-Indigenous because of their experiences, histories, cultures and values’ (Rigney 1997, p.114). As will be demonstrated in the following chapters, utilising this Indigenist approach and methodology supported Indigenous leadership, self-determination and control of the research development (Braun et al. 2014) - correcting the power imbalances created by western research (Lambert 2011). At the basis of this approach is a profound respect for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and First Nations ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. Rose, James and Watson (2003) reflect:

Respect is founded in law, and lawful behaviour will be respectful. Equally, respect for law is itself lawful action... between human beings and country, between humans and other living things, between humans and other humans, between humans and the environments or habitats that support the life of all species, including humans. In addition, respect is enjoined between humans and sacred sites, humans and knowledge, humans and lawful practice. As we understand what people are saying, respect permeates all lawful action and is itself a necessary element of mutual care. (p.3)

Ethical Issues

Formal ethics approval was granted for this project on 22 December 2022 by the University of Technology Sydney, ETH22-7589 – *Holistic cultural immersion programs as diversions for First Nations offenders and those on remand*. However, in

undertaking this research methodology, I was faced with numerous ethical and moral questions. The most fundamental query was how to ask for very personal knowledge from storyteller/participants, and once in possession of that knowledge how to ensure it was privileged, protected and controlled. This was achieved by forming relationships with my storyteller/participants, always keeping them at the forefront when questions arose, making time to ask them permission, then accepting either acquiesce or denial. The protection of identity was not important to any of the storyteller/participants however I still de-identified them. This raises the issue of Jack and Lisa Bulman, after yarning and deliberation with them, we decided it was imperative that they, and *Mibbinbah* be identified as Jack and Lisa and the work of *Mibbinbah* are pivotal to the meaning and truth of this research. The use of songline/storymaps ensured that they always have access to their knowledge and have control of that knowledge. A further issue was one of cultural protocol and what information I could write about: what parts of Culture were open access so to speak? My answer was consultation, yarning with storyteller/participants (some of whom were law men/knowledge holders), *Wiradjuri Mudiyigang* (Elders) and my own *bagaraygan* (advisory mob). My navigation of these issues was only accomplished through the relational accountability formed through *yindyamarra*.

As noted previously, challenges arose which forced a change to occur in the methodology. However, it was not just challenges which changed the methodology, change also occurred through my re-immersion in Culture, in my acknowledgement of the agency and sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country). It is important for this research that the reader comes on this *journey* to understand how these *changes* ultimately provided a deeper relationality with storyteller/participants, through this a more nuanced knowledge was shared, knowledge which although shared was still able to be controlled by storyteller/participants. I came to storyteller/participants without a preconceived formal agenda, rather I came to them with the goal of forming relationality. I formed relationality, then relational accountability by using *yindyamarra* and *dadirri in* yarning. This allowed for *murruway marambul* (proper way), knowledge transfer - this knowledge sharing was weaved via First Nations storying, creating deep memory storage, supplemented with recording and journaling as I am a learner in this cultural process. This knowledge, with contemplation and the active participation and acquiesce of *Ngurambang* (Country), was then transferred to songline/storymaps in their creation and ultimately stored within those songline/storymaps.

The process of weaving, story and songline/ storymaps to create knowledge archives is detailed in the next chapters, the *durrawan* (currawong) chapter and then my exegesis chapter, *budyaan galang* (bird mob). The exegesis was necessary as it is an overview of my process, showing how knowledge is received, interpreted and pictorially created and then written.

Durrawan / Currawong

Chapter Four

This chapter elaborates on my methodology and charts the changes that occurred over the course of the project. It was integral to my research journey to chronicle such changes and how I responded to them, especially as evidence of the shaping power of *Ngurambang* (Country). Mostly, the changes arose from challenges around collecting data and the conflicts of “time” whilst in the field. However, they also occurred as I became more immersed in my Culture, more connected to *Ngurambang* (Country) and more aware of the agency of *Ngurambang* (Country). This process involved shedding the skin of my western education. *Durrawan* chapter offers deeper explanations of the concepts within my methodology, the centrality of the role of *yindyamarra* as well as the meaning and operation of songlines and storying. It also contains an explanation of the shaping of my ethical and moral standpoints in my discussion of the *wétiko* disease and repatriation (Forbes 1992).

Yindyamarra is a way of life, it is an ethos, a spirit, an attitude and an aspiration. Relationality is how we as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) communicate and position ourselves within the world and within ourselves. We establish our relationality through yarning, we present ourselves, lay bare who we are - not only to others but ourselves, seeing our reflection in words and actions, and we commit to relational accountability (Wilson 2008). Yarning is both a conduit and building block for the passing of First Nations knowledges. A conduit because this researcher has established relationality with storyteller/participants, an accountability to them and their stories. Accepting the primacy of their knowledges of their own lives and their stories, following *yindyamarra*, watching, listening and learning. A building block, because the yarning circle, value adds as each person speaks defining and expanding on knowledge.

My responsibilities to this research are deeply embedded within my Culture, and thus within me. As this project is committed to decolonising research, it requires the dismantling of institutions and practices within those institutions which are colonial. In my life, I have experienced the harm perpetrated by colonialism and my knowledge informs the methods of this research - this is encapsulated in *winhangadilinya* (to feel your own spirit, to know yourself). It informs not only my internal knowledge but my external, situating me within the world, connecting me culturally in an ever-extending

past, and present. This places boundaries, obligations and responsibilities on my research process, *gariya yaambul yala* (to always speak the truth, speak straight and advocate for justice).

This research is predicated on honouring, doing slowly and respecting, contained within the *Wiradjuri* way of *yindyamarra*. However, *winhangarra* (listening, hearing, and thinking) and *marrumbang* (kindness and love) also played critical roles. The yarning I undertook with community members, storyteller/participants included stories which are varied and lived experiences which are diverse. I needed to honour them through listening, *winhangarra* (listening and hearing) and treat them with *marrumbang* (kindness and love). By utilising these two *Wiradjuri* ways combined with *winhangadilinya* (knowing oneself), I developed a deeper understanding of the knowledge shared whilst maintaining that I have not overstepped or mis-stepped.

I have responsibilities under *buyaa* (law) to our *Wiradjuri Mudyigang* (Elders) to listen, learn and act when instructed to do so. It is crucial to be guided by the knowledge and lessons of our *Mudyigang* (Elders), *Ngurambang* (Country) and stories. Therefore, it was my responsibility to take the time to deepen existing relationships with *Mudyigang* (Elders) in my local community, specifically *Wiradjuri Mudyigang* (Elders) who I work with. I am privileged to have bonds with *Wiradjuri* people built over time and I must honour and respect those relationships. It was also my responsibility to build relationships with local non-*Wiradjuri Mudyigang* (Elders) and honour our ancestral relationships through our Songlines and pre-colonial relationships. This was integral to this project as I entered different communities to conduct the research. I was culturally obligated to use *yindyamarra* to honour their Culture, their Country and their knowledges. Whilst I may not be on *Ngurambang* (Country), my actions impact *Ngurambang* (Country). All *Ngurambang* (Country) is connected. We have responsibilities for each other - all our actions have reactions. Johnson (2017) relates a story retold by Wagamese (1996):

“I know where to hide it, my Creator”, the Mole said. “I know where to hide the gift of the knowledge of Truth and Justice”.

“Where, then, my brother?” asked the Creator. “Where should I hide this gift in the humans?”

“Put it inside them”, said the Mole. “Put it inside them because then only the wisest and purest of heart will have the courage to look there”.

And that is where the Creator placed the gift of the knowledge of Truth and Justice.
(p.3)

The Wétiko Disease

This research methodology is a reflection of my worldview and how I conduct the research is a reflection of who I am. The research process I follow through *yindyamarra*, is to ensure that I don't fall prey to *Wétiko* Disease (Forbes 1992). As Forbes (1992), a *Powhatan-Renápe, Delaware-Lenápe* scholar, has detailed in his work *Columbus and Other Cannibals* and reinforced by Wilson (2017) a *Opaskwayak Cree* man, *Wétiko* Disease is a western malaise of compulsive consumption of the earth where brutality has no boundaries, greed knows no limits, perversion no border, arrogance no frontier, deceit no edge and unbridled ambition will consume you. Forbes (1992) explains:

A colonial system almost always assigns low status to all native customs, and if racial differences are apparent, also assigns low status to the physical characteristics of the conquered population. The conquered people are made to feel inferior, and this inferiority is used as a weapon of psychological warfare to control them... The low status assigned to the Native culture and race is used as a weapon against all persons of 'mixed' ancestry or all natives who seek to 'rise' in status. Such persons must deny and denigrate Native values and characteristics if they wish to escape from the lower, most exploited sectors of society... In the most 'astute' colonial systems the masses of Native origin will become divided into numerous castes and sub-castes... In most such systems it is the hope that the different castes will come to act as distinct social units opposed to each other. (p.65)

Wétikos from the *Cree* of Canada are ordinary people who have been infected by a cannibalistic spirit who harm themselves or 'other creatures by means of terrible evil acts (Borrows 2016; Forbes 1992, p.24; Ladha & Kirk, 2016; Levy 2022). They are not

supernatural monsters, but a spirit who tricks its host into believing that this ravenous consumptive action is indeed the correct way to behave. As articulated by *Anishinabe/Ojibway* man and member of the *Chippewas of the Nawash* First Nation of Canada, John Borrows (2016), ‘in historical terms, this consumption often involved eating human flesh because starvation was a frequent contributor to social and psychological problems’ (p.818). A *wétiko* is not just confined to an individual human being in Forbes’ (1992) definition, it can manifest in institutions and indeed in whole countries in the form of colonialism, those ‘who selfishly cannibalize our social, emotional, economic, or environmental infrastructure’ (Borrows 2016, p. 818). In western terms, *wétiko* disease has been described by Paul Levy (2022) as ‘malignant egophrenia’ – the ego unchained from reason and limits, acting with the malevolent logic of the cancer cell (p.13). Ladha and Kirk (2016) explain:

Wétiko can describe both the infection, and the body infected; a person can be infected by wétiko or, in cases where the infection is very advanced, they can personify the disease: a wétiko. This holds true for cultures and systems; all can be described as wétiko if they routinely manifest these traits. (p.2)

Wilson (2020) added, ‘wétiko disease is sort of like a real mental and social and emotional and physical, but especially a spiritual collapse’ (p.8). The *wétiko* is reflected in *Wiradjuri* culture in general terms as a *Yowi*, not some beast but instead a human who has no skin, not in the sense of flesh but rather in the sense of kinship and relationships with other people and therefore it has no relational accountability (Wilson 2020). Thus, *wétiko* inhibits a person from understanding their cultural responsibilities and instead infects the individual with a supercharged ego and ambition. My challenge in this project is to maintain my Culture and my cultural protocols when dealing with communities and *Mudyigang* (Elders), to privilege their knowledge and not mine and resist western institutional pressure. Particularly, the allure of self-aggrandising my position in the research or the urge to want more control, more recognition and more power over the knowledge. Sackett (1978) importantly reflects:

One aspect of the traditional belief system is the notion that there should be no bosses. Ultimately, it is thought that all humans are equal, in that they are all less than the Dreamtime-beings whose edicts they have to follow. (p.42; Atkinson, 2002)

Repatriation

Institutions have stolen our ideas and knowledge and they have imprisoned them in much the same way that they have imprisoned our bodies. The creation of the “savage” is the foundational component of colonialism and has worked to contain our knowledge. Hobbes’ (1968) ‘state of nature’ has worked since invasion to project First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) as being stuck in an ‘irreversibly primitive condition’, resigning our knowledge and ideas to native curiosities (cited in Youngblood Henderson 2002, p.20). We need to repatriate our ideas and knowledge from institutions, including the academy, and return them to our *mayiny* (peoples). Institutions deny our holistic knowledges and ideas and act as ‘cognitive prison house[s]’ (Youngblood Henderson 2002, p.16). It is only after our ideas and knowledges are returned, valued and seen as equal that we can begin the journey of collaboration with western institutions. Youngblood Henderson (2002) states:

Faced with the realization that some Indigenous idea or action might compete with their constructs, they evoke the Hobbesian nightmare of the chaos that would follow if they were to change the existing order: It is not the chaos they fear, but having their contrived superiority challenged. (p.15)

This project rejects the *wétiko* disease contained within eurocentric knowledges and worldviews and reclaims our dismissed, denigrated hidden knowledges. Western education and institutions have taught First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to place self above all else, ignoring our collectivism. This research rejects this western worldview, seen by Sartre (1948) as ‘an iron law which denied the oppressed all weapons which he did not personally steal from the oppressor’ (as cited in Youngblood Henderson 2002, p.17). This project has worked to repudiate the *wétiko* disease, to stop being complicit in our own infection by western ‘desires of glory, pride, power, wealth and universalism’ (Forbes 1992; Youngblood Henderson 2002, p.19). By adopting a First Nations methodology based in relationality, responsibility and indeed *yindyamarra*, this research has been able to facilitate findings which reflect community worldviews and visions.

Our ideas hold our *dhulubang* (spirits) as do our bones and our artifacts. Our *Ngurambang* (Country) and ourselves aren't complete until we return our *dhulubang* (spirits) to *Ngurambang* (Country) to be whole again. This is the trauma we face. Our knowledge lies within these institutions contained within our bones and artifacts, languishing in a type of purgatory (Colwell 2017). They wait for us to release them, bring them home to *Ngurambang* (Country), to Community. Colonialism has created a battleground for our knowledges and worldviews and it is in the institutions and our own minds that this war rages. Ultimately, it is there that our sovereignty will be won or lost.

In using this methodology and these ways of research honouring the words of each knowledge holder yarned with, we repatriate our ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. This is like the physical repatriation of our bones and artifacts from western institutions. Just as these bones and tools are leaving the cemetery of western institutions' cabinets and collections, so too must our ideas and knowledge leave the charnel house of institutions and return to our communities (Colwell 2017; Youngblood Henderson 2002). Just as our bones and tools still contain our *dhulubang* (spirits) and the power of Culture, so does our knowledge. This research rejects our complicity in the colonial project, rejecting western research methods which, with intent or indeed hubris, seek to continue the subjugation of First Nations knowledges. This research instead privileges First Nations knowledges in order to release our Culture from its cognitive prison.

For First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in Australia to rekindle our Cultures and revitalise our knowledges, we must hear our voices and our ideas in our own words. We cannot privilege our knowledges when they are conveyed in the words and language of the coloniser, in the colonisers' books and the colonisers' research. Institutions have presented a narrative which places negative values on our worldviews, and this traps our *dhulubang* (spirit). Memmi (1965) states, 'it is a curious fact to write for a people other than one's own, and it is even stranger to write to the conquerors of one's people' (cited in Youngblood Henderson 2002, p.17).

Songlines

Ngurambang (Country) holds our knowledges - cognitive control of knowledge should never lie with colonial institutions. Releasing our knowledge allows songlines to re-emerge and re-connect, to regain and restrengthen our relationships and responsibilities to *Ngurambang* (Country), *miyagan* (kin) and *galang* (tribe). Songlines are the navigating tool which connects our stories and our histories, and they are also more than this - they are a means of retaining and disseminating knowledge. Songlines remind us we are connected to everything and everyone everywhere. As much as Songlines are archives, they are also dynamic, alive and operating in the 'everywhen' of First Nations Cultures. The adaptability of Songlines enable their repair and their applicability to the now.

This research added to Songlines. My visiting, interacting and *winhangarra* (listening, hearing, thinking) with other First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in their communities reconciled our Songlines which are interconnected across this continent. Throughout this research was a re-activation of Songlines eroded by colonisation which First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) made when crisscrossing this continent for trade, ceremony and knowledge transfer. This reconnection process aided the researcher to access collective knowledge trails and archives so that storyteller/participants were better able to express and exchange their knowledges when yarning and storymapping.

On a much broader level this research process contributed to revitalising our knowledge systems and added to our stories. It emphasised the importance and efficacy of our systems of knowledge and the transfer and archiving of that knowledge. This will occur on a macro platform of education for future First Nations researchers, as well as for First Nations storyteller/participants and readers of the research. As previously stated, this process conforms with my duties under *buyaa* (law), it is *murruway marambul* (proper way). *Buyaa* (law) informs that it is my duty to teach, share and pay respect to, not only my own people, but also to other *bagaraygan* (mobs), their *Mudyigang* (Elders) and their knowledges. By *winhangadilinya* (knowing myself), I can use *yindyamarra* to *winhangagigilanha* (care for) for the storyteller/participants, Communities and their knowledges, to interact with them with respect, *gariya yaambul yala* (to speak truthfully).

When the colonisers stole the country, they stole our lives, they stole our archives of knowledge, they stole our past and our future. They gathered their knowledge, gave it their names, created their maps, even created their version of history - at once oblivious, at the least reckless, to the fact that all of these things were already

recorded and archived in the preceding sixty-thousand years (Neale & Kelly 2020). Neale and Kelly (2020) restated the powerful words of Jorgenson and McLean (2017):

The archive is a source of power, it takes control of the past, deciding which voices will be heard and which won't, how they will be heard and for what purposes. Indigenous archivists were at work well before the European enlightenment arrived and began its own archiving. Sometimes at odds, other times not; these two ways of ordering the world have each learned from, and engaged with, the other. Colonialism has been a struggle over archives and its processes as much as anything else. (p.47)

Waagan / Crows: We-al-li and Dadirri

Our stories contain many meanings and the truth of each story holds significance for each of us (Archibald 2008). I have been told stories which contain knowledge meant specifically for me, containing impact for me and my journey. This research, although an academic process, is also far deeper - it is decolonisation in action, a return to my Culture. In the next chronicling of my story, *waagan girinyalanha* (crows talking together), I am once again jumping the “barbed wire fence” of cultures, fully appreciating the battle scars it will inflict.

Archibald (2008) relates a story told by anthropologist Barre Toelken of the detrimental effect of western education and institutions on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) ability to make meanings of First Nations stories. An example was offered in which a Navajo Elder known as Little Wagon replied to a query from his grandson on where the snow comes from. The grandfather said that an ancestor found some fine burning material and kept it burning until the owners, the spirits, asked for it. Due to the valuable nature of the material, the spirits made the ancestor do various onerous tasks. As a reward, the spirits said they would clean the grandfather's house and empty his fireplaces every year over the canyon. The Elder recounted that sometimes the spirits forget to keep their word but that it was important to keep an eye on the canyon. The grandson then asked: why does it snow in some other places? The grandfather later lamented that his grandson did not understand his stories (Archibald 2008; Toelken & Scott 1981, p.73). Toelken and Scott (1981) cited in Archibald (2008) state the lesson taken from this interaction:

I found by questioning him that he did not in fact consider it an etiological story and did not in any way believe that that was the way snow originated; rather, if the story was about anything it was about moral values, about the deportment of a young protagonist whose actions showed a proper reciprocal relationship between himself and nature. In short, by seeing the story in terms of any categories I had been taught to recognize, I had missed the point; and so had our young visitor, a fact which Little Wagon at once attributed to the deadly influence of white schooling. (p.14)

A pivotal moment in this decolonising journey was attending a *We-al-li* workshop facilitated by Aunty Judy Atkinson focussed on trauma, healing and *dadirri*. I was extremely fortunate to attend but even more so to form a relationship of knowledge sharing with Aunty Judy which continued throughout this project. The workshop by its design and method created a safe place of sharing knowledge and stories. This atmosphere nurtured the true beginnings of my decolonising journey. It also taught me the visceral power of healing for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), most importantly for me personally. Aunty Judy offered practical demonstrations and lessons on forming relational accountability. In a short space of time, Aunty Judy was able to form relationality, reciprocity and responsibility amongst the workshop participants. This masterclass in building relationality and reciprocity was a confirmation of my intended process as well as a practical component of my First Nations methodological apprenticeship. As part of this workshop, Aunty Judy asked us to go outside onto *Gubbi Gubbi Ngurambang* (Country) and listen to *Ngurambang* (Country). During my listening, I was joined by *bula waagan* (two crows) who talked the whole time during my contemplation - it seemed poignant and significant being a *waagan* (crow) man. After this exercise, we came back to have a break before continuing the workshop and during this break I spoke with Aunty Judy of the significance of my interaction with the *waagan* (crows). Aunty Judy told me that *waagan* (crows) are lore givers and that I must listen to them talking. Later in our discussions, she also reminded me that the *waagan* (crow) was a part of a community and *cleaned up*. This storytelling of the importance of the *waagan* (crow) was further reiterated to me by another important spiritual man later in my journey, he told me that I must listen not only to the *waagan* (crows) talking but also to their silences.

This storytelling - of *waagan* (crow) as a lore giver, *waagan* (crow) as a communal being, *waagan* (crow) as needing to be listened to - was intended for me by *Ngurambang* (Country). It carried special meaning to me and also represented a challenge. Tujague and Ryan (2023) in their work *Billabongs of Knowledge* have noted the work of Tyson Yunkaporta (2021) in *Sand Talk* and how he 'sees all of our rituals and ceremonies as metaphors: taking problem-solving messages and storylines and putting them into physical form' (p.250). This story was a healing opportunity for me to *bagaray bang* (rebalance) in so many ways through the contemplation of its meaning, the process of listening and connecting to *Ngurambang* (Country). It was a form of restoration, my *bagaray bang* (rebalancing) in Culture. As articulated by Archibald (2008):

Sometimes Indigenous perspectives are presented without explicit comment in accordance with the oral tradition of letting the listener, now reader make meaning from someone's words and stories without direction from the storyteller. (p.17)

This story and searching for its meaning, my meaning, took many months. I spent almost a year listening to *waagan* (crows) - when *waagan* (crows) spoke I stopped, I concentrated, I listened and I contemplated the talk and the silence. When meaning came, it came in a rush, a moment of revelation which yielded a first meaning, and then after contemplation of that meaning, a further revelation. I thought about *waagan* (crows), I had conversations with and about *waagan* (crows), these conversations - most especially with my *ngamurr* (daughter) Gemma as well as Jack Bulman - began centring the significance of *waagan* (crow) for me. He is, after all, my totem. Upon reflection of what a totem means, I realised that it is not about what *waagan* (crow) does for me but what should I be doing for my brother *waagan* (crow). *Waagan* (crow) represents custodianship and responsibility and this was when I realised my story's meaning - *waagan* (crow) was to teach me responsibility. *Waagan* (crows) surround my work constantly reminding me of my responsibilities in how I undertake this research. It is responsibility to *waagan* (crow) as well as to people who have given to and shared in this project. On a macro level, it is responsibility to contribute to restoring cultural knowledges and worldviews interrupted by colonisation (Tujague & Ryan 2023).

It was only after learning this meaning and thinking on it, turning it around, over and over in my mind, that the other meaning was released. I realised that this process of listening to *waagan* (crows) was actually an apprenticeship in *dadirri* and *yindyamarra*. I had respected *waagan* (crow), honoured him, deeply listened to his voice, privileged his voice and knowledge. Aunty Judy telling me to listen to the *waagan* (crows) instructed me to build that capacity to listen deeply - it was a lesson in functionality and spirituality. It made me prepared to accept and listen and privilege the storyteller/participants voices, honour and respect them. As Cajete (1994) emphasises:

Indian [E]lders often remind young people to live the myths by saying', "These stories, this language, these ways and this land are the only valuables we can give you - but life is in them for those who know how to ask and how to learn. (cited in Archibald 2008, p.17)

The Kimberley: its time when its time

The selection of the Kimberley is purposeful. These communities are not only the setting for the film *Mad Bastards*, but the actors are also the real people, community members of the Kimberley. This film is not their fictional story; it is their documentary. The relationality of this project is a First Nations process which continues in community selection. *Mibbinbah* have been instrumental in my invitation onto *Ngurambang* (Country) and into Community. I have travelled with *Mibbinbah* across the continent carrying a songline, re-creating, re-establishing old knowledge, writing its journey - exemplified in the Seven Sisters songline. *Mibbinbah*, who have spent years building relationality through respect and responsibility, have spoken *for* me. Such is their respect for Community that I am taken in without question, accepted onto *Ngurambang* (Country), not as a visitor or a tourist, most especially not as a researcher but rather as another blakfella.

The journey to the Kimberley is a continuation of my Songline, bringing the threads of my knowledge as a *Wiradjuri* man to the *Djukun*, *Yawuru* and *Gooniyandi mayiny* (peoples) I connected with along the way. My Songline is already intertwined within the Songlines of the *Muthi Muthi* and the *Gunditjmara*. The songline of

Mibbinbah winds its way through this continent, connecting communities, passing information from Wadeye to *Rubbi* to Toowoomba to Uluru - coast to coast and top to bottom. They tell stories connected with each community, questions are asked, answers delivered and considered, knowledge is passed and gained, adding to our Songline archive and building our Cultures. As Neale & Kelly (2020) reflect:

Everything starts and ends with Country in the Aboriginal worldview. Yet there are no endings in this worldview, nor are there any beginnings. Time and place are infinite and everywhere. Everything is part of a continuum, an endless flow of life and ideas emanating from Country, which some refer to as the Dreaming. In the Dreaming, as in Country, there is no separation between the animate and inanimate. Everything is living—people, animals, plants, water and air. We speak of Sea, Land and Sky Country. Creator ancestors created the Country and its interface, the Dreaming. In turn, Dreaming speaks for Country. Country has Dreaming, Country is Dreaming... Songlines, related to Dreamings or Dreaming tracks, connect sites of knowledge embodied in the features of the land. It is along these routes that people travelled to learn from Country. (p.1)

I bring my story and I share the knowledge I have and this is considered, absorbed. This is our ceremony practice. In response to my story, knowledge is then shared with me. This project is not just about gathering knowledge, it is about sharing and disseminating knowledge. This ceremony practice creates connection and enables the process of forming a relationship, this relationality becomes accountability (Wilson 2008). These relationships formed as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) aren't just for the research or the life of the project, these are relationships which transcend this project. When we share language and knowledge of *Ngurambang* (Country), there is a natural generosity, a largesse of spirit. This is not only reflected in knowledge transfer but in all things from time, accommodation, food and drinks. There is no payment for time or knowledge and we don't own our knowledge - we are its custodians and it is shared with all those who honour it and show respect. I followed our protocols, our ceremony and my actions honoured my hosts. I showed respect to freshwater people, saltwater people and the desert mobs. Too often this process for western researchers is a moment of *buying Manhattan for beads and trinkets*, resulting in a perceived ownership of the knowledge and process by those researchers (Bryce 2021). Being on *Ngurambang* (Country), even though it is other *mayiny* (peoples)' *Ngurambang* (Country), and

adhering to lore and respecting *Ngurambang* (Country) creates relationality. Encouraging language, showing interest in language, sharing language is *murruiway marambul* (proper way), it has forever been our way - the way of our Songlines, to learn other languages, share knowledge and Culture, to travel through each other's *Ngurambang* (Country) (Neale & Kelly 2020). In a visceral way, speaking in language connects us to our deep ancestral past (McGrath, Rademaker & Troy 2023). Language holds the key to our time and songs, and words hold meaning and a method to recall our past. However, language does not only recall the past, it also makes the past *live* in the now. When I use language to describe my methods, it connects me deeply to the research in the same way as storyteller/participants use of language in their yarns adds depth and gravitas to their stories. This meeting, learning and listening to others language is our way - it is *murruiway marambul* (proper way), the way Songlines. Songlines are our archive. To understand our Culture and to give it primacy in our lives, it must be wrestled from the written word back to the oral tradition. The storyteller/participants voices, slipping into and out of language, in this research add truth. Conducting this research on *Ngurambang* (Country) adds extra dimensions as noted by McGrath, Rademaker & Troy (2023):

Being in landscape and experiencing one's body and one's voice as part of the landscape - the touch on one's skin, the smell, the sounds, and sights of a place-are among the ways in which Indigenous people experience, research, and perform history. Being on Country and performing history is healing. (p.15)

In my instance being on *Ngurambang* (Country) and performing research is my healing. When speaking in language or listening to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) speaking their languages, we feel the deep embrace of our *Ngurambang* (Country), their *Ngurambang* (Country), the deep time history stretching backwards and forwards, unbound by temporal constraint. Indeed when I speak language, I feel a deep visceral connection to my *Balumbambal* (Ancestors), as if they are next to me and I feel their strength as well as their pain. Time is irrelevant, there is no then, now or tomorrow. Language is who I am, it is my identity. The process of relational yarning or *talk talk* before the formal and/or recorded yarn/interview was the most revealing - people's heart feelings came through, not guarded, not querying 'what does this researcher want'? This allowed them to share what was important to them, and this was making the

community heal, although heal as an English word does not convey the full meaning of healing to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) (Atkinson 2002; Tujague & Ryan 2023). Healing is central to us - it rebalances us within our Country, our Communities and our Culture. This is strongly captured by the *Wiradjuri* word *bagaray bang* which means restored, comforted, healthy and comfortable. This research represents not a challenge to non-First Nations readers but rather an invitation to recognise the existence of different worldviews and different knowledges. John (Fire) Lame Deer from the Sioux Lakota Nations reflects:

Before our white brothers arrived to make us civilized men,
we didn't have any kind of prison. Because of this, we had no delinquents.
Without a prison, there can be no delinquents.
We had no locks nor keys and therefore among us there were no thieves.
When someone was so poor that he couldn't afford a horse, a tent or a blanket,
he would, in that case, receive it all as a gift.
We were too uncivilized to give great importance to private property.
We didn't know any kind of money and consequently, the value of a human being
was not determined by his wealth.
We had no written laws laid down, no lawyers, no politicians,
therefore, we were not able to cheat and swindle one another.
We were really in bad shape before the white men arrived and I don't know
how to explain how we were able to manage without these fundamental things
that (so they tell us) are so necessary for a civilized society. (Erdoes 1994, p.70)

Derby

The organisation which was delivering the *Mibbinbah* program was the Men's Outreach Service Aboriginal Corporation (MOSAC) based in *Rubbi*. They organised a group of men to participate in the BTBYCB program. During the research period, there was Sorry Business - meaning someone from the community had passed away - and the group were unable to participate. An alternate group was arranged through Anglicare Derby. Up until this point in my research, I had both time and opportunity to form relationships with potential storyteller/participants. I was presented with the conundrum

of how to keep my research following *murruway marambul* (proper way) and to take the opportunity to yarn with men in Derby. I reflected on this during the three-hour journey to Derby. I also yarned with Jack and Lisa Bulman with whom I was travelling. I thought over the program and its goals and decided that I would join the program as a participant. I hoped that I would be able to create relationality and accountability through sharing stories and reciprocity (Wilson 2008). During the program, I was asked to personally reflect and share in the yarning circle any memories, thoughts, opinions and stories that related to my life journey. It required *winhangadilinya* (to feel your own spirit, to know yourself). In turn, other participants did the same. This was a First Nations process - it was the way we do ceremony and the program became ceremony and the ceremony became research (Wilson 2008). The program re-imagines what ceremony is and what it achieves, as noted by Tujague and Ryan (2023):

Traditionally, after a war, a difficult journey or disasters and challenge, Aboriginal people would come together to rest and recover. This was often followed by ceremony of dance, song, giving thanks, grieving or wailing. There would be storytelling for men and women, teaching the young ones of the challenges and celebrating both the blessings and lessons learnt. This was all about returning to balance. This [was/is] a replenishment of mind, body and spirit. (p.248)

By *gariya yaambul yala* (speaking truth), I was accepted. This process and reciprocity accelerated our connection and it was enough time because in these contexts time is not quantifiable in a western sense. This connection was carried through, during and after the days of the program when we sat and yarned, sharing, creating and weaving Songlines of knowledge (Archibald 2008; Gay'wu Group of Women 2019; Neale & Kelly 2020). The most telling moment of this journey to Derby came after the yarning and on arrival to my hotel. My co-participants in the program asked me what my impression of their community was. What really mattered to them were my reflections on the work they were doing, the outcomes of this work for the Community and its importance. This was a watershed moment. I looked at my hotel full of non-Indigenous people locked behind gates in much the same way as settlers behind stockades, cages around their businesses - clearly afraid of the unknown, afraid of the "savage" created in their minds. Two worlds and two worldviews were staring back at me as I contemplated the questions. One was First Nations, focussed on the positives of

Culture and the agency of Country, a narrative that had been prevalent throughout our yarning. The other was settler colonial, mired in the deficit narrative scripted since invasion of a “criminal savage” from a dying primitive culture. The response of colonisers to these questions has been to create cages for the “savages”, for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples).

Time

Time has become a stress point for this research and the process of *walking in two worlds* has become like jumping a barbed wire fence between the alacrity of institutional demands and the ‘everywhen’ of First Nations Culture, gouging cognitive furrows at each leap, leaving personal scarring. Interwoven in time is control, time itself being a tool of control. It became evident in building this research methodology that there would be conflict between western eurocentric time which is built on a ‘capitalist temporal order’ (Adams 2009, p.i) and First Nations time, where taking your time is revered for its efficacy. At issue for the research process was an ethnocentric institutional belief ‘that the time frame under which Western society operates is in some way a fundamental, universal truth’ (Adams 2009, p.1; McCready 2001).

This tension around time interacts with the power and gravity of silence for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). There is great meaning to be found in silence, as opposed to the western need to fill gaps in conversations, more is *said* in First Nations silences than in superfluous words (Archibald 2008; McGrath, Rademaker & Troy 2023; Neale & Kelly 2020; Tujague & Ryan 2023; Wilson 2008). You are respected for your ability to listen, not your ability to speak. As relayed by Jack and Lisa Bulman, a lore man once said, ‘you have two ears, you have two eyes and only one mouth and there is a very good reason for that’. Listening takes time. By its very nature, it requires waiting and considering - it requires *yindyamarra*. Luther Standing Bear (1933), *Oglala Lakota Sioux* Chief reflected:

Silence was meaningful with the Lakota, and his granting a space of silence before talking was done in the practice of true politeness and regardful of the rule that ‘thought comes before speech... and in the midst of sorrow, sickness, death or misfortune of any

kind, and in the presence of the notable and great, silence was the mark of respect... strict observance of this tenet of good behaviour was the reason, no doubt, for his being given the false characterization by the white man of being a stoic. He has been judged to be dumb, stupid, indifferent, and unfeeling. (cited in Thompson 2002, p.3)

Our knowledges and our stories are passed via language orally and drawn on our *Ngurambang* (Country). This takes time to listen, to consider, to draw and to teach. As stated earlier in this chapter, the process of taking your time, spending time to create relationality, responsibility and accountability has yielded the most nuanced knowledge transfer. The centrality of time in this project has been dramatically demonstrated to me, not only in my interactions with institutions and the constraints imposed on time, but in the very process of yarning.

Two instances occurred during the research period that reiterated the need to accommodate the *will of time*. The *Wandjina* (rain making spirits in *Wanjina Wuggurr*) brought rain to the Kimberley and the *Maroowarra* (Fitzroy River) came into flood on my way to *Martuwarra* (Fitzroy Crossing). Both bridges were cut off, effectively splitting the local community in two. A law/lore man told me that *Maroowarra* has one of the largest volumes of water flow in Australia, making crossing hazardous alongside other dangers like debris and crocodiles. *Mibbinbah* in conjunction with MOSAC of *Rubbi* had planned for a group of rangers to undergo the BTBYCB program, however the rangers were on the other side of the river. Unable to cross, we were unable to reach them. I must turn to *buyaa* (law) and respect this *Ngurambang* (Country), which in turn shows respect to my *Ngurambang* (Country). I used *winhangadilinya* (to feel my own spirit) and trust in *dhulubang* (spirit), by respecting the voices of this *Ngurambang* (Country). *Winhangarra* (listening, hearing) the *bila* (river), the spirits within this Country, most especially *Wandjina* (rain making spirits in *Wanjina Wuggurr*), who also have meaning for law, culture and language. In doing this, I am respecting my own *Balumbambal* (Ancestors).

I recognise that the *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) have made their decision, they want me on this side of the *bila* (river), they want me to adjust to the time of *Ngurambang* (Country), to put aside my research calendar and respect *Ngurambang* (Country). However, listening to *Ngurambang* (Country), its *dhulubang* (spirits) and story has yielded an answer to this problem. The flood meant I had to stay with the facilitators of the program, the MOSAC outreach workers as well as Jack and Lisa, in

the same house. This led to us then going onto *Ngurambang* (Country), receiving knowledge, sharing meals together and yarning, laughing, discussing life, its challenges, Community aspirations as well as ways and strategies to achieve these goals. We created relationality through reciprocity, we shared hope. *Ngurambang* (Country), in its way, had influenced the research and made it richer, made it more First Nations. This respect for *Ngurambang* (Country), for our *bila* (rivers) and their prominence, their presence, is not restricted to this continent but is reflected in other First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) around the globe. In the Brazilian Amazon the *Wari*' people have succeeded in having the *Laje Korní Memem* River given personhood (ABC News 2023). This is our existence - we are a part of a circle, a continuum, a *part of Ngurambang* (Country) - not apart *from Ngurambang* (Country).

The second instance which demonstrated these lessons around time was when I lost signal for my phone. Minutes outside of *Rubbi* on my trip to *Martuwarra*, my phone *dropped out*. At first, I felt annoyance then stress then acceptance. It reoriented me to concentrate on yarning in the car, listening deeply, watching *Ngurambang* (Country) as we drove through it, noting changes in the *bugurr* (plants), the *dhaagun* (earth), the *budyaan* (birds). However, it also meant I had the opportunity to sync to *Ngurambang* (Country), listen deeply and practice *yindyamarra* with *Ngurambang* (Country) without any distraction. The *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) and *dhulubang* (spirits) of this *Ngurambang* (Country) were working with me and deciding how this project should be conducted. It was fitting that the *bila* (river) made the decision for a man from the *Wiradjuri*, the people of the three *bila* (rivers). As Luther Standing Bear (1933) expressed:

Only to the white man was nature a wilderness and only to him was the land 'infested' with 'wild' animals and 'savage' people. To us it was tame, Earth was bountiful, and we were surrounded with the blessings of the Great Mystery. (p.201)

Songline/Storymaps

It was the intention of this researcher, as stated in the methodology, to invite the storyteller/participants to construct storymaps as we yarned to better express and relate

their storying. However, in the field this presented numerous problems. It was logistically difficult given the circumstances of flooding, distance and community priorities during Sorry Business. At the same time, I was struck by the integral role of art in the lives of the people of the Kimberley, whether it be for cultural storytelling, pleasure or at times commerce. After this observation and after yarning about the centrality of art in Culture with community members and storyteller/participants, I considered that I needed to *turn the tables* and rather than have the storyteller/participants produce the storymap, I would create the map and then present it back to them in a reciprocal arrangement of knowledge sharing. At once, this demonstrated the value I placed on their story as well as my deep listening. By concentrating on listening and re-listening to their stories to produce a storymap, I was also going through a rigorous process of data analysis. This presented an opportunity which aligned with feedback from the storyteller/participants in which there was, at best, a disinterest in being provided written transcripts of our yarns. However, the thought of being presented a pictorial representation of our storying was intriguing and interesting. This method aligned also with *murrurway marambul* (proper way), it is the way of the Songline - our stories have more meaning when combined with a pictorial representation. Songlines as our archive exist in oral and pictorial forms, not in written tomes. By creating this archive and returning it to Community, we ensure community control of knowledge, levering it from the hands of colonial institutions. In this way, our storymaps became a songline. Without our stories or songlines, without the archives and memories, we allow colonial institutions to control our narratives and our histories and only tell their version of our truth. This research project and its methodology contributed to revitalising our ways of Knowing, Being and Doing - ensuring our truths are told in our ways. Ensuring these words of George Orwell (2022) do not become a truth for us, 'everything faded into mist, the past was erased, the erasure was forgotten, the lie became truth' (p.74-75).

These maps form part of our Dreaming, the yarning and reflection became part of ceremony and the creation of songline/storymaps were the ceremony between me and the storyteller/participants. The process of finding materials is also ceremony and the use of language adds to it (Wilson 2008). The maps were also my ceremony with *Ngurambang* (Country), listening speaking in language to *waagan* (crow), other *budyaan* (birds), *gidyira* (animals), *marramarra* (trees), *bugurr* (plants), *dhawura* (wind), *galing* (water), and *birrang* (sky). Language is the gel connecting me,

Ngurambang (Country), songline/storymaps and storyteller/participants. It is sovereignty.

Budyaan Galang / Bird Mob Process

Chapter Five: Exegesis

There were two male cousins; one lived in a northern isolated part of [British Colombia], and the other in the city of Vancouver. One day, the northern cousin came to visit his city cousin. The city fellow wanted to bring his cousin to the better, more lively parts of Vancouver. He chose Robson Street. Robson Street gets quite busy with lots of people walking along the street, shopping, and looking around. There's lots of traffic, loud music being played from the car stereos. As they were walking down Robson Street, the northern fellow said, "I feel out of place here. This cement sidewalk is so hard, my feet are sore from walking on it. There are so many people, you get bumped a lot. It's so noisy. I miss my home. I miss the quiet. I miss the smell of the land. I miss the trees and mountains being close by, and I miss the birds' songs. I feel as out of place here as that bird I hear singing in a tree at the end of the street." The city cousin said, "You must be homesick: how can you hear a bird singing in a tree at the end of the street with all this noise?" The northern cousin said, "Let me show you something. Do you have any coins?" The city fellow handed him a pocketful of change. The northern cousin took it and threw the coins onto the cement. A strange thing happened as those coins hit the sidewalk. There was a moment of silence. In that moment of silence, the people and their noise stopped. In that moment of silence, those who listened heard a bird singing in a tree at the end of the street. (Archibald 2008, p.95)

Budyaan galang (bird mob) chapter is included in this thesis to explain how my methodological process was developed and how it works in practice, it intends to evidence the cultural integrity of this project and the rigor of following cultural process. The *budyaan* (bird) songline approach is, by its very use, answering my research questions. This Indigenous process goes towards the aims of answering what helps communities - that is a return to our ways, our processes, privileging our knowledges, affirming our identities. It is healing, it is sovereignty. The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process is built from my *budyaan* (bird) collaboration. As I walk, sit, and think on *Ngurambang* (Country), as I listen to *Ngurambang* (Country), I hear *budyaan* (birds) and they remind me of their stories and the significance of their stories to this research. When the *budyaan* (birds) move around Country, they carry the seeds for bush tucker.

The *budyaan* (birds) sustain us, they teach us of the importance of all things *in and to Ngurambang* (Country). The *budyaan* (birds) leave me gifts, *gawuraa* (feathers), to enhance my memory and remind me of the knowledge that we as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) hold. This is because I am a learner and a listener in this decolonising journey. It is also important because I am *Mowgee* (my clan), we are *waagan* (crow) and *maliyan* (wedgetail eagle) people. We are *budyaan galang* (bird mob). In turn, I place the gifts from *budyaan* (birds) in the storymaps as reminders and signposts to the storyteller/participants, as part of our created songlines. Each *budyaan* (bird) tells me how to conduct this research, how the process is to work. *Garru* (magpie) teaches me to tell my truth, to be honest and see people face to face. *Waagan* (crow) teaches me to listen and think deeply, to take my time. *Burrurgiyan* (ibis) teaches me about balance and what is healthy, about our place and where we are not fringe dwellers or interlopers because we belong. *Durrawan* (currawong) teaches me of the changes that must occur. *Dhundhu* (black swan) speaks of reciprocity, protection, healing and humility. This mirrors the process spoken of by Archibald (2008) about the synergy of following the messages of *Ngurambang* (Country). The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process is our worldview and how we create knowledge and share knowledge - this is *murruway marambul* (proper way), *yindyamarra yambuwan* (respecting everything).

Kinship with all creatures of the earth, sky and water was a real and active principle. In the animal and bird world there existed a brotherly feeling that kept the Lakota safe among them. And so close did some of the Lakotas come to their feathered and furred friends that in true brotherhood they spoke a common tongue. (Standing Bear 1933, p.193)

Garru / Magpie

I have spoken in the previous chapter of the process of storyteller/participant selection, the role of *Ngurambang* (Country) in that selection and providing opportunities for yarning. The yarning which takes place both before and after oral recording are all a part of the knowledge which has been shared. This is First Nations way, nothing is said or not said which does not have importance. In the western epistemology, evidence is required which can be documented, that is their way. Our

knowledge collection and sharing are more exacting - requiring deep listening, contemplation then memory and recall. This process requires that we meet in person, one to one, looking at each other, not at notebooks, video recorders or indeed microphones. This is the story I receive from *garru* (magpie). *Garru* (magpie) looks at you, sees your face, recognises you. *Garru* (magpie) decides whether you are friend or foe, whether he needs to swoop you and drive you away or leave you peacefully sharing *Ngurambang* (Country). *Garru* (magpie) teaches the importance of memory, how memory plays a role in our Cultures, our way is the way of story, these are held in our memories and recited as part of ceremony. *Garru* (magpie) has come into my house, walked through my house, moving from room to room, looking, seeing, judging, walking from backdoor then out through the front door. Watching *garru* (magpie) reminds me of his role, making meaning from his story, reinforcing memory as integral to not only our Cultures but also to this *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process. *Garru* (magpie) judges your truth, this is the way of our yarns, we meet face to face judging our truths. It is important that I let myself be *seen* by storyteller/participants and to let them judge my truth in this project.

Waagan / Crow

I have spoken earlier of *waagan* (crow) and his role in my life and as a part of this research. The story given to me is one of *waagan* (crow) teaching me how to listen deeply, to take my time, to be responsible for how I conduct my relationship with storyteller/participants and treat their knowledges. This lesson is part of my journey in creating the songline data analysis through the storymapping as I must listen deeply and concentrate and take my time to understand what is shared. However, it also has implications for how I recall the knowledge in my memory. As I am a novice on this decolonising journey, I have recorded yarns. After each yarn, I think about what we have talked about, I go outside onto *Ngurambang* (Country) - at this point of time it means walking on the storyteller/participants *Ngurambang* (Country) - listening to rhythms of their *Ngurambang* (Country). This puts their story into context, it commits it to memory and triggers the memories of the previous unrecorded yarning, our relational yarning. This journey in storyteller/participants *Ngurambang* (Country) is important for perspective and focus which will be needed later in the creation of the songline data

analysis. This is also part of *buyaa* (law), respecting storyteller/participants and importantly respecting storyteller/participants *Ngurambang* (Country). *Buyaa* (law) requires that I honour and respect, use *yindyamarra* with all *Ngurambang* (Country), as it teaches that all *Ngurambang* (Country) is connected. By respecting all *Ngurambang* (Country), I privilege the agency of *Ngurambang* (Country). In response, *Ngurambang* (Country) aids me in memory. McGrath, Rademaker and Troy (2023) acknowledge ‘the land is the theatre of storytelling and itself the storyteller - it provides proof, containing relics of the deep past, and it activates a living history’ (p.15; Fixico 2013).

This process is also about watching and looking when on *Ngurambang* (Country). I watch *waagan* (crow) and how he relates with *Ngurambang* (Country) - he watches, sees special things, then comes and collects them and he cherishes them back in his nest. This is my process as I walk on *Ngurambang* (Country) - I listen, I look, I think, I see *Ngurambang* (Country), the special things are revealed, I collect them and they then become part of songline/storymaps as their meanings are revealed to me. Archibald (2008) reflects:

Another important principle of learning through storytelling is that since stories can be heard again and again, the meanings that one makes or doesn’t make from them can happen at any time. One does not have to give a meaning right after hearing a story, as with the question-and-answer pedagogical approach. An important consideration is hearing stories over time so that they become embedded in memory. (pp. 24-25)

In *waagan* (crow) chapter, I stated that data analysis would occur through songline/storymap creation after storying and yarning and this will now be explained in detail and practice. When I begin the songline data analysis through storymap creation I firstly listen to the recorded yarn. I listened deeply to the words, remembering the context of where they were spoken and how they were spoken. I waited and thought before listening again to the yarn, this time taking notes, stopping at points and replaying parts over and over to understand the knowledge. Once I have completed this listening, I think on how these words in the recorded yarn fit into our previous unrecorded yarns. The process of listening and taking notes encourages my memory and recollections of knowledge previously shared between us as Archibald (2008) notes, ‘I quit using the tape recorder fairly early on in our research relationship and instead made written and ‘memory’ notes after our discussions’ (p.47).

Most importantly the storymaps are created using the reflective practice *wayamiilbuwawanha* (to turn around and look at yourself). I then think deeply about the words used to express the knowledge and how to represent that knowledge in our First Nations worldview; how to present, share, save and archive to honour our processes. I go onto *Komumberri* and *Yugambah Ngurambang* (Country). I acknowledge the agency of this *Ngurambang* (Country) and the role of it in this process. I use *Wiradjuri* language, and most especially our word *Ngurambang* (Country), as its meaning transcends English and reminds me of my cultural responsibilities. I do not use *Wiradjuri* to rename place but rather to re-ground place through language and this carries forward my cultural obligations that exist in language speaking and learning. This is part of *buyaa* (law), respectfully listening to other *mayiny* (peoples)' *Ngurambang* (Country) is also paying respect to *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country). It allows me to listen and accept the gifts which *Ngurambang* (Country) is giving me to tell the stories of storyteller/participants and to share their knowledge. I walk onto *Ngurambang* (Country) and practice *winhangarra* (listening, hearing, thinking) - this is my process for *winhangadilinya* (knowing oneself), for feeling and it allows me to practice *winhangadurinya* (to reflect, to meditate).

This then becomes a collaboration with *Ngurambang* (Country) and with the *budyaan* (birds) and we become research partners in creating the data analysis. As I walk contemplating the storyteller/participants stories, both *Ngurambang* (Country) and *budyaan* (birds) become active in this cognitive process. The collaboration becomes symbiotic; we are working together to find and chronicle the meanings. Archibald (2008) noted in her work:

The written record of [Elders'] stories lacks the nuances of our interpersonal interaction and the depth of the emotion and humour that were shared [face to face] ... Talking, hearing, and feeling during my personal interactions with the Elders as well as visualizing their stories during and after sessions helped me to establish some thematic notions that were verified by their textual record. (p.93)

Durrawan / Currawong

Durrawan (currawong) carries the message of change, his story is one of signalling the cycles of the seasons on *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country). Seasonal changes mean hunting and gathering different foods and different ceremonies. *Durrawan* (currawong) sings in groups in the tree in my front yard, he calls when I walk on *Ngurambang* (Country). He leaves his gifts, his signposts, his *gawuraa* (feathers) and seeing these are a constant reminder of the change that needs to take place in our society. It also signals the change *which is taking place*, the adaptation within communities facing colonisation and western institutions. *Durrawan* (currawong) also speaks to the change happening to me on my decolonising research journey. The increasing rate of change in this project towards First Nations worldviews, our ontologies, our epistemologies, reflects reconnection to my 'blood memory' as noted by Leilani Holmes (2000):

Knowledge is passed to others in the context of relationships and deep feelings of connection. I have described this as heart knowledge. Knowledge also passes through the generations; thus, Hawaiians are united with the kupuna (Elders) of generations past, I have called this knowledge blood memory. (p.46)

The process of this research has unlocked stories, lessons and knowledges from my childhood, journeying me back to my Culture. This is itself healing, it is a *bagaray bang* (rebalancing), a restoring of spirit which resonates through my approach to yarning with storyteller/participants, through the creation of the songline/storymaps and through my songline data analysis.

Burrurgiyan / Ibis

Burrurgiyan (ibis) is another *gift giver* in the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process. When I walk through *Ngurambang* (Country), I watch all the *budyaan* (birds) around me, I talk to them and wish them *yiradhu marang* (good day), saying *mandaang guwu* (thank you), acknowledging our sharing of *Ngurambang* (Country). *Burrurgiyan* (ibis) is walking around, slowly looking around, not hurried, leaving a *gawuraa* (feather) as a gift in my path. When he flies over my home, I am reminded of a story from months ago. This is *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process, working with Songline,

creating Songline and discovering data embedded in story. Many months ago, I attended a presentation of the PhD projects at the Faculty of Health at my university. There was a Welcome to Country from a Gadigal man and he spoke of the *burrurgiyan* (ibis) and his role, how special he was and most importantly that he was not the “pest” nor “bin chicken” of settler minds. The gifts *burrurgiyan* (ibis) has left me have stirred this memory, this story, and opened meaning to me. *Burrurgiyan* (ibis) is reviled by the settlers and made to be the outsider, an interloper into the cities created by the coloniser. This is the settler way, to demonise all that does not fit his way. However, *burrurgiyan* (ibis) is not the outsider - the cities are what don't belong. *Burrurgiyan* (ibis) has adapted to the coloniser and found ways to circumvent his cities where settlers have destroyed the *Ngurambang* (Country) of *burrurgiyan* (ibis). He has in turn learnt to thrive and I see this story as the story of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). The colonisers sought to destroy *Ngurambang* (Country), change it so that we can't recognise it. However, our links to *Ngurambang* (Country) are stronger and we belong. Now we are changing, adapting to new ways, not discarding old ways but adapting as we always have. This is the meaning of the story of *burrurgiyan* (ibis) - adapting, recognising Culture in new ways, changing ways to ensure our knowledge is protected and privileged. This new way, new songline way of research is an adaptation of our old ways, our traditional ways.

Dhundhu / Black Swan

Dhundhu (black swan) also has gifts and story for me. While walking on *Ngurambang* (Country) recently, I came across a gift of a *gawuraa* (feather) from *dhundhu* (black swan) in my path. I picked up the *gawuraa* (feather) and walked with it, thinking about it and wondering why on *this morning* I came across such a gift. Later, I went to this little park near a lake to sit and read a book and as I read two *dhundhu* (black swans) came and sat in front of me within arms distance. They yawned to me then went about eating. They moved closer and then coming together in front of me, they started preening and picking out *gawuraa* (feathers) and throwing them over me. They both continued to shower me with *gawuraa* (feathers) and then one moved behind me and threw them from behind. When any people came near us, they chased them away. I

stayed with the *dhundhu* (black swan) while they fed and then while they slept around me. Eventually they went back to the lake. I knew this was important as they had invited me to the park with their gift and then showered me with *gawuraa* (feathers). They yarned with me and they selected me. I needed to think on this and learn what my people had said about *dhundhu* (black swan), I wondered what are their stories? I found a story for *dhundhu* (black swan) which described how other *budyaan* (birds) were pulling out his white *gawuraa* (feathers) to show him scorn for his pride and to teach him humility. In the story, *waagan* (crow) flies over and drops his *gawuraa* (feathers) over him to help him cover up, giving him black *gawuraa* (feathers).

The encounter started to reveal its meaning. Considering my totem being *waagan* (crow) and his role throwing feathers to the swans then *dhundhu* (black swan) visiting me, preening themselves and throwing *gawuraa* (feathers) back - this was about reciprocity. Cyclic, holistic, it is *murruway marambul* (proper way), First Nations way. It reminds me of the importance of reciprocity in this project and giving back to storyteller/participants, evidenced by giving the gifts of *gawuraa* (feathers) to the storyteller/participants in the maps. It is also giving the maps to the community. However, this encounter is also cautioning me to avoid the *Weitiko* disease of pride - the maps, the songline, the data analysis, the process belong to us all. *Dhundhu* (black swan) had shown me the way, shown me that I had been following *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process - learning their stories, making meaning then following their way.

[Graham Smith (2000)] emphasizes achieving an Indigenous consciousness-raising process that does not dwell on the colonizers but focuses on how Indigenous thought and action become transformative, thereby serving to improve Indigenous living conditions. (Archibald 2008, p.90)

Collaboration with Ngurambang / Country: My Personal Ceremony

Being in landscape and experiencing one's body and one's voice as part of a landscape, the touch of wind on one's skin, the smells, sounds, and sights of a place-are among the ways in which Indigenous people experience, research, and perform history. Being on Country and performing history is healing. (McGrath, Rademaker & Troy 2023, p.15)

These storymaps are a songline reinterpreted - they are my adaptation to modernity, to technology. This research is not making the claim of cultural knowledge or the ability to recreate and restate cultural knowledge or ceremony. Rather, this research is using *yindyamarra* with respect for our First Nations ways of safeguarding and disseminating the knowledge passed by storyteller/participants. This is done in the spirit of celebrating our ways of Knowing, Being and Doing, our epistemologies and ontologies. As McGrath, Rademaker and Troy (2023) note:

As with various North American tribes, Indigenous Australians 'dreams and visions delivered revelations, including complex interpretative stories about the past and present-in other words, forms of historical interpretation' (Saunt, 2006). Stanner notes that people did not see a separation between mind, body, spirit and personality, name totem, and features in the landscape. (p.14)

Songlines are narrative stories, sometimes presented in pictorial or sculptural forms. Stories that can be traced onto the sand or dirt as maps, offering both literal and spiritual guidance. These research storymaps are like this; the stories are contained in the words of storyteller/participants, and the maps are a form of drawing in the sand. The materials and objects chosen are the means by which I interpret what I was told, representing events or moments as well as an interpretation of the landscape. This use and creation of these songline/storymaps is a culturally appropriate way of reflecting back what I have learnt to storyteller/participants and disseminating knowledge. As Archibald (2008) reflected:

My part included acquiring and validating my understandings and eventually sharing them by becoming a teacher to others. This reciprocal action has a cyclical nature that is embedded in the 'hands back, hands forward' teaching. (p.50)

These storymaps are a collaboration between storyteller/participants, Country and me and they belong to the storyteller/participants. I have created them so that they are a teaching tool for others on how I used cultural methods, a message about knowledge and what I have been told. It is my responsibility to see them passed on. The maps have a cyclical nature, as does First Nations life. They were a rigorous and efficacious method of data analysis and required many layers of reflection and

contemplation before creation. *Ngurambang* (Country) was active in the selection of materials to represent the knowledge of storyteller/participants and we formed a symbiotic relationship to prioritise the voices of the storyteller/participants. This process reveals once again the integral role of *Ngurambang* (Country) in First Nations lives. The maps are three dimensional and they remain in a three-dimensional form in my mind. They rise off the ground representing landscape and movement and they have fluidity in my cognisance. This is the songline/storymap ceremony - the ideas of the storymaps dance in my head and this dance is my ceremony. My process is one of the postulant; I am asking *Ngurambang* (Country) for advice, direction, an entreaty for knowledge, an acquiescence to this research. By undertaking my process in this way, agency reverts to *Ngurambang* (Country) as opposed to the colonial discourse which rips agency and life from *Ngurambang* (Country). McGrath, Rademaker and Troy (2023) describe:

Creative ancestors travelled across the landscape, singing in language as they went. Indigenous songs and dance re-present these ancestors. Journeys and travel are core to Indigenous Australian cosmologies; song and spoken performances traverse and fuse landscapes and networks of story. Consequently, the terms "song-lines" and "song cycles" are useful descriptors for stories of a continuous past-present embedded in landscapes of mobility, sites being revisited and reenergized through song, dance, and art. (p.17)

Budyaan / Birds: Songline Sovereignty

The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process is sovereign and holistic, and the songline/storymaps are circular, circles of information within circles of information, cyclical stories in our unending continuum as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). This has been the nature of our Cultures since the beginning of time. Translating this into interdisciplinary research modalities enhances our health and SEWB, which is contingent on our connection to *buyaa* (law) and to *Ngurambang* (Country). These stories have been about constant connections. The process of looking at the songline/storymap, trying to make meaning and then reading the guide, encourages the reader/researcher to look at the map, think about the content, how the image fits and

then rethink and relook, practicing *wayamiilbuwawanha* (turn around and look at yourself) (Russ-Smith 2019). Deficit discourses, western epistemologies and ontologies seek to control and dominant First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), however in this research songline/storymap process ‘we listen to hear and look to see, there is no deficit, there is Country, there is our sovereignty’ (Russ-Smith 2019, p.240). The songline/storymaps are narrative resilience and narrative resistance. They are the pictorial representation of this practice and they are an embodiment of our sovereignty.

The first step in liquidating a people is to erase its memory. Destroy its books, its culture, its history. Then have somebody write new books, manufacture a new culture, invent a new history. Before long that nation will begin to forget what it is and what it was... The struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting. (Kundera 1980, p.133)

The creation of our relationships, the songline/storymaps and the use of First Nations languages are all declarations of sovereignty. They actively reject the colonial project and colonial discourses, and in the process, repatriate our knowledges (Russ-Smith 2019). By approaching the data analysis through oral storytelling and the visual, visceral nature of these storymaps, we assert our sovereignty and acknowledge that our sovereignty exists within our relationships with each other, our *Ngurambang* (Countries) and our languages. This existence of sovereignty has been a continuum, it has not been extinguished by time nor others’ laws, that is because our sovereignty is not over the *Ngurambang* (Country). It is a sovereignty because *we are Ngurambang* (Country) (Grant Snr & Rudder 2014; Russ-Smith 2019).

Western dictionaries define the English word ceremony *as* ‘a public or religious occasion that includes a series of formal or traditional actions’ (Oxford English Dictionary 2025) or ‘a set of formal acts, often fixed and traditional performed on important social or religious occasions’ (Cambridge Dictionary Online 2025). However, neither this English word nor its description holds the meaning of my use of ceremony. Ceremony for me is not formal, nor public, nor fixed, it is my personal relationship with *Ngurambang* (Country) and through *Ngurambang* (Country), my *Balumbambal* (ancestors). It is my yarning with both. My ceremony in yarning is not the special ceremony of Culture. It is, rather, a personal and relational ceremony between me and the storyteller/participants as is the process of finding materials for the storymaps

(Wilson 2008). Yarning is collaboration, the maps are a collaboration, the use of language a celebration and collaboration between me and storyteller/participants. The maps are a sharing and receiving, a ceremony of giving and receiving, it is a ceremony between the researcher and *Ngurambang* (Country). My personal ceremony listening and yarning in language to *waagan* (crow), other *budyaan* (birds), *balugan* (animals), *guulany* (trees), *bugurr* (plants), *dhawura* (wind), *galing* (water), *birrang* (sky), all part of *Ngurambang* (Country). Language is the gel connecting me, *Ngurambang* (Country), the songline/storymaps and storyteller/participants. The songline/storymaps are themselves also a type of modernised message stick, information imprinted in image, being carried over the internet, telling the story of experience, spreading and sharing the knowledge from one community to another.

Bagaray Bang / Rebalancing, Healing

As part of its research questions, this project has examined *healing programs* and the outcomes they generate for people and communities. However, the process of conducting this research with a method grounded in our Cultures has also produced a healing process in of itself, a statement of the power and efficacy of Culture as a healer. In our First Nations worldviews, *Ngurambang* (Country) is alive and is active in our lives. She is our mother and when I listen to *our mother*, it is as if I am spending time with my *badhiin* (paternal grandmother), talking between *badhiin* (paternal grandmother) and *warunarrung* (grandson). In this conversation, we are story sharing and story making together, as if over the breakfast table, others join in and all are there; *babiin* (father), *babiinbal* and *badhiin* (paternal grandfather and grandmother), great grandparents, our line stretching back blurring in the distance. It is also peering forward as well, seeing my *warunarrung* (grandson) and his *galin* (children), again stretching into the distance. This is our continuum, reinforced by the constancy of our relationship with *Ngurambang* (Country). By listening to and respecting *Ngurambang* (Country), I am rebalancing my relationship with *Ngurambang* (Country) and healing myself. Nick Thompson, as cited in Archibald (2008), says:

...that the land in the Western Apache territory ‘looks after us. The land keeps badness away’ (Basso 1996, p.61) because its stories and place names are essentially good: they make you remember how to live right, so you want to replace [heal] yourself again.
(p.94)

Knowledge Archive Returning to Community

The actual process of keeping the research “secure” in a western institution is itself an act of colonialism, a method of control and is asking permission to use information which First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) already own. The songline/storymaps are themselves an archive, a knowledge tool. By sending storymaps back to storyteller/participants, knowledge archives are restored to Community where they belong. The songline/storymaps hold voices and as such knowledges. They are difficult for institutions to hold in their libraries and collections. However, for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), they are our Culture, our art which is knowledge, embracing our adaptability through technology, in an image on a phone or in a frame on a wall. They don’t need to be deciphered from “academic speak”, nor require any special qualification. At their core, they are accessible. These songline/storymaps represent our holistic Cultures, containing and weaving together knowledges of the storyteller/participants, from *Ngurambang* (Country) and also from First Nations *Mudyigang* (Elders) and educators both inside university faculties (such as Law and Health) and outside in the Community. As McKemmish et al. (2011) reflect:

Reconciling research is envisaged as a collaborative, co-creative journey, in this case between members of the academy, Indigenous communities and the archival community. It validates multiple sources of knowledge and promotes the use of multiple methods of discovery, implementation, and dissemination of knowledge.
(p.220)

Circularity

The path of this research has been a decolonising journey, a re-grounding in Culture, reconnecting and privileging our knowledge and prioritising the agency of *Ngurambang* (Country). Our Cultures on this continent have always collaborated with *Ngurambang* (Country), known our connections, the symbiotic way in which we exist together, practicing *yindyamarra*. The continuum of our relationship expressed within the cyclical nature of our Cultures. How is that expressed within a narrative to give meaning to my methods? How is the synergy between *Ngurambang* (Country), me and story to be explained to enliven the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process? The truth of this process is that it is alive and constantly building in synergic link with *Ngurambang* (Country), which is itself in constant flux. These songline/storymaps are alive - they move with story, with knowledge, they are not stagnant pages on a shelf. I have written in this research of the need to take time with story, the need to keep interrogating stories for their meaning, different veils lifted to reveal new meanings, new depths. How do I explain this process? I have one more story to tell. This one story encapsulates my process. It is storying, ceremony, Culture, collaboration, healing, synergy, and circularity. As Archibald (2008) affirms:

The power within stories to heal emotionally and spiritually, the interaction which occurs between storyteller and story listener, creates a relationality of... synergistic story power that had emotional, healing, and spiritual aspects. This synergistic story power also brought the story to life. (p.100)

I wrote earlier of the story of *dhundhu* (black swan) and my meaning making of the story. However, stories have many levels, that over time with more thought reveal themselves. The truth of *dhundhu* (black swan) has thus revealed more knowledge. I told my story of *dhundhu* (black swan) to my *ngamurr* (daughter) and at the time she was reading material on the *Dharug* Nation in the Hawkesbury region of New South Wales (Winbourne Edmund Rice Centre 2024). It triggered a cloudy memory of something she had read previously about *dhundhu* (black swan). She re-read and discovered in *Dharug* language *dhundhu* (black swan) is known as *mulgoa*. This intrigued her as the place named Mulgoa on *Dharug* land in the region of western Sydney in New South Wales is significant for my *miyagan* (family). My *Balumbambal* (Ancestor), our *marradir* (rock), our *ngama* (mother) - Diana Mudgee - spent many years of her life in Mulgoa at the Cox family property. After the murder of her *miyagan*

(family), *ngama* (mother) Diana became a ward of the Cox family and in her later life she lived on “their” property, called Winbourne (Winbourne Edmund Rice Centre 2024). My *ngamurr* (daughter) reminded me of this story and sent me details on this property, Winbourne in Mulgoa. I was intrigued and read the history and learnt that the Cox family sold the property in the 1960s to an entity of the Catholic Church, the Christian Brothers Order. This was significant for me as I attended a Christian Brothers school. I thought about this and memories flooded back. I remembered that I had gone to stay at this very property, in these buildings many times whilst at that school, staying for days at a time, attending the chapel, walking the grounds, swimming in the waterhole. I had walked the paths and slept in the buildings as had *ngama* (mother) Diana. She had always been with me. This was the deep meaning of my meeting with *dhundhu* (black swan), the truth that my *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) were with me then, with me now and with me in the future. This is our circularity. It is the presence of my *Balumbambal* (ancestors), they are also collaborating with me, directing me, helping to form my relationality with *Ngurambang* (Country) and they are a visceral part of this research. This chapter is itself circularity, circling back from this story to its beginning in the creation of the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process. *Waagan* (crow) is my totem and journeys with me to all *Ngurambang* (Country), guiding me and reminding me of my obligations to *Ngurambang* (Country), constantly re-grounding me in process. However, *dhundu* (black swan) has greeted me in a special way by selecting me. The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process, the songline/storymaps, are not just our way to disseminate knowledges, they are our knowledges. As echoed by Luther Standing Bear (1933), Chief Oglala Lakota Sioux:

Everything was possessed of personality, only differing from us in form. Knowledge was inherent in all things. The world was a library, and its books were the stones, leaves, grass, brooks, and the birds and animals that shared, alike with us, the storms and blessings of earth. We learned to do what only the student of nature learns, and that was to feel beauty. We never railed at the storms, the furious winds, and the biting frosts and snows. To do so intensified human futility, so whatever came we adjusted ourselves, by more effort and energy, if necessary, but without complaint. (p.194)

Burrurgiyan / Ibis

Chapter Six

This chapter contains the knowledge which was shared between storyteller/participants, researcher and *Ngurambang* (Country). These storymaps are guides to navigate that knowledge, to follow the journey of storyteller/participants' songlines. They represent First Nations data analysis, privileging our ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. The songline/storymaps were created after I have yarned directly to the storyteller/participants, addressed each storyteller/participant personally and reflected on their story. Most importantly, I reflected on and with *Ngurambang* (Country). The songline/storymaps in turn spoke to me as I created them from our yarns, they revealed the collected shared knowledge - because that is our relationality, our accountability and our ceremony.

In the songline/storymaps I use *Wiradjuri* language, my language as a *Waagan Wiradjuri* man. I use language because language is identity and language is ceremony with *Ngurambang* (Country). It is recognition of the agency and sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country). I do this with respect and with storyteller/participants' permission. The use of language and stories from our Cultures is *yindyamarra* and acknowledgement of our deep histories and connection to our *Ngurambang* (Countries). This adds depth and meaning to the knowledge storyteller/participants are sharing. The use of language is also *murruway marambul* (proper way), this is the way our *mayiny* (peoples) have always greeted each other over millennia it is the way of Songlines, it is *yindyamarra yambuwan* (respecting everything). My *buyaa* (law) tells me that respecting another *mayiny* (peoples) language and *Ngurambang* (Country) is *murruway marambul* (proper way), respect for them is *Wiradjuri mayiny yindyamarra nga-dhu*, *Wiradjuri Ngurambang yindyamarra nga-dhu*, *Wiradjuri ngiyang yindyamarra nga-dhu*, *Wiradjuri muyulung-ngin-guyliya yindyamarra nga-dhu*, *Wiradjuri buyaa yindyamarra nga-dhu* (respecting *Wiradjuri* people, respecting *Wiradjuri* Country, respecting *Wiradjuri* language, respecting *Wiradjuri* Elders, and respecting *Wiradjuri* law) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.18).

This research project is reconnecting and renewing Songlines across *bangalngaarran-gaarra* (the whole earth), from *giranggawu* (east) to *dhurbuwunhanha* (west), *balima* (north) to *guya* (south). However, this process also creates new songlines, new information, new connections through the sharing of knowledges and

experiences. My *yindyamarra bungany ngu-ng-gilanhi* (giving the gift of honouring, respecting, and listening) to storyteller/participants and *bunba-y-marra-nha yindyamarra dumba-l-girri ngulung-ga-girri* (longing for respect, honouring, and listening to be shown in return) creates a relationality and the personal sharing of stories creates a songline. *Yindyamarra* is key to *Wiradjuri* life and as such is key to this project. Using *yindyamarra* in our yarning creates a process for songlines, *winhangarra bunma-bunma-rra yindyamarra*, (learning makes a part of *yindyamarra*), *winhanga-nha bunma-bunma-rra yindyamarra* (remembering makes a part of *yindyamarra*), *marra marra bunma-bunma-rra yindyamarra* (experiencing makes a part of *yindyamarra*) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.59).

Each of the songline/storymaps sits on material printed with the work of a central desert artist telling the stories of their *Ngurambang* (Country). Importantly, these artworks are all by women and this is significant as all but one of the storyteller/participants are men. These fabrics and their stories pay tribute to the visceral role of women in our lives, their centrality to our being and our healing. They honour the connection in our lives as First Nations men to our *miyagan* (families) and our communities as in each storymap there is the omnipresence of women and their influence on storyteller/participant lives and stories. Women are a repository of our stories and knowledge and pass it on as *yinaa, ngama, badhiin, bamali, ngamurr, miimi, wundayan and waringinali* (wives, mothers, grandmothers, aunts, daughters, sisters, nieces and cousins). They are integral to our being. The use of women's stories through the fabrics is practicing *yindyamarra* to women - respect, honouring, seeing and listening to them. The process of fabric selection was integral to the creation of the songline/storymaps.

I firstly listened to the yarn of the storyteller/participant then contemplated it, and in that process, recalled all of our yarns which were told on *Ngurambang* (Country). Then I visited the retailer where the fabrics were commercially available and looked through them. I contemplated the storyteller/participant and which fabric suited their story - whether that was by colour, feel or relationship to the story of the fabric. This process added another layer of analysis to my process and the creation of relationality with the storyteller/participant. The artworks of the material are the stories of central desert artists working through the *Warlukurlangu* Artists Aboriginal Corporation based at Yuendumu on *Anmatjere* land in the Northern Territory. They kindly gave their permission to use their artworks for this project. When I told the *Warlukurlangu* Artists

of this research and its aims, they were excited not only because they love to see their stories used in many ways and repeated, but also because their young men suffer from the destructive intrusion of colonial institutions. They saw their voices and their Culture helping young men. In doing so, this project was connecting the stories of the storytellers/participants with the stories of the artists. Knowledge is added to existing knowledge, then returned to the knowledge-givers, the storytellers. This process of adaptation is our way and it adds depth and nuance.

Personal connection is key to creating relationality between researcher and storyteller/participant and creating a songline for sharing of knowledge and story. In order to create that personal connection, I used personal items as part of the storymaps. These included items from my home, my immediate locality, gifts from *Ngurambang* (Country) and my *miyagan* (family) as well as my own personal belongings. Using these items created connection, displaying truth and respecting my *buyaa* (law) and the interconnection of all *Ngurambang* (Country). Respecting storyteller/participants, their stories and their *Ngurambang* (Country) is my responsibility under *buyaa* (law) which in turn shows respect to my *Ngurambang* (Country). My respect is demonstrated in how I reflect storyteller/participants' stories, their truths and knowledges. *Yindyamarra wudhagarbinya gulgandarra yarra*, (*yindyamarra* listens before speaking) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.86). *Yindyamarra bala-yindyang* (*yindyamarra* is patient, slow and soft), (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.52). *Yindyamarra giilang ngiyawaygunhanha giilang giilangyaldhaany murun-wi-gi-nya* (*yindyamarra* is always the story that the storyteller lives and breathes) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.79). These songline/storymaps also contain, hidden, a piece of my *Ngurambang* (Country), *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country) from Mudgee and *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers). This represents me the researcher in the story, the quiet listener. This quiet listener sits, honours and respects storyteller/participants knowledge through *yindyamarra*.

In the songline/storymaps and guides there is repetition of both item and the meaning which the item/gift carries, however this explanation and guide are integral to each storyteller/participant's songline/storymap. Repetition is a vital component our First Nations deep memory process, the process we use as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to create our Songlines, ensuring archiving and sharing of knowledge. This repetition is a visceral part of my process creating songline/storymaps, the mantra of process ensuring *yindyamarra* in the telling of the stories. The words of the

storyteller/participants are not written at this point of their story and knowledge sharing. At this stage, we follow our First Nations ways - oral form in my mind then translated into pictorial form. Their words are written later in the *dyirridyirri* (willie wagtail) and *dhundu* (black swan) chapters.

Our yarns and storying occurred in two locations, *Rubbi* and Derby, they took place where possible, and mostly on the *Ngurambang* (Country) of the storyteller/participant or their family/connections. There were individual and group yarns which occurred over a period of two weeks, with a follow up after three months. The yarns and stories were both unrecorded and recorded utilising a First Nations deep memory process as detailed in the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) chapter. This process concentrates on the linking and connection of stories in yarns of the storyteller/participants and *Ngurambang* (Country). The priority was the flow of knowledge and focusing on *murruway marambul* (proper way) and the visceral interconnectivity of all things on *Ngurambang* (Country), rather than English words. The yarns were semi structured to the extent that the storyteller/participants were asked at different stages of the yarn: What programs do you think work in communities? What are the difficulties faced by First Nations communities and organisations in delivering and developing these programs? Does the *Mibbinbah* BTBYCB program and its approach work, and if so, why? The storyteller/participants were left to explore these questions without interruption and to then lead the yarn in whatever direction they chose. The storyteller/participants were firstly the CEO of a *Rubbi* based First Nations community organisation delivering programs to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and communities in urban and remote areas of the Kimberley, then the facilitators/community members of that organisation, as individuals and as a group. The CEO and chief facilitator of *Mibbinbah* were yarned with as a group. The final yarns were with members of the Derby community, who were also facilitators on various community led programs.

CEO P was chosen as a storyteller/participant because of his extensive work over multiple organisations working in First Nations communities. He also had extensive connection to these communities through his marriage into the *Yawuru* mob. His role as CEO included funding applications, program selection, delivery and evaluation. I use both *Noongar* and *Wiradjuri* words in this map as CEO P is a *Noongar* man. In have also included *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) because in the *Whadjuk* language of the Noongar people, CEO P is called *wardung* (crow) which is culturally important as part of *wardungmaat* (male ceremony, moiety in *Whadjuk*). *Waagan* (crow) also being my totem, was very significant to both of us and during our yarn *waagan* (crow) was *yarra* (talking) above us. This reminded me of my instructions from *Mudyigang* (Elders) that I must use *winhangarra* (listening, hearing, thinking) when *waagan yarra* (crow talks), reinforcing my commitment to *yindyamarra* when relating CEO P's knowledge through story. Beneath the *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) is a hidden piece of my *Ngurambang* (Country), representing me as the quiet listener, by respecting CEO P's knowledge and experience with *winhangarra* (listening, hearing, thinking), the truth CEO P brings to his story to be highlighted and heard.

CEO P's map is placed upon a print by *Warlpiri* artist Lee Nangala Gallagher. This is *Yankirri Jukurrpa* (Emu Dreaming in *Warlpiri*) and is a story of the *yankirri* (emu in *Warlpiri*) and *wardilya* (bush turkey in *Warlpiri*) (Gallagher L. 2024). This *Jukurrpa* (Dreaming in *Warlpiri*) belongs to women from the *Nangala/Nampijinpa* kinship groups and men from the *Jangala/Jampijinpa* kinship groups who are connected to the place on *Warlpiri* Country called *Ngarilikurlangu* (Gallagher L. 2024). I chose this fabric because *yankirri* (emu in *Warlpiri*) takes on the role of looking after his chicks, and CEO P spoke frequently of his family. Also, as a part of this story, after a fight with *yankirri* (emu in *Warlpiri*), *wardilya* (bush turkey in *Warlpiri*) takes off to the north. CEO P also made this journey to the far north. This is a *Walpiri* story, an important story, and it is knowledge which has been shared and then repeated with *yindyamarra* (Gallagher L. 2024).

Encircling this map is money which signifies the position of funding to CEO P's life and his organisation's dependence upon funding to deliver their services. During our yarn, he spoke of the importance that his organisation does not charge communities for the programs and services which it delivers. The result is that funding becomes core to their planning and success. However, this also equates to a time-consuming labour and cost intensive process of funding applications and evaluations. Travelling through

CEO P's map are seed pods from a poinciana tree which indicate his tracks or journey through life, these pods come from the tree in my front yard.

Beginning in the bottom middle of CEO P's map are the *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) as mentioned above denoting the cultural importance of *waagan* (crow) to us both. There is a book detailing British colonialism and a model skyscraper representing British incursion and violent settlement onto *Noongar Ngurambang* (Country). On top of the book is a resistance band and boxing glove encircled in the embrace of an Aboriginal circle - this signifies the ongoing resistance of *Noongar mayiny* (peoples) to invasion. Sitting in a *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood, where we keep our precious items including our babies) is a picture of a fighting Irishman entwined with yellow and blue feathers. This represents CEO P's heritage of *Noongar*, Irish and Swedish (national colours of blue and yellow). Next is the *gadi* (snake), sitting on top of blue and green stones, representing *Wagyl* (the water python in *Whadjuk*) who created the water around *Boorloo* (Perth). There is green cloth with blue sticks, on top of which is white and black *gawuraa* (feathers) from the *dhundhu* (black swan). This represents the Swan River in *Boorloo*. Next to the *bila* (river) are seed pods from the ghost gum, a sacred tree which holds the *dhulubang* (spirits) of *Balumbambal* (ancestors). The seed pods represent CEO P's three children living in *Boorloo*.

Moving clockwise around CEO P's map following the poinciana seed pod tracks, next is the yellow sticks and yellow tennis ball. These represent the *stairway to the moon* of *Rubbi*, with the pearls and pearl shell representing the colonisation of *Rubbi* and the violent mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples. These items reflect CEO P's move there from *Boorloo*. Next to these are the book *Songlines* (Neale & Kelly 2020), with an Aboriginal beanie and ghost gum pods on top. These signify CEO P's marriage and entrance into the embrace of the *Yawuru* people and the cultural knowledge and lore held by the families of his wife.

We next move to the top left corner, we follow the tracks which go around and come back, as does all First Nations life, circular and connected. There is a broken ball, ripped blue bear broken, turned over toy cars and trucks and a teddy bear wearing handcuffs. These sit atop a police hat and police badge. These items represent CEO P's first job in *Rubbi* working in child protection and the difficulty of that job - broken families and especially broken children. Sitting also on the police cap are an orange level and ghost gum pods. The level represents the need to balance SEWB of families with community needs. However, there are also the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong

feathers), which are next to the hat and signify change because in *Wiradjuri* stories when the *durrawan* (currawong) gather and sing, it signifies a change in season. This is the hope to undertake work and programs which change families and communities to arrest interaction with colonial systems, it also signifies the need for colonial systems to change the ways they see First Nations *mayiny* (peoples).

The songline/storymap next journeys back to the left where there is the *dinawan* (emu) caller signifying men. This represents CEO P's next job with the MOSAC. CEO P told me how when he first started at MOSAC it only had five staff members, but now after many years it had grown to over thirty. This is represented by the tools, signifying his work *building up* the organisation and its programs. Sitting on the weight is a teabag and underneath the weight is a pink soap powder holder which represent MOSAC's *drop-in* service in *Rubbi* so men can have a yarn over a cuppa and do their laundry at the same time. Underneath the *dinawan* (emu) caller is a weight with *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) - these are the programs MOSAC operates, hoping to build strength, resilience and create change in men to strengthen families and Community.

Journeying to the middle top is a black *Mibbinbah* t-shirt which represents the BTBYCB program. On top of this are the black roses and silver heart with black lace and broken ghost gum pods. These represent suicide and its effects, breaking spirits, families and communities. These also show the first time MOSAC used *Mibbinbah* to deliver their BTBYCB program as part of suicide prevention. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) and whole ghost gum pods symbolise when CEO P yarned about the change that the BTBYCB program creates in Community, helping to make families whole again. On top of the *Mibbinbah* t-shirt is a weaving spindle, a symbol used by *Anmatjere* artist Clifford Tjapaltjarri Possum to demonstrate love (Possum 1996). I use this symbol to create further connection with CEO P as a painting by Clifford Tjapaltjarri Possum's daughter, Michelle Nungarrayi Possum, hangs in my house (Possum 2009). This signifies the love which the BTBYCB program creates, and which is necessary to generate healing in communities. The weaving of love tendrils come off the spindle and connect many parts of CEO P's map.

In the top right-hand corner is a circle of brown wrapping and sitting inside this circle is a representation of a *larrkardiy* (*boab tree in Yawuru*) made with branches from one growing in a park near my house. Inside the circle is a compass, binoculars, ghost gum seed pods and on top of the *larrkardiy* (*boab tree in Yawuru*) is an

Aboriginal bracelet circle. These items are a representation of remote Aboriginal communities in the Kimberley that MOSAC services with its programs, including BTBYCB. On the corner of the brown wrapping are the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) of change, which is what the programs seek to achieve. The *larrkardiy* (boab in *Yawuru*), which is a constant in these remote communities, is important as it provides water, food and medicine. The *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) in this map is medicine and it represents *bagaray bang* (a rebalancing, a healing). This is what CEO P has yarned about, the important of creating positive change, change being central and integral to First Nations Cultures.

Moving clockwise is a wooden fence, a prison holding the bodies of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). Inside the prison walls is a metal cage with broken ghost gum seed pods and this is the cage which holds the broken *dhulubang* (spirits) of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) when in prison. On top of the wooden prison fence is a police baton, and on top of the cage is a closed lock - these represent the mindset of the colonial legal system, closed to First Nations law and Culture. With the lock is an orange label with keys symbolising the negative labels and narratives attached to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and that are key to colonial repression. However, also in the wooden walls are whole pods and the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers), of change. This is CEO P's yarning and sharing with me about MOSAC delivering the BTBYCB in prison as an alternative, as sometimes it is difficult to deliver programs to remote communities. By delivering the programs in prison, it can create change in people so when they leave prison, they take that change and healing with them back to *miyagan* (family) and Community.

Next are application forms with money sitting on top, a calculator, reading glasses and a silver pen. These signify the funding process and the "Key Performance Indicators" (KPIs) of auditors and accountants, represented by the calculator, glasses and pen. This is the tension of having to "fit" programs into artificial parameters to ensure their delivery to communities. It is the inapplicability of a numbers game to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) who only represent 3% of the total national population, yet 36% of its total prison population (ABS 2024a; 2024b). The frustration of attempting to explain how changing one life through a program can have a *knock-on* positive effect and healing for families and communities beyond that one person.

Sitting in the middle of the map, signifying its central importance, is a *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) encompassed within a green and brown

rope. *Yindyamarra dhurang-ga marru-wa-nha gulaman* (*yindyamarra* is in the bark that forms a coolamon) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.73). The rope is First Nations Culture which touches and surrounds all First Nations life holistically as all is connected. Inside the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) are the ghost gum seeds pods of Community, headphones representing listening, and my *babiin*'s (father's) pocket watch representing taking time. This centers how communities must be listened to and time taken to consider Culture in all matters which effect communities. This *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) of importance is tied securely by a rope to funding. *Yindyamarra bala yambuwan* (*yindyamarra* connects all that we have spoken about, *yindyamarra* is everything) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.88).

Storyteller/Participant: B



Figure bula (2.) Songline/storymap for storyteller/participant B.

This storymap sits on the artwork of *Warlpiri* artist Lynette Nampijinpa Granites from *Warlukurlangu* Artists of *Yuendumu* and it is titled *Fire Country Dreaming* (Granites 2023). Starting in the left bottom corner travelling clockwise, this part of the songline/storymap represents and pays homage to B's Māori heritage through a greenstone, silver fern, *wild kiwi* buff and New Zealand passport. There is water in both directions signified by the green and blue sticks and blue and green glass beads, representing Aotearoa (New Zealand) as an island and the journeys which B has

undertaken. There is also personal connection in these items which strengthens and creates relationality between B and this researcher, the passport and greenstone belong to my *yinaa* (wife) and the other items my *ngamurr* (daughter).

Moving clockwise, remembering a pivotal story B told me when yarning at a BBQ about a trip he took to France and meeting a shaman from South America. This had great significance for his life and how his journey unfolded, leading him to Australia to work in the central desert and Western Australia, eventually marrying a *Yawuru* woman and having children. This story is represented by the dressmake/fashion model adorned with French colours and French rooster and croissant sitting on Quechua Peruvian beanie, small lama, and silver necklace with Indigenous South American pendant, with rainforest bird feathers inside the beanie for the shaman. These personal items also create connection as they are from my time in Peru, speaking to Indigenous Peruvians and a shaman. Next is my *babiin*'s (father's) pocket watch/stopwatch, sitting in the protection of a tree pod and representing *Ngurambang* (Country) protecting time, remembering my yarning with B about the importance of taking your time in Community.

Next is a depiction of the *Rubbi* Cemetery surrounded by a white fence, the red teardrops and letters placed to represent individual headstones and people, with the glass tiles amongst the headstones signifying B's project. This project is the creation of headstones by the deceased's *miyagan* (family), the decorating of headstones to tell the story of that person's life and bringing the *miyagan* (family) together. The men building the headstone and seated around the headstone and the women and children joining in the design, creating a time of healing for the *miyagan* (family). This creates a place where the *miyagan* (family) and community can come and sit and read the story of that person's life in pictures, creating the circle which is First Nations Culture. The spotlight to the left represents this mob and B's wish to bring people through the cemetery and *shine a light* on this special place. The banana peel is my yarn with B about banana trees in his backyard and his use of the whole tree not just the banana. This emphasises B's thinking *outside the box*, repurposing and not discarding but working with what he has and the importance of looking beyond the shiny sweet *gift*.

Throughout the map are groups of nuts from under a ghost gum tree which represent different communities that B has worked in and with. Importantly for mob, ghost gums signify the presence of *dhulubang* (spirits). The yellow sticks and ball represent the *stairway to the moon* of *Rubbi* and its significance to the mob from there,

the cemetery and where B lives and works. The forms and money show the difficulty of funding KPIs and applications, however sitting atop this is the owl wearing ceremonial painting. This represents B's acquired wisdom and his knowledge of life, utilising wisdom to navigate the processes of funding. The *dinawan* (emu in *Wiradjuri*) acknowledges the naming of B as the emu by his wife's community the *Yawuru* mob. It is the male *dinawan* (emu) whom stays and nurtures the *marrung* (eggs) and chicks, the little pegs with pink represent B's children. This also acknowledges the story of *dinawan* (emu) in the sky flying above us and helping us to see and understand what is happening. This has significance for the work B has undertaken in Community, that he continues to do and wishes to do in the future. There is also a *waagan gawuraa* (crow feather) as *waagan* (crow) was talking during our yarn in the cemetery and then followed us to B's house where he continued to yarn with us - always reminding me of my responsibilities, to listen, honour and respect the knowledges B was sharing with me.

The tools, spanners, shifters, screwdrivers and little trucks speak to B's learned skills and his ability to pack loads to travel onto *Ngurambang* (Country) and meet with remote communities, highlighting his resilience and resourcefulness. It also represents how he came to work for the MOSAC because these were skills which were in demand alongside his social work skills. The thermometer, bandages and mask speak to the motorbike accident and resultant recuperation which brought B to *Rubbi*. In the centre of the map, is a chef's knife, coat and grater which represent B's time as a chef in the central desert. In the heart of the centre is a greenstone *Hei-tiki* (symbolizing protection, fertility and childbirth in Māori culture) to represent B's father, an important figure in his life. B's father worked with communities in Aotearoa and Central Australia as a social worker which influenced B's worldview. Also featured in the centre is an emu caller from Katherine representing B's calling as the *dinawan* (emu) and as a facilitator in community. Surrounding the centre touching and connecting all the different parts of B's story is the rope which binds and connects everything together. We yarned about the circular connecting nature of *Ngurambang* (Country), Culture and Community. Around B's story and connecting his story are open pods from the poinciana tree. Whilst this tree is an introduced species, it thrives in the tropical environment and has become "naturalised" in Australia, its wide umbrella canopy providing shade and protection in hot climates. This is a metaphor for B as a First Nations man from Aotearoa thriving in the warmth of Australia, his wide-open arms and spirit providing

protection for our mob. The pods are the tracks of his journey - not a journey of straight lines nor meandering but winding purposely - asking and then answering the question: what am I doing here? Touching lives across the continent along the way.

Surrounding the songline/storymap and moving into and out of the pieces are the seed pods of the poinciana tree, the pods are the tracks of B2's journey which is not a journey of straight lines or meandering but questing, stopping to investigate then re-starting and returning to places and people that matter. The journey pods also reflect the immensity of the distances B2 travels in his work. This poinciana tree has a very wide canopy which offers shelter, shade and protection to people, plants and animals. This tree also represents B2's spirit because its qualities reflect his love of, commitment to and generosity towards Community. It represents our first meeting in *Martuwarra* when B2 had just returned from a long arduous, and perhaps pointless, journey and was quite angry. He had just bought his lunch when he was approached by an Uncle telling him a story about his brother. B2 stopped, listened then asked the Uncle if he had eaten. The Uncle said he hadn't and B2 then proceeded to give the Uncle his lunch. This spoke of B2's character, his generosity and his commitment to *miyagan* (family), Community, *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture.

Beginning this songline/storymap in the bottom right corner is folded up blue fabric printed with the *Water Dreaming* artwork by *Warlpiri* artist Chantelle Nampijinpa Robertson (Robertson 2024). On top is a large shell with a piece of coral and gold jewellery, seeds of the ghost gum and woollen beanie made with the colours of the Aboriginal flag, surrounded by a circle of driftwood beads. This represents B2's home in *Jambinu* (Geraldton) on the Indian Ocean, the beauty of the beaches and its *Ngurambang* (Country), the gold signifying the arrival of extractive colonisers for mining. The nuts/pods are collected from under a ghost gum and as mentioned, for mob this is an important tree as it holds living *dhulubang* (spirits). In this map, the nuts/ pods represent mob/Community, the woollen beanie represents the need for protection and shelter from the winds of *Jambinu*, with a wider meaning about the protection provided by Culture, Community, *miyagan* (family) and *Ngurambang* (Country). It also demonstrates the holistic nature of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), the 'knitting' of Community, language, *miyagan* (family), *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture.

Moving clockwise in this journey is the badge, handcuffs and baton of the police and the colonial legal system, signifying B2's intersection with them as well as the clash these institutions have with so many First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). The black rope encircling these items, represents the continual loop of our interactions with western "justice". Next are the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers). When *durrawan* (currawong) comes on *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country) in *galang* (many) and sing

their *babirra* (song), they tell us seasons are changing. The groups of *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) in this map represent change. The journey of B2 is about change, both creating change in himself, in his life and helping others to create change.

Journeying to the left bottom corner are pods from a Norfolk Pine and a *gandhalwurr* (turtle), this is a depiction of my yarning with B2 about hunting and the differences of hunting between the *Yamatji* of *Jambinu* and the *Yawuru* of *Rubibi*. In *Jambinu*, it's mostly land hunting. The pods of the Norfolk Pine, collected on *Yuin Ngurambang* (Country) in south-east New South Wales, are loved by local *bundharry* (kangaroo) there. *Yuin Ngurambang* (Country) is very important to my *miyagan* (family) as many of us grew up there and it was a safe place for us. It is also a place my *babiiin* (father) hunted and later took me hunting. This yarn about hunting formed an important relational connection between B2 and myself. The *gandhalwurr* (turtle in *Wiradjuri*) on the map represents the hunting in *Rubbi* around the sea and inlets. Above this are the bougainvillea flowers, a beautiful plant however covered with as many thorns as flowers. This represents B2's mother, a strong Blak woman (as are many of our women) with a beautiful *dhulubang* (spirit) but with thorns. Colonialism's detritus making relationships between men and women, at times, problematic. The bougainvillea from my garden but native to Peru, also represents a connection amongst all First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and a specific yarn with B2 about my connection to and experiences of living and working with the *Kakataibo* of the Amazon - a link between First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) across *bangalngaarran-gaarra* (the whole earth), from *giranggawu* (east) to *dhurbuwunhanha* (west), *balima* (north) to *guya* (south).

Next is a mobile phone sitting on B2's journey poinciana pod, this represents the story B2 told me of his search to find his *miyagan* (family) and his *babiiin* (father) in *Rubbi*. He described the role of social media in this search and it echoed a story often repeated in many First Nations lives in this country, being dislocated by the traumas of colonialism and seeking reconnection to *miyagan* (family), Community, *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture. The phone is connecting between the bougainvillea and the thistle. The thistle, kilt pin and tartan represent B2's father and his Scottish surname. The thistle is the national flower of Scotland, and it not only represents his father's heritage but also their relationship - the beautiful flower the final arrival at a relationship but the many thorns signifying the difficulty of reaching that point.

Continuing around the outer circle, next is a spindle with weaving material sitting on ghost gum pods and connecting to black roses and a silver heart. The spindle is from the work of *Anmatjere* artist Clifford Tjapaltjarri Possum (Possum 1996). As mentioned above, I chose him as I have a link through an artwork by his daughter Michelle Nungarrayi Possum (Possum 2009). Tjapaltjarri uses the spindle to represent love and this in turn represents B2's love of Community and his love of doing work in Community. It depicts B2's beginning as a volunteer and the emphasis he placed on helping, doing the work, giving back and reciprocity. The black roses and silver heart represent the problem of suicide in the Kimberley and the colonial trauma which breaks down First Nations SEWB, the black circling rope representing cycles of trauma. The work that the program and B2 undertake is the spindle weaving of skills and love for Community, which is helping Community deal with this endemic problem.

The circle journey continues to the money and funding application forms, the yarn between B2 and I about funding. B2 said the process of funding is problematic, especially the lack of understanding of the difficulties of the process, the box ticking of KPIs and its competitive nature. The book *The Lions Share* (Porter 1975) represents how British colonialism and imperialism by design has created gatekeepers and politics of conflict and schism in communities (the Wétiko Disease, refer to *Durrawan* Chapter). This book is surrounded by another circle demonstrating how this process continues to reinfect and retraumatise First Nations communities. Next is the yellow sticks and yellow ball representing the *stairway to the moon* of *Rubbi* where B2 now lives and works. This leads to the circle of *Bimara* (the Rainbow Serpent in *Yawuru*) who created and shaped the landscape, the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) meaning change, the broken ghost gum pods signifying broken spirits but then the healing symbol of the whole pods. This speaks to the work B2 has done with domestic and family violence, creating change, restoring families and restoring Community.

Continuing around the circle is the prison, the wooden circle surrounding the wire cage containing the *dhulubang* (spirits) of *miyagan* (family), with Community *locked out and away* from prisoners. Inside the circle is a further circle, the chain of incarceration surrounding the wire cage with broken ghost gum pods inside, representing the broken spirits of prisoners. On top are the keys with an orange label holder, representing the racist labels of “violent”, “criminalised”, “deviant” and “untrustworthy” which are imposed on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). Ultimately, on top of the prisoners is the heavy weight of the lock/the incarceration pressing down on

them. However, next to the prison is the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) of change, representing B2's work with prisoners delivering the BTBYCB program and helping to facilitate change. Importantly, noting the ability of the program to include personal life experiences, create relationships and bridge the "facilitator" and "participant" gap.

Next to and linking with the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) is the weaved basket of whole ghost gum pods, with darts attempting to pierce the basket. The darts have fletching of blacked out Australian flags, these darts represent the settler colonial institutions trying to pierce strong changed communities. The weaved whole pods are healed communities - healed in our way, rebalanced, restored, comforted, healthy. This is the *bagaray bang* (a rebalancing, a healing). This represents the point in my yarn with B2 when I asked if the cultural programs would work instead of prison and his strident reply was, 'Shit yeah!'. B2's insight in this comment is not just from his work, but also from his own life experience of being in prison. B2 yarned that this alternative approach could break people out of the cycles of re-offending and out of the colonial legal system, but it would need to *weave in* all of the other important elements such as housing and jobs. It must be Aboriginal created and delivered because that gives the confidence and strength to mob to change. The gym equipment next to the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) is also part of B2's personal lifestyle change, the darts are his hobby and are also an important symbol of the vicarious trauma which First Nations facilitators, program providers and organisations experience when working in communities which are devastated by colonialism and the need to find ways to deal with that trauma.

In the centre of the concentric circles of the songline/storymap are two more circles that are linked. The first is a circle of ghost gum pods which represent the *dhulubang* (spirits) of Community. Circles signify the cyclic ways of our Cultures, protection and holistic SEWB - our continuum. The poinciana pod is B2's journey into Community and then his being with Community. The pocket watch/stopwatch selection is important as this is the watch which *stops* western time. It is cradled in a natural *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) which carries vital things for Community, whether babies (our future) or water or food. The stopwatch/pocket watch is the centrality of *stopping and taking time*. I yarned with B2 at length about the importance of this in Community, respecting the process of forming relationships, establishing trust and respect. The time that it takes to travel to Communities, how the

distance seems to place these Communities beyond the sight and care of governments, but they remain within our First Nations sight. The watch is also the time needed to be spent with *Mudyigang* (Elders).

Completing the journey are the headphones which speak to my yarn with B2 about the importance of listening and the need to sit and listen deeply. B2 expressed how no one listens to mob - not western governments, institutions nor programs. *Waagan* (crow) was talking in the background of this yarn, reminding us of the importance of listening and being respectful, and this is why I placed his *gawuraa* (feather) over the headphones. The headphones are circled by orange cords connecting back to Community and time, reminding of their connections and the holistic nature of our Cultures. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) are also present, speaking of the changes that B2 and Community are making through *winhangarra* (listening, hearing and thinking) and using *murruway marambul* (proper way).

Storyteller/participants: Rubbi Group (S, TJ and B2)



Figure bulabu bulabu (4.) Songline/storymap for the Rubbi Group of storyteller/participants.

This songline/storymap brings together three stories of three people – S, TJ and B2 - and their *murru* (journeys), ultimately forming one story, a songline through collective yarning. This is *ngaligungu murru* (our journey). These three streams of knowledge are appropriate as *ngadhu ngurrigiilang Wiradjuri gibirr* (I am a proud Wiradjuri man) and the Wiradjuri people are known as the people of the *bulangumbaay bila* (three rivers). The knowledge contained within these three flows is received with *yindyamarra* - *yindyamarra bala mugumnawa yanguu* (*yindyamarra* is inside the song of running water) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.32).

This project is conducted with *yindyamarra*, it is the Wiradjuri way - *yindyamarra ngalan-guranha giilang* (*yindyamarra* lights the stories) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.26). Songlines have stretched across this continent since *gudyiin*

(ancient time) and are our way of storing, carrying and transferring our knowledge. I have utilised *yindyamarra winhangarra* (respecting, listening, hearing, and thinking) during the time yarning with the *Rubbi* Group, this is to honour and respect the knowledge which they are passing to me in their story, *mawbuwarra ngaa-mi-nya-gu, wudhargarbinya wudha-dhuray-gu, wingangarra gulbali -gu* (looking to see, listening to hear, learning to understand) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.17).

This respect is my responsibility under *buyaa* (law), the respect for *Ngurambang* (Country) of the *Rubbi* Group shows respect to my *Ngurambang* (Country). My respect is reflected in how I relay their stories, their truths and knowledges. *Yindyamarra wudhagarbinya gulgandarra yarra* (*yindyamarra* listens before speaking), *yindyamarra bala-yindyang* (*yindyamarra* is patient, slow and soft) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.52). *Yindyamarra giilang ngiyawaygunhanha giilang giilangyaldhaany murun-wi-gi-nya* (*yindyamarra* is always the story that the storyteller lives and breathes) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.79).

The three stories are placed on three separate pieces of base fabric whose Dreaming stories have significance for each storyteller. On the right of the map, B2's story is placed upon *Women's Travelling Dreaming* by *Warlpiri* artist Maureen Nampijinpa Hudson, speaking to the journey of finding family (Hudson 2024). The middle fabric is *Mina Mina Dreaming* by *Warlpiri* artist Pauline Napangardi Gallagher. *Mina Mina* is an important women's site on the Western Australian border and the Dreaming story tells of women's journeys (Gallagher P. 2024). This artwork was chosen as the researcher travelled from Queensland to Western Australia to listen to the storyteller/participants and the story of S is placed on this fabric. The fabric base on the left is *Emu Dreaming* by *Warlpiri* artist Lee Nangala Gallagher and this has been chosen as the story of the *yankirri* (emu in *Warlpiri*) is one which crosses this continent through Songlines, in much the same way as stories are told in yarns across the continent (Gallagher L. 2024). TJ's story is placed here. It also acknowledges the *dinawan* (emu) in the sky flying above us, helping us to see and understand what is happening, like the role that TJ plays in his Community and his work.

This songline/storymap is bordered by the poinciana seed pods from my front yard, a tree with a wide sheltering foliage. This signifies the protection and comfort that the *Rubbi* Group and their work offers mob in Community. When the seed pods are open, they leave husks with etchings representing *murruway* (tracks) and these *murruway* (tracks) are their journeys in their life, their knowledge collection.

Starting the storymap guide in the bottom right corner is B2. There is the turtle, the seeds of the Norfolk pine, seed pods of a ghost gum tree, gold jewellery, a tartan ribbon, and a circle of Aboriginal beads. These items represent B2's early life in *Jambinu* and the *gandhalwurr* (turtle) and Norfolk pine seeds signify hunting. I collected the Norfolk pine seeds during a trip to *Yuin Ngurambang* (Country), a significant place for my family where the *wambuwny* (grey kangaroo) feed on these pods. Hunting on land and water links B2 to his *miyagan* (family) and the *Yawuru* in *Rubbi*. The tartan ribbon is acknowledgement of B2's heritage in Scotland, the gold is the colonial mining quest, the coveting and then the taking and desecration of *Ngurambang* (Country). The Aboriginal beads that encircle the gold point to the connection to *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture that can never be broken, no matter the violence and colonial intervention. This always was, and always will be, Aboriginal *Ngurambang* (Country). The beads touch the ghost gum pods, a sacred tree holding the *dhulubang* (spirits) of our *Balumbambal* (Ancestors). These seeds emphasise the strength gathered from the connection of Community to *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture.

Moving clockwise to S and to his *Ngurambang* (Country) are the yellow sticks and yellow tennis ball, the *stairway to the moon* in *Rubbi*. In *Wiradjuri*, *giwang gadhang-ga* (moon over ocean). Next to the sticks are my wife's mother of pearl necklace and a black pearl, items which are commonly coveted by settler colonisers, but which have always been a part of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) lives as food, within ceremony and importantly as trading goods, moving through Songlines across *Ngurambang* (Country). These items are next to coloured stones of the ocean touching the ghost gum pods of Community, signifying the ongoing presence of *bagaraygan* (Aboriginal peoples). Next are *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers), covering a piece of my *Ngurambang* (Country) and these represent me in this map, the quiet listener practising *winhangarra* (hearing, listening and thinking).

Next to the *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) is brown paper with ghost gum pods inside and a black wallet and this paper is touching blue sticks with orange sticks on top. This is the *Ngurambang* (Country) of TJ at *Martuwarra*, the brown paper encircling the ghost gum pods represents the Community and colours of the *Ngurambang* (Country). The blue sticks with orange sticks on top is the *Maroowarra*, the two orange sticks the two crossings, orange because when I came to *Martuwarra* the *Maroowarra* was flooding and the bridges needed repair. The black wallet is mine and

it is made from *wayal duhn* (kangaroo tail). It represents my yarn with TJ about tracks in the ground, standing next to the *Maroowarra*, connecting us.

Running across the bottom of this map under their stories is a music sheet representing the songlines weaving through each story and the *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) - this is *waybarra-bu ngiyambalagarra, yindyamarra burambabirra wayba-yi* (weaving and yarning together, sharing what has been woven) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.41). I then have *winhangadurinya* (reflected) on this *waybarra gulbanha* (weaving knowing). There is a green and brown rope which connects the stories and inside is the representation of *Rubbi* next to a pink spoon of clothes washing powder and a teabag, this is where the *Rubbi* Group connect in their work at MOSAC, the teabag and washing powder being part of the services provided by MOSAC.

Moving back to the left bottom corner is a return to TJ's story. There is a rodeo belt, rodeo buckle and western hat reflecting his love for, and competition in, rodeos. These are also a statement about the ability of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to adapt and excel when faced with new and challenging circumstances. Despite having violence and dispossession thrust upon them, Aboriginal stockmen became masters of the horse and the colonial pastoral landscape. These are personal items of mine, the rodeo belt belonged to my *babiin* (father) who was a rodeo rider in his youth, still breaking in horses when he was 79! The belt buckle is mine and I bought it when at a rodeo on Turtle Island with my *babiin* (father). These very personal items create a connection of story across the continent, a songline from *Martuwarra* to *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country), and with that connection comes a commitment to share knowledge with *yindyamarra*.

Moving clockwise, next is a police hat, police badge with a skyscraper and black motorbike gloves on top. This represents TJ telling me of his time in the police, the gloves signifying police operations and the skyscraper a symbol for *Boorloo*. This part of TJ's story led to important knowledge and lived experience which he brought back to Community. Next to the hat are the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) signifying the many changes in his life when he moved from *Martuwarra* to *Boorloo*.

Above the police hat is *The Lion's Share* book on colonialism (Porter 1975) on top of which are *burrurgiyan gawuraa* (ibis feathers), a truncheon, a broken ghost gum pod, an intact ghost gum pod and a weaving spindle. *Burrurgiyan* (ibis) is a reviled bird in white Australia, seen as an invasive interloper coming into cities disturbing the "order of things", living on the edges, feeding on the scraps. Labelled the "bin chicken"

to ensure its denigration, indicating distaste and a form of *othering*. This mirrors the racist image painted by settler colonisers of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in Australia, seen as outsiders in our own *Ngurambang* (Countries), unwelcome in settler cities disturbing their artificial tranquillity and forced through colonial policies to the fringes (Subbed In n.d.). TJ noted how mob are treated with profound disrespect by governments, mining workers and individual people - not only in big cities, but in *Rubbi* and *Martuwarra*. The broken ghost gum pod represents how mob have been bludgeoned off *Ngurambang* (Country) by colonial violence, becoming “fringe dwellers” confronted with this colonial narrative determined to break our *dhulubang* (spirits). However, these misconceptions of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) are as wrong as the ones of *burrurgiyan* (ibis). *Burrurgiyan* (ibis) is native and a revered important bird in Culture, a sign of healthy *Ngurambang* (Country) and a functioning ecosystem. This is the knowledge of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), our knowledge of ourselves and our *Ngurambang* (Countries) - the whole ghost gum pod is the resilience of our *dhulubang* (spirits).

The weaving spindle is a symbol used by *Anmatjere* artist Clifford Tjapaltjarri Possum to signify love (Possum 1996). This weaving of love is necessary in our Culture as part of *bagaray bang* (a rebalancing, a healing). This weaving travels through the centre of this map journey. To the right of the *burrurgiyan gawuraa* (ibis feathers) is an Aboriginal beanie with broken ghost gum pods and an Australian passport which sit atop a *Mibbinbah* t-shirt. Significantly, this t-shirt is from the *Mibbinbah National Gathering* conducted on *Yuin Ngurambang* (Country) in October 2023. This gathering was a time of connecting, healing, story and knowledge sharing. These items represent the conflicts of identity faced by First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and the damage inflicted by descriptions and notions of identity imposed by colonial institutions to disrupt First Nations cultural connections on colonised land. This is the meaning of the passport sitting astride the Aboriginal beanie and the broken spirit of the ghost gum pod. However, on top of these items are the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) signifying the change brought about by the BTBYCB program, especially the profound effects on identity as emphasised by TJ. Indeed, the very first issue the BTBYCB program confronts is identity and this is a demonstration of integral importance of identity to Community.

Continuing clockwise is a wooden fence with ghost gum pods and sitting inside is a metal cage containing broken ghost gum pods. On top of the cage are keys and a

locked padlock, with an orange label attached. Sitting across the wooden fence are handcuffs and a medical support bandage and the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers). The wooden fence and metal cage are the prison that sits beside the MOSAC office, next to the police station and across the road from the courthouse - a focal point in *Rubbi*. In this positioning is a stark reinforcement of the colonial project, the short but seemingly inevitable journey of men and women one step from the shelter of Community (MOSAC's building) to the police station, across the street to the courthouse and then back across to the prison.

The wooden fence holds the bodies of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and the metal cage incarcerates their *dhulubang* (spirits). This is where the real damage occurs represented by the broken ghost gum pods inside. The orange label represents the colonial labelling of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) as the “savage” needing caging, restraining and controlling. The handcuffs are the “colonial bracelets”, isolating *bagaraygan* (mob) from their *miyagan* (family). The medical support bandage speaks to a central issue which we yarned about – support. The lack of back up programs after BTBYCB and the lack of support given to *bagaraygan* (mob) whilst in prison and when they are released, particularly the lack of trained First Nations staff and facilitators. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) link to a set of scales, with large denominations of money on one side and small denominations on the other and a level or balance on the scale. There are also ghost gum pods on the scales. On top of, and next to, the scales and wooden prison walls are construction tools. These represent the yarning of the *Rubbi* Group about the large amounts of funding available to construct and run prisons, weighed against the small amounts of funding available to fund programs in communities. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) and building level are the change that must occur to rectify the balance. The *Link Up* lanyard and keys next to the ghost gum pods on the *Mibbinbah* t-shirt represent that the BTBYCB program is a key, a door opener into identifying and raising First Nations issues in Community. *Link Up* is an organisation committed to reuniting families affected by the Stolen Generations and restoring Cultural connection and kinship (Link Up Queensland 2024).

Next are application forms with money and a calculator on top, alongside *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) and a knotted rope connecting to a cake tier with a remote control. The application forms and money represent funding, the calculator the KPIs which are attached to the tiers of government, and the remote

control is a symbol of colonial control through funding. The rope, the strangling of programs by funding mechanisms, programs which are desperately needed in communities. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) further convey the *Rubbi* Group's yearning of the need to change this situation.

Next are compasses, telescopes and binoculars sitting on top of a map. Also, on top of the map are green and blue stones, a toy car, a pod with *murruway* (tracks) burnt into it with a lighter. Around these is Aboriginal knitting encircling ghost gum pods, the knitting then reaching back into and surrounding the centre of the map. These are the remote communities the *Rubbi* Group service and where they are from, the knitting represents the warmth and protection of Culture which embraces Community. The car signifies the immense distances travelled to work in Community, the blue and green stones, burnt pod and lighter alluding to further obstacles that arise when delivering programs in remote areas like that of flooding and bush fire.

Moving down is the book, *The Coroner* (Hand & Fife-Yeomans 2004), on top of which sits black roses, broken and whole ghost gum pods and a silver heart. These represent suicide and mental health issues which were prevalent in yarns with the *Rubbi* Group. However, this is touched by both the knitting, warmth and protection of Culture and the weaving from *the love spindle* (Possum 1996). In the centre of this songline/storymap, encircled by all of the issues which we yarned about, are the answers and solutions to the issues and obstacles faced by the *Rubbi* Group. On the bottom is the *Mibbinbah* t-shirt, on top is cardboard and *larrkardiy* (*boab tree in Yawuru*) branches, sitting next to a dumbbell with *durrawan gawuraa* (feathers) sitting on a mitre hat. The t-shirt represents programs designed by Aboriginal people and delivered by Aboriginal people, the mitre hat is the knowledge which must be listened to and the dumbbell the strength derived from connection to Culture. The cardboard and *larrkardiy* (*boab tree in Yawuru*) branches represent the boab tree which is so important in the Kimberley, providing food, water and most importantly medicines to heal. This is the centrality of healing in First Nations Culture. This is the *bagaray bang* (restoring and balancing) created by these programs in Community, through understanding Culture and *bagaraygan* (mob). The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) signify the positive change which comes with the program. Next is the hand painted *dinawan ngulanha* (emu caller) from Katherine in the Northern Territory. This represents the authentic voice that the *Rubbi* Group yarned about - it's what works, what these programs contain.

Continuing their yarning of what is needed, in the very centre is the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) containing the pocket watch/stopwatch belonging to my *babiin* (father), the ghost gum pods and headphones. This represents taking the time in Community, listening to Community. Sitting connected below the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) is a painted owl, a toy dog wearing a mitre hat with testamur, sitting on syringes and a dream cloth patch encircled by new green poinciana seed pods and the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers). The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) speak to the change that is needed, the syringes represent our yarns about renal clinics, supermarkets and fresh food access as well as job creation. There was a focus on being proactive and preventative, not reactive. The owl is the knowledge and wisdom of Culture, the testamur dog the mixing with new knowledge, the adaption of Culture to change and the *yindyamarra* which must be paid to our Cultures and our knowledges. The green pods are the new journeys, new directions which governments and institutions must take with First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). The dream patch is the *Rubbi* Groups yarning, their dreaming, their created songline. Language is identity, story is songline and songline is knowledge.

use of language, the respecting of others *Ngurambang* (Country) is *murruway marambul* (proper way) - this respect is in turn *Wiradjuri mayiny yindyamarra nga-dhu*, *Wiradjuri Ngurambang yindyamarra nga-dhu*, *Wiradjuri ngiyang yindyamarra nga-dhu*, *Wiradjuri muyulung-ngin-guyliya yindyamarra nga-dhu*, *Wiradjuri buyaa yindyamarra nga-dhu* (respecting *Wiradjuri* people, respecting *Wiradjuri* Country, respecting *Wiradjuri* language, respecting *Wiradjuri* Elders, and respecting *Wiradjuri* law) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.18).

The use of *yindyamarra* is the way our mobs have always greeted each other, stretching into deep history. This is the way we created our Songlines. This research project is reconnecting and renewing songlines over *bangalngaarran-gaarra* (the whole earth). Songlines hold further significance in Jack and Lissa's story as they are both songline carriers, they travel from *giranggawu* (east) to *dhurbuwunhanha* (west), *balima* (north) to *guya* (south), bringing stories and thus knowledge to many mobs. Their storying with me creates a new songline between us, *yindyamarra bala gudhi-dya* (*yindyamarra* is in the song), a passing of new knowledge, experience and connection. *Nginha gudhi bala gudhi-maradhal-bu gudhi-giyira-bu* (the song is the song of the past, and the song of the future) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.45). My *yindyamarra bungany ngu-ng-gilanhi* (giving the gift of honouring, respecting and listening) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.22) to Jack and Lisa, and *bunba-y-marra-nha yindyamarra dumba-l-girri ngulung-ga-girri* (longing for respect, honouring, and listening to be shown in return) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.22) creates a relationality, the personal sharing of story creates a songline. *Yindyamarra* is key to *Wiradjuri* life and as such key to this project, using *yindyamarra* in my yarning with Jack and Lisa creates a process for songlines, *winhangarra bunma-bunma-rra yindyamarra* (learning makes a part of *yindyamarra*), *winhanga-nha bunma-bunma-rra yindyamarra* (remembering makes a part of *yindyamarra*), *marra marra bunma-bunma-rra yindyamarra* (experiencing makes a part of *yindyamarra*) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.59).

Over a long period Jack, Lisa and this researcher have developed a relationship of friendship, respect and trust which has enabled a sharing of story and knowledge, *yindyamarra ngalan-guranha giilang* (*yindyamarra* lights the stories) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.26). It is that personal connection which has created a songline, this process of *yindyamarra*, is further enhanced in their storymap by my use of many personal items. My respect for Jack and Lisa is reflected by the way I tell their story,

their truth and relate their knowledge, *yindyamarra wudhagarbinya gulgandarra yarra* (*yindyamarra* listens before speaking), *yindyamarra bala-yindyang* (*yindyamarra* is patient, slow and soft) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.86; p.52). *Yindyamarra giilang ngiyawaygunhanha giilang giilangyaldhaany murun-wi-gi-nya* (*yindyamarra* is always the story that the storyteller lives and breathes) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.79).

There are two different base paintings which form Jack and Lisa's joint stories, each of these have important links to their Dreaming. On the left of the storymap is Jack's story, this story sits upon the artwork of *Warlpiri* artist Maureen Nampijinpa Hudson titled, *Crow Women* and it tells the story of how crows became black when they were caught in the great fires on *Warlu Kurlangu* (Fire Country), and after being burned in the flames all the crows turned black (Hudson 2024). *Yindyamarra bala bagaray bang bimbarra waganha wuurrawin buguwindya Ngurambang-ga* (*yindyamarra* is the healing fire that dances through the grass in the Country) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.37). *Waagan* (crow) is part of Jack's Dreaming and it is a totem which I share with Jack. *Waagan* (crow) has been around our meetings and yarns from the first moment of *yarra* (talking), signifying connection and *winhangarra* (listening, hearing, thinking). Lisa's story is placed upon artwork by *Warlpiri* artist Chantelle Nampijinpa Robertson titled *Water Dreaming* (Robertson 2024). The place in this painting is *Puyurru* and the owners of this are women from the *Nangala/Nampijinpa* kinship groups and men from the *Jangala/Jampijinpa* kinship groups. It tells the story of two *Jangala* men, rainmakers, singing the rain, unleashing a giant storm and the storm travelling across the Country linking with other Dreaming (Robertson 2024). This is significant for Lisa as her Dreaming is linked to the water, be it salt or fresh water, travelling across the Country in her work, *yindyamarra bala mugumnawa yanguu* (*yindyamarra* is inside the song of running water) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.32). Lisa is also like a great storm, full of power in her convictions. However also like the storm which leaves the life sustaining water in its aftermath, she leaves love, empathy and healing in her wake. These paintings honour Jack and Lisa's cultural connections to the crow and water, safe places for them. Jack and Lisa carry these safe places within them and in turn help to create safe places which are essential to their work.

In the very centre bottom of Jack and Lisa's songline/storymap are *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) covering a piece of my *Ngurambang* (Country.) This signifies

my commitment to telling Jack and Lisa's story truthfully, utilising *yindyamarra winhangarra* (respecting, honouring, listening, hearing, and thinking). Honouring my instructions from *Mudyigang* (Elders) to listen to *waagan* (crow), respect what I am hearing, honour the storyteller and think on the storyteller's words. It requires me to be the quiet listener, *yindyamarra wudhagarbinya, gulgandarra yarra* (*yindyamarra* listens before speaking) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.52).

Surrounding Jack and Lisa's story are sheets of music representing Songlines, their life is encompassed by Songlines. Jack and Lisa carry Songlines from Country-to-Country, reconnecting and repairing what has always been since *gudyiin* (ancient time, the time of our ancestors). On top of the Songlines are the seed pods of the ghost gum tree, home to the *dhulubang* (spirits) of *Balumbambal* (Ancestors). In Jack and Lisa's map, they represent the spirits of Community which guide and look over their work. The pods of the poinciana tree appear as their tracks, this tree having a wide foliage that offers protection and shelter from the weather. This is Jack and Lisa's story - offering safe places for all they encounter doing their work.

This songline/storymap is in two parts which unite to become a whole. To the right of the *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) is Lisa's story. There are ghost gum pods sitting on top of possum fur with some partially completed knitting of an Aboriginal beanie, the knitting moving through Lisa's story into Jack's, connecting all elements of the songline/storymaps. The knitting, and seed pods are Lisa's family and mob, the *Gunditjmara*. The possum skin is the traditional way of the *Gunditjmara* to hold and carry their babies, representing her birth - *yindyamarra buwurr gurrugambirra bangal-ngarra-ngarra* (*yindyamarra* is the possum skin cloak that shelters all) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.38). The strands of knitting are the passion, healing and connection which Lisa knits amongst communities. To the left of the possum skin is a broken truck, sitting under grass and a red heart, this represents Lisa's *babiin* (father). The grass is a part of *Gunditjmara* Culture for the deceased, the grass in situ is evidence that *puit puit chepetch* (the good spirit in *Gunditjmara*) has guided his spirit to the clouds. To the right are the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers), this is *Wiradjuri* storying. When the *durrawan* (currawong) gather and sing it means change of seasons in *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country). In Lisa's songline/storymap *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) signify change and Lisa's relationship with her stepfather. The red teardrops with letters on top honour people passing away into the spirit realm and Lisa's part in helping this process. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) also touch the

broken ghost gum seed pods, indicating a broken relationship. The teddy bear and toy cars are Lisa's children and their importance in her life.

Above the toys is a tight circle of brown paper and inside are ghost gum pods with an owl, sitting on blue stones and binoculars. The brown circle is the protection which Lisa offers to people through her approach to healing. The blue and green stones are Lisa's water Dreaming, the ghost gum pods are the spirits of communities, the owl the wisdom and humility which Lisa has gained and practiced in Community, the binoculars her ability to see *mayiny* (people) and their *dhulubang* (spirit or soul).

Moving back to the *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) at the bottom middle of the songline/storymap, the journey continues to the left for Jack's story. There is a green material with *dhundhu gawuraa* (black swan feathers) and *burrurgiyan gawuraa* (ibis feathers), a wallet made of barramundi *guya* (fish) skin and Norfolk pine seed pods. The cloth represents *Muthi Muthi* Country around Balranald, Lake Mungo, *Kalari* and *Marrambidya*. These *bila* (rivers) are shared between *Muthi Muthi* and *Wiradjuri mayiny* (peoples)), creating and restoring songlines between Jack and the researcher. The *gawuraa* (feathers) and barramundi skin wallet represent the *budyaan* (birds) and *guya* (fish) who come to the *bila* (rivers) and which the *Muthi Muthi* catch. The Norfolk pine seed pods were collected during my meeting with Jack and Lisa on *Yuin Ngurambang* (Country). *Yuin Ngurambang* (Country) holds great significance for my *miyagan* (family) and I. These pods, fed upon by *wambuwny* (kangaroo), signify the importance of hunting kangaroo to the *Muthi Muthi*. The wood and saw are the colonial industry of timber cutting, however sitting on top of these items and encircling them is an Aboriginal necklace indicating the resilience of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and Cultures, restating that this always was and always will be Aboriginal *Ngurambang* (Country).

The ghost gum seed pods in the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) are sitting next to a fashion dummy draped with the French Coq and French national colours, topped by the Aboriginal necklace, signifying that Jack is a *Muthi Muthi* man with French roots as well. Moving along the tracks of the seed pods, there are two white hearts sitting atop broken ghost gum pods indicating broken relationships. Next are football boots with a mouth guard and boxing glove, these are Jack's time with football which stills plays an important part in his life - indeed in most First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) lives. The boots belong to my *ngamurr* (daughter) and the mouth guard is mine, creating further personal connection. The boxing glove signifies the

conflict of Jack's early life. Sitting on the boots are the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) of change. Next to the boots is a toy *mirri* (dog), wearing a mitre board and carrying in his mouth a testamur. Next to the *mirri* (dog) is a tube of Fisocream and sitting on these are more *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers). This speaks to Jack's time at university, his achievements and qualifications, both academic and First Nations. Also acknowledged here are the changes in Jack's life, the meeting with Lisa and the beginnings of *Mibbinbah* as a project.

The songline/storymap moves back to the bottom middle to the *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers). This signifies Jack and Lisa coming together with *Mibbinbah*. Moving along the seed pod tracks through the middle are the black roses of the spectre of suicide which is prevalent and endemic in our communities and which *Mibbinbah*'s work assiduously battles. The silver heart is the love, compassion and empathy which Jack and Lisa bring to this battle. The recorder sits astride Jack and Lisa's shared path and the sheet music, honouring their role in connecting and making new songlines, sharing knowledge with communities to strengthen them to resolve the issues they face.

In the middle of Jack and Lisa's map is the depiction of the *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) which I made using boab branches from a tree growing near my home. The *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) is very important to the people of the Kimberley and it has many uses for water, food, tools and medicine. In the *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) is a passionfruit and the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) of change. Next to it is a weight with a weaving spindle on top, a *Mibbinbah* cup sits alongside the weight. The *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) signifies the healing of *Mibbinbah*'s programs, the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) the change the programs create and the weight is the strength and resilience that is found in communities which is unearthed and reinforced by the programs. The passionfruit is the passion which Jack and Lisa bring to the work of healing. The weaving spindle is a symbol used in the artwork of *Anmatjere* artist Clifford Tjapaltjarri Possum to indicate love (Possum 1996). This love is prevalent and integral in Jack and Lisa's work, teaching people to love themselves, their *miyagan* (families), Community and Culture - *mununbul waybarra mawam-bul bala yindyamarra* (everything weaving together is *yindyamarra*) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.41). The weaving of the spindle moves throughout the map, connecting and encompassing the whole map. Around the *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) are compasses and telescopes indicating Jack and Lisa's journeys bringing *Mibbinbah* and its healing to all corners of the country - *waybarra marramarra*

(weaving making), *yindyamarra burambabirra wayba-yi* (sharing what has been woven), *waybarra winhangarra* (weaving learning) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.41).

The songline/storymap journeys to the left to symbols of colonial violence and imprisonment. These are the wooden fence of the prison, the night stick and handcuffs of colonial violence, holding the ghost gum pods of mob and the metal cage which is their cognitive prison. The lock is the attempt to imprison our spirits and the orange label is the “savage” label attached to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). However, these are connected to the work of *Mibbinbah* by the green and khaki rope of *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture, with the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) of change sitting on top. These signify the change which is brought by connection to Country. The red resistance band is the resistance to colonial institutions, fortified by the resilience and strength of *Mibbinbah* programs.

In the top left corner of the songline/storymap is the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) of protection containing my *babiin's* (father's) watch, headphones without speaker cords and ghost gum pods of Community with the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) of change sitting on top. These reflect the imperative need for change to the current approach of governments, the vital need to take your time in Community and to listen to the knowledges and experiences of Community about their own needs and solutions. The lack of speaker cords signifies the role of listening *and silence* in our Cultures. In First Nations Cultures, silence is valued and especially if words only contain more empty promises - *yindyamarra bala dyilmang ngurunggal galing-ga, guwiiny yabun-dha wiray yarra* (*yindyamarra* is in the silence on the water in the early morning, it is in the word not spoken) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.60). Next to the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) is a level, which sits upon a green rope and connects to money, a book on British colonialism (Porter 1975) and the ghost gum seed pods of Community. The green rope links money, colonialism and the written application forms for funding, a calculator sitting atop of an Aboriginal beanie. The level is a balancing of Community priorities against the “bean counters” of the KPIs so integral to colonialism. This is representative of the struggle the “tug of war” which Communities and First Nations organisations must undergo to secure funding, whilst maintaining the integrity of Culture. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) are the symbol of the changes which must occur to these processes.

The journey moves to the top right-hand corner of the storymap where the application forms and money are surmounted by a remote control and the ghost gum seed pods of Community. This is the control exerted by governments and funders over funding, the attached white rope noose is the strangling pressure and suffocating measures these institutions exert on organisations and Communities to conform to their standards of success and oversight. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) emphasise the changes needed to funding processes to better reflect the reality faced by First Nations organisations and Communities. The green and khaki rope of *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture links and encircles the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) of taking time and listening, indicating the difficulties of funding controlled by western standards of measure or KPIs and the ongoing violence of colonial institutions. It also acknowledges the healing of Culture and Community through resilience, strength and *bagaray bang* which means restored, comforted, balanced, healthy and comfortable. *Nginha-guliya-laa yindyamarra wurrugan, yindyamarra bala yambuwan, (yindyamarra connects all that we have spoken about, yindyamarra is everything). Yindyamarra Wiradjuri murum-wi-gi-nya dumbarra widyungga maldhan-u murun-bu mayiny-dhiyala (yindyamarra, the Wiradjuri way of life, shows how to work and live with people)* (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.48).

Storyteller/Participant: F



Figure ngumbaaybu marrabu (6.) Songline/storymap for storyteller/participant F.

F's songline/storymap is presented on an artwork by *Warlpiri* artist Priscilla Napurulla Herbert titled, *Desert Fringe Seed Dreaming* (Herbert 2023). Encircling this map are seed pods from a ghost gum tree, a sacred home to *dhulubang* (spirits) in our Culture and these seeds represent F's *Balumbambal* (Ancestors). These spirits surround

F's story reflecting his link to his *Ngurambang* (Country) and the holistic nature of our Cultures. Inside this circle of spirits are a further circle of the pods of the poinciana tree reflecting F's journeys and tracks around his Country. In this yarn, as with all storytellers/participants, I have become the quiet listener utilising *winhangarra* (listening, hearing, thinking) then honouring and respecting knowledge through *yindyamarra*. This respect is my responsibility under *buyaa* (law), respect for all *Ngurambang* (Country) shows respect to my *Ngurambang* (Country) as all *Ngurambang* (Country) is connected. *Yindyamarra giilang ngiyawaygunhanha giilang giilangyaldhaany murun-wi-gi-nya* (*yindyamarra* is always the story that the storyteller lives and breathes) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.79). This songline/storymap represents F's and I *waybarra-bu ngiyambalgarra-bu* (yarning and weaving story together) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.41)

Beginning in the bottom left corner then moving clockwise, there are wooden slates from a wharf that extends out over the great tides of Derby, seeking to dominate the Country. The rodeo buckle reflects the cattle industry in which so many of F's mob have been treated violently, however it is also a story of resilience and adaptation over colonial systems as mob became experts in horse and cattle. The mango represents our yarn next to a mango tree and the need for patience and respecting knowledge. Mangos are sweet but if you don't know the right way to pick them, if you don't respect the knowledge, the sap can give you a painful burn.

Next is F's work in domestic and family violence in Community. The *gandhalwurr* (turtle) represents the wisdom he brings whilst the broken ghost gum pods reflect the broken people and spirits. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) signify the change that F works to create in traumatised *miyagan* (families) and the whole pods represent the restoration and healing outcomes of that change. The whole pods sit on scales weighing the process, next to them are a blue balance beam on a ball, a spirit on one end balanced by the *waagan gawuraa* (crow feather). *Waagan* (crow) is an important bird reminding us of law and responsibility. In our Cultures, *bagaray bang* (healing, restoring and balancing) is not about punishment. Surrounding the balance beam is a circle of Aboriginal beads signifying the holistic nature of F's program and its bearing on healing of mob. The police badge, handcuffs and truncheon represent the police and their role in identifying and diverting people to F's program. In this part of F's map, the headphones acknowledge when F told me of the need to listen to people, their stories and what they believe is important to them. The headphones are connected

to a *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) containing my *babiin*'s (father's) pocket watch/stopwatch, the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) is how we protect precious items, indicating the importance of taking the time to listen to Community and *Mudyigang* (Elders).

Next are papers and money representing F's yarn about funding - the process and importance of funding and his excitement at having just received significant funding for an extended period which enabled future planning. This emphasised the uncertainty of funding. Connected to the funding is rope which ties to a book on colonialism (Porter 1975) alluding to ongoing colonial control over funding. The rope also connects to a dumbbell made of lead, zinc and iron which represents mining in the Pilbara, tying funding to mining.

The dumbbell sits next to an Aboriginal beanie representing the warmth and comforting embrace of *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture, sitting on top are *gawuraa* (feathers). The red ones symbolise the *ngarriyaurn* (kite) so prevalent in the Kimberley - the fire bird who helps to start fires for hunting, signifying how all *gagamin* (brothers) and *mingaan* (sisters) in and with *Ngurambang* (Country) have adapted to help one another. *Yindyamalgirridyu mingaangaland-hibu gaagang galandhibu* (I will respect my sisters and brothers). The other *gawuraa* (feathers) of *burrurgyian* (ibis) and *waagan* (crow) signify adaptation and responsibility, paying respect to the warrior *Jandamarra* who famously defended his land and people from colonisers by successfully using their ways - like the gun and horse - against them. This is further represented by darts, with an Australian flag as a fletching which has been covered over with black paint. Adaptation to colonial institutions is also signified by the dumbbell connecting to another *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) containing ghost gum pods representing F's Community. These signify the power and strength which F's mob continues to draw from their ability to use *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture to nourish strong successful communities.

The final part of the songline/storymap is the centre. An inner circle of ghost gum pods representing the presence of F's *miyagan* (family) on *Ngurambang* (Country), next to the weaving spindle representing his love for them (Possum 1996). The *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) is at the centre and the cultural story of this tree is that it was planted upside down to make it humble. This suits F as a very humble man doing important work. The boab is also important as a source of food and medicine through its seeds, roots, inner bark, pulp and water. The inner bark is used for making rope, baskets

and nets and this alludes to F's importance to the Community and his holistic view of his work and life. This boab was created using branches from a boab tree near my home, further connecting our songline. This storymap is *yindyamarra burambabirra wayba-yi* (sharing what has been woven), *mununbul waybarra mawam-bul bala yindyamarra* (everything weaving together is *yindyamarra*) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, pp.40-41).

songlines which stretch west to east north to south across this continent. Our yarning together is *yindyamarra*, restoring what has lain dormant.

Beginning on the middle right side of T's songline/storymap is the steel cage representing the forced removal of his *gunhinarrung* (mother's mother) and *ngabun* (mother's father) as members of the Stolen Generations. Inside the cage and surrounding it are broken seed pods of the sacred ghost gum, a home to *dhulubang* (spirits). These seeds represent the *dhulubang* (spirits) of his *miyagan* (family) and *Balumbambal* (Ancestors), broken spirit from being removed from *miyagan* (family), Community, *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture. The lock and keys represent being kept against their will, the orange label holder the labels put on them to justify removal. Straddling these items is a pencil rubber overlaying onto First Nations cultural symbols, this represents colonial attempts to "erase" Culture through child removal. The yellow lanyard over the seeds is the symbol of *Link Up*, an organisation committed to reuniting families affected by the Stolen Generations and restoring Cultural connection and kinship, showing the resilience, patience and determination of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to reconnect to our Cultures (Link Up Queensland 2024).

Moving clockwise, next is a *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) holding a small ghost gum seed and a larger seed sitting upon glass beads. These represent T's *gunhi* (mother) giving birth to him in the *bila* (river) in Kununurra, holding him in the protection of a coolamon. *yindyamarra dhurang-ga marru-wa-nha gulaman* (*yindyamarra* is in the bark that forms a coolamon) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.73). Next to the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) is a book about British colonialism (Porter 1975) and this represents the racism and violence experienced by T's *gunhi* (mother) when she was turned away from the hospital which is why he was born in the *bila* (river). However, this part of T's story is also one of First Nations resilience and traditional ways triumphing over rejection and racism.

Continuing T's tracks, he journeys back Derby, his *Balumbambal Ngurambang* (Ancestors' Country). On his path are *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) representing change. Derby is signified by the wharf reaching out into the ocean, a colonial structure seeking to dominate the sea, the people and *Ngurambang* (Country). There are also more ghost gum seed pods connected to a western belt and rodeo buckle symbolising the spirits of T's mob and his community. These pods are his *babiin* (father) and *babiinbang* (uncles) who were stockmen, the belt and buckle representing

T's desire to become a horseman like them. It also demonstrates our ability as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to adapt, change and triumph over colonial obstacles. T's songline and mine are connected by the belt, which was made for my *babiin* (father), a horseman and rodeo rider in his youth. The buckle is mine from a trip to a rodeo in Turtle Island with my *babiin* (father). The seeds of Community and *miyagan* (family) are connected by a weaving spindle, this is a painting symbol of love used by *Anmatjere* artist Clifford Tjapaljarri Possum, demonstrating T's love of *miyagan* (family) and Community (Possum 1996).

Next are more *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) indicating another cycle of change in T's life. The *gandhalwurr* (turtle) represents the wisdom and knowledge that T gathers on his journey. Next are the government forms and money alluding to funding, something T and I yarned about. This funding is connected to the football boot, basketball and mouthguard in First Nations colours. This is T's work with youth and community through sport, something that T has loved and is still passionate about. However, the knife connecting the funding to sport represents the cutting of programs which work and the uncertainty of funding.

Moving upwards are more *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) as T changes again to become a police liaison officer in *Martuwarra*. This is symbolised by the police hat, however sitting on the hat is the Aboriginal beanie which speaks to T's role straddling Community and western law. On top of the hats are black roses and a silver heart representing suicide in Community, something which deeply affected T in his work. These hats, with the ghost gum seed pods of Community sit on a set of scales, signify T weighing up this dual role. The binoculars in front of the scales represent T's experience of *having your eyes opened*, seeing the issues, solutions and the need for more Community input and involvement.

Next is a representation of the *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*), a vital source of food through its seeds, roots and inner bark. Its inner bark is to make rope, baskets and nets and its pulp is used for water and most importantly for medicine. It is also the name of where T now works and speaks to his role in the Community doing work which is medicine, which *bagaray bang* (heals, restores and balances) youth. I created this depiction using branches from a single *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) sitting near my house, further connecting our songline.

The next journey is T's present and his passion for sport and its role in the Community, especially with reaching and engaging with youth. The youth program that

T works with is also represented and its success is celebrated in this map. The Weet-Bix symbolises the breakfast and clean clothing provided to all the kids to start their day and the emu collar and Aboriginal necklace represent the artifacts and jewellery that T and other workers make with the youth out on *Ngurambang* (Country), offering them an incentive for attending school. There is a rope with branches through it to represent the *gugaa* (goanna) which T and the youth hunt during the wet season. The *gugaa* (goanna) is one of the main totems of the *Wiradjuri* and we are further connected by the rope which my *wurramany* (son) uses on camping trips. These parts of the map show the power and *bagaray bang* (healing) of Culture and *Ngurambang* (Country). Next to the *gugaa* (goanna) are police handcuffs and baton alongside and *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers). These signify the change that T's program, based in Culture and *Ngurambang* (Country), makes to youth to divert them from interacting with the colonial legal system. The *gugaa* (goanna) also sits next to the headphones and stopwatch in a coolamon. T yarned about the need to listen to the Community in decision making, to take the time to consider consult and include First Nations knowledge. However, also the need for the Community to listen to one another and take the time to become involved to help each other. The green rope is the tug of war of competing interests, the funding from governments and mining and the need to maintain Culture and knowledge.

In the centre of T's map are the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) signifying the need for change. The *gawuraa* (feathers) sit on a calculator which represents the way or method to a solution and this is a symbol for T himself. T yarned about wanting to be part of the solution for youth and the Community in general. T is that solution. The knowledge, wisdom and experience which he brings to his work is respected as reflected in his relationships within the Community. Grounded in Culture, T's work is creating significant positive outcomes. *Nginha-guliya-laa yindyamarra wurrugan, yindyamarra bala yambuwan* (*yindyamarra* connects all that we have spoken about, *yindyamarra* is everything), (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, pp. 88-89).

Wirnparrku, making him very sad. *Yarripiri* journeys through the Northern Territory to the top end in search of his family (Frank 2024). This story echoes P's own story of travelling driven by the importance of his *miyagan* (family). P was born on Central *Arrernte* Country in *Mparntwe* (Alice Springs) and travelled north with his parents to *Larrakia* Country *Garramilla* (Darwin) before coming home to the Kimberley. He emphasised the importance of travelling for his children and his discovery of the importance of all children.

The songline/storymap begins with the seeds from the ghost gum tree, a sacred place where *dhulubang* (spirits) reside, and these represent the spirits of young people. P's story is dominated by the work he does with young people and the significance they have in his life. In the bottom right, there is the green cloth with blue sticks which represent the *Maroowarra* and on top is a wallet made of Barramundi skin, alluding to murals in the town of *Martuwarra*. The two yellow sticks are the crossings over the *bila* (river) and to the east is P's *babiin Ngurambang* (father's Country), *Gooniyandi Ngurambang* (Country). Ghost gum seed pods represent P's *babiin* (father's) mob and the time P spends on this *Ngurambang* (Country). On the river is an English thesaurus (Australian Oxford Mini Thesaurus 2018) representing the language loss around *Martuwarra* that T's *babiin* (father) was worried about, a concern he passed on to P. On top and circling this is the ring of Aboriginal beads signifying the efforts and success of P's mob in restoring and maintaining their language as an integral part of Culture. The drill bit represents attempts in 1979 to drill on Noonkanbah Station by the company Amax with government support and enforced by police (Australian Trade Union Institute 2021). This was strongly resisted by mob and ultimately *Ngurambang* (Country) triumphed as no oil was ever found despite lots of wasted money, reinforcing the agency and sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country) (Australian Trade Union Institute 2021). The station is now owned and controlled by mob. The *gawuraa* (feathers) and darts represent the Bunuba warrior *Jandamarra*, who was known by settlers as "Pidgeon" and infamous for his resistance and rebellion against colonisation. The darts' fletching have Australian flags painted over with black paint signifying *Jandamarra*'s successful use of European weapons against settlers. The darts, necklace and drill bit all highlight the ability of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to successfully adapt when faced with challenges, supported by their deep connections to *Ngurambang* (Country) and Culture.

Moving to the bottom left corner is P's *ngama Ngurambang* (mother's Country), *Murujuga* (the Dampier Peninsula). There is a weight with a lighter sitting on top representing the huge port which takes the iron ore (weight) and gas (lighter fluid) from *Ngurambang* (Country). On top of the weight sits an Aboriginal beanie which speaks to the strength and resilience of mob still maintaining Culture and *Ngurambang* (Country). There are ghost gum seed pods which represent P's *ngama* (mother's) mob and the time spent on her block at *Gulan*. P's *ngama* (mother) is represented by the pencils, rubbers and sharpener tied with the pink ribbon, acknowledging her role as his primary school teacher and her ability to adapt to western education and then help her Community. Sitting on top of a book on colonialism (Porter 1975) is a turtle, a pearl shell pendant and pearl necklace (my wife's). This signifies the deep history of P's mob, hunting turtles, collecting and trading pearl shell and pearls for millennia, and millennia to come, despite colonial attempts to destroy Culture.

Seed pods from the poinciana tree, which come from my garden, represent P's tracks through the map. Two seed pods tracks come from his *babiin Ngurambang* (father's Country) and his *ngama Ngurambang* (mother's Country) and move to the bottom middle of the map. This is P's birthplace in *Mparntwe* and his family's time in *Garramilla*, represented by the emu caller from the Northern Territory sitting on the dark red cloth. Also on the cloth is a *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) with three ghost gum seed pods representing P's *babiin* (father), *ngama* (mother) and him. Two more journey tracks move to a plastic pipe which allows two separate flows into one, this is the two different mobs of P's parents flowing into the one, which is P.

Following the journey pod straight up are *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) representing the change made by P's parents in moving back to Derby. Derby is represented by the wooden pier stretching out over the coloured stones symbolising the ocean. On top of the pier is a level, this represents P's parents wish to move to the Kimberley as it was better *balanced* for their family. The compass on top of the pier signifies that Derby is at the middle of P's *ngama Ngurambang* (mother's Country) to the west and his *babiin Ngurambang* (father's Country) to the East. The ghost gum seed pods are the Community to which P belongs to in Derby, the binoculars signify seeing the Community and its issues through experienced eyes.

Moving to the left are rope, tools, a small telescope and a *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feather). These tools and rope represent P's *babiin* (father) and his work for

the road gangs then starting his own business, first thrashing the roadside followed by dump trucks and removals. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feather) represents the change of one business to another. The tools because he was constantly working with old trucks and equipment, always having his head under the bonnet. This speaks to the resilience and adaptability of P's *babiin* (father) to learn new work, master it and thrive. The telescope is P's admiration, looking up to his *babiin* (father) for what he achieved for the *miyagan* (family).

Next in the top left corner are football boots, a mouthguard in Aboriginal colours and *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers). These items strengthen our connection in storying and songline, the boots belong to my *ngamurr* (daughter) and the mouthguard is mine. These acknowledge P's yarn about his time playing football in *Naarm* (Melbourne). The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) symbolise the change needed to return to the Kimberley to his children.

Moving to the right is a police cap, handcuffs, baton and a car that represent the trouble that P's *ngamurr* (daughter) had with the police after riding in stolen cars. Connected is the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) holding my *babiin* (father's) pocket watch/stopwatch signifying the time P committed to chasing and following his *ngamurr* (daughter) to keep her safe. On top is the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feather) of change when P decided that enough was enough and he had to become part of a change in the youth and in the Community. This is when P became involved in youth and community projects.

Next on the right is a black tie, a Weet-Bix biscuit, washing powder in a pink dispenser, encircled by an Aboriginal bracelet, broken ghost gum pods sitting on a drawing of a *dinawan* (emu). This speaks to P's first involvement working in a program to get children in remote areas into school and help them to stay in school. This was a holistic program represented by the encircling Aboriginal bracelet. The black tie represents the supply of uniforms, the soap powder is the supply of washing machines and other appliances to *miyagan* (families), the Weet-Bix is the supply of breakfast and food to children and their *miyagan* (families) through the program. The broken ghost gum pods are the *miyagan* (families) which are supported through the program. The *dinawan* (emu) is P and his care for youth like the male *dinawan* (emu) who cares for the chicks. There is a rope which also encircles the pocket watch/stopwatch and the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) and connects to the

headphones, this represents the need to take the time to listen to what Communities want, reflected by the holistic response of this program.

Moving to the right corner of the songline/storymap are the paper forms and money which represent funding, on top of this are headphones which represent the need to listen to Community. Sitting on the edge of the forms are a student bear, a calculator, tools and a blue key. These represent the programs which P has suggested, repairing old cars with youth and then taking them out to purpose build safe bush tracks on *Ngurambang* (Country), removing the thrill of stealing and racing cars. The other program providing safe rooms at school for helping with schoolwork or just yarning about problems. These represent the difficulty in persuading funding bodies to listen to community members and to *what will work* in communities. The blue key represents *the key to Derby* - that everyone is related, meaning the Community holds the knowledge to the problems and also the solutions.

Moving down is the representation of the *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*), an important tree that provides food, water and medicine as well as material for making baskets and rope. This tree is also the name of where P works providing programs which *bagaray bang* (heals, restores and balances) youth. This depiction of a *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) has been made using boab branches from a single boab tree sitting near my house, further connecting our songlines. Next to the *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) is a spindle for weaving from the work of *Anmatjere* artist Clifford Tjapaltjarri Possum who uses the spindle to represent love (Possum 1996). This represents P's love of Community and especially his love for working with youth.

Below the *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*) is a BBQ sauce bottle, BBQ utensils and a basketball, symbolising the time P puts into making sure kids have a feed after playing basketball, no matter how late it finishes and not for money but just because it matters. Next to the BBQ utensils are *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) of change reflecting P's view of the importance of helping kids to adapt and make change in their lives to prevent them from interacting with the colonial legal system. Next is a dream sign and dump track which signifies P's dream to own sand trucks and his deep belief in the need to have dreams and aspirations.

Finally, completing the circle is the *gadi* (snake), important in *Gooniyandi Ngurambang* (Country) because weather change comes from four different directions, from four different *gadi* (snakes); *Jangala*, *Joongoorra*, *Jawandi* and *Jawalyi*. The *gadi* (snake) is prominent in P's story as he is from both west and east through his *ngama*

(mother) and *babiin* (father). P travelled south to north as a *bali* (baby) and he now helps to bring change to his Community. *Nginha-guliya-laa yindyamarra wurrugan, yindyamarra bala yambuwan* (*yindyamarra* connects all these that we have spoken about, *yindyamarra* is everything) (Sullivan, Grant Snr & Grant 2016, p.89).

Dyirridyirri / Willie wagtail

Chapter Seven: Discussion Chapter

People should regard their words as seeds. They should sow them and then allow them to grow in silence. Our elders taught us that the earth is always talking to us, but we should keep silent in order to hear her. There are many voices besides ours. Many voices. (Deloria 1992 cited in Howell 2025, p.1)

These songlines/storymaps have been analysed and then themed. However, this has the hallmarks of a western approach, splitting and putting knowledge into separate boxes, perpetuating the harmful myth of objectivity in research and accentuating the dominant worldview. The knowledge contained within these songline/storymaps - the data and the themes within the stories are interconnected. They represent the holistic nature of our First Nations Cultures. They evidence the circularity of our worldviews. We are at the centre of a circle, yet also part of the whole and sitting on the periphery, always encompassed by the circle and the circle is *Ngurambang* (Country). The yarns (data) flow unrestricted like the *bila* (river), going its own way, telling the stories and sharing the knowledge at its own pace. Margaret Atwood (2005) reminds us:

Water does not resist. Water flows. When you plunge your hand into it, all you feel is a caress. Water is not a solid wall; it will not stop you. But water always goes where it wants to go, and nothing in the end can stand against it. Water is patient. Dripping water wears away a stone. Remember that my child. Remember you are half water. If you can't go through an obstacle, go around it. Water does. (p.16)

The previous chapters of this thesis have outlined selection and research processes, the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process and songline/storymap data analysis. These processes are based in *yindyamarra*, blended with *dadirri*, language and relationality, giving agency to *Ngurambang* (Country) (Archibald 2008; Atkinson 2002; Basso 1996; Grant Snr & Rudder 2010; Fixico 2013; Wilson 2008). Even though they make no claim to be a direct representation of traditional cultural practices, they may earn criticism as inauthentic and disrespectful. I would like to reiterate that these processes are intended as a reworking, a revitalisation and homage to the resilience of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and their Cultures (Rose, James & Watson 2003). By

placing First Nations worldviews at the forefront of the research process it affirms the strength, value and continuity of Culture. Collaboration with Country and its inhabitants has always been a part of First Nations Cultures and this collaboration is communication, connection, then becoming knowledge (Rose, James & Watson 2003). My collaboration with *Ngurambang* (Country) and my *gambang* (brothers) and *miimi* (sisters) - the *budyaan* (birds), *balugan* (animals), *guulany* (trees), *bugurr* (plants) and *marradir* (rocks) - is my adaptation and response to the dominant culture of settler colonialism. Rose (1990) reminds us that 'the ties between person and country constitute an intense and enduring solidarity; they exist before the person is born, are manifested throughout the person's life, and continue after death' (p.55).

As described earlier, there are three distinct groups in this research; *Mibbinbah* represented by Jack and Lisa Bulman; *Rubbi* represented by yarning with CEO P, B, B2 as well as the group reflective yarn with B, S and TJ; and Derby represented by F, P, and T, with a group reflective yarn as well. These groups share a commonality through the experience of the BTBYCB program, all but one have been through the program and they are then taking it back into Community as facilitators or messenger/knowledge holders. In this way the project has not only been concerned with the relationality and reciprocity between researcher and participant but also between participant and their communities and families.

In both *Rubbi* and Derby there are prisons dominating the Community reinforcing western dominance and this makes the knowledge of the storyteller/participants so poignant. The storyteller/participants all have personal experiences in dealing with intergenerational trauma caused by child removal, suicide and self-harming, substance abuse, family violence and economic marginalisation. Both communities sit beside beautiful land and seascapes and thus both have an integral strength through close connection to *Ngurambang* (Country), Culture and language. *Rubbi* is a tourist town with caravans and cruise ships, a centre for the pearl trade, tainted by its treatment of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). It is a town where First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) are on the fringes, the shops selling their tourist trinkets are devoid of Aboriginal patrons or staff. First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) move through the streets seemingly wearing a cloak of invisibility, at least to the cognisance of the tourist throng. These "day trippers" of colonialism walk through wallets full, seeking to buy connection, looking to buy Culture. There is a sense of affluence in the streets of cafes, restaurants and pearl sellers, however also a sense that this affluence is reserved for a

select few. Derby is different, perhaps rawer than *Rubbi*. In this town, the settlers are the ones on the fringe. It has the feeling of the frontier, shops shuttered, settlers feeling their ways through the streets, safety to be found in their caravans and cars. At night forming a laager, circling their wagons behind high razor wire topped fences. However, outside these “fortresses” of fear, a vibrant connected Community exists, enriched in their connection to each other, their Culture and to *Ngurambang* (Country).

Our yarns together were wide ranging, unstructured, led by the storyteller/participants speaking of the things that mattered to them. It is their voices which sound clearly through this project, it is their knowledge which speaks in this chapter. The themes of this knowledge sharing are interconnected, each dependent on the other, forming a circularity of dependence. *Funding and Control* are first in the findings because they dominate the minds of all participants whether CEO, facilitator, community member or program provider. The thesis poses the research question: *how do First Nations led on-Country programs address the cultural, emotional and psychological needs of men?* Addressing these issues after the cataclysmic effects of colonial invasion are, at first instance, difficult but weaving the “value added” trauma of funding applications and evaluations make them a monumental task. The storyteller/participants yarns provide insight into the difficulties encountered however, also provide solutions. The storyteller/participants provide the *shopping list* needed to address their *cultural, emotional and psychological needs*. They begin their list with *Listen, Consult and Time* as these are fundamental to First Nations life and are connected to *Funding and Control*. How do you determine funding if you don’t listen, consult and take your time? Listening, consulting, and taking time is *murruway marambul* (proper way). Through respecting Culture and *Ngurambang* (Country), *Sovereignty, Resilience and Strength* are created. *Sovereignty, Resilience and Strength* in turn facilitate *Adaptability* in Community and acknowledge the *Holistic* nature of First Nations lives. *Colonialism and Trauma*, discussed in-depth in the *dhundhu* (black swan) chapter, has created the need for listening, consulting and taking time. It has created the need to express sovereignty, the need for resilience and strength, the imperative to rely on First Nations holistic Cultures and to adapt. The section titled *Colonialism and Trauma* closes this circle and completes the circularity of the journey. It is colonialism which dominated funding, which exerts control, which creates the trauma which necessitates funding and ultimately creates the need for healing.

Songline/Storymap and Discussion: Funding and Control



Figure marrabulabula (9.) Songline/storymap for *Funding and Control* theme.

Discussion

Every participant in this research project yarned about funding and expressed that it held a centrality, an omnipresence in their lives. Funding affected all individuals, their organisations and communities in fundamental ways. Funding determined jobs and the supply, format and delivery of programs. It also created a competition for resources between organisations, between communities and even within groups and within communities. Indeed, government spending, or finance in the form of either grants or assistance payments, dominated the income of First Nations communities, resulting in a ‘disproportionate importance’ and the creation of potential conflicts and schisms within communities (Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb 2016, p.3). CEO P said, ‘it’s a challenge as an organisation, a bloody big challenge’ and this was reiterated by CEO of *Mibbinbah* Jack who said, ‘it’s been very difficult’.

The inequality of funding to communities creates problems and pressures for the organisations delivering the programs and has the ability to create a *blame game* where the program providers are asked: *why can’t you do it for us you did it for them?* This exacerbates the *Wétiko* disease created by settler colonial policies where ‘greed knows

no limits' (Forbes 1992, p.xvi). As stated by Jack, 'we are always going from one Community that have that little bit of funding and then we got to go to the next one and you don't really put much on your invoice because they don't have funds'. The tension that exists for program providers navigating the miasma of funding and grants compliance whilst maintaining the integrity of their programs and relationships with communities holds not only a professional cost but a personal cost as well. As storyteller/participants further reflected:

I'm going to be brutally honest here, we call them gatekeepers, it's really hard to have to do those negotiations [with funding bodies]. As well, sometimes you feel disrespected, you're not valued for what you do. (Jack)

But everyone got their gatekeepers, you know where they say you gotta come to us, they won't let you network with people, some people they just want the politics. (B2)

This *Hunger Games* mentality at times means programs are *shoehorned* into formats, to meet key performance indicators, disregarding the true purpose or direction for which each program had been designed. As reflected on by storyteller/participants:

It's a funded program, so kinda gotta make it fit. (CEO P)

Yeah unrealistic, like it takes twelve months to build a relationship, there's things like bushfires and floods and they impact... even if you deliver [the programs] in prison you got to certify... that takes time... (B2)

Also at issue is that funding bodies have little to no understanding of the complexities of delivering programs to remote communities, rarely, if ever getting *boots on the ground* to evaluate the difficulties.

I think the government really has to have someone on the ground up here to understand how hard it is, in terms of how difficult it is to work in the Kimberley... By the time you get there, its fucken tiring, then you gotta work... like you get really fatigued, really exhausted when you're travelling for weeks... (B2)

The type of work we do, [the funding bodies] don't really understand, they look at a map and they say, "Oh it's just down the road". Realistically, its fucken hard. (B2)

This disconnection of funding bodies, indeed almost ambivalence, is reflected in their insistence on "their way is the right way" combined with the inflexibility of "a one size fits all" mentality and a complete disregard of First Nations expertise. When yarning with the participants, the *realities* of delivering programs to remote communities was given constant voice because this is their reality. The western concept of time-related performance indicators and "number crunching" was at constant tension with *what works*. As further stated by B, a First Nations designer of healing programs and experienced facilitator of outreach programs to remote communities in the Northern Territory and the Kimberley:

[The funding bodies] say: how long does the program take? Well, it takes as long as each individual needs, it can take two days or two months. It all depends on how deep that trauma is... There may be things going on in the community which may impact such as *Sorry Business* ... You don't know what's gone on in the community... like who someone's lost, you gotta make it a lot more flexible.

The rise of neo-liberalism in Australia and the need for "responsible fiscal investment" founded in western economic theory occurs at the expense of prioritising social need. The championing of outsourcing has led to 'a rise of competitive contractualism' in funding and grants, and this direction and the subsequent actions undermine First Nations sovereignty (Craig & Porter 2006; Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb 2016, p.361; Walker, Porter & Marsh 2012). This also places First Nations organisations in a competitive environment, forced to prioritise programs which can deliver a quantifiable outcome to garner funding. This leads to an emphasis in which accountability is not to their prime targets, First Nations communities, but rather on 'bureaucratic or administrative accountability' (Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb 2016, p.361). As articulated by B, 'organisations cease to be about providing programs and become more about funding'. The notion of organisations constantly in tension trying to fulfill the western notions of "successful" program delivery was a frequent comment, as evidenced below:

When it comes to funding you gotta tick the boxes to get it. (B2)

To see our processes aren't respected I think at times does get to us and make us emotional... It's all negotiating, it's not coming from our ancient ways, you know how we traditionally do things. (Jack)

The funding process also holds dangers for First Nations program providers themselves as they run the risk of losing their *raison d'être*, their accountability to communities, and in the process staying aligned with their cultural responsibilities. As multiple storyteller/participants succinctly stated:

They lose their sense of true self, because they become fearful, they get attached to money, they get lost in the world of the dollar, they forget about the authentic, the original way things are done. (Lisa)

You do this to help people, not get funding, like how are we gonna help our people. (B2)

[The funding specialists] should be just pushed off to the side, they shouldn't have any input into our core operations because we are operating *proper way*. (B)

Funding for First Nations organisations and programs in Australia is provided by the 'public finance' sector, and this gives that sector great control over services, service delivery and the governance of programs and organisations (Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb 2016, p.361). In a literature review comparing international public funding programs in developing countries to First Nations organisations in Australia, Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb (2016) expressed:

Government's choice of funding modality can produce powerful incentives for organisations to perform in preferred ways, but it can also divert limited resources, narrow accountability, and undermine capability... It can also have unintended effects such as stifling innovation, narrowing accountability, and encouraging gaming. (p.359)

This exertion of control over First Nations organisations has a profound effect on their ability to operate to serve their targeted end-users, First Nations *mayiny*

(peoples). It is even more draconian that, in these very organisations, are some of the few instances where there is a meaningful degree of First Nations self-governance (Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb 2016; Sullivan 2010). The result is a negative, problematic relationship between provider and applicant. As articulated succinctly by B, ‘I hate funding’, and further by B2 ‘these organisations they’re supposed to be here to help, not control’. Control of programs through compliance mechanisms dilutes the First Nations focus areas which are integral to the programs. As stated by Jack and Lisa:

It’s not our way controlling things, our work has to flow organically, the work, the circle, the Community it’s created by that, people trying to control, what time, what day that stops the flow of the work... The thing about our programs is that it’s always about flexibility, no one mob is exactly the same.

The *Rubbi* Group were also very direct in their assessment of the complexities of funding compliance and the control that funding bodies exert. They said:

[There are] too many levels of government involved... A lot of [facilitators] want to build relationships but the fellas upstairs, they don’t give a fuck, they just want stats, they want to tell us what programs [to deliver]. They want programs that aren’t authentic.

Colonial governments seem unable to engage with the overwhelming literature and reported evidence that clearly demonstrates that First Nations communities operate differently to other communities. There is a general lack of knowledge or indeed comprehension about the fundamentals of First Nations Culture, the connection between individuals and family, to extended family and then to Community and Country (Atkinson 2002; Dudgeon, Milroy & Walker 2014). Because of First Nations cultural interconnectedness, a change in one person has the potential for a *knock-on* effect to families, then extended family and thus whole communities (Dudgeon, Milroy & Walker 2014; Linklater 2014; Wilson 2008). It is the antithesis of the western mindset and thus the adherence to KPI number counting is not necessarily a harbinger of success for programs. Jack and Lisa reflected:

It's that Western way, that top-down approach, where they come in and go this is what's wrong with you and we're going to fix it. We know that isn't going to work, the best approach, it's always a strength-based approach... We come and talk to the mob, and we ask them what the issues are, what the concerns are and most of the time they not only tell you the issues, but they'll give you the solutions as well.

The lack of engagement by government department funders and service providers with local communities was noted in an evaluation of the *National Partnership Agreement on Remote Service Delivery* conducted in 2014 (Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb 2016). As evidenced in their review, Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb (2016) remarked that 'performance information should seek Indigenous governance and constituent satisfaction outcomes' (p.369), 'in addition to service delivery outcomes' (p.360). This lack of engagement ignores the *collective knowledge* and expertise that First Nations organisations and communities have in successfully conducting and delivering programs. The literature is overwhelming that First Nations organisations 'are more effective in achieving development outcomes' (Hunt et al. 2008; Kelaher et al. 2014; Limerick 2009; Moran 2006; Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb 2016, p.360; Tsey et al. 2012; Vos et al. 2010).

There are issues not only with compliance accountability for funding, but also with the process of applications for funding and grants (Craig & Porter 2006; Walker, Porter & Marsh 2012). The difficulties of funding applications are linked and exacerbated by the length of grants. The current processes in place for grant applications create an onerous impost on the time of program providers and First Nations organisations, this time impost in fact in many cases is so great that program providers abandon applications. The CEO of one organisation I yarned with told me that when making funding applications they employed an academic as a professional 'funding writer' (CEO P). He continued, 'the dollars and cents... We've actually done the calculations and put them in funding applications before' (CEO P). Other storyteller/participants reflected:

What I wanted to chase up was this philanthropic funding cause its less [control and time consuming], once they understand what you're doing and what you're trying to achieve its less of that KPIs. (B)

It's always been a difficult road, funding... The thing is, Brett, for me to spend the time to fill out all the applications, cause they want so much like evaluations, KPIs... it's such a complicated process, it would mean we wouldn't be able to get out and get into Communities and do our work. (Jack)

In the past we've done many, many submissions and proposals... some we've got, a lot we haven't got... so you question yourself sometimes, like: why haven't we been funded? Some organisations have plenty of money... and I don't know, there's something missing I think, and I don't understand it... So, what we do is partner with local organisations. (Jack)

The losers in this intricate web of funding applications are the First Nations organisations and communities. The organisations carry the load of the funding shortfall, and it means either funding is pulled from other areas or it effects their core business models. These business models themselves have become a necessary requirement in a perfect scenario of neoliberalism. This exercise of neoliberalism consists of placing a western governance system upon First Nations organisations in order for them to heal trauma caused by colonial policies, the onus falls on them to comply or fail and thus bear the burden of continuing trauma (Libesman 2015).
Storyteller/participants reflected:

If there's a negative to anything, it's the funding. The limited dollars that we have to be able to really expand what we do... We love what we do but you know we'd also like to expand, employ staff. (Jack)

[We] don't charge for the actual service, the program... We've only ever charged for extra costs. (CEO P)

To be honest its seriously heartbreaking, to know what we can do [for communities] and then be knocked back, knocked back again and again, it breaks your heart, but you feel for the communities missing out, it's not just us missing out. (Jack)

We don't have the funds to go freely in and out. (Jack)

[Delivering programs remotely] costs an arm and a leg, no one will do it unless funded by government. (CEO P)

We've never charged for it... Its gonna be hard cause a lot of communities aren't gonna pay. (CEO P)

We said look we'll do it but if you can pay for our accommodation and fuel... the travel expenses... we didn't charge for our staff. (CEO P)

Length and amount of funding also plays a crucial part in the complication of the process because smaller grants of funding and shorter terms mean more applications. The current system of funding has seen an increase in the number of smaller grants over shorter periods with 'highly prescriptive terms' (Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb 2016, p.361). As illustrated by Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb (2016):

The contours of fragmentation are illustrated by a 2012 [Australian National Audit Office (ANAO)] audit (ANAO 2012, p.32), which highlighted more than 2000 funding agreements (to more than 900 Indigenous organisations) administered in the 2010–2011 period, and that 820 Indigenous organisations funded under just one grant system were required to submit 20671 performance, financial and acquittal reports during this period (ANAO 2012). (p.361)

This continuous cycle of grant applications and accountability requirements places First Nations program providers and organisations in a constant *stress position*. Most especially, a position of financial deficit as the funding grants are quite specific in content with no allowance for the administrative costs of compliance (Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb 2016). This process manages to perversely institutionally traumatise organisations which are in the business of alleviating the trauma of colonially traumatised communities. As stated by Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb (2016):

This approach contributes to the sense of funding insecurity— resulting in significant human resources being dedicated to playing the 'funding game' of rolling grant applications – to say nothing of the resources absorbed by government departments in the management of such modalities. (p.361)

The stress or insecurity produced by short funding is manifested in the creation of an inertia in organisations when trying to future plan for their communities. This

issue is evidenced in my yarn with F, a domestic violence worker in Derby. F was in an almost euphoric state of relief and excitement because his organisation had just received state funding for four years, meaning his important program with families affected by domestic violence could plan ahead. He said:

So, the Minister [for Community Services of Western Australia] has just come up here with her entourage last week, to announce funding for the next bloody four years, which is bloody great!... And that's the good work Anglicare WA does, ensuring that continuity of funding is happening in partnership with Emama Nguda Aboriginal Corporation.

As much as short-term funding places stress on individuals and organisations, the loss of funding can produce devastating effects on individuals and communities. It can mean the discontinuation of vital programs dealing with suicide prevention, education, substance abuse and family violence. The loss of these programs means a loss of the ability of communities to heal from the intergenerational traumas of colonialism and may be seen as a further re-traumatisation (Atkinson 2002; Linklater 2014). This situation is compounded, as mentioned earlier, by the fact that many of the people employed in these programs are from the very communities which they service, which in turn creates more trauma and stress on individuals and families as loss of jobs impact the whole of the Community and its viability (Moran, Porter & Curth-Bibb 2016).
Storytellers/participants reflected:

The funding for that program [working with troubled youths] got cut, so I started looking for a job. There was a job advertised at *Martuwarra*, 280 kilometres away. I applied and ended up getting the job so I had to move my family over to Fitzroy. (T)

You know at times, we've been promised [funding] by the Federal Government... In 2013, we were promised over \$400,000 and we were promised and promised and then they had an election coming up, and that was the Labor Government, and they went into caretaker mode, so then put a hold on it, and then we didn't actually see that funding, cause the Liberals got in and that was the end of it. (Jack)

The reporting requirements are onerous, the application processes are complex and the funding given as a form of feudal largesse and taken arbitrarily. The funding

process presents as a form of *coercive control* of programs and organisations. This coercive control is itself a further manifestation of settler colonialism. Jack and Lisa shared:

A lot of times you know funding bodies want you to record and answer in a deficit model, so talk about traumas this and that, whereas we're really a strength-based organisation, we love to talk about the celebrations are, what the victories are for mob.

A facilitator of outreach programs and prison programs who had personally experienced family and personal trauma leading to incarceration was more direct and scathing in his assessment of this *coercive control* exerted through funding. He said, 'sometimes I feel like we're treated like dumb blacks' (B2).

The yarning with the storyteller/participants in the Kimberley took place under the backdrop of the 2023 Australian Indigenous Voice to parliament public debates which flooded the media over many months leading up to the constitutional referendum on the Voice proposal. Whilst this thesis does not have the space to engage in this public debate, the violence and trauma it caused for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *mayiny* (peoples) nor the positionality of all parties, it is worth noting that some storyteller/participants saw benefit in the proposed Voice mechanism as a more nuanced and streamlined approach to securing funding for communities and programs. There was a sense that the proposal recognised the systemic difficulties of funding processes and the value and need for First Nations knowledges and input. As noted by B, 'I've got my doubts on the Voice, but maybe they can help and advise the Government on directing funding... but maybe it will just be a shitshow'.

Songline/storymap guide

This storymap sits on the artwork of *Warlpiri* artist Maureen Nampijinpa Hudson titled, *Crow Women Dreaming* (Hudson 2024). In it, ghost gum seeds representing community spirits are circled by a First Nations necklace and sit on top of money which symbolises funding. The calculator represents KPIs and the control of funding bodies is alluded to by the TV remote, rope and the book on British colonialism (Porter 1975). These all sit upon many funding application forms. Poinciana tree pods encircle our songline journey, all encompassed by the weaving and weaving spindle

(Possum 1996). We as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) are on a journey in story and these stories are our knowledges, weaved together to form our truths. These truths, reflected in the voices of the storyteller/participants, are represented by the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers). When *durrawan dyuri* (currawongs flock) and *babirra* (sing), it means change is coming on *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country). The storyteller/participants want change, change in the way funding is administered.

Songline/Storymap and Discussion: Listen, Consult and Time



Figure marramarra (10.) Songline/storymap for *Listen, Consult and Time* theme.

Discussion

There is a fundamental belief for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in listening, indeed in the practice of deep listening. In First Nations Cultures, there is reason for the existence of specific words which name our methods of deep listening such as *dadirri* and *yindyamarra* (Atkinson 2002; Grant Snr & Rudder 2014). *Yindyamarra* not only means to listen, it also means to honour and respect. These concepts are intermingled and integral to each other. To listen to our communities and to consult with them is to respect and honour them and their Cultures, their Country. As Jack shared:

You know we are saying it all the time, without the Communities, without the relationships, the beautiful exchange we have, you know we couldn't do what we do, that beautiful exchange both ways.

We have an expectation that we will be listened to as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), as we have an expectation to practice listening. It is through listening that we get knowledge and through knowledge we learn respect. Jack and Lisa relayed a conversation with an Elder from *Wadeye* who told them, 'we have two ears, two eyes, and only one mouth and there is a reason for that'. Our knowledge is within our stories which are passed orally and visually so we assume others will listen to our voices as this is how the knowledge of Country is given. That knowledge is survival, that narrative is our essence. Over millennia, we have maintained our relationship with Country as we are a part of Country and Country is a part of us, thus we have knowledge and experience of our own lives developed over those countless generations (Watson 2017). Country carries different strengths which are also the strengths of the *mayiny* (peoples) who belong to that land (Kwaymullina 2017). Listening, consulting and taking time with communities is a theme which is linked to other themes throughout the yarns with storyteller/participants. This is our circularity as we acknowledge the interconnectedness of all things within *Ngurambang* (Country), the kinship with all that is both animate and inanimate within *Ngurambang* (Country). We as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) consult with, listen to and respect all others in *Ngurambang* (Country) - the flying ones, the swimming ones, the walking ones, the crawling ones, the growing ones, the stationary ones, the wind, the rain. We all operate as brothers and sisters within the circularity of *Ngurambang* (Country). We have an expectation that these others will listen to us and we, in turn, listen to them. This is *murruguay marambul* (proper way). This project has been based in relationality, asking permission, listening, respecting voices and through this process, creating relational accountability which acts as conduit to privileging those voices. This is my *buyaa* (law). The knowledge shared is cumulative of many generations of wisdom, of our *Ngurambang* (Country) and our place within Country. As yarned by storyteller/participants:

If you give respect, you'll get respect. Sometimes these organisations don't give the respect that's due to our local mobs, the Elders, the Community members. They don't

give them that respect, to say you know what's wrong and you know how to fix it, we'll walk with you... No, they fucken want to talk down to Community. (Jack and Lisa)

Communication, it's just like a relationship, consult with the Community, sit down with them... it's just respectful. (B2)

You need to understand, you need to be directed, you're almost a child... you need them to direct you towards an understanding of what they need. (B)

This knowledge is intimate knowledge from living and working in the Community, it is in the interconnection of our lives as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). As yarned by F, an experienced facilitator in the Kimberley, currently delivering a specialised family violence program:

When I'm introducing myself to perpetrators [of family violence]... I just take one look at the surname and I go ah, I make that connection. I know that somebody... Even the others - like T or P - who work over at Boab Street facility, or even the girls in here, they'll always know someone.

This point was further emphasised by T, a program facilitator in Derby with vast experience in programs and police liaison, delivering and working in the Kimberley:

You've got people going out into communities and telling people what the problems are and how to solve them... Have local Aboriginal people involvement in that process... Too long we've been driven by [outsiders] telling us what you gotta do... It makes people feel better when they are part of the process going forward.

B, program designer and facilitator from *Rubbi* further expressed that 'they say, "nothing for us without us"... That's basically the concept... When [Community] give you something you gotta listen to it'. Failure to consult and listen, to meaningfully engage with First Nations Elders and communities is itself a colonial act because it is a repudiation of knowledge and a championing of the notion of inferiority of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). It is not merely ignorance, nor do arguments of expediency or efficiency have credence, the failure to listen, consult and take time are overt acts of suppression and control (Watson 2017). To continue to fail to consult is to continue the

colonial project, it is an ongoing complicity in cultural genocide (Atkinson 2002; Kwaymullina 2017; Watson 2014; Williams 1990). Kwaymullina (2017) has powerfully voiced, ‘as each generation of Nyungar passes through, it is our duty to listen to, or tell, and then remember the yarns’ (p.9; Collard 2008). The concepts of First Nations cultural ways, as previously stated, seem to escape western eyes and ears. There is a process, a way to consult, a way to listen and from this, a way of respect. The literature is clear on the need to include First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in decision making, to privilege their knowledge of their own lives (Alfred 2009; Dudgeon 2008; Moreton-Robinson 2017; Rigney 1997; Wright, Lin & O’Connell 2015). The disrespect of process and the dismissal of knowledge produces a blindness to the nuances of Culture and produces distrust and disconnection. As commented by Jack, CEO *Mibbinbah*:

I think a lot of western mob, they don’t get the concept of silence. They want to come in and control the situation, the conversations... A lot of the time, it’s a test. Silence is okay, you know, you just have to sit in it sometimes... This is the way we’ve done it for thousands of years... I don’t think some people [westerners] are ready for that because it’s all about time and money.

There’s not a language or a way to write that in a western world for that to be understood, because for us it’s just the way and it doesn’t matter which side of the country you’re on, or where you’re living on the country. We know it, we all know it.

Consultation and listening carries a macro aspect - it speaks to and is connected to sovereignty, further linking themes within the storyteller/participant voices. This is acknowledgement, this is *murruguay marambul* (proper way). As stated by storyteller/participants:

You know the Old People, if you’re willing to sit long enough to hear the Old People, they will tell you... They tell you all the time, you just gotta slow down enough to be able to hear them. (B)

People tell you they’ve got a degree in this and that, but I don’t think that means anything... It gives you the skills to be able to achieve the outcome *you* [emphasis added] want, but it doesn’t give you the nous to understand what [communities] want. (B)

We have that local knowledge. (F)

You know, you find people in our Community that are making decisions without consulting other people. (T)

A further issue raised by P, a program facilitator and Community member from Derby, was that consultation and listening also carry an expectation for action; ‘I tend to think I know a few solutions, I’ve put it out to people, there has been a lot of reviews of like yeah that’s a good idea *but* [emphasis added]’. The approach of *Mibbinbah* is evident from the very first contact with Community. *Mibbinbah* relies on its reputation, *murruway marambul* (proper way), word of mouth.

We are always invited into communities so that is a blessing in itself, we’re able to work with mob because we’ve been invited in. (Jack)

We are blessed that we are able to learn [from communities] as much as they learn from us. (Jack)

Most of the time, they’ll tell you what the issues are, but they give the solutions as well. (Jack and Lisa)

This then begins an extensive process, to consult, to sit and to listen. When discussing the possible implementation of the BTBYCB, firstly there were meetings with Elders, extensive consultation followed to tailor the program to issues identified and prioritised by the Community. As CEO P said:

It was really well received. We had some Elders come out from [Kimberley Aboriginal Law and Culture], they are the bosses and keepers of agreed law, senior people for the Kimberley.

The Elders listened and watched Jack and Lisa, they then decided themselves on the suitability of BTBYCB for their communities. CEO P continued, ‘they, said this is good, we like this for our fellas, and we need our missus, our partners to come’. The *Rubbi* Group of facilitators also highlighted the need for consultation saying, ‘you need

that feedback, it's the most important part'. This process is two-way, it necessitates Community approval as the program cannot work without engagement. B commented, 'when you go to a community and you say we're starting at 9am, they'll come but they are doing the interview that first day of you'. Jack reflected, 'one thing about Community they have the best developed bullshit meter. They judge you, they see you'. He continued, 'follow up is important to us to show we are fair dinkum about making a change in Community' (Jack). This process of consultation may seem like a specialised skill, however it is just *murruway marambul* (proper way). It is *yindyamarra*, valuing Culture and valuing people. Jack commented, '[communities] need organisations to walk hand in hand with them'. B further reflected:

When I did my community development accreditation, you know that's the bit they didn't tell you... They gave you all the charts, you know the mechanisms, they didn't actually tell you that the people tell you what they want, and to understand that... that's the skill.

Jack and Lisa summed up the key to their work, the relational accountability that they create with Communities, the respect they give to Elders, Culture and Country: 'We love this work, the interaction, the two-way learning, the relationships we form in communities, with communities. You don't do it for the money'. That relational accountability does not end when the final day of the program is delivered. First Nations relationships continue beyond the now (Archibald 2008; Kovach 2010a; 2010b; Wilson 2008). Jack added, 'it's about relationships. This is what all our work is about, it's the relationships, building relationships, building trust, building rapport and be able to be welcomed back with respect'. Lisa added, 'that's what I love about our work, wherever we go we are treated like family'.

The atmosphere created by consultation, listening and respect ensure interconnectedness, engagement, reciprocity and the privileging our First Nations epistemologies (Moreton-Robinson 2017; Wilson 2008). The ceremony created through listening, consulting and respecting connects to sovereignty. It is the evidence that our ways of Knowing, Being and Doing are valued, affirming Culture within communities. As Eldridge (2008) said:

Interconnectedness is the traditional Native American belief that human beings are made of an intertwining of spirit, mind, emotions and body ... it means that all living beings in this world including the earth are connected and that one's actions have far reaching consequences. (p.1)

Songline/storymap guide

This storymap sits on the artwork of *Warlpiri* artist Lee Nangala Gallagher and it is titled *Yankirri Jukurrpa* (Emu Dreaming in *Warlpiri*) (Gallagher L. 2024). It depicts the story of the *yankirri* (emu in *Warlpiri*) and *wardilya* (bush turkey in *Warlpiri*). This dreaming belongs to women from the Nangala/ Nampijinpa kinship groups and men from the Jangala/Jampijinpa kinship groups (Gallagher L. 2024). The *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) in the storymap represents cherishing knowledge. As First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), we carry our precious items in a *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) such as *dhangaang* (food) and sometimes our *bali* (babies). Inside the *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) are headphones representing listening, the speaker cord meaning yarning and consultation. The old pocket watch symbolises *ancient time*, taking time. The seeds of the ghost gum representing the spirits of Community. The *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) is protecting and cherishing what we as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) prioritise - *Ngurambang* (Country), *miyagan* (family) and *yindyamarra*. The mitre of education is topped by the Aboriginal beanie representing First Nations knowledges of our own lives and Cultures. These are surrounded by the poinciana tree pods of our songline journeys, in story relating the voices of storyteller/participants. The weaving spindle and weaving alludes to the weaving of our lives and knowledges, the weaving of the voices through yarning. The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) represent change and sit on the songline journey because the storyteller/participants asked for change - they want to be listened to, for time to be taken, to be consulted about their lives.

Songline/Storymap and Discussion: Sovereignty, Strength, Resilience



Figure ngumbaaybu marrabu marrabu (11.) Songline/storymap for Sovereignty, Strength, Resilience theme.

Discussion

It is the continued existence of all life that makes any life possible. In such a context, it makes little sense to speak of ‘human rights’ as something that is separate from or superior to the network of connections that is Country. Nor, as ever, does it make sense to speak of rights as a concept shorn of responsibilities. The right to be human is a right to Country; a failure to fulfil the responsibility to care for Country is a failure of humanity. In this respect, the colonial apocalypse both was built on the denial of Indigenous humanity and continues to prevent Indigenous peoples from exercising the

right to be human by failing to resolve the sovereignty stories of those who were here before, and all those who came after. (Kwaymullina 2017, p.16)

Although the word *sovereignty* was bandied about in the cacophony of the Voice to parliament debate - the “elevator music” to my yarns with storyteller/participants - no one ever said, *I’m concerned about sovereignty*. This is because notions of western “sovereignty” do not apply to First Nations Culture. Sovereignty is not ownership, it is not dominion over land, nor dominion over people, plants or the creatures. Sovereignty for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) is *Ngurambang* (Country) - it is our relationship with *Ngurambang* (Country), recognising the agency of *Ngurambang* (Country) and the place of *Ngurambang* (Country) within us. *Ngurambang* (Country) precedes us and will succeed us (Russ-Smith 2019). Sovereignty for the storyteller/participants was expressed through their connection to *Ngurambang* (Country), the use of their language, the acknowledgement of their responsibility to *Ngurambang* (Country) and the acknowledgement of the centrality of *Ngurambang* (Country). My use of *Wiradjuri* language in telling the stories of storyteller/participants is an expression of sovereignty, not my sovereignty but that of *Ngurambang* (Country) as language is integral in our relationship to *Ngurambang* (Country). Sovereignty is this light that then becomes an expression of our place, our belonging in *Ngurambang* (Country), the things we do on and with *Ngurambang* (Country). In this way *Ngurambang* (Country) *gifts* us our strength and provides resilience because it sustains us. In this way the sovereignty stories of storyteller/participants were the stories of their relationship with *Ngurambang* (Country), the practising of Culture. As expressed by Kwaymullina (2017), ‘narratives – whether in the form of song, dance, art or ceremony – also form evidence of sovereignty’ (p.10). The narratives of our lives, our stories, the telling of our stories is our complicity in the sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country). It is our essence as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), as yarned by B when discussing his cemetery program:

I want the Elders to sit in front of the headstone and have different icons on it and they get the young ones and tell them the story of it, then I want it so the young ones can say yeah, yeah this is part of my Culture. (B)

In Derby, the storyteller/participants expressed sovereignty through the positioning of *Ngurambang* (Country) as a *reward* for successful program engagement.

Activities on Country then became the embodiment of success, being on *Ngurambang* (Country) accentuated the naturally produced feelings of positivity around Culture, reinforcing the sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country). T, who was involved in creating and facilitating a program for troubled kids at school, yarned:

These are kids that are low attendance, getting into crime, and we are also working with the families as well.

The incentive we have at the end of the week is going out on Country and we do that every Friday. We do it at different seasons too... We go hunting, we go and cut timber.

We hunt goannas [in the wet season], cause that's the season for them, we also chuck a line, explain to the kids about the wet season, and yeah it's just such a good time.

From making artifacts, to making jewellery, to carving boab nuts, things that they love doing... You can do a lot of things with that, going out on Country, cutting the timber, telling the right story, like what was the boomerang made for and all that.

In the space in between our yarns, T had changed jobs although he had stayed in youth work. His new role involved taking school children onto *Ngurambang* (Country) and teaching them about the stories of *Ngurambang* (Country). This was called *two-way science*, an accompaniment to western teaching which involved taking their western teachers as well. Teaching the teachers and expressing the sovereignty, connectiveness and knowledges of *Ngurambang* (Country) was building the strength and resilience of the children. T reflected, 'the kids they love it, we teach them the stories, the stories we were told, the power and importance of things, things like the boab tree'. This notion of the position of *Ngurambang* (Country), its place in our lives as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and our interconnectedness manifested as sovereignty, is not limited to just one program. F, an experienced family violence program facilitator yarned:

At the end of the sessions, there is a trip out on Country for three nights and that's like a type of reward, basically we go out on Country and talk about what's been discussed over the last five weeks and talk about any assistance [the young people] may need, and we talk about that out on Country... So, the going out on Country part is like the reward at the end for attending the sessions.

What we do as far as combining culture into what we kinda do in lowering the incidence of family violence is to also add the cultural aspect.

The strength that connection with *Ngurambang* (Country) gives Community cannot be underestimated. As CEO P stated, ‘we’ve got less disruption here in terms of continuous culture, every primary school kid in Broome is learning Yawuru, we’ve got really nice cultural revival stuff happening, it gives us real strength here’. The expression of sovereignty through recognising the agency of *Ngurambang* (Country), in conducting ourselves *murruguay marambul* (proper way), fosters strength and resilience and ultimately it heals. Jack and Lisa spoke of this process at length and it was a theme of our yarns over eighteen months: ‘the proper way of doing things is in [Community’s] everyday world’. Both were strident in their affirmation that their relationships with communities, indeed the process of working with communities on their *Ngurambang* (Countries) ‘tapped into’ the strength and resilience which already exists in communities. The strength and resilience of Jack and Lisa is also expressed through listening to stories; story is knowledge and through knowledge is sovereignty. Jack shared that ‘the heart of *Mibbinbah* is those relationships’. Further stating:

Sitting in the circle, its transfer of knowledge, each and every way. It’s massive and beautiful and heart-warming... We are always talking about transfer of knowledge and it just doesn’t go one way. (Jack)

This reciprocity through relationality creates waves which travel both to and from, creating strength and resilience for communities because *murruguay marambul* (proper way) is followed, stories are heard, sovereignty is noted and acknowledged and this in turn creates strength and resilience for facilitators. Lisa shared that, ‘if you can get out there and get in that richness you walk away feelin’ proud’. Other storyteller/participants shared:

I’m lovin’ what I’m doing, I get the enjoyment out of seeing kids happy...I look forward to seeing a kid with a happy face, seeing them change is the best thing. (P)

I loved that job, I was running programs in Community... I was really shy of talking but working with kids, it built my confidence by talking, teaching them, learning all that side of things. It gave me a lot of skills along the way. (T)

‘I love that when we go into a different community we will say we have come from, say Wadeye or from Alice Springs, and they want to know what the other mobs are doin’. So we’ll share what we did in Wadeye with the Finke mob or the Hermannsburg mob or anywhere, you know, the Alice or Broome or Toowoomba. Everywhere in the country they want to know what the other mobs are doing and they are proud. (Lisa)

This *murrurway marambul* (proper way) is not always the easy way but practising law and following law is recognition of sovereignty. In my yarns with B and P, we spoke about *Mibbinbah*’s first time in the Kimberley and how the *Mudyigang* (Elders) wanted Jack out in the desert, far out without phone and internet. They wanted him to listen, to understand. B said, ‘the Old People they wanted [Jack] out there you know even further, so they needed the kids to hear him, what he was saying, and also for him to hear [the Country]’. Jack said, for him, ‘it was beautiful’ and ‘special’. As part of my yarning with B, we spoke about a program he had developed making and decorating headstones with the relatives of those who had died to tell the stories of their loved one. It was designed to help with trauma and healing however also to tell story and leave knowledge. The cemetery became the visual expression of their sovereignty - telling the stories, the knowledge of connection and coming to the cemetery to visit family became a knowledge journey. B shared:

[After death] you are still part of the Community, even when you’re not... As I amble along here the more I understand about Country.

Talking about people in the cemetery, [an Elder] was giving me a history lesson without really telling me... It’s almost like a history book, so when the kids come here, they are lying down, jumping around on the graves, sunning themselves... The Elders sit in front of the headstone and they have different icons on it and they get the young ones and tell them the story of it... Listening to stories, seeing stories, what whitefellas can’t see.

The more I come here, the more I understand about the place.

A transfer of story and knowledge exists through re-imagined songlines when *Mibbinbah* travels from Community to Community, from *Ngurambang* (Country) to *Ngurambang* (Country). Through this comes First Nations narrative sovereignty and through sovereignty comes strength and resilience (Kwaymullina 2017). Sovereignty for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) is manifest in our stories, *Ngurambang* (Country) and relationships. The question of sovereignty is not one for us but rather is one for colonisers. It is colonial systems which fail to recognise and appreciate our law and our Cultures. Indeed, our query to them is: *how can you claim sovereignty over Ngurambang (Country) when you don't know its stories?* Kwamullina (2017) says, 'Indigenous Peoples of Australia offer pathways into the future for all those who genuinely wish to engage with us in a way that respects that narrative sovereignty' (p.17).

Songline/storymap guide

This storymap sits on the artwork of *Warlpiri* artist Priscilla Napurulla Herbert titled *Desert Fringe Seed Dreaming* (Herbert 2023). A rope encircles all items signifying the circularity of Culture and its interconnections. The dumbbell with the Aboriginal necklace represents strength within First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and the rubber fitness/resistance band is our resilience. The *dinawan* (emu) caller reflects our stories, songs, ceremonies - our narrative sovereignty. Sitting on top of this is the dart with Australian flag blacked out, this is the sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country) *laying over* western concepts of "sovereignty" and their violent suppression. The *burrurgiyan gawuraa* (ibis feathers) symbolise First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), considered outsiders and fringe dwellers. The reality is that *burrurgiyan* (ibis) is the native - he belongs and his stories of strength and resilience place him in the sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country), still on his *Ngurambang* (Country) no matter the changes nor challenges.

The weaving comes from the spindle (Possum 1996) that weaves around all things, this is Culture connecting our lives, stories, songs, dances, ceremonies, and in doing so, expressing our sovereignty. It asks the question: *how can you claim sovereignty when you don't know the stories or knowledge of Ngurambang (Country)?* The weaving is also connected to the pods of the poinciana tree, a tree with a wide

foliage which provides shelter and protection from the elements. Culture gives this to us as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). The pods are the songline journey with the storyteller/participants as they tell their stories, their knowledge, their sovereignty. Sitting on the pods is a piece of *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country), emphasising the ever-present agency of *Ngurambang* (Country). The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) represent the change the storyteller/participants are asking for.

Songline/Storymap and Discussion: Adaptability and Holistic



Figure *bulabu marrabu marrabu* (12.) Songline/storymap for *Adaptability and Holistic* theme.

Discussion

Find a new way of being, an old way of being, outside that of colonial power... We have ancient models that pre-exist the colonisation of our lands and lives. We don't really need to look anywhere else but at ourselves; we need simply to re-emerge as First Nations peoples. (Watson 2014, p.164)

A startling finding in this *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process was that there was a reluctance in our yarns to talk about prison, not so much because it is a *shame job* but rather because it is such an ordinary part of life. First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) don't often speak about prison or police interactions because they are unremarkable, constantly occurring. However, in white society, such contact with the so called

“criminal justice” system is often a defining moment. Instead, mob talk about what’s good in our communities. First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) have these interactions with colonial legal systems - whether lawyers, police liaison officers, police officers, as potential victims or perpetrators or due to racial profiling – it is all part of everyday life. How many non-Indigenous *mayiny* (peoples) can say they have had an interaction with the police? Often, it is beyond most of their life experiences. I have deeply learnt that we as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) adapt when we see a problem. We consider it and we problem solve in our way. As a result, we try to stop those interactions with the colonial legal system, we stop things from happening with the police. We are sixty-five thousand years old as Cultures which have survived, adapting to changing adverse conditions, whether ice ages or european invasions. We are in the process of adapting to these current circumstances, to the fact that we are racially profiled and discriminated against. We adapt by limiting the interaction with the colonial system. Adaptability is itself a strength, a sign of resistance and resilience. For First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), time is subjective not objective, and we have adapted to play the *long game* (McGrath, Rademaker & Troy 2023). Storyteller/participants reflected:

It’s a generational change, a constant change and Jack and I say it a lot, we may never see it in our lifetime, the change we hope to see, but as long as it’s for our children, our grandchildren, for the Communities, as long as we’ve put some imprint on it... But it takes time. (Lisa)

Trusting the elements of nature, of Country, the rain the sun, you have to trust the timing. (Lisa)

The process of adapting occurs at a personal level as well, as yarned by the *Rubbi* Group when discussing personal change:

I’m still developing in myself to become better... you know the transformation that can happen. (*Rubbi* Group)

We are starting a journey from a safe place, being comfortable in our own backyard. (*Rubbi* Group)

[Anger is] something I’m still learning to deal with. (B2)

All storyteller/participants had personal stories of adaptation and skill learning which were then utilised to make change for the benefit of the Community. My yarns with T showed the sense of adaptation and change:

When I left school, I went out working on the stations, in our days in Derby that was what the main employment was... Then I worked for the local shire doin' all jobs, like a gardener. Then I got a job with a local Aboriginal organisation as a sport and rec[reation] officer... I started with the police force there and with the job came so many skills. (T)

It was a big eye opener for me [seeing domestic violence and drug and alcohol dependence]. To see the bigger picture of how kids get to grow up because of the issues... I did it for six years then I decided I had enough of locking people up. (T)

This adaptability is intertwined with a holistic approach to community issues. First Nations community led organisations and the community workers and facilitators themselves understand the holistic nature of First Nations Culture. This results in the delivery of programs which see and value the interconnectedness of problems and the need for an interconnected holistic response. Yarning with F, who was working in a family violence program, said of his work:

I help [mob] with any other items that they need help with. So housing, transitional housing, emergency housing, crisis accommodation... Anything from housing to employment assistance, which includes advocating and liaising on their behalf.

It could be anything from Centrelink, housing, mental health services. Anything from the hospital to anger management services... Any stuff the fellas might need help with, including education or training, employment.

It's basically providing a wraparound.

The only reason we do this is because of that lived experience, especially in the [domestic violence] space... Especially in this place Derby, we've grown up in Derby, it's a really tight Community. I've grown up with my people... The best thing about Derby is we've got local people employed here, a majority eighty to ninety per cent.

I was at stages where we used to go down to the [basketball] courts and used to be there till ten o'clock at night, and never got paid overtime. Just for the love of the kids, to make sure they got a feed.

Commenting on the program he was delivering to youth in school, T said, they 'come in early in the morning and we give them a hot breakfast, we give them a clean uniform before the day starts and they look forward to that'. P also yarned about a program which he had been involved with *The Remote School Attendance Program*, 'our job was to get the kids that were disengaging at school, to school'. With an understanding of the holistic nature of Community and the community issues facing mob, storyteller/participants described problem solving and holistic responses that were designed to benefit whole of Community. There was a keen awareness that these were not just problems for the children, but the issues of the family and in turn the Community needed to be factored into a holistic deterrence to institutional interaction. P commented:

[To] make sure [families] had the right support around them, [we] provided them with agencies that could assist them with things such as power, rent assistance, water maintenance on their houses, getting them school uniforms, even getting them washing machines to make sure their kids got clean clothes.

Working in community programs was not just limited to delivering pre-existing programs, it was about watching what worked, what was needed and then adapting ideas to respond to community needs. Storyteller/participants reflected:

I developed a headstone project so that the men will initiate and make a headstone, the women negotiate and direct the artistic [process], so the matriarch from one side and then the matriarch from the other side [will negotiate]. Then the kids and grandkids come with a design then merge them. The men would make it and then put it into the ground, then the women would come along and unveil it. (B)

You have to make [altering programs] appropriate. (B2)

Since 2011, we've been running that program for Aboriginal men's groups, but whenever we went into Community our male Elders would say to us, what about the women, we need to work with the women as well... So since 2014, we've trained up women facilitators. (Jack)

We had ten lads employed as project associates. It worked really well. We were building the capacity of local fellas, also empowering them to become leaders - not only in their own communities but in the wider community as well. (Jack)

My yarns with storyteller/participants were marked by discussions of community work, speaking of the involvement in *proactive and preventative* programs, either as a participant or facilitator or indeed both. First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) are constantly evolving, working to improve their health, education and their lives by connecting to Culture and *Ngurambang* (Country). As noted by the Derby mob:

I wanted to be part of the Community, [to be a part of] the solution of preventing young kids from going to jail... I wanted to try and make things better. (T)

I think the main thing is getting [Community] people to be involved, whether it's working or volunteering, you know, being part of bettering our Community... You gotta' make people involved and be part of that process, whatever it is, of development of the Community. (T)

In these sessions, we will work on everything to do with lowering the incidence of family violence... It's showing [mob] techniques, strategies to deal with family violence situations... In the end we want to lower the incidence of family violence in our communities... We want [those causing harm] to live in harmony with their families. (F)

I started working with kids because of my daughter. My eldest daughter, she used to get into a lot of trouble, not stealing cars just being in them. I used to chase her around... I thought nah, that's enough, I'm gunna get a job helping kids in this community. (P)

This project raises the questions: what would our Culture, our communities look like if we weren't forced into making rapid change? What if we could have had the time to adapt? This is what First Nations communities are doing now - they are adapting

using their own methods, knowledge and Culture. The renowned American anthropologist Margaret Mead posited that the sign of “civilisation” within a culture is not tools or artifacts, but rather in the discovery of a healed femur in a human skeleton. Her theory was that in animals such a break would mean certain death as it leads to vulnerability to predators and an inability to access water and food. A healed femur in humans means that someone cared for, helped and offered protection and support (Lasco 2022). Australia is a privileged society yet has rising poverty, rising homelessness, rising youth detention, rising Elder abuse, rising marginalisation of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and a rising preponderance to seek carceral solutions to these issues. A blatant malaise of lack of care. Conversely, this research has underlined the awareness of community held by First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and the need to support each other, to adapt, prevent and protect, rather than lament. So, it begs the question who then is more “civilised”? Who is the “savage”?

Songline/storymap guide

This storymap sits on the artwork of *Warlpiri* artist Anita Nakamarra Gibson titled *Water Dreaming* (Gibson 2023). The mitre hat of western knowledge is placed in the centre, topped by the beanie in Aboriginal colours, representing First Nations knowledges about ourselves. There is a circle of beads in Aboriginal colours containing the seeds of the ghost gum and a pair of binoculars. These symbolise Community surrounded by Culture, seeing our issues clearly. The weaving spindle with the seeds of community on top represent the weaving and healing of Culture which connects all things to *Ngurambang* (Country) (Possum 1996). The *burrurgiyan gawuraa* (ibis feathers) speak to the power of adaptation practised by First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), *burrurgiyan* (ibis) being a native *budyaan* (bird) who has adapted and thrived amid colonialism. There is also the *dhundhu gawuraa* (black swan feather) and *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) alluding to the cultural story of *dhundhu* (black swan) circularity and *waagan* (crow), teaching humility and reciprocity to each other, to Community and to all things in and with *Ngurambang* (Country) (refer to *budyaan galang* chapter for this story). The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feather) alongside the western belt and rodeo buckles represent the strength of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to change, adapt and master western ways - in this case horses and

pastoralism. These are surrounded by the seed pods of the poinciana tree which signify the songline journeys and knowledge sharing of the storyteller/participants. These are, in turn, encompassed by the circle of rope acknowledging the circularity within Culture. The circle of pods are our knowledge, which in turn encircles the weaving of the spindle, which circles the Aboriginal beads encompassing the ghost gum seeds of the spirits of Community.

Dhundhu / Black Swan

Chapter Eight: Discussion

Dhundhu (black swan) chapter considers the second research question: *how has the Mibbinbah men's program used cultural continuity and revival to respond to the experiences of Aboriginal men?* In order to answer this, it is necessary to examine the harmful impacts of colonisation on First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). Such impacts are expressed throughout by those who have experienced them personally - through their own lives, their families' lives and as community workers. Colonialism creates the conditions of harm in which healing is then needed and this is strongly reflected in the voices of storyteller/participants. The response of *Mibbinbah* to colonial trauma is then yarned, with *Mibbinbah* shining a spotlight on the darkness of colonisation and its intergenerational violence. They also illuminate pathways of healing, weaving Culture and cultural protocols into a program designed to get men *yarning together, healing together*.

Songline/Storymap and Discussion: Colonisation and Trauma



Figure marramarrabulangumbaay (13.) Songline/storymap for Colonisation and Trauma theme.

Discussion

Colonisation and its resultant traumas, in particular intergenerational trauma, were prevalent in the yarns with storyteller/participants. At times, they manifested through racist state violence including hyper incarceration and forced child removal. Other times, they manifested in the degradation of SEWB resulting in suicide (especially youth suicide), self-harming, substance abuse and family violence. Colonialism weaved its sinister spider web through each yarn, through each theme - indeed without colonial violence there would be no need for funding, no lack of listening or consultation, no need to question or assert sovereignty, build strength and

resilience, nor to adapt. Without colonialism there would be no need for organisations such as *Mibbinbah*, nor any need for healing. It was clear through the voices of storyteller/participants that their very being and *raison d'être* was created by colonialism.

In 2024, the Productivity Commission reported the standardized suicide rate for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander *mayiny* (peoples) nation-wide as 29.9 deaths per 100,000 and indicated that this rate is increasing (Productivity Commission 2024). In the Kimberley between 2018-2022, the suicide rate was reported to be the highest in Australia at 32.9 deaths per 100,000, which is alarming when compared to Baulkham Hills New South Wales which was standardized at the same SA3 level but only reported an average rate of 5.3 deaths per 100,000 (AIHW 2025). The statistics are telling however they are figures on a page indicating another failure of “Closing the Gap”, squiggles of ink to speak of in another election cycle. The truth is in the personal and collective toll and is contained in the stories and voices of Community. Suicide and suicide prevention loomed large in my yarns with storyteller/participants whom all had lived experience, whether in designing, delivering and working within programs or in personal relationships. In one instance, a storyteller/participant had made multiple attempts at suicide themselves. Some reflections included:

So, I started in the youth suicide prevention. It was with the families as well 'cause sometimes they can't see the signs. (B2)

There was a lot of shit happening up here in the Kimberley, they just needed to get some stuff happening, like suicide was crazy, like it was in the top ½ a percent, I think, and with youth suicide. (B2)

We are also working in the suicide prevention space through our *Alive and Kicking* team, suicide prevention initially for young men but now for everybody (CEO P)

I also worked one on one with a police officer... When you work one on one, you get to see and do the policing work. It really opened my eyes... You get to see things that you don't normally see as the normal citizen. (T)

Things like going to suicides, the amount of family members I've gone out to, you know... Having to deal with them, finding them in the state they were and then having to approach the families. (T)

A lot don't have headstones 'cause they are too ashamed [that the cause of death was suicide]. They are left like that. (B)

In the Kimberley, the Stolen Generations are not a page in a report or a chapter in a book. The Stolen Generations are not just a part of life, they are a major life narrative for the storyteller/participants. This colonial trauma of forced child removal is still current and even accelerating today. Storyteller/participants shared:

My mum coming back to Derby is where her mother came from, just out of town on a cattle station, where her mother was taken away. She was Stolen Generations. (T)

My mother she gave birth to me in the river 'cause she was turned away by the hospital. They wouldn't let her give birth in there 'cause she was Aboriginal. (T)

She was Stolen Generations from up on Beagle Bay, my missus. (B)

I worked for child protection and that was an eye opener and quite disturbing and distressing job... Working as a community member close to the Community and this Community most of my original connections are in this town... A constant conflict of interest, basically trying to look after kids. (CEO P)

Domestic violence was identified by storyteller/participants as a major issue and many were working or had worked in men's behaviour change programs. Domestic violence is itself a symptom of the wider effects and impacts of centuries of colonialism. This was yarned by CEO P from within the context of his multi layered First Nations organisation delivering programs to all levels of Community, in the town and remote communities:

Look we've got - and we're not unique in our area - entrenched poverty, intergenerational trauma, lateral violence [and] the result of that, very high rates of

[domestic violence and] intimate partner violence, which as far as I'm concerned, they are versions of lateral violence. (CEO P)

Substance abuse... you know, ice has made a move into the Kimberley in the last five to six years... yeah [it's] very available, it leads to more extreme behaviour, but the reality is that grog is still the number one issue. It causes prison, you know, family break up, child removal and everything else. (CEO P)

It is pertinent to note that family violence is a major issue and increasing across the wider community as a whole. For First Nations women, compounded by colonial trauma, it has led to higher rates of hospitalisation and death (AIHW 2023) In the Kimberley, there is concerted and constant programming to tackle the issues.

Storyteller/participants reflected:

So basically [the family response team], a police officer, a critical response worker and a rep from the department of community [services] will sit down together every morning to triage any of the family violence incidents which have come through from the police. (F)

My role is to work with perpetrators who use violence against their partners in the program. I'm required to basically visit the perpetrators who have been referred by the family violence response team... It's showing them techniques, strategies to deal with family violence situations. (F)

Ultimately, what we want to do is to at least lower the incidence of family violence in our communities, this is so our male perpetrators are not receiving fines and going to court and sort of not ending up in jail essentially. We want them to live in harmony with their family. (F)

The blokes in prison are gunna come out of prison... They are gunna go back into an environment where family domestic violence is commonly practised, not necessarily them but their brother, even their missus or someone might be a violent person. (CEO P)

Importantly, just as our First Nations lives are interconnected, holistic and circular so are the “gifts” of colonialism. There is an interconnection between child

removal, substance misuse, poverty, sovereignty, dispossession and violence. This is articulated succinctly by CEO P who has intimate knowledge and insight through his work and personal experience of the confluence of colonialism and harmful outcomes for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). He said, ‘I think there’s a huge correlation between [family domestic violence] and suicide. If we could reduce [family domestic violence], we’d reduce suicide’ (CEO P). Prison, although not a particularly notable subject, was none the less present in our yarns. It presented with an almost inevitability. This is supported by ABS 2024 figures which reported that 43% of incarcerated people in Western Australian prisons are First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), and across the border in the Northern Territory that figure rises to 88% (ABS 2024a; 2024b).

Storyteller/participants said:

These young fellas in Community, they are seeing prison as a rite of passage. (Jack)

The recidivism rates - and they are very high for the Kimberley - so we are at the pointy end. Unfortunately, usually [Western Australia] is the worst performer in these areas, in most areas, and the Kimberley is the worst area in [Western Australia]. (CEO P)

I’m always puzzled by how and when decisions are made to lock up our mob and bail’s refused. For a lot of our brothers, our Countrymen, they don’t get good lawyers. The strongest legal defence, the strongest legal arguments may not be made for them... Our mob are not the best arguers for themselves... So they don’t get bail, [they say] jail’s normal... I’ll cop it sweet. (CEO P)

A [legal] system in a foreign language, so whatever kind of thing. (CEO P)

Storyteller/participants reflected on the harmful impacts of incarceration and the challenges around supporting mob once they are incarcerated:,

When they come out [of prison], they got this prison mentality. I’m this and that, I’m a big strong fella, I’ll fight you, I’ll fight this, I’ll flog you if I don’t get this or that. (B2)

‘Cause when you look at it, these men are going to prison and learning more stuff. (B2)

I could tell he's from prison by the way he sat, the way he talked. You can pick [which prison] they been from by the prison talk. (B2)

The justice system, they don't ask why'd you do that? Well, not in depth. (B2)

It's an issue for prisons, what if the facilitator has a criminal record? Which is prevalent in the Kimberley and in the Aboriginal Community as a whole... That's hard. (*Rubbi Group*)

At times, the “offending” has occurred within a community against a community member and as such it can be difficult to safely talk about issues. It can also be challenging to feel safe within a community affected by lateral violence, a manifestation of the *Wétiko* Disease. The *Rubbi Group* reflected:

Experience delivering in the prison and out of it are two different things. Communities are safe places, although some prisoners, they think it's safer to say things in prison than in community [because of community dynamics].

Storyteller/participants also flagged the importance of breaking the cycle of re-imprisonment and the vital role of *through programming* for release: They said:

When you get out, you gotta go through that waiting process till another organisation gets back, stuff like that. (B2)

It's reducing recidivism as well, so even if someone gets the program in jail, if that helps them out next time [it's positive]. (CEO P)

If they could talk to an organisation to get help; get housing, help them finding a job. And in that way, it's a way to start a journey, their journey, so instead of a journey of the cycle of prison. (B2)

In prison, I heard some feedback... So guys saying they are really not getting support in prison, counselling or mental health and stuff. (*Rubbi Group*)

The yarn of the *Rubbi* Group, including First Nations facilitators delivering diverse programs both in Community and in prison, was strongly echoed and supported by the literature (AIHW 2023; McCausland & Baldry 2023). This section has privileged the voices of the storyteller/participants by stating their case and worldview, prioritising their perspectives and acknowledging their lived experiences. Each point raised by storyteller/participants are interconnected and they reveal the decimation wrought upon First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) by colonialism. However, their voices rise above deficit narratives and while they state the issues, they also provide the response to the questions posed by trauma and give directions to the next journey. This journey is part of our continuum, as in our Cultures, nothing is ever finished, it is merely transforming into its next entity.

Songline/Storymap Guide

This storymap sits on the artwork of *Warlpiri* artist Maureen Nampijinpa Hudson titled *Women's Travelling Dreaming* (Hudson 2023). *The Lions Share* (Porter 1975), a book discussing nineteenth and twentieth century British Imperialism, sits on top a police hat with a truncheon and a rope. This symbolises the violence and control asserted by colonial institutions over First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). There are handcuffs across the book linking to a wooden fence which depicts the journey from police interaction to prison, the wooden fence signifying prison walls. Inside the fence is a metal cage with ghost gum seeds inside. This is the mental damage of prison on the spirits of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), represented by the ghost gum seeds. On top of the cage is a padlock with keys and an orange label, sitting on broken ghost gum seeds. The orange label is the constant deficit colonial narrative of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), creating broken spirits. However, there is also a circular kangaroo leather bracelet depicting the circular connection of Culture and the cage is in turn encompassed by the circle of Aboriginal beads of *Ngurambang* (Country).

Although assailed by colonialism, First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) remain interconnected and enveloped by *Ngurambang* (Country). Under the book is a syringe to represent the underlying damage of intergenerational trauma manifested as substance abuse. On the brim of the police hat are the black roses and silver heart of suicide,

further trauma resulting from colonial violence. There is a compass signifying the reach of colonialism and trauma to all corners of *Ngurambang* (Country), stretching out and touching. However, it also speaks to the colonial need to expand and invade but not understanding *Ngurambang* (Country) or asking for direction, confident yet at the same time ignorant. Under the brim is a feather of the Indian Myna bird, the invader who chases native birds, greedily taking all the resources from the native *budyaan* (birds). The pods of the poinciana tree are the songlines of the participants yarns as their voices tell their truths and the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) is their truth and assertion that change must come.

Songline/Storymap and Discussion: *Mibbinbah* Spirit Healing



Figure marramarrabulabula (14.) Songline/storymap for *Mibbinbah* Spirit Healing theme.

Discussion

In the *durrawan* (currawong) chapter, I outlined the reasons behind the selection of *Mibbinbah*, and specifically the BTBYCB program, for this research project. Employing a *triage* of healing in its design, the program reflects the benefits of having been developed through First Nations eyes and delivered by First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to address the impacts of intergenerational colonial trauma (Atkinson 2002;

Dudgeon et al. 2010). The program's use of the *Mad Bastards* (2011) film, which was made across locations in *Rubbi* with local people, carries special significance for the participants as well as the communities in which they facilitate. Storyteller/participants shared:

The film was our mob, a family affair. (CEO P)

It works on two levels... They can identify with [the film] ... They know [the actors], they know they aren't lying, you know like this is real. I mean what they are portraying is real. No bullshit in it. It's on Country. (B)

All that inside knowledge [within the film], all the stories. You know, [participants] go, "That's wrong, he shouldn't have done it". Or "yeah that's the way we do it, even it's not from this Country he shouldn't have done it like that". (B)

It's as real as real can be, that's why people relate to it. (B2)

The storyteller/participants yarn about *Mibbinbah* and the program fell into three distinct categories: issues with delivery and effect in prison; delivery in Community; and personal introspective reflections on the effects of the program on the facilitators/community workers. The common thread woven throughout was the healing restorative process created by *Mibbinbah* (Atkinson 2002). Some storyteller/participants shared:

In Community, it's Be the Best You Can Be. In prison, it's Mad Bastards. (B2)

We see this as prevention work, but its healing work too. (CEO P)

Specifically, very much men's services, men's healing, men who had been involved in [family and domestic violence]. (CEO P)

We know that what we do with Community is really important - it starts that healing... Everyone, as you know Brett, needs that healing. Even if we heal from one thing, we need to keep going with that healing process. (Jack CEO *Mibbinbah*)

We are a strength-based organisation. (Jack CEO *Mibbinbah*)

[Participants] pick up on [the characters' problems] in the movie and say "you can't be doin' those things". But straight after it, they good. They feel good about talking about what's going on [for themselves]... Once they've spoken about it, they feel they gotta do something about it, instead of just thinking about it in their head. (B2)

It's an ice breaker... In your own world...to talk about [trauma]. (*Rubbi* Group)

Prison

The *Rubbi* Group and Jack and Lisa had experience facilitating the BTBYCB program in communities on *Ngurambang* (Country) and in prison. The prison experience in the Kimberley, while not unique is interesting. Prisons are placed on *Ngurambang* (Country) in both *Rubbi* and in Derby and prisoners are surrounded by their Countrymen. This does not alleviate the destructive nature of incarceration, nor its attendant acceleration of trauma (Atkinson 2002; Anthony et al. 2021; Blagg 2016; Dudgeon et al. 2010). It also does not slow the incarceration rate, especially the recidivism rate. Indeed, this rate is climbing post COVID-19 (ABS 2024a; 2024b; Gibson 2024) and is starkly higher than the incarceration of other First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) under colonisation across Turtle Island (Canada, the USA) and Aotearoa (New Zealand) (Fox, Hansen & Miller 2022; Robinson et al. 2023; Roettger, Lockwood & Dennison 2019). There is evidence, however, that the BTBYCB program does contribute to positive outcomes for men in the Kimberley. In his yarn, B2 said 'when you look at it, these men are going to prison and learn' more stuff, cause this [BTBYCB program], I reckon gets them out of the cycle. CEO P further describes:

[BTBYCB is] reducing recidivism as well, so even if someone gets the program in jail, if that keeps them out next out next time [it is positive].

No one will argue with [the costs of the program] because prevention is better than cure.

This research project has posited that healing and cultural immersion programs can be used as diversions for First Nations offenders. However, participants, particularly in *Rubbi*, identified a *realpolitik* element at play. Prisons are already full of

First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), leading to the question of whether they should be abandoned or rather considered an opportunity to begin the healing journey in prison. Whilst prison is not a 'safe space' (Atkinson 2002, p.124) nor is it "ideal", there are benefits in attempting healing prerelease with follow up. Lisa, lead facilitator for *Mibbinbah*, stated that through its very design the program creates a safe space and has a built-in requirement of follow up. She said, 'we see the results very quickly in the program, and how it works in creating that safe space'. CEO P added, 'we'd like to be able to deliver this a bit more flexibly, this program. We believe in this program. We like it, we like the link'. This was elaborated on by B2 who said, 'that's what I like about [BTBYCB], I relate to it myself. That's why it's easy to get men to open up about themselves, it makes 'em feel comfortable'. Furthermore, Jack CEO *Mibbinbah* commented:

One of the biggest things for us is follow up, we won't go into a Community if we can only go there once... Follow up is important to us to show we are fair dinkum about making a change in Community... Follow up in with lads in prison is even more important.

As identified by CEO P, people in prison will eventually be released and healing and change must begin beforehand, 'the blokes in prison are gunna come out of prison, they are gunna go back into an environment where [family and domestic violence] is commonly practiced'. He continued, 'what's worked is [in] the prison [is]... a captive audience, its relevant to them. Prisons are an excellent space in that sense' (CEO P). The results from delivering the program are evidenced and experienced by the facilitators - the storyteller/participants of this research themselves. The *Rubbi* Group reflected that BTBYCB offers 'a good chance for [men] to open up to more things in their life they haven't really been able to explore'. They continued:

The thing with the *Mad Bastards* BTBYCB program is that it's after [doing the program] for the men when they realise there's more stuff they need help with and they want that help. They need more support, but the prison guards aren't taught in these areas. (*Rubbi* Group)

B2 spent a considerable time speaking of his experiences in delivering BTBYCB in prisons and his was a very nuanced perspective as he had spent significant time incarcerated himself. He shared, ‘I’ve got different answers outta the prisons [when delivering BTBYCB], continuing, ‘you get more answers out of the prisons ‘cause they want self-help now, ‘cause they are [like *Mad Bastards* character] TJ or a Bullet, and they want the support a Tex or Uncle Blak gives’ (B2). Insightfully, B2 elaborated:

[BTBYCB can] change the cycle, it gives you more confidence. Incarceration doesn’t really do that, it gives this tough, this ego, a fucked mentality... After doing this, I find that [men] want to do other programs, like men’s behaviour change programs... They say, “yeah, yeah, I want to do this”.

Community

Firstly and foremostly, *Mibbinbah* is centred around travelling to communities and delivering their programs *in situ* on *Ngurambang* (Country). Jack and Lisa yarned at length about their experiences in delivering multiple programs around communities in Australia. These yarns took place over a period of two years, usually after Jack and Lisa had come back from a community or an extended period delivering to multiple communities. Many times, they were on their way to other places for more healing work. The toll of this work would seem immense, however for Jack and Lisa there was always positivity. Another community helped, their own knowledge expanded, their enthusiasm palpable and infectious. They shared:

Since 2011 we’ve been running [BTBYCB], originally for men’s groups. (Jack)

It’s all about relationships with us, we hold them very dearly. The big part of BTBYCB is about relationships. (Jack)

Some of the communities we go into, it’s not just jump in the car and go into the next suburb. They are remote communities. (Jack)

We know in *Mibbinbah* we create safe spaces. (Jack)

We've worked in some of the toughest communities across the country and people have warned us and said, "don't go to that community", or "I wouldn't waste your time". But we've gone in there, you know [with an] open heart, open mind and been so looked after by mob... We don't get fixated on a bad story. (Lisa)

We know that in communities, that richness is in their being the best versions of themselves. [Mob] can share stories, they have language. They understand the land, their Culture is still rich. The proper way of doing things is in their everyday world... And we get to work in and with that. (Lisa)

We say no matter where we go, we get as much as we give. (Jack)

Such is *Mibbinbah's* commitment to work in and with communities, that they made attempts to not only deliver in communities themselves, but to train local facilitators within communities to ensure follow up. Delivering on Country and to Community was always viewed as *best practice* by the storyteller/participants, as they explain:

It worked really well, we were building the capacity of local fellas. Also empowering them to become leaders, not only in their own communities but in the broader communities as well. (Jack)

When we sit down and reflect on it, we are seriously blessed with what we do. (Jack)

Sitting in the circle, its transfer of knowledge. Each and every way, it's massive and beautiful and heartwarming. (Lisa)

The beauty is you can see a lot of different target groups [in Community]. (*Rubbi* Group)

Delivering in Community also presents challenges - not only due to the distances travelled and time needed, but also in understanding the ways of communities in general as well as how particular communities function. There was evidence from the storyteller/participants of the negative effects and impacts of 'lateral violence', itself a product of colonial trauma and the *Wétiko* Disease in action (Forbes 1992; Levy 2022; Wilson 2008). Jack reflected that often 'in Community, you're judged by what you say

and also by what you don't say'. B2 commented that 'some people, they just want the politics [of Community]', while the *Rubbi* Group reflected that 'sometimes in Community everyone shuts down, or they won't turn up 'cause they don't know who is delivering [the program]'. Despite this, there was a strong sense throughout that the work in Community is where true progress can be made and it is where healing starts. Storyteller/participants poignantly expressed:

You need connection to Community to make change. (B)

Our way is getting on the ground and going out and doing our work... Our work has to flow organically. The work, the circle, the community - its created by that. (Lisa)

Every Aboriginal man or person wants to get back to their community or even a close town, where they grew up... like it's their place. (B2)

This connection and the centrality of this visceral link is emphasised by Professor Aunty Judy Atkinson in her seminal and influential work, *Trauma trails recreating song lines* where she says, 'culture, spirit and identity are linked across time and place to Country and kin. Healing occurs when these re-connections begin to be made' (2002, p.205).

Facilitator experience

There was a familiarity, a recognition and an ease with the storyteller/participants who had first participated in the BTBYCB program and then facilitated it with other groups. Those that had completed the program were able to evidence its efficacy through their own personal experiences, as shared:

The program is very beneficial as it helps you identify and find a lot of the struggles you go through yourself as well as being able to talk about your own issues, as well as stuff with us young men, where we still suffer from like that trauma. (*Rubbi* Group)

Mad Bastards helped me identify things that were such issues in my life that I wasn't realising. (*Rubbi* Group)

The personal connection with the program and the depth that it reaches is illustrated by the yarns with B2, who said ‘it helps me with identifying my shit’. He continued:

I even end up talking about [the program] with my missus. I end up talking to her about stuff, its taken a lot of time for me to be this calm. I used to be the most ignorant, angriest bastard out there, wouldn’t care who I’d fight... That’s what I like about the [BTBYCB program], I relate it to myself. That’s why it’s so easy to get men to open up about themselves, make ‘em feel comfortable. (B2)

Throughout, there was a recognition of an almost universal experience of intergenerational trauma among First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) (Atkinson 2002; Brave Heart, 1998; Duran 1990). An understanding that colonialism had left its “fingerprints” indiscriminately across the crime scene that is First Nations communities. However, in this universal experience, there was a strong understanding of what works, *best practice* generated from lived experiences. The evidence of this lies in the storyteller/participants own voices, not in the hearsay of the “objective” western researcher nor the “experts with white saviour complexes”. These “experts” continue to spread their “wisdom” of our Culture with the same largesse with which colonialism spreads its trauma. The current western “wisdom” is not working. The current methods are not reducing the trauma which are the drivers of incarceration as evidenced by the fourteen of nineteen unmet Closing the Gap targets (Productivity Commission 2024). Rather, they are accelerating it. In 2022, there were 12,556 Indigenous adults in prison - a figure representing 31% of the total prison population. In 2024, this figure has grown to 15,070 Indigenous prisoners or 35% of the total prison population, despite First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) being only 3.8% of the Australian population (ABS 2024a; 2024b; Gibson 2024). A further problem for the future is that as at June 2024, the current rate of First Nations youth incarcerated was 59% of the total youth in detention (ABS 2024a; 2024b). As noted by Dr. Paddy Gibson (2024), First Nations youth ‘are an appalling 29 times more likely than their non-Indigenous counterparts to be locked up’ (p.1). In an interview with *Wiradjuri* journalist Stan Grant, renowned First Nations psychologist Dr. Tracey Westerman expanded:

The evidence tells us that the earlier you incarcerate children that is the strongest predictor of future criminality... So the stats say 98% of kids who go to prison will go back to prison before they reach eighteen. (Sydney Opera House 2025)

This research project asserts that the experts are the very community members who both received and delivered the *Mibbinbah* programs. The evidence was in their experience, and it is their voices which are privileged in this research. The program has provided a stage for storyteller/participants to *sit back and view from a distance* the effects of colonialism on themselves and their communities. It has provided a forum where that insight can be yarned about with others, offering an even deeper experience of insight. As shared by B2:

That's one thing I like about the program, the fact you can bring your baggage with you... A lot of programs you gotta leave your issues, you gotta leave them at the door, all your emotions, everything.

[BTBYCB] makes you feel everything. When you're facilitating it, you think about the shit that happens in life.

Like I say to [men who participate in the program], I don't know your personal situation, but I understand what you're going through 'cause we've all been through similar circumstances, have similar questions. We relate to one another.

Mibbinbah and the BTBYCB program pays homage to the circularity within First Nations Cultures as it shifts from one *Mad Bastards'* character to another - moving from one personality to another, shifting in recognition then understanding. This also speaks to the fundamental core of Culture, that nothing ever disappears it rather transforms. It acknowledges the absence of linear movement in First Nations ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. The film, and thus the program, does not begin with the youngest character chronicling a linear journey. Instead, it starts with the character in a middle age bracket, seeing issues through his eyes. He glimpses his past, sees his now and the future for himself and his family. This is our Culture as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) - our past is current with our now and our future. As B2 reflected:

You see people turn from [one character to another], Uncle Blak to Tex... They start off standoffish - they got that TJ [character] stance. You know, arms folded, chip on the shoulder and then they have us talk... Then they start breaking down them walls.

There was a lot of things in the movie, in the BTBYCB program, that I could relate too. A lot of stuff. I was a TJ, I was a Bullet, I've been Tex, even an Uncle Blak [laughing]... I really understand [TJ], you know getting into drugs, getting into fights. I was an angry person, 'cause when I get angry I react too and that's still something I'm learning how to deal with.

Derby mob

There was a further nuance in my yarns with the Derby mob because we had done the BTBYCB program together and sat in the yarning circle and shared personal stories. After this, we then sat and yarned which created an *exit poll* immediacy of reaction. Yarning again after the completion of the program allowed for a more reflective consideration of the experience, its efficacy and its potential as a process which would travel through our lives (Archibald 2008; Simpson, Abur & Charles 2020; Wilson 2008). The relational accountability which we formed through sharing in the program made for more connection when we yarned again six months later (Wilson 2008). By this point, we had a familiarity, an ease and even more opportunity for reflection (Archibald 2008).

T - a respected community leader and a man with immense experience in the colonial legal system and program delivery - had an epiphany whilst going through the program. As evidenced by storyteller/participants earlier this chapter, this is a common response however because I had participated in the program, I was able to witness the process of profound change which occurred in T. The Derby Group were a late replacement group because the original group had to cancel due to *Sorry Business* as previously noted. The new group were in some ways unprepared for the program - they had no information on it nor its structure or goals. This *cold call* delivery also provided a *test* for the program: would it be possible to create not only a safe space to share but also create an atmosphere for healing?

Notably, T originally presented as a reluctant participant. He had work commitments, and the three days of the program would significantly impact on these.

He was further aggravated that the program was based on the *Mad Bastards* (2011) film which he had seen more than once and he had difficulty foreseeing the value of rewatching a “movie”. In the first session, he had quite a negative attitude and was offering minimal engagement and perfunctory responses. However, in the midst of the process, it was possible to see a gradual shift which led to engagement and eventual enthusiasm for the program. There was a profound change between the morning session and afternoon session. T reflected:

Watching the movie, the *Mad Bastards* you know, seeing it in another way and watching that movie, it was really good to workshop that movie and pick out the things that happen because it's the things that happen to us in our Community.

This change and this relational connection were also reflected in the personal life stories which we as participants were able and willing to share. These stories ran the gamut of experience. The racism reflected in T's birth story in the river due to the hospital refusing his mother admittance because of her Aboriginality and his stories of his grandparents' removal by the government as part of the Stolen Generations. P's story of his daughter's interaction with the police and others in the group sharing stories of sexual assault. There were also positive stories about working in Community and even NAIDOC awards. Through structure, engagement and recognition of *murruguay marambul* (proper way), the program was able to form connection with participants and create healing. T reflected, 'it was a really good way how the program was set up. It's definitely a program for Aboriginal people'. P added, 'I've never broken down a movie like that, so it sort of opened my eyes... Breaking it down, you can relate to a lot of it'. Most notably, the change that occurred in the first day from morning to afternoon session was then accelerated by contemplation overnight. T said, 'we don't do that enough, what we've had in the last couple of days talking about the issues'. He continued:

You know domestic violence is one of our biggest problems in our community... I was thinking pretty negative about the problem with domestic violence yesterday, but today I feel pretty good. Just the fact we talked on things, how to deal with the issues and how to identify things, talking about the issue itself. (T)

The experience of T was repeated by others in the BTBYCB program. There was a feeling of positivity after the program completion, it was not just a matter of noting problems but also noting the positives:

So, it's just telling me to have a look, open your eyes, have a look, get it all in instead of having that one negative picture. (P)

We've got that lived experience... especially in this place Derby. We've all grown up in Derby, it's a really tight knit community. I've grown up with my people, we've all grown up in the Kimberley and Pilbara, cousins and so forth. (F)

The best thing about Derby is that we've got local people employed here, a majority of between eighty and ninety per cent. (F)

Seeing [young people] change is the best thing. I love it. (P)

The experience and understanding generated from working across diverse and multiple communities coupled with the visceral understandings which only arise from being First Nations is expressed in how the *Mibbinbah* BTBYCB program successfully forms relational connections between participants. This relationality is not only between participants but also a form of relational accountability between *Mibbinbah* and participants. This relational accountability has been reinforced by further contact between myself and storyteller/participants, most especially those in Derby who were my co-participants in the BTBYCB program. We will always be connected through this experience (Archibald 2008; Wilson 2008).

Mibbinbah's programs, particularly BTBYCB, address the issues which were raised in the *dyirridyirri* (willie wagtail) chapter by the voices of the storyteller/participants. There is a connection between the questions raised in that chapter and the responses provided in the *dhundhu* (black swan) one. *Mibbinbah* don't supply the answers, the answers must be found within each individual and each community. Whilst there are commonalities among them, each individual and community are ultimately the experts in their own lives. *Mibbinbah* provides the mechanism and atmosphere for healing, a window for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) to yarn and consider the issues in their communities as well as the strengths and values found in our Cultures.

Songline/storymap guide

This storymap sits on a print of the artwork of *Warlpiri* artist Lee Nangala Gallagher called *Yankirri Jukurrpa* (Emu Dreaming in *Warlpiri*). This is a story of the *yankirri* (emu in *Warlpiri*) and *wardilya* (bush turkey in *Warlpiri*). It belongs to the women from the Nangala/Nampijinpa kinship groups and the men from the Jangala/Jampijinpa kinship groups who are from the place, *Ngarilikurlangu* (Gallagher L. 2024). Surrounding this storymap is a circle of brown paper representing *Ngurambang* (Country) and how it encompasses all of our lives as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). The agency of *Ngurambang* (Country) is integral in our healing and it is the preferred place where the work of *Mibbinbah* occurs. Inside the circle of *Ngurambang* (Country) are seed pods from the poinciana tree symbolising the tracks of the songlines of the storyteller/participants and me. These songlines are our yarns, the voices in this project, the knowledge has been shared. They form a circle alluding to the circularity of our journeys, which have no end as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). All things transform as they journey, this reflects the healing and transformation processes initiated by *Mibbinbah*. Within this, there is also a recognition that my journey with the storyteller/participants is ongoing and our relationality continues whilst transforming from this project. Sitting across the songline journey pods are the *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) from my totem, expressing my responsibility to the storyteller/participants to deeply listen and honour the knowledge which has been shared.

Inside this circle of songline knowledge is the gym weight and rubber resistance band representing the strength and resilience of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). The *dhundhu gawuraa* (black swan feather) sits across these to signify the relationality and reciprocity *Mibbinbah* forms with communities. These symbols are interconnected to the trauma of colonialism; the black roses of suicide, the syringe of substance misuse, the steel cage of prison, the ghost gum seed pods representing the *dhulubang* (spirits) of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) enclosed in the prison, the handcuffs of the police - all sitting on the book of British imperialism (Porter 1975). Next, the weaving spindle representing love in the art of Clifford Possum Tjapaltjarri, which weaves in and out of the map connecting all elements - a constant theme in my yarns with Jack and Lisa

(Possum 1996). The *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) sit across the songline pods of participants reflecting their demands for change. The *coolamon* (container for carrying made of bark or wood) comes next with the headphones of listening and stopwatch of taking time, which sit at the forefront of *Mibbinbah*'s interactions and interconnection with Community. The *burrurugiyan gawuraa* (ibis feathers) are a sign of the place of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in *Ngurambang* (Country) and their ability to adapt and overcome.

Next is the *gugug* (owl) decorated in First Nations art reflecting our knowledges of our own lives and of Community - the basis of *Mibbinbah*'s work. The Aboriginal beanie with the ghost gum pods of the *dhulubang* (spirits) of Community encircled by a band of *wambuwuny* (kangaroo), sitting with the level and scales - the *bagaray bang* (rebalancing) essential to our healing. This also reflects on the *bagaray bang* (rebalancing) of our lives with all who are part of *Ngurambang* (Country). The *waagan gawuraa* (crow feathers) are a reminder of the responsibility we all bear to *Ngurambang* (Country).

Everything rests upon a *Mibbinbah* t-shirt, grounded by it at the centre of the map. The *dinawan wulanha* (emu caller) placed here reflects the call out from *Mibbinbah* to First Nations strengths. The compass is *Mibbinbah* pointing out the direction as well as their constant journeying from *giranggawu* (east) to *dhurbuwunhanha* (west), *balima* (north) to *guya* (south), travelling to communities. Dominating this central point are branches from the *larrkardiy* (boab tree in *Yawuru*), very important in the Kimberley as a source of water, food, clothing, building material and most importantly as a medicine tree, a healing tree. This is the healing journey *Mibbinbah* bring to communities. Atkinson (2002) reflects on the potency of healing:

Healing required experiencing feelings of safety in what had previously been experienced as an unsafe world. When people work together to create safety for each other they rebuild community, and what emerges is a deepening self-knowledge not just of the individual but of the group - community is made in this activity. The ability to begin to rebuild the essence and experience of family and community, therefore is an essence of healing processes. (p. 213)

The yarnning of the *dyirridyirri* (willie wagtail) and *dhundu* (black swan) discussion chapters come together in a songline/storymap. This represents our First

Nations worldviews, all things interconnected, holistic and circular. Our answers and our solutions are within us - they are contained in our connection to Culture and its interconnectivity to *Ngurambang* (Country).

Collective Songline/Storymap: A Summation



Figure marramarradhina (15.) Songline/storymap for Collective Summation.

Discussion

Colonialism sits in the middle of adaptability/holistic, listen/consult/time, sovereignty/strength/resilience and funding/control. It is central to all of these themes. A rope moves from colonialism and tightens around the other themes. The brown paper, which encircles, connects and encompasses all of the storymap, is *Ngurambang*

(Country). The pods of the poinciana tree are our songline journey, the voices of storyteller/participants encircling and telling their story truths, on Country and across Songlines. Touching these are the *durrawan gawuraa* (currawong feathers) which signify change in *Wiradjuri Ngurambang* (Country). This is the voice of Country, expressed through the voices of the storyteller/participants songlines, expressing the need for change. Inside Country is the spindle which weaves through adaptability/holistic, listen/consult/time, sovereignty/strength/resilience and funding/control accentuating the interconnectivity of all things within *Ngurambang* (Country). This storymap is circular, inside each theme are circles, which in turn are encompassed by the circle of songline and this in turn inside the circular embrace of Country. Culture does not have beginning nor end, everything in our worldviews continues - it does not finish or die, it transforms continuously. This is the importance of healing. Through healing, we as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) transform and we grow stronger. As B powerfully expressed:

I was talkin' to the people and they told me a story about a lot of the kids when they hang themselves, they do it in a tree in their front yard or backyard. What [the family] do is they cut down the tree obviously, but they don't kill it. They still let it grow, so that the tree sprouts from the stump. So they say, "it is about understanding yes the tree triggers us, but it also heals us". (B)

Burrindin / Pee wee

Conclusion

This chapter is both a conclusion and a reflection on my PhD journey, my songline in this project. It is named after *burrindin* (pee wee) because this *budyaan* (bird) is drawn to his own reflection in the water. At times, he is confused by it and even shows aggression, other times he finds comfort in it and calls out to it. This has been my experience. This project has been my mirror. It has invited me to examine my relationship with my Culture and offered opportunities to revitalise my cultural connections.

Gurragayarra /conclusion, finish speaking

This research began with a clear goal - to investigate alternatives to the colonial legal system for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), a system which has harmed and continues to harm First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and their communities. These alternatives are First Nations derived justice and healing programs which are based in First Nations worldviews and privilege First Nations experiences, realities and perspectives. This research project is not static, not mired in academic dogma, rather it is adaptive like First Nations Cultures and *Ngurambang* (Country). When new truths have been learnt, new knowledge exposed, new goals identified and challenges presented, this research has adapted, decolonised and re-indigenised. The journey of this research and this researcher is evidenced in its reading, chronicling the influence of *Ngurambang* (Country), *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) and storyteller/participants.

To examine First Nations justice alternatives, First Nations voices had to be privileged and in order to achieve this First Nations ways had to be utilised and *murruway marambul* (proper way) followed. Since invasion First Nations voices have been progressively silenced, resistance bludgeoned, our Cultures devalued, *Ngurambang* (Country) debased and assaulted, lies told and retold till they became “truths”. This project contributes to overturning that colonial project by raising our voices, bolstering resistance, valuing Cultures, listening to truths and respecting *Ngurambang* (Country). Indeed, respecting the inherent agency and sovereignty of

Ngurambang (Country). It is what remains constant within us, within our Cultures and thus within this project.

This thesis is an invitation to see a different worldview and to consider challenges and solutions through a First Nations lens. Why is this important? It is important because of the need to change the colonial legal system and its institutions. The word *institution* conjures up a picture of a grand edifice made with bricks and mortar, but the truth is that the bricks of institutions are people and those people are the accused, the guilty, the innocent, jurors, police, politicians, judges, lawyers, law teachers and law students. I am a lawyer and a law teacher and you, the reader, may at some stage be one or more of those other people. That is why the invitation is important.

The colonial legal system is alien to First Nations Cultures and it is premised upon punishment and incarceration which only succeeds in criminalising and marginalising First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). In contrast, First Nations justice is based in *bagaray bang* (rebalancing and healing). The question was not how to make the colonial legal system accommodate First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), but rather ask what are the alternatives to a system mired in western epistemology and intent on continuing the colonial project? First Nations justice solutions do not seek to criminalise and disempower First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), instead they provide an intersectional and holistic response to issues (ANROWS 2018; HRLC & Change The Record 2017; Victorian Equal Opportunity and Human Rights Commission 2012). First Nations justice solutions are grounded in healing and based in First Nations knowledges, working to achieve First Nations self-determination and control over First Nations lives (Atkinson 2002; Cox, Young & Bairnsfather-Scott 2009; Cunneen & Tauri 2017; HRLC & Change The Record 2017). We, as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), are the experts in our lives, in our lived experiences and we know the power of our Cultures, the powerful *bagaray bang* (rebalancing, healing) of *Ngurambang* (Country). Thus, this project posed and answered two research questions:

How do First Nations led on-Country programs address the cultural, emotional and psychological needs of men?

How has the Mibbinbah men's program used cultural continuity and revival to respond to the experiences of Aboriginal men?

My responsibilities to this research are deeply embedded within my Culture and therefore within me. Through acknowledging the agency of *Ngurambang* (Country), following *yindyamarra* and *murruway marambul* (proper way), this work contributes to driving a larger narrative which recognises that after sixty-five thousand years of continuity, First Nations knowledges have value and First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) are the experts in our own lives. Through the examination of the questions above, this research seeks to change the narrative within settler colonial minds and institutions toward a recognition that other systems of justice and knowledge not only exist but may be more efficacious than their own.

The answers given to these questions were not my answers, they were answers of the storyteller/participants. They are not the words of western “experts” nor the voices of academics and their recommendations. Rather they are the words and voices of the real experts, First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) who are living this experience, dealing with injustices daily and adapting and finding solutions to the issues. These words are their recommendations, resonating through the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process, a distinctly First Nations process which both generates First Nations knowledges and facilitates First Nations knowledge sharing. This research has provided evidence of the efficacy of our ways of Knowing, Being and Doing in offering solutions to the issues which we identify as important, issues not created by us but thrust upon us.

The questions were addressed and answered in the *dyirridyirri* (willie wagtail) and *dhundhu* (black swan) chapters. It is imperative to acknowledge that these answers and recommendations are all weaved together, intertwined and interconnected. This is because First Nations Cultures are holistic, all things dependent on one another and balanced. Western notions of a simplistic piecemeal approach are flawed, most especially when coupled with “it worked in Canada/New Zealand”. Success is determined by legitimate deep engagement with First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), communities, organisations and Cultures. True weight and value must be given to local First Nations knowledges and methods where collaboration is not control.

The storyteller/participants were, with one exception, all *dyirribang* (men). This was not by design but was determined by *Ngurambang* (Country) as explained in the *durrawan* and *budyaan galang* chapters. *Ngurambang* (Country) explicitly intervened in the process and provided *dyirribang* (men) as storyteller/participants. However, the centrality and valuing of the role of *yinaagirbang* (women) was honoured throughout

the research, through relationships and storymap material. As stated in the *gugubarra* (kookaburra) chapter, my own process relied on the profound guidance of my *badhiin* (nana/grandmother), a *maliyan Wiradjuri* (wedgetail eagle) woman.

The first research question posed: *how do First Nations led on-Country programs address the cultural, emotional and psychological needs of men?* This is answered fundamentally by how these programs directly address colonialism and intergenerational trauma. They confront these twin scourges by recognising their harmful impacts - realistically seeing that suicide, substance abuse, family violence, homelessness, hyper incarceration and poverty are symptoms of colonial policies, not evidence of some perceived deficit of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples).

The storyteller/participants have yarned a songline, the map to guide *what works* to meet their *cultural, emotional and psychological needs*. Importantly, it was recognised that First Nations program governance ensures First Nations Cultures are built into the program design keeping them First Nations centric. Not in a generic way but tailored to the particular community to which the programs are being delivered and thus being community controlled. This is achieved by ‘consulting, listening and taking your time’ in each Community before program delivery. It is by taking the time to form relationality between program facilitator and Community, listening to *Mudyigang* (Elders), respecting their knowledges and taking action based on their counsel. Building Culture into programs, understanding the link between SEWB and practising Culture and focusing on *bagaray bang* (healing, re-balancing) – all of these methods acknowledge, recognise and treat the emotional and psychological needs of men.

Embedding Culture into programs is sovereignty and this is the songline of the *dyirribang* (men), the storyteller/participants. It is the sovereignty of *Ngurambang* (Country) because *Ngurambang* (Country) is Culture. The storyteller/participants use of language in their lives, during programs, telling their stories, is sovereignty because programs are *on-Country* and so *Ngurambang* (Country) hears everything. If First Nations programs are First Nations designed and First Nations facilitated, this in turn embeds Culture and sovereignty into programs. When this occurs, strength and resilience is built in participants and facilitators because Culture is valued, and through this, we as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) feel valued.

Culture-centric programming recognises the holistic nature of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) and our communities. It understands that we need to be *bagaray bang* (balanced, healed) and approach issues beyond the immediate one, looking deeper to

understand our connections. By taking the time to listen, consult, be respectful, consider issues holistically, embedding Culture, recognising sovereignty and creating strength and resiliency, First Nations programs are able to facilitate First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) in doing what we have always done - adapt. For *on-Country programs* to achieve these goals, the recommendation is to remove the shackles placed on program providers by funding control which are just as onerous as the shackles placed on the necks, wrists and legs of our *Balumbambal* (Ancestors). This top-down control only perpetuates a continuation of intergenerational trauma. Change is imperative and that change requires consultation, recognition of First Nations sovereignty and recognition of the holistic nature of First Nations Cultures, the value of First Nations knowledges. This will result in a streamlining of the funding process, making applications less laboursome. The evaluation process needs First Nations values at its core, a realisation of the holistic interconnected nature of our communities, a recognition that a change in one person in Community has a *knock-on* effect in the family. A change in a family leads to change in extended family and a change in extended family leads to Community change. Ticking boxes for KPI's which are based in western methodologies will not bring benefit to First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) do not need governments and funders to *do the work*, we just need them to provide the means. Once this is done, they need to *get out of the way* and let First Nations Communities do for ourselves.

The second research question asked: *how has the Mibbinbah men's program used cultural continuity and revival to respond to the experiences of Aboriginal men?* It should be noted that *Mibbinbah* offer multiple programs, however this research selected the introductory BTBYCB program. As previously explored, BTBYCB is based on the film *Mad Bastards* (2011) which was *workshopped* by a working group to identify the major issues of intergenerational trauma driven by colonialism treated in the film. Once the issues were identified, the focus of the working group was to facilitate relationality between program facilitator and participant, leading to relational accountability and the creation of a safe space. This precipitates the yarning between the potential participants of the program. The group was able to do this because they had personal experience of these traumas as they were First Nations led which ensured Culture was woven into the program, contributing to relevancy and thus building connection, guaranteeing *continuity* and stimulating *revival*.

The true ability of *Mibbinbah* to respond to *dyirribang* (men) is through their core principle of meeting and yarning with *Mudyigang* (Elders) and Community before any program delivery takes place, taking the time to listen and consult on what the Community thinks are the issues which must be addressed. This adaptability of *Mibbinbah*, the ability to tailor focus, presents as a *bespoke* program for each participant group. *Mibbinbah* achieve this through experience, experience working in communities, by being First Nations and ensuring relevancy. They also practice a high level of duty of care around who delivers the program, the training of facilitators and how it is delivered. They watch facilitators, then correct them and they won't do a program unless they can guarantee follow up. This is a key element in ensuring that the program remains relevant, is *on point* and that the issues identified by the Community are addressed. *Mibbinbah* rely on the results of their work, their reputation, their work in one Community passed on to the next Community, by *word of mouth*.

Mibbinbah intuitively address the first research question posed by this research, they take time, listen, consult and acknowledge sovereignty by delivering programs on *Ngurambang* (Country). They recognise strength, encourage resiliency, understand the holistic interconnectivity of First Nations Cultures and they adapt. They do this because they are themselves First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). They do this despite the obstacles placed in their path by draconian funding requirements and restrictive control exerted by those funding requirements.

The tragedy which this research exposes is that we are in a time when government Closing the Gap targets apparently can't be met, where funding is difficult to secure for First Nations programs. However, Australian governments can always seem to find extra "housing" in prisons for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), always find water and food in those prisons for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), always find "jobs and job training" in those prisons for First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), always find "programs" to deliver. It is just that Australian Governments are unable to "find" those things when First Nations *mayiny* (peoples) aren't in prison.

This challenge is met head on by the storyteller/participants. Their voices are strident in the findings, they shout about the significance of approaching First Nations issues through First Nations worldviews, recognising the value of First Nations knowledges, the very value of First Nations *mayiny* (peoples). It is through a process which utilises Culture, which follows *murruway marambul* (proper way), which centres

Indigenous healing towards *bagaray bang* (re-balancing, restored, health and comfort), that meaningful justice can be found.

Budyaan galang / bird mob

The truth of this research lies in the creation of the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process. This project asked for deep personal knowledge to be shared which required a First Nations method of sharing and archiving. I needed to create a process which fulfilled my obligations to the storyteller/participants however, most importantly which fulfilled my *buyaa* (law). *Buyaa* (law) does not command nor demand, it asks. Following *buyaa* (law) is a privilege and it offers the opportunity to connect with all things in *Ngurambang* (Country). The weaving of my methodology into the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process is my ceremony with all things in *Ngurambang* (Country) - the blending of voice, the movement of image, the collaboration with *Ngurambang* (Country).

This research is alive because the process is alive and because *Ngurambang* (Country) is alive. Through the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) method, the research moves and undulates with our ceremony in the maps as they move three dimensionally, releasing knowledge. The process speaks through songline/storymaps, in language and in Culture and *Ngurambang* (Country) then hears it through language. The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process listens to *budyaan* (birds), to *Ngurambang* (Country) and to storyteller/participants. All things are working in concert - in *buyaa* (law), *mayiny* (people), *budyaan* (birds), *balugan* (animals), *galing* (water), *guulany* (trees), *dhawura* (wind), *yurung* (rain) and *birrang* (sky). All things are in ceremony with *Ngurambang* (Country), producing knowledge.

The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process is the answer to this research, it is the very voice of the storyteller/participants, their aspirations and recommendations in tangible forms. *Budyaan galang* (bird mob) required that I form relationality with the storyteller/participants. In order to do this, I needed to take time, let them get to know me, leave them the space to know my truth and follow our First Nations ways, *murruway marambul* (proper way). I had to sit and hear them, listen deeply to the knowledge which they shared. I then needed to consult with them, yarn to them about the knowledge that was passed, how it would be disseminated and archived.

The storyteller/participants were able to see their voices and knowledges displayed in their songline/storymap in an image form. They saw how the knowledge could and would be shared and remain controlled by them. The storyteller/participants were able to see how the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process followed First Nations cultural ways, creating ceremony and acknowledging the agency of *Ngurambang* (Country) in our lives. In privileging Culture, giving respect and honouring through *yindyamarra*, the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process was an exercise of sovereignty. Its use is a rejection of colonialism and a valuing of First Nations ways of Knowing, Being and Doing. In valuing us as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), creates strength.

The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process acknowledges trauma and also challenges it through cultural integrity, authenticity and *bagaray bang* (healing, rebalancing). This healing and rebalancing bolters resilience, it is holistic and follows the circle of First Nations lives and Cultures, deeply woven through the interconnectivity of family, Community, Culture and our unending collaboration with *Ngurambang* (Country). The *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process embodies adaptability - it changed and adapted to both challenges and knowledges - this is *murruway marambul* (proper way).

It has been my honour to be guided by *Ngurambang* (Country), to create and use the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process and, most importantly, to be a custodian of the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process as a *Mowgee Wiradjuri Waagan Dyirribang* (Wiradjuri Crow Man of the Mowgee clan). I offer the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) method as a gift for other researchers, those who come after me, as it was given to me as a gift.

Ultimately, the questions posed by this thesis are answered by the very use of a First Nations research process which privileges and uses our ways of Knowing, Being and Doing and which reveals our knowledges and truths. In some western eyes, our Cultures have been relegated a convenient “nod” for inclusion, a necessary Reconciliation Action Plan, “trotted out” for visiting western dignitaries or even opening sporting events and then discarded. We have been used and discarded ever since invasion. However, this research refuses that and opens the way for *real* engagement with First Nations Cultures through valuing us, through uncompromising respect, honouring and listening - through *yindyamarra*.

Supervisor Relationship

First Nations Culture is cyclical and so is this thesis - no ending, just transformation. My supervisor relationship is the same and through transformation, it has an ending at its beginning. One of the first steps in the PhD process is choosing a supervisor, indeed a supervisory team. This relationship is vital in the PhD process, it is intimate as you share your thoughts and worldview, it requires guidance and at times a shoulder to cry on. If you are very fortunate, it may involve a mentorship. In a First Nations paradigm, this type of relationship is *murruway marambul* (proper way).

The last subject in my undergraduate degree led me to my chief supervisor. The subject re-examined historical judgements, viewing them through an alternative lens, a different worldview. It was a subject which challenged concepts, allowed freedom of thought, it was a process which opened possibilities, and with a teacher who acknowledged and respected differing worldviews. When it came time to approach a supervisor, there was no doubt in my mind who would be the best *fit* for me and for this project, a person who could understand and respect my worldview. That person was Teresa Libesman, a renowned and respected leader in the research of child protection, however more importantly a thinker unrestricted by epistemological boundaries. Significantly in our first discussions Terri suggested bringing someone into the project who could add insight into First Nations incarceration and the criminological aspects of the research, she suggested Christopher Cunneen. Chris' standing in the world of criminology and his expertise in First Nations intersections with the colonial legal system is immense, the list of his body of work is beyond the capacity of this chapter to list. His guidance through the wormhole of First Nations interactions with the colonial legal system has been invaluable.

The first book I read when I began my undergraduate degree was *Indigenous Legal Relations in Australia* (2009) by Larissa Behrendt, Chris Cunneen and Terri Libesman and it was very influential in my studies. The closing of this circle was Larissa coming onto the supervisory team. Larissa brings immense knowledge and experience, guidance in not only legal and academic matters but First Nations guidance. We, as First Nations *mayiny* (peoples), always know there is always more knowledge to

learn. Larissa has been generous with her time and with knowledge sharing, the value of her critical analysis of my thesis has been immeasurable.

The supervisory relationship became a reciprocal journey of knowledge sharing, at the start knowledge passed to me and then the journey changed and I shared my knowledge. In life, you sometimes form a picture, an expectation of how things will be. I had a picture of what a supervisor relationship might be, altruistic, providing mentorship, collegiate, however my supervisors have done that rare thing in life, they have not only met my expectations of a supervisory relationship, they have exceeded it and for that I will be eternally grateful.

Winhangadurinya / to reflect, to think about

Burrindin (pee wee) is native to this continent and he has even been classified as a ‘temperamentally inherently “bold” species’ (Kitchen, Lill & Price 2010, p.1). High volumes of human interaction and *traffic* can have significant impacts on native bird species leading to altering behaviour patterns, increasing aggression, stress and mortality rates and even decreasing birth rates (Anderson & Keith 1980; Ellenberg et al. 2007; Kitchen, Lill & Price 2010). However, some native birds such as *burrindin* (pee wee) are ‘urban adapters’ and conduct an ‘urban colonisation’ of their own (Kitchen, Lill & Price 2010, p.1; McDougall et al. 2006). This is the circularity of *burrindin* (pee wee) - he began as the native then urbanisation colonised his habitat and he learned to overcome his fears and trauma, not relinquishing his old ways but adapting to meet the challenges. At the beginning of this project, I had a sense of what it was that I was trying to achieve, to give a voice to those whose voices have been muted by colonialism. However, when I began my PhD, I felt that I was the interloper in the western academy. I had a visceral feeling of the foreignness to it and it wasn’t until I immersed myself and this project in *murruway marambul* (proper way) and listening to *Ngurambang* (Country) that I could move forward.

At the beginning of this project, I believed that my connection to my Culture was strong, however it has seen me strengthen my connection to my *Balumbambal* (Ancestors), to understand their agency in my life and through them to understand the ultimate agency of *Ngurambang* (Country). Basing this project in *yindyamarra* has

granted that time for deep listening, deep thinking and through that process a deep honouring of my *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) and *Ngurambang* (Country). This deep honouring is expressed by taking the time to speak with the *budyaan* (birds) and with *Ngurambang* (Country) in language, strengthening my relationality with *Balumbambal* (Ancestors), which in turn reinforces the relational accountability I have with and to *Ngurambang* (Country).

The confusion experienced by *burrindin* (pee wee) in his reflection is expressed in my attempts to understand the messages and stories of *Mudyigang* (Elders), *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) and *Ngurambang* (Country). I experienced frustration about the time that is wasted in the academy, discarding my western learning to embrace my *dhulubang* (spirit) and take the time to think, to listen and deeply examine what is the truth of these stories. Notably, my frustration disappeared when I activated this cultural process, reiterating my place within the circle of *Ngurambang* (Country), and in turn completing the circle.

This project has a circularity mimicking First Nations Culture, it occurs in concentric circles. The circles of the *dhundhu* (black swan) story bringing my *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) through my life; the circle of the lessons of *waagan* (crow) reiterating the teachings of *buyaa* (law); the circles of songline knowledges reconnecting pathways and the reciprocity of my relationships with storyteller/participants and my supervisors; the circles of the *Mibbinbah* BTBYCB program which moves through the cycles of life - character to character, child to middle age, and then *Mudyigang* (Elder) connecting to child.

There is a question unanswered: why is this chapter named after *burrindin* (pee wee)? The answer is contained in a final story. This chapter came about through my *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process, this is *murruway marambul* (proper way), walking on *Ngurambang* (Country), practising *yindyamarra*, listening and thinking deeply, honouring *Ngurambang* (Country), listening to my *Balumbambal* (Ancestors), watching and listening to my *gaagang* (brothers) and *mingaan* (sisters), the other inhabitants of *Ngurambang* (Country) who are all my *miyagan* (family) and who speak directly to my *dhulubang* (spirit). I had wrestled whether to write a reflection of my experience with this research, whether to open my personal process to the view of others. To help with my quandary, I turned to *Ngurambang* (Country) for guidance. I went out onto *Ngurambang* (Country), immersing myself in the *budyaan galang* (bird mob) process, seeking an answer, seeking knowledge. In my journey, I found myself looking at

burrindin (pee wee), as I have many times, and I noticed that he left me a *gawuraa* (feather) in my path. I picked it up, thanked *burrindin* (pee wee) and continued my walking. About two kilometres away I noticed more *burrindin* (pee wee) going about their *barrawinya* (hunting), I wished them *yiradhu marang* (good day), which is *murrurway marambul* (proper way) - *yindyamalagirridyu mingaangaland-hibu gaagang galandhibu* (I respect my brothers and sisters). These *burrindin* (pee wee) also left me the gift of *gawuraa* (feathers). I understand from these gifts that this is important, I thought about *burrindin* (pee wee) and what he does. I remembered that he reacts to his image, he sees himself in mirrors and windows, he sees his reflection. Again *Ngurambang* (Country), as she has many times in my life, answered my query - I must write a reflection. There is a basic circularity which is created with reflection, looking from the end to the beginning, in turn back to the ending, in turn linking beginning and end in a continuum. This part of my cultural immersion, my healing, seeing my reflection in the research is my *bagaray bang* (rebalancing), it is the completion of this circle, not finished just one end meeting the other.

The final circle is my connection to *Ngurambang* (Country), it is central in this project and in my life. When I walk on *Ngurambang* (Country), I breathe. With every breath I take in the very essence of *Ngurambang* (Country), the unseen nano particles which swirl as I walk, which fly into the air. *Ngurambang* (Country) absorbs me and feeds me. My *Balumbambal* (Ancestors) have done the same over millennia, they fed *Ngurambang* (Country), they became *Ngurambang* (Country), that is how they are now with me. My *babiin* (father) is *Ngurambang* (Country), his *ngama* (mother) is *Ngurambang* (Country), her *babiin* (father) is *Ngurambang* (Country), his *ngama* (mother) is *Ngurambang* (Country) - into the distance, as one day I will become *Ngurambang* (Country). That is my circle.

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