

**NIDJA BEELIAR BOODJAR NOONOOKURT  
NYININY: A NYUNGAR INTERPRETIVE  
HISTORY OF THE USE OF BOODJAR  
(COUNTRY) IN THE VICINITY OF  
MURDOCH UNIVERSITY.**

This Report was co-authored by:

Len Collard, MA

Sandra Harben, BA

Dr Rosemary van den Berg, PhD

FOR

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**INTRODUCTION**

The approach to the study of Murdoch University and the surrounding districts is articulated in the World Indigenous Nations Higher Education Consortium (WINHEC) (2002). The guiding principles for consideration by WINHEC for their Accreditation System states that:

- 1) The criteria for accreditation review will be founded upon the local Indigenous language and cultural beliefs and practices that provide the epistemological and pedagogical basis for the institutions under review.
- 2) The accreditation review process will include the role of locally respected Elders and recognised cultural practitioners, and the use of the heritage language(s) as reflected in the institution/program under review.
- 3) The WINHEC Accreditation Self-Study process will be guided by local cultural standards that are developed by the respective Indigenous community and will serve as the basis for defining quality.
- 4) The WINHEC Accreditation System will promote Indigenous research that is respectful of cultural and intellectual property rights and closely integrated with the communities being served (WINHEC 2002, p.6).

The draft document containing these principles was presented by WINHEC delegates to the Annual Executive Board Meeting of WINHEC, October 2002, Todd Park Campus, Wanaga o Aotearoa, Porirua, Wellington, New Zealand. Following the Conference the delegates presented this information to the National Indigenous Higher Education Committee at Griffith University in Brisbane, Qld, in November 2002.

This study was carried out in Whadjuck Nyungar boodjar on behalf of Murdoch University that is located in our part of the country. Calls from Indigenous Australians for a history reflecting their experiences and concerns are mirrored globally in countries such as New Zealand, South Africa, the United States and Canada. In his text, *Te Mana, Te Kawanatanga: The politics of Maori self-determination*, M. H. Durie (1989) wrote of the Maori reclaiming their histories through their writing. In Australia, Indigenous accounts of

history are pertinent to issues of responsibility and obligations of cultural integrity, especially for those of us with ties to this land that pre-date the arrival of Europeans. Additionally, non-Aboriginal people benefit from learning more about contributions made by Indigenous Australians to the development of the Nation, not least because of the role that knowledge plays in facilitating improved relations with Indigenous people.

This project researched and developed a Nyungar interpretive history encompassing both traditional and contemporary events with a particular focus on land currently occupied by Murdoch University and its surrounds in Perth, Western Australia. Nyungar worldviews, theories or ideologies have existed for over 40,000 years, however, our existence has largely been ignored by many social scientists focussing on Aboriginal experiences. A number of commentators (such as Sabbioni 1993; Choo 1990; Langton 1981; Muecke 1988; Keen 1988; Narogin 1990) have recently critiqued the minimal recognition of Nyungar, Murri and Koori ideology and theories within the social sciences. As a group of Nyungar proposing this study of Nyungar and other experiences it was important to us to recognise the existence of Nyungar theories, attitudes, values, beliefs and ways of how to use these notions as starting points for research projects.

### **SOCIAL, CULTURAL AND LANGUAGE DIVERSITY**

History, social, cultural and language diversity, as an interpretive exercise, as much as an account of past events, is well accepted. With regard to the history of Australia since colonisation, both the interpretation and formal documenting of history has been, for the most part, the province of non-Aboriginal people. Until recently, the great diversity of regional Australian Aboriginal societies and cultural terminologies has generally been overlooked. However, this diversity was acknowledged and mapped by Tindale (1974) who identified that there were as many as 500 Indigenous geopolitical language societies across Australia. However, the Tindale map we show identifies the Western Australian Tribal Language Groups.



## WESTERN AUSTRALIA TINDALE TRIBAL BOUNDARIES

QuickTime™ and a  
TIFF (LZW) decompressor  
are needed to see this picture.

This is further evidence that it is no longer acceptable to ignore the variety and diversity of language groups, their cultures and knowledge, and the importance of regional identities in Aboriginal and Islander Australian societies.

Of these 500 language groups, twelve (12) belong to Nyungar boodjar or country. Nyungar is the generic name of the original people in the south-west of Western Australia. It specifically refers to our people whose ancestors originally occupied and continue to occupy the whole South West. The word Nyungar means people or person and is not gender specific (Mountford and Collard 2000). The twelve geopolitical language groups within Nyungar are Balardong, Juat, Kaneang, Koreng, Minang, Njakinjaki, Pibelman, Pindjarup, Wardandi, Whadjuk, Wiilman, and Wudjari (Tindale 1974). Some of the other regional identities in Western Australia include, Wongi, which is the generic name of the Aboriginal people from the Eastern Goldfields region of Western Australia, and Yamatji, which is the generic name of the Aboriginal people in the Murchison and Gascoyne areas of the mid-west of this state, while in the north-west of Western Australia, in what is known as the Pilbara, are peoples who refer to themselves as Mulba or Marlba and the Martu or Mardu (Collard 1996; van den Berg 1994; Brewster et al. 2000). Further north, in the Kimberley region, are Aboriginal people who are identified by their respective groups like the Tawuru of Broome (Torres 2000), the Kwini of Kalumburu (Chalariameri 2000) and Ngarinyin around Derby (Mowaljarlai and Malnic 2001), to name a few. There are many more groups throughout the Kimberley who also insist on identifying themselves by their traditional names. They are not identified as one group like the Nyungar, Wongi or Yamatji (van den Berg 2002).

By using the Tindale (1974) map we were able to identify the specific geographical and linguistic groups within our own Nyungar boodjar such as the Balardong, Koreng or Kaneang groups. This method is a useful tool for other researchers who may be interested in the geography of other Indigenous peoples of Australia such as Koori, Mulba, Murri, Nunga, Pallawah or Wyba. In our opinion, this could well challenge the continuous generic use of the term “Aborigine”. The Budget MacQuarie Dictionary (1998, p.2) Third Edition’s definition of an Aborigine is “one of a race of tribal peoples, the earliest known to live in Australia” or “(generally) one of a people living in a country or place from earliest known times”. Alternatively, Harvey Arden’s (1994) etymological explanation of the term “Aboriginal” refers to:

‘Ab’ (from the Latin); [he explains] means ‘from’ or ‘out of’ ‘origin means ‘

beginning' or 'source' and 'al' (also from the Latin) means 'one belonging to'. Combining this with the word 'origo' (Latin) which is translated as "I arise" or 'become visible'. 'An Aboriginal is one who, from the beginning who is rising and becoming visible' (Arden 1994).

A definition was also developed by the Commonwealth Department of Aboriginal Affairs, one that situated people in a network of Aboriginal kinship and affinity, and not by appearance, as: "An Aboriginal person or a Torres Strait Islander person is a person of Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander descent who identifies as an Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander and is accepted as such by the community in which he or she lives" (cited in *What is Aboriginality?* 2002).

The term "Aborigine" does not tell us anything about the regional diversity of Indigenous Australians, it tells us even less about the richness of each of our own cultural, language and geopolitical systems. It simply tells us that we are the original peoples of Australia.

The issue of identity is central to Indigenous people. To describe the Koori, Nyungar, Mulba, Murri, Nunga, Pallawah, Wongi or Wyba as Aborigines or Indigenous Australians denies us our own diversity and identity within our own theoretical and applied epistemology. As Tindale (1974) identified, there are over 500 or more geopolitical language groups across Australia. Each of the language groups has their own identity, language, kinship systems, country, belief systems and religion. However, even though the twelve Nyungar language groups are identified as separate entities (Tindale 1974), they nevertheless share the same identity, language, kinship systems, country, belief systems and religion.

Jules Whiteway amply supports our views that Aboriginality "has nothing to do with the colour of my skin. It's about respect, culture, community and kin" (Oxenham et al. 1999, p.164, *He gave us life and our trilogy*). Yamatji woman, Darlene Oxenham (1999), states that the "importance of the issues of kinship, family and obligations" described her Aboriginality as such:

I think I may have asked the question, 'What is Aboriginality, or is there an essence?' And we looked a bit deeper into what it means to be Aboriginal, and some of those things that we looked at included family relationships, and the obligations you have to relations. We also looked at each of our territorial feelings: and we saw that as quite a defining point because each of us knew

where we were actually from, and that had a lot of importance (cited in What is Aboriginality? 2002; Oxenham et al. 1999, p.102).

Despite our critical perspective on using the term Aborigine, we could not at times avoid using the terminology “Indigenous Australians” or “Aborigine”. However, we tried to minimise its use wherever possible and are confident that these terms were only used in a more general sense when describing the Australian Indigenous people as “a whole”.

Nyungar and other Indigenous social scientists need to write history from their own theoretical positions. It is no longer acceptable to ignore our own cultures and condone the colonial models of the Aborigine. As Whadjuck, Balardong and Pindjarup Nyungar writing this paper we have carried out our responsibility by acknowledging the variety and importance of our own regional and political identity.

A number of different language variations occur amongst the Balardong, Juat, Kaneang, Koreng, Minang, Njakinjaki, Pibelman, Pindjarup, Wardandi, Whadjuck, Wiilman and Wudjari in the southwest of Western Australia (Tindale 1974; Douglas 1976). There are even variations in the spelling of the word which include Nyungar, Noongar, Nyoongar or Nyoongah. This variation reflects both regional dialect differences as well as an attempt by groups in these areas to retain, in a modern Australian society, a sense of independence and difference within. Therefore, the authors acknowledge that writing our Nyungar language has been somewhat difficult because of the different ways our words have been spelt over the course of time.

Nyungar wangkiny or language and the commitment to it is central to our identity. In 1833, Lyon wrote:

[Nyungar] retain only those characteristics of man which it is impossible for him to lose, under any circumstances; namely, the power of language ... The language of Derbal [of the Perth waters] seems to possess a great deal of originality. But there is something very peculiar in its construction; or, it is characterised by great irregularity in the declension of its nouns and conjugation of its verbs. In either case, to acquire it accurately, and commit it to writing correctly will be no easy task (Lyon 1833, p.9).

Therefore, for this interpretive history, despite different spellings, the incorporation of Nyungar language and expressions to describe places, people, events, artefacts, flora and fauna, was essential to any proper understanding of the use of boodjar (land) in the vicinity of Murdoch University (Collard and Palmer 1998).

Not only should the reader find this study interesting but, more importantly, it will symbolically act to demonstrate that this study recognises the continued significance and power of our Nyungar wangkiny or language as an applied practice of our theory, which will signify to the reader that Nyungar theories and wangkiny are alive and strong.

Nyungar language is evident in place names, suburbs, trees and animals found throughout the South West. They have been incorporated into the Australian-English language usage, and it proves that Nyungar have remained faithful to our Nyungar wangkiny despite regressive policies and practices being imposed upon us. These practices assist in restoring and preserving Nyungar ways of expressing culture and experience. As stated by the late Ralph Winmar (1996), Elder and “Keeper of the Stories”, “Nyungar language has a harmonious quality, and it is a real treat to hear two fluent speakers in conversation”.

Of equal importance, research of early colonisation (1829-1850) requires detailed attention, primarily because of the profound presence of Nyungar voices in the majority of stories detailing this period in Western Australia’s history. Exploring issues of Nyungar land use, Nyungar knowledge of the natural environment and Nyungar comprehension of colonisation is pivotal to this report.

We also recognise the relative dearth of information or narratives about Nyungar yok or women. Their role as boodjar boordier owners and persons of influence needs discussion because nearly all references place Nyungar yorga in the role of food gatherers, but fail to recognise their contribution in maintaining the economic and social well-being of Nyungar society. Therefore, the issue of gender in Nyungar society is also discussed.

As mentioned, history is an interpretive exercise, not a transparent vehicle for conveying truth in the Cartesian sense. The surviving materials upon which a historical analysis can be made are selective, often contradictory and imbued with the socio-cultural values of the time. There is, in contemporary Australian society, a heavy reliance on written or visual data from which to draw conclusions about history, which privileges the opinions and experiences of

very particular groups, especially those in the non-Indigenous society. Further, it is impossible for any individual or group to keep account of minutiae in its infinitude; we are always dealing with the partial and incomplete. Consequently, for those interested in the past, whether historians, social anthropologists or archaeologists, there can be no claims to a definitive truth.

Constructing a Nyungar interpretive history demands a disruption of colonial discourse with a concomitant acknowledgement that it, too, will be a partial account mediated by past and present interpretations. To that end, this project has utilised the theoretical and applied knowledges of several Nyungar Oral Historians as well as material originating from non-Nyungar and non-Aboriginal people. By constructing a Nyungar interpretive history we ensure that we do not, like non-Nyungar writers, suffer the consequences of blindly adopting western history and cartographic conventions which can easily lead us into talking about Nyungar and Nyungar languages, land uses and cultural lifestyles as if they no longer exist. The research team noticed that official reports and other written texts almost always refer to Nyungar cultural forms, Nyungar land use and Nyungar names in the past tense. We suspect this reflects the way official histories focus most attention on Nyungar and land use prior to colonisation and have largely not examined the use of boodjar by Nyungar since 1829.

In direct contrast to the inference that Nyungar culture died out soon after colonisation, many Nyungar continue to enjoy and access much of their boodjar or country, moort or family, katitjin or knowledge and their wangkiny or language. Indeed, it is still the case today that many Nyungar, be they Whadjuck, Balardong, Pindjarup or Minang, continue to access areas around Derbal Yiragan or Perth estuary waters for sustenance, knowledge and spiritual renewal, and practice distinctly cultural forms or business matters (Eggington 1991-1993; Bennell 1978a; Bennell 1978b; Collard 2002; Walley, J. 2002; Walley, R. 2002; Garlett 2002; Gentle 2002; Hayden 2002; Winmar 2002).

Finally, it is crucial that we acknowledge that our conclusions are provisional, open to criticism and seen as one theory or set of stories rather than the definitive and fixed true story. Like wedjela, Nyungar also sometimes differ in their interpretation of events. Having said this, one feature of the many discussions that took place between Nyungar involved in this project was the degree of respect accorded to people who may have had a different story to tell.

## **NYUNGAR THEORY**

As Nyungar writing about the Nyungar world, we engaged a set of propositions as our guiding principles to develop a Nyungar theoretical framework. This theory enabled us to put into context how Nyungar knowledge is constructed, passed on and supported. The foundation of our theory is the trilogy of boodjar (country), moort (family or relations) and katitjin (knowledge). This trilogy provides the structure for our Cosmology.

Our research is going to show that the three are intrinsic; one cannot apply this theory by using one of the major components without the others. On this basis, boodjar or country is the first major theoretical component. Moort or family is the second, followed by katitjin or applied knowledges as the third. Therefore, it is fundamental for researchers investigating Nyungar to appreciate the content, method and context of Nyungar theory as a basis for this style of research.

In the South-West, yeye or today, as in kura or the past, Nyungar boordier or elders play a role as custodians of all knowledges, and in particular “special” knowledges, both theoretical and practical which are to be passed on. Today this continues through intergenerational Nyungar interaction using oral and written discourses. This, in turn, records and perpetuates the need to use Nyungar theory, language, values, attitudes and beliefs as a basis for intergenerational transmission of katitjin or knowledge, both theoretical and applied, by and among Nyungar. As each generation passes on, it is then our and their duty, as the current and future generation of Nyungar, to take on these custodial responsibilities, passing them on to our future generations. These include keeping harmony with social protocols in our past, current and future worlds by ensuring that each successive generation of regional Nyungar descendants, be they Whadjuck, Balardong or Minang, are brought up to understand and take their responsibilities and place as active participants and custodians of such ancient katitjin or knowledges.

In contemporary Nyungar societies of south Western Australia, these concepts are still evidenced. Nyungar gerontocracies, boordier or elders are still acknowledged as the custodians of knowledge and wisdom of their boodjar, moort and katitjin, and are responsible for the perpetuation through ongoing communications of Nyungar theories, knowledges and its application (Bennell 1993). Brown supports this notion and suggests that any Nyungar history must emerge from the way Nyungar people construct reality (Irrluma [A. Isaac Brown] 1988, pp.106-113; Sabbioni 1993).

## AN INSIGHT INTO THE NYUNGAR COSMOLOGY

“Our Creator of the Trilogy” - Waakal or Nyungar Rainbow Serpent

Nyungar believe that the Waakal or Nyungar Rainbow Serpent is our Creator. According to Whadjuck/Balardong “Keeper of the Stories”, the late Tom Bennell (Yelakitj):

There are two different sorts of carpet snake. If anybody ever see them, the old bush carpet, he got white marks on him. The old water carpet snake, he is purple and oh, he is pretty. He is purple. I saw them myself. I saw them, oh, up to fourteen or fifteen feet long, very pretty. But the old forest carpet snake, he is only just an ordinary old carpet snake. But the real water snake oh, he is pretty, that carpet snake. I don't think too many people have seen him. They wouldn't know he was a carpet snake, but he is a carpet snake all right, but the Nyungar call him Waakal (Bennell 1978 b).

Although Nyungar occupy their own boodjar, our cultural ideologies, language and social mores are based on the same tenets since kura, a long time ago (Bennell 1993). Many stories or mythologies are told and while the content of those stories changed with the narrator, the basic theory always depicted the Waakal or Nyungar Rainbow Serpent as fundamental to Nyungar Cosmology.

Whadjuck/Balardong Len Collard (2000, pp.2-4) tells of how “the Waakal came out of the earth. Sometimes it went kardup boodjar (under the earth) and sometimes it went yira boodjar (over the earth) and it made bilya (river/s), the kaart (hill/s) and ngamar (the waterhole/s)”. Nyungar theorised it created the Derbal Yiragan, (now known as the Swan River) which means, “where the estuary is filled up to by the winding river” (Kickett 1995, p.4). It also made all the other waterways in Nyungar boodjar. The late “Keeper of the Stories” Balardong/Whadjuck Ralph Winmar, reinforces the Waakal theme in his story when he says, “At York, you can see where the Warkal [sic] (water snake) left a track when he came over the hill. The Warkal [sic] is the giver of life, he made the rivers, swamps, lakes and waterholes, he maintains the fresh water sources.” (Winmar 1996, p.21).

These Waakal theories as stories are real to Nyungar. If one were to look at Derbal Yiragan (Perth waters of the Swan River) from the top of geenunginy bo kaart or ‘the hill to see far’



(Mt Eliza, Kings Park), one could visualise this huge Waakal twisting and turning as it made its way to the coast at Walyalup or Fremantle. Author and poet the late Dr Jack Davis, a northwest Aboriginal man who spent most of his life in Nyungar boodjar with our moort, wrote the play Kullark (1982). The audience could hear Dr Davis's version of the local Whadjuck boordier Yagan's ceremonial chant which could be heard loud and strong as he pays tribute to the Warrgul [sic] for creating the Nyungar universe:

Woolah!

You came, Warrgul,

With a flash of fire and a thunder roar, and

As you came, you flung the earth up to the sky,

You formed the mountain ranges and the undulating plains.

You made a home for me

On Kargattup and Karta Koomba,

You made the beeyol beeyol, the wide clear river,

As you travelled onward to the sea.

And as you went into the sunset,

Two rocks you left to mark your passing,

To tell of your returning

And our affinity (Snell 1988, p.16).

Yagan, who was a Whadjuck boordier and patriot who defended our boodjar in the early days of colonisation, has been described by many non-Indigenous people as a "native savage". However, his moort and other Nyungar know him as Whadjuck boordier (landowner, patriot, warrior and defender of Nyungar boodjar, moort and katitjin).

This is how "Keeper of the Stories" Tom Bennell relates the Nyungar oral history:

The Waakal - that's a carpet snake and there is a dry carpet and a wet carpet snake. The old Waakal that lives in the water, they never let them touch them. Never let the children play with those. They reckon that is Nyungar koorlongka

warra wirrinitj warbaniny, the Waakal, you're not to play with that carpet snake, that is bad. Boorda noonook mighty minditch and that means you might get sick and die. They never let them (the kids) touch them [carpet snake] when they go out. Nitcha barlup Waakal marbukal nyininy - that means he is a harmless carpet snake. He lives in the bush throughout Nyungar boodjar. But the old water snakes; they never let them touch 'em. They are two different sorts of carpet snake. If anybody ever see them, the old bush carpet, he got white marks on him. But the real water snake oh, he is pretty, that carpet snake. ... the Nyungar call him Waakal kierp wirrinitj. That means that carpet snake, he belongs to the water. You mustn't touch that snake; that's no good. If you kill that carpet snake noonook barminyiny that Waakal ngulla kierp uat, that means our water dries up - none. That is their history stories and very true too. They never let their children touch or mess around with those carpet snakes. If they come down here to Mindjarliny, the old Nyungar call that Minjarliny, noonook Minjarliny koorl nyininy, Nyungar wam, Waakal carrungupiny - that means that carpet snake is going to get savage. Mulgariny Waakal koorliny noonar mar yirawal billariny see - they reckon that carpet snake could make a storm come. Make it rain for them. Mandikan, that's a spring pool down west of Beverley. They call that Mandikan, that is a wirrinitj kierp for djinangany noonook barlung. It is fresh water, just like rainwater. When we were carting water from there one time, one old Nyungar come and said, oh koorlongka noonook kierp nartcha buranginy djennagar Mandikan. That is warra wernitj he said "Nitcha kierp ngarda mar koorliny benang - this water underneath sky going tomorrow [going to rain]". Well, that night it did. Thunder and lightening, a lot of it and it was a miracle. Whether it was true or not, but that is how it happened. We had a big thunderstorm. We were clearing there, right alongside the water at the time, and all that clearing, it washed the logs right out. We had to wait a week for it to dry out before we could burn it. Noonar karla koorlangka karl koorl buranginy - might be one week before we light our fire and, by jove, yes, it was true. Anyway we packed it all up and left (Bennell 1978 a).

**The version of Tom Bennell's story was interpreted by the Nyungar authors in this way:**

Waterhole of the spirit snake the Waakal. He can see you, he is looking at you, he can see everything. Hey, children, where you got that water from is where the spirit of the Waakal lives. That is no good if you did not use your kaarnya or commonsense by following the proper protocol before getting the water because it is a sacred waterhole.

Nyungar have protocols to follow when they are around the Waakal's sacred waterholes. The stories that many Nyungar tell is that when the water is clear "it is all right to take the water, but when it is 'dark or murky' the Waakal is swimming around and you must not take any water while he is there" (Bennell 1978a; Winmar 2002; Hayden 2002).

**Whadjuck/Balardong Oral Historian Dorothy Winmar (2002) talks about wirrin or spirit of ngulla boodjar or our land.**

They believe in the Waakal very dearly. They reckon without the Waakal around they would have no water. They would not let the kids go and torment the Waakal. They (Nyungar) would drive them away. There is a Waakal in the Swan River and he very rarely shows himself. If the water was muddy, the old grannies used to say don't swim in there, because he is having a feed. Don't swim (warra wirrin or bad spirit); wait until the water is clear then you can go and jump in (quop wirrin or good spirit). He was very important to their lives, because they believed in having fresh water. They wanted the water, so they wanted the snake to stay alive (Winmar 2002).

**Balardong/Wiilman oral historian Janet Hayden (2002) recalls this about the Waakal:**

We lived under the bridge, where the Tonkin Highway is, where the bridge goes over the railway line at Maylands. They used to live around there. Then we moved to Twenty Two Camp and that is where a lot of the stories about the Swan River started to come out about the Waakal, where they've got the pipeline running across there, near Bennett Brook, where the pipes go across

the railway line or under the railway line or near there. They wouldn't let us go near there, the Guildford Bridge because of the heading of the Swan River, that is where the Waakal would run, from there right down to Kings Park. That was the run, so we weren't allowed there. No girls, no boys were allowed there. They would tell us to get out of there, you little black so and so's. We weren't allowed there, that is wirrin, devil or bad spirits. Bulai! Waakal - lookout! you know. Old Nyungar would go [run] for their lives. Uncle Stirling (Bennell) was very fluent with his Nyungar and he would say, "that's it, you kids, don't go there, you stay away. But because we were inquisitive kids, Uncle Eddie (Bennell) and Uncle Brian (Bennell) and me and some wedjela kids, Gilbert's we used to call them, they used to go down to the swimming pool and I would sit on the bank and watch them all swimming right there, underneath the bridge where we weren't supposed to go. We were all there. I never swam in the river because I was frightened of jenarks or devil/bad spirits - at the time and I would not get in there. But the boys, they was so daring; they would jump in and go for a swim. When we came home, you can be sure we got a good hiding. We would come home with wet clothes, or we would try and dry them before they got home. I would be the only dry one. But the Swan River, to a lot of Nyungar even then, they weren't allowed near the Swan River. I used to wonder why because, when we were back home in Brookton, the Avon River was not sacred to us. It was where you got everything - jilgies, turtles, whatever came out of the river. We just took it. The Avon River was our lifeline, where the Swan River wasn't. It was taboo to us. We weren't allowed to go there (Hayden 2002).

Mrs Hayden's oral history highlights that the Avon River for Balardong Nyungar was used for economic sustenance and that only some parts of the Avon River was held sacred, those parts being where the Waakal lives in the deep waterholes.

The Waakal is the basis for Nyungar culture, theory and laws and Nyungar all over the land adhere to the tenets handed down from generation to generation. However, some Nyungar believe that there was a time when the Nyungar deviated from our tenets. As Whadjuck/Balardong Oral Historian Sealin Garlett tells it, "I used to listen to those stories and I remember her [his grandmother Yurleen Garlett] telling one of her nephews a story about a

flood that happened there. The story happened a long time ago and it is as follows:

There was all the Nyungar or people who used to camp the Derbal or estuary [around Perth waters]. There were some fellas from the north; they came for some ceremony. They came and sat down and sang. They had come to trade and they brought some medicine and some fire. That was, like, along the river. They reckoned that in the wintertime, it was cold, see, and these fellas who used to hunt up in the bush, they brought some things down, clothing and stuff (yongka booka [kangaroo skin cloaks]). These fellas only used to stay for a little while, while the ceremony was there and they used to exchange things, you know? One time, these northern fellas stayed longer than usual.

What happened was that the old people reckoned that these Nyungar found a plant there was a plant in the bush that they had dug up and if they boiled it in a certain way, it had something inside the plant. The plant had something in it that made them feel good, made them laugh and yarn. It had something of an alcoholic residue in it. These people used to drink it and it made them, not necessarily drunk, but it used to make them feel good and freer. I suppose that's what alcohol does for you; it loosens you up, I think. Anyway, these people stayed and the old people were getting a little bit worried, because these fellas stayed and they started to feel murtong [strong sexual urge] for the yorga there, you see. People were saying that they were not right skin for this country; they can't go joining with these women because they were the wrong skin. What happened was that, after they had some more of this drink or too much of this drink, they had sexual relations with the women. They weren't supposed to do this. What happened later was that some of the little kids were born disabled, born funny and, in Aboriginal way, this brought shame to the people. Sometimes, some of the old people would knock the kids on the head and cast them away. And then these fellas were told to give this drink to the old people and it began to affect them. They used to say, "no, that's all right, we all one mob. They can stay here". But there was one man who had a dream and this man's name was Boornyarri, who dreamed that this big spirit, in the form of a Waakal came to him and said, "We are going to water (flood) this place. You know this is koorndan; this is shame what these fellas are

doing”. When other people heard about it, they kept coming down. There were a lot of little kids who were deformed and a lot of kids were neglected, and a lot of these old people were affected by the drink. Boornyarri and a few people who were left and were not drinking this stuff began to feel ashamed about what was taking place. So the Waakal came and he talked to this fella, Boornyarri. He said “ you know we’re going to send a big water to this place and the water is going to cover this area. These people won’t go, but they know the law of this land”.

So Boornyarri said to the old people, “Hey, I had a dream and this is what happened”. And the old people said, “No, no more dream. You know that this is really good stuff that we got now. We don’t have no more dreams about this; we are all going to get along”. But Boornyarri said, “You know this fella said the water’s going to come and wash all this away, the leaves and the fruit and the roots that you know. There’s going to be no more left”. And this other fella said, “No, look, I can see plenty big mob there”. So Boornyarri went away. He was worried that hardly anyone listened to him. Later, the Waakal came back again and he said, “The Creator has got seven people with you; there are going to be seven altogether. There are going to be three women and four men and, Boornyarri, you have to lead. Tell these fellas, get them together, tell them don’t touch any of that plant and keep talking to your people”. But you know, they kept talking and nothing came and then, one day, the water came down. It rained and rained and the water came down. The water came along side of their camp and was getting higher and higher and these old fellas, they were laughing and laughing, and said, “See, Boornyarri, we don’t have to walk long way now to get water. We got kierp just here”. But he told them, “No, you mob, you’re not allowed to do that. You mob got to listen now, this is true; you got to listen to me”. And the water kept coming down. Then Boornyarri and the others went to the high cliff at Kings Park. And the other fellas were looking around. They went to his camp and looked and found nothing. The people started to sing out and they started to light a fire. But the rain, that rain kept coming. Later when all the water was rising, the people were beginning to go to where Boornyarri was. Then from a distance, this Waakal came to pick them up. There were seven people on this hill and when he came, the Waakal stopped

where Boornyarri was and he helped all these fellas on his back and they moved out. All the other people got on the rocks and jumped on the Waakal's back, but they slid off. They tried to hang on to his tail, but the Waakal pushed them off. He then circled the ground and mixed the sand up when he circled. He then went out over the Swan River where the Narrows is now, out over where the Causeway is, out past where Trinity College was built and he made a track to York. When he got to York, he stopped and had a rest. Then he said to Boornyarri, "Don't get off [my back]. Wait till the water subsides". They waited. When the water subsided, they got off on a rock and the big snake disappeared. Then the Great Spirit said to Boornyarri, "Look back towards Perth and the area around York. I will never cause a flood again, I will never do this to Nyungar land". Then the Waakal went down towards Beverley and Brookton and they reckon the last place he camped was at Boyagin Rock. That was his resting place or Ngoorndiny – sleeping place of the Waakal (Garlett 2002).

To Nyungar, it is impossible to talk about people and boodjar or land as separate entities. As Patricia Baines (1988) writes:

To look at the land through Nyungar eyes is to perceive personhood in all life forms. Old trees are parents and seedlings are children. Birds and animals, particularly when one of them behaves in an unusual manner or is distinguished in some way, may be a deceased ancestor.

The land is seen as a huge body - most often it is recognised as the body of one's mother. To put a trench through the ground is to scarify the mother's back or dig into her guts (Baines 1988, p.228).

Nyungar, as do Aborigines throughout Australia, be they Koori, Murri or Nunga, believe that the land is their mother and watching wedjela desecrate it is akin to watching the rape of their mother. Nyungar cannot perceive such vandalism (Ngulak Ngarnk Nidja Boodja: Our Mother This Land 2000).

This and other stories and theories are but just a few of many told by Nyungar maam or men and yok or women. Nyungar firmly believe that the Waakal is the giver of life because of its

role in maintaining fresh water sources. Belief in the Waakal and its control over the fresh water is as relevant today as it has been for millennia.

In our Nyungar Cosmology, then, the Waakal is the Creator, the keeper of the fresh water sources. He gave us life and our trilogy of belief in the boodjar - the land - as our mother and nurturer of the Nyungar moort - family and relations - and our katitjin - knowledge so that we could weave that intricate tapestry known as the “web of life”. This is the trilogy of our Nyungar theory. Our stories reflect this belief.



## FIRST IN THE TRILOGY OF NYUNGAR THEORY:

### BOODJAR

Nyungar boodjar (country or land) lies in the south-western corner of Western Australia. It extends eastward of Esperance (Wudjari) moving in an arc to the north-west close to the small wheat-belt town of Nyoongah (Njakinjaki), and west-north-west towards Coorow (Juat), and south of Geraldton across to the west coast of Western Australia. These are the general boundaries of the boodjar or country where all Nyungar moort have boodjar or geographical land and moort or family regional affiliations.

Nyungar, or the people, encompass twelve different dialect groups here and the boodjar is divided into corresponding territories as previously mentioned (Tindale 1974). Several of these groups, including Juat, Whadjuk, Balardong and Pindjarup, have boodjar in and around the Beelya (Swan River) region. Further, each local language group is subdivisible again into specific moort or family members with ownership and/or access rights to specific boodjar within the larger Nyungar area. Thus, the cities of Perth and Fremantle exist within the Whadjuk boodjar (Green 1984, p.8). More specifically, the area currently referred to, as Murdoch is located within the country of Whadjuck Nyungar.

### **MAP SHOWING NYUNGAR LANGUAGE GROUPS**



Prior to 1829, the boodjar surrounding the Beelya (Swan River) was divided up into four sections, each owned by different family groups. The boordier, or leaders, of these boodjar divisions are relatively well known. To the north of the river on the coastal side, Yellagonga

used this boodjar or land, whilst on the eastern side lay Weeip's domain. In the southeast Nyungar boodjar around the Swan River lay Munday's territory. Finally, in the southwest boodjar, Midgegooroo and his moort lived (Green 1984, p.50).

According to the "Keeper of the Stories", the phenomenon known as the Waakal created the shape of the boodjar and Nyungar and gave foundation to the meaning of life, "thas a Nyungar story many years ago" (Bennell 1993, p.3). Nyungar all over the land know and understand the theoretical and applied tenets of boodjar, moort and katitjin. As we have seen, when the great Waakal created the boodjar, he ensured that there was wirrin or spirits to look after the land and all that it encompassed. Some places such as waterholes or rocks, rivers, trees or plants were created as sacred sites and hold wirrin, both warra (bad) and quop (good). Nyungar are the holders and keepers of the knowledges or katitjin of these places. The Nyungar was also given koorndan or respect and kaarnya or commonsense by the Waakal, so that we could abide by the principles and law of looking after the boodjar and everything in it.

### **Nyungar Boodjar and Moort - Nyungar Land and the People**

Nyungar has occupied, controlled and managed the south-west boodjar (land) of Western Australia for millennia (Hallam 1981, p.35). Knowledge of Nyungar boodjar has been told to Nyungar koorlangka or children by Nyungar custodians and is well supported by other forms of documented evidence collected by wedjela since their earliest visits to the area. Nyungar might say of these accounts: nidja Nyungar boodjar nguny wangkiny or this is our Nyungar land and stories.

In the wangkiny of "Keeper of the Stories", the late Tom Bennell:

Ngulla beeliar wah koorliny ngulla nidja. That means he going down the gullee there travelling. Don't go through the wild hills or nothing if they do goes over the hills, if they does travel anywhere, they find the gullee, where ever, the gullee running down. They follow the gullee down this way which they call Beerit (Perth). [In Nyungar language a gullee is a type of sheoak that runs along the creek beds]. This way down towards ngulluk Beerit our Beerit which they call Perth. They follow the gullee all the way down, they know where they want to go to, till they get to where they want to go, they know where they are

then. Ngulla karla koorliny ngulluk yeye karlark koorliny. That means they going home. They, today going home. Beeliar wah, Beeliar Beeliar. See that means going up the gullee back home where they come from. They know where the branch off gullees and they know where the branch don't go and when they go down that little creek, every gullee that comes in from the south or the west or the east" (Bennell 1978 a).

To place our boodjar in a more global perspective, carbon dating indicates that Nyungar were on their boodjar 28,000 years before sheep were domesticated or systematic harvesting of wheat developed in the Middle East (Green 1984, p.5; Hallam 1972).

Nyungar oral histories recount how the Australian mainland once included the bidjigurdu (islands), specifically Rottnest, Carnac and Garden islands (known in Nyungar as Wadjemup, Ngooloomayup and Meeandip, respectively). The joining boodjar was covered with trees until a great fire split the ground asunder, allowing the sea to rush in. This event was caused by a volcanic eruption or earthquake and is estimated to have occurred 20,000 years ago, thereby creating the current coastline formation (Green 1984, pp.6, 403).

### **Djanga Koorling - Early Contact with Wedjellas**

In more recent history, a Dutch crew from the vessel Elburgh sighted three Nyungar wearing booka or cloaks made from yonka, or kangaroo skins near Cape Leeuwin in 1659 (Green 1981, p.72). When Dutch sailors landed on our shores, Nyungar had karla (camp sites) in and around the big beelya, later to become the Swan River. Captained by Willem de Vlamingh, they briefly explored the areas now known as Cottesloe, Fremantle (Walyalup) and Freshwater Bay - literally gahbi (water) and djikap (fresh) in Nyungar - and found multiple karla or home fires of our moort, although they declined to reveal themselves directly to the djenaga or devils (Green 1979, p.141). However, our theory is that Nyungar watched the Dutch sailors and other mariners from the cover of the bush. They did not choose to reveal themselves to the "djanga or spirits" as they may well have been fearful of this unknown presence or phenomena. In the Nyungar world all known "phenomena" were created by the Waakal and were known to Nyungar through our mythologies. This event was totally strange and needed close scrutiny.

The Nyungar may well have observed the strangers ill-fated gastronomic incursion with the

boyi (zamia nuts) when Captain de Vlamingh's crew ate the nuts without adopting the Nyungar practice of first neutralising the poison, thus incurring significant illness (Green 1984, p.29). This happened when de Vlamingh's crew were exploring Nyungar boodjar or the people's land on the beelya or what became known as the Swan River.

The following is an imagined scenario and conversation of what may have taken place on this occasion:

Some Nyungar were watching from the thicket as the sailors began to eat the nuts - one Nyungar might have said:

Kaya, geennung barlapiny janga Nyungar ngarniny nidja warra boyi. Choo, barlup boola mindich ngarniny nidja boyi.

Yeah, look, they spirit people eating these no good nuts. Oh dear, they will get sick after eating these nuts.

Nyoorn, mila boorda barl boola mindich, noonook geennung, unna?

Oh sorrow, sooner or later they get much sick, you wait and see, eh?

Nyoorn, geennung barl wa? Balapiny koorbool mindich yeye! Nyoornitch choo, balang boola ngarniny warra boyi. Yeye barl boola kobal minditch, unna?

Oh dear, look at them, what? Their stomach is gonna get sick now! Oh, sorry, shame, they ate lots of poison nuts. Now they'll get plenty sick in the stomach, eh?

Barlang djanga mindich yeye, unna? Barlung koorbool mindich, kaat mindich, boola goonah, boorp, boorpiny ngarniny nitch warra boyi, wah? The spirit people are sick now, eh? They've got the stomach ache, headache and they've got the runs sickness and passing wind for eating those no good nuts, eh?

Nyoorn djanga Nyungar balapiny katitjinburt nitch warra boyi unna? Choo, karnya nyoorn janga katitjinburt nitchjuk warra boyi.

Oh dear, spirit people, they've got no idea, eh? About this no good nut, eh?

Oh, sorrow and shame, spirit Nyungar don't know anything about these nuts.

While the above scenario describes an imagined conversation by Nyungar at first contact with the djanga or white people and their imagined reaction to them, it was just over one hundred and thirty years later that the djanga began making their presence felt in the southern region of Nyungar boodjar or land in Minang country now known as King George Sound at Albany. The process of British colonisation began in 1791 when George Vancouver claimed the Albany region in the name of King George III (Green 1981). Vancouver had arrived in the winter and made a brief stop there. While cutting timber from the surrounding bush, he came upon a deserted Minang karla campsite or home fire. They had moved further inland for the winter.

Shortly before Vancouver departed the area he placed a number of gifts within the largest mia mia or huts as reparation for the timber he had removed (Green 1981, p.81). By leaving these gifts, Vancouver was acknowledging the fact that Nyungar own the land.

The Minang Nyungar were welcoming hosts when Matthew Flinders arrived aboard the Investigator in the summer of 1801. Exchange of various items between the Nyungar and the British, in addition to daily visits to the beach by Minang Nyungar to watch the visitors, cemented a respectful relationship between the two parties (Green 1984, pp.32-33). Captain Phillip King experienced similarly cordial treatment when he visited the area on three occasions between 1818 and 1822. Captain King earned the hospitality of the Minang Nyungar hosts by respecting their wishes for the visitors not to have contact with Nyungar yorga or women and koolangka or children (Green 1981, p.75).

Although French presence in the southwest was felt during these exploratory years, it was not until 1829 that the British formally claimed the western portion of Australia as part of the British colonies of New Holland or Nyungar boodjar (Collard and Palmer 2001).

### **British Colonisation of Ngulla, Our Boodjar or Country**

In days to come, all these white people in W A what I call  
it whereas the Nyungar never call it Western Australia.  
Ngulla boodjar they call this (our land) ngulla boodjar, he

said (our land). (Bennell 1978 a).

The precise numbers of Whadjuck Nyungar living around the Swan River region and its surrounds prior to wedjela invasion and settlement is unknown. However, early approximation suggests that Whadjuck Nyungar boodjar would have been able to sustain large population sizes compared to most other areas on the continent. Bates (1992, pp.14-15) estimates that around 1,000 Nyungar lived in the Swan River area, but other ethno-historical sources imply that this estimate is exaggerated. Armstrong (1836, p.797) believed that there were 700 Nyungar in the area in 1836 while Hammond (1933, p.26) claims that around 200-300 Nyungar gathered at various sites in the region for community meetings and economic exchange. Hallam puts a conservative estimate of around 400 Nyungar living in the general Perth surrounds at the time of colonisation. Contrary to what many of the early colonists imagined, the number of Nyungar living in the area was not large by European standards. Nevertheless, regardless of the precise numbers of Nyungar people living around the Swan River area at the time of colonisation, the region was able to sustain the people and their lifestyle.

Colonisation of Nyungar boodjar around the Beelya (Swan River) began in earnest when Captain James Stirling arrived at the mouth of the Beelya aboard the *Success* in 1827. Later, Stirling went up-river and saw Whadjuk Nyungar at Claise Brook in East Perth who were less welcoming than their Minang Nyungar counterparts in the Albany region where sealers had kidnapped Nyungar yok or women (Green 1981, p.77). However, Stirling received a more cordial welcome further up-river when a group of around thirty Whadjuck Nyungar followed the boat to the area around Jane's Brook and exchanged gidgee or spears and kylie or boomerang with the crew for clothing and freshly-killed swans (Green 1981, p.77). This would have been simply a matter of courtesy or diplomacy.

Significantly, by 1829 when Captain Fremantle arrived at Woodman's Point, about seven kilometres south of the mouth of the Swan River, he recorded that he:

saw and heard natives on both sides of the river who halloed to us very loud and appeared to cry out, "warra, warra". I had not proceeded very far before I heard yelling of the black fellows (as Jack calls them) and [leaving the boat] we gained the top of the hill where we saw a native with a firebrand in one hand and two spears in the other shouting, "warra, warra" and pointing to the shore

where the boat was desiring us to go away (Fremantle 1979, pp.37, 41).

'Warra' in Nyungar means 'no good' or 'bad'.

It was over 140 years later that "Keeper of the Stories" related this part of an oral history as below:

wedjela wort dombariny, see, that means the whites took over kedjal barminyiny barlung, that means he (Nyungar) gonna get his spear and try and drive him out or kill him (Bennell 1978 a).

Nyungar endeavours to stop British colonisation were the beginning of conflict on Nyungar boodjar. In May 1829, on behalf of the British crown, Captain Fremantle formally, but illegally, annexed the Swan River Colony. (Hallam and Tilbrook 1990, p.xiv). By June 1829, sixty-nine colonists arrived aboard the *Parmelia* under Captain James Stirling (later to become Governor of the small colony) and by December of the same year, there were 652 British settlers recorded in the colony (Hallam and Tilbrook 1990, p.xiv). Nyungar moort or family of boordier Midgeegoroo moved to Karlup or what is now known as Lake Monger, three kilometres to the north of their traditional beelya karla or river camping grounds around the Darbal Beelya estuary in the river. As the wedjela colony grew:

More Nyungar groups were displaced, their access to accustomed food resources was hindered and staple crops were spoilt by the activities of these newcomers. On the Murray River, soldiers broke down fish traps in the river, and fired on Aborigines who later approached the barracks (Hallam and Tilbrook 1990, p.xiv).

By 1831, Nyungar were "collecting rent" from the wedjela farms and flourmills that were illegally occupying our boodjar and the number of attacks on our Nyungar moort by wedjelas became a regular occurrence. As invasion, exploration and colonisation extended further into Nyungar boodjar or lands, many of the Nyungar tried to protect our boodjar from wedjela intrusion, but to no avail.

In Nyungar written histories and oral traditions, "Keepers of the stories" such as Tom Bennell (1908-1989) relate the experiences of our Nyungar moort when the British 'redcoats' arrived to colonise the Beelya or Swan River. He (Bennell 1993, pp.23-24) shares a story handed

down to him:

h'an' these whasenames

see these Nyungar

talkin' 'bout this place

down 'ere

ahh what they call h'it again

Mounts Bay un'it (Swan Brewery)

well they talkin' 'bout that place

Nyungar

Well

I know that Nyungar run

they told me years h'an' years ago

that place was there (pause)

two 'undred

to one 'undred h'an' fifty years

before white fullahs come 'ere

they knew all that run

Nyungar did

I bin talkin' to that ol' fullah



they father bin 'live

when the white fullahs come (hand moving circular)

from over there (pointing)

still 'live like

O! man Bennell h'an' h'em see

they used to say

ngala maam

ngangk h'an maam

mother h'an father see

balap nyinanginy nidja wardan

thas Fremantle sea

baal balap djinangany

wardany nidja wadjela yaarl koorliny

in the boat see

they seen 'em come on the boat

they all bardan kurlangany

from there

Yaarl koorliny Nyungars, kurl baminy see

Killin' 'em

shootin' 'em

cuttin' they throat

knockin' they 'eads off h'an all

see thas what they bin doin'

h'an' this never bin said

Red Coat fullahs

h'an' they used to go from 'ere

h'an' when they got off the boat from 'ere

they went through from Fremantle

*Karlkarniny*

they used to call that sandhill in

Kings Park

*Karlkarniny*

thas from there

from Karlkarniny

balap kurlangany nidja marlap

up the sea this way (pointing)

Bunbury

Collie

right up through there

they bin killin'

killin' Nyungars

all the way through there see

but none of thas bin said

Well ol' Felix [Bennell] (pause)

h'an' I forgot this ol' fullahs name

h'it's that long ago

h'it's over seventy years ago [1918]

they bin tellin' me all these things

h'an' stories

they learnt me

all that

right through that way

thas 'ow lot a Nyungars

nidja ngalak nyinalang

see thas us people

'ere the wadjelas

people baminy

fathers

mothers

they killed 'em see

thas 'ow they got us (mixed blood)

Thas 'ow there's no back relations

well thas 'ow I know (Bennell 1993, pp.23-24).

Although, in the colonial history books these deeds are written as “glorious battles”, our Nyungar oral history, combined with the pen, now gives an entirely different view of the slaughter and terrorism imposed on Nyungar by the colonising people. Nyungar tried to defend our boodjar/lands as patriots against the wedjela invaders. Whadjuck/Balardong oral historian, Fred Collard, confirms the position voiced earlier by the “Keeper of the Stories”, the late Tom Bennell. Collard (2002) says:

The Bennell family came from Lake Monger and they were driven out by the Red Coats in the early 1800s [1830s] . . . They were driven out one night when the Red Coats came across on the boat from Fremantle. There was a lot of war among Nyungar people who were stealing the flour, tea and sugar [and] some of the early settlers were shooting some of them, so they (Nyungar) retaliated. A lot of the Nyungar were shot by the Red Coats, in the days of Yagan's time, and were rounded up . . . and so the Bennell family was cornered up at Lake Monger. The Red Coats were going to shoot them in the morning at daylight, but in the night time, the Nyungar went down through the middle Swan . . . [and escaped] (Collard 2002).

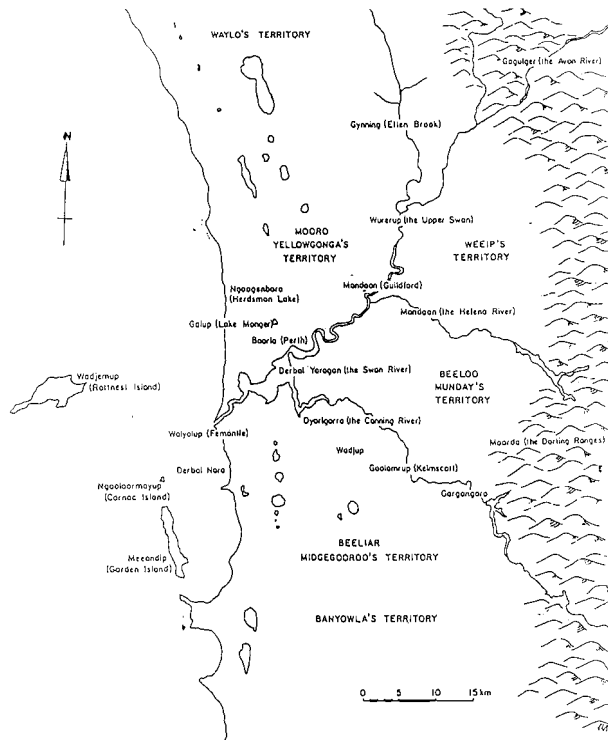
These oral histories of our Nyungar moort relate events that give a different perspective on the accounts of the dombariny or the “take-over” of Nyungar boodjar by wedjelas in south-west of Western Australia's early colonial period. By 1832, William Shenton went so far as to suggest that because the Aborigines [Nyungar] were reacting to the loss of their lands and food resources they should be removed to Rottnest Island or Wedjemup where they could be allowed to pursue their traditional ways (Hallam and Tilbrook 1990, p.xv). Between the years 1832 to 1834 there was turmoil for our Nyungar moort in the Swan River colony as more and more of our boodjar or lands were illegally annexed by the invaders.

It came to a head on 29 October, 1834 when the Massacre of Pinjarra occurred where a number of Pindjarup Nyungar were killed at the place where the townsite of Pinjarra is now situated. The ‘Battle of Pinjarra,’ as the history books recorded, turned the tide of Nyungar resistance to colonial invasion around the Swan River and Murray River regions (Cooper

1967; Perth Gazette: 1 November, 1834; 8 November 1834; 15 November 1834; Roe 1834-1838). Inland, areas like York were to feel the force of colonisation in 1836 (Hallam and Tilbrook 1990, p.xvi). By 1840, most of the military-based warfare and fighting was over for the Nyungar of the South West and by 1850, they were subjected to ongoing colonial land theft which is yet to be resolved.

Nevertheless, when the colonists arrived and took up land on Midgegooroo and his moorts boodjar or territory, the Whadjuck Nyungar found themselves at odds with the wam or strange new people who looked like their dead relations or djanga. Two years after the arrival of the invaders, William Shenton, who owned the flourmill at South Perth, remarked on the depletion in game, including kangaroos and waterfowl and other birds over the two years since the invasion of the Europeans. In his observations, he noted that “the natives have lost their hunting grounds and have been driven from their usual haunts and fisheries and could not approach the river without danger, as European grants now lined the banks” (Hallam and Tilbrook 1990, pp.209-210).

## NYUNGAR LEADERS BOODJAR



Nyungar Place Names and Territories; Swan River Coastal Plain  
(As told to Robert Lyon by Yagau in 1832)

Source: N. Green, *Broken Spears*, Focus Education Services Perth, 1984, p.50

“Keeper of the Stories” Tom Bennell’s comments reflect upon this issue:

Boodjar, that is the dirt. Boodjar wam, that is somebody come from another country. Barl yaarl koorliny ngulla boodjar nyininy. That means he come and sit on our (Nyungar) ground. Noonook want to wort koorliny nitcha not noonar boodjar. You want to return to your own home or country, this is not your country (home). You want to noonook karla koorliny. That means you want to get back to your own country (home) Noonar boodjar wam. Stranger where is your country? Nitcha you want to koorlaniny ngulla boodjar Nyungar says you want to come here and take ours koorl buranginy nitcha ngulla coming and taking this our country from us got nothing boodjar, Uart, boodjar, uart, yeye ngulla. None, land, none today, us wedjela wort dombariny. See that means

the white took over (Bennell 1978 b).

It was during this time that clashes between the Nyungar boodjar boordier or landowners and the colonisers were becoming more frequent (Bennell 1993, pp.23-24). Shenton also observed that “no one has any idea of the real number of natives destroyed by the settlers and Midgegooroo’s action should be interpreted as patriotic resistance to the loss of resources, terrain and kin to European usurpation” (Hallam and Tilbrook 1990, pp.209-210). However, even though there were many massacres against Nyungar, it was not until 1834 that matters came to a head with the so called “Battle of Pinjarra” - the term now used by the Pindjarup Nyungar is the Massacre of Pinjarra - where many Pindjarup Nyungar were killed (Cooper 1967; Perth Gazette, 1834: 1 November; November 8; November 15; Roe 1834-1838; Collard and Palmer 1996).

We also know that Nyungar yok were interacting with the wam or strange Europeans because there were many children being born from relationships between the two. “Keeper of the Stories” Yelakitj tell us about the Nyungar kids becoming fairer or of a cross-cultural issue:

Norps all koorlongka durrigar, Kids all children getting white, Durrigar – white, a wedjela koorlongka, a white kid, durrigar durrigar koorlongka koorlongka warra – white kids, white kids no good. Nyungar women running with the white men. Nyungar woman’s [are asked] noonook winjaliny koorliny, where are you going? [Nyungar says] koorlong getting durrigar, now kids getting white, no good. She would sit down and have a bit of a cry for a while and then say “I’m all right” (Bennell 1978b).

In keeping with the matrilineal heritage of kurrlonggur or children, Nyungar accepted the “fair” children.

### **History, Cartography and Cultural Differences**

At this stage it is prudent to elaborate on notions of history making, recording and cartography in relation to cultural differences. The history of Australia’s south-west is a discourse which, to date, has been almost written exclusively by non-Aboriginal people to reflect their personal and political perspective. On a personal level, the colonists were influenced by economic and religious beliefs that precluded insights into the corresponding

structures of Indigenous society. Politically, many factors coalesced to reinforce the moral and legal legitimacy of their appropriating someone else's land, thereby justifying the deployment of the British military on Nyungar boodjar and the re-allocation of land title to the colonists' networks. In addition, it legitimated, in the mind of the wedjela at least, that the imposition of a European-style political economy and legal systems upon the Nyungar and other indigenous peoples across Australia was for the Natives' own good. Recording history with an Indigenous content in this milieu meant producing a narrative that systematically edited and mediated both events and explanations in light of a European aesthetic. In other words, the British colonists placed their own wedjela interpretations and agendas on Nyungar boodjar, moort or family or relations and katitjin or knowledges.

### **Nyungar Places and their Meanings in and around Murdoch University.**

Throughout the region now known, as Murdoch University and surrounding metropolitan areas are a range of Nyungar sites with known and unknown Nyungar names or words. Some of these Nyungar words and names of places in close proximity to the site are included below:

Willagee, the place of red ochre, Beelier the river, Lake Kogalup, the place of the quokka, Windich Place, a street named in honour of the famous Nyungar explorer and boordier Tommy Windich (see photo in website), Yagan's Park, a Whadjuck boodjar boordier and patriot who defended our boodjar and moort in the earlier colonisation of this country (see photo in website), and Goordandalup, one name associated with the Crawley Bay and Crawley Point area. There is some evidence that the name Goordandalup means a place of betrothed persons or hearts together. This name corresponds to Nyungar accounts of the use of the area as a place where marriage ceremonial activity took place (Bates 1992; Collard, Mountford, and Palmer 2000; Collard, Mountford, Palmer and McGuire 2000; Collard, Collard and Henderson 1996).

Another name regularly associated with Crawley Point/Pelican Point is Bootanup. The place of pelicans is reported to have been a favourite playing spot for Nyungar children. Here children would learn to recognise different footmarks and would imitate different birds (Williams 1984, p.6). Further south and west of Bootanup (Point Currie or Pelican Point) is another area, which Nyungar also call the place of the pelican. Nyungar preferred shallow places along the beelya or river, like Matagarup, where food gathering or moving from one



side of the river to the other was simpler. This word, which means leghole, was the name given to the flat area around the Causeway. Apparently Nyungar maam or men would wade into the shallows with their gidgee or spears and catch cobbler and other fish (Bates 1929).

To the north east of the Goordandalup area is the site named Goonininup. In recent years, this site has received considerable publicity as the place most associated with the Waakal, or as Bates spells it, "Waugal", the principal creator being, conceptualised by Whadjuck Nyungar as a snake or serpent type creature. As we have seen, Bates records that in Nyitting (or creation period) the Waugal moved throughout boodjar (country) leaving kaata or hills, valleys, bilya or rivers, the boya or rocks, pools and other land forms. All those places in the South West where the Waakal rested were made known by the presence of lime, which was its goona or excreta, and certain salt pans now found in inland districts were formed from its koormp or urine (Bates 1985, p.221). According to Nyungar, the name Goonininup is derived from the Nyungar word goona, or faeces. This, according to Nyungar knowledge, is the place where the Waakal rested on its journey and defaecated, leaving limestone as a permanent reminder for all to see (Vinnicombe 1989, pp.13-14). In our Nyungar language, goona means "faeces", nyininy means "sitting or location of" and "up" means "here – at this place", for example, this is the place where the (Waakal) faeces is located.

As well as its significance as an important place connecting Nyungar with Waakal, Goonininup was, and remains, a site of significance to Nyungar for a variety of reasons. Bates (cited in Vinnicombe 1989, p.18) records that Goonininup is a key camping place on a major trade route used by Nyungar travelling from other areas to Perth in order to trade for the highly demanded wilgi (red ochre). Nyungar believe that Goonininup is one of a number of places where young boys were initiated and would attend and be taught important katitjin or knowledge before being admitted into maam boordier adulthood. When initiates were finally accepted into full boordier adulthood, a celebratory keeniny (or dance) and a big feast was held in the Goonininup boodjar area. This keeniny and big feast was arranged by the local Nyungar boordier to coincide with seasonal Yongariny or kangaroo hunts (Vinnicombe 1989, p.20; Collard and Mountford 2000). It was also a place for fishing and other economic activities.

For Nyungar, any one place may be called a number of different names by different people at different times of the year. For example, some Nyungar refer to Kings Park as Karra katta or the hill of the spiders, Yongariny or place for catching kangaroo, Geenunginy Bo or the

place for looking a long way and Karlkarniny or by fire place sitting. All of these places are equally correct - it depends on the context in which they are being used, and by whom. By accepting European cartographic conventions unproblematically, we run the risk of misrepresenting or making too simple our understanding of Nyungar sites and land use.

European cartographic conventions and systems of boundary-making are not directly or easily transferable into Nyungar systems of naming and land use. European maps are usually set out in such a way as to imply that places have fixed names over time, that one place has only one 'true' name and that people share a consensus of meaning about one place. Those with even a basic understanding of Nyungar systems of reading and speaking about boodjar (country) would immediately recognise that introduced cartographic conventions, in and of themselves, are inadequate analytical tools for talking about Nyungar names and land use.

Western cartographic conventions reflect the importance of making boundaries to function as markers to exclude others and demonstrate individual ownership and control. For Nyungar, talking about one place as if it exists in isolation is akin to talking about people as if they exist in isolation from their community. The same place may have many names according to who is using it, for what purpose and at what time of the year. Women and men may have different uses for the same place, or several events may have occurred in a place, resulting in it having several names. Also, if the name is descriptive, for example, dark or black water, the same name might occur in several places - wherever dark water is found. Thus, boodjar is a more dynamic entity for Nyungar than for wedjela. This accounts for some of the difficulty in interpreting wedjela accounts of the region. In addition, it exemplifies how a Nyungar interpretation of history and place can differ quite markedly from a wedjela interpretation (Green 1979; Collard and Palmer 1998).

### **Nyungar Boordier, Boodjar/Landowners and Use in Whadjuck Areas**

The grounds now occupied by Murdoch University sit firmly within the boodjar of Midgegooroo and Yagan, two Whadjuck boordiers. The extent of Whadjuck boodjar was recorded by English colonial Robert Menli Lyon in 1832. He obtained his information through consultations with Whadjuck boordier Midgegooroo's son, Yagan (Green 1979, pp.141-142). Lyon documented Whadjuck boodjar as extending south from the Swan River to an area approximating the northern tip of Rockingham, east to the Karta Moornda or the Black Hills

or Darling Range, following a north-west route back along the Canning River to the Swan River (Collard et al. 1996). Further examples of Nyungar wangkiny incorporated within Whadjuck boodjar nomenclature are: Ngooloomayup, now known as Carnac Island; Meeandip, now known as Garden Island; Gargangara north of Armadale; Goolamrup, now known as Kelmscott; Dyarlgarro Beelya, now named the Canning River, and Derbal Yiragan, the Perth estuary waters.

According to Hallam and Tilbrook (1990, p.208):

The locality most frequented by Midgegooroo and his group lay south of the Swan Estuary and the Canning River, stretching down to Mangles Bay, half-way towards the Murray River . . . the area to which he and his family had customary usage rights extended west to the mouth of the [Swan] river [Fremantle], and also further north of the Swan estuary to Lake Monger, and north east to the Helena River; while his son Yagan moved freely into the area north of the Swan estuary from the crossing at 'the Flats' [Heirisson Island, just east of Perth city centre] to the lakes behind Perth and yet further north to Upper Swan.

Hallam differs from Robert Menli Lyon by including Karla or Lake Monger and the Helena River as part of Midgegooroo's boodjar or river land estate. Nyungar believe that Lyon is right because territories north and east of the Swan River belonged to boordier Yellagonga and his moort or people who camped mainly around Karlup or Lake Monger and, to the east, the beelya or Helena River divided boordier Munday's and boordier Weep's boodjar or territories. These places were not a part of Midgegooroo's land, although he and his son, Yagan, had access to Lake Monger and the Helena River by moortung or kinship.

**Pindjarup Oral Historian Joe Walley provides an insight into moort and boodjar of the Pindjarup people through the oral histories passed on to him.**

First, I want to talk about what I was told about the Pindjarup Nyungar and their tracks coming through Pinjarra and Ravenswood. They had a crossing just down at McKay's corner. The track crosses over there and comes to a clay pit area where there is a water hole and a camping area where Nyungar used to stay. It takes a while to travel around there. Opposite, near Lake Gorgerup,

to where we are sitting, they travelled through Lake Gorgerup, went right up the lake side and travelled back, keeping to the north eastern lakes, crossing between Lake Gorgerup and what is known as the Black Lake. Coming back into Willies Lake and then into Black Lake. Crosses there and comes onto a road that was put in by the Shire. That road is Mulga Drive and it takes you through all the swamps. The first little swamp is known as Black Swan Lake, no, I'm not sure. Maybe Joondalup Lake, starting off to what is known now as Pagononi's Swamp further over. A spring is there where they stopped and got their water, caught their turtles and continued on from there to Black Swamp, near Pagononi Place. This is heading north going towards Fremantle from Pinjarra and then they went to Pagononi's Lake. There is a graveyard there, back onto Pagononi's Swamp Road. The first two Aboriginals were buried there many years ago. I don't know if it had anything to do with the conflicts with Thomas Peel. He used to live a half a mile west of these graves. These Nyungar travelled that way through to Hansley Swamp followed through into Warriup Swamp. They kept to the east side of those swamps while they travelled north. They travelled through there, although they had to split up once they passed Hansley Swamp. They went through the other side, west to Rockingham and around. Some of them went the other way, because of the different times of the season. Some went back inland. There is a swamp there where the kangaroos came into the Medina/Kwinana area (Walley, J. 2002).

Pindjarup Oral Historian Joe Walley discusses further these aspects of Nyungar koorliny or travelling, or run, in his oral interview and says: "They [Nyungar from the Murray River region] travelled right through Murdoch into Fremantle and back to the crossing" (Walley, J. 2002).

In several other Nyungar Oral Histories collected for this study, claims that during the middle decades of the 20th century many different Nyungar moort came to the areas south of Walyalup or Fremantle to camp and hunt in the bush area are apparent. They camped in boodjar that was not claimed by wedjela and fished along the coast and hunted for other wildlife that lived in the vicinity of the swamps (Drake and Kennealy 1995).

Boordier Midgegooroo's boodjar or territory thus covered a large area of land including the Swan River. However, this study is more concerned with the section around Murdoch

University including Kardinya, Coolbellup, Hamilton Hill, Hilton, Murdoch, Bull Creek, South Lakes, Leeming and Willetton. Nyungar have always had a connection to the boodjar or land around these swampy areas and during the 1960s Nyungar camped in the surrounding swamps and bush. As Whadjuck/Balardong oral historian Fred Collard claims:

This is what we call sand plain country, swampy like down here and the woolly bush, there used to be a lot of little brush kangaroos, the little silvertails or quer and the yongka and a few emu used to be here. . . Nyungars camped from Fremantle through the bush down through the Murdoch Swamp, down to the Riverton Hotel. That was all bush and Nyungar camps were scattered all through there . . . near the swamps like Bibra Lake, Mandogalup Lake and Booragoon Lake. They all had rich foods like fish, turtles, swamp hens, gilgies, ducks and swans, ducks eggs and kaarda or goannas. . . Yes, it was all bush, kangaroo and quer; no big buildings along there then (Collard 2002).

As well as those from the Juat, Whadjuck and Balardong groups, Pindjarup Nyungar travelled up through the Pinjar boodjar or swamplands around the Murdoch area. Moort or family ties made it possible for different Nyungar groups to travel through these regions, following the line of swamps that was so prolific in this part of boordier Midgegooroo's boodjar or territory.

**Whadjuck/Balardong Dorothy Winmar remembers that:**

My grandmother used to live along the river [Swan River] right down there and she reckon they used to walk right out to Rottnest Island; that it was all sandbanks, way back. They used to walk across there and because Rottnest is a hill and it stood out when there was no water there. They stayed for a time and then walked back . . . I couldn't understand it, but in those olden days, things were a lot different (Winmar 2002).

**And again, according to Whadjuck/Balardong Fred Collard:**

Earlier, Uncle Felix and them used to say "kura, kura, Nyungars used to walk across there" [Wadjemup/Rottnest], that was a long time ago. Kura means a long time ago, he said "Nyungars jenna koorliny means walk". So someone had handed it down to him. If he was alive today, he would be 150 years old,

so you see a lot of older people handed it [that story] down to him (Collard 2002).

The ancients would have used Wadjemup (Rottnest Island) as extended hunting and fishing grounds. This, like many other ancients, demonstrates the enduring link between Nyungar and Ngulla boodjar (our country). In total, Nyungar boodjar stretches over 3,000,000 hectares approximately (Green 1984, pp.1, 403).

In the late 1950s and 1960s, the State Housing Department began building houses for Aboriginal people in the Coolbellup, Hamilton Hill, Hilton and Willagee locales. Many different Nyungar groups were given these houses to further the Western Australian government's move to integrate Nyungar and other Aborigines into the wider community and Nyungar and Aboriginal people from other areas began shifting from the old reserves in the wheat belt to houses in specific suburbs. Just oral historian Margaret Gentle tells of her move to Beeliar boodjar or country: "All the people who lived at Allawah Grove got a house . . . all over the metropolitan area. Some got old houses or new houses. My children and I were given a new one. We lived in Murdoch Drive, Coolbellup. Many people I know from Pinjarra moved to the Coolbellup area, too" (Gentle 2002; Palmer 2001).

Pindjarup Nyungar Dr Richard Walley has a story on the Beeliar boodjar or river land around Murdoch University. He remembers when there was a big pine plantation covering much of the area where Murdoch University now stands. During his teenage years, he and several of his moort or family and friends used to come into the pine forest and practise their dance and didgeridoo music. As Dr Walley says:

At that time we were the only ones doing cultural presentations and performances and . . . it used to be the universities that used to embrace us . . . When this University opened up, they approached us. The connection here was very early. I used to play football with the Nyungar football teams as well. Someone contacted us during one of our games and they wanted to know if we could open up or be part of this ceremony to open this university. And when they said Murdoch, we said we didn't know where it was, so when we came here it was in the middle of the bush.

There was no other development . . . There was just this place in the middle of

the bush (Walley, R. 2002).

### **Accessing Information in the Sites Register**

The Western Australian Government, through the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA), holds information on Aboriginal heritage and sites on its Aboriginal Sites Register. The Register contains data on about 17,000 Aboriginal sites across the State. The Register is held under Section 38 of the State's Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972. This register contains a brief description of the site, the site type, the site informants and a map showing the site boundaries and location. Where the informants have requested the site information be kept confidential, the location of the site is censored by placing one or more 2km square boxes over the extent of the site (DIA 2002).

Many people visit the Department of Indigenous Affairs Head Office each year to view site material. Policies and procedures are in place governing access to the material, and people intending to view (either electronically or physically) should familiarise themselves with the policies first by accessing the Department's website: [www.aad.wa.gov.au/](http://www.aad.wa.gov.au/)

The online version of the Sites Register is an index to the Aboriginal Site Register. An appointment is required to view all related material held by DIA. A review of sites in the area of this study found that over 40 Nyungar sites had been recorded by the Department (see map). These sites include camping, burial, artefacts, scar trees and so on, This information coincides with the oral stories shared with us by the Nyungar involved in this study

## **SECOND IN THE TRILOGY OF NYUNGAR THEORY: MOORT**

For Nyungar, your moort is your family or your relations. The Waakal gave us the foundation of our knowledge about kinship systems and how we relate to one another, for instance, who we could marry and what our obligations are to one another. Nyungar descendents suggest “nitcha ngulla Whadjuck un Pindjarup and Balardong Nyungar boodjar”. Interpreted into wedjella language, it says “this is our relations and our ground”. The following history about Nyungar is told through the oral tradition of “The Keeper of the Stories”.

The old Nyungar, the tribal Nyungar they used to have their mob and travel in tribal mob”. Your tribal mob would have been your moort that is the Nyungar name for “Relations”. Nyungar they used to call their yok when carrying doordajee doordajee. Now that means she is going to have a baby. Kooboorl, kooboorl, koombar kumbariny. That means the belly is getting big (Bennell 1978 a).

In Nyungar culture all kurrlonggur (children) born to Nyungar yok (women) take their mother’s (Gnarnk) bloodline. This is because “Nyoongar culture is matrilineal and our cultural identification is recognised through our mothers’ heritage, not our fathers’ affiliations” (van den Berg 2002, p.xii). If a Nyungar knows who the kurrlonggur ngarnk (child’s mother) is or if the mother does not have a partner the Nyungar always knows who the moort of that kurrlonggur is and therefore knows who he/she belongs to.

In Nyungar moort theory, a Nyungar man might have had several yok or wives and inherited many kurrlonggur, and thus becomes the Maam or maaman (father), but through the birthmother of the kurrlonggur their heritage is always ‘true’. Therefore, a kurrlonggur knows who their ngarnk is even if the maam of the moort is not their biological father. Just Margaret Gentle relates this part of her story, “...I was sort of like daddy’s girl. My brother was mum’s boy. I had lots of big sisters and brothers. We weren’t all just having the same mother and father. You know a lot of blackfella ways; that was going on for years with Aboriginal people” (Gentle 2002).



### **The Story of Great-Great Grandfather John Jack Monger-Bennell and his Children**

A story about one of our moort, Great, Great, Grandfather John Jack Monger Bennell, helps put moort relationships into context. John Jack Monger-Bennell was the son of John Monger and his Nyungar mother. Our Dembart John Jack was promised one of the daughters of Dembart Cleetland (1826) and Deman Jenny; their daughters were Ilangan (Annie) and Kandiyani. Dembart John Jack Monger-Bennell and his promised yok Ilangan (Annie) had four kurrlonggur. However, Ilangan passed away whilst giving birth to her fifth child, their spirits went to Kur-an-up. This is the Nyungar place where the spirit of the deceased Nyungar went when they passed away. Kur-an-up was 'over the sea', where the djangas came from – spirits of the dead Nyungar people. (When the wedjella [white person] arrived on the shores of Walyalup or Fremantle, the Nyungar thought that they were the returned spirits of their dead ancestors, hence they were referred to as the djanga or spirits) (Bates 1992).

### **Children of Deman Ilangan (Annie) and Dembart Monger-Bennell**

The oldest child of Deman Ilangan and Dembart John Jack Monger-Bennell was Jack. He married Sarah Isaacs-Blurton - a young Nyungar yok from the Walyalup or Fremantle area. The following oral history was passed on to Balardong/Wiilman oral historian Janet Hayden from Dembart Dooram Bennell, son of Kandiyani. Sarah was born on the top of a hill in Fremantle [this hill is possibly where the Fremantle War Memorial is now situated]. Although they did not have any children, Sarah was well known as a midwife. She delivered many Nyungar babies into the world and also helped care for them. Jack, in the meantime, used to go off looking for droving work and the like (Hayden 2002). Wendy was the second oldest child, then came Gwen and Yurleen was the youngest. She was also known as Fanny. Yurleen married William Garlett.

After Annie died, John Jack Monger-Bennell took all his children back to give them to Cleetland and Jenny, but they could not look after them because they were too old. Ilangan's (aka Annie) sister, Kandiyani, was then given to Dembart Monger-Bennell and they raised the four surviving kurrlonggur or children. From the union of Dembart Monger-Bennell and Deman Kandiyani were born eleven children or kurrlonggur. Many of the great-great-great grandchildren of Ilangan, Kandiyani and John Jack Monger-Bennell still live in and around Nyungar boodjara today (Hayden 2002).

### **Children of Deman Kandiyan and Dembart John Jack Monger-Bennell**

The union of Deman Kandiyan and Dembart John Jack Monger-Bennell produced twelve children. They are as follows, but not necessarily in order of birth. Nellie, also known as Doorlak, Felix, Bertie, Ned, Gertie, Mabel, Rosie, Ivy, Jack, Lilly, Dooram and John. Len and Sandra are the Great-great-grandchildren of Kandyian and John Jack Monger-Bennell.

### **Moort Relationship Names**

The “Keeper of the Stories”, the late Tom Bennell (Yelakitj), shared this story about moort relationship names and how the moort would have wangkiny with each other:

Deman is the name for Grandmother and Dembart is the name for Grandfather. I say ‘dembart yaarl koorl’ – Grandfather come here or ‘deman yaarl koorl’ - Grandmother come here. She is saying this to the daughter of her daughter. Wort koorl deman, that means ‘go away grandmother’. They might go to some of their other relations, they don’t call them uncles they call them konk and their brother-in-law they call them ngoordja. They call their brother ngoony and sister djook. A child is called a ‘nop’. A maam calls his yok – koorta. Koort is heart. Cousins well they call them same - grandfather, same as their cousin, dembart (Bennell 1978 a).

In the early Nyungar social world, when one Nyungar met another wam muern or strange black, they would ask, “ngeern noonar moortung”? or who are your family? The response might be ngunya Yagan moort or I’m from Yagan’s karla, which would mean Yagan and his people are also my people or relations. Implicitly this would mean “south of the Swan River is my boodjar (or place) and this is where my moort or family are from”.

In contemporary Nyungar society an older Nyungar person or Nyungar who comes across a wam or strange Nyungar might then ask one of the other moort’ “Ngeern bullah kurrlonggurr”? (Whose child is that?) Or he might ask the young person directly, “Ngeern noonar ngarnk”? (Who is your mother?) Or, alternatively, he might ask, “Ngeern noonar maam”? (Who is your father?) This would enable the Nyungar who is asking the questions to make sense of, or identify, who is answering and therefore enable each to confirm their relationship and obligations (if any) to one another.

### **Moort, Dartj and Merenj in our Boodjar**

The Nyungar recognised six seasons in their year, Bunuru, Djeran, Makuru, Djilba, Kambarang and Birak, and managed our boodjar accordingly. Each Nyungar moort or family had their own land for hunting and gathering purposes and regarded the incursion of others onto it as trespass, although resources were shared freely with neighbours (Tilbrook 1983, pp.105, 556). This would explain the story as handed down by “Keeper of the Stories” Tom Bennell who says:

The old Nyungar, the tribal Nyungar, they used to speak with their mob, and travelled with their mob. They would go across one way, then the other mob might want to go across the other way. Well, they pass through and let them go on. Noonookurt koorliny, means they can go through. If they [stranger] make any bad trouble, they might have a big fight halfway there and the strongest team, well, they say. Ngulluk koorl koorliny [mean they can go back] (Bennell 1978 a).

There were between thirty and forty distinct roots, nuts and vegetables eaten by Nyungar and which were gathered nearly all year round. The flowers of three or four trees and shrubs afforded them honey, either by suction or steeping in water. There was hardly any shortage of food throughout the six-season cycle, katiŋin or knowledge was given to the Nyungar by the Waakal to manage our land according to the seasons and Nyungar harvested only the food for their immediate use (Swan River Trust 1998).

The Nyungar or people of the south west of Western Australia had a veritable supermarket of food from which to choose, depending on the food chain. As Whadjuck/Balardong Oral Historian Fred Collard (2002) states, “They used to. . . move around with the seasons in the early days [and] the season was all about where the food line was”. And according to one Nyungar historian, Dr Rosemary van den Berg:

On the coastal plain, they hunted kangaroo (yongka), emu, (waitj), possums (coomarl), snakes, (land snakes, not water snakes), lizards (caarda, and yoorna), turtles and their eggs, honey, birds like rosellas, bronze-wing pigeons and ducks and their eggs and the bardi grubs, which could be eaten raw or cooked in the coals. Their vegetable and fruit intake included edible tubers,

quandong, berries and nuts and a type of grain which could be crushed and made into a damper. The boyoo or toxic zamia palm had special treatment before it could be eaten (van den Berg 2001, p.96).

“Keeper of the Stories” Tom Bennell (1978b) says one Nyungar would have said to his moort when they were around their karla, “Do you want to dartcha koorliny? That means do you want to go hunting for meat or merinj koorl buranginy – go looking for vegetables.

Fish and other marine life were plentiful in the wardan or the sea, the darbal or estuary, beelya or rivers, and pinja or swamps all along this coastal strip. According to Pindjarup Oral Historian Joe Walley:

The Pindjarup Nyungar used to follow the lakes or water chain from Pinjarra, right through where Murdoch University now stands, to Walyalup or Fremantle. It was a seasonal run for the Nyungar, from Pinjarra to Ravenswood, past Lake Gorgorup, Black Lake, Pagononi’s Swamp, Hansley Swamp and Warriup Swamp and past Thompson’s Lake (Walley, J. 2002).

Then the Pindjarup Nyungar made their way up past Bibra Lake and North Lake, Mandogalup Lake and Booragoon Lake. All this area teemed with bird and marine life like fish, turtle, swamp hens, gilgies, ducks and swans (Drake and Kennealy 1995; Collard 2002). Between the Murray River and the Swan River, Nyungar followed the seasonal food chain and lived a healthy and leisurely lifestyle, much like those who lived around the Swan River region did and in other parts of Nyungar territory in the south-west.

Very seldom were there obese Nyungar. Their diet and hunting, gathering and foraging practices ensured health and physical wellbeing. In retrospect, their lifestyle could be compared to a veritable Eden.

It is quite apparent that these oral histories of food, diet and health contrast with much of the information penned by European colonists. Most of these writers were men and in the early part of the colonial period in the south-west of Australia, historical accounts mentioning Nyungar from the period 1829-1850 are dominated by the writings of Captain T. T. Ellis, Superintendent of Native Tribes (1832-1834); Francis F. Armstrong, Native Interpreter (1835-1839) and Chief Interpreter, Schoolmaster and Moral Superintendent to Natives (1840-

1872); G. F. Moore, Advocate General (1829-1841); and Robert Menli Lyon, bachelor farmer (1830-1834) (Tilbrook 1983, p.99).

Consequently, a significant portion of the material now available to scholars reflects the preconceptions of these British colonists. One consequence of this is the relative dearth of official narratives concerning Nyungar yorga or women and their role as boodjar owners, boodier and persons of influence. In relation to this, Catherine Berndt remarks:

European observers imposed their own models on what they saw or heard, highlighting some aspects at the expense of others. In these models, the status of Aboriginal women was distorted, and their positive role was barely recognised (Berndt 1973, pp.7-8).

Green (1981, p.75) also argues that colonial officials were further predisposed to relate a gender-biased account because of Nyungar cultural norms wherein men usually deal with men. Thus, Nyungar men were more likely to approach male colonists and vice versa. When the former began arriving in the southwest, Nyungar men actively discouraged contact between Europeans and yorga (Green 1981, p.75). A similar point is made by Tilbrook (1986, pp.99-100) who suggests that information regarding female Nyungar boodier at the time of colonisation was comparatively scant because of the tendency for the yorga or women and koorlangka, the children, to maintain their distance from wam or strangers.

### **Nyungar Women (Yok/Yorga) and Children (Kurrlonggur)**

Nyungar yorga took substantial responsibility for Nyungar day-to-day life. Through the harvesting of vegetables and roots, as well as hunting small animals, Nyungar yorga contributed greatly to the dietary variety of their families, thereby sustaining the overall health of the community. They constructed their mia mia (shelter), made their booka (kangaroo skin cloaks) and bags from the yongka pelts (kangaroo) and were the primary care-givers for the koolangka (children) (Moore 1842, pp.110-111, 590). Nyungar yok/yorga were also important to the relations between Nyungar groups from different areas. They played a pivotal part in many ceremonies, including welcoming individuals to their family's lands (Tilbrook 1986, pp.100-101, 556), and in death rites of individuals (Ellis 1833, p.568). Yorga/yok were also central to the procreation of kurrlonggur by forging new moort alliances with other wam Nyungar. According to Balardong/Whadjuck Sealin Garlett (2002), Kings Park was a

ceremonial place for women and they had their special areas for women's business. Nyungar maam or men respected this right. Nyungar yorga were also landowners with property rights, although this practice was rarely documented by male colonists (Tilbrook 1986, p.104). Thus, Nyungar yorga were also boodier (leaders) alongside Nyungar maam or men.

Charles Symmons, Chief Protector of Aborigines, repeating Armstrong's census in 1840, identified tracts of land as belonging to both men and women, so that, for example, Munday and his wives, Bugup and Kogan, are described as owning one tract of land, Yellagonga, his wives, Windan and Yangan, his sons Elal, Dua and Dower and the daughters, Daleer, Gargap and Morap, as owning another. The groups are still under male heads, but the difference between Symmons and Armstrong is that the former lists wives along with husbands, sisters together with brothers, as people in whom rights, be they ownership or access, are vested.

The contribution of Nyungar yok/yorga (women or females) continues to be diverse and substantial. They play a primary role in nurturing and upholding the social, economic and political well-being of Nyungar families. Nyungar yok/yorga are, along with the Nyungar maam or men, cultural and economic boodier or leaders in Nyungar society. There is a symbolic affiliation between creation sites and knowledge and the role of yok or women.

The importance of women is reflected in Kaneang Oral Historian Mort Hansen's story about Kings Park:

This place we know as Kings Park an' if you go down the river (pointing to the south) and look back at the shape of Kings Park, it looks like it's a boodjari yorga (pregnant woman) laying there. That's where Nyungar people were given life (Collard and Palmer 1998).

Nyungar yorga contributed much to their economic life by taking responsibility for a huge proportion of Nyungar work. They hunted and collected much of the food, they built the family mia mia and they spun fur and hair for rope used for a variety of purposes. They took responsibility for most of the care and katitjin or knowledge of the kurrlonggur or children. When necessary, yok would carry tools for the maam or men. The women usually had two choota or bags; one to carry the koolangka or child or baby, and the other for food and items

collected during the day's work (Moore 1884, pp.55-56).

Some of the food collected by yok included kooya or frog, gilgee and yargan or turtles. Frogs or kooya were cooked on a slow fire of coals and ashes and yok would hold them in one hand by the hind legs and with an adept pinch of a finger and thumb, remove the lower part of the frog's intestines. It was then eaten bit by bit from the head to the toes (Hallam 1980, p.46; Collard, Mountford, and Palmer 2000). The Yorga also caught and prepared the various tasty, fatty and nutty grubs found in the balga xanthorrhoea or grass tree, wattle and other trees (Grey cited in Hallam 1987, p.29). The yok possessed the expertise necessary for finding and catching freshwater yargan or turtles available in the dried-up swamps, pools and other waterways around the Swan River area. Boola Yorga, or lots of women, waded through the water using their toes to detect the breathing holes where turtles were and gilgee, or freshwater crayfish, were also caught. George Grey (1841) describes the activities of Nyungar yok who worked the dry waterways:

The season of the year in which the natives catch the greatest quantity of frogs and freshwater shellfish is when the swamps are nearly dried up; these animals then bury themselves in holes in the mud, and the native women, with their long sticks and their long thin arms which they plunge up to the shoulder in the slime, manage to drag them out. At all seasons, however, they catch some of these animals, but in summer a whole troop of native women may be seen paddling about in a swamp, slapping themselves to kill the mosquitoes and sandflies, and every now and then plunging their arms down into the mud and dragging forth their prey. I have often seen them with ten or twelve pound weight of frogs in their bags (Grey 1841, p.276).

It was considered women's business to find such food and according to Daisy Bates, Nyungar living around the Crawley Bay area went crabbing and prawning at a stretch of water they called Goortandarup (Bates 1929; Collard, Mountford, Palmer et al. 2000). In contrast to this account, Balardong/Wiilman Oral Historian Janet Hayden suggests that the area around Crawley Bay and Kings Park were off limits to Nyungar yorga and kurrlonggur because of a massacre that was supposed to have happened there between the wedjela and Nyungar. She further states, "My grandfather warned me not to go anywhere near Kings Park or Crawley Bay; they were very evil places for women and children. He never liked going there because, to him, it was always a separation of his people" (Hayden 2002). Yet in

pre-colonial times, Kings Park was a meeting place for Nyungar women/yorga where they held their secret women's business (Garlett 2002).

At the beginning of this discussion we mentioned how wedjela histories have ignored the major role played by Nyungar yorga. Another example of this is provided by wedjela interpretations of the role of Nyungar yorga in facilitating meetings. A good example of this is Moore's suggestion that:

Women are the mere slaves of the men, obliged to watch and attend their movements and to carry all their property as well as the young children, in bags, at their backs. They must construct the hut, make the fire, provide roots for themselves, and give a share to their husbands, whilst he does not always share his game with them (Moore 1842, pp.110-111).

In contrast to these accounts, we know that Nyungar yorga had a central role in facilitating meetings between different groups. This is evidenced by Captain T. T. Ellis's description of a visit by Monang, a Murray River or Pindjarup boordier maam or leader, from the Pindjarup Nyungar to the Mt Eliza ration depot on the Swan River. Approximately one hundred Nyungar had gathered to hold a keeniny or dance to mark the event. Ellis noted that a yorga, who he only refers to as the wife of Gibban, directed much of the dancing (Ellis 1833). Tilbrook (1986) interprets this as a "master of ceremonies" role.

So this provides another instance where wedjela perspectives have distorted the oral traditions of the Nyungar insofar as Nyungar yorga were not 'mere slaves of the men', but were boordier or 'bosses' in their own right. The Nyungar oral historians in this study are testimony to our assertion that Nyungar yorga continue to be powerful economic and social leaders, nurturers of family and kin, social practitioners of Nyungar theory and "keepers of the katitjin or knowledge" given to Nyungar by the Cosmology – the Waakal or Nyungar Rainbow Serpent – our cosmology. This is the second trilogy of Nyungar theory, our moort stories reflect this belief.



### **THIRD IN THE TRILOGY OF NYUNGAR THEORY: KATITJIN**

The katitjin (knowledge) given to Nyungar by the Waakal or Nyungar Rainbow Serpent included all things connected to our boodjar. The Waakal gave us our knowledge about the sacred sites such as Boyagin Rock, Mandikan, Karta Koomba, Pinjarra, Mundaring, Walwalyalup, Waakal Mia, and the Darbal Yiragan or estuary, and our relationship to them. Waakal gave us our knowledge about Nyungar and our relationships, responsibilities and obligations to one another. The Creator gave us our katitjin about the animals, plants, bush medicines, trees, rivers, waterholes, hills, gullies, the stars, moon, sun, rocks and seasons, and their interconnectedness in the web of life. Of the six seasons in the Nyungar world four were used for fishing, hunting and gathering, one for law and ceremony, and the other one, the Nyittiny, cold times, for new home fires or camping grounds.

The Nyungar Rainbow Serpent also gave us our katitjin or knowledge about the spirits or wirrin in our boodjar, wirrin and moort in the cycle of life. Some Nyungar people were given boolyada or magical powers to heal or kill and to protect all things sacred created by the Waakal. The Cosmology also gave us our koorndarn or kaarnya – the fundamental and underlying principles that give all cultures their values and belief system or their “commonsense, respect and shame” (Bennell 1993; Winmar 2002; Kickett 1995).

The following profiles and stories, which are in keeping with our Nyungar oral tradition, were shared by Nyungar maam and yok from our boodjar. The speakers were active participants in this research project and we are very grateful to our people and say, “kaya noonar quopadar wangkiny ngulla katich nitcha” or “yes, you are very good speakers, we understand this. You are also the ‘Keepers of the stories’ and custodians of such ancient katitjin or knowledge”.

#### **Profile of Whadjuck/Balardong “Keeper of the Stories” Tom Bennell aka Yelakitj**

“Keeper of the Stories” Tom Bennell was the son of Kate Collard and Charlie Holland of Merredin. Some of his moort affectionately called him “Nutty”. He was married to Muriel (the daughter of John McGuire and Doorlak Bennell) and had a daughter,

Elizabeth Jean. Yelakitj had this to say: “These stories I am doing, I am not going to give my history away. If these stories are not worth anything I’ll put them in the fire and burn them” (Bennell 1978 b).

As Nyungar moort who recognise the worth of the oral histories passed on by Yelakitj, we say:

yeye dembart – ngulluck katitjin noonar bulyada wangkiny. Today Pop, we understand the magic or power of your words. From all your moort.

### **Profile of Whadjuck/Balardong Oral Historian, Dorothy Winmar**

My name is Dorothy Winmar. Yurleen is my Aboriginal name that I took from my grandmother who was Yurleen. My mother is Dolly Humes and my father is Richard Garlett. He was Yurleen’s son and they are from this area. I am proud to sit down and talk to you. It gives me the chance to speak about my family. Yurleen Garlett, her mother, was Yurleen as well and that lady is the woman Daisy Bates interviewed as part of her Swan River Nyungar history at the turn of the Century. That was my grandmother’s mother. My mother’s mother was Ada Bennell. Ada is Yurleen’s sister.

### **Profile of Balardong Oral Historian, Fred Collard**

My name is Fred Collard. I was born in Brookton in 1928. My mother was Janie Shaw and she came out of the Mogumber Mission or the Moore River Settlement. She was sent out to work on the farms for five bob a week in the Brookton area and that is where she met my Dad and got married. His name was Fredrick John Collard and he was the son of James Joseph Collard. Mum and Dad had nine children and I am the eldest. We were brought up in Brookton. Most of our lives were spent working on the farms, clearing the land for the Brookton farmers because the government was giving land to the new settlers. My grandfather, uncles and aunties and my brothers and myself helped to clear all the Brookton farms and dig the blackboys out, chop the trees down and clear the land. That was most of the work we did, we also dug the wells on the farm and fenced the property. Most of that work was ten bob (\$1) for one acre to chop it down and one pound (\$2) to two pound (\$4) an acre to clear the land, which was pretty heavy, maiden timber. So for most of my life was brought up there. I got married in Brookton when I was 19 to Elizabeth Jean Bennell and the Bennell family is an old family that goes right back to Lake Monger, where the Bennell family came

from.

### **Profile of Pindjarup Oral Historian, Joe Walley**

Joe Walley, I was born in Pinjarra in the 1930s. My mother was Mary Nannup who married Louis Walley. Her father was David Nannup who married Emily Jones. My father's father was Stephen Walley who married Joanna Isaacs, which makes part of my family coming from Busselton, originally from Pinjarra. But I keep to the Pinjarra side. One of the first Aboriginal names on the Walley side was John Walley, who married Tundop. His son, another John Walley, married a Wallbanger, an Aboriginal woman. Great grandfather John and great grandmother Mary Rose Walley had a son, Stephen, who married Joanna Isaacs. They are my grandparents on the Walley side. Granny Mary Rose is buried in Pinjarra and Granny John in New Norcia. This is when they [the Walley's] started branching into Pinjarra and although it's the mainstay of our family, we got relations all over but the trunk of the family tree of Walley knowledge and learning is in Pinjarra. I got this knowledge from here.

### **Profile of Juat Oral Historian, Margaret Gentle**

I was born in the Mogumber Mission [Moore River Native Settlement]. My mother was Grace Wilkes and my father was Dave Gentle. It so happens that Joe Walley's grandmother brought me into the world, in a tent at the settlement; the place where all the buildings were up high on a rise. Down by the bottom, there were old houses where the families lived. She [Joe's grandmother] was a midwife. She was the woman who brought me into the world. I was born in 1935, on the 1st of January 1935. My mum was a Wilkes who had one brother, Edgar Wilkes, and two sisters. They all married to different people. Some passed away and some are still alive. So I am a real blood relative of the Wilkes. Then there's the Corunna's - all of the seven sisters and one brother, they all had children, at least, there were maybe two or three who did not have children. There is Mrs Hedland, that's Aunty Cissy, who was my mother's sister. Mrs Corunna, that's Adeline. I can't think of all the names. One of them was named Jane. I did hear them all, and I've got some papers and things at home. I have got a niece who lives in Midland. She gets all the files and things which she tells me about or sends them to me or I pick them up off her. Most of my life we never stayed long in one place. The settlement, when we left there I must have been around ... I was about five or six

years old and walked to farms around Walebing and Moora. [My family] headed that way out to Moora, shearing or root picking, whatever they could do [for a few years]. This probably was in the early 1940s. I was pretty young, about eight or nine, but we didn't mind the walking my brother and I. He was about ten or eleven. There were only two of us. Irwin; he is now living in Meekatharra. I had other brothers and sisters but they have all passed on. In my family, we had mixed families. My father had another child by another woman, before he was with my mum. My mother was legally married to Uncle Frank Narrier and in the papers I've got at home, there is a reason they had a big fight. My father won. He, Dave Gentle, beat Uncle Frank Narrier. He, my father, married my mum, but she was legally married to Uncle Frank Narrier. I don't think of that Wedjela way. I think of it Aboriginal way. Anyway, it's funny but that is how it was. You know, we lived anywhere, we lived any place. Wherever we found a place to live, we stayed. It was all right on the farm because they had little tin humpies or some little place for the families to live in. Walebing, that's just out on the other side of Moora and you get back on the main road that goes through to the north or back to Perth. On the Great Northern Highway. Yes, that's it. It would be the one. That's all I been doing, not stopping in one place for too long. I always wondered why we kept moving but today, to me, that was a good thing because I might have been one of those Stolen Children. So, my father must have got tired [of moving]. He said there was a lady at Lockridge who lived in a little house and helped looked after five to six children (wedjela kids). And she asked us if we would like to spend a night there. We said yes and Dad said that he will come back and pick us up in the morning; and he did. I don't know what year it was. I was about school age. I didn't have much schooling then because we were always on the road, all the time, I suppose. I was about eight. It was in the early '40s. This was after we lived in a little camp and tent out at Walebing. I was still pretty young then, you know. I remember sitting at the shearing shed door, where my dad was shearing and watching them shearing and throwing the fleece out on the table I liked watching that, you see.

### **Profile of Pindjarup Oral Historian, Dr Richard Walley**

I was actually born in Meekatharra, I was born in my grandmother's country, and what I found out many years later, was that my elder brother and sister were taken away.

When I was born, Mum was quite willing to have me up in that area, so my registration and all my certificates would have been in the Cue Post Office. Cue was the place to keep all that regions records, so when the kids were taken away in the Pinjarra area, my records weren't there. They were up in Cue. So that's why I got through the loop, because I was not recorded as being in that particular region, although I was a part of the region, not part of my father's and grandmother's country.

### **Profile of Balardong/Wiilman Oral Historian, Janet Hayden**

I was born in Brookton in the southwest. My name is Janet Phyllis Hayden. My mother was Martha Bennell and my father was Francis Charles Bolton. My mother is a Balardong woman and my father is a Wiilman man. So we have a link to the two. I spent most of my life in the country and I have worked in the schools doing Nyungar language with my daughters. We have been involved in a lot of Aboriginal organisations and a lot of major services like the police, Community Health. I have been a Justice of the Peace for fifteen or sixteen years. I got sick of that because it didn't seem to register with me, so I resigned. I guess we've taken care of a lot of children right across the board. My main objective was always to keep Nyungar language and take it into our schools and to teach Aboriginal people, too.

### **Profile of Whadjuck/Balardong Oral Historian, Sealin Garlett**

My name is Sealin Garlett. I'm the son of Snowy Garlett and Kadji Taylor, or Mary grandparents are Yurleen Bennell and William Garlett. I was born in 1957 at a little place called Bruce Rock, which is about 300 kilometres east of Perth. My association with the Swan River people is here at Murdoch, Coolbellup and the Southern Districts. I moved down here and have been living in this area for the last eighteen years. I was born on 31st of March 1957.

## **ORAL HISTORIES FROM “KEEPER OF THE STORIES” AND ORAL HISTORIANS**

The following Nyungar oral histories are evidence of the connection of the theory and the practical application katitjin or knowledges of the Cosmology – the phenomena known as the Waakal or Nyungar Rainbow Serpent, creator of The Trilogy - boodjar, moort and katitjin - which is the foundation of the Nyungar “meaning of life”.

### **Whadjuck/Balardong Dorothy Winmar. She tells us about early communication, the jimbar or spirit and karla, and then, her moort.**

Before the white men came out, a lot of these big hills or rocks were very useful to Aboriginals, because they used to get up on top of the rock and send smoke signals to let the one mob know what was going on to another tribe. They would make a big fire and when the other people on some other rock saw it, they would tell them they saw their fire and then they would go down and meet each other. They might tell each other news, like, if an old elder died and they wanted to gather around. They were very significant sites; the rocks, waterholes or gnamma holes where they drink from, and where all the kangaroos live. They would make their home around there for a while. When the wedjela first came here, the Nyungars lived on the top of Kings Park and they saw the ship coming in. Grandmother said they thought it was the spirit of their people coming back and they were scared of what was coming back, that they were ghosts. But then they learnt that they were another sort of people, white people and then they got used to seeing them and talking to them. Another time, another little ship came in with a barge on it and the barge came out with a horse on it. The Nyungar had never seen a horse before. My grandmother [maybe great grandmother?] was a little girl and she ran and climbed up the tree. She was scared because she thought the monster was coming to eat her up. They called those horses gnoorts. [And they thought it was a big jennark or spirit?] Yes, they thought it was a jennark because they used to tell stories about the jimbars or spirit in those days. The jimbar had a big mouth and used to bite the black people and eat them up. [And the jimbar is a spirit?] The jimbar was like a dinosaur, as big as a dinosaur. So when they saw the wedjela bringing the horses off the boat they

thought it was like a jimbar. I lived around the Merredin, Bruce Rock, Corrigin area for a while, but Brookton was always my dad's home, but I never lived there. Yes, these were the places they went to. A lot of places there. I suppose they couldn't understand why the white man was chasing them around. When the white men treated them bad, were cruel to them, they used to burn the white man's crops. They set light to the crops full of wheat. A lot of them would end up in jail at Rottnest Island.

**Whadjuck/Balardong Dorothy Winmar. She tells us about her moort.**

My grandmother was born around the 1870s. My aunties or grannies were Wendy Bennell and Gwen Bennell. Wendy Bennell worked for a housewife as a domestic in Perth. She saved up and bought a house in East Perth. She always spoke about my Grandmother and my old Grandmother always spoke about her but they never saw each other or come to see each other. It was probably too far for them to travel. When she died (grandmother Wendy), my mother's sister, the government would not let anybody take her things. They kept them because they said she did not have any relatives. My father made a special trip down to Perth to have a look at things if she had any belongings worth getting. That was my father's grandmother. Because she was white and grandmother was dark, they wouldn't let anybody touch her things. Yes, that's right. My grandmother, Yurleen, was a very dark old lady and my Auntie was very fair, so nobody would think they were sisters. Nobody would know. They had the same mother and their father was old Jack Bennell, but his father was a white man so there was a throwback coming out in that generation.

**"Keeper of the Stories" Yelakitj. He tells us about the old days, merenj, yok and moort.**

They never worried about food back in those days. They could go anywhere, get what they want. Not like it is now. They get what they don't want and work for their living. Poor old black fellas. Years ago when they (wedjela) come and took their country, they had government rations; that's all they fed them on, flour, sugar and tea. They never give them meat, they never used to have any meat, they went out and got a kangaroo. Well they learn how to make a damper, they knew how to make a damper. Learnt from the old Nyungar women.

Hey, yok, noonook merinj winjarlnj ? - now he said to his wife, where is my damper?

Derniny doorkiny derniny - that means pull the ashes out, put the damper in there and cover it up. Nyinniny - this means sit and wait. Sit down and wait for it (damper).

Mila doorkiny mila doorkiny - means it will be cooked directly. Cook it up, pull it out break the green leaves, dust the damper up and eat all that up. They would sit down and eat it all up.

Quop ngarniny, merinj ngarn - means good feed, food good

Nguny koorlongka boollara, I must have merinj koombarr merinj - that means he wants plenty of tucker; he got a big family to feed.

### **Whadjuck/ Balardong Sealin Garlett. He tells us about his moort and heritage.**

Uncle Cliff was 87 years old, so that would have been close to 1988/89 and he took me for a ride on the back of this horse and cart. We asked the driver to go around the Kings Park area and take his time. He showed me all the Nyungar camps. He showed me where my Grandma used to live, where they picked out a camp and where they used to stay. We would pull up and all walk around. They showed me some of the birds and the trees, and the ashes and the blackboys, and medicine that was in the blackboys. They showed me the roots of the trees and the medicine bushes. I remember when we looked at that camp. He showed me where these people used to get water from. It was a great highlight for me, especially in my young adult years, to absorb all that information at that particular time. To know that I listened to the information he was telling me and that it was a part of me and something that belonged to me. Something that sort of says that this is your heritage and your Grandma is a part of your heritage and a part of Yurleen's to keep and respect and to never let it die away. So, that was a privileged event. What they said about creation stories from that area of Kings Park, a creation story that my Grandma used to say was to be passed on to her children and her grannies, and it made sense to me as I moved around there.



**Balardong/Wiilman Janet Hayden. She tells us about the Waakal Mia and the Crawley Baths near the Swan River.**

When grandfather talked about the Waakal, he spoke about one area; that was the old Crawley Baths - the Crawley Baths should not have been made into a swimming area. You know where that brewery is, that's the Waakal's waterhole and its nest is at Mosman Park. Waakal Mia that is what it is called. When grandfather talked about the Waakal, he spoke about one area; that was the old Crawley Baths. I only went there a couple of times when I was a girl. Uncle Ed said that should never have been turned into a bathing place; that is what he always said about Crawley Baths. They've got those big things on top of it now. It would be good to go and have a look. I should go and have a look. Yes, when people wanted to go swimming there, mostly flash people would go down from work or the army people. They would use that for their bath and showers. Or whatever they were, what that's all about. Yes, they reckon there was warm water there. It was always there. That's what they call the Crawley Baths. That's what old boy said. You don't go near them places. Grandfather said you don't go near those places. Maybe because it was men's places, I don't know. The books I read said that particular place, that Freshwater Bay area, going towards Crawley was where the Waakal killed the people for breaking the laws, something symbolic; some powerful stuff there.

**Juat Margaret Gentle. Speaks about her experiences of wirrin or spirits of ngulla moort when she "was in bed in that house on my own".**

There's a lot of old people who have been through there over the years and their spirits will come back to that place. Sometimes, we will talk about that ..... we won't talk about that in the night time though. Yes, it had everything. Wandering had everything and there was sadness there, too. ....Yes, there was that too and there's those old people who keep coming back to see their children who died. Their spirits keep coming back. A lot of children were there before I went there [with Joe Walley in the 1970s] .....Yeah, God only knows what happened before me and Joe got there.

**Pindjarup Dr Richard Walley. He tells us about the significance of the Nyungar boodjar where Murdoch University is situated, identity, wirrin of moort and katitjin.**

Around this campus, you got lots of trees that had a lot of significance to our people, starting from the old wattle. Did you know that the seeds, in the earlier times, were used to grind and make into flour. Also to us, when we were brought up, the wattle was very prominent with bardies, you know. We'd always get the wattle bardies and they were good feeding and the wattle gum was very, very good. You also have, as you go east, the jam trees which have the same thing, the bardies and the gum. I think the jam gum is something we used to look forward to, so there were trees that provided that sort of gum and provided us with the bardies than you have other trees. Cause they provide warmth for the fire. And also the jam gum provided fantastic timber for boomerangs and nulla nullas and those sorts of things, like shields and dallops. So they were fantastic for that. The sheoaks had many different names. The name of the sheoak in our area is called gullee, which is a sort of a strong sheoak. It is prominent for a number of reasons; one is the sheoak boomerang was a special boomerang and when you make a boomerang out of sheoak wood, it was absolutely beautiful. So a lot of the ceremonial boomerangs were made out of sheoak. The other thing about it is the sheoak shield. If you made it out of the right wood, it was absolutely fantastic and it would be strong. If you made it out of piece that had a little fault in it, it would be brittle and it could just break. So, one of these things is, you had to know your timber and your sheoak. You had to know about it and in my case, it was my bush name. I was named after it. So in Pinjarra, all the older Pinjarra Nyungars knew me as Gullee. They call me Gullee Walley and "how's Gullee going" and that, so that's where that name came from, after that sheoak. ... oh, yeah, very serious about that, but also I keep it in that circle. I don't use it anywhere else. I won't use my name in the traditional term for my outside work, or any of my titles. I believe my name stayed within that community and those particular people who call me that. It becomes special because it is special to that particular location. And I find that a lot of people don't know what it's about and leave it that way. I think there is a problem today where people adopt a name and they think that name will give them their identity. I think your identity is well beyond that particular name. It is your acceptance within a community. ... you'll also find that you have a few totems. You'll also find that in our area we had the totem like weitj; he was the one of our totem eagles. We also had a totem, which was the kip, the dolphin, that

was another totem for us and yonga, the kangaroo. You'll always find that sometimes people say you got that totem, but one totem shows you who you are, and our major totem in the area was weitj and that we also had other totems, with different family connections. So where you're from, the different locations and I think that trees and the plants are also parts of your totem. Gullees very important for a number of reasons. You can actually look under a sheoak tree and there is a natural carpet you can see. It's always a place for people to have a rest and also the fallen needles that come off and cover the ground, as a ground sheet, makes a pleasant place to sit down and talk and eat. I think that is one thing that it's all about. The other thing in the middle of summer, if you're sitting under one, a gentle breeze goes through it and you can hear the whispering of the breeze. It actually talks to you. It made a noise to you like that. You can hear the sound whereas you don't hear that sound through the other trees. You hear them rustling, but you don't hear the whisper that comes through. ... someone speaking to you... well, it depends on you, if you want to tap into something, you will listen to that and be a firm believer that the breeze is part of the spirit and people. If they want to speak to you, whether they're loved ones that have recently passed on, or old people or ancestors from years ago, or someone sending you a message. There are many ways to interpret it as a communication line. The wind is a communication line. You can feel that sometimes people walk into a place and feel a cold shiver. The shiver comes from a breeze, or something that has hit them and therefore, there comes the other side where there might be danger, or something that's bad is about to happen. So if you listen to nature, nature gives a lot of signals out, and if you tune in, you can either become a survivor or if there is no danger there, you're cautious so that its like having insurance, I suppose. If nothing happens, so what? But if something does happen, you are prepared and I think that's a good thing about the sheoak. If you sit down, you can listen and if you want to communicate with someone, if you call the spirit or you want to speak to a god or someone in that sort of sense, that's the way to do it, because right throughout history, you will always find people like Confucius and others who say, "We sat under a tree to contemplate". They didn't sit in church, it was under a tree and you'll find that sitting under a tree gives you a lot of answers to things, whether it be an apple falling or whatever. A lot of things have happened under a tree, whether it was lightning that struck it. We still have that connection today and if you embrace that connection, or wisdom, you'll learn a lot more under a tree than in a classroom.

## **MYTHOLOGY OR TRUTHS: NOT CHILDREN'S STORIES**

Nyungar mythology, as in other cultures, is an explanation of so much of our behaviour, fears, superstitions, taboos and very instincts. Mythology is an attempt to articulate these. The following mythologies, as told by Balardong/Wiilman Janet Hayden, Pinjarup Dr Richard Walley, "Keeper of the Stories" Tom Bennell, and Whadjuck/Balardong, Sealin Garlett "are as old as Nyungar".

### **Mythologies**

#### **Balardong/Wiilman Janet Hayden. She relates her personal experience with the weerlow or the curlew.**

Oh, Nyungar people feared him. If there was a place where they saw old Weerlow, they would never go there and camp, they would always camp away from him and if Weerlow lived in a certain area, they would turn their tent camps away from him. They would never put him between their camp and the fire. They would never ever go and camp near where there were Weerlows, even my mum and old Uncle Tom Bennell and them. They were very powerful birds and the old people would say, wherever he is, he is death or someone is going to die if you hear him. He was always the bringer of death. Yeah, he was a symbol of death. Weerlows and the old owl were the two birds that people [Nyungar] feared. The owl always played more of a part. Oh goodness, people just called him moorpool, he's got another name, but I can't think of it. It was always something sad when you see them [Owl and Weerlow]. I have experienced that when Uncle Aub Hayden died. When he died, we had him [weerlow] right at the window knocking ... This bird, he just wouldn't leave us alone and tormented us for two days. I said to old boy, well, if you want to die in the house you can die, but you can go to hospital. He went and died in hospital. But also Bogan died, remember Bogan, he died only shortly before that. So whether he bought me the death notice for Bogan, I don't know, but old boy died the day we buried Bogan. So it was like, so eerie because he wouldn't leave the door, he just knocked, just bashing the door. I got up and went outside and walked around the house. I couldn't see him. The minute that I walked outside in pitch black about 1.00 a.m., he was gone and the minute that I came back inside, he would come back and bash at the door again. Aaron, my grandson, was about sixteen and he had a fit and ran back inside and screamed his head off, Nan,

that bird's here again, that bird's here again! And Scrubby ran inside. He's a man and he ran inside and said, Mum, get out here, that bird's out here. Oh, I'll never forget that, true. I had to get on the phone to ring Roger, my son. I told Roger to come down here and chase this bird away, that there's a Weerlow down here. Yes, this was home in Brookton.

**Pindjarup Dr Richard Wally. Relates a djitti djitti story.**

Well, there are a number of djitti djitti (Willy Wagtail) stories. The first one that I ever heard was when we were in the bush. The djitti djitti was the little bird that lured you into the bush for the gnardis, the wudartjis. You'd always find that you'd never, ever go out of the circle of firelight, if we did go to the dark areas, that's where the gnardis and woodartjis were. But during the day, the wudartjis were quite cunning, they'd actually hide in caves and behind rocks and they'd have this ability to blend in, so you can't see them, but sometimes you could smell them. As a kid, you'd be told to watch out for the djitti djitti, because it will keep taking you away and even today you'd find that a djitti djitti, when you go to it, it doesn't fly away. It will just bounce a little bit and entice you further and further away. It just keeps bouncing and before you know it, you're way into the bush. So if you're a child, you think you can catch it, 'cause it's just in front and it's bouncing around and it mesmerises you and before you know it, you're way into the bush and you could be lost. That's one of the first bird stories I actually heard – watch the djitti djittis 'cause he's taking you to the wudartjis.

**Balardong/Wiilman Janet Hayden. She tells us her story about djidi djidi.**

Djidi djidi was always referred to as the little shepherd. Grandfather used to always talk about how he was his shepherd. We still or my girls relate to that, because no matter where we go, if there's something was wrong with the family, he will come and tell the girls, not so much me, but those two over there [daughters]. They will always warn them of danger or if something is happening. We grew up with those stories, how mischievous the little djidi djidi was and how they got their name. They were named the mischievous ones. Old Wardong was such a lazy old man, the old elders of the tribe gave Wardong orders to look after little children and the old people in the camp while the rest go hunting. When everybody went hunting, all the warriors and the old boss men, old Wardong was laying underneath the tree. All he wanted to do was boss people around for a feed, so all the little djidi djidi's had to take food over to him, feed him and go back. They got fed up with it, so this day, they said to one another, we are going to play a game on him. So while old Wardong was sleeping, they went and took all his food away from him and then they started to torment him. He said to the mothers, take these kurrlonggurs away, but no, they wouldn't go away. The children kept tormenting this old man so what did he do? What did old Wardong do? He told the little Djidi djidis [kurrlonggurs] that he would turn them into little birds. They were little children, see, and these little boys kept on tormenting him. He got fed up with it and he went and changed all these children into little birds, into little Djidi djidis. They were crying to their mums and grannies but they couldn't do anything about it. When the hunters came home and asked where all the children were, all the mothers and grandmothers were crying as they told what happened. Old Wardong was quite happy, laying underneath the tree. The women told the leaders that Wardong changed the children into little birds, so the old men said to old Wardong, well, for being so lazy, you will be a scavenger all your life. We will change you into an old black crow. And that's where Wardong became the old black crow. He still has his name, Wardong, and the little Djidi djidis still have their name. Even the little children are referred to by the name Djidi djidis. That story is very special to me. But that is only one little story. But like the eagle, the power of the eagle, the old warlitch, how he became king of his tribe, because he saved his people, helped them to get light, bring the sun back to earth, how powerful he was. There is a lot of stories that the old people sit and tell about. The

Wardong was always referred to as the laziest of all scavengers. He was the laziest of all birds and even today you will always find the Kulbardi, Wardong and the Djidi djidi's fighting. They are very protective towards their environment their homes/nests. They won't let Wardong come near them. It is exactly like the stories that we grew up with. Like Kulbardi and Djidi djidi protecting their home, their food and their little ones and keeping Wardong away, because he was a lazy old good-for-nothing and he still is, you know.



### **Here is another of her stories of Warlitj, Kulbardi, Wardong and Djidi Djidi .**

The story I was told about, I have it all written down at home. Warlitj was always a very proud bird, he never really mixed with the others, he was on his own and he never really got involved, unless he wanted a mate. Then she would go her way and he would go his way. Anyway, this time when darkness came over the earth, they had no way of bringing light back, and the sun wouldn't come back. They had to send a bird and all the birds volunteered. Warlitj volunteered and Kulbardi volunteered; all the birds volunteered. They had to fly as high as they possibly could, searching for the sun. They found old Gnarnk, but she wouldn't come back and it was Warlitj, Wardong, Djidi Djidi, Kulbardi and another one, I can't think of that bird's name. They brought the sun back. They told her that without her the earth would die. She was the Giver, they called her the sun, the Giver of Life. The earth is our mother, but when we talk about mother, we call her Gnarnk, because she is the giver of life, the sun is the giver of life and Warlitj was the most powerful of birds. He was the one that the sun, like Gnarnk, gave him authority to be the king of all birds. The one bird that went on to keep the counsel to Gnarnk, was old Kulbardi. He was the one that gave counsel because he was the most eloquent of speakers, and he still is. He was the one who would relay the message that it was given to him. But it was Warlitj who went and took them as high as he possibly could. That might explain why, in the morning, when the sun, the Gnarnk, yira koorl, you will hear him talking. He's moorditch, moorditch. Oh, yes, barl, he moorditch. So that's part of the story. I look at kulbardi in the morning and you can hear him, no matter whether you're in town or in the bush, you will always hear kulbardi. He is the first one who sings the songs; he breaks the day. If you look closely, the one who flies the highest in the sky is old warlitch. He is still up there and he is the guardian of both the earth and the sun. And he will always be that way. So when the kulbardi spoke to Gnarnk, the sun, and brought her back, they might have agreed that she has to sing to him in the morning and welcome him all the time. When the old fellas start telling their story, they just say, oh yeah, he is the one, kulbardi is moorditch, because he was the best speaker. Listen to kulbardi and he could tell you a story in the song that he sings. He is the happiest bird. He won't stop singing no matter what you do to him unless you put food in his mouth. He'll just sing, he is so happy; lots of kulbardi around here.

**Whadjuck/Balardong Sealin Garlett. A kid's story about the green parrot.**

The Nyungars used to call it Darlmoorluk or Twenty-eight parrot. Darlmoorluk, that's it. Ha Ha, twenty-eight! He was a happy bird. If we knew he was coming to camp, he was not only a good feed, you know, Nyungars used to have a good feed out of that fella, but he was a happy bird. Sometimes the Nyungars only kill them when they were desperate. They always told the kids that this fella was good to have around. He was a protection at our camp, if you know that this fella, this Darlmoorluk, was going, then you fellas don't let your kids wander around because the woordarji, or the little bulyits, or whatever, yeah, or the djenagubbi is going to come around. Don't let them run around, but if that Darlmoorluk was there, you know that your camp was safe.

**Pindjarup Dr Richard Walley. Relates a the story about Bullung (pelican) and Bulland (crane).**

Bullung and Bulland, which is the pelican and the crane; that's a short little one. They were two brothers and they were both skinny at the time. The pelican was never, ever big and they were both same shape as the crane. They went fishing and during this particular fishing expedition, the old crane stood at one end of the stream and he was looking for the fish and the pelican stood at the other end. What happened, the fish would swarm around and the pelican would grab one. He thought it was only one and he didn't want to share it. So when old Bullung walked up to him, said "how are you going"? Bulland said "Grmmrrmm . . ." and shook his head. He kept the fish in his beak and when another fish came along, he grabbed that one, too. And he'd grab four or five fish in his mouth and the other fella up there, he's skinny, he's starving and he's looking. "How ya going? Any fish down there"? "Grmmrrmm . . ." he kept swallowing these fish. This happened four or five days in a row and then, after a while, old pelican started looking fat and his beak started to get big. And the other fella, old Bulland, he's still skinny, up the other end. The other one is still getting little fish here and little fish there and then next thing you know, there was this wild dog came barking and chasing something. As the dog came closer, well the pelican, he couldn't fly off as fast as the crane. The old crane, he took off flat out 'cause he was pretty fit, but the pelican, he realized that he was getting fat. The dog was getting closer and closer to him, and as he tried to fly off, this dog jumped towards him and landed on his back. Then the crane came back and pecked at the dog, so now, when you look at the pelican when he takes off, you can see where the claw marks are and the feathers are jagged. That's how the pelican got fat and realised that you have to be very careful in the future. But the crane still stays very quick and the pelican is very slow to take off. They were simple little stories like that where you look after yourself, health wise. If you become too fat and too lazy, may have a heart attack, or it may be many other things.

**“Keeper of the Stories” Yelakitj. Tells us about bulyits, kurrlonggur, bardies and bulyada [bulyada man].**

Bulyit – [he’s a] little hairy man about two foot high, that means devil, [he will] take the children must not go out after dark, after 4.00 p m, [must] gather them all up and bring them home. Bardee borl bardee koorl barmaniny - that is before our time, children going out and breaking up all those black boys to get the bardee. Borl, borl borl darkanyin - that means breaking black boys balga up. Bardee’s koorl buranginy - that means getting all the bardees out. Koorlongka dookaniny - means carry all the children home. You would then gather them all up and take them home. After 2.00 o’clock they [the children] must not go chasing bardees, they wouldn’t be allowed. They reckon these debil debil will take them away. That is a little bulyit man. As soon as the sun goes down, he starts edging them off and taking them away. Koorlongka wort worpuliny worpuliny. Well, they get around, they might get sick. There was always an old witchdoctor in those days. What they call them they Dembart. Dembart noonook kaataminy koorl djeenaniny nguny djenark minditch - means he must come and have a look at him he is sick with the debil debil. This old witchdoctor, he come and he said djeenaniny, barlung kaya noonook djenark minditch so, I directly got to noonook warbaliny - that means he got to doctor him up, but they only do it when the sun goes down. They never do it through the day; only in the afternoon around sunset. They could doctor him and all his chest and one another all around with their fingers, they clap their hands together and they draw that spirit that djenark spirit out of him. Nguny djenark Noonung barmaniny yeye, he said, Noonook quop benang. Noonook quop - Well, that means he will be all right tomorrow. He would be up walking around tomorrow morning, good as a gold. Nowadays not too many people believe in this mubbarn [northern Aboriginal word for magic/power] business, but years ago, the old witchdoctor was very, very clever. This was before the doctors [white] came out. Before, they can do their own healing. They got any sickness inside of them, the old witchdoctor [clever man] can remove that. He can remove his sickness from him. Now they [Nyungars] even don’t believe in that. They have their white rules and they forgot about the Nyungar rules now. Old Oscar Little (deceased) he’s a good witchdoctor [bulyada man]; he could cure anybody. What they should do for old Oscar Little, and I’ll give him his due, they should give him a surgeon to work in there on the Aboriginal

people. Let him doctor them up; he'll remove anything, without putting a mark on you. You got a growth or cancer, now cancer is a hard thing to cure, but I can guarantee that Oscar Little will shift it. Now black fellas go to the doctor, they got to pay for it. Well, somebody's got to pay for it, the Aboriginal department or someone. Now if they had their own witchdoctor, they don't have to worry about hospitals and doctors. Let him go and do it, if he fetch that blood from you without putting a mark on you.

**Whadjuck/Balardong Fred Collard. Tells the story about a powerful bulyada man Bibbarn. This story tells us that not all bulyada was for good.**

Uncle Felix used to tell us a story about Bibbarn who was an old Nyungar man living around Brookton. Bibbarn was a warra moort, you know, a bad old fellow. He was reputed to have killed about a hundred Nyungars. He killed my grandmother in Brookton where the Brookton football ground is now. She had a big savage dog and he put that dog to sleep and then he went and he done her in, [motion of pinching the throat]. Wort buranginy, pinch your throat. When they came home, she was bleeding out of the mouth. After a while the Nyungars used to go out, they were called blacktrackers, the Nyungar blacktrackers, like a police aide, and they used to track Bibbarn and they would track him and he went into an anthill, then he would just take off. He was a warra moort; he could turn himself into anything. So before they [wedjellas] caught him, all the Nyungars around Brookton, when they went to sleep in their little mia mia, they always slept way over in the bush. They put three little blackboys (balga bush) and cover them over and make out it was them and they would be watching from the bushes. When they caught him, they took him over to Wadjemup (Rottnest) and put him in there. They just left him on the boat, you see, with the police over there. When they come back, there was a wardong on the mast and the captain looked up and said, I never seen a crow riding on the mast before. When they got back here to Fremantle, they said Bibbarn was missing. He was back here. He turned himself into a crow and he was back here ever since.

When he died in Woodanilling, he was fairly old. I know there was four or five young people that I knew; they reckon he died all screwed up because they could see all the spirits of the people that he had killed coming to him. So, they were trying to straighten his arm and leg up, Frank Jones, Oliver Ward and Arthur Morrison. They were together all trying to straighten his legs and, you know, like all young seventeen or eighteen year olds, they started laughing and poking fun. One fellow let the arm go and the arm came up and caught one fellow around the neck. They thought he was alive and took off. That bloke dragged the body, ha ha. That was a common story you see. Uncle Felix used to tell us that sort of story. I think Bibbarn is in the history books isn't he. He is a person in the archives recorded in 1875 at Rottnest. So he is one person who is in

the archives. He was a real bulyada or magic man, you know.

**Balardong/Wiilman Janet Hayden. A story about our moort, a bulyada maam, who was destined to be “Keeper of the Stories”.**

Grandfather Cleetland and Granny Jenny, they are both buried together in Dale, just up from the cemetery, there is an old camping ground. They're both buried there. They didn't come back to die in their own country and die like down here in Serpentine, they died where their kids were. There is a big well just out of Dale. Your grandfather, old “Nutty” Tom Bennell, was the only one to have his future told there. Grandfather John Jack took him there as a little boy. He was the only one who had him and no one else and he told them all. Grandfather John Jack told them all, don't take anybody there, because “Nutty” Tom Bennell was the chosen one. He was “destined to be the Keeper of the Stories. He could do a lot of powerful things”. My mother is Martha (Diddley) Bolton (nee Bennell) ... was there and ... saw the things what was given, the things that two old boys did, ... witnessed what your grandfather did (Boolywar) ... so why would people come along and say I got this and I got that. Look, there were only two people who went that far and who had that power to do things. I saw some uncanny things.



**Juat Margaret Gentle. Tells us about moving to Pinjarra, bulyada man Oscar Little (deceased) and school days.**

Pinjarra? I went to Pinjarra a long time ago. It was just that all the kids and teenagers in Perth thought we'll go and have a look at Pinjarra. So we went down there and I found out I had relations there. I had somewhere to sleep as my sister was there. So the two old people, Ernestine and Oscar Little, do you remember them? They were very nice old people. There was a lot of people who came to Pinjarra who lived there before but he was well respected. He was an old doctor fella, Uncle Oscar. He was well known around this country, that old fella for that, yes, that's right. [Margaret was told about Tom Bennell's oral history when he said, "old Oscar Little was a boordier bulyada" and she had responded] Oh yes, he had it all. Like one little boy, my grandson, got hit by a truck in Pinjarra when we were living down there and we used to tell him (Old Uncle Oscar) to come to the hospital with us, just to be there. We just sat there thinking and he put his mind into my grandson, who had a broken leg, a broken arm and one eye, was finished [not expected to live]. We stood there and Joe was so broken up, he just stood there with tears running down his face. I was just holding and talking to my grandson. I reared up all these kids - a woman of my age.

I went to school here in Pinjarra. Well, it was so little; the school is hardly worth remembering. We went to school for two days, Violet Kearing and me; she was Theo Kearing's daughter. We use to go off and play hooky and have a good time, then I would shoot back home. We would go down the river, or around the bushes laughing and telling stories, things like that, you know? Actually I can't remember it all, but I can remember when we walked four miles to school from the other side of Lockridge, at the reserve there. Fifteen of us kids walked from there every morning and walked back every night. Then we shifted a bit closer to Lockridge.

**Whadjuck/ Balardong Sealin Garlett. Story of women's ceremony, kiep and hunting and fishing.**

One of the things that Uncle Cliff Humphries talked about was that, that place [Kings Park] was a ceremonial place and more so for the fact that it had a lot of areas where women had special places. It wasn't his right or my right to know what had taken place there. But he said they often talked about the significance of that place to the women. In Aboriginal way, when women got a special place, that's a place that's not necessary to pay attention to [by men], but you have to respect it. He [Uncle Cliff] said when the wedjela came [1829] the police used to come on horse back and at first, the policeman said you have to camp at the back of this place here [Kings Park] ... Charlie Gairdner's [hospital] side of Kings Park. And he reckoned that the old people used to say, "but, um, they would say, there's no noonkar kierp there". There is no water in that area there [at the Subiaco side of Kings Park] where they used to camp. They used to bring the water to their camp [at the Subiaco side of Kings Park]. In that area there ... the kierp or water at the base of that hill, it was in abundance; there was sort of a flow, yeah, yeah. Yeah, and that's what the fellas say, you know, that it was too far, it's too far to go to bring water. He reckons where Point Walter was, the water use to go right out there, and there used to be a sand bar where they used to walk across and get the fish from there. When you look from the hill and you look over Point Walter and you're having a look at the sand bar, you can see in your mind, you can sort of picture that back then, of it taking place. He said there was an area where they'd put wood; it was like a pine. And they'd sit their kids on it. It was accessible, a good hunting area along the Point Walter side and they used to get young birds and fish, and crabs used to come up. If you came at the right time, there would be fish stuck in the sand bars. That was a real good time of being hunters and gatherers. He reckons these are stories that his mother had passed down. Uncle Clifty [Humphries] used to say that one thing that kept the Nyungar here, is that we were content with what we had. We were able to live off the land, survive off it. There was plentiful food.

He reckoned that some Nyungar used to go [to Pinjarra] for funerals, for respect. Some Nyungar used to go down there to camp and some of them even got women and got married down that way. They would even be invited to stay. Pinjarra was a deadly

[excellent] place for fish and it was a good place for kangaroos. You could get a lot of really strong meat from that area. Those Nyungar were very strong; they were really good fighters those mob there. A lot of our Nyungar people from here, once they got to know them, kept their distances for a while. Old fella [Cliff Humphries] reckoned that once they [our mob] got to know them [Pinjarra mob], they gradually began to have intermarriage. And relationships and yeah, fellas came over this way to live and some stayed down that way.

**Pindjarup Dr Walley. A story about connection to boodjar and moort.**

... 'cause what happens then, you got children of those couples who've got affiliations in both countries, so they can go between both quite easily.. Thus, when I start off with my story, I can travel quite easily through Yamatji country 'cause that's my grandmother's area. I can travel right through the Perth area quite easily because that is my great grandmother's area and I can travel through the Moora area without any problems, which is quite prominent through the Indich connection. I can go through the Balardong country, through the York and Quairading area, which is my mother's country. So what it does is, it opens up the whole landscape for you but, you still have an affiliation back to one part of the country. So even though I have a connection all the way through, my affiliation is still back in Pinjarra and this is what I'm talking about. You can't explain it, even though I wasn't born there. It's my grandmother's country and great grandmother's and great grandfather's country [on the Walley side]. You go back all through those areas and you'll find that it is something beyond. That there is a spiritual link that pulls you back. It's not necessarily just me, it's a lot of people who are looking for a place of belonging. Sometimes they find that place of belonging in very unusual places, or sometimes they find it exactly where they are looking for it.

**Pindjarup Joe Walley. Travelling, camping, Nyungar katitjin, western civilization and the wedjela writings of history versus the oral history of Indigenous peoples.**

They [his Pindjarup people] camped up from the swamp, on the north end of the swamp, so they could actually use the water and share it with the animals. I do believe what old Dave Nannup, my grandfather, told me about Aboriginal people, that they never ever lived, as people assumed, right on water. They lived away from the water, so they didn't frighten the animals. Living away from the water and carting it back to the camps for their use, made sense. There was a lot of fresh water and good camping places there. If you camped near the water, you would frighten the animals away. If you scared them away, then you would have to go running around looking for the animals for food.

Yes, the animals came into that water soak, kangaroos and other animals, Aboriginal foods. Frightened, they stay away from the water. They caught the animals at their drinking time at the water. I still say that even though the majority of white people say that the Aboriginal system was stupid, they were not. They were very, very sensible. They were that way so they could survive. They had to actually learn to survive by being sensible, not by being stupid. For thousands of years, they did it, so I think if people knew how the old people lived, how they survived, they would survive, too. It was a natural thing to learn to survive therefore they had to be sensible to survive, not by being stupid. People from all over said the Aboriginal people had intelligence; what is more, they were more intelligent than the Europeans because they lived with the land. We didn't say we owned land; the land owned us. We had to share. This is the difference between Europeans and Aboriginal people. They never, ever put greed first; they put need first. The need was always the first thing, the most important thing. Going back, I should have brought the story along and you could have taken it back to Murdoch - the Aboriginal people and their beliefs and where they travelled, and how they got to the places. It is an unfinished story, but unfortunately, I think, Western civilisation caught up with the Aboriginal people. [Nyungar] People started eating white fellas food, instead of going to find food. Now they go and buy it and things like that. So these old stories, white people don't believe them, they [wedjela] think are not true. Well, how many stories going right back, can you say is true? I am a firm believer in

the old Aboriginal ways. How many stories can you say is true? The Bible, because it is written down? When we speak, it is verbally a handed down story. They [wedjella] say they are just words, you make it up. What is the difference between a man's written word or a person's word that is not written down? There is no difference. Well, one is written down and one is spoken. Yes, but it had to be spoken for it to be written down, ha ha ha. There is no difference at all.

In the tradition of Nyungar culture, our oral histories continue through our Balardong, Wiilman, Juat, Pindjarup and Whadjuck oral historians. The old Nyungar were just as "intelligent" back in the old days, [when] they knew Robert Menli Lyon was recording our history and our culture. Nyungar ensured he observed our tradition.

Lyon wrote this statement of Nyungar in 1833, only four years after the "wam wedjela, koorl barminyiny our moort and dombariny ngulla boodjar – or the strange white people came and killed our relations and took over our country", "I have reason to believe that their (Nyungar) history and geography are handed down from generation to generation orally ..." (Lyon 1833, p.8).

Nyungar oral histories will continue ad infinitum and they will continue to be recorded by Nyungar, Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people alike. Our oral histories will continue to have a profound influence on our generations to come and they will be the eternal link to Nyungar identity, heritage and culture.

Our stories as handed down to us from the Nyungar oral historians and "Keepers of the stories", whether they are from the Whadjuck, Balardong, Pindjarup or Wiilman language groups, and other Nyungar groups, are testimony to the Nyungar Cosmology, the phenomena known as the Waakal, the Nyungar Rainbow Serpent – Creator of the trilogy of boodjar, moort and katitjin. Our stories reflect this belief.

## CONCLUSION

Yeye mila boorda, Kura

“from the present to the past”.

Since 1975, Murdoch University has grown into a major university, teaching Australian Indigenous Studies, which was introduced in 1980 as a part of the degree programs that it offers the public from within the Beeliam boodjar or boordier Midgegooroo and Yagan territory on the southside of the Swan River. From being a place where Nyungar once loved, fought, hunted, gathered and foraged for food in the surrounding countryside; conducted their cultural and social rites and ceremonies; and found spiritual sustenance in their religious beliefs, to a place where Aborigines are now attending the Kulbardi Centre and studying at tertiary level in mainstream programs, is a huge metamorphosis. After years of living under colonial and state rule, Aborigines now have some autonomy to choose their own destinies.

Murdoch University is doing its part in making higher education possible for all Aboriginal and Islander peoples whether they are Nyungar, Yamatji, Koori, Murri, Mulba or others with the incentive to achieve this through this educational system. When some of the Nyungar boordier who were interviewed for this study were asked whose land it is that Murdoch University now stands upon, these were their responses:

Whadjuck/Balardong Dorothy Winmar said: “I do know they are my relations. They come from the same tribe and that tribe is the Whadjuck tribe and they come from the Swan River and Kings Park right down to Fremantle” (Winmar 2002).

Juat Margaret Gentle reminded us that, “There was the Kickett’s, Benita Walley was living there, and then there was Don and Gladys Linden, [Joe Walley’s sister Gladys Walley]. They lived there. And there was big flats there in Coolbellup. Some of the Pinjarra lot came to live in those flats because they worked over at the big woolsheds along the Fremantle to Mandurah road” (Gentle 2002).

Balardong/Wilman Janet Hayden commented that:

no, only this part, this is all Yagan’s. .... This is all Yagan’s country here. We

have always said that this is Yagan and Midgegorgoo's country. This is the foundation of Midgegorgoo and Yagan's family. They named that park after him over there ... this is his tribal country right here. You could say this is Yagan's country - and okay, you could say Bennell country too" (Hayden 2002).

Pindjarup Dr Richard Walley stated that:

I can go right back to, say, the Perth connection, or the connection from around this area goes right back to my great-great grandmother, Fanny Balbuck, who was actually born on Heirisson Island. Her family used to go between Heirisson Island right up to Kings Park and then they would come south, right around to this area here, following the swamps more than anything else (Walley, R. 2002).

Whadjuck/Balardong Sealin Garlett reminded us that:

my Grandma (Yurleen ) used to say this was to be passed on to her children and her grannies... there are places where you find serenity; where you find a sense of belonging ... that this is a part of our place, this is a part of our area, our culture. Nitcha boodjar koonyarn nitcha koorl buranginy boodjar karluk maya koonyarn wah. Deman deman and maam wiern kia moort koonyarn. Deman and maam noonookurt, boodjar koonyarn karla koorliny. Koorlongka boorda gneenunyiny. Those words say that this is my country where I belong. This is deman and maam, my grandmother and grandfather's land, this is their land where their spirits move now. Boorda or later on, this is going to be the responsibility of my children and my children's children, their home and this place will always be linked to their spirit (Garlett 2002).

Pindjarup Joe Walley says:

their families have been travelling up into Fremantle, that way back and forth. When they came through, there was an old chap and if they look back in the library, they would find the old man's name and the old camps at Thompson Lake and Dog Hill there...Pompey, he was a great grand uncle of mine and he



traveled up and down, to and from Pinjarra. On the numerous tracks they travelled (Walley, J. 2002).

Finally, “Keeper of the Stories” Tom Bennell said, in 1978, that:

the Nyungar never call it Western Australia. Ngulla boodjar, our land, they call this ngulla boodjar our land, he said. Nitcha ngulla koorl nyininy. This is our ground we came and sat upon (Bennell 1978 a).

Kura, yeye mila boorda “from the past to the present”.

## **REFERENCES**

Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA)