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Recognising community truth-telling: An exploration of local truth-telling in Australia

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Deakin University and Reconciliation Australia Acknowledge Traditional Owners of Country throughout Australia and recognise the continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respect to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, and to Elders past and present.

We would like to extend our heartfelt thanks to all the interviewees who generously shared their time, expertise, knowledge and perspectives, often about difficult and painful histories, as well as stories of extraordinary courage and hope. This report would not have been possible without their contribution and its analysis is fundamentally built on the invaluable information and insights so generously shared by those who participated.

CONTENT WARNING

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples should be aware that this report contains the names of people who have passed away.

Readers are warned that some of the content may be upsetting as the report contains descriptions of historical violence and ongoing trauma.

The report may also include historically and culturally sensitive words, terms or descriptions; such material does not reflect Deakin University or Reconciliation Australia's viewpoint but rather the social attitudes and circumstances of the period or place in which it was created.

While we make every reasonable effort to ensure the accuracy of information, there is the possibility that descriptions of case studies could contain inaccuracies or contested information.

Protocols

Deakin University and Reconciliation Australia recognise the rights of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples to tell their histories in their own voices and to check all content prior to it being shared in a public sphere. Transcripts of interviews and a draft of the report were shared with interviewees before publication.

The project received formal Deakin University Human Research Ethics approval (DUHREC ID# 2021-104) on 6 May 2021. More details about the ethical principles informing the research are detailed below.

THE PROJECT

This report was produced as part of the project 'The role of truth-telling in Australian reconciliation', funded by Reconciliation Australia, the Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation and the research consortium Centre for Resilient and Inclusive Societies (CRIS).

The research team

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have been calling for a fuller account of Australia's history for many decades. Truth-telling has been understood as being central to reconciliation since the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation began its work 30 years ago, and even prior to this. More recently, this long-held desire for truth-telling was articulated as one of three critical components needed to achieve political transformation in the 2017 Uluru Statement from the Heart, which called for Voice, Treaty and Truth.

This collaborative research project between the Alfred Deakin Institute of Citizenship and Globalisation (ADI) and Reconciliation Australia seeks to respond to these calls for truth-telling.

It asks what *methodologies* and *processes* of community truth-telling are most effective in contributing to:

- *the recognition of the complexity of colonial history and its current legacy*
- *the redress of injustice arising from this colonial history*
- *the recognition of ongoing First Nations sovereignty*
- *the reconciliation and healing of relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the broader Australian community*

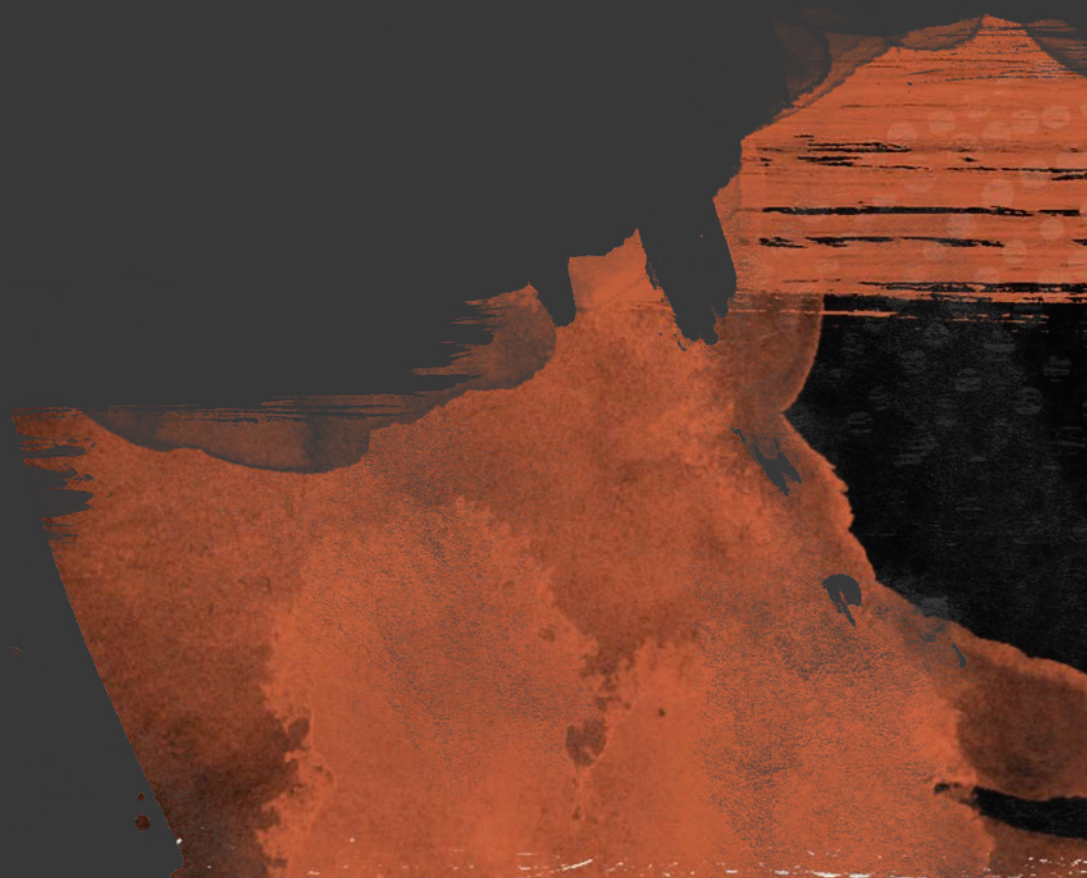
In this study, community truth-telling is understood in very broad terms as including locally based activities or processes that have sought to recognise and engage with a fuller account of Australia's history and its current legacy by bringing to light and addressing the unrecognised histories of both violation and First Nations sovereignty, resilience, self-determination and contribution.

The study explores these questions by documenting a small, non-representative sample of 25 community truth-telling initiatives, including 10 in-depth case-studies in which 35 participants were interviewed. These projects provide a very modest but illustrative snapshot of the hundreds of innovative and creative grassroots initiatives that are currently taking place around the country to reckon with the complexity of Australia's colonial past and the challenges of reconciliation and redress.

Thus far these processes have not been systematically documented.

We sought to understand how truth-telling is currently understood and practised by a diversity of Australians in these community initiatives that address the country's colonial past. What truths are being told in these contexts and how are they being told? How are they contributing to reconciliation, redress and self-determination? These projects include an extraordinary array of ongoing activity including community commemorations, festivals, memorial events, public artwork projects, repatriation of ancestors, return of land, renaming of places and the creation of healing sites.

It is critically important to ask what we can we learn from these experiences to support truth-telling initiatives going forward. The project has therefore sought to document these local truth-telling processes to assist in building more in-depth knowledge about the complexities, strengths and challenges of communities' efforts to tell their truths over many decades, and the inspiration that can be drawn from them. If Australia is to engage in national and state-level truth-telling, it must understand and build on existing resources, skills and wisdom as a critical first step in realising the aspirations of both Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island Peoples and non-Indigenous communities to recognise injustice, deepen understanding and redress past wrongs.



FINDINGS

A rich and diverse community engagement with the past

It is clear that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have not waited for formal truth-telling processes to ensure their historical truths are told.

Communities across the country have shown enormous persistence in the task of truth-telling. They have repeatedly advocated for repatriation, renaming, reparation, commemoration, public art and education, among other forms of recognition and truth-telling. These activities have often required sustained effort over decades, with minimal resources.

Our research indicates the extraordinary depth and variety of engagements with the colonial past and more recent experiences of systemic violation, such as the Stolen Generations. An initial mapping of these activities identified several hundred initiatives across the country, reflecting an enormous variety in forms of truth-telling. This diversity attests to the creative manner in which the legacy of colonialism can be recognised and some of its negative effects addressed. At the same time, our research indicates that there are certain contexts, such as the Torres Strait, where engagement with the unique and complex history of this region is still emerging.

Truth-telling is intended not only to acknowledge violations of the past. It is also about an active reclaiming of agency, identity, pride, respect, self-determination and sovereignty in the face of attempts since colonisation to erase Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' presence in the Australian nation-state, its landscape and its history. Community truth-telling has therefore sought to address the failure to recognise the remarkable contribution of First Nations Peoples to the country and to their local communities. This ranges from recognition of acts of heroism and resistance to colonialism, to First Nation People's critical role in local economies.

These processes of truth-telling and recognition are seen by communities across the country as a critical precondition for any meaningful form of local or national reconciliation. Reconciliation is understood by interviewees as being about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous communities creating new relationships through truth-telling, in recognition that often these relationships have never existed before, or are in need of fundamental repair.

Truth-telling and the recognition, reparation, healing and engagement that it involves is not regarded as a one-off event because the impact of colonialism is complex, widespread, multi-generational and multi-faceted. Therefore, the truth-telling that is required is an ongoing process that needs to be continuously facilitated and built upon to address these legacies. The repetition of many of the community events documented here attests to the importance of deepening the process of truth-telling over time.

First Nations leadership of truth-telling

A substantial proportion of the projects we documented have been initiated and driven by First Nations communities, who are currently carrying a large share of the responsibility for educating the next generation about the experience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities at a local level. Placing this responsibility on local communities, particularly on individuals who have been traumatised, such as members of the Stolen Generations, as well as people who have experienced other forms of intergenerational trauma, is deeply problematic.

Survivors of the Stolen Generations have made a significant contribution to truth-telling and education about the experiences of the Stolen Generations. Many survivors have taken on the responsibility of truth-telling personally, re-telling their stories publicly in order to increase awareness and understanding. Survivors have conducted this work on their own initiative, often mobilising together with other survivors. They have created non-profit corporations that provide a variety of types of support for survivors and their descendants to meet needs not adequately addressed by government services. These organisations have pioneered new approaches to truth-telling. They have focused on the recovery of sites of historical violation as locations of truth-telling and healing. They have initiated educational projects to inform young people about the Stolen Generations and have created digital archives of survivors' stories to build a resource to be used for education while ensuring that survivors can decide when and with whom their stories are shared. It is clear that the impact of this crucial truth-telling work could be significantly improved by sustained funding and support, which would ensure that the responsibility for this undertaking is not left to those who have been traumatised.

Most of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities we interacted with have had to obtain the resources for truth-telling initiatives themselves. It is evident that truth-telling work could be significantly enhanced if it were better resourced and funded from a variety of sources, including the private sector and government. To support truth-telling work financially, First Nations communities have engaged strategically and creatively, and on their own terms, with private individuals, corporations, government and others to raise the funds to finance projects and initiatives around truth-telling. However, many critical historical events remain officially unrecognised. Currently there are between 4000 and 5000 memorials to those who died in the First World War scattered across small towns in Australia. While as many First Nations people died in frontier conflicts, a tiny proportion of memorials around the country commemorate these individuals.

A significant impact on the national narrative

The impact of this community truth-telling work has been significant and has arguably contributed over time to a considerable shift in the national narrative about Australia's colonial history, including a growing recognition of the violence of that history, as well as the rich contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples to the country. This has occurred through myriad local truth-telling activities that highlight important aspects of First Nations history, previously excluded or unrecognised in the historical record. These include truth-telling events that recognise historical violations such as massacres, major Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander historical figures, or key moments of resistance. These activities have collectively helped foster a reassessment of colonial narratives about Australia's history and a more profound understanding of both First Nations and non-Indigenous communities' histories.

Community truth-telling initiatives are an increasingly important source of education for non-Indigenous communities, as evidenced by growing numbers of non-Indigenous participants attending memorial and other commemorative events organised by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the country. This impact could be greatly strengthened if there were more systematic support for non-Indigenous Australians to participate in truth-telling in partnership with First Nations Australians. There appears to be growing recognition and respect within non-Indigenous communities for the significant impact of historical experiences of violence on First Nations communities that transcends contestation about exact details, although this contestation does continue in some communities. However, the continued incidence of vandalism of memorials, sculptures and sites of remembrance indicates that the recognition of both the violence of colonial history and the contribution of First Nations communities remains disputed by some. These responses are evidence of the importance of ongoing education and truth-telling to address the prejudice and misunderstanding that leads to such violence, and which ultimately perpetuate the legacy of colonialism.

On the other hand, in a number of localities, non-Indigenous community members have been important partners in truth-telling and, in some instances, have initiated truth-telling activities in collaboration with First Nations communities. These individuals are important role-models. They demonstrate how truth-telling can be conducted as a genuine partnership that benefits both First Nations and non-Indigenous communities. In some contexts, the process of engagement between First Nations peoples and non-Indigenous communities around collaborative activities has led to the development of lasting relationships and new levels of understanding between those communities. Nevertheless, in order to have a lasting impact, this understanding needs to be nurtured and deepened on an ongoing basis, as well as linked to meaningful redress of past wrongs. In general, much more will need to be done to ensure that a greater number of non-Indigenous community members become active and equal participants in local truth-telling.

Local and experiential truth-telling initiatives are important

The community truth-telling initiatives detailed here show that an experiential rather than a didactic approach to truth-telling is seen as crucial. Here, learning occurs through creating immersive experiences, rather than focusing on facts alone. These initiatives incorporate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous communities in practices such as smoking ceremonies, walking on Country, cultural performances and storytelling. Some initiatives include personal interaction between descendants of the victims and perpetrators of massacres, or personal engagement with Stolen Generation survivors. These experiential engagements are deeply inspiring for non-Indigenous communities as well as First Nations communities and can provide a powerful motivation for non-Indigenous communities to participate in truth-telling. They create a context for healing and dialogue that facilitates deeper and more meaningful understandings of the multiple violations experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as drawing attention to the rich and ongoing contribution that these communities continue to make to contemporary Australia.

Embedding these truth-telling processes in local places – on Country – has emerged as significant across many types of initiatives. Festivals such as the Freedom Day festival, which commemorates the Wave Hill Walk-Off, an event that played a central role in precipitating the land rights movement of the 1970s, is held at the site where the walk-off occurred so that visitors can walk and experience this route themselves. The Mannalargenna Festival has been located at the exact spot where Mannalargenna left the Tasmanian mainland on his last journey before being exiled to Flinders Island. Survivors of the Stolen Generations seek to reclaim the sites of their violation at Kinchela Boys Home and Cootamundra Girls Home as sites of healing, recovery, memory and education. Other events, such as the Appin massacre memorial commemoration, take place near the site of violation as a symbolic gesture of respect and reclamation.

In a small number of both larger and smaller municipalities, such as Hobart in Tasmania, Gundagai in New South Wales and the former electorates of Batman and Moreland in Victoria, local government has played a central role in facilitating recognition and redress of colonial legacies. This support has had a considerable impact on the ability of local communities to participate in processes that meaningfully acknowledge local colonial history and its impact on contemporary society. Truth-telling could be significantly enhanced if more local councils systematically and creatively supported community-driven truth-telling initiatives that address colonial history and its ongoing impact in their locality.

These localised processes of truth-telling could also be supported by directing resources to ensure the important work being done to document and recognise local histories is properly resourced and supported through in-depth historical research. These histories could also be systematically integrated into local and national school curricula so that young people grow up with a meaningful understanding of the Country on which they are located and the contribution of First Nations communities to that locality, as well as to the country as a whole. As more formalised truth-telling processes get underway, there will be a need for more support for individuals to access and navigate historical records relating to themselves and their families. This includes emotional support for the trauma that may be associated with this process, particularly for members of the Stolen Generations and legal support to access and verify records, as well as support from archivists to find the information that individuals need to understand their own and their community's history.

The importance of national recognition

Greater systemic national recognition of First Nations history and agency could help create a more conducive and equal environment for truth-telling and reconciliation. For example, Mabo Day, which commemorates the Mabo decision overturning the doctrine of terra nullius, is only recognised as an official holiday in the Torres Shire. However, if it were recognised in the national calendar, as advocated by the Mabo family for more than 20 years, this decision could begin to be claimed with pride by all Australians as decisively refuting the myth that Australia was 'unoccupied' or 'ungoverned' at the time of colonisation.

Another form of national recognition that our research indicates is critical to facilitating truth-telling and reconciliation is a recognition of the cost of the frontier conflicts that founded this country, for First Nations communities in the main, but also for non-Indigenous Australians. This could occur through a national day of remembrance so that the tragedy of this loss could be collectively understood, recognised and mourned by all Australians. State and territory governments could consider identifying remembrance days that are relevant at their level.

Finally, our research shows that national recognition of the impact of the policies that led to the Stolen Generations and the lessons for the present could play an important role in truth-telling and reconciliation. This could occur through a national day of recognition, national and regional commemorative events, as well as the establishment of national and local museum sites that permanently recognise and educate future generations about this legacy, so that survivors and their descendants are not compelled to carry this responsibility alone.

INTRODUCTION

Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have long called for truth-telling about Australia's colonial past and the more recent history of violations experienced by First Nations communities, such as the polices relating to the Stolen Generations. The Royal Commission of Inquiry into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which delivered its report in 1991, quoted the words of the Aboriginal writer and artist Sally Morgan who underlined the importance of truth-telling:

> *In the telling [of history] we assert the validity of our own experiences and we call the silence of two hundred years a lie. And it is important for you, the listener, because like it or not, we are part of you. We have to find a way of living together in this country, and that will only come when our hearts, minds and wills are set towards reconciliation. It will only come when thousands of stories have been spoken and listened to with understanding. (Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, 1991, p. 26)*

The *Australian Declaration Towards Reconciliation* released in 2000 at one of the largest gatherings of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous leaders in Australian history, also reiterated the importance of truth-telling for reconciliation: 'Our nation must have the courage to own the truth, to heal the wounds of its past so that we can move on together at peace with ourselves' (Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation, 2000).

In 2017 the Uluru Statement from the Heart articulated truth-telling as part of a process of political transformation. It called for the establishment of a constitutionally protected First Nations Voice to the Australian Parliament and a 'Makarrata Commission' (named after a Yolngu word meaning 'coming together after a struggle') to supervise a process of treaty-making and truth-telling between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and the rest of the Australian community.

In May 2021 the Yoorrook Justice Commission was established in the state of Victoria as the first formal truth-telling process into historical and ongoing injustices in Victoria. Discussions around similar treaty and truth processes were also underway in other states at the time of writing, with the Queensland government announcing in August 2022 that it would include a truth-telling Inquiry for First Nations Peoples as part of its Path to Treaty process. This moment therefore offers unique opportunities for engagement around how truth-telling can be effectively progressed.

It is against this background that this study analyses a small cross-section of community-based initiatives that we believe will assist with building knowledge about truth-telling processes and methodologies, and support local truth-telling efforts across the country. The wide array of initiatives outlined here gives an indication of the vibrancy of existing community engagement with the complexity of Australia's colonial past and its ongoing legacy.

By focusing on local truth-telling examples, this project seeks to:

- contribute to the knowledge base about community truth-telling in Australia by analysing 25 case studies of community truth-telling
- gain a deeper understanding of what community truth-telling is and how it can best be progressed
- achieve a more substantive understanding of the role of truth-telling in reconciliation, as well as its contribution to sovereignty, self-determination, reparation and redress

Why is truth-telling important?

> *Truth-telling is a gift: truth-telling benefits the whole nation, and communities must be supported to tell the stories they want to tell in the ways they want to tell them. (Reconciliation Australia and Healing Foundation Truth-telling Symposium 2018)*

For much of Australia's history, the rights, histories, experiences and contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples have been ignored and silenced. Through the advocacy of First Nations people, there is growing community awareness of the value and need for truth-telling that builds a shared understanding about Australia's colonial histories and the impact of this history on contemporary Australian society, in particular the continuing inequality and inequity experienced by First Nations Australians. Survey data also shows there is widespread community interest in and support for truth-telling at local, state and national levels: 83% of the general community and 87% of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples surveyed in the 2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer believed that Australia should undertake formal truth-telling processes (Reconciliation Australia, 2022).

In his Boyer lecture in 1968, the anthropologist Bill Stanner famously identified a 'Great Australian Silence' about First Nations Australians that he argued could not be the result of mere inattention but was the result of what he described as a 'cult of forgetfulness'. He explained:

> *It is a structural matter…a view from a window which has been carefully placed to exclude a whole quadrant of the landscape. What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned into habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale. (Stanner, 1991)*

Much important work has been done since Stanner's lectures to explore, document and publicise Australia's history, including formal truth-telling processes such as the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, which famously documented the experience of the Stolen Generations in the 1997 Bringing Them Home report; the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, which released its report in 1991 with 339 recommendations; the Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation's final report, released in 2000; and The Referendum Council's Final Report, released in 2017. All these initiatives have been important steps in building understanding of the effects of colonisation, dispossession, forced removal and trauma on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, as well as understanding their remarkable resilience. Despite this, there is more work to be done. As Dean Ashenden, winner of the 2022 Australian Political Book of the Year for Telling Tennant's Story: The Strange Career of the Great Australian Silence, has recently argued of the 'Great Australian Silence', '… no-one, including the many generations of victims, has really grasped how far the consequences reach, or how, at last, to bring them to a halt' (Ashenden, 2022, p. 153). This is the challenge and the opportunity that truth-telling offers.

Community leader Noel Pearson, from the Guugu Yimithirr Aboriginal community on Cape York Peninsula, is a lawyer, an academic and a key architect of the Uluru Statement from the Heart process. He delivered the 2022 Boyer lectures in conversation with Stanner's Boyer lecture. He has underlined the continuing challenge facing the country in addressing the silence that Stanner identified and argues that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples are still the most 'unloved' Australians. He contends that until the question of recognition is effectively addressed, 'we will not know who we are' as a nation (Pearson, 2022). The task facing the country therefore remains significant.

However, the invitation in the Uluru Statement from the Heart for recognition and political transformation offers a new opportunity for a process of change that builds on the powerful history of struggle for social justice and sovereignty by First Nations people over many decades. This struggle has increasingly been joined by non-Indigenous Australians. Critically, the truth-telling that is being advocated for explicitly calls for a *shared* and *active* process between everyday Australians in which both First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians engage as *equal* partners. It calls on non-Indigenous Australians to go further than passively witnessing testimony of violation by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, although this is an important first step. It calls on them to actively grapple with their own contribution to recognising and redressing the legacy of injustice in Australia's history and to consider what this means for *all* Australians working in partnership.

Participants in dialogues organised during consultations leading to the release of the Uluru Statement from the Heart therefore emphasised:

> *The shared nature of this truth-telling. It is not for or owned by any particular group….It was offered as part of a proposal to the Australian people for a different future, one in which all Australians could understand the truth, shame and complexity of their own stories and thus move towards a stronger, freer and richer future. (Appleby and Davis, 2018, p. 504)*

Consequently, truth-telling is conceptualised as an opportunity for First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians to participate in a process of creative local engagement about the many truths of colonial history, rather than a more formalised national process that takes place at a distance from local communities. This engagement is seen as a collaborative process, rather than a contest between competing 'versions' of history. The aspiration is to develop a *shared* understanding of the complexity of the country's history. This includes potentially uncomfortable recognition of the violence that accompanied colonisation and the ongoing legacies of this in contemporary society, such as the continuing violence and prejudice experienced by First Nations people in the criminal justice system. The Frontier Wars that accompanied the expansion of European settlement in Australia lasted for 140 years and cost more lives than were lost in the First and Second World Wars (Ashenden, 2022). However, this legacy of violence has never been properly acknowledged or recognised.

At the same time, the desire for truth-telling that has been expressed seeks to recognise and respect, rather than judge, the many different experiences that Australians have had of the country's history and its current reality. Megan Davis, former Referendum Council Commissioner and key architect of the process leading to the Uluru Statement from the Heart, argues that the Makarrata Commission, which will supervise a process of local truth-telling, is intended to provide, 'a record of historical *experience*' rather than 'judge the truths that emerge from the locally led activities' (Appleby and Davis, 2018, p. 509). The cross-section of truth-telling initiatives that are documented in this report attest to the innovative capacity of *all* Australians to grapple with complex histories, create new understandings and advocate for necessary social transformation.

Importantly, truth-telling is not about perpetuating a narrative of First Nations victimhood, but about empowerment and enriching *all* Australians' understanding and experience of Australian nationhood and identity. Participants in regional dialogues organised during the consultative process leading to the release of the Uluru Statement from the Heart emphasised that truth-telling should not only recall trauma but 'defiance against government actions and policies' and 'narratives of survival and revelation' (Appleby and Davis, 2018, p. 506).

Truth-telling is also about First Nations Peoples asserting and claiming their agency, sovereignty and self-determination within this nationhood in ways that co-exist and enhance existing laws, governance and culture. Davis and Appleby explain that truth-telling was seen by regional dialogue participants as a way in which 'they believed they could address current disadvantage and power imbalance *on their own terms*' (Appleby and Davis, 2018, p. 503, emphasis added). Dialogue participants expressed the desire to 'tell the truth about history *in our own voices* and from our own point of view', and for 'mainstream Australians to hear those voices and to reconsider what they know and understand about their nation's history' (Referendum Council, 2017, p. 17, emphasis added). Therefore, 'truth-telling' is about an active process of building new relationships and understandings. It is about truth-*doing*.

The most recent 2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer indicates broad support within the Australian community for this vision of empowerment and self-determination. It found that 80% of Australians believe the creation of a national representative Indigenous body is important and 79% believe such a body should be protected under the constitution. There is also growing support for a Treaty between First Nations and other Australians, with support increasing by 19% since 2020, to 72% today (Reconciliation Australia, 2022).

Trust is critical to relationships and reconciliation. The 2022 Australian Reconciliation Barometer indicates that 63% of the non-Indigenous people surveyed said they trusted Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people they had not interacted with, while the same percentage of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples said they trusted non-Indigenous people they had not interacted with. Significantly, however, levels of trust increase substantially when people have had direct interactions with each other. Trust levels rose to 86% of non-Indigenous people expressing trust in First Nations People and 79% of First Nations People trusting non-Indigenous people whom they had interacted with (Reconciliation Australia, 2022). The critical challenge, as Noel Pearson has recently pointed out in his Boyer lectures, is that most non-Indigenous people do not personally know First Nations Peoples and have therefore not developed a sense of fellowship with them. This needs to be addressed through truth-telling processes at a community level.

While truth-telling does not guarantee an outcome of reconciliation, it can contribute significantly to it. As a participant at a workshop held by Reconciliation Australia outlines:

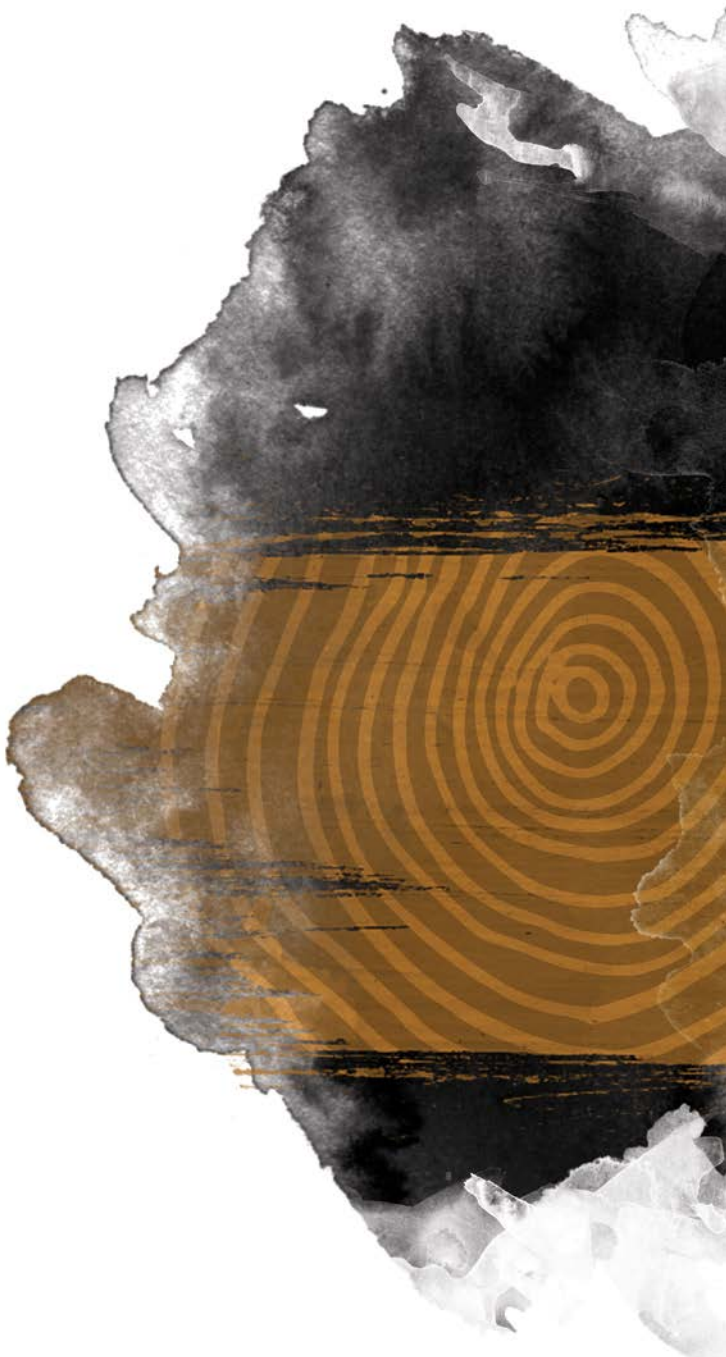
> *Truth-telling has the broadest role to play in reconciliation. Changing place names, re-telling the story of an area, talking about massacres – so at the local level it is happening in some places. (Reconciliation Australia, 2021)*

Truth-telling about Australia's histories is critical to securing justice and healing and to address the trauma and racism experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. Former Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Social Justice Commissioner Mick Gooda explains:

> *We know that truth-telling is central to the healing we must all go through. Without the truth we will never heal properly … This healing is what we all will need, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and non-Indigenous people alike. (Riga, 2022)*

Truth-telling is also an important part of recognising the place of First Nations Peoples, their ongoing sovereignty and critical role in Australia's national story and political identity. As the historian Henry Reynolds has recently written:

> *Our First Nations have been treated with such profound disrespect that it runs like a dark and ugly thread throughout the history of settler Australia … Truth-telling is the ultimate gesture of respect. It indicates a willingness to listen, to learn and to concede that the stories should be heard of those who have been victims of great wrongs. That is the single most important lesson from all the world's many truth commissions. (Reynolds, 2021)*



METHODOLOGY

Case study research

The study used a qualitative research methodology to develop **ten** *Interview Case Studies* of community truth-telling and **15** shorter *Summary Case Studies*.

Case study research is a qualitative research methodology that involves in-depth exploration and analysis of a specific case or cases within their real-world context. It aims to provide a detailed and holistic understanding of a particular phenomenon such as truth-telling. Case study research is particularly useful when investigating complex, context-dependent phenomena and exploring causal relationships, for example the relationship between truth-telling and reconciliation. By providing detailed and nuanced insights, case study research can contribute to theory-building, policy development, and practical findings.

The case study research methodology involves several key elements:

1. Selection of Cases: Researchers purposefully select cases that are considered informative and relevant to the research question. Cases can be selected based on their uniqueness, representativeness, or ability to provide rich and in-depth insights. A detailed overview of the selection criteria for the cases studies that were analysed in this research is provided below.

2. Data Collection: Multiple sources of data are collected to gain a comprehensive understanding of the cases. Data collection methods that were used in this study included grey and peer reviewed literature, interviews and audiovisual materials where relevant. Triangulation, which involves using multiple sources of data, was employed to enhance the validity and reliability of the findings. The methodology for data collection is detailed below.

3. Data Analysis: The collected data is systematically analysed using various qualitative analysis techniques. In this study we used an inductive grounded theory approach to describe and explore patterns, themes, and relationships within the data to generate insights about how truth-telling was understood and practised and to develop a rich description of the cases.

4. Contextualisation: Case study research emphasises the importance of understanding the broader context in which the cases are situated. This involves considering social, cultural, historical, and organisational factors that may influence the phenomenon under study. The context provides a framework for interpreting and making sense of the findings.

5. Theory Development: While case study research is often exploratory and descriptive, it also allows for theory development and refinement. Through the analysis of the cases, researchers may identify patterns, constructs, or relationships that contribute to existing theories or propose new theoretical frameworks. In this study we were concerned to understand the relationship between truth-telling and range of other concepts such as recognition of colonial history, redress of injustice, recognition of First Nations sovereignty and the reconciliation and healing of relationships.

6. Generalisability vs. Transferability: Case study research is primarily focused on generating in-depth, context-specific knowledge rather than aiming for statistical generalisability. However, the findings can be transferable to other similar contexts or provide insights that inform broader theoretical frameworks. We hoped, through these case studies to provide insights for other truth-telling initiatives in similar contexts (Yin, 2018; Baxter and Jack, 2008; Gerring, 2007; Stake, 2006).

Our analysis was informed by a 'grounded theory methodology' (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). This meant that we did not begin with a rigid definition of truth-telling but sought to build an understanding of truth-telling inductively, from the ground up. We also did not assume a link between truth-telling and reconciliation or make any assumptions about what role truth-telling could play with regard to the recognition of colonial history, First Nations sovereignty, the redress of injustice or healing as posited in our research questions. Instead, these questions were kept open-ended, to be informed by the data that emerged. Therefore, we sought to allow the data to metaphorically 'speak' for itself. An inductive approach seeks to discover meaning *emerging from* the data, in order to develop broader theory and analysis. This approach facilitates building knowledge closely supported by empirical data, while also allowing for a higher level of abstraction and engagement with existing theories. Grounded theory has been found to be particularly suitable for research with First Nations communities as a result of its flexibility, openness and lack of theoretical presuppositions (Denzin, 2010; Evans, 2017).

An inductive approach is also appropriate as understandings of truth-telling in Australia are only now evolving.

The qualitative methodology, which interprets meanings in social and cultural context, was intended to enable the study to investigate how reconciliation and truth-telling are understood *by social actors themselves*, to identify and map the commonalities and discontinuities between and *within* Australians' understandings of truth-telling and the role it can play in reconciliation. This is the starting point for developing an understanding of how truth-telling processes could be designed in a way that is just, inclusive and likely to support both reconciliation and social transformation, as well as being meaningful for participants in truth-telling and the wider community. Specifically, the study was intended to qualitatively explore the question of 'Historical Acceptance' which forms one component of a five-dimensional framework of reconciliation developed by Reconciliation Australia. Historical Acceptance is defined by Reconciliation Australia as the following:

> *All Australians understand and accept the wrongs of the past and their impact on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Australia makes amends for past policies and practices and ensures these wrongs are never repeated. (2022)*

Through its survey of questions related to the theme of Historical Acceptance, the Barometer provides a valuable quantitative overview of general Australian sentiment about truth-telling, attitudes to the country's colonial history and its impact on the present, and the need for reparations. This broad quantitative data is complemented in this study by a qualitative approach that seeks to explore the question of historical acceptance in more depth by examining how this process of understanding the wrongs of the past actually occurs through the engagement and interaction that have occurred in the context of local community-based truth-telling initiatives.

The analysis of the case studies that we documented enabled us to make a series of findings about the diversity and creativity of truth-telling that is taking place in Australia, the impact of this truth-telling on recognition of colonial history and its contribution to reconciliation, in addition to findings about the methodologies and processes of truth telling that would be most effective in progressing truth-telling in a manner that is transformative and inclusive.

Ethics approval and project advisory group

The project received Deakin University Human Research Ethics approval (DUHREC ID# 2021-104) on 6 May 2021. The study was also overseen by an advisory group of senior Aboriginal stakeholders who were consulted around the overall conceptualisation of the project, the categorisation and grouping of truth-telling case studies, and the ethical implementation of the methodology, for example a trauma-informed approach to interviewing and the use of a yarning methodology.

The project was broadly informed by the following principles, which were developed by participants at the 2018 Truth-telling Symposium organised by Reconciliation Australia and the Healing Foundation:

1. The right to know our many truths: truth-telling must encompass both past and contemporary injustices, empower multiple narratives and embrace complexity.
2. Safety is paramount: time and effort must be put into creating safe spaces for truth telling. This includes ensuring truth-telling is conducted in a culturally safe manner.
3. Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander recognition and control: Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and communities must lead the design of truth-telling processes and the narrative that they create, including how engagement in truth-telling occurs, the stories that are told and the records that are kept.
4. Listen, bear witness and record: audiences to formal truth-telling processes must be receptive, that is, able to listen and accept the truths that are shared. Accurate records must be kept and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people must retain ownership of records relating to their personal stories.
5. Build off key documents of truth: truth-telling must be informed by the work that has already been done, in particular, the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the Uluru Statement from the Heart.
6. Inclusivity and reciprocity: non-Indigenous Australians, including recent migrants, have an important role to play in truth-telling.

7. Time sensitivity: balancing the sense of urgency to tell the truth with allowing time for participation of many in what can be difficult processes.

8. Responsibility, action and accountability: truth-telling must involve responsibility and action for ensuring that past injustices are not repeated. Resources are required and there must be accountability for outcomes.

9. Healing, justice and nation-building: acknowledging that truth-telling is an uncomfortable process, that the process is not about shame or guilt, but about driving positive change and acceptance.

10. Truth-telling is a gift: truth-telling benefits the whole nation, and communities must be supported to tell the stories they want to tell in the ways they want to tell them.

Data collection

Data was collected from documentary material and online yarning interviews with stakeholders from ten community projects.

Literature review: Mapping community truth-telling

The project consulted close to 600 sources over the course of the research, ranging from scholarly articles and books to newspaper reports, websites and organisational reports. We began the study with an extensive process of gathering a range of documentary sources that could help us identify and 'map' existing community truth-telling activities. Key potential sources of information about truth-telling activities were initially identified as including the massacre map project led by historian Lyndall Ryan at the University of Newcastle, the community-run website Monuments Australia and local councils, particularly those with Reconciliation Action Plans, as well as news items from reserves and mission communities, as these localities were sites of some of the most severe colonial restriction and violation. These sources were systematically searched for the term 'truth' and 'Indigenous/Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander'. Approximately 400 initiatives engaging in various forms of truth-telling were identified in most states and territories and were recorded in a spreadsheet.

Scholarly engagement with the most recent call for truth-telling is still emerging but there are a number of critical contributions to the discussion on truth-telling that we did engage with to help inform our conceptualisation of the study, the data we collected and the analysis of interview and case-study material. These included Dean Ashenden's *Telling Tennant's Story: The Strange Career of the Great Australian Silence* (2022); Henry Reynolds's *Truth-Telling: History, Sovereignty and the Uluru Statement* (2021); Mark McKenna's *Return to Uluru* (2021); Megan Davis and George Williams's *Everything You Need to Know about the Uluru Statement from the Heart* (2021); and Thomas Mayer's *Finding the Heart of the Nation: the Journey of the Uluru Statement towards Voice, Treaty and Truth* (2019). Prior to this there was relatively little published specifically on the call for truth-telling in the Uluru Statement from the Heart. Critical scholarly contributions included a piece from constitutional lawyers Gabrielle Appleby and Megan Davis, 'The Uluru Statement and the Promises of Truth' in *Australian Historical Studies* (2018), and historian Mark McKenna's essay, 'Moment of Truth: History and Australia's Future,' in the *Quarterly Essay* (2018).

Scholarly literature was also sourced through EBSCO Academic Search Premier, a key interdisciplinary database of more than 10 000 journals from the social sciences and humanities, anthropology, engineering, law and the sciences, using the search terms 'truth', 'truth-telling' and 'reconciliation'.

There was often very little formal documentation about the community truth-telling initiatives we investigated, which speaks to the critical challenge of making visible the enormous contribution these initiatives are making to truth-telling. Many produce limited documentation of their activities, even for internal purposes. In this context, journalistic accounts of events run by various community truth-telling projects provided an invaluable, and, in some instances, sole source of information about community truth-telling processes where we were not able to secure interviews.

We attempted at all times to 'triangulate', or compare multiple sources on case-study sites to ensure that we reflected both historical events and contemporary responses to them as accurately and ethically as possible. However, we did not have the resources to consult archival records or primary material. Where historical records remain contested, we sought to recognise this. However, our primary focus was to understand the impact of these events on local communities and the manner in which they have responded to them, rather than to engage in contestation about historical details.

Grouping community truth-telling initiatives

Using the inductive methodology outlined above, the 400 initiatives that were documented in the first phase of the study were analysed in order to understand whether they fell into any particular conceptual categories or appeared to indicate any specific trends. The analysis of existing projects identified four broad conceptual categories oriented around the twin imperatives of recognising colonial and contemporary violation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, as well as their agency, sovereignty and resilience in relation to this history.

It is important to note that these categories are understood and used here as a means to group and analyse the wide range of truth-telling activities documented, rather than an attempt to develop rigid or mutually exclusive categories. Many truth-telling initiatives include elements from a number of the categories outlined below. Included under each category is an indicative list of some of the activities that we saw as falling under these categories. This is not intended to be an exhaustive list of all possible activities under each category, nor were we able to document all the types of activity listed in our research. However, we did attempt to ensure the case studies we chose were drawn from the full array of truth-telling categories.

Recognising colonial violence

- Documenting colonial violation, e.g. University of Newcastle massacre map
- Acts of recognition of colonial violation, including monuments, plaques and public art marking sites of colonial violation
- Memorial commemorations, including engagement between descendants of massacres, e.g. the Appin massacre memorial
- Local research and investigation of violations

Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty, self-determination and agency

- Renaming or dual-naming of areas to recognise ongoing Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty
- Commemorations of acts of resistance and assertion of sovereignty, e.g. the Wave Hill Walk-off
- Recognition of individuals who led resistance, e.g. Eddie Mabo
- The assertion of political agency and sovereignty, e.g. Native Title processes
- Engagement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, private companies and government regarding sacred sites

Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander cultures, contributions and resilience

- Monuments, plaques and public art to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander achievement, contributions and resilience
- Renaming or repurposing of public areas to recognise Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander contribution
- Activities related to the revitalisation and celebration of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' practices, cultures, languages and knowledge

Redress, healing and reconciliation

- Processes to reinterpret or contest the meaning of colonial statues through creative engagement
- Repatriation of remains and cultural heritage artifacts
- Initiatives for redress and reparation, e.g. for members of the Stolen Generations
- Story-telling and public education to recognise violation, resilience, contributions and Indigenous agency, e.g. the Kinchela Boys Mobile Education Unit
- Public art and community initiatives to redress misinformation about colonial history, e.g. the extinction of Tasmanian Aboriginal communities
- Collaboration and engagement to re-story, reconcile and heal through activities such as local reconciliation committees, arts, performance and yarning

Interview case study sites

As a result of this initial scoping work and consultations with the advisory group, the following criteria were developed to guide a more systematic identification of truth-telling processes, including the interview case study sites for in-depth research.

Selection criteria

The community truth-telling examples should:

- be led by or developed in partnership with Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples
- showcase a diverse range of truth-telling processes, taking into account:
    - demographic diversity (gender, age, different First Nations communities)
    - geographic diversity (a range of states and territories including urban, regional and remote areas)
- contribute to building a broad picture of the many forms that truth-telling can take (e.g. education initiatives, memorialisation through art or community engagement, museum exhibitions, documentation projects, formal hearings)

In particular we looked for truth-telling initiatives that would allow us to explore in depth:

- initiatives whose development was characterised by extensive processes of community engagement
- initiatives that appeared to have contributed to ongoing and sustained community engagement, healing and education, and enhanced understanding of First Nation sovereignty
- initiatives that could illustrate the strength, resilience and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and communities
- initiatives that were identified as having been developed with regard for community and cultural wellbeing and safety
- initiatives that would exemplify relationship-building and cross-community and stakeholder collaboration and partnership

The interview case studies provided an opportunity to better understand how truth-telling processes have developed organically at a local level, to explore what the successes and challenges were and to identify what understanding could be drawn from these experiences. The case studies were conducted by gathering and analysing existing documentary material on the truth-telling processes identified through the literature review. In addition, 31 one-hour yarning interviews were conducted with a total of 35 interviewees to gain a deeper understanding of each of these truth-telling processes. The spread of these interviews is outlined in the table opposite.

Name of site	Interviews completed	Interviewees	Category	State/ territory
1. Convincing Ground Massacre	3	2	Recognising colonial violence	VIC
2. Appin Massacre Memorial	5	6	Recognising colonial violence	NSW
3. Muralug Massacre	3	4	Recognising colonial violence	Torres Strait
4. Freedom Day Festival	2	2	Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty, self-determination and agency	NT
5. Renaming of Merri-bek Council	4	4	Recognising Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander sovereignty, self-determination and agency	VIC
6. Yarri and Jacky Jacky Statue	4	5	Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, contribution and resilience	NSW
7. Mannalargenna Day	5	5	Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, contribution and resilience	TAS
8. Women of Pearling Monument	1	1	Recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander culture, contribution and resilience	WA
9. Kinchela Boys Home	1	2	Redress, healing and reconciliation	NSW
10. Cootamundra Girls Home	3	4	Redress, healing and reconciliation	NSW
Total	**31**	**35**		

> “We know that truth-telling is central to the healing we must all go through. Without the truth we will never heal properly…This healing is what we all will need, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and non-Indigenous people alike.”

Participant recruitment

Considerable discussion was held in preparation for the interview case studies, including with the project advisory group, about the most appropriate approach to recruiting research participants. In order to ensure that the research process built trust in the study and did not cause any harm or exacerbate community tensions, it was important to begin with an informed consent and information-gathering phase before trying to recruit participants. This involved identifying all the relevant organisations and role-players in a case-study site and ascertaining their willingness to participate in the research before seeking to recruit individual research participants.

We therefore began the recruitment process by mapping all the relevant organisations and role-players within a case-study site, to inform them of the study and provide them with the opportunity to participate should they wish to do so. This was done through a combination of online searches and, where needed, personal engagement. We worked closely with Reconciliation Australia in sites where the organisation had existing contacts, and established relationships in order to identify organisations and individuals to approach to explain the research and its overall objectives and, if possible, identify potential interviewees. Once relevant organisations were identified, they were sent a formal letter explaining the study and requesting the opportunity to interview the individuals the organisation had identified as most appropriate.

In some instances, an initial meeting was required with organisations to discuss the study before an agreement was made to schedule a time for an interview on a separate date. Prospective interviewees would receive the project documentation and consent form prior to the interviews taking place. Where organisations or role-players expressed concerns about participating in the study that we could not effectively address, or did not respond to our requests for an interview, we respected their decision not to participate in the study. As a result, several of the case-study sites that we had initially envisaged including in the study were ultimately not included. Therefore, while we made every effort to include a range of case studies addressing different types of truth-telling in a variety of states and including a balance of participants, the case studies need to be seen as a small cross-section of the innovative and creative grassroots work that has taken place around the country, rather than as a representative sample.

Yarning interviews

Extensive engagement occurred at the beginning of the research process with the project advisory group and external experts to develop an interview process that would be suitable for the nature of this study. This involved, in particular, a process that sought to be trauma-informed and drew on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander methodologies in a culturally appropriate manner. The starting point for a trauma-informed approach is a recognition that each person we interviewed could have been affected by trauma and that our interaction with them could have significant impacts, both positive and negative. In addition to individual forms of trauma, as Chamberlain et al. note, 'Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people also experience historical trauma' (Chamberlain et al., 2020, p. 1). Therefore, 'every interaction with someone who has had a trauma experience can either cause further harm or lead to healing' (Laurent and Wright, 2020, p. 83). Laurent and Wright argue that a trauma-informed approach is therefore based on 'five principles; safety, trustworthiness and transparency, choice, collaboration, and empowerment' (Laurent and Wright, 2020, p. 83). We sought to integrate these principles with approaches that have been found to support sensitive conversations with Aboriginal parents about complex trauma. These include:

> *Ensuring emotional and cultural safety; establishing relationships and trust; having capacity to respond appropriately and access support; incorporating less direct cultural communication methods (e.g. yarning, dadirri); using strengths-based approaches and offering choices to empower parents; and showing respect, caring and compassion. (Chamberlain et al., 2020, p. 2)*

To incorporate less direct cultural communication methods, the interview process was also informed by the principles and processes of yarning. Yarning is an Indigenous cultural form of conversation and storytelling which has been shown to be a productive means of gathering data (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). Yarning essentially involves a purposeful 'sharing of stories' (Walker et al., 2014, p. 2). Knowledge, experience, ideas, concerns and aspirations can be shared through yarning in a space of informal and cooperative dialogue (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010). Yarning is not focused solely on acquiring information but is about communicating via circular nested stories shared to co-create meaning from everyday life (Tedmanson, 2015) in which the voice of both the researcher and participant contribute to the yarn.

The yarning interviews sought, as far as possible, to draw on the protocols and principles for yarning outlined below, which were formulated by Barlo, a Yuin man from the far south coast of New South Wales, and colleagues, based on extensive doctoral research with a group of Aboriginal Elders from Australia and First Nations Elders from North America. (Barlo et al., 2020)

Key Protocols and Principles informing yarning

Protocols

- *Gift*: A gift is given when the participant offers their knowledge; when this knowledge is accepted and valued, the gift is considered to be received.
- *Control*: The participant (not the researcher) determines the length of the yarn, and its overall direction.
- *Freedom*: The participant shares only what they wish to share. How they choose to share their knowledge is also part of the freedom.
- *Space*: The physical place in which the yarning takes place needs to be culturally suitable and physically comfortable.
- *Inclusiveness*: From an Indigenous perspective, everybody is welcome in the yarning space. In order to receive the gift of knowledge, the researcher must be listening actively and intently.
- *Gender specificity*: Personal characteristics of those who are present may determine the yarn topic, which may be gender, or age, specific … Gender issues emerging may be about power and loss of control, or it may be a reminder of feminine and masculine differences. Be mindful of gender issues when preparing for interviews to be better prepared to manage the situation.

Principles

- *Reciprocity* is an honouring process that demonstrates the importance of the relationship, while maintaining a power balance within the space. It involves honouring both the person and their knowledge.
- *Responsibility* is demonstrated through the researcher's role in handling the data the participant has provided respectfully and in keeping the participant informed each step of the way during the research process.
- *Dignity* must be afforded to every person who enters the yarning space by treating each with the upmost respect and honour.
- *Equality*, from an Indigenous perspective, means that, regardless of age or gender, each person has the same rights and responsibilities within the yarning space.
- *Integrity* strengthens the yarning space, with the expectation for each person to be honest and fair.
- *Self-determination* allows each participant to choose to be there, or to end their participation at any time.

Interview process

We endeavoured to implement a reflexive approach to the development of the interview process for the study. We began with a draft interview questionnaire, which was amended after input from the project advisory group to focus more on interviewees' experiential and personal understanding of truth-telling. Initially, a set of open-ended questions was formulated focusing on four key areas: the interviewee's experience of a particular community initiative; the relationship of the project to truth-telling; the project's impact on the wider community; and discussion of the 'way forward'. However, as the interviews unfolded it became clear that this set of questions was often too structured. To allow the interviews to unfold meaningfully as a yarn, we opened up the conversation for interviewees to focus on any aspects of the projects they wanted to discuss, or indeed any aspects of their lives that were evoked by our engagement with them on the topic of truth-telling. This process involved an attitude of 'deep listening' to the participants to continually deepen the conversation. Our approach to listening was influenced by the Indigenous concept of Dadirri, which refers to a deep and reflexive listening from the heart (Atkinson, 2002). Dadirri focuses on repairing damaged relations and damaged Country through the weaving and wending of stories that embrace cyclical forms of knowledge and increasing understanding (Bawaka Country et al., 2020). This was very much how the interviews unfolded, with interviewees often sharing a series of nested stories about the initiatives they were involved in and their own lives that co-created experiential truths about colonialism and its damage to Country within the context of the yarn itself.

Allowing stories to unfold within the context of a yarn is critical to recognising the agency of research participants, as it gives them 'control over the direction and the content of the yarn' (Barlo et al., 2020, p. 92). This allows the participant to yarn about their history, ideas and any other information they wish to discuss without fear of redirection or interruption. In addition, 'this technique provides the opportunity for the participant to present their knowledge in whatever style they see as appropriate' (Barlo et al., 2020, p. 92). As Bessarab and Ng'andu explain, 'The rigor in the yarn is to listen and allow the story to flow while looking for threads that relate to the research topic' (2010, p. 41). Therefore, 'Utilising yarning as a research tool means that the researcher needs to allow the participant some flexibility in responding to their questions and like the traveller engage with the journey and not be so focused on the destination' (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010, p. 42).

Yarning approach

A yarning approach requires seeing the interview as part of relationship with the research participant, rather than as an isolated instance of information extraction during the interview. We therefore drew on the following holistic framework in approaching the interview process:

1. Pre-interview

- Identify preparation that needs to occur

2. The interview

Has identifiable phases:

- Social yarn
- Introducing the research, ethics, cultural safety, informed consent, options for support
- Research yarn
- Discussion about data sovereignty/ownership and outcomes

3. Post interview

- Maintaining contact
- Sharing transcript of interview with participants
- Sharing emerging analysis with participants
- Receiving and incorporating feedback

The interview

We attempted to create a culturally safe environment within the context of each interview, including establishing a sense of trust and equality. We did this by dividing the interview into different stages: a social yarn, a yarn about mutual expectations and finally the research or topic yarn. Therefore, we started each interview with an Acknowledgement of Country, followed by a 'social yarn' as outlined by Bessarab and Ng'andu (Bessarab and Ng'andu, 2010), in which all participants in the interview process, including the researchers, situated themselves by introducing themselves and sharing something about their backgrounds, their personal wellbeing and their Country (Geia, Hayes and Usher, 2013).

The second part of the discussion concerned clarifying mutual expectations and informed consent, building on an Information to Participants sheet that was circulated prior to the interviews. Important issues here were the questions of anonymity and data sovereignty. While conventional ethical research practice is to provide research participants with the right to participate in the research anonymously, as Barlo et al. note in the context of their research with Elders, 'De-identifying participants can be both disrespectful and culturally inappropriate' (Barlo et al., 2020, p. 91). Indeed, we found in this study that virtually all our research participants did not want their contribution to be anonymised. Another important issue concerned the principle of data sovereignty. As Barlo et al. note, 'The knowledge being shared was already part of the participant's life prior to the research being introduced, and thus, remains the property of the participant. The researcher is not a discoverer or explorer' (Barlo et al., 2020, p. 94). Therefore, 'Simply receiving information does not give the researcher permission to use it, let alone ownership of such information: its ownership always remains with the traditional custodians of the information' (Barlo et al., 2020, p. 96).

In order to respect this principle, the transcript of each interview was sent to interviewees for them to provide comments or corrections, or simply to keep for their records. In addition, drafts of the interview case studies were shared with research participants who had been interviewed for these case studies. In several instances this led to extended engagement with research participants to elicit and include their feedback after they received draft sections of the report, before the case studies were finalised.

RECOGNISING COLONIAL VIOLENCE

Introduction

This section of the report explores the way in which the history of colonial violence has been recognised in Australia through community truth-telling initiatives. The myth that Australia was peacefully settled has been substantially discredited; however, the national narrative in Australia is still often fractured between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples' understandings of a society founded on violence and dispossession and a 'settler narrative', which does not recognise this. These divisions around the Australian national narrative, the 'stories' of its past, were expressed in the so-called 'history wars' of the 1990s, which followed the publication of the *Bringing Them Home* report on the forcible removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children from their families. The report used the word 'genocide' to refer to this historical violence, which lead to an intense public debate between historians about the evidence regarding whether there had been a deliberate policy to exterminate Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples, the number of deaths and massacres on the colonial frontier and the number of children forcibly removed (Maddison and Shepherd, 2014).

However, at the same time as these debates have unfolded at a national level, there has been ongoing grassroots work in local communities to grapple with the colonial past and recognise the truths of colonial occupation, including the violence that often accompanied it. In a number of instances these processes of recognition have involved cooperative, if sometimes intense, interaction between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and non-Indigenous residents about local history. We have chosen a small, illustrative cross-section of sites to cover here, including three sites where we were able to conduct interviews – Convincing Ground in Victoria, Appin in New South Wales and Muralug in the Torres Strait – as well as Pinjarra, Wadjemup (Rottnest Island) and Kukenarap in Western Australia; Coniston in the Northern Territory; and Waterloo Bay/Elliston in South Australia. The focus on these sites does not in any way detract from the invaluable work being done at other massacre sites that we have not been able to include here.

What is notable is the multiplicity of forms of truth-telling and different degrees of engagement with the country's history of colonial violence, as well as the complex mosaic of truths that emerge.

As former Referendum Council member Megan Davis has argued, the 'promise' of truth-telling will be realised creating a common 'understanding of the contested nature and experience of Australia's history' (Appleby and Davis, 2018, p. 509). There are consequently varying levels of recognition of colonial violence in local communities and some truth-telling processes are further developed than others. In some cases, such as the Appin massacre site, there are regular memorial services and sustained collaborative engagement between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous community members over many years. In sites such as Appin and Kukenarap there has been productive engagement between the descendants of the perpetrators and victims of colonial violence, leading to new levels of understanding and recognition. On the other hand, in other communities, truth-telling about colonial violence is at an early stage. For example, in Portland, the Convincing Ground massacre, the first significant recorded massacre in Victoria, which occurred in 1834, has yet to be formally recognised. The case study on the massacre at Muralug in the Torres Strait provides a unique insight into the particularities of the colonial experience in this region, which was substantively different to that of the mainland. It also speaks to the largely unfinished work of truth-telling in this region, as this massacre and other experiences of colonial violence have yet to be systematically recognised, despite the community-led healing work that has occurred. On the island of Wadjemup in Western Australia, negotiations are still ongoing to recognise the history of the island as the site where Aboriginal men and children were imprisoned and subjected to forced labour and terrible conditions. In South Australia, there is still continuing contestation about whether a massacre occurred at Elliston. At Pinjarra, it is only recently that the violence that occurred there has been recognised as a massacre, and local communities still do not feel that it has been properly recognised.

Nevertheless, even at the sites where more formal and substantive recognition has not yet occurred, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have sought to ensure this complex and sometimes confronting history is acknowledged, respected and grappled with. In Portland, local community Elder Walter Saunders has erected a sculpture to recognise the devastation experienced by local Gunditjmara clans after the Convincing Ground massacre. Chris Saunders organises an annual commemoration of the massacre with a smoking ceremony at the site of the killings on Australia Day, as an alternative to the national public holiday that commemorates the

1788 landing of the First Fleet at Sydney. In addition to simply contesting the colonial narrative, Gunditjmara have also sought to make their own histories more visible through collaboration with UNESCO on the World Heritage-listed Budj Bim Cultural Landscape, where the Gunditjmara developed one of the largest and oldest aquaculture networks in the world many millennia ago. At Wadjemup, multiple projects also seek to inscribe the presence of Whadjuk community in this popular tourist destination using information boards, walking trails and artwork. These types of initiatives have created opportunities for more complex understandings of, and relationships with, place for non-Indigenous communities. More prominent representation and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander experiences at these sites creates new possibilities for truth-telling and the development of common understandings of the violence that accompanied Australia's founding, as well as the ways in which this legacy can be recognised and addressed collaboratively by all Australians.

1. Interview Case Study: Convincing Ground massacre, Victoria

Introduction

The 'Convincing Ground' massacre, which took place near Portland, Victoria in 1834 as a result of a dispute over the possession of a beached whale, is the first significant recorded massacre in Victoria. While the number of people who died at the site is contested, with estimates ranging between 20 and 200 people (Ryan, Debenham, et al., 2022a), it is evident that the event remains a significant historical trauma for the Gunditjmara people of the region, with a large number of individuals from the Gunditjmara clan, the Kilcarer Gunditj (Dhauwurd Wurrung speakers) dying at the site. The site has been registered on the Victorian Heritage Register since 2006 (Victorian Heritage Database website). The massacre marked the start of ongoing conflict between the Gunditjmara people in southwest Victoria and the British colonists that would subsequently come to be known as the Eumeralla Wars, which lasted until the 1860s. It is estimated that of a population of several thousands only a few hundred Aboriginal people in Victoria survived this conflict. The killing at Convincing Ground has come to symbolise some of the struggles over sovereignty in Australia in the early days of colonisation. Following the massacre, all but two young men, Pollikeunnuc and Yarereryarerer, from the Gunditjmara clan were reportedly killed (Clark, 2011).

They fled to join the Cart Gunditj clan at Mount Clay but this clan was recorded as having subsequently 'disappeared', probably due to a combination of violence and disease. It is clear from interviews conducted as part of this study, and ongoing efforts to protect and respect the site, that the events at Convincing Ground remain an important part of living historical memory among the local Gunditjmara people and an ongoing symbol of colonial violence more than 170 years after the event.

Walter Saunders, a descendant of one of the few surviving members of the Kilcarer Gunditj and the Cart Gunditj clans, describes how the Cart Gunditj who were based at Mount Clay, and hence able to see whales coming into Portland Bay, would light fires to alert other clans, including the Kilcarer Gunditj, who were the Traditional Custodians of the coastal area where whales would sometimes be beached. British whalers soon became aware of what the Cart Gunditj smoke signals indicated and would use this information to secure whales for themselves. According to Walter Saunders there was active cooperation between white whalers and the Cart Gunditj:

> *When the whalers came there was an unwritten pact between Portland whalers, and sealers. So that the Cart Gunditj when they saw the whales coming into the bay, they'd light a fire for the white whalers to get in their rowboats and they'd row out and spear some whale. They'd drag them back and they'd tie them to a mooring on a float in the bay. And then they'd go out and get another, that's what happened. But the unwritten pact was that if a whale got washed up in the beach, that was the Aboriginals' whale. Okay. So one of these whales broke its mooring that was killed by the white whalers and washed up on the beach. Aboriginal people thought it was theirs. So there was a big argument and all of the whalers got their guns and shot over 60 people and massacred them, only two young people survived that and they swam over the rivers and ran to Cart Mountain … (Personal interview, 8 March 2022)*

The massacre by British whalers at the site of one of Victoria's first whaling stations took place on the coast at Allestree in Portland Bay, approximately 10 kilometres from the town of Portland, in what is now the Shire of Glenelg in southwestern Victoria.

While the origin of the name 'Convincing Ground' has been a source of debate, Clarke (2014) provides significant evidence that this name was given to the area by the whalers, who believed they had 'convinced' the local Gunditjmara people of their 'mistake' in trying to take possession of a beached whale. As Bruce Pascoe argues, 'Both sides probably saw it as a beach head in the fight for possession of the soil itself' (Pascoe, 2007).

The massacre was recorded in the diary of Edward Henty, first permanent colonial settler in the Port Phillip district, who began whaling and sheep farming in the area in late 1834 and is also mentioned in the journals of George Augustus Robinson, the Protector of Aborigines in the region, who later investigated the circumstances surrounding the killings. Historian Clare Land argues that the documentation of the Convincing Ground Massacre by the Protector of Aborigines, George Robinson, accompanied and assisted by the Tasmanian Aboriginal man, Tunnerminnerwait, 'may have suggested to Robinson and Tunnerminnerwait that Victorian Aboriginal people were undergoing an attempted extermination similar to th[e] Tasmanian Aboriginal people' (Land, 2014, p. 23).

The site came to national public attention in January 2005 when Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Officers halted bulldozing and development work that had begun as part of a proposed coastal residential development (Clark, 2011). A newspaper at the time reported that 'Western Victoria's Glenelg Shire Council and the local Koori community are locked in a bitter fight over whether the land, known as the "Convincing Ground", should be preserved for its historical and cultural significance' (Russel, 2005). Local resident Walter Saunders, a descendant of one of the only two survivors of the massacre, reportedly stated that 'he was disgusted that the site could be built on and furious with the council. "This local shire has known about this site for years … we asked them back in 1995 to do a cultural overlay to protect the area and they've done nothing."' The case was subsequently taken to the Victorian Civil Administrative Tribunal and it was eventually agreed that the area of land at Convincing Ground would be set aside as a reservation (Clark, 2011).

Recognition initiatives

There are a number of ways in which the colonial history of Portland, including the Convincing Ground massacre, have been recognised more recently. While the site of the massacre has remained largely untouched since the plans for commercial development at the site were halted in 2005, in 2020 it was reported that the Gunditj Mirring corporation is planning a community effort to restore the Convincing Ground after receiving $30 000 as part of the Coastcare Victoria Community Grants. The corporation's project officer, Denis Rose, said the initial stage would be to clean up the site and replace weeds with native plants. Eventually, there were plans to create a 'reflective area' where First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians could learn the history of the site and 'contemplate a healing future' (Wright, 2020).

Mayapa Weeyn ('make fire')

In 2018, a five-metre-tall steel sculpture of intertwined gum leaves entitled *Mayapa Weeyn* (make fire) was launched as a tribute to the Cart Gunditj and all 59 clans of the Dhauwurd Wurrung. Walter Saunders, a local resident and a descendent of the Kilcarer Gunditj and the Cart Gunditj clans, played a central role in the construction and design of the sculpture, which recalls the signal fires the Cart Gunditj lit to signal to other clans when whales beached. The sculpture was part of a public art project, Kang-o-meerteek (Dhauwurd Wurrung for 'mountain to sea') at Mt Clay (Farrington, 2018).

Journalist and local Portland resident Tony Wright explains further:

> *Narrawong got together and started telling stories about the past … and what came out of it was this extraordinary sculpture in stainless steel where the Aboriginal people would send up smoke when a whale was coming ashore … so that the other clans around the area could gather for feasting. Or when white whalers arrived, they would send up smoke to inform the whalers that the whales were in the Bay. Knowing that once the flensing and so forth had occurred so the whalers could get all the whale bone and oil, then the local people would be able to feast on the rest of the whale, which of course led in many ways to the Convincing Ground massacre. (Personal interview, 25 March 2022)*

Walter Saunders describes the rationale for the artwork and his personal desire to respond to the decimation of the Cart Gunditj and other clans whose experience he doesn't feel has been properly acknowledged:

> *And it's my intention … to go and build various sculptures. In all the lands of all of the clan groups of the Dhauwurd Wurrung. And to … recognise them because, they just disappeared. And because the massacres aren't counted, well then they don't matter. They don't count. And that's so wrong. (Personal interview, 8 March 2022)*

He also sees the sculpture as a way of recognising not only the devastation experienced by the Gunditjmara peoples but also the *contribution* of the Cart Gunditj to the Victorian economy:

> *And that statue is in recognition of the important role they [Cart Gunditj] played in Victoria, Portland's economy, because Portland is the oldest white settlement in Victoria. And yet it was Aboriginal people who were woven into the economy and assisted with the establishment unknowingly to their own ends. (Personal interview, 8 March 2022)*

For Walter Saunders the 'disappearing' of clans such as the Cart Gunditj has also been an epistemological disappearance created through the failure to include these deaths in our understanding of massacre. He argues, 'the definition of a murder or a massacre, that is another layer of this disappearing' (Personal interview, 8 March 2022). He explains the way in which he believes current definitions of massacres do not take into account Aboriginal family structure or the way in which punitive expeditions would pursue family groups:

> *If you know anything about family clan groups, which is the majority of Aboriginal Australia … if you've got a group of 40, 50 Aboriginal Peoples having a ceremony and a group of people ride through on a horse, three or four horsemen shooting indiscriminately, everybody scatters. Only those people who die in that first assault are recorded. According to what the definition of a massacre is … (Personal interview, 8 March 2022)*

He argues that a further layer of disappearing is created by the way in which the clans of the Dhauwurd Wurrung have been defined under Native Title legislation, which recognises only '15 apical ancestors[1] when there should be 52. So we're being forced to participate in the disappearing. Because the [Native Title] Act does that.' (Personal interview, 15 March 2022)

Therefore, the creation of the sculpture at Mount Clay seeks to refute these literal and epistemological 'disappearances' by recognising the diversity of the Gunditjmara clans and their contribution to the Portland economy.

Walter Saunders describes how he utilised the process of creating the sculpture to engage in an experiential and informal process of truth-telling with local residents:

> *It took me two years to build it in my shed. So every second week I came and stood there and people came and I'd give a talk about what the story is, what it's about. And a lot of old people who know the story and visit the place [Mount Clay]. It's a very beautiful spot. You get this absolute, huge vista of the whole of Portland bay… And so a lot of people came, they came from Camperdown and Colac, which is two and three hours away from here. Some came from Mildura and came to listen to the story. (Personal interview, 8 March 2022)*

The practical process of building the sculpture involved a wide range of local residents and tradespeople who also became familiar with the story:

> *All the white people know the story of the Cart Gunditj, all the white people in Portland do … I had to buy the stainless steel. I had to get it cut out by the laser cutters. All of those people involved in that process knew about the story and said congratulations. They said, it's about time the story was told, even the people who brought the rock, that huge piece of basalt, it weighs 20 ton …they know the story and that's a town half an hour away from here … Each one of them know the story and pay tribute to it. (Personal interview, 8 March 2022)*

[1] In anthropology, an apical ancestor is a common ancestor from whom a lineage or clan may trace its descent. The word apical is used because this ancestor is at the apex of the genealogy. See: http://www.yinhawangka.com.au

The opening up of the process of truth-telling by Walter Saunders revealed new stories of old wounds. Walter Saunders recounts giving a talk at the local library about Convincing Ground: 'I gave the story of the massacres, of the history of this area and how unjustly it was taken.' At this talk a local resident told him:

> *'My family killed an Aboriginal person and they threw him in the well, and then we filled up the well, and I know where the well is, Wal.' So those are the stories that are coming out just by scratching the surface, and that's what needs to happen … And it's opening up a lot of wounds. So it's not just the colonial past it's what happened after that … and what's happening today. (Personal interview, 8 March 2022)*

While Walter Saunders articulates the value of truth-telling, he is concerned about a number of aspects related to it:

> *I wonder is this really beneficial for Aboriginal people? Is it going to be any good if it's based on these fallacies, if it's just more theatrical paint on Australia's stage play to pat themselves on the back? You know, it's a very important question. What are the motives, is the motives to cover it up? Is the motives to put it deeper, so it can't be found, so the true horrors of the colonisation of Australia are going be hidden? (Personal interview, 8 March 2022)*

Based on his own experience in his workplace, he rejects the idea of truth-telling as a performance of victimhood that places the emotional responsibility on victims to 'perform' their pain for a non-Indigenous audience:

> *They expect me to tell them the terrible, sad stories, as if I'm sharing my mental anguish. And I don't want to do that … but they want to share it because they don't know it. And they're saying, well, you're the only person or the first Aboriginal I've met that's opened up and told me these things and I'm going. Yeah, but why is it up to me? (Personal interview, 15 March 2022)*

He also emphasises the need to centre families, rather than organisations, as the fulcrum of truth-telling and support:

> *Because this affected us … it didn't sort of round up the organisation and put them into boys homes and steal their kids. It happened to families and … if you keep going through corporations and representative bodies, you lose the humanity. It happened to my great grandmother. It happened to my great uncle … It's families that they got to focus on. (Personal interview, 15 March 2022)*

While he sees the value in individuals having access to records, particularly for members of the Stolen Generations, he is concerned about the kind of support that people will need for this process, 'Because again, we could be just washed over, just like they did with the massacres, just washed over' (Personal interview, 15 March 2022).

He argues therefore:

> *It's a cathartic thing to do, so it'd be great … some people are going to benefit by actually going into the archives and seeing how they were tracked down. Seeing the number that they were given, even though most of them remember the number they were given when they were a ward of the state because they're only given numbers, remember. But how are we going to offer to help these people, say just from my family alone? How are we going to find researchers? To go through and trawl through all the history and the stuff in the State Library, in the archives and everything to get the proof of what happened. You can't let the people who were traumatised go and do that. It'll just kill them. But once it's in a pile then it's sort of cathartic because the people will look and be a way of healing themselves internally, just to sit, and it's putting some order and somebody's going to believe them. And it also might trigger memories that they've absolutely hidden from themselves. (Personal interview, 15 March 2022)*

Commemoration at Convincing Ground

Another key way in which the history of Convincing Ground has been recognised over the last five years is through an annual smoking ceremony at the site of the massacre on 26 January (officially Australia Day but commemorated by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous Australians as Invasion or Survival Day). This event is led by Chris Saunders, a young Gunditjmara man. While initially only a few people attended the event, by 2021 it was reported that more than 300 people participated, many from the local non-Indigenous population. Chris Saunders explains, 'At first, it was just family and Elders … But now, it's shifted to include the wider community, which we wanted to see all along' (Wright, 2021a).

The public ceremony on the beach is preceded by a private ceremony at dawn for Traditional Owners. Later in the morning, the ceremony moves to Portland, where another smoking ceremony is held for the wider community at an area known as 'the Ploughed Ground'. The area is claimed to be the spot where the Henty family first ploughed the land, purportedly 'introducing' farming to Victoria. It includes a memorial stone 'in commemoration of the discovery of Portland Bay by Lt James Grant' in 1800 (Wright, 2021a).

However, for Aboriginal residents of the area, the beginning of colonial agriculture signified the invasion and appropriation of Indigenous land. In fact, the Gunditjmara had lived in the area for thousands of years before Lieutenant Grant's 'discovery', and not far out of town is evidence that the Gunditjmara were farming long before the Hentys. The Budj Bim landscape, about 40 kilometres north-east of Portland, is Australia's latest UNESCO World Heritage site, chosen for its evidence of fish and eel farming dating back at least 6 800 years – the world's oldest aquaculture operation (Wright, 2021b).

Tony Wright describes the way in which the smoking ceremony at the Ploughed Ground has challenged the heroic colonial narrative for many non-Indigenous residents:

> *A lot of white people attend that too, giving a way to understanding what's happened down here, because until fairly recent years there was a quite a bit of intolerance of the idea that the Hentys weren't … and William Dutton, weren't sort of heroic figures who came and settled the land and ploughed it and gave it a meaning. But for the Gunditjamara people, they'd been left out of that story for a very long time for a fair bit of my life and now they're reclaiming that. And one of the ways is this. (Personal interview, 25 March 2022)*

Tony Wright explains the impact the two smoking ceremonies, and the re-telling of history they have involved, has had on local non-Indigenous residents and their understanding of the history of the area:

> *These two smoking ceremony … the [one at] Convincing Ground to remember the first massacre in Victoria and the other on the Ploughed Field – to say essentially 'The Hentys weren't the discovers of this place, they weren't the first settlers, they weren't anything, they just arrived in 1834 and we've been here forever' and it is very interesting that more and more white people in this area are open to that. (Personal interview, 25 March 2022)*

> *They love attending this. So it would have been last year there would have been 300 people on the beach and probably five or six hundred people on the Ploughed Field and the majority of them being white people, really who were very pleased to be part of it and to learn. And Chris would stand in the sea and give the story of what happened there and would point out to the sea, to Deen Maar, Lady Julia Percy Island, which was the place where the Gunditjmara believe that spirits leave the universe … (Personal interview, 25 March 2022)*

At the same time, many in the community are still not aware of the history of Convincing Ground:

> *I was talking about the Convincing Ground, that smoking ceremony that was advertised around the place on Facebook and so forth and I was astounded the amount of people who were saying 'What's the Convincing Ground and where is it?' You know, so when you taking those tiny steps, those steps are going to take a while but they are being taken. People are now willing to talk openly about this. (Personal interview, T Wright, 25 March 2022)*

This heroic colonial narrative, inscribed in the landscape through a number of statues and monuments memorialising the Henty and Dutton families, have increasingly been contested as well, particularly by local Gunditjmara resident Shea Rotumah, who asked at a local council meeting in July 2020, 'What is the Shire's stance on monuments that celebrate or memorialise colonial figures/history, especially in regard to the effect these figures have had on our people? Are there any plans to be proactive in this space?' The Mayor of Glenelg Shire Council, Anita Rank, was reported as responding that the Council 'will endeavour to undertake a comprehensive audit to understand the nature and magnitude of monuments and place names across the shire' (Henty, 2021, p. 19). A picture of Shea in Gunditjmara dress holding a boomerang aloft appears next to one of these statues in an ABC report in 2020. He is quoted as saying that, 'he does not have to go far to be reminded of the history of Aboriginal oppression in his home town' and asserted that, 'A lot of people who live in the shire, they're worried about their history being erased' (Miles, 2020).

Conclusion

The interviews at Convincing Ground indicate a slow shift over many decades in non-Indigenous community understandings of local history and the impact of events such as the massacre at Convincing Ground and the devastation of the Gunditjmara clans. In general, local discussion has moved away from a debate about whether or not a massacre occurred or how many people died to an increasing recognition of and respect for the significance of these events for the Gunditjmara people. This is evidenced by the increasing number of people who attend the annual commemoration of the massacre organised by Chris Saunders and the anecdotal conversations that Walter Saunders has had with local townspeople, as well as the personal experience of Tony Wright, who grew up in Portland. Nevertheless, it is important to also recognise that this increased acknowledgement of some of the truths of colonial violence has been the result of the tireless work of local Gunditjmara community members such as Walter and Chris Saunders (and other individuals) and no doubt remains contested.

There is still no substantive memorial to the Convincing Ground massacre and the town of Portland remains dominated by the statues of colonial settlers. Moreover, as Walter Saunders' discussion of truth-telling indicates, how this legacy of colonial violence should be addressed through truth-telling is complex and sometimes disputed. At the same time, much can be learned from the richness of this engagement with truth-telling, including Walter Saunders' emphasis on truth-telling that is about claiming agency and sovereignty rather than victimhood, as well as his emphasis on the critical importance of properly supporting families and individuals to meaningfully participate in truth-telling, should they wish to do so.

> "Many Nyungars today speak with deep feeling about this wild, windswept country. They tell stories about the old folk they lost in the massacre and recall how their mothers warned them to stay out of that area."

2. Interview Case Study: Appin massacre and Winga Myamly memorial, New South Wales

Introduction

On 17 April 1816, at least 14 Aboriginal people were killed on Dharawal Country at Appin in New South Wales after their camp was attacked in the early hours of the morning by soldiers from the 46th Regiment of the British army, led by Captain James Wallis. The soldiers fired on men, women and children and chased them to the nearby cliffs of the Cataract Gorge, where many jumped to their deaths. Official reports state 14 bodies were counted, but it is likely that many more died (Museums of History NSW website; Neath, 2017; Ryan, Pascoe, et al., 2022). A military regiment had been sent to the Macarthur area in NSW to 'round up' all local Aboriginal Peoples. The regiment received information that 'many local Aborigines' were camping in Cataract George. They then attacked by night and, according to the regiment's own account, only two women and three children survived (Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group and Wollondilly Shire Council, 2016).

After the Appin massacre, Captain Wallis hung three bodies (Dharawal leader, Canabygal and Dharawal warrior, Durelle, as well as an unknown woman) from the trees on McGee's Hill in order 'to strike terror into the survivors' (Allas and Muller, 2021). Their heads were later removed and their skulls sent to the Anatomy Department at the University of Edinburgh, where they were held in the collection of the Edinburgh Phrenological Society for more than 150 years. In 1991, the skulls were returned to the National Museum of Australia (NMA) in Canberra where they still reside while discussions on their future care continue between the museum and community members (Allas and Muller, 2021).

This massacre has been described as 'foundational to the expansion and consolidation of the Australian settler-colonial state' (Pugliese, 2019, p. 257) and formed part of the Sydney Frontier Wars, which included 'well over 100 armed conflicts and skirmishes between non-Indigenous colonisers and Aboriginal peoples between 1788 and 1817' (Gawaian Bodkin-Andrews et al. forthcoming, p. 6). Within 25 years of British settler occupation of the Macarthur region, where the Appin massacre occurred, the majority of local Aboriginal people who had occupied the area from the Dharawal, Dharug, and Gundungurra Nations were dead (Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group and Wollondilly Shire Council, 2016).

Dharawal woman of the Cubbitch Barta clan, Aunty Glenda Chalker, contends that, 'Governor Lachlan Macquarie declared war on the Aboriginal people of the Sydney region and actively pursued Aboriginal people in order to — these are his words to "strike terror"' (Fuller, 2022).

In November 2022, the site of the massacre and events related to it, such as the hanging of the bodies of three of those killed, was formally recognised by the NSW Heritage Council with a State Heritage Register listing as the 'Appin Massacre Cultural Landscape'. The recognition was the result of significant work by a specially commissioned Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee (ACHAC), made up of local Aboriginal people, including members of Winga Myamly, and chaired by Aunty Glenda Chalker. Aunty Glenda discovered her connection to the massacre and the cultural landscape 60 kilometres south-west of Sydney when she was in her mid-20s and has 'dedicated decades of her life to researching the history and fighting for recognition and protection' (Fuller, 2022). The NSW State Register Heritage Committee noted that, 'The Committee specifically acknowledge[s] Aunty Glenda Chalker for her enormous contribution to this listing process and to ACHAC, noting that her contribution is recognised by many.' The impact of this Heritage listing was amplified by the screening of a documentary (Australia Wars) by filmmaker and Arrernte and Kalkadoon Nations woman Rachel Perkins about frontier conflict, which included a segment on the Appin massacre, in which Aunty Glenda Chalker appeared. She explains, 'I think it was a lovely coincidence of timing that the … documentary came out just prior to the gazettal of the Cultural Landscape. I think that was … something for me to remember the rest of my life, because I think it was just such good timing for the whole thing to come together like that' (Personal interview, 11 January 2023).

The listing took place in the face of impending development, including a motorway, which would have destroyed some of the cultural sites associated with the Appin massacre. Aunty Glenda Chalker emphasised that the Appin Cultural Landscape is of great cultural significance to the Dharawal and Gundungurra people. 'It is a place of sorrow when remembering those who were lost before, during and after the 17th April 1816. This landscape is now protected from development, so future generations can learn of the atrocities and injustice to our ancestors' (New Matilda 2022).

Heritage NSW Executive Director Sam Kidman said that, 'The State Heritage Register listing of this important landscape recognises the truth of past injustices to Aboriginal people and provides an opportunity for healing and reconciliation' (New Matilda 2022). Listing on the State Heritage Register provides formal legal recognition that an item or place is of State Heritage significance, and means that the landscape's contribution to the identity and wellbeing of the people of New South Wales will be protected and conserved (New Matilda 2022).

Background to the massacre

After the arrival of settlers in the Macarthur region during the 1790s, there was initially a period of relatively peaceful coexistence. At this time Governor Lachlan Macquarie reportedly attempted to honour his instruction from the British Government to ensure that British settlers live 'in amity and kindness' with the Aboriginal population. However, tensions escalated from 1814 when a widespread drought forced more Aboriginal people into the Macarthur region in search of food (Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group and Wollondilly Shire Council, 2016). In May 1814, soldiers fired on a group of Aboriginal people gathering corn grown by settler farmers and a series of killings and counter-killings began. This led to a period of 'low-level' warfare (Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group and Wollondilly Shire Council, 2016).

In April 1816, Governor Macquarie recorded in his diary that he felt 'compelled' as part of his sense of 'public duty' to come to the 'painful resolution' of 'chastising these hostile tribes' and to 'inflict terrible and exemplary punishments' on them. He therefore ordered 'three separate military detachments to march into the interior and remote parts of the colony, for the purpose of punishing the hostile natives, by clearing the country of them entirely, and driving them across the mountains' (Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group and Wollondilly Shire Council, 2016). Macquarie commanded that, 'In the event of the natives making the smallest show of resistance - or refusing to surrender when called upon so to do - the officers commanding the military parties have been authorised to fire on them to compel them to surrender' and that, 'Such natives as happen to be killed on such occasions, if grown up men, are to be hanged up on Trees in Conspicuous Situations, to Strike the Survivors with the greater terror' (Pickering, 2010).

This decision to deploy the military against the Aboriginal population in the area was to have an enduring legacy that is seen as lasting to this day. Gavin Andrews is a Dharawal Elder and Knowledge Holder, and a descendent of Dharawal Peoples caught up in hostilities surrounding the massacre. He explains:

> *The consequences of that day were simply this … The government of the day in 1816 said to the colonists, wherever they were, that it's ok … to kill black fellas with impunity – nothing would happen to you if you kill black fellas. And that was the – became the unofficial law of the day … Those orders were never withdrawn or contradicted. And in, in fact, those orders had never been, as far as I know, never been withdrawn and contradicted, and you could argue that they stand today … we had this period of government that sanctioned murder as a tool of land clearing. That's Australian history. And that's the truth. (Personal interview, 8 December 2022)*

Annual memorial of the Appin massacre

In the late 1990s, a small group of people from the Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group (Winga Myamly means 'sit down and talk' in the Wiradjuri language) began to gather each year on 17 April at Cataract Dam, close to the site of the Appin massacre, to remember the event. Winga Myamly is the name given to the Minto Reconciliation Group, which brings together Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal People from the Macarthur Region.

The group approached Dharawal descendants and Elders, the local Land Councils, Wollondilly Shire Council, Campbelltown City Council and members of the wider Aboriginal Community (Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group and Wollondilly Shire Council, 2016). It was decided that a site near Cataract Dam would be best suited for a place of memorial, as it had facilities for a public event.

From 2000, attendance and awareness of the event began to grow in the wake of the national developments around reconciliation and the symbolic walk over the Harbour Bridge in Sydney. After 2007, when the commemoration moved to the weekend closest to the date on which the massacre occurred, numbers increased significantly, from a few dozen to a few hundred people, and it was increasingly attended by local media (Madsen, 2016).

At the 2007 memorial ceremony, sponsorship from Wollindilly Council funded a memorial plaque that was unveiled in the garden at Cataract Dam. It reads as follows:

> *The Massacre of men, women and children of the Dharawal Nation occurred near here on 17 April 1816. Fourteen were counted this day, but the real number will never be known. We acknowledge the impact this had and continues to have on the Aboriginal people of this land. We are deeply sorry. We will remember them. (Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group and Wollondilly Shire Council, 2016)*

Ann Madsen, a member of the Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group for over 20 years, explains that the annual memorial near the site of the massacre:

> *is an opportunity for Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people come together, to physically walk together. Through this journey we have learnt that reconciliation occurs through listening … and learning from the stories of the people … remembering stories never told in history books … stories of people whose spirit survives. (Madsen, 2016)*

In the decades preceding the memorial, there was very little awareness or public acknowledgement of the events that occurred at Appin. A number of participants in the Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group talk about how they gradually became aware of the massacre through informal channels.

Sister Kerry Macdermott OLN, one of the founding organisers of the annual memorial, also grew to understand the significance of the massacre gradually over time through her engagement with Aboriginal Elders in the Minto area, where she has resided for over 40 years:

> *the least one can do is when you go to an area to find out the history of the area … And so that's what I did. And so part of the history is about … the Appin massacre … and I thought, 'Oh, what was that?' And then of course I asked our Aboriginal community. And so I became more and more aware - every area in Australia has an Aboriginal history … what was their life like before we came? (Personal interview, 7 November 2022)*

Although Fran Bodkin and Gavin Andrews are Dharawal Elders and Dharawal Knowledge Holders, details of the massacre were not shared with them when they were growing up. However, they were aware of an unarticulated sense of loss and tragedy in their family histories, which they later researched to understand what had happened. Gavin Andrews outlines, 'I didn't know of it at all as a massacre event or a historical event … but what I did know of as a kid, there was a darkness, there was something there that was really sad and wasn't spoken about' (Personal interview, 8 December 2022).

According to Ann Madsen she 'hadn't heard of the Appin massacre until Sister Kerry started talking about it because it wasn't taught' (Personal interview, 11 November 2022). While there were historical records of Macquarie's diary and the decision to carry out military operations against Aboriginal people, they were not commonly discussed: 'That something can be written in the Governor's diary, published in more recent books and yet is not spoken about in the community - that it was something that occurred' (Personal interview, 11 November 2022).

For Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group member Peter Jones, participation in the group and helping to organise the memorial has been a significant learning journey:

> *I was a person who lived out here for 50 years before I knew the name of the people whose land I was living on. So, you know … I think it's also a case that it's never too late for us to, to learn or, or to be involved. (Personal interview, 15 September, 2022)*

To begin with, the commemoration largely involved a small group of people from the Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group. Since then, the event has grown slowly and organically to an internationally recognised event:

> *It's grown slowly over the years, probably a dozen people used to meet down there on a Sunday and have a little picnic and acknowledge. And that's grown into a public event that's between 300 and 400 people. And that other people in the world are finding out about and ringing us up and saying, can you talk to us about what you do? (Personal interview, P Jones, 15 September 2022)*

The growth of the memorial event has been less founded on a formal strategy than a commitment to continue the journey of healing and reconciliation its organisers see the event as representing. 'The strategy is just to keep doing it every year … however it happens' (Personal interview, P Jones, 15 September 2022).

From the beginning, the ethos of the event was based on community ownership and relationship building. Sister Kerry Macdermott explains:

> *it's just very, very low-key ordinary stuff. But it works. That's the thing. It works because of your connection and your relationship with people. It's built on that, I think. It's the trust in the community that they know you're not going to go away. So they turn up. (Personal interview, 7 November 2022)*

She advises other communities considering similar events:

> *It's just getting to know one another, your local community and coming together. So it can happen if you've got a heart for it and a willingness to give it a go. And it doesn't matter if it doesn't work one way, just try another way. It's like anything…in life, you just try. Don't give up. (Personal interview, 7 November 2022)*

There is a strong emphasis on ensuring the focus of the event remains on solemn commemoration of the loss of lives at Appin, rather than allowing the occasion to be appropriated for either political or commercial ends:

> *Sometimes people want to bring all sorts of banners out there and I say, 'No, it's not about that. It's not about promoting you, it's about remembering what happened' … because it could become just a carnival … it's not just like a community fun day. It's a deeply sad day. (Personal interview, K Macdermott, 7 November 2022)*

Therefore, there is an attempt to keep the event, 'not so much quiet but gentle, trying to keep it gentle, trying to avoid some of that politicisation of the event' (A. Madsen, personal interview, 11 November 2022).

At the same time as the event is intended to be focused on remembrance of the past, it is also about a celebration of cultural survival and a gesture of reconciliation. Regular attendees include Descendants and Elders; the Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation; Aboriginal organisations; local churches; the Wollondilly, Campbelltown and Camden Councils; university teachers and students; and politicians (Madsen, 2016).

The event has been significantly sustained by the substantial voluntary community support the Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group has been able to build over the years. This includes the support and participation of a range of local stakeholders such as the Tharawal Aboriginal Corporation, which provides chairs and helps bus Elders to the event, as well as local councils, non-governmental organisations, the Catholic church, the local police and local businesses and schools. Collectively, these organisations provide resources, infrastructure and support on the day of the memorial service. The event therefore requires a substantial investment of time and effort by all stakeholders. Elder and MC of the event, Uncle Ivan Wellington, explains, 'It's a massive lot of work it is, but we've come through it and I see that we're growing. We're growing from it … We got everyone involved in all that' (Personal interview, 6 December 2022).

While the Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group and the event itself are non-denominational, there is no doubt that the memorial has benefited significantly from the support of the Catholic church, primarily through the leadership of Sister Kerry Macdermott and the networks she is able to access through her role in the church. At the same time, Sister Kerry's approach to leadership has meant that this has not led to the exclusion of other role-players. As Ann Madsen explains, 'Sister Kerry has seen her role as someone who walks alongside, not as in leadership at all. It's a very gentle walking alongside people and supporting people' (Personal interview, 11 November 2022).

Each year, Sister Kerry formally seeks support from local Elders for the event to be held. Long-standing Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group member Peter Jones explains:

> *I guess we're saying, as a community group, we're holding this memorial on behalf of our community, but we only do it with your permission. So whenever we hear from anyone that they don't want us to do it, we wouldn't do it, I guess that's the bottom line. (Personal interview, 15 September 2022)*

For Elder Gavin Andrew, the community mobilisation involved in organising the event is as significant as the event itself:

> *The event itself is really secondary to the ground support that comes together to have the event. And we, we get donations of sausages and salad and so on … Everything's done on a shoestring and the purpose is that … we feed people and then we walk down the road, down to the dam face where there's a little memorial plaque … And then different people speak. (Personal interview, 8 December 2022)*

The event generally follows a similar process. Ann Madsen explains:

> *We are welcomed so warmly to the country by Aunty Glenda Chalker. To hear the Dharawal language echo through the bush as spoken by Dharawal woman Aunty Frances Bodkin, with the English translation often by Uncle Gavin Andrews, is very moving. Dharawal culture is shared in song and dance by Matthew and Glen Doyle. We remember that Dharawal culture is alive. We are cleansed and reconciled by a smoking ceremony conducted by Uncle Ivan Wellington. (Madsen, 2016)*

Uncle Ivan emphasises, 'We really come together strongly on the day of the massacre of the people and – What a ceremony! What a turnout! People come there and show their respects' (Personal interview, 6 December 2022).

Although local council officials and politicians are invited to attend the event and their support is welcomed, there is a strong emphasis on maintaining community ownership of the organisation and running of the memorial gathering. Peter Jones explains, 'We fight very hard as a group … in keeping this event off the work plans of local government, in the sense that they don't own this event … It's an event that is solely run by the community' (Personal interview, 15 September 2022). This community ownership is seen as critical to the sustainability of the event as it is not subject to changing government priorities, funding cycles or staff turnover. The event can't be undermined by a sudden loss of funding, 'because we don't even have a bank account' (Personal interview, P Jones, 15 September 2022). Nevertheless, at certain times, the support of local councils for specific items has been critical; for example, for a brochure on the Appin memorial and the memorial plaque unveiled in 2007.

While members of the Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group are convinced of the event's impact, Aunty Glenda Chalker has some reservations about whether the event reaches a wider audience. 'I think the people who come to this function are already converted … They're either from the Aboriginal community or they're supporters of the Aboriginal community. They are the people who come' (Personal interview, 11 January 2023). At the same time there are some individuals at the event who do not know a lot about the Appin massacre or the local history of the area. Through her Welcome to Country at the event, Aunty Glenda has an opportunity to engage with and educate these attendees: 'When I give a Welcome to Country, I often talk about the massacre and I talk about … my Country and people will come up to me after and say, "oh, I didn't know that"… And lots of things, you know, that happened … it's not just the massacre, it's other things that happened around the area … they just don't know' (Personal interview, 11 January 2023).

In 2016, on the 200th anniversary of the massacre, the event attracted considerable media and public attention and was attended by the State Governor, as well as several thousand citizens. Uncle Gavin Andrews describes this day: 'Over 2000 people turned up … when we had our little ceremony down there, there were the young people of all colours and creeds climbing on the rocks and sitting in the trees … All of a sudden, the roadway was people, as far as you could see' (Personal interview, 8 December 2022). While the 200th anniversary was attended by the State Governor, he declined to speak at the event, which was a source of deep disappointment to the Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group, as no formal apology for the massacre has ever been offered by the state government.

Sister Kerry outlines the apparent reluctance of the state government to formally acknowledge the massacre:

> *We had hoped that we might get an apology from the government for the massacre, but it didn't happen. But the New South Wales Governor, he came, so I think at least he was there … but the government to my knowledge still hasn't actually said anything about acknowledging the massacre and being sorry for what happened. And why put up a big statue of Governor Macquarie who ordered the massacre and you don't acknowledge the people that were massacred? (Personal interview, 7 November 2022)*

On the other hand, two descendants of those killed and those who committed the killings at Appin met for the first time at the 200th anniversary event. Elder Aunty Glenda Chalker, a descendent of the girl survivor Giribunger, and Sandy Hamilton, descended from Stephen Partridge, who served with the 46th Regiment that carried out the attack in 1816, met at the gathering. Aunty Glenda Chalker explains that Sandy Hamilton 'saw an interview that I'd done … and made contact and came down for the anniversary. And she's done that every year … So I keep in contact with her … that's a whole other story about reconciliation' (Personal interview, 11 January 2023). Sandy Hamilton attended the commemoration the following year with her mother, sister and niece. Neither she, nor her family, had not known about the role of their ancestor in the massacre. She explains, 'It's a kind of grieving … I was taught to be proud of my history, my name and the wonderful stock we come from. We made this nation. But there's a lot of anger and grief.' She concludes, 'We are all Australians and need to take ownership of our history. We deserve to know the truth of how we came to be who we are. Then we can also make real choices about who we want to be as a society, as Australians' (Allam and Earl, 2019).

Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group member Ann Madsen explains the impact that the arrival of descendants such as Sandy Hamilton have had on the event:

> *We have had, unexpectedly … people arrive on the day to say 'I was a descendant of one of the soldiers'. Things like that. And then we have invited that person to tell their story or to acknowledge their story, given them a chance to give … their own apology. I think it's happened twice. And the embrace that happened between the Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, descendants, was truly a moving moment. I get teary just thinking about it again. So yeah, reconciliation happens every time we are there because of the fact that it is Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people coming together to acknowledge the horror of an event and to celebrate the continuing culture. (Personal interview, 11 November 2022)*

"Reconciliation happens every time we are there because of the fact that is Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people coming together to acknowledge the horror of an event and to celebrate the continuing culture."

For Dharawal Elder Gavin Andrews, facing up to the harsh truth of Australia's history through events such as the Appin memorial is critical:

> *It's an uncomfortable truth for many Australians. But we must face up honestly to what actually occurred … whether we're Aboriginal or European origin … Hiding behind the shadows of history is an uncomfortable existence until we face it, with some honesty. Truth is about the obligation to do the right thing … The right thing is being honest about what happened in this country, not just at Appin. About our country, part of our bigger story. (Personal interview, 8 December 2022)*

For Aunty Glenda Chalker, education in schools will be critical to truth-telling:

> *The only way the truth-telling is going to happen is through telling it through school children. And those school children will go home to their parents who may or may not believe what's being taught to their children or may or may not even like what's being taught to their children. But I think it has to start in education, and education is through schools. That's the way that people are going to know the real history of this country. (Personal interview, 11 January 2023)*

Sister Kerry Macdermott also underlines the value of truth-telling in recognising injustice and as the first step in the journey of healing and reparation of past wrongs. She explains:

> *It's so important that we have truth-telling in the country … that history is written not from a white perspective, but from an Aboriginal perspective and really tell it as it is, in all its sort of tragic sadness. But until you do that, you can't have any form of justice that flows from that or any reconciliation because unless you tell the truth, there's always something you're hiding. And so it won't ever get better. And then no healing can take place … We have to tell the truth. (Personal interview, 7 November 2022)*

Conclusion

The interviews conducted demonstrate the value of sustained community engagement with the truths of colonial history. The memorial event, which has consistently taken place for more than 20 years on the Sunday prior to the anniversary of the Appin massacre, has slowly built awareness and interest in this seminal historical event.

The massacre helped shape the contemporary configuration of Australia as a settler-colonial society by unleashing government-sanctioned military violence against Aboriginal people resisting colonial occupation and expansion on their land. Despite the major historical significance of the Appin massacre, the ethos of the event has remained humble. The focus on community ownership and respectful, low-key engagement with history has been founded on relationship building and trust built slowly over a number of years, rather than performative or symbolic gestures of reconciliation. The organisation of the annual commemoration has reflected this, bringing local Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal residents together in practical and voluntary collaboration to make the event happen.

After many years of local commemoration, the 200th anniversary of the Appin massacre brought the memorial event to wider national and even international public attention. However, this has not altered the character of the memorial, which is still organised by a small group of committed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal volunteers who have been working together for many decades and in many senses model the type of respectful collaboration and partnership which the event is intended to contribute to fostering in broader society. It is impossible to know conclusively what impact the memorial has had on understanding of colonial violence and its ongoing legacy in the wider Appin community. However, the increasing numbers who have attended the event over the years, and the significant turnout in response to press coverage of the event in 2016, would seem to confirm a growing interest in and recognition of this history.

The gradual coming to awareness of the massacre among the members of the Winga Myamly Reconciliation Group attests to the slowly developing consciousness of and more open engagement with historical trauma like the Appin massacre. The annual public memorial event underlines and makes explicit this critical memory work for a broader group of people. The repetition of the event annually emphasises that recognition and healing is ongoing work, a process that will not be completed through one event but needs to be reiterated and deepened over time. The recognition of the Appin massacre through the truth-telling that occurs at the memorial gathering is, as Sister Kerry Macdermott stresses, the first step in any meaningful redressing of past wrongs and is a precondition for reconciliation to take place. This is linked to the wider task of recognition and truth-telling occurring in the country as a whole.

Nevertheless, it is clear that there is outstanding work to be done. The necessity for the recent intervention by the Aboriginal Cultural Heritage Advisory Committee, chaired by Aunty Glenda Chalker, to prevent development on some of the sites where the massacre and subsequent hangings occurred is indicative of the way in which the recognition and respect for the trauma that occurred at Appin, built up through the memorial event, can be undermined. Nevertheless, the declaration of an Appin Cultural Landscape on these sites opens up new opportunities for recognition, engagement, redress and healing of this historic trauma. A significant and troubling legacy of this historical trauma that is yet to be addressed is the final resting place of the remains of some of the victims of the massacre who were transported overseas for 'scientific' study after the massacre, and who have been held at an Australian museum for many decades.

3. Interview Case Study: Massacre at Muralug, Torres Strait

Introduction

In 1869 the Kaurareg Aboriginal peoples of the Torres Strait suffered a series of massacres that nearly led to their destruction as a people; however, they have continued to thrive and now hold Native Title over seven Torres Strait Islands, including Muralug (Prince of Wales Island) and Nurapai (Horn Island).

Kaurareg Country lies to the immediate north of Cape York Peninsula, Queensland, and includes Muralug (Prince of Wales Island), Nurapai (Horn Island), Tarilag (Packe Island), Bedhan (Possession Island); Keriri (Hammond Island); and Waiben (Thursday Island). According to Memmet, 'The Kaurareg occupy a vital linking position in the maritime trading network between Cape York and Papua New Guinea and are closely related to the adjacent mainland Aboriginal people, the Gudang, through intermarriage' (Memmet, 2022).

The First Nations Peoples of the Torres Strait are of Melanesian and Aboriginal origin and speak distinct traditional languages. There are between 150 to 200 islands in the Torres Strait, with only 20 inhabited, and a population of approximately 10- to 12 000. Waiben is the largest populated island, with approximately 3 600 people, and the smallest populated is Ugar (Stephens Island), with about 40 people. The overall number of Torres Strait Islander people in Australia is approximately 90 000, with the majority living in Queensland and Western Australia. The Torres Strait region is made up of five clusters: Eastern, Central, Far Western, Near Western and Kaurareg clusters. There is also the Northern Peninsula region, where the majority of occupants are of Torres Strait background. The Torres Strait communities have their own experience of colonisation that differs from the Australian mainland (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2014).

The Kaurareg are seafaring peoples, who for thousands of years used outrigger canoes and other watercraft to navigate their homelands. They have traditionally had close trading relationships with peoples across the Torres Strait, as well as regularly visiting the Australian mainland of Cape York Peninsula, where they have maintained ceremonial, marriage and trading relationships with several Aboriginal groups there (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2014). Anthropologist Nonie Sharp explains that, 'The Kaurareg were the closest geographically and socially and culturally to mainland Australia Aboriginal groups, and the white powers of the day regarded them as the "most backward"' (Smith, 2018).

McNiven has noted that, 'Similar to early contact between Europeans and Aboriginal people of mainland Australia, violence and death were features of many early Torres Strait encounters' (2001, p. 175). However, whereas for mainland Australians frontier violence resulted from European invasion and forced annexation of lands for colonial settlement, in the Torres Strait, Europeans were initially not interested in settlement but in visits and trade. Thus, a different frontier dynamic developed in the Torres Strait, which included trading relationships between Torres Strait Islanders and Europeans (McNiven, 2001). Nevertheless, from the latter part of the 19th century, the British and Queensland governments sought to exert increasingly significant control over Torres Strait Islander communities.

Massacre

One of the earliest and most violent encounters with British colonists in the Torres Strait occurred in the 1860s with the Kaurareg peoples of Muralug (Prince of Wales Island). Until the settlement of Somerset was established on the eastern tip of Cape York in 1864, the Aboriginal people of Cape York Peninsula and the adjacent islands, including the Kaurareg, had had little contact with Europeans. Somerset was established to respond to the Queensland colonial government's desire for a major trading port in the north of Australia and the British government's need to establish a strategic outpost to guard the Torres Strait, which was becoming an increasingly important trade route, linking the Pacific and Indian oceans (Queensland Government website).

Before long there was a conflict between the Royal Marines and local First Nations communities. A report written by police magistrate John Jardine in 1865 stated that two Marines had been seriously wounded in the conflict but that 'Aboriginal aggression' had been 'met with severe and just punishment' (Queensland Government website).

Tensions came to a head in April 1869, when captain James Gascoyne and his crew on the cutter boat Sperwer were murdered after their ship anchored off Muralug (Prince of Wales Island) while trading and trawling in the area. Their vessel was left burnt, only 30 miles from the settlement at Somerset (Sharpe, 1992). Accounts of how many people on the ship were killed vary from eight to twenty-eight (Sharpe, 1992; Osborne 2009; Queensland Government). However, it is clear that the event had a significant impact on the colonial community, with the massacre reported in the Queenslander newspaper as 'one of the most frightful ever heard of' (The Queenslander, 1869).

The Kaurareg Aboriginal people of Muralug were blamed for the killings and two retaliatory raids were organised by the authorities at Somerset, the first led by the Police Magistrate, Frank Jardine, assisted by Captain McAusland of the Melanie and its crew members; the second by Henry Chester, who temporarily replaced Jardine as Police Magistrate (Sharpe, 1992). Anthropologist David Moore, who worked extensively with the Kaurareg, described these two men as having 'derogatory attitudes to and a total lack of understanding of either Aborigines or [Torres Strait Islanders]' (cited in Osborne, 2009, p. 11). Anthropologist Nonie Sharpe writes that, 'a pall of silence hangs over the first of these expeditions' as there are no formal records of it (1992, p. 70). Instead, various attempts to reconstruct events from the recollections handed down in the Jardine family, as well as other eyewitness accounts, give some sense of what may have happened. According to Jardine's son, a 'great slaughter' of Kaurareg on Muralug took place, although accounts of the events differ. Gida (c. 1849–1899), also known as Gida of the Kaurareg, mamus (chief), described the killings to the European journalist Archibald Meston, who wrote an account 30 years later (Memmet, 2022). Whatever the details of the killing, as Sharpe notes, 'There seems little doubt that many Kaurareg died that day' (1992, p. 71).

Retribution against the Kaurareg continued after this. Two more expeditions, plus an 'observational' one, were mounted by Chester, who took over as Police Magistrate from Jardine. On 5 April 1870, a year after the attack on the Sperwer, Chester led a party of 25 royal marines and eight Australian 'native police', five of whom had been recently released from St Helena's prison, where they had served time for rape and armed robbery, to investigate the ongoing rumour that James Gascoyne's wife had been detained by the Kaurareg, although she was in fact in Melbourne at the time of the attack on the ship (Sharpe, 1992). They revisited the scene of the massacre, took 20 men prisoner, set fire to their camp, badly wounded one Kaurareg individual trying to escape and destroyed all but two canoes. Three of the prisoners were identified as being responsible for the attack on Sperwer and were shot by troopers. Chester explained the rationale for the killings as producing a 'moral effect', which 'will go far towards preventing future outrages on small trading vessels' (Chester quoted in Sharpe, 1992, p. 72). Three years later the missionary W Wyatt Gill wrote that he visited the area and described a 'scene of more than ample revenge exacted by whites' (Osborne, 2009, p. 11). According to Moore, 'There was a considerably greater slaughter of Prince of Wales Islanders than was mentioned in official reports … the Kaurareg were decimated … and scattered' (cited in Osborne, 2009, p. 11). Retribution was therefore seen to have been effected and the Kaurareg, who had been noted by earlier voyagers for their warrior prowess and 'kindness' were now 'dispersed' (Sharpe, 1992, p. 72). While Sharpe notes that 'controversy and disagreement still surround the question of the amount of retribution meted out to the Kaurareg' (1992, p. 72), it is clear that these events and subsequent actions against the Kaurareg have had a lasting intergenerational impact on the community and have been passed down in oral history.

Shipwreck survivor Barbara Thompson

The massacre occurred in an area where, it was reported, the Indigenous people 'had constantly maintained friendly intercourse' with Europeans (Carroll, 1969, p. 37). Famously, the Kaurareg had sheltered and cared for a young Scottish woman called Barbara Thompson for five years after she was shipwrecked off Nurapai (Horn Island) in 1844 until she was retrieved by the HMS Rattlesnake in 1849 (Wallace, 2012). Three Islander men rescued Thompson and took her to Muralug Island in the Torres Strait. She was treated as the markai (ancestral spirit) of the Elder Peaqui's deceased daughter and was known as Giom (Wallace, 2012; Maynard and Haskins, 2016). The artist and naturalist Oswald Brierly was on the ship that retrieved Thompson, taking part in a survey of the Cape York Peninsula. Thompson, through detailed conversations with Brierly about her time with the Kaurareg, provided invaluable information about Kaurareg life and customs, which is still being used today.

Maynard and Haskins write that Thompson gave detailed accounts of everyday life on the islands – 'the songs and dances, sport and games, houses, sophisticated tools, weapons, utensils and craft, as well as descriptions of men's hunting techniques' (Maynard and Haskins, 2016, p. 166). She told Brierly that 'the Indigenous people pitied "white fellows", who they thought had no country of their own and were therefore obliged to "roam about" on ships for provisions' (Maynard and Haskins, 2016, p. 171). In the 1970s, the anthropologist David Moore used Brierly's diaries, which recorded his conversations with Thompson, to create an ethnographic reconstruction of the lives of the Kaurareg prior to colonisation. He later visited the areas in which the Kaurareg lived and helped document their language. The book he published in 1979, 'Islanders and Aborigines at Cape York', is still colloquially known as the Kaurareg 'bible'. The information that Thompson provided, and which was later documented by David Moore, was subsequently used by the Kaurareg community to support their Native Title application in 1996, as it provided evidence of their traditional custodianship of several Torres Strait Islands. This was particularly critical in the light of the displacement and violence that the Kaurareg faced, which endangered the continuity of their language and culture.

Enid Tom, Elder and Director of the Kaurareg Aboriginal Native Title Corporation, describes the continued debt she feels to Barbara Thompson, 'as the first white woman that was here', whose recollections have helped preserve critical elements of language and culture of the Kaurareg peoples:

> *You know what she did for us in return [for being saved from the shipwreck]. She recorded everything and it saved our language. I met her family … her sister's great-great-great grandchildren, who came up and did a trip up here to have a look at the place where she lived for five years. She was a shipwreck, like Eliza Fraser. She lived five years with the Kaurareg. And so she learnt everything and Kaurareg has a lot of history in this place … She left here knowing about our culture, our language, our food that we eat, everything, the burial system, kinship system, everything. (Personal interview, 24 March 2023)*

The accuracy of Thompson's account of Kaurareg life has recently been underlined by the exposure, as a result of climate change, of burial sites on the beaches of Muralug that Thompson had described in her conversations with Brierly. Enid Tom is now working with archaeologists and other Kaurareg community members to map and protect these burial sites. She emphasises:

> *It proves Barbara Thompson was telling the truth … She speaks about seeing people being buried on the beaches because the rest of the island is rocky … They didn't have the tools so they buried them on the beaches and she even pinpointed some of the beaches exactly where they are. And I go past those beaches and I think she pinpointed it right here. (Personal interview, 24 March 2023)*

In 2022, two of Barbara Thompson's descendants, Glynis Hatch and Sherrin Blum, met with Kaurareg Elders, including Enid Tom, in the Torres Strait. The two women had discovered their relationship with Thompson and the story of her time with the Kaurareg while doing research on family history. Glynis Hatch explains that after Thompson returned to Sydney, 'Barbara's life in the Torres Strait was not talked about because at the time it was not appropriate for a white woman to live with Aborigines' (Hatch, 2022, p. 165). On the other hand, in the Kaurareg community, the story of Barbara Thompson was passed down from generation to generation in oral history and was well known.

Glynis Hatch describes the warm welcome she and Sherrin Blum received when they came to the Torres Strait:

> *We arrived on Horn Island and spent four days there meeting the Elders, especially Enid Tom, who has become a special friend. We cried when we met her. We were warmly welcomed, some of the Elders had flown from Cairns just to meet us. People would come up to us and hold our hand and say, 'You share Barbara's blood'. We cannot stress enough how much Barbara is loved and honoured by the people of the Torres Strait. (2022, p. 165)*

They visited Muralug, where 'Auntie Barb' (Barbara Thompson) had spent five years. Here they heard how, 20 years after Thompson had left the Kaurareg, the events unfolded that led to the massacre at Muralug after the Sperwer was shipwrecked in 1869 and its crew and captain were killed. Glynis Hatch explains how they visited an area on Muralug called 'Death Valley', where the massacre reportedly took place:

> *Some artefacts made by the Kaurareg were found at the site [of the shipwreck] so the officials rounded up 500 of the 800 tribe members, herded them into a valley on Prince of Wales Island and massacred them … We cried and apologised. To hear someone talk about their ancestor being massacred was heart-wrenching. (2022, p. 166)*

Glynis Hatch outlines the emotional impact that this type of truth-telling can have:

> *If more people heard stories like this, they'd realise what happened. The fact that part of their tribe was massacred. I'd read that before. I'd seen it in print, everything – when Enid was telling me, or telling us, we're in tears and we're apologising. And she said, you didn't do it. And we said, we know, but because that's someone telling you about their family, and that is very, very moving. And if more people could hear stories like that to realise what's happened, that's the important thing. (Personal interview, 19 April 2023)*

She explains the devastation that the Kaurareg faced after this massacre and the importance of Thompson's contribution to the survival of Kaurareg language and culture, 'Later the rest of the tribe were moved off their island and were sent off with other tribes to another island. TB decimated the population' (2022, p. 166) and 'a lot of people died with disease, diseases that they've never had before' (Personal interview, 19 April 2023). In this context, 'Barbara's story was a constant through their lives … So this story has been passed down' (Personal interview, 19 April 2023).

During the visit Kaurareg Elders requested that Barbara Thompson's remains be repatriated to Muralug in recognition of her contribution to the survival of Kaurareg culture and history. Enid Tom explains her desire to bring Thompson 'back up' after seeing a photograph of her neglected grave: 'She hasn't got a head stone. There's no history. For this woman, saved our language … She recorded all that' (Personal interview, 24 March 2023). Glynis Hatch and Sherrin Blum, after consulting members of their family, support the repatriation of Thompson's remains to Muralug. They feel that this will allow for meaningful recognition of Barbara Thompson, whose remains are now in an untended gravesite in Sydney. Glynis Hatch explains, 'So because it's an unloved grave … It's not loved, it's not cared for. And when Enid brought up the idea, we just looked at each other and went, Yeah! Because she's loved up there, she's admired, she's respected' (Personal interview, 19 April 2023). Kaurareg Elders are currently in discussions with the Queensland government and the RAAF in order to organise the repatriation so that, as Glynis Hatch explains, 'Barbara can come home to the islands where she is known, loved and acknowledged for her contribution to their history, and more widely to Australia's history' (2022, p. 166).

A contemporary legacy

By the end of the 19th century, the number of Kaurareg had reduced to about 100. The remaining Kaurareg were moved to Keriri (Hammond Island). In March 1922 they were again removed, this time at gunpoint, from their traditional homelands and forced to relocate to Adam on Moa Island and to Puruma/Coconut Island. As a result they were 'forced to survive in cultural, social, political and economic environments that in their experience were not truly respectful, dignified, fair or favourable' (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2012, p. 4). Enid Tom explains the impact of these events. 'I've watched my people struggle on Horn Island. They were a nobody because of our history being removed from this area, totally removed from the island in the Torres Strait in 1800s' (Personal interview, 24 March 2024).

This history of violence and displacement persists in the memory of the Kaurareg community as a whole. Milton Savage, Kaurareg descendent and Chair of the Kaurareg Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (KNTAC) explains how these events live on in oral history, with stories of how police ambushed the Kaurareg in the middle of the night, 'while everyone was asleep and opened fire on everyone in the village'. He explains the stories that were passed down to him, 'They shot every man, women and child. For us here, we're the ones that survived from our ancestors camping out around the island. That was the main population of my people' (Smith, 2018).

Milton Savage questions the respect that colonial authorities such as Jardine still command in contemporary Australia. He explains, 'Jardine, in the colonization history, he was a good man. But for us Indigenous people he was a murderer, he was a wicked man, and he died a very sinful death which was witnessed by everybody, a story that has been passed down from generation to generation' (Smith, 2018). Jardine died of leprosy in 1919 and was honoured in the local press at the time for his 'pioneering spirit' and generous hospitality. However, the story passed down through generations of Kaurareg people is very different. 'We heard stories of (Jardine) riding on horseback, snatching babies from the mother's arm and bashing the head against a tree, but yet they name streets, rivers and hotels after him, that is an insult,' Savage said. The Jardine River in North Queensland carries his name, along with the surrounding National Park, Jardine Rock, Jardine Islet and Jardine Creek, among others. 'I really think the early settlers, their names, their stories, their histories should be kept in a museum somewhere, not in the public places,' Savage said. 'The naming of the roads or buildings should come back to Traditional Owners, because this is our country, and the Australian people need to respect that … But what is truth, what is true?' (Smith, 2018).

After the Second World War, descendants of the Kaurareg began to return to their traditional islands, and laid claim to Native Title over several of them. Enid Tom explains how her own family returned to islands they had been displaced from when her mother was nine years old:

> *My granddad came close on a lugger with his family and all the Kaurareg decided, 'Oh we've got to go back', cause they weren't … allowed to speak their own language … and they were starving most of the time. So my grandad said, 'No, I'm not having this. I'm taking my children back home'. So they came back and they came to Horn Island, cause there was no one here. The war had just finished, so he gathered up all the men and got them sheeting, iron sheeting, after the war and nails and everything and made houses … So the Kaurareg came back to their land and built a village here.' (Personal interview, 24 March 2024)*

On 23 May 2001, after a five-year battle, the Kaurareg people were able to secure Native Title rights over most of Nurapai (Horn Island), Muralug (Prince of Wales Island), Zuna (Entrance Island), Tarilag (Packe Island), Yeta (Port Lihou Island), Damaralag (Dumuralag Islet) and Mipa (also known as Pipa Islet and Turtle Island) (Kaurareg Native Title Aboriginal Corporation [RNTBC] website).

Enid Tom explains she learnt from an early age from her father the significance of securing legal recognition of the Kaurareg people's Traditional Ownership of their homelands:

> *When I was a little girl, my father used to … he was the chief Elder of the tribe and the first applicant for our Native Title. He used to talk to me about those areas, especially that island, Prince of Wales Island. He used to say, 'Get some education, help me to get our islands back' – this is way before Native Title – 'and you have to protect these islands, there's a lot of areas that need protection.' (Personal interview, 24 March 2023)*

A healing and truth-telling process

In 2012 the Healing Foundation engaged in a significant healing process with the Kaurareg community as a first step to its wider engagement with communities in the Torres Strait region. The Healing Foundation was established in 2009 to address the harmful legacy of government policies towards Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities after Prime Minister Kevin Rudd's apology to the Stolen Generations.

The Healing Foundation's engagement with the Torres Strait communities began with a healing gathering on Horn Island in May 2012, focusing on the relationship between the Kaurareg Nation and Torres Strait Islanders, with participants representing the Kaurareg Nation and the Torres Strait Islands. During the forum, participants, 'were able to define healing, discuss their

healing needs and start a healing process to deal with the pain caused by the impact of colonisation in their region' (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2012, p. 2). The Foundation noted at the time that 'there had been little engagement' with the broader Torres Strait Islander community about the impact of the history of violence and dispossession experienced by the Kaurareg and 'what this meant for Kaurareg people and the Torres Strait Island community' (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2012, p. 4).

It explained that:

> *Kaurareg Aboriginal people have suffered cultural prejudice from the wider community but also within the local community. Historically they are a nation of people dispossessed of their traditional lands, culture and language. There has been little acknowledgment of the Kaurareg Aboriginal people from the people who settled on their traditional lands. This has caused immense tension, anger and hurt and people feel they are still fighting for the appropriate recognition. (Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Healing Foundation, 2012, p. 6)*

Truth-telling was central to the process of healing. As Chair of the Kaurareg Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (KNTAC), Milton Savage explains:

> *Well the healing is all about truth-telling. You talk about intergenerational trauma, the effects of colonisation, like how our Elders have been treated. You can't speak your language or practice your culture, you'll get shot. Then you got the massacre, forceful removal from land, from Country, forceful removal at gunpoint. (Personal interview, 13 April 2023)*

At a more recent healing gathering in the Torres Strait in 2019, the Chair of the Healing Foundation, Professor Steve Larkin, emphasised the continuing significance of truth-telling for participants from the Torres Strait, including the Kaurareg, 'One of the things they call for is they want truth-telling. They want this history to be known by all Australians.' He explained that the motivation for this was not about wanting people to feel guilty or to attribute blame, 'It's more about understanding the history of this in Australia, so other Australians might better understand the situation Indigenous Australians here have been in' (Giakoumelos, 2019).

Regina Turner, President of Mura Kosker Sorority, a women's group which is working with the Healing Foundation, explains:

> *Kaurareg were forcibly removed from Keriri, their homeland and relocated … You get to hear the true story and what really happened and the split between community. That's why I think it's very important that we, as the next generations after the Elders, can make sure that this healing takes place. (Giakoumelos, 2019)*

Truth-telling is not easy given the history of oppression experienced by many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples, including the Kaurareg. In the past, as Milton Savage outlines:

> *If you speak out the truth, like an activist being an activist, you'll be thrown in jail or you will be asked to be dismissed from the land. So this was all the Aboriginal Protection Act legacy. So that's why people are afraid of sticking up, otherwise they'll be thrown in the back of the paddy wagon, and taken down to the jail cell … People, they were calling me a troublemaker. You are only going to stir up things. You're only going to cause problem for us … So this is why it's very important that we share this with the white Australians. So the white Australian can really understand, it wasn't our fault. We haven't done anything wrong to no one. (Personal interview, 13 April 2023)*

Nevertheless, as a result of these processes of healing and engagement, there is now more recognition and respect for the unique identity of the Kaurareg and the impact of colonialism on the Torres Strait Island community as a whole. Milton Savage explains:

> *Because of the healing now every everyone's given true recognition to Kaurareg. And that was the struggle that … I went through until today, now Kaurareg is more … acknowledged, respected. Everyone is saying that, 'We are sorry, we didn't know all of this. Now we understand.' You see, that's why we say to people, 'It's not your fault why these things happen'. Because the early explorers established a class system here on TI [Torres Strait Islands]. (Personal interview, 13 April 2023)*

Milton Savage and Luisa O'Connor were both participants in the Healing Foundation process in 2012. Milton explains the unfolding impact of this earlier truth-telling:

> *We talk about history, healing, it takes time for people to accept. But now people have watched it in the movie, in documentaries. Now the government's making changes. Now they realise. 'Oh, so that's what Milton was talking about back then two years ago. Luisa and Milton were always talking about the healing. Oh, so now I understand.' (Personal interview, 13 April 2023)*

For Milton Savage, the legacy of discrimination and dispossession can be addressed through collaboration, rather than blame, between affected communities, both those who benefited and those who were victimised. He argues, 'So how do we correct this set of mistakes in the past? … We can't put anybody or blame anybody for it. But I believe that it is our responsibility to get together, stand up and correct it' (Personal interview, 13 April, 2023).

Defending Native Title

Subsequent to these healing processes the Kaurareg have continued to defend their rights as Traditional Owners. In 2021 the Kaurareg Aboriginal Corporation was successful in winning an injunction to stop a marina being built on the shores of Muralug that would have disturbed a sacred story site related to the warrior-giant Waubin (Wiggins and Carrick, 2021). The marina would also have had potential negative environmental implications because, 'the sea grass is special to dugong around that area and they feed off it. If we build the big marina, we change the tide' (Personal interview, E. Tom, 24 March 2023). As a result of the Native Title Determination in 2001 recognising the Kaurareg as the Traditional Owners of Muralug, it was possible to prevent the development planned by the Torres Strait Shire Council. Enid Tom explains:

> *They [Torres Strait Shire Council] did not consult with the Traditional Owners as we have Native Title rights over [Muralug]. And so the residents are saying to them, you need to speak to the Traditional Owners, you need to consult with them if you want to build a marina, all we want is a pontoon because the tide drops twice a year over there on that beach. Twice a year. You don't need a big marina for twice a year. (Personal interview, 24 March 2023)*

Late on a Friday in May 2019, days before works were set to begin, lawyers for the Kaurareg Native Title Aboriginal Corporation (KNTAC) took the matter to Federal Court. The granting of an injunction to stop the development is understood as a legal first as the court granted an injunction under Native Title law to prevent 'future acts' — actions that might impact Traditional Owners' Native Title rights in the future. The hold placed on works gave the KNTAC time to appeal the planning approval for the harbour, and to make a separate application to the Federal Environment Minister for a declaration to permanently protect the site. As part of that second process the Minister obtained an independent report from an anthropologist which highlighted the importance of the site. When Council obtained that report in early 2021, it abandoned its construction plans (Wiggins and Carrick, 2021).

Enid Tom explains the significance of this outcome for the Kaurareg: 'We protected what was ours. And I'm proud that I did that because I fulfilled my dad's legacy for me. Telling me to protect that island – always pointing at that hill' (Personal interview, 24 March 2023). Graham Carter, barrister with Brisbane Chambers, who represented the Kaurareg Aboriginal Corporation, emphasised the wider implications of the decision, explaining that it 'sends a message that the Federal Court takes the threat of harm to Native Title rights and interests very seriously' (Wiggins and Carrick, 2021). Critically, he sees the court case as being about Kaurareg asserting their right to self-determination and recognition:

> *This whole issue arises because Kaurareg want to be masters … over their own Native Title lands and waters … And so really a lot of this was about Kaurareg saying, We're here and you have to deal with us. You have to listen to us. So in its own, quite apart from protecting this very important story site, was also this concept of respect for Kaurareg's views and its processes … and acknowledging the role of Kaurareg in management of their lands and waters and their authority to say what is and is not appropriate. (Personal interview, 22 February 2023)*

The court case is also demonstrative of the power that Native Title determinations can provide to even small Aboriginal corporations and communities. As Enid Tom outlines, 'It is a good example for small corporations to take the councils to court. Because you can't let them do what they like because they're a council. They have their laws, we have our Native Title laws, we know our laws' (Personal interview, 24 March 2023).

Conclusion

The story of the Kaurareg, like that of many First Peoples in Australia, is one of enormous hardship, violence and dispossession, but also a remarkable story of survival and determination to preserve culture, identity and sovereignty, despite the depredations of colonialism. The story of the Kaurareg also provides a window into the unique and complex experience of communities in the Torres Strait, who were impacted by colonialism in a different manner to the frontier conflict of the mainland. The Kaurareg are unique in having a historical relationship both with the Australian mainland in the Cape York region and connections across the Torres Strait Islands. Their history makes evident the diversity of experiences of colonialism in the Torres Strait. The Kaurareg are one among many communities in the Torres Strait who were impacted by colonialism and who continue to grapple with this legacy.

The story of the Kaurareg is also a story about truth-telling and reconnection. It speaks to the manner in which colonialism, on the one hand, decimated First Nations communities, but also how it, in some instances, created extraordinary relationships between First Nations and non-Indigenous communities, as evidenced by the rescue and care for the shipwreck survivor Barbara Thompson by the Kaurareg. Her subsequent detailed account of the life, culture and traditions of the Kaurareg provided an invaluable resource for the Kaurareg community in their fight for survival and for sovereignty over their lands, by documenting culture and language that may well have been lost as a result of the violence the community experienced, as well as providing the evidence they needed to succeed in demonstrating their traditional ownership of land in the Torres Strait for their Native Title application in 1996. The connection of Barbara Thompson's ancestors with Kaurareg Elders and plans for the repatriation of Thompson's remains to Muralug reiterate these relationships of care and connection between First Nations and non-Indigenous communities through the generations.

The healing work that has occurred between the Kaurareg community and other Torres Strait Islander Nations, facilitated by the Healing Foundation, has played an important role in ameliorating some of the damage and tensions caused by the displacement of the Kaurareg from their traditional lands. However, the plans to build a marina at Muralug without consultation with Kaurareg Elders speaks to the ongoing work required to heal the wounds of the past and ensure meaningful recognition of the Kaurareg, including their continuing sovereignty in their traditional lands in the Torres Strait. At the same time, it is another example of the resilience the Kaurareg have shown since the massacre in 1869, as they used the contemporary legal system and their hard-won Native Title rights to defend and reassert their custodianship of traditional lands through the protection of a sacred story site.

4. Summary Case Study: Incarceration at Wadjemup/Rottnest Island, Western Australia

Rottnest Island, called Wadjemup (meaning place of spirits) by the Noongar people, is 18 kilometres off the coast of Western Australia, adjacent to the capital city of Perth. It has a traumatic history as a site of incarceration of Aboriginal men and children (Melville, 2016). However, prior to the colonial period it was an important cultural site for Whadjuk Noongar people. The island was connected to the mainland about 6,500 years ago and there is archaeological and oral-history evidence that Wadjemup was used by the Whadjuk Noongar people for important ceremonies and meetings before sea levels rose, making the island inaccessible by land. After the colonisation of Western Australia in the early 1800s, Wadjemup became Rottnest Island Aboriginal Establishment and was used as an Aboriginal prison between 1838 and 1904, and a forced labour camp for Aboriginal and other prisoners until 1931 (Rottnest Island Authority, no date a). Almost 4,000 Aboriginal men and boys from across Western Australia were imprisoned in the Rottnest Island Prison over a period of almost 100 years between 1838 and 1931 (Melville, 2016). The prison was built as part of a network of coercive colonial institutions, including policing, courts and prisons, designed to 'control' the Noongar people through the enforcement of British law in the 19th century.

This led to the increasing incarceration of Noongar men for a variety of newly introduced 'offences' that were ultimately intended to support settler occupation of the land. After the establishment of the Swan River Colony on Noongar lands in 1823, Noongar peoples were increasingly driven off their land and were denied access to traditional vegetation, hunting grounds and water sources (Stasiuk and Hibberd, 2017).

Noongar men were charged for actions such as shooting domestic animals, cattle theft and 'trespassing' as they tried to find food for themselves and their families to survive. Stasiuk and Hibberd argue therefore that 'The Rottnest Native Prison was the final tool that the colonists employed to quash Aboriginal resistance to colonization' in Western Australia (2017, p. 200) and consequently, 'the significance of this site is inseparable from its role in the strategic colonial occupation of Noongar country and the dispossession of their lands, and later all of Western Australia' (2017, p. 198).

Conditions at the prison were extraordinarily brutal. Prisoners were forced to labour long hours in the heat, were beaten and were chained together at night. Some were hanged. The prison building, known colloquially as the 'Quod', was built by prisoners themselves in 1863. It was a panopticon-style prison designed to create a sense that inmates were under constant surveillance. It consisted of extremely small cells (3 x 1.7 metres), each of which held up to seven people with no windows, no beds and no bucket for a toilet. Over time, the prison cells became increasingly overcrowded and included boys as young as eight (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, no date a). Prisoners slept on the damp floor and froze in winter. Disease was rife as a result of the harsh conditions. Hundreds died and were buried in unmarked graves on the island. The incarceration of men at Rottnest Island Prison had a severe impact both on individuals who had been imprisoned and more broadly on Aboriginal kinship structures, as Aboriginal communities had no cultural experience of imprisonment (Stasiuk and Hibberd, 2017). If prisoners survived their incarceration on the island, they were not returned to their families but were released in Fremantle. As a result, many of these men never returned to their homelands. This created long-lasting fractures within familial, cultural and social structures throughout the West Australian Aboriginal community (Rottnest Island Authority, no date b). The removal of key family members and Elders, sometimes permanently, led to the break-up of families, reverberating across the state and across generations.

This is a history that has been largely unknown or ignored by tourists travelling to the island, which became a significant tourist attraction from the early 20th century as a result of its considerable natural beauty. In 1907, the Colonial Secretary's department drafted a plan to transform the island from an Aboriginal penal settlement to a recreation and holiday destination (Rottnest Island Authority, no date b). It was, 'reimagined as a place of pleasure and escape for non-Aboriginal Australians' (Stasiuk and Hibberd, 2017, p. 191). The identity of Rottnest Island as Western Australia's 'premier tourist destination' stands in stark contrast to its bleak history and the continuing failure to properly acknowledge the violence that took place there. Stasiuk and Hibberd argue that 'the forgetting of past atrocities on Rottnest Island and the greater marginalization of the history of large-scale incarceration and mistreatment of Aboriginal peoples is a hole in national memory' (2017, p. 209).

Many tourists, until very recently, stayed on the site of the old prison, the 'Quod', which was converted to tourist accommodation in 1911 and later became a hotel, which functioned until 2018. One of the main campsites on the island, Tentland, was for many years located on the unmarked graves of more than 373 Aboriginal men. This is the largest unmarked Aboriginal burial ground in Australia and the site of the largest number of deaths in custody in Australian history. The area is now known as the Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground. The first skeletal remains were uncovered in 1971 (Stasiuk and Hibberd, 2017; Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, no date a). According to the Rottnest Island Authority, 'These discoveries were not made public until a decade later.' In the 1980s and then in the 1990s portions of the campsite were closed and fenced off in response to the discovery of further remains. However, it was only in 2007, more than 30 years after the first discovery of remains, that the Tentland campsite was finally closed entirely (Rottnest Island Authority, no date c).

Despite this history of 'forgetting', there have nevertheless been ongoing advocacy efforts over many decades by Noongar community members and organisations to ensure that this dark history is recognised and that Wadjemup is 'reimagined', not only as a site of colonial violence but also a place of considerable spiritual and cultural significance to the Noongar peoples. Since the 1980s, Aboriginal activists have called for the state government to acknowledge the Island's prison history and memorialise the Burial Ground, where at least 373 Aboriginal men lie in unmarked graves. In 1993 the Rottnest Island Deaths Group Aboriginal Corporation (RIDGAC) was established, 'to protect and preserve the burial grounds and spirits of their ancestors' Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, no date a).

“Part of the reason the massacres are continuing to cause harm is they haven’t been properly acknowledged. The simple act of listening is a really important first step in a more complex conversation that needs to be had about how did Australia settle itself. ”

RIDGAC has worked for nearly 20 years to 'compile and share the devastating history of Aboriginal imprisonment on the island' and has 'sustained the debate on how we should treat the unidentified bodies of the Wadjemup prisoners and remember their experience'. The first goal of the Corporation was to halt all development on the burial ground, and to lobby for removal of the roads, buildings and campground that were just four feet above the human remains. In 1994 RIDGAC organised a meeting of Aboriginal people from across Western Australia. Two or three hundred people reportedly came to Wadjemup to take part in a ceremony to rebury the bones of a prisoner who been discovered the previous year. The meeting included senior Elders from Noongar country as well as the Goldfields, Western Desert, Pilbara and the Kimberley. The Premier at the time, Richard Court, attended the event and according to RIDGAC, 'publicly acknowledged Rottnest as Australia's biggest deaths-in-custody site' (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, no date a).

There have been a number of other engagements with the history of the island and attempts to ensure that Noongar presence is inscribed in its landscape. Noongar historian Professor Len Collard, as well as Elder in Residence at Edith Cowan University and Whadjuck Traditional Owner Dr Noel Nannup, have both contributed to public discussions about the violence and trauma experienced at this place. Noel Nannup and Whadjuk Traditional Owner Karen Jacobs worked together to design a Coastal Walk Trail Project in 2007-8 at Wadjemup. The walkways were designed to 'potentially allow visitors to grieve the Indigenous histories' and 'encourage a rebirth of intercultural reconciliation' (Collard and Revell, 2015, p. 125).

Other projects have sought to recognise the pre-colonial history of the island as well as the contributions of Whadjuk and other Noongar communities. Always Wadjemup (Wadjemup: Koora Wordel, Kalygool Wordel) is an online exhibition with a range of audio-visual material that presents the enduring connection of the Noongar people to Wadjemup, going back thousands of years and continuing today. Curated by Vanessa Smart, a Noongar woman from Manjimup, and Samara King, a Karajarri woman from Broome, over a period of six months from January to June 2020, it reflects the artists' experiences working on Wadjemup. The curators explain that the intention of the exhibition is to capture some of the complex histories of Wadjemup: 'There are many truths, many stories, and many voices. We have not been able to capture them all. We ask this exhibition is received in the spirit it is intended, one of recognition, reclamation, and reconciliation, by giving our Aboriginal voice to Aboriginal issues' (Always Wadjemup website, 2020).

The Wadjemup Bidi project seeks to incorporate Elders' knowledge of Wadjemup into local community education and information boards. As part of this project, Noongar artist Peter Farmer has worked with his family to create the Mamong Djoorts (Whale Tracks) sculpture on the Warden Nara Bidi. This includes an audio component, recorded by Aunty Kerry-Ann Winmar. While these information signs may not directly address colonial atrocities, they are a way of asserting continued connection to the site and alerting visitors to the varied histories of the region (Rottnest Island Authority, no date d). The Rottnest Island Museum has increasingly attempted to recognise the history of the island, although there is yet to be a museum or memorial specifically dedicated to recognising the atrocities that occurred on Wadjemup. For example, in 2015 the museum screened a documentary made by Stasiuk on the history of Wadjemup called Wadjemup: Black Prison—White Playground (2015) and two of his short films, Weewar: A Bindjareb Warrior (2006) and Razor Wire (2012). Stasiuk and Hibbard argue that, 'The presentation of these works on the island reveals the importance of filmmaking in shifting attitudes toward the representation of Western Australian colonial and Aboriginal history from an Aboriginal perspective' (2017, p. 207). In 2020 the museum was given a one-million-dollar refurbishment and renamed Wadjemup Museum, reflecting growing recognition of Noongar presence on and cultural custodianship of the island. The refurbished museum, developed in collaboration with the Wadjemup Aboriginal Reference Group, attempts to reflect some of the history of the island as a prison camp. It includes a mill stone in the museum's Truth Telling Space, which Aboriginal men and boys imprisoned on the island used to grind wheat into flour, giving the building housing the museum, the Old Mill and Hay Store, its name (Rottnest Island Authority, 2020).

Another site of activism has been the 'Quod', the former prison at Wadjemup, which was converted into a state hostel for tourists as Rottnest Island became a popular holiday destination in the early 20th century. Later it would form part of the commercial lease for Rottnest Lodge and as a result the origins of this commercial accommodation in a prison complex

gradually became obscured. Tanya Ferrier, a non-Indigenous Western Australian artist, developed the artistic project The Quod Project in 2011 in response to the invisibility of the Quod's history. She explained the shock she felt when she discovered that the place where she had spent her childhood family holidays staying in the Hostel (as the Quod was called in the 1970s) was in fact a site of violence and trauma. She explains, 'There is my family's happy holiday memory and WA Aboriginal families' concentration camp and graveyard memory' (Murray, 2011). The project was her attempt to understand 'how tragic this site is and how inappropriate it is that they [the Rottnest Island Authority in conjunction with the Rottnest Island Resort consortium] use it as a tourist resort' (Ferrier cited in Stasiuk and Hibbard, 2017, p. 209). Ferrier concludes, however, that 'the project demonstrated that despite the shameful, racist past non-Indigenous people were "ready to acknowledge this information now"' (Murray, 2011).

In 2018, a landmark decision was made after more than a century of its operation as a tourist accommodation to close the Quod, a result of the activism of a number of community stakeholders and ongoing engagement with the Rottnest Island Authority over many years. In 2020, the government of Western Australia announced the launch of the Wadjemup Project as a state-wide multi-agency initiative led by the Western Australian government's Department of the Premier and Cabinet to progress the final memorialisation of the Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground and determine the future of the Quod. The Wadjemup Whadjuk Cultural Authority Reference Group was established in 2021 to lead the state-wide consultation regarding the future of the Burial Ground and the Quod. Truth-telling is critical to process. As the Wadjemup Aboriginal Reference Group, set up in 2017 to advise the RIA, notes, 'Truth-telling is an important step to reconciliation, which is even more significant in the context of the colonial history of Wadjemup and the past actions of the Rottnest Island Authority and the State Government of Western Australia' (Rottnest Island Authority 2021, p. 9). In its 2020-2021 Reconciliation Action Plan, the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA) for the first time explicitly acknowledged its role as the statutory authority responsible for the island's management since 1987 and issued an apology.

It noted that the Rottnest Island Authority:

> *has played a historically significant role in the obfuscation of the Aboriginal prison history. It is acknowledged that many past practices of those entrusted with management of the Island were not respectful of Aboriginal peoples or the cultural significance of the Island. We recognise that this has caused great pain and anguish within Aboriginal communities. For this we apologise. (Rottnest Island Authority, 2021)*

5. Summary Case Study: Kukenarap (Cocanarup) massacre memorial, Western Australia

Kukenarap (Cocanarup), 15 kilometres west of Ravensthorpe, is the site where between 30 and 40 Noongar men, women and children were massacred in a series of reprisal killings for the killing in 1880 of pastoralist John Dunn, who had allegedly violated a young Noongar girl. Yandawalla (a.k.a. Yungala) was later charged with the murder of Dunn, but was subsequently acquitted. Both prior to and following the acquittal, reprisal killings of Noongar people occurred (Scott, 2016). Scott quotes an article from a 1935 newspaper which states that after Dunn's death:

> *… members on the station were then granted license to shoot the natives for a period of one month, during which time the fullest advantage was taken of the privilege … In the course of their guerrilla warfare the whites arrived one day at the Carracarup Rock Hole, and, knowing it was a watering-place for the blacks, they crept quietly over the hill until they could peer down to the hole. There they saw two natives who had just risen from drinking. Two shots broke the stillness of the gorge and two dusky souls were sent home to their Maker. The bodies were left lying at the rock hole where they dropped as a grim reminder to the rest of the tribe of the white man's retribution. (Scott, 2016, p. 71)*

The massacre had a lasting impact on the consciousness of Noongar people in the area.

Noongar scholar and novelist Kim Scott, who wrote two novels drawing on the history of the area, describes this intergenerational impact:

> *Many Nyungars today speak with deep feeling about this wild, windswept country. They tell stories about the old folk they lost in the massacre and recall how their mothers warned them to stay out of that area. One man describes how Nyungars will roll up their car windows while passing through Ravensthorpe, and not even stop for food or petrol. The whole region has bad associations and an unwelcoming aura for them. It is a place for ghosts, not for living people. (Scott, 1999)*

As a result of this memory of death, many Noongar shunned Ravensthorpe for decades, leading Scott to title his second novel about the area Taboo.

More than a century after the massacre, in 2015, a memorial sculpture remembering its victims was unveiled. Assistance for the project was provided by Lotteries WA, the Department of the Environment, Main Roads WA and the Shire of Ravensthorpe. The memorial consists of two large metal wedgetail eagle wings, representing the Noongar totems, Wedge Tailed Eagles and Mallee Fowl. There is also a walk trail with boards displaying quotes from Noongar community members. The memorial includes the words:

> *This area of country has a harsh, complex and sometimes contradictory history. Many Noongar people were killed here, and all that death and the apartheid-like 20th century legislation meant many of our families were never able to return and reconcile themselves to what had happened. (Monument Australia website)*

The memorial was the result of the activism of local Noongar community Elders and eight years of collaborative work between Noongar and local agriculturalists (de Landgrafft, 2015). In 2007, descendants of some of the individuals who died in the massacre, including Elders and sisters Carol Petterson and Roni Grey Forrest, approached the Ravensthorpe Historical Society, asking for its support in building a memorial to those who lost their lives at Kukenarup (Goldfinch, n.d.). Noongar scholar, Kim Scott wrote about the process surrounding the memorial in his book Taboo. Jones writes, 'The book follows divided communities as they come together around the memorial, and the pain and angst of recognising a past palpably present' (Jones, 2018).

Roni Forrest was one of the drivers of the project, after researching the history of the massacre. She explained how she first learnt about the massacre in the 1970s from her father, when she still lived in the area, but 'didn't believe it' and 'thought it must be absolutely impossible that people could still have skeletons in riverbeds'. She felt that only the 'Wajala (white man)' side of the story had been told and decided that it was important that the Noongar side of the story was told, 'So I wanted to do the white thing, I guess, and write our stories down' (de Landgrafft, 2015).

More than 200 people gathered to witness the unveiling of the memorial in 2015. The Ravensthorpe Historical Society reports that friendships created between settler and Noongar communities during the process have resulted in 'a healing of wounds' (Goldfinch n.d.). Noongar Elder Carol Petterson stated at the unveiling of the memorial, 'It's important because it's a hallmark of the reconciliation process. Reconciliation is an action, not a word, and that's what's happened here today' (de Landgrafft, 2015).

6. Summary Case Study: Pinjarra massacre memorial, Western Australia

The Pinjarra massacre is one of the bloodiest events in Western Australian history. The attack on 28 October 1834 was led by the governor of Western Australia, Captain James Stirling, and an armed party of 25 people. Stirling reportedly believed that the 'Murray tribe' would thwart his plan to create a settlement south of Perth and that they threatened to 'destroy the whites' in the area. The party cornered a group of at least 80 Noongar men, women and children and opened fire on them. Between 15 and 80 of them died. A police superintendent who was part of the attacking party was speared and later died, and a police constable was wounded. This led historian Keith Windschuttle to argue that Pinjarra was a battle, rather than a massacre; however, this has been contested by researchers associated with the massacre mapping project at the University of Newcastle (Owen, 2019).

There have been ongoing efforts to address this legacy of violence; however, it has remained contested. In the late 1990s, the Shire of Murray voted not to recognise the events as a massacre. Current Shire President David Bolt, however, is reported as saying a much deeper understanding had grown over the years of the event's impact, with the Shire recognising the 'massacre' name since 2006 (Warriner, 2019).

In 2017, a 'Back to Pinjarra Day' was organised to commemorate those who died at the site of the massacre by the Shire of Murray and the local Bindjareb community. Bindjareb Traditional Owner Karrie-Anne Kearing was reported as saying the commemoration was important to acknowledge these deaths as a massacre, rather than a battle (Juanola, 2017).

A monument consisting of a rock with a plaque has been erected in the Battle of Pinjarra Memorial Park, which is intended to commemorate those who were killed in the Pinjarra Massacre. However, there appears to be widespread dissatisfaction with this memorial, which does not use the word massacre to refer to the violence and is in a park whose name refers to the 'Battle' of Pinjarra. In 2019 it was reported that the Council had given in-principle support to a Pinjarra memorial, with the Noongar community leading the project, supported by the Department of Planning, Lands and Heritage and other groups (Warriner, 2019).

There have also been several artistic engagements with the violence that occurred at Pinjarra. In 2011 the Western Australian Museum commissioned 21 artworks (one for each of 21 named victims) to create the *Pinjarra Massacre Memorial* exhibition with the aim of showing 'how the arts can break boundaries and a small town's history can reach a large audience' (*Pinjarra Massacre Memorial, 2011*). One of the artworks, *Quirriup,* a print by Laurel Nannup, is now part of the Australian War Memorial collection (Australian War Memorial website, *Quirriup*). A play about the massacre, *Bindjareb Pinjarra*, alternates scenes from the past and the present, drawing on written and oral versions of the incident to question various versions of history. It toured extensively, and was one of Western Australia's longest-running theatre productions (Artback NT website, 2012).

7. Summary Case Study: Coniston massacre memorial, Northern Territory

The Coniston massacre, in which at least 32 Aboriginal people were killed by police over several months in 1928 in Central Australia, in the Northern Territory, was the last-recorded and possibly largest massacre in Australia. At the time, Central Australia was one of the last frontiers in the European conquest of Australia and Coniston was its western outpost (Wilson and O'Brien, 2011). The area was the site of sustained conflict between the competing interests of Aboriginal Traditional Owners of Land and settler pastoralists, which was intensified by an extended drought. The violence was sparked in response to the killing of Frederick Brooks at Yurrkuru, a waterhole within Coniston Station, and another white man camped along a nearby river. These killings were seen by settlers to be part of an alleged 'Warramulla invasion', which the author Michael Bradley has argued was 'a figment of a fevered white imagination' (Bradley, 2019). Mounted Constable William George Murray was appointed to investigate the killing of the men, which led to a series of expeditions that resulted in the reprisal killing of numerous Aboriginal people (Vaarzon-Morel, 2021). Bradley highlights the indiscriminate nature of the shootings, which resulted in the murder of over 100 Aboriginal people including men, women and children (Arnold, 2009; Bradley, 2019). To this day, the victims remain nameless in the official record (Vaarzon-Morel, 2021).

An official inquiry was established after the killings to determine whether the police party was at fault for the Aboriginal deaths. No Aboriginal people testified to the inquiry, which ruled that Police Constable William George Murray and his associated parties of settlers were not guilty of murder and that they acted in self defence (Heaney, 2018). The inquiry estimated that 32 members of the Warlpiri tribe were killed during these patrols, although the Warlpiri stated at the time that between 60 and 70 people lost their lives (Monument Australia, no date b).

The consequences of the massacre were far reaching for the three Aboriginal groups involved (Warlpiri, Ammatyerr and Kaytyete). Many who survived fled the area, a forced dislocation that continues to affect Aboriginal people in the region today. Numerous families lost at least one member, if not more (Arnold, 2009). In 2003, at the first major commemorative event for the massacre, its impact was still deeply felt by local community members. Warden, who attended the event, explains, 'People still talk of uncles, fathers, grandfathers who were killed along with aunts, mothers and grandmothers' (Warden, 2003).

It took many years before the events of Coniston began to be properly investigated and written about, despite the abundance of Aboriginal oral evidence (Arnold, 2009) and they are still not widely known in Australia outside the Aboriginal community in the Northern Territory. Nevertheless, the story of the massacre was kept alive through oral history by the survivors and their descendants.

An important intervention to publicise the story of the Coniston massacre more widely was the 2012 docu-drama Coniston, produced by Francis Jupurrurla Kelly and David Batty (ABC RN, 2012). The docu-drama shares Aboriginal views on what happened at Coniston and interviews survivors from the massacre or from the generations descended from the massacre victims.

There have been three major memorial events commemorating anniversaries of the massacre. In 2003, on the 75th anniversary of the killings, after many years of discussion among Traditional Owners, a commemorative ceremony was held and a monument describing the significance of the events was erected at the site of the first reprisal killings, with the assistance of the Central Land Council. Men and women, now elderly, who witnessed the events surrounding the massacre, were at the ceremony; 'Some spoke and some wept' (Warden, 2003). During the commemoration, several of Constable William Murray's descendants, including his grand-niece, apologised to the relatives of the victims. Representatives of the Northern Territory police were also present and offered an apology for the harm caused (Warden, 2003). In 2008, on the 80th anniversary of the massacre, another monument was unveiled at Athimpelengkwe (Baxter's Well), which consists of two large rocks representing senior men who were killed (Monument Australia, no date a).

In 2018 several hundred people attended the third commemorative event on the 90th anniversary of the massacre. At the commemoration attendees called for a national day of remembrance for Coniston and other massacres around Australia. However, 'this has not eventuated, nor has there been a formal apology from the nation or any acts of reparation' (Vaarzon-Morel, 2021, p. 454). Traditional Owner Teddy Long spoke to the crowds at the place where he said all the 'trouble started for everyone':

> *We want to help develop a story place here to tell people what happened, an interpretative display. We've been struggling for a long time to set this up here at Yurrkuru. I know we got no water but we are trying to get help from somewhere. (Heaney, 2018)*

Fellow Traditional Owner Dwayne Ross also asked for more signage and commemoration of the multiple massacre sites around the area:

> *They took our people away and now is a chance to have something back to us so we can learn together … We have been working on these maps, of where our people got taken away. We need to put more memorials in those places. (Heaney, 2018)*

In an interview with the Guardian, Liza Dale-Hallett, the great-niece of George Murray, similarly argued for the importance of acknowledging colonial violence like the Coniston Massacre:

> *Part of the reason the [massacres] are continuing to cause harm is they haven't been properly acknowledged. The simple act of listening is a really important first step in a more complex conversation that needs to be had about how did Australia settle itself. (Allam and Evershed, 2019)*

A descendant of Coniston survivors, Francis Jupurrurla Kelly, agreed:

> *We want everyone to understand why so many of our innocent men, women and children were murdered in cold blood. Many kartiya [whitefellas] were too greedy for our land and didn't see us as fully human. We can only come together as one mob, if everyone, starting with all our schoolchildren and our elected representatives, knows what has happened to our loved ones and why, so they are never forgotten. (Allam and Evershed, 2019)*

8. Summary Case Study: Elliston massacre memorial, South Australia

The Elliston massacre, also known as the Waterloo Bay massacre, took place in 1849 and occurred in the context of ongoing frontier wars in Australia as European settlers arrived from Adelaide, the capital of the colony of South Australia, to establish Port Lincoln on the east coast of the Eyre Peninsula. This process led to escalating violence and the displacement of Aboriginal communities already living on lands that settlers sought to occupy. The Elliston region was inhabited by Aboriginal Nauo, Kokatha and Wirangu people.

This frontier violence has been described by Foster, Hosking and Nettelbeck (2001, p. 8) as an 'undeclared war' on the Australian frontier conducted through 'localised' and 'covert' violence between settlers and Aboriginal people in South Australia (Foster, Hosking and Nettlebeck, 2001, p. 7).

Between June 1848 and May 1849, there were a series of incidents between settlers and Aboriginal people in the Elliston district, which led to escalating tension. In the first of these incidents, John Hamp, a hutkeeper at Stony Point sheep station, was speared and clubbed to death by Aboriginal people in June 1848. The second incident occurred in August 1848 when at least one Aboriginal person was shot by the overseer of the Stony Point sheep station for stealing a shirt. During the following year, in May 1849, five Aboriginal people – two adults, two boys and an infant – died after eating poisoned flour stolen by an Aboriginal man from another station near Yeelanna. The man from whom the flour was stolen was arrested and charged with murder, but sailed for the United States soon after being released by the authorities. In the same month, May 1849, James Rigby Beevor was speared to death at his hut, and four days later the first white woman to settle in the area, Annie Easton, was speared to death on an adjoining property. Her unharmed infant was found beside her body (Foster, Hosking and Nettlebeck, 2001). The Colonial Frontier Massacre map at the University of Newcastle records that in reprisal for these killings 'it is possible that a settler posse chased a group of Wirangu people to Waterloo Bay on 17 May and shot and killed at least ten of them as they sought refuge in the bushes down the headland' (Ryan, Debenham, et al., 2022c).

From the 1880s, a variety of popular narratives emerged about these events in journalistic and creative accounts by non-Indigenous authors, which Foster, Hosking and Nettelbeck describe as leading to a 'well-developed local legend' (Foster, Hosking and Nettlebeck, 2001, p. 54). In this account of events John Hamp's severed head is found in a camp oven at his hut by his twelve-year-old son, John Chipp Hamp. Subsequently, the Aboriginal people responsible for the murders were allegedly rounded up by a group of horsemen and herded over the Waterloo Bay cliffs, leading to 'many' Aboriginal casualties. Thus far, little archival material supporting this particular account exists. Nevertheless, oral history in local communities recounts a story of up to 250 Aboriginal people driven to their deaths over the cliffs just south of Elliston.

While it is clear that violence occurred that took the lives of both Aboriginal and settler community members in the context of ongoing frontier conflict, the factual details of these events, and in particular the exact number of people killed, are perhaps less significant than the contestation around the story, which continues today. As Foster, Hosking and Nettelbeck note, contending accounts of these events, 'register the long and uneasy memories of violence in the unsettled areas of South Australia' (Foster, Hosking and Nettlebeck, 2001, p. 72).

From the 1970s, there has been an ongoing debate about how to recognise and commemorate the killings that occurred in 1848-9. In 1970, the Federal Council for the Advancement of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders and the South Australian Aborigines Progress Association (SAAPA) unveiled a plan to build a cairn on the cliffs at Waterloo Bay to 'commemorate a massacre of 250 Aboriginal people by white settlers in 1846' (The Advertiser, cited in Foster, Hosking and Nettlebeck, 2001, p. 69). It was reportedly intended that the cairn would be part of a national mourning campaign by Aboriginal people, timed to coincide with the bicentenary of the landing of Captain James Cook at Botany Bay in New South Wales in 1770. The Chair of the District Council of Elliston reportedly stated that the Council would agree to the cairn being built if 'it could be proved that the massacre took place' (The Advertiser, cited in Foster, Hosking and Nettlebeck, 2001, p. 69). As such evidence was not available the cairn was not built. Instead, in December 1971, a plaque in memory of John Hamp, marking the site of his death, was unveiled by the deputy Chair of the Elliston District Council. In addition, granite cairns were built and tin plates erected at several sites relating to the killings of Captain Beevor and Annie Eaton (Foster, Hosking and Nettlebeck, 2001).

The question of how these events would be memorialised arose again in 2012 with the proposed development of a coastal trail by the Elliston Council. The Council sought support from the Wirangu community, who have a Native Title claim over the land on which the coastal trail is located. The coastal trail was completed in seven months but it wasn't until 2017 there was an agreement on a monument. Part of the condition of the government funding acquired for the trail was a Reconciliation Monument, 'intended to symbolise the current generation's recognition of past wrongs against the original inhabitants of this land during settlement' (District Council of Elliston, 2017, p. 3).

However, the wording for the monument became highly contested, in particular, whether it would include a reference to a 'massacre' at Waterloo Bay. A Council report at the time noted that 'there is resistance within some elements of the community to using the word massacre' as a result of the 'absence of definite proof' to describe what happened as a massacre (District Council of Elliston, 2017, p. 3).

The debate over the wording on the monument caused significant tension in the local community. As a journalist described it, 'In a remote town of a few hundred people — mostly farmers, small business owners and itinerant surfers — the debate over the monument's message turned neighbors into enemies, shifted power in the local government and poisoned even the most routine interactions' (Cave, 2018). However, in September 2017 wording was agreed to at a Council meeting, which sought to recognise both the contestation around the violence that occurred in the 1840s, as well as the possibility of reconciliation. In 2018 the monument was erected on a cliff near the site of the killings. It consists of two granite plinths, each over two metres tall, between which is a small boulder with a plaque on it that reads:

> *This monument commemorates an incident, referred to by the traditional owners of this land as "The Massacre of Waterloo Bay". A large number of Aboriginal people were killed near this site in May, 1849 by a party of settlers.*
>
> *Waterloo Bay is a significant site in the history of frontier conflict between traditional owners and settlers, often resulting in the destruction of traditional family life.*
>
> *This memorial promotes a new spirit of reconciliation, helping to forge a renewed and healing sense of community through tolerance and understanding*

The former mayor of Elliston, Kym Callaghan, played a central role in negotiations around the monument, which finally led to a degree of community consensus. He was awarded the Order of Australia in 2021 in recognition of his service to local government and the Elliston community. The project also earned the Council a Promoting Indigenous Recognition award at the National Local Government Awards in 2018 (Delaney, 2021). Callaghan explained that it was only after months of meetings with people both for and against the wording and the Wirangu community that the Council felt comfortable voting on the wording. 'At the time we made sure everyone had an opportunity to say their piece and hear from the Wirangu and it wasn't easy but that's democracy' (Barnes, 2018). Veda Betts, 76, a Wirangu Elder, whose grandmother told her how she met a woman who said she had survived the 1849 attack as a child by hanging onto a branch on the side of the cliffs, commented, 'It's progress but we need for more of this to happen. Everywhere' (Cave, 2018).

RECOGNISING ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER SOVEREIGNTY, SELF-DETERMINATION AND AGENCY

Introduction

This section explores the way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have sought, through truth-telling, to assert and claim their continuing sovereignty and the increasing recognition by non-Indigenous communities of this sovereignty. The recognition of First Nations sovereignty has remained a contested question in Australia and has been seen by some as a fundamental challenge to the integrity of the nation-state. However, First Nations Australians have articulated a much more complex and nuanced conception of sovereignty, grounded in deep attachment to place and care of Country. The Uluru Statement from the Heart explicitly locates the call for truth as part of a political process founded on a recognition of the 'sacred' nature of First Nations sovereignty, which 'has never been ceded or extinguished' but which 'co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown' (Uluru Statement from the Heart, 2017).

The examples below concern community-level recognition and celebration of this ongoing sovereignty by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Island communities. These include the annual commemoration of the historic Mabo decision overturning the doctrine of terra nullius and recognising Aboriginal and Torre Strait Islander land rights and the annual Freedom Day festival in the Northern Territory, which commemorates the ground-breaking Gurindji, Mudburra and Warlpiri peoples' 'walk-off' from the Wave Hill cattle station, led by Vincent Lingiari, which sparked the land rights movement prior to the Mabo decision.

Renaming the geography of Australia, whether island, cove or electorate, to contest the inscription of the colonial legacy in Australia's physical and descriptive landscape is another important way in which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities have achieved recognition of their ongoing sovereignty. Here we describe the campaigns of communities at Risdon, K'gari, Batman and Moreland. In Risdon, the renaming of Risdon Cove, site of the first recorded massacre in Tasmania, as piyura kitina, meaning 'little native hen', was associated with the reclamation of the land at Risdon Cove through Native Title and the ongoing assertion of self-determination on this land. In Victoria, there have been two significant renaming initiatives. Activism by Wurundjeri Elders led to the renaming of the Moreland City Council, whose name was associated with a Jamaican slave planation linked to the colonial landowner and speculator Farquhar MaCrae. It became Merri-bek City Council. Also in Victoria, the Batman electorate, previously named after the colonial official Batman, who was accused of involvement in the massacre of Aboriginal people in Tasmania, has now been renamed after the Yorta Yorta Aboriginal leader William Cooper. In Queensland, Fraser Island, which was named after a Scottish couple who falsely defamed the Butchulla community, has been renamed K'gari. These campaigns have, in some instances, been waged over decades, in order to ensure that symbols of colonial domination and violation are replaced with names that meaningfully honour Country and First Nations. Through these community initiatives Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities across the country are finding innovative ways to assert personal and political sovereignty and self-determination within the context of the settler-colonial state.

1. Interview Case Study: Freedom Day festival, Northern Territory

Every August, people from across Australia gather on Gurindji country in the Northern Territory for the Freedom Day Festival, which celebrates the 'Wave Hill walk-off' of 23 August 1966, when 200 Gurindji, Mudburra and Warlpiri workers and their families walked off Lord Vestey's Wave Hill Cattle Station in protest against the work and pay conditions. Stockmen at Vestey's received far lower wages than non-Indigenous workers or were paid in rations of salt beef, flour, sugar, tea and tobacco. Aboriginal women working as domestic servants were rarely, if ever, paid wages and Aboriginal families lived in tin sheds on the property (Phillips, 2016). As importantly, the stockmen and their families wanted their traditional lands returned to them in order to establish a pastoral operation and community run under Aboriginal leadership. This model, combining Aboriginal autonomy and land rights, helped shaped Australian government policy following the 1967 referendum, which granted new powers to the Commonwealth government to make laws for Aboriginal people. The Gurindji were the first Aboriginal community to have land returned to them by the Commonwealth Government (Australian Heritage Database, 2007).

Led by Vincent Lingiari, this action sparked the national land rights movement, culminating in the historic return of land at Dagaragu (formerly Wattie Creek) to the Gurindji people by Prime Minister Whitlam in 1975 after an eight-year campaign, supported by non-Indigenous people, including unionists. This finally led to the creation of a land rights act [Land Rights Act 1976 (NT)]. The iconic image of Whitlam pouring sand into Vincent Lingari's hand at Dagaragu continues to be a potent symbol of the struggle for land rights and self-determination, despite the fact that many of the hopes for meaningful self-determination at Dagaragu that Vincent Lingari initially envisaged have not yet been realised (Hope, 2016; Abram, 2018). A commemorative plaque marks this site. The song by Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody 'From Little Things Big Things Grow', initially released in 1991, about these events has helped raise popular awareness of the story (Abram, 2018).

The Wave Hill walk-off has been consistently celebrated over approximately 40 years, since 1983, when Gurundji Elders were reportedly encouraged to stage a re-enactment of the walk-off by the non-Indigenous activist Stan Davey, to restore some of the early pride created by the walk-off and subsequent campaign for land rights. The first Freedom Day, held on 23 August 1983, was reportedly so popular that the Kalkaringi and Dagaragu communities were deserted – everyone being 'at the river or on the track' (Ward, 2016, p. 288).

The 50th anniversary of the walk-off in 2016 was marked by significant celebrations, with approximately 5000 people participating in three days of music and cultural events, and was attended by a number of high-profile politicians, including the leader of the Labor opposition, Bill Shorten. The celebrations begin with a re-enactment of the walk-off; the route has been a heritage site since 2007. New signage for the route, which begins at Jinparrak (Old Wave Hill Station) and ends at the gravesite of leader Vincent Lingiari, was unveiled on the 50th anniversary of the walk-off, after it had been upgraded in conjunction with the University of Melbourne. Selma Smiler, the granddaughter of Lingiari, addressed the crowd at this celebration saying, 'He's a legend among Aboriginal people and Torres Strait Islanders … I'm very proud to be part of his bloodline even though people always ask what it's like growing up in his shadow. I'm a very proud granddaughter' (Davidson, 2016).

Gus George, one of the stockmen who walked off the Wave Hill cattle station with Vincent Lingiari, explains his experience there and the reasons for the walk-off:

> *I was working there in '66. I was working in the station, stock camp. And I get the rations and all that … looked after cattle work and all that … We had no showers, or something like that in the house or water. That's why we strike, […], well, better ways to [live] … I was get paid about maybe $50 a month … And the rations, that was that. (Personal interview, 18 March 2022)*

He describes his response to Whitlam's visit and the subsequent establishment of Dagaragu:

> *Yeah, that that was a good thing … when Whitlam was coming up for the sand … We was happy, we gonna get the station back … I was happy … After we walked off, we was waiting for the station … to get the land back. And then when we get the land back, we come back and move to this [place] and start that. All working there. (Personal interview, 18 March 2022)*

He feels that the ongoing commemoration of the events is important for future generations, 'We get the land back … and we celebrating to show the young people, that's what we celebrate when we get the land back. That's why we do that every year' (Personal interview, 18 March 2022). Therefore it is important to, 'keep the Freedom Day going on, and we get the young people from the school and other people from the other states, might be overseas [people] and they come' (Personal interview, 18 March 2022).

> “It’s not just about the story being out there so that people can have respect, it’s about then the flow on effect of that on the people who you know are affected by the increase in respect that occurs in the broader population.”

Freedom Day Event

Gurindji Aboriginal Corporation Coordinator, Traditional Owner and Community Liaison Rob Roy explains how the annual commemoration began as a small community event ('We had community barbeque down there, a lot of dancing') at the Victoria River in what is now the township of Kalkaringi, where the group who walked off established their first camp (Personal interview, 18 March 2022). Echoing the words of Paul Kelly and Kev Carmody's song – 'from little things big things grow' – Rob Roy describes how the celebration gradually grew over time, 'every time we went down and celebrated the walk-off with dancing, barbeque, it sort of became like, "Alright. This actually feels good" cause a lot of people started coming in' (Personal interview, 18 March 2022). The popularity of the Northern Territory Barunga and Garma festivals inspired the Gurindji community to continue developing their festival. Over time, the story of the festival was more widely publicised in the media, 'so they come out every year and the story spread and it just grew from there' (Personal interview, R Roy, 18 March 2022).

It was with the launch of the Gurindji Aboriginal Corporation and in particular when it was awarded Native Title over Kalkaringi in 2014 that the Corporation was able to focus on developing the Freedom Day festival into a major public event. One of the current organisers of the festival argues that the festival has tried to balance an emphasis on the self-determination of the Gurindji people, which was epitomised by the walk-off, with a desire to share the story about the collaboration between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people that took place around the walk-off:

> *The Gurindji story, the story of the walk-off, is very much – it is the Gurindji people and the Aboriginal people, but it's also the white fellas that came and supported them, the union members … and the like. So there's a real bonding there and I think that's an important part of the story too … And what's important to the festival now is to bring people in from other places to come and celebrate with the Gurindji people. (Personal interview, 12 April 2022)*

At first it was difficult to raise funds for the festival. Rob Roy explains, 'Like Mr. Lingiari, we had no bank balance and we had no office – our dirt was our office' (Personal interview, 18 March 2022). However, the Gurindji community persisted, literally knocking on the doors of government officials to seek funding:

> *They were kind of hesitant at first, but that was over the phone … they don't know who they're talking to. Let's surprise them with a door knock. And that we did. 'Ooooh, you're here!… I spoke to you last week." "Yeah, I know, but you weren't listening." You know, that sort of reaction. [laughter] (Personal interview, 18 March 2022)*

As the event takes place in a remote environment, it is expensive to run and poses significant logistical challenges; therefore, funding remains an ongoing challenge. Despite the significance of the events the festival commemorates, the local community is expected to fund and organise it, unlike the considerable support given to events surrounding the ANZACs. As one community organiser put it, 'It is kind of similar to like an ANZAC Day-type of event, that we're … expecting the ANZACs to pay for Anzac Day in this situation – the Gurindji … it falls with them (Personal interview, 12 April 2022). While the organisers continue to seek ongoing committed funding, the 'ultimate vision … as for the Gurindji community as a whole, is that self-determination and not having to rely on going to government for support' (Personal interview, Community organiser, 12 April 2022).

In 2014, when the Federal Court made a Native Title determination over the Township of Kalkaringi, with Gurindji Aboriginal Corporation becoming the Prescribed Body Corporate (PBC), this gave the Corporation power in terms of local decision-making, and they took over the running of Freedom Day. This local control over the festival has been important and is reflective of the broader aspiration of the Gurindji for self-determination. As an organiser explains:

> *It's local people making their own decisions. And taking control back … a lot of those false starts that happened back in the day … the Gurindji Corp, is now the real, in my opinion, it's Lingiari's vision of living on our land – our way is actually sort of really coming true in lots of ways. It's still a difficult journey, but, yeah, that's the way I see it at least. (Personal interview, 12 April 2022)*

Since then, marketing and advertising has increased to the point where festival turnover is approximately half a million dollars, and around 5 000 people attend. Rob Roy is proud of his activities as activist and lobbyist, 'I go up to Darwin and ask the big man up there, to give us some money, yeah, so. To make sure we put in a good show every year and every year we do' (Personal interview, 18 March 2022). A number of significant politicians have attended the event. Rob Roy jokes that he gave Bill Shorten (at the time the head of the Labor Party) a job, 'so he started working for us … soon as he got off the plane at the airport, I said, "Can you get those boxes please and put them in the car?" Oh – good on him' (Personal interview, 18 March 2022).

Most important, however, is the impact that the growth of the festival has on knowledge of the events surrounding the Wave Hill walk-off:

> *It's growing in regards to what visitors we got and what knowledge that they've got to tell, and how do they actually remember what took place 56 years ago now … It's good to share to people who don't know the history of Australia properly yet, you know. (Personal interview, R Roy, 18 March 2022)*

As Rob Roy notes, the events at Wave Hill 'did change the face of Australia, what happened here'. This is something that he feels both Indigenous and non-Indigenous communities need to be more aware of. Therefore, the festival is a 'very educational experience' (Personal interview, 18 March 2022).

One of the organisers of the festival explains the importance that the Gurindji community place on this educative element of the events:

> *The Gurindji people and the Elders of the walk-off and the family of Vincent Lingiari … they're all just so incredibly focused on making sure that that story gets told year on year. It's currently taught in school curriculums and that sort of thing, and I know that's a huge source of pride … to know that that story is being told. (Personal interview, 12 April 2022)*

It also generates a significant amount of local community pride about the national and historic impact that the Wave Hill walk-off had on Australian society:

> *It's a magical moment each year to happen for the community, and it's a real moment of pride and … telling their story to a broader audience because … in my experience, all the people I've met out there are so proud of the Gurindji story and their role in sort of changing the nation. You know, land rights was established out of that and a whole bunch of other stuff came about from that and I think, culturally in Australia that really changed people's mindset around Aboriginal people, and you know where they stand in society, so I think that they're incredibly proud. (Personal interview, Community organiser, 12 April 2022)*

Rob Roy explains:

> *The atmosphere is just filled with mixed emotion, right throughout the weekend. You know, a bit of pride, bit of happiness … even though many of the old people passed … They all gone now, but they're probably all gone smiling … knowing that what they've left behind, and we became who we are because of Vincent Lingiari and 200 men and women that walked off back in the day. Yeah, mixed emotion, but you know, the atmosphere fills with joy and laughter and a bit of pride … And it's good to share that, it's good. (Personal interview, 18 March 2022)*

Telling this story is an important part of truth-telling because it is an inspirational story about overcoming social injustice:

> *It's an iconic story of … David and Goliath kind of thing, where Lingiari and the other stockmen stood up to the powers that be and said, you know, enough is enough. Yeah, I think it's a really powerful story. And the truth-telling process, I think there's definitely a strong element of reconciliation there, too, around the white fellow and black fellow uniting as one, and how that story was won through those people, those different people coming together and sort of working towards the cause. (Personal interview, Community organiser, 12 April 2022)*

The organiser adds:

> *You know the song 'From Little Things Big Things Grow'? I mean most Australians will know the words, but they probably, a lot won't know what's behind that. And I think, hopefully that can, it can grow and people can understand the story more and more because I think it's a story that all Australians can probably rally around. (Personal interview, Community organiser, 12 April 2022)*

Rob Roy feels that it's also important to tell the broader, more violent truth of the Gurindji story:

> *Up in the Nhulunbuy area you've got a lot of untold stories … Whether it's genocide and whether it's massacres that's never been told what really happened. Truth, you got to tell the truth otherwise we're not going to be a great nation. If we don't tell the truth and try to work and live with it somehow, you know. You can't hide things forever because … it's just gonna hurt you inside and cripple you again. (Personal interview, 18 March 2022)*

If the massacres are kept secret, 'what's the use in celebrating anything that you want to share in love with others?' (Personal interview, R Roy, 18 March 2022). The first step has been sharing these difficult stories with the next generation. 'We've started telling the kids here. We started saying yes, we did have a lot of massacres here back in the days. And it's good to be told, it's good for that to be told' (Personal interview, R Roy, 18 March 2022). This telling of the truth about the past helps to create understanding of the challenges of the present and also the possibility of change. 'We're still fighting systemic racism in the NT especially, you know with … what's happening now with the courts and the shootings and all that sort of stuff. That doesn't have to be, just because it is' (Personal interview, R Roy, 18 March 2022).

Rob Roy sees hope in truth for new levels of understanding and a better life for all Australians:

> *People will know, people will be able talk about it. You know and … Hey, you never know it could make peace and we could all live together properly, you know, in Australia with everybody not being too much of ignorant all the time. (Personal interview, 18 March 2022)*

For him, this engagement needs to start small. For example, catching barramundi together at the festival can open up significant conversations:

> *Little things like that can make big talks, hey? You know some telling the truth, getting it out there. You win something every day, you win people everyday, at least, that's what I like to think of it, you know. (Personal interview, 18 March 2022)*

Conclusion

It seems appropriate that such a significant event as one of Australia's longest strikes, which led to the passing of the Aboriginal Land Rights Act 1976 (NT), should be commemorated by a large festival with attendees from all over Australia. The remarkable persistence and resilience of the original participants in the walk-off from the Wave Hill cattle station is reflected in the determination of the Gurindji community to keep recognising and celebrating this historic expression of sovereignty and self-determination over approximately 40 years, with small-scale celebrations of the walk-off beginning in the 1980s. The event started as a modest grass-roots celebration initiated by Elders who wanted to ensure that younger Gurindji knew the story of how their community, Dagaragu, came to be. This mission to educate young Gurindji about the struggle for self-determination, and to now share this knowledge with a much wider and increasingly non-Indigenous audience, is a remarkable feature of the festival. Despite its remote location, the event has grown into a major national event attended by federal and state politicians and well-known musicians from around the country. In the history of both the original event, and the growth of the festival, the fact that the Gurindji have been strategic in accessing appropriate support, on their terms, from non-Indigenous Australians has contributed substantially to their successes.

2. Interview Case Study: Renaming of Moreland municipality to Merri-bek, Victoria

Introduction

On 26 September 2022, the Moreland City Council was renamed Merri-bek, after a ten-month engagement process.

The Council argued that the name change was part of its commitment to reconciliation and truth-telling after it was made aware of the link between the name 'Moreland' and a Jamaican slave plantation associated with the relatives of doctor and land speculator Farquhar McCrae, who acquired a large swathe of land in 1839 in what is now Merri-bek. This acquisition dispossessed many Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung communities of their land, which they had occupied for thousands of years. The Council therefore argued that, 'The name 'Moreland' is linked to 2 examples of racism: global slavery … and the dispossession of Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people of the land we live on today' (Moreland City Council, 2022, p. 8). Uncle Andrew Gardiner, Wurundjeri Elder and Deputy Chair of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, explains the dispossession experienced by Wurundjeri communities as a result of the acquisitions of land speculators such as Farquhar McCrae:

> *In less than 2 years, most of the current city area was declared the private property of just 29 men. This destroyed our civilisation that had been in harmony with this country for tens of thousands of years. With our culture and community shattered, echoes of this devastation still reverberate today. (Moreland City Council, 2022, p. 9)*

Moreland Councillor Adam Pulford described the name change as an 'act of reconciliation with traditional owners'. He explained, 'When we learned our community's name is tied to the history of racism, slavery and dispossession, we had a decision to make: Do we keep tied to that history? Or do we move forward with a name that is more inclusive, that honours the traditional owners of this place and connects us to our history dating back tens of thousands of years.' He continued, 'Language matters. The names we choose for things matters. It dictates the stories we tell and the values we hold, so it was an important decision to change it when the traditional owners raised it' (Associated Press and Kolovos, 2022).

The name change was not uncontested as the Council did not consult with the community about whether the name of Moreland would change, but rather engaged in public consultation about three alternative names chosen by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, subsequent to a decision at a Council meeting in December 2021 that the name would be changed. After the name had been changed the Council received a petition, reportedly signed by more than 1400 people 'demanding it revisit the consultation process for renaming the municipality' (Dexter, 2022). The Council responded by arguing that:

> *The decision to recommend renaming Moreland City Council follows a broad community engagement process, with record numbers of Moreland residents participating and a majority supporting the name Merri-bek. Following the community engagement process, the elected Council voted by majority to recommend the renaming. The community engagement process was robust and appropriate. (Moreland City Council, 2022a)*

Timeline of the process

The process began when the office of Council CEO Cathy Henderson was contacted by a community member on 15 October 2021 on behalf of Elders from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation and community members. The community member requested a meeting with the CEO and Mayor to 'alert them to a matter of significant concern involving the City … a confronting example of ingrained racism of historic origin relating to the City that involves ongoing insensitivity' (Moreland City Council, 2021, p. 6). It was clear that the CEO and Mayor took this matter extremely seriously.

A meeting took place on 19 November 2021, attended by newly inaugurated Mayor, Mark Riley; the CEO, Cathy Henderson; and Eamonn Fennessy, Director Community at Merri-bek City Council. They were presented with a Letter of Request signed by a number of members of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, including its Deputy Chair, Uncle Andrew Gardiner. The Letter of Request had also been signed by several leading local community members, including the former president of the Uniting Church, a former councillor and former MP. The letter made an explicit link to reconciliation and truth-telling:

> *The undersigned, representing the traditional owners of the land - the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people, and citizens of the municipality, offer support and encouragement to Council to utilise re-naming of the Council as an opportunity to complement the current spirit of truth-telling and reconciliation, embracing this change as a timely platform for awareness-raising, acknowledgement and healing. (Moreland City Council, 2021a)*

The letter requested Council to make a commitment to:

- partner with stakeholders in a respectful process to select a suitable new name during 2022
- initiate and implement actions that acknowledge the impacts and consequences of dispossession, encourage respectful understanding through truth-telling, redress injustice and heal racist hurt (Moreland City Council, 2021a)

Attending the meeting from the community were four Elders from the Wurundjeri community and the former leader of the Uniting Church, as well as the former MP and former councillor who had signed the Letter of Request and a Merri-bek resident who was instrumental in organising the approach to the Council. Director Eamonn Fennessy describes the group as 'a really interesting group that came to us. It wasn't just the Wurundjeri, it was a coalition, quite a diverse group of people' (Personal interview, 15 March 2023). He explains the impact of the meeting: 'It was a pretty profound unveiling of an issue' (Personal interview, 15 March 2023). CEO Cathy Henderson also outlines this impact: 'Those of us representing the Council that were at that meeting … we all felt the import and the weight of the words from the Elders that were there' (Personal interview, 14 April 2023). At the meeting, 'the Elders set out the history about the name of Moreland and why it was racist and offensive' (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2023). The Council leadership was presented with information about the historical process of dispossession in the area and how this was associated with the name Moreland.

Cathy Henderson explains:

> *Community members had researched things … showing the dispossession of First Nations people and how quickly it happened in the late 1830s and 1840s, and showing the parcels of land in what was then Moreland and how they'd been so quickly sold over just a few years to Farquhar McCrae. (Personal interview, 14 April 2023)*

The community members argued that:

> *It's not tenable for a Council that represents a couple of hundred thousand people with a huge commitment to diversity and inclusion and great work on anti-racism and supporting asylum seekers and also working in the reconciliation space to retain the name Moreland. It's untenable for you to retain a name … drenched in racism and associated … with global slavery and local dispossession. (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2023)*

The Council representatives were also given 'a very clear request from the delegation and absolutely from the Wurundjeri Elders that Council move pretty quickly to consider changing our name in 2022' (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2023). According to Rod Duncan, who helped organise the meeting, the strategy of the group was on the one hand to ensure that the Council recognised the problem that the Moreland name represented but also to offer solutions on the way forward. 'We went in there and said, "You've got a problem and we are here to help you solve that problem"' (Personal interview, 11 April 2023). Linked to the request to change the name of the Council was a request to organise a process of truth-telling and education. The Wurundjeri Elders asked the Council to 'tell the community the story of dispossession of our lands and what impact that has had and continues to have on our people today' (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2023).

It is clear that the Council leadership felt compelled to respond to the information and request that had been presented to them. As Cathy Henderson explains, 'I very much felt that in terms of the history of Moreland City Council, what Moreland stood for was diversity and inclusion. And to be standing behind a racist name was uncomfortable and felt like something that needed to be addressed' (Personal interview, 14 April 2023).

The request that had been made was further bolstered by a website, 'NoMoreland' that had been set up with historical information that was ready to go live to the public, which included detailed information about the link between the name Moreland and a Jamaican slave plantation. Rod Duncan explains, 'So we had a website, independent of Council, a website that had all the evidence … and after the meeting I said, this is going live this afternoon and this is the information it's got on it' (Personal interview, 11 April 2023). Associated with the website was a Change.org petition. Rod Duncan outlines the role that he feels this played in supporting the name change process:

> *So we're able to give people, firstly, the members of the public, the capacity to feel they were part of it by popping their name on the change.org petition, and then give the supportive Councilors the gravitas to be able to use that in their case that thousands of people are supporting this. (Personal interview, 11 April 2023)*

Eamonn Fennessy outlines the impact that the website had on the sense of urgency with which the Council needed to respond to the request from the community group: 'We had to move relatively quickly because this group that had come to us said, "look, we've got a website, we're going live with it. We'll probably talk to the media". So we needed to formulate our advice quickly' (Personal interview, 15 March 2023).

The Council representatives undertook to take the information and request for a name change to a Council meeting where a decision could be formally made. Cathy Henderson explains, 'We wanted to signal our openness to listening to the Elders and our openness to working with them' (Personal interview, 14 April 2023). The CEO and the Community Director worked on a report for a special meeting of Council that took place on 13 December 2021, which recommended the Council, 'support in principle changing the name of Moreland and co-design a community consultation process to take place in 2022 to support truth telling and reconciliation, and to choose a new name' (Moreland City Council, 2021, p. 8). A decision to support the name change was made at the Council meeting.

Linked to the recommendation to change the name of the municipality was a recommendation for a process of truth-telling and reconciliation:

> *It is also proposed to open a conversation with the community on the impacts and consequences of dispossession and racism and encourage respectful understanding through a program of education, truth telling and reconciliation. (Moreland City Council, 2021, p. 9)*

The willingness of Council to respond to the approach of the community group was also informed by the 'Statement of Commitment to Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung People and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Communities of the City of Moreland' that the Council had signed with Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders in October 2021, which formally set out the Council's vision for reconciliation. This included a commitment by the Council to build collaborative and respectful partnerships with Traditional Owners and to 'seek to include Woi-wurrung names in the process of naming and renaming spaces, places, roads and parks in the City of Moreland' (Moreland City Council, no date).

The Council faced considerable opposition from some members of the community as a result of its decision not to take the decision whether to change the name to the public for their input. As Eamonn Fennessy acknowledges, 'there was a lot of attacking of the process' (Personal interview, 15 March 2023). Those who opposed the name change primarily did so on two grounds – that the historical link of the name Moreland with a slave plantation in Jamaica could not be proved and that there would be significant economic implications to the name change. According to CEO Cathy Henderson, 'Our usual habit and our usual protocol with significant changes, including significant symbolic changes, would be to consult the community before coming to a decision' (Personal interview, 14 April 2023). However, in this instance it was felt that there could be significant negative consequences to opening up the decision as to whether to change the name of Moreland to community consultation that recalled some of the negative impact on vulnerable communities elicited by the marriage equality debate that took place nationally in 2017.

In this instance, the CEO argued that consulting about whether a name change should occur:

> *would be tantamount to having a community consultation process on whether it's okay to have a racist name. Or, if it wasn't that it would be on whether the name of a slave plantation is or is not inherently racist. Both of those were topics for consultation that we thought would be traumatic and harmful to engage on, and wouldn't advance community engagement with reconciliation, wouldn't advance community understanding, but would probably result in hurt and trauma, both to First Nations people, but really to others in the community as well. (Personal interview, 14 April 2023)*

This decision was also guided by Council policy and values:

> *We were guided very much by what Council stands for in terms of its policy, its Council plan, and our Statement of Commitment, which was really clear about what we were partnering in with Traditional Owners and how we support not only Traditional Owners, but our local people from all First Nations communities. And then we looked at our policy around social inclusion and against racism, and it was really clear … that it was untenable to go out to the community and say, look, we've got this name, we know this terrible truth about it, should we keep it? (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2023)*

Eamonn Fennessy explains further:

> *I think the phrase we used was 'there are some questions that you just shouldn't ask'. And asking the community should we retain our existing name, which we know to be racist, was not a question that we felt in any way we should ask of the community, given the diversity of our community and the ramifications of that on so many people, not just First Nations people, but people of all sorts of backgrounds. It was just untenable that we prosecute that question. (Personal interview, 15 March 2023)*

While the decision was informed by the Council's values and desire not to cause harm to First Nations and other communities, it is clear that there were political risks in this decision and not all community members would understand why there had not been consultation on whether the name would change. It is evident that local councils who take on potentially contested processes such as a name change face a range of potential challenges. As Eamonn Fennessy outlines, 'It flushes the issue into the public realm and it can be incredibly hard for local government and for elected officials' (Personal interview, 15 March 2023). In Merri-bek some local government officials 'got some pretty awful racist sort of feedback from some people, but it showed the impact that this level of government can have' (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2023). Therefore, 'it takes a Council that's really committed to things. And I think if you've got bold commitments to things in policy or in partnerships, you have to stick by them' (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2023).

Despite these difficulties, what the Merri-bek case makes clear is that local government is in a unique position to facilitate processes of engagement with local history and this can have a powerful impact. 'I think there's something in terms of the very place-based nature of local government, its connection to Traditional Owners and the importance of doing the right thing, which we heard again and again from people' (Personal interview, E Fennessy,15 March 2023). CEO Cathy Henderson also underlines the important role that local councils can play in truth-telling and reconciliation in partnership with Traditional Owners, 'because local councils are … closest to the community, but also have really strong responsibilities for land … so the relationship to Country and the custodianship and ownership of Country by Traditional Owners deeply relates to the work of local councils. So there's some powerful work to be done' (Personal interview, 14 April 2023).

While the Council was convinced by the initial evidence presented to them about the association of the name Moreland with a Jamaican slave plantation, there were some within the community that did not accept the historical veracity of this link. Historian James Lesh was commissioned by the Council following the decision to change its name and did detailed research into the connection between the name 'Moreland' and a Jamaican slave plantation.

He found that the name Moreland, 'has associational and financial links to eighteenth-and nineteenth-century Caribbean slave plantations' (2022, p. 2) and specifically that the accounts in McCrae family evidence show, 'associational *links* between "Moreland" in Melbourne and "Moreland" in Jamaica' (2022, p. 4., original emphasis). The name Moreland was given to the property that Scottish settler, doctor and land speculator Farquhar McCrae acquired in 1839 in the area's first colonial land sales. The land, which was later expanded by further land purchases, comprised over 600 acres between present day Moonee Ponds Creek and Sydney Road (Lesh, 2022). Farquhar McCrae's paternal grandfather, Alexander McCrae, made a considerable fortune through the proceeds of the Moreland Estate in Jamaica, which, like similar plantations in the Caribbean at the time, used slave labour to produce sugar, molasses, rum and other products. While Alexander did not own the plantation, his close association with its owner, William Harvie, including his marriage to William's sister, ensured that he became an 'elite and wealthy member of Jamaican colonial society; his status and his money produced from the Moreland Estate' (Lesh, 2022, p. 14).

Although Farquhar McCrae did not receive a substantial inheritance from his grandfather's estate, he was well aware of this history and, according to Lesh, used the name Moreland to claim 'prestige and distinction by invoking his family's Jamaican colonial heritage' (2022, p. 2). The money that paid for Farquhar's property acquisition in Melbourne came from his father in-law and uncle, John Morison, who was also associated with the slave trade and had acquired his wealth from the Windsor Castle Estate in Jamaica (Lesh, 2022). Thus, 'the extraordinary wealth produced on slave plantation estates – from sugar, tobacco, cotton, indigo, and rum for European consumption – was ultimately transferred back to Britain and its colonies including Australia' (Lesh, 2022, p. 13). The abolition of slavery in the 1830s coincided with the intensification of colonisation in places such as Australia. As a result, Lesh argues, 'Financial proceeds from the declining plantation industry were invested in mid-nineteenth-century Australia and its new colonial cities such as Melbourne and Adelaide' (2022, p.13). The name Moreland, which endured into the 21st century, is part of this historical legacy.

> "The names we choose for things matters. It dictates the stories we tell and the values we hold, so it was an important decision to change it when the Traditional Owners raised it."

The City of Moreland is a relatively recent municipal boundary and was created in 1994 as a result of the amalgamation of the former Cities of Coburg and Brunswick under the Kennett Liberal government. At the time of the amalgamation, residents were surveyed about a possible name for the new municipality. Moreland was proposed as one of several possibilities and received the most support from a community survey. The name Moreland was familiar to residents as it had been used locally for more than 150 years to name Moreland Station and Moreland Road (Lesh, 2022).

There appears to be some contestation about the degree to which there was community and particularly, political, awareness of the association between the name Moreland and a Jamaican slave plantation. James Lesh states unequivocally that, 'These associational links have been on the public record for the last century, including when the City of Moreland was named in 1994' (2022, p. 4). Critically, however, although 'residents, historians, and members of the McCrae family informed the community of the historical links to the Jamaican plantation' (Lesh, 2022, p. 19), the link to slavery was not made explicit. It is only through the intervention of the community group who approached the Council that this link was problematised and a request for redress made. The responsiveness of the Council to this request has to be seen in the context of growing local and global awareness of the harm and exclusion created by place names that continue to revere various aspects of colonial history, as part of a country's symbolic landscape in the contemporary context. Including First Nations place names is seen as a way both to acknowledge and address the harm of colonisation and dispossession by recognising First Nations contributions to local and national Australian identity.

For Rod Duncan, the obscuring of the link between the name Moreland and slavery is not benign and is part of the construction of a 20th century mythology about the origins of the Australian nation-state that played out at a local level. 'The amount of cleansing the story went through, probably in the early 20th century, has not been undone' (Personal interview, 11 April 2023). He argues that prior to the amalgamation, the association of the name 'Moreland' with slavery was reported in the local media. However, when the community survey later took place there was no mention of this association.

CEO Cathy Henderson and Director Eamonn Fennessy use the term 'hidden in plain sight' to explain the way in which it was widely 'known' that there was a link between the name Moreland and a Jamaican estate but that the nature of that estate had remained unremarked in public discourse over the 27 years of the Moreland Council's existence:

> *I do not believe there was wide understanding that Moreland was named after a slave estate. I think that some people in the community, including some former Councillors and Mayors, had an understanding that Moreland was named after a Jamaican estate that was a slave estate. But I wasn't aware of that … I think we refer to it kind of as a bit hidden in plain sight. In retrospect, I'd seen the sign, which said, Moreland is named after a Jamaican estate, and really a Jamaican estate from the 18th or 19th centuries is almost certainly going to be … an estate that's involved in slavery and making money out of slavery … But I think for the Council and for most community, and for me and for most staff, it wasn't something we were aware of. (Personal interview, C Henderson, 14 April 2023)*

Eamonn Fennessy outlines that while there had apparently been some knowledge of the association of Moreland with slavery in the 90s, it 'didn't gain traction' and was 'dismissed' (Personal interview, 15 March 2023). It wasn't until the approach by the community group and Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders in November 2021 that the association with slavery and the link to Wurundjeri dispossession in a local context was explicitly problematised and a request for change made. Eamonn Fennessy emphasises, 'It certainly was the first time it had been raised in that way to Council in living memory' (Personal interview, 15 March 2023).

Co-design process

After an agreement had been secured at the special Council meeting in December that the name would be changed and that the Council would work together with stakeholders to co-design a process to find a new name, a process of regular engagement took place which built trust and relationships between the Council and Elders from the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation.

Cathy Henderson explains:

> *It was a very rich time of discussion and engagement. I had never spent as much time with Elders as I did during that time, which was a privilege for me. And also really helpful in terms of developing our understanding of what was going on with the name change and what it meant for truth-telling and what it meant for … justice for Traditional Owners and for Aboriginal people. (Personal interview, 14 April 2023)*

The significance of the name change was brought home through these discussions. 'There were moments where the importance of this and the gravity of it were put to us as having the same significance as changing the date [of Australia Day] nationally' (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2023).

The process of engagement built a new level of understanding between the Council and the Wurundjeri Elders who participated. As Rod Duncan explains:

> *Literally we sat down almost every Thursday morning for one hour at least online, chatting. And it was a lot of chatting. There was a lot of talk of football and other irrelevancies, which in fact was really important. It was trust building, it was familiarisation, it was particularly Indigenous Elders being heard and the stuff that slipped out in amongst that. (Personal interview, 11 April 2023)*

The reality of the continuing hardships that Wurundjeri communities face was brought to the fore during the course of discussions. Rod Duncan outlines, 'There's a whole lot of other things going on in these people's lives … and that's the reality of their circumstances' (Personal interview, R Duncan, 11 April 2023).

The trust-building process made it possible to navigate complex negotiations about how the renaming process would work. 'There were times when that was naturally pretty tricky for them and for us, but we sort of forged a way through it' (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2023). Challenges arose particularly in discussion about whether community members would be invited to suggest names for the municipality as part of the engagement process. Cathy Henderson explains, 'This Council has had a history of when we name things, that we invite the community to suggest names' (Personal interview, 14 April 2023).

However:

> *in this case, the Traditional Owners felt very strongly that the new name for the Council should be a Woi-Wurrung name … that was a very difficult process to talk through because it wasn't the usual process. And we knew that some in the community would criticise that they wouldn't have a chance to put forward names earlier in the process. (Personal interview, C Henderson, 14 April, 2023)*

Another central focus of the discussions between the Council representatives and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation was the Elders' request for a truth-telling process to accompany the renaming. Consequently, a community education and truth-telling program of events, forums and information was approved at a Council meeting in March, 'around local Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung history, and why renaming Moreland is an important step towards reconciliation and healing' (Moreland City Council, 2022b, p. 10). It also sought to encourage 'the community to consider the ongoing impacts of past injustices including dispossession and racism' (Moreland City Council, 2022b, p. 11). This community education and truth-telling process was seen as 'critical to raise awareness and guide respectful and informed participation in the renaming process' (Moreland City Council, 2022c, p. 12).

As part of this process there were four public events, including a public screening of an episode of the documentary First Australians showing the dispossession that the Wurundjeri Peoples had experienced in Melbourne, which was requested by Wurundjeri Elders in the discussions with Council about the community engagement process. Cathy Henderson explains, 'We had a screening of that with attendance by Elders, sort of a facilitated discussion at Brunswick Town Hall. And that was quite powerful' (Personal interview, 14 April 2023). Two information sessions at libraries in the area also helped facilitate some public dialogue. Other public engagement included ten stakeholder discussions with a range of local community groups. The public events were accompanied by the distribution of education and publicity materials, including a resource pack for local stakeholders such as schools. In addition, several videos explaining the process were also created, including one in which Uncle Andrew Gardiner, Deputy Chair of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation, presented the proposed names and spoke about the collaborative process with Council (Moreland City Council, 2022c).

Importantly, in their discussions with Council, the Wurundjeri Elders emphasised that they wanted truth-telling to be a partnership, rather than being the sole responsibility of the Wurundjeri community, 'Elders said, we want you to tell this story. And of course it was like, well, can we tell that story? Is it all right if we tell that story? [they said] … you can tell everyone else and we'll help you tell it' (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2023).

Cathy Henderson was aware that truth-telling can exact an emotional and logistical toll on First Nations communities:

> *It was a challenge with working out a programme of truth-telling that relied on First Nations people participating to share their stories of truth, which is both a really generous act, but also is burdensome in terms of time. Because as we know, Elders have a lot of commitments, but also in terms of emotional commitment because telling, telling stories is very powerful, but it's also an emotional ask as well. (Personal interview, 14 April 2023)*

In this context, genuine partnership is crucial. 'Obviously you can't really do truth-telling without Traditional Owners involved. And so that does take careful engagement and partnership, I think. And you have to be guided by Traditional Owners' (Personal interview, C Henderson, 14 April 2023).

It also requires ensuring that truth-telling is emotionally and culturally safe:

> *I think care for Elders and First Nations people and everyone involved - on terms that work for them. So just really being conscious that any truth-telling process can involve retraumatising and that it's talking about terrible things and that if you're going to be involved in a process like that, and we have an absolute responsibility to support people in any way that is needed, both First Nations people and others who might be affected as well. (Personal interview, C Henderson, 14 April 2023)*

While truth-telling needs to be a partnership, the Elders emphasised the responsibility of non-Indigenous Australians to continue truth-telling on an ongoing basis:

> *One of the things that Elders said to us towards the end of this process was that we as non-First Nations people needed to do the work. So, where we could, we needed to go out there and be doing the work ourselves. So for instance, one of the Elders encouraged us to guide and tell the story of the renaming because that's part of truth-telling and engagement. (Personal interview, C Henderson, 14 April 2023)*

The public process of engagement began in May with a smoking ceremony and special Council meeting to formally accept and endorse three names chosen by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation. The process was unique because it sought to combine the legal requirement to present the names to Council with First Nations traditions, which included inscribing the names on paper bark and a smoking ceremony. Cathy Henderson explains:

> *The Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Cultural Heritage Aboriginal Corporation … the official body of the Traditional Owners, needed to nominate names to us … they developed a ceremony to give those names to us. And that happened in May. And there'd never quite been a ceremony like this. So there was testing, there was testing of inscribing on paper bark scrolls. (Personal interview, 14 April 2023)*

Rod Duncan explains how Uncle Andrew Gardiner came to his home when he had COVID to remove bark from a tree outside his house in order to practise the inscription on paperbark, 'So Uncle Andrew came down, chopped it off the thing, and then took it home and got the burner, the burner and burnt the alternative names into that' (Personal interview, 11 April 2023). He explains the importance that was attached to this process by Uncle Andrew Gardiner: 'He pushed for this quite strongly. He said, this document, this is a document, historical document, I want it framed in the proper way, as a protected permanent thing on public display' (Personal interview, 11 April 2023). The result was, 'an extraordinary ceremony … It was very moving and very important and uplifting as well. But it was a sad day also because it was acknowledging the terrible dispossession' (Personal interview, C Henderson, 14 April 2023).

Over the next few weeks an intense process of public engagement around the name change and truth-telling unfolded. The process of engagement about the renaming and the association with a slave plantation in Jamaica was inherently also a process of truth-telling about local dispossession. Rod Duncan explains:

> *The number of people who said to me, and presumably to each other, 'I never knew that. I didn't realise that all that land was wiped off'… really what we saw from the beginning … is here is a way to raise awareness of that level and scale and impacts of dispossession that's swept across this area and many others. So that was central, that was really the purpose of the exercise. (Personal interview, 11 April 2023)*

As Cathy Henderson outlines, this understanding of the links between global slavery and local dispossession evolved through the process of sustained engagement with local history elicited by the renaming process:

> *At the beginning, I really thought the racism, that that would be a lot of what we'd be talking about during the process, the racism of slavery and what happened in Jamaica. But as time went on, as we went through the education process and truth-telling, and as we worked with the Elders, that was a part of it. But it was really the core of what we were doing was trying to acknowledge what happened as a dispossession in the 1830s and 1840s, and to celebrate the continuing living culture and the amazing culture that is the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung people. (Personal interview, 14 April 2023)*

While the story of how the name of Moreland was linked to a slave plantation in Jamaica may have been complex for some people to grasp, for Eamonn Fennessy it was the engagement with local history that was particularly powerful and helped to bring home the continuing relevance of this history:

> *It's a story we need to tell a lot more. I think it really shocked people that it maybe hadn't been told much before, but actually localising it was important as well. So this stuff happened here in Coburg, Brunswick, Faulkner and Roy, this is what happened, and this is its impact today. It's still having an impact on people's lives. (Personal interview, 15 March 2023)*

As part of its engagement strategy the Council reached out to CALD (Culturally and Linguistically Diverse) communities. Eamonn outlines the impact that the truth-telling process had on migrant communities who developed a new sense of affinity and understanding for the Wurundjeri community based on a common experience of dispossession:

> *They'd come in going, why do you want to change the name of Council? It's a waste of money. Why are you doing this? And then when they heard that story of, particularly dispossession, many groups for various reasons, it flicked a switch. They had a real empathy with that, aligned sometimes with their own experience of loss of place and loss of country and dislocation. (Personal interview, 15 March 2023)*

As a result of the process, community members developed a deepened understanding of how the name change related to reconciliation. Eamonn Fennessy explains, 'Something that many people would say, "Oh, it's just a name. It's just symbolism". But actually for the Wurundjeri, it had really profound importance as an act of truth-telling. And then of reconciliation' (Personal interview, 15 March 2023).

It was not only the more formal truth-telling activities that had an impact in terms of shifting the consciousness of community members. The discussion about the names proposed by the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Aboriginal Corporation created a new level of engagement with Wurundjeri language and culture at both formal and informal levels. The response rate to the survey sent out to community members about which of the three names to choose was 'the highest response to any Council engagement in recent years' (Moreland City Council, 2022c, p. 9). Cathy Henderson remembers:

> *[I walked] into a cafe in Brunswick, and I could hear people sitting at a table debating which of the three Woi-wurrung words they liked best. And it was amazing to hear … and there was sort of a debate in the community about, well, do we like Merri-bek? It means rocky country, love the Merri Creek, but what about Jerrang, leaf of tree? That's beautiful. And it was really lovely to hear that, I guess having Woi-wurrung language being talked about in this lovely positive and embracing way. (Personal interview, 14 April 2023)*

Thus, as a result of the process, 'People have thought more about Wurundjeri's place here' (Personal interview, E Fennessy, 15 March 2022). Cathy Henderson explains the impact that she believes the renaming process had:

> *I don't lay claim that it's shifted a majority of people's consciousness, but I believe it did result in quite a number of people … at least 6000 people [who responded to the community survey] thinking about what Woi-wurrung word best symbolises this place for me. And I believe there are many people in this municipality who thought about, who added to their thinking about what happened in this country with dispossession and what the challenge is now. (Personal interview, 14 April 2023)*

Conclusion

The Merri-bek renaming process is a testament to the significant impact that organised community groups can have in ensuring that the local impacts of colonial dispossession and the ongoing links to contemporary injustice are explicitly recognised, problematised and addressed. It is also clear that in Merri-bek, this process has only just begun through the year-long engagement around the name change. The work of truth-telling, redress and reconciliation are long term undertakings that, it is evident, will need continue as an ongoing process in partnership between all sectors of the community.

What is remarkable is that until the local community group, led by Wurundjeri Elders, assertively presented the Council with the 'truth' about the relationship of the name Moreland to a slave plantation in Jamaica and processes of local dispossession, that this knowledge had lain essentially dormant in public and political consciousness throughout the 27-year history of the municipality. This is likely to be the case in many different contexts across the country, where the inscription of colonial names, leaders and other iconography has become routinised and normalised – an unremarked feature of the contemporary urban landscape. It took the activism of local community stakeholders and Wurundjeri Elders to bring these truths to light, to draw out the import of these truths and insist on a social and political response.

The ability of the local community group and the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung Elders to make such a substantial impact at a local council level was no doubt the result of the fact that the council they were interacting with was deeply aligned with the values and principles they were attempting to articulate, and once it was made explicitly aware of the association of Moreland with slavery and dispossession, it felt compelled to respond.

This process also makes the clear the powerful impact that a local council with significant political will can have in facilitating local community engagement with colonial history and finding ways in which to redress this history. It is also evident that this was a complex and contested process. The Council's decision not to engage with the public about whether the municipality's name would change caused ongoing rancour, particularly among sections of the community who were opposed to the renaming. The rapid nature of the process, which was partly shaped by an imminent state election in November, did not provide an opportunity to engage in a sustained manner with sections of the community who were resistant or simply did not understand the reasons for the name change.

Nevertheless, the decision not to undertake public consultation about the name change was also clearly motivated by a desire to protect members of the community from harmful and divisive debate that could have exacerbated experiences of racism in Merri-bek. Despite these challenges, the response of the Council to the request from Elders of the Wurundjeri Woi-wurrung community to change of the name of the municipality in the light of its association with slavery and colonial dispossession was a significant act of respect and recognition, which should create the space for further reparation and more dialogue in the community about the impacts and ongoing effects of colonial history in the local and contemporary context.

3. Summary Case Study: Native Title determination, Torres Strait

On 30 November 2022, at a hearing on Waiben (Thursday Island), the Federal Court formally recognised the native title rights of the Ankamuthi, Gudang Yadhaykenu, Kaurareg, Kemer Kemer Meriam and Kulkalgal peoples over land and sea in northern Cape York and the Torres Strait region. This is the first joint claim between First Nations people of the Torres Strait and mainland Australia. A culmination of 21 years' work, this Traditional Owner-led settlement of about 65,000 square kilometres, comprising 2,500 hectares of land and more than 2 million hectares of sea (the largest sea claim determined in Australia), resolved seven separate and overlapping native title claims (Burney, 2022).

Premier Annastacia Palaszczuk emphasised the role that this claim would play in reconciliation:

> *The islands and the sea play a fundamental role in the culture of First Nations peoples from the Torres Strait and the Northern Peninsula Area of the Queensland mainland. This determination formally recognises this continuing connection to country and Sea country and the rights and interests to that country. Recognising native title is vital to Queensland's path towards reconciliation. It helps preserve First Nations people's culture, values, and traditions, which benefits all Queenslanders. (Palaszczuk, 2022)*

During the hearing, dancers from different Nations celebrated the decision. Ankamuthi Traditional Owner Charles Woosup stated, 'I will feel very, very proud, to be on my own country, on sea country', and emphasised the importance for the next generation: 'I've grown up knowing my area, but not owning it, now that they're going to grow up knowing that it's theirs, and they got every right to protect it' (Richardson and Rigby, 2022). However, he regretted the time it had taken, with only one Elder remaining who was part of the original claim. Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council Chair Ned David echoed the sentiment, stating:

> *That's one lesson I think we all should learn from; ourselves as traditional owners, First Nations people and more importantly the government … There are no other people in this region but Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders, surely, we must accept they've been using and enjoying the rights and interest in this country for eons. (Richardson and Rigby, 2022)*

David expressed sorrow at the fact that the landmark Mabo decision came after Eddie Mabo had passed, but stated that:

> *This is a continuation of what Uncle Eddie started all those years ago … And you know his famous words, 'all the resources, all the fishes in the sea belongs to me and my people'. We're basically now delivering on those prophetic words. (Carrick and Kelsey-Sugg, 2023)*

At the hearing, Justice Debra Mortimer stated that the determination was a milestone of innovation in terms of many groups agreeing on the outcome. She thanked all those who gave evidence, stating:

> *This is the longest consent determination set of reasons I have ever written. And that is because of your evidence, the evidence of the claim group members. It is mighty in the formal judgement … You are more powerful together and that is what this determination today shows. (NITV, 2022)*

She also affirmed the importance of the role of truth-telling in working towards justice:

> *Thank you for telling your stories and committing them to writing for everybody to see of the oppression and injustice that has been brought by colonisation … Those stories of injustice and oppression, they must be told and people like me must be prepared to talk about them. That is one small first step on what is a long journey. (NITV, 2022)*

The evidence submitted was so compelling, the native title claim was accepted without the need for a trial (Carrick and Kelsey-Sugg 2023). As opposed to a litigated determination, consent determinations aim to provide a more efficient way to settle Native Title issues (Agreements Treaties and Negotiated Settlements website). As such, Justice Mortimer affirmed that there was no burden on the applicants to prove connection. However, in her determination she chose to share excerpts from some of the 'treasure trove of song, story and narrative about what the sea country, reefs, cays, islands and islets … mean to the people of this region' (David on behalf of the Torres Strait Regional Seas Claim v State of Queensland [2022] FCA 1430, p. 28).

> “A public holiday would be a celebration all Australians can share in with pride – a celebration of truth that unites Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and a celebration of justice that overturned the legal myth of terra nullius - Mabo symbolises truth and justice and is a cornerstone of Reconciliation.”

She quoted Bernard Charlie, a Gudang Yadhaykenu man, describing what his Sea Country means to him:

> *When I come to my sea country, I sleep right. It feels like I'm in my lounge room, at home. In language we call it beiberr. That's the feeling I get. I feel good. I feel like I'm looked after, I got the right. This feels different to just being welcomed to country, it's like feeling you are right. (David (2022) FCA 1430, p. 2)*

She also formally recognised the importance of 'sense' and 'sound' which 'resonated across much of the affidavit material', quoting Meriam man Mr Falen Douglas Passi:

> *You can hear maiso [the sea breakers] on the edge of the Barrier from Mer. The songs that our Elders composed can be very emotional. My cousin John Passi composed a song called Opnor Zeuber … :*
>
> *Opnor ira zeuber eno*
>
> *The breakers of the Barrier in front of Mer*
>
> *Dub bakoli opem torupeli e*
>
> *A swell of the ocean*
>
> *Terge teskaisili maiso i esoli*
>
> *The breakers hit the edge of the reef and cry out. (David (2022) FCA 1430, p. 2)*

In the procedural history section of the determination, Justice Mortimer notes that the claim is one of the longest and most complicated Native Title determinations in Australian history, having commenced in 2001 on behalf of the descendants of many Torres Strait Islander ancestors (David (2022) FCA 1430, p. 9). During the hearing period between September 2007 and July 2009, overlapping claims were made by the Kaurareg and Gudang Yadhaykenu Peoples, leading to a separation of the initial claim into two parts (David (2022) FCA 1430, p. 10). Further complications entailed a February 2017 claim on the western side of Cape York. However, Judge Mortimer reports that from November 2019, when she prescribed a timetable to work towards a final resolution, 'all active parties … were co-operative and proactive in a case management process … work[ing] together to comply with this timetable' (David (2022) FCA 1430, p. 12).

By looking at linguistic, social and cultural diversity and convergence, anthropological experts argued that the claim group members of the Torres Strait and Northern Cape form a 'single society' (David (2022) FCA 1430, p. 13), 'a continuum of related peoples and sociocultural forms' (David (2022) FCA 1430, p. 29). In October 2020, the applicants resolved to establish a unified working group, with a unified claim, with the exception of some islands that are exclusively Kaurareg (David (2022) FCA 1430, p. 13). Gur A Baradharaw Kod Torres Strait Sea and Land Council was created as the peak body for prescribed body corporates across the Torres region.

However, Justice Mortimer concedes that '[N]ative title is far from a perfect resolution for post-colonial effects on Country' (David (2022) FCA 1430, p. 16), and in her determination quotes from Poruma man Francis Pearson's affidavit, which explains the way in which Native Title determinations can create more rigid boundaries between communities:

> *Before time, the stopping on the island to ask permission was more like passing someone and saying hello. A friendly thing of respect. Now, people are asking "where are you going? You can't go without asking". It was more relaxed in those days. Trying to draw lines on maps and saying "this is my sea country" and "this is your sea country" is tearing people apart and separating us. This separation is not our tradition. It comes from Native Title. We used to be more together, now it is "you stay there, and I stay here". This is not the traditional way, the way of our ancestors since before time. (David (2022) FCA 1430, p. 15)*

Nevertheless, Justice Mortimer expresses hope that 'this determination provides a platform for further dialogue, and the preparations for it have already provided a mechanism for Native Title holders to point to troubling parts of post-colonial relationships that are yet to be fully mended' (David (2022) FCA 1430, 2022, p. 16).

Ned David revealed that it took time to build trust between the different Nations, but once it was accepted that it would be in the best interests of all their people, the process moved smoothly. He said the next steps would be focusing on community growth, reaping economic benefits from the determination, and, most importantly, ensuring the area is properly maintained.

Cape York Land Council Chair Richie Ah Mat asserts that these are the richest, most unpolluted sea grounds anywhere in Australia (Richardson and Rigby, 2022). Gudang Yadhaykenu Traditional Owner and volunteer ranger Michael Solomon said future generations would benefit from the job opportunities that looking after Country generated (Palaszczuk, 2022).

Ugar (Stephens Island) Traditional Owner Brian Williams, who is part of the Kemer Kemer Meriam Nation, stated:

> *I am going towards my 70s and have this wonderful knowledge of working on these reefs. When they put them on the [claims] map … to me they are more than just areas. They are my life. My father's life, my brother's life, my ancestors' life. We have all worked that area. To me, the determination shows the court that this is our waters. We are willing to share with others, but we want everyone to know that our ancestors and us have worked that reef and the sea. (Elu, T. and Williams, T., 2022)*

4. Summary Case Study: Risdon Cove massacre and land return at piyura kitina, Tasmania

Risdon Cove, on the banks of the Derwent River, now called piyura kitina (meaning 'little native hen') by the Mumirimina people of the area, was the site of the first recorded massacre of Aboriginal people in Van Diemen's Land (now Tasmania) on 3 May 1804, in which between 30 and 50 people died (Ryan, Debenham, et al., 2022b). Risdon Cove is significant because it was the first site of British settlement in Van Diemen's Land in 1803, and is now part of the present-day city Hobart. Penelope Edmonds describes the massacre as 'notorious as a site of foundational British colonial violence against Aboriginal peoples in Tasmania' (Edmonds, 2016, p. 126). The immediate impact of the event is indicated by the fact that in 1830, 30 years after the event, an official inquiry, The Broughton Committee, was established to 'inquire into the origins of the hostility of the Aboriginal Tasmanians to the European settlers between 1803 and that date' (Australian History Mysteries, 2011).

While there are conflicting accounts of the events, evidence indicates that Lieutenant William Moore, the commanding officer at the small settlement and garrison at Risdon Cove, ordered troops to fire on a group of Moomairremener Aboriginal men, women and children, who were passing through on a 'kangaroo drive' to hunt kangaroos (Edmonds, 2016). Later, the magistrate at Risdon Cove, surgeon Jacob Mountgarrett, ordered that a canon at the garrison be dragged up the hill from the water's edge, loaded and fired at the Moomairremener people to disperse them. He then led a group of armed men comprising at least twelve soldiers, ten convicts and two settlers in a charge where more people were wounded and a young Aboriginal boy about two years old was captured after his mother and father were both killed. Following the massacre, Mountgarrett reportedly sent two casks of Tasmanian Aboriginal remains to Sydney. Moore and Mountgarrett each provided written reports after the massacre and claimed that the group threatened the outpost by attacking a settler and that only two Moomairremener men had been killed (Ryan, Debenham, et al., 2022b). However, evidence that later emerged contradicts these claims. Edward White, an Irish convict, gave eyewitness testimony at the Broughton Committee:

> *On the 3rd of May 1804… saw three hundred natives come down – in a circular form, and a flock of kangaroo hemmed in between them, there were men, women and children – they looked at me with all their eye – I went down to the creek and reported them to some soldiers then went back to my work – the natives did not threaten me – I was not afraid of them… the natives did not attack the soldiers – they would not have molested them – The firing commenced about 11 o'clock – there were a great many of the natives slaughtered & wounded, I don't know how many – some of their bones were sent in two casks to Port Jackson by Doctor Mountgarrett; they went in the Ocean; a boy was taken from them; … they never came so close again afterwards – they had no spears with them – only waddies – they were hunting and came down into a bottom…the natives were driven from their homes afterwards & their wives & children were taken from them by stock keepers. (Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre website; Australian History Mysteries, 2011)*

This massacre has had a lasting impact on relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal communities in the area. A bicentenary ceremony was held at Risdon Cove on the 200th anniversary of the massacre in 2004.

This extract from one of the speeches that day reflected on some of the lasting effects of the massacre:

> *When the white invaders started killing us off on this day two hundred years ago, they also started the killing of our culture, our languages, our intimate knowledge of our lands, our child raising practices, our family connections, our trade routes, our economy, and every other aspect of our traditional way of living in this land for thousands of generations.*
>
> *On the massacre site where we stand today, they took the bodies of the people they had killed, stuffed them into barrels and shipped them off for scientific study. We are still trying to bring home the remains of our people taken to all parts of the world all those years ago.*
>
> *They took a little boy whose parents they had killed and named him Robert May. That was the start of Europeans trying to turn our children into white people. We are still trying to put right the effects of that long practice of removing our children from their families and community.*
>
> *They put up fences, hoed the ground, planted foreign plants and brought in their animals which destroyed our traditional hunting grounds. We are still trying to heal the damage done to our lands. (Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre website)*

Despite this legacy of trauma and violence, there have been significant and ongoing efforts to redress the harm done and reclaim the sovereignty of the original inhabitants of the area. It is clear through a number of events, campaigns and actions that the reclamation of an embodied relationship to place is seen as critical to this process. Thus, a campaign of direct action and political pressure in the 1980s and 1990s resulted in the title to piyura kitina being returned to the Aboriginal community through the Aboriginal Lands Act 1995 (Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, 2020). In May 1992, Tasmanian Aboriginal people occupied Risdon Cove in order to raise awareness of the massacre. Rocky Sainty, an emerging leader from the North West, said the Aboriginal people wanted to inform the community of the killing of the Moomairremener people at Risdon Cove soon after the first landing. He stated, 'The site is a valuable link to our past; we need to be there in order to relate to that past' (Daniels, 1995, p. 60). The occupation ended after three weeks. In 1995, after many decades of Aboriginal agitation and struggle for recognition of Tasmanian Aboriginal people and their land rights, the Tasmanian Aboriginal Lands Act 1995 acknowledged the dispossession of Tasmania's Indigenous people, and the Tasmanian government 'returned to the Aboriginal community thirteen parcels of land', including piyura kitina (Edmonds, 2016).

According to the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, since the return of the land at piyura kitina:

> *The Aboriginal community have continued a process of reasserting their sovereign rights to their country through active management and the revitalisation of community and cultural activities at piyura kitina … piyura kitina is now a central place of gathering, celebration, education and cultural revival for the Tasmanian Aboriginal community, and the importance of its reclamation and management by the Aboriginal community cannot be understated … It is more than symbolic that piyura kitina is now a key cultural gathering place for the Aboriginal community in Tasmania. (Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, 2020, p. 4)*

In May 2001, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people met at Risdon Cove as part of National Sorry Day commemorations. The event was organised by various reconciliation and church groups, and was also attended by school children. Aboriginal Elder Aunty Brenda Hodge recalled, 'We all walked together through the pyramid structure on the site, and everyone was given a piece of black twine and white twine to represent black and white people coming together. We then walked slowly over a bridge together and up to the slope where the violence had occurred. We then came back to form a large reconciliation circle' (Edmonds, 2016, p. 125). Edmonds notes the importance of the embodied nature of the event at the site of violence: 'The acknowledgement of the violence of colonization on the very site of this violence anchored the ceremony as one that was commemorative as well as reparative of social relations. The bad feelings of sorrow and shame connected people in palpable ways to a specific historical location' (Edmonds, 2016, p. 128).

Since then, there have been numerous programmes at piyura kitina that have sought to build localised forms of sovereignty through the rehabilitation of the land and building of relationships to people and place. The piyura kitina Land Management Environmental Plan aims to 'guide the restoration of the landscape to a healthy state, in keeping with how the landscape would of been prior to the theft of the land from the Mumirimina' (Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, 2020, p. 4). Archaeological evidence indicates that these people occupied the land for approximately 40 000 years before colonisation. During this time:

> *The Mumirimina people of the Great Oyster Bay Nation had rights and responsibilities for the management and use of the country that encompasses piyura kitina, according to the lore of that country and its people. This included all the social and cultural interactions within the Mumirimina and between other Tribes, how and when resources were harvested and used, and how trade and social structures were established and maintained. Some of the riches in resources that the Mumirimina were responsible for included the abundant shellfish of the Pittwater-Coal River and the kangaroo grounds along the eastern shores of the Derwent. (Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre, 2020, p. 4)*

Current initiatives include the establishment of a Children's Centre to facilitate education of the next generation that will ensure the continuity of Aboriginal culture and self-determination, as well a number of initiatives around the maintenance and restoration of the land, and activities to protect Aboriginal cultural materials at piyura kitina.

The 20th anniversary of the handback was celebrated on 10 December 2015 and was marked by a call from the Tasmanian Aboriginal Centre for more land returns (Hunt, 2015). The Centre's State Secretary, Trudy Maluga, argued:

> *There's a lot of Crown land left in Tasmania and that land is our land. We're asking the present Government and future governments to take that into consideration and give us the autonomy over those lands. To heal them, to bring our youth there, to teach them and share all of our knowledge with the broader community. (Hunt, 2015)*

5. Summary Case Study: Renaming of Fraser Island to K'gari, Queensland

A decades-long campaign by Butchulla Elders and community members, finally endorsed by the Queensland government and World Heritage Committee, resulted in Fraser Island being renamed the K'gari (Fraser Island) World Heritage Area in September 2021. K'gari means paradise in the Butchulla language. Fraser Island was named for a Scottish couple who were shipwrecked there in 1836 and spent only a few months on the island. The name has particularly negative associations because Eliza Fraser reportedly lied about being mistreated by Butchulla people in order to gather money from sympathetic supporters. Eliza's accounts of her time on K'gari were syndicated internationally and reinforced the narrative that First Nations Peoples were 'savages' and 'cannibals' (Barrowcliffe, 2021).

Barrowcliffe, a member of the Butchulla nation and a researcher, notes that the renaming of K'gari is the latest in a growing number of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander name repatriations across Australia where colonial place names have been replaced by the original Indigenous name. One of the most famous examples is Uluru, which for many years was known as Ayers Rock after Sir Henry Ayers, the colonial Chief Secretary of South Australia in the late 19th century, but which had been known as Uluru by Aboriginal communities for many thousands of years prior to this. According to Barrowcliffe name repatriation is critical because 'it speaks to the importance of language in both culture and sovereignty… Overwriting Indigenous names with colonist names is an attempt to deny this deep, pre-existing connection and the sovereignty of Indigenous peoples' (Barrowcliffe, 2021).

The process of re-naming K'gari has been an extended, complex process. In 2011, the state government added K'gari as an alternative to the name Fraser Island in the Queensland Place Names Register. In late 2014 the Federal Court of Australia handed down a determination that recognised the Butchulla people's non-exclusive Native Title rights and interests over Fraser Island. In 2017 the Fraser Island section of the Great Sandy National Park was renamed K'gari (Fraser Island) National Park. In June 2022 the Butchulla Aboriginal Corporation finally received freehold title to more than 22 hectares of land within the area where they already hold Native Title.

Butchulla woman Chantel Van Wamelen said the land transfer would empower the Butchulla people to revitalise cultural practices on Butchulla Country. Resources Minister Stewart said land transfers such as these could play an important role in Queensland's journey towards reconciliation. He stated, 'Although this land transfer will not rectify past injustices, I hope it can provide future benefit to the Butchulla people' (Stewart Scott, Minister for Resources, 2022).

The Queensland government has indicated a wider willingness to engage in further name repatriation as part of its commitment to truth-telling. A National Parks First Nations Naming Project has been working to revert national park names to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander names. North Stradbroke Island and Moreton Island National Parks have reverted to Minjerribah and Gheebulum Coonungai, respectively.

6. Summary Case Study: Renaming of Batman electorate to Cooper, Victoria

In June 2018, the north Melbourne electorate of Batman was formally recognised as the electorate of Cooper by the Australian Electoral Commission after the Yorta Yorta activist, leader and founder of the Aborigines Advancement League, William Cooper. The name change occurred after a public campaign by the Darebin City Council that lasted for several years. John Batman is widely known as the 'founder' of Melbourne after his expedition to the Port Phillip Bay area with businessman and politician John Fawkner led to a small settlement which grew into the city known as Melbourne today. Batman negotiated with local Aboriginal people to acquire land in the area by offering food, tools and blankets in exchange for thousands of hectares of land. This treaty was not recognised by the colonial New South Wales government, as it went against the practice of the time of deeming land to be terra nullius (land belonging to no one) (The Junction website).

> "I will feel very, very proud, to be on my own country, on sea country...I've grown up knowing my area, but not owning it, now [the next generation] are going to grow up knowing that it's theirs, and they got every right to protect it. "

This attempt at a treaty with local Wurundjeri communities led to Batman developing a reputation as a conciliator and treaty-maker. However, prior to his arrival in Victoria, Batman was a member and leader of the Black Line, a group whose goal was to round up all surviving Aboriginal people in Tasmania using roving parties (The Junction, no date). In 1830, Lieutenant-Governor George Arthur ordered thousands of able-bodied settlers to form what became known as the Black Line, a human chain that crossed the settled districts of Tasmania. The line moved south over many weeks in an attempt to intimidate, capture, displace and relocate the remaining Aboriginal people in Tasmania (National Museum of Australia, 2022). In 1829 Batman was involved in an incident at Ben Lomond in Tasmania, where his party came across a large Aboriginal camp, including women and children, on whom they opened fire as the people in the camp fled. Fifteen people were documented to have been killed. Batman himself reported that ten men and two women were shot, presumed dead. He also reported that he shot two men, a woman and a child whom he had captured, allegedly because they were too injured to keep up with the roving party. Batman reported these events to Lieutenant-Governor Arthur but was never held accountable. Later he travelled to Victoria and attempted to purchase land around Port Phillip Bay from the Wurundjeri people via a treaty, for which he became famous as a conciliator (Clements, 2011).

A Council report advocating for the decision to change the name of the electorate noted this violent history and stated, 'One cannot under-estimate the hurt and grief still felt today by our Aboriginal community at the dispossession and loss of land and culture that John Batman represents.' The report argued, 'Continuing to honour John Batman through the name of an electoral division perpetuates the trauma of the past' (City of Darebin, 2018). Widespread community consultation prior to the name change indicated significant community support for the change, along with the support of current and former MPs in the electorate. The Council concluded, 'There is now broad community understanding in our municipalities that changing the name would be one way of recognising past dispossession and symbolically righting past wrongs' (City of Darebin, 2018).

Ultimately the decision to rename the electorate was unanimous, according to the Electoral Commissioner Tom Rogers. The newly renamed electorate's MP, Ged Kearney, was among those who lobbied for the name to be changed. The decision was welcomed by then Greens MP Lidia Thorpe (whose state seat of Northcote sat within Cooper's boundaries), Warren Mundine (the former head of the Prime Minister's Indigenous Advisory Council) and Aunty Esme Bamblett (the current CEO of the Aborigines Advancement League) (Wahlquist and Karp, 2018).

A campaign to rename the local Batman Park is in process. In 2017 the name 'Gumbri' was proposed to recognise prominent Wurundjeri Elder Jessie Hunter (Gumbri) but was not endorsed by her family and the proposal was not approved under the naming rules for places in Victoria (NITV Staff Writer, 2018). In 2018 the Batman Park sign was vandalised on Australia Day weekend, and it has since been removed (Gardiner, 2018). Although the proposed name change was not approved, the Darebin Council noted that it remained 'committed to renaming of the park and will continue to engage with the Traditional Owners and Darebin community in the planning, design and implementation of permanent signage for the main park entry' (City of Darebin, no date).

7. Summary Case Study: Recognition of Eddie Koiki Mabo, Queensland

The extraordinary contribution of Eddie Koiki Mabo to the landmark High Court decision in 1992 that finally overturned the doctrine of terra nullius (land belonging to no one), which had provided the legal basis for the dispossession of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities up to that point, is recognised in a number of ways in Townsville and the Torres Strait, where he was born, lived and worked, as well as nationally.

Eddie Koiki Mabo (c. 29 June 1936 – 21 January 1992) was born on Mer (Murray Island) in the Torres Strait. In 1974 he was working as a gardener at James Cook university when, in discussion with academics at the university, he discovered he did not legally own his land in his traditional homeland. In 1981, Mabo attended a Land Rights Conference in Townsville organised by the JCU Student Association, and met visiting lawyers and scholars, who saw the merit in his case to have his ownership recognised, and agreed to support it.

In 1982, Eddie Mabo, along with Sam Passi, David Passi, Celuia Mapo Salee and James Rice, began a lengthy legal claim for ownership of lands on the island of Mer in the Torres Strait, between Australia and Papua New Guinea. Although three of the plaintiffs (including Eddie Mabo) did not live to see the outcome of their ten-year battle, in June 1992 the High Court of Australia ruled in favour of Eddie Mabo in Mabo and Others v. State of Queensland (No. 2) (1992). In recognising the traditional rights of the Kemer Kemer Meriam people to their islands in the eastern Torres Strait, the High Court also held that Native Title existed for all Indigenous people in Australia prior to James Cook's expedition in 1770, and prior to the establishment of the British Colony of New South Wales in 1788. This decision helped pave the way for the passing of the Native Title Act 1993 by the Australian Federal Parliament, which established a legal framework for Native Title claims throughout Australia by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples and destroyed the 17th century doctrine of terra nullius by which Australia had been colonised.

Although Eddie Mabo died on January 21, 1992, just months before the High Court decision, his work forced the authorities to recognise Native Title in a decision that has made possible hundreds of successful Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander land claims (JCU Library News, 2016; Glaister, 2022).

Today, Mabo Day is marked as a commemorative day annually on 3 June, the anniversary of the Mabo decision. It is an official holiday in the Torres Shire but not nationally, and occurs during National Reconciliation Week in Australia. In 2002, on the 10th anniversary of the High Court decision, Eddie Mabo's widow, Bonita Mabo, called for a national public holiday on 3 June. In 2003, on the 11th anniversary of Eddie Mabo's death, the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC) launched a petition to make 3 June an Australian Public Holiday. This has not occurred to date. Eddie Mabo Jnr, representing the Mabo family, explained why the family felt the day should be recognised nationally:

> *We believe that a public holiday would be fitting to honour and recognise the contribution to the High Court decision of not only my father and his co-plaintiffs, James Rice, Father Dave Passi, Sam Passi and Celuia Salee, but also to acknowledge all Indigenous Australians who have empowered and inspired each other.*
>
> *To date we have not had a public holiday that acknowledges Indigenous people and which recognises our contribution, achievements and survival in Australia.*
>
> *A public holiday would be a celebration all Australians can share in with pride – a celebration of truth that unites Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians and a celebration of justice that overturned the legal myth of terra nullius - Mabo symbolises truth and justice and is a cornerstone of Reconciliation. (Victorian Aboriginal Education Association website)*

On the 30th anniversary of the Mabo decision in 2022, Kaleb Mabo, Eddie Mabo's grandson, again called for Mabo Day to be recognised as a national public holiday. He said that Mabo Day is:

> *a day for everybody to celebrate not just Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people. That is why I've started to push for this day to become a national public holiday, so Indigenous people and non-Indigenous people can recognise it for what it is. (Glaister, 2022)*

At James Cook University in Townsville, Eddie Mabo is recognised as 'one of the most important historical figures to have spent time at the University' (JCU Library website). Eddie Mabo initially worked as a groundsman at the University, but his interactions with students and academics played a critical part in his development as an activist, eventually leading to his crucial role in the landmark land rights case. In 2008, a commemorative plaque was unveiled at the James Cook University Library on the Townsville campus, which was named the Eddie Koiki Mabo Library in his honour, recognising that it was the place where Eddie Mabo 'spent many productive hours reading, studying and researching law and land rights' (JCU Library website). An ongoing art exhibition is also located at the library, which began with an exhibition of artworks by Gail Mabo, his daughter, on the first anniversary of the naming of the Eddie Koiki Mabo Library.

An annual art exhibition is now held in commemoration of Eddie Mabo from 21 May, to coincide with National Sorry Day (26 May), National Reconciliation Week (27 May to 3 June) and Mabo Day (3 June) (JCU Library website). The university also holds an annual public lecture in honour of Eddie Mabo called the Eddie Koiki Lecture Series, which is a public commemorative presentation by a prominent person who has made a significant contribution to contemporary Australian society. James Cook University Professor Martin Nakata (Deputy Vice Chancellor - Indigenous Education and Strategy) explains that the annual Mabo Lecture Series:

> *honours, celebrates and remembers Koiki Mabo's achievements as a proud Meriam man who understood Malo's law (the traditional law) and worked to have it recognised – as an activist who worked on behalf of the Torres Strait Islander community in this city (Townsville) and as a revered former employee of this University. The Lecture Series honours him by highlighting the ongoing work of Aboriginals and Torres Strait Islanders as well as the contribution that non-Indigenous people make towards our cause. (JCU Library News, 2022)*

RECOGNITION OF ABORIGINAL AND TORRES STRAIT ISLANDER CULTURES, CONTRIBUTIONS AND RESILIENCE

Introduction

In this section, we draw on examples of truth-telling that showcase the contributions and resilience of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities. The truth-telling that First Nations communities have called for concerns not only recognition of colonial and contemporary violation, but also recognition of the agency and self-determination of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, including their unique contribution to shaping contemporary Australian society. The initiatives described here speak to this varied and important contribution. In the face of an Australian landscape still largely dominated by physical representations of the 'heroes' of the colonial period, these projects seek to explicitly reinsert Aboriginal presence and history onto Country, for example by recognising the leadership of key historical figures such as Mannalargenna in Tasmania and Yagan in Western Australia, who led their people through extraordinarily difficult circumstances following colonial occupation.

Mannalargenna Day in Tasmania is a place-based initiative that celebrates the continuing culture of Tasmanian Aboriginal communities, despite the colonial narrative that declared them an 'extinct' people. It does this through the annual celebration of the legacy of Mannalargenna, the leader of the Pairrebeenne/Trawlwoolway clan, who was exiled to Flinders Island. Until recently, the festival has been symbolically held at the site where Mannalargenna and other Aboriginal Tasmanian people left the mainland for Flinders Island. The festival is notable for its inclusive approach and its desire to share the rich legacy of Tasmanian Aboriginal culture and connection to Country with both First Nations and non-Indigenous communities.

The case studies also include sculptures that have been created to commemorate the unique contribution to Australia of individuals such as the Noongar warrior Yagan, who led resistance to colonial expansion in Western Australia, and two Wiradjuri men, known as Yarri and Jacky Jacky, who saved an entire town of non-Indigenous settlers from a flood in Gundagai, New South Wales.

In addition, it describes the recognition of the contributions of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander servicemen and women through the Yininmadyemi monument in Sydney, and a sculpture of a pregnant woman diver, which recognises both the unique contribution and terrible exploitation of women who participated in the pearling industry in Broome, Western Australia.

The prominence of these art works in public spaces is crucial because it makes First Nations contributions to Australian society explicit and visible. The majority of these sculptures have been built as a result of the leadership and activism of community groups and individuals, which helped forge strong collaborative relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander and non-Indigenous communities. The engagement around the creation of these artworks, as well as the artworks themselves, has had an important impact in building understanding and recognition of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities' contribution to Australian society.

Significantly, these monuments – in the cases of the sculptures depicting Yarri and Jacky Jacky, and Yininmadyemi – reflect historical moments in which non-Indigenous communities relied on Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and individuals in times of crisis, sometimes without recognising this debt at the time. The Yarri and Jacky Jacky monument stands in recognition of the heroism these men demonstrated in saving a third of the non-Indigenous population of the township of Gundagai. The process of developing the statue to recognise this contribution, while only occurring more than 150 years after the events, is an important example of cooperative engagement between local Aboriginal and non-Indigenous communities. The bronze statue now stands at the centre of the town of Gundagai.

Although little recognised until recently, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have made a significant contribution to the country's war effort, serving in every conflict since Federation, but often receiving little acknowledgement and continuing discrimination on their return from war. A monument in Hyde Park, created by Kuku Yalanji/Girramay artist Tony Albert and commissioned by the City of Sydney, seeks to make this contribution more visible and, as Tony Albert explains, 'literally write them into history through my artwork'.

Some of the other monuments signify a more complex history, in that they represent First Nations leaders and community members who experienced some of the most systematic and brutal colonial violence. These monuments recognise their survival and resilience despite this violation. The statue of a pregnant diver in Western Australia recognises the economic and moral debt that the pearling industry in Broome owes to Aboriginal women. Pregnant Aboriginal women, who were believed to have improved lung capacity, were forced to dive naked, without equipment, for pearls. An unknown number died as a result. The Noongar warrior Yagan, whose statue now sits in a prominent position in Perth's Yagan square, was killed by a bounty hunter before being decapitated. This violation was perpetuated more than a hundred years later when vandals removed the head from a statue of Yagan in 1996 while Noongar community leaders were in Britain negotiating for the return of his remains. The construction of a nine-metre-tall cast-iron statue, entitled Wirin, the Noongar word for 'spirit', by artist Tjyllyungoo, seeks to symbolically redress this harm.

1. Interview Case Study: Yarri and Jacky Jacky sculpture, New South Wales

Introduction

In 2017, a bronze figurative sculpture was unveiled in the main street of the New South Wales town of Gundagai by artist Darien Pullen to recognise the extraordinary bravery of two Wiradjuri men, known as Yarri and Jacky Jacky[2] (who later changed their names to James McDonnell and John Morley) (NITV, 2018). They saved the lives of at least 69 people, a third of the town's population at the time, during a flood in 1852 that still remains one of Australia's greatest natural disasters. The bronze statue was unveiled on the 165th anniversary of the flood. Gundagai residents, the Brungle Tumut Local Aboriginal Land Council and the local community attended the launch event, which included a march down Gundagai's main street before an official ceremony (NSW Aboriginal Land Council, 2017).

Wiradjuri Elder Sonia Piper, a member of the Yarri and Jacky Jacky Sculpture Committee, which worked for three years to ensure the sculpture was erected, explains the significance of the sculpture to the local community:

> *We couldn't have been any prouder on the day that the opening was and we seen all the people around in town and in the Main Street in Gundagai and it made us feel so proud. And this day we are still very proud of what we achieved in our community, with two famous Aboriginal men that did so well in the community and in Australia. (Personal interview, 17 February 2022)*

Eighty-nine of 250 townspeople died in the deadly flood as the original Gundagai township was swamped by two metres of water. Using a canoe made of bark and a rowboat, the two men worked for two days, plucking non-Aboriginal townspeople people from rooftops or trees and ferrying them through raging currents to save their lives, despite tensions between the two communities and previous warnings by the Wiradjuri people that Gundagai township had been established on a flood plain (Gapps, 2017). For Elder Sonia Piper, the rescue was an early example of reconciliation. 'I always think that must be the first time with the reconciliation, because those two Aboriginal men didn't care what colour people they rescued, you know' (Personal interview, 17 February 2022).

Ian Horsley, whose family have lived in Gundagai for generations, acknowledges the debt that he and his family owe Yarri and Jacky Jacky. '[I have] a great-grandfather saved by the two men in the Gundagai flood. We're descended and here as a result of their bravery, so [there has] never been anywhere else to live' (Personal interview, 2 February 2022). He recounts the story of his great-grandfather being saved by one of the two men:

> *He came out from England unaccompanied as a 16-year-old, which is pretty incredible when you think about it, that's courage in itself to me. And then got himself up to Gundagai by, we think, about 1848. And was getting established there … but he had himself engaged to the innkeeper's daughter. And when the flood hit they got up in a tree. Tragically, she fell out of the tree and drowned. And he was rescued. (Personal interview, 2 February 2022)*

[2] Jacky Jacky was a generic and derogatory term used by white Australians to refer to Aboriginal Australians, instead of using their names. Elder Phyllis Freeman explains, 'If you say Jacky Jacky, it's like it's nobody'. According to Phyllis Freeman, Jacky Jacky was 'given' this name by the daughter of a white farmer who nursed him after he was stabbed before the time of the flood.

Wiradjuri Elder Peter Smith describes the remarkable rescue:

> *You can imagine like, taking the canoe into the water. Bringing people in from off of roof tops and out of trees … no motor or anything on the canoe, so they had to take it back upstream and use just the current of the river, as it was, in full flood. To do that, to go and get the people, pick them up, put them on shore, then go up again with these canoes. And keep doing that for, you know, three nights, 72 hours. (Personal interview, 4 February 2022)*

Ian Horsley explains how the townspeople ignored the warnings of the Wiradjuri people:

> *I think what's particularly heartrending is that they had warned, on numerous occasions, the white men, that sooner or later, that there would be a huge flood. White men, typically thinking they knew everything, survived two or three smaller floods and persisted in living down on the flood plain and sort of starting to expand a little settlement. And sooner rather than later, just what happened, happened and there was catastrophic loss of life. (Personal interview, 2 February 2022)*

Recognising Yarri and Jacky Jacky

After the flood, Yarri and Jacky Jacky were presented with inscribed breastplates and a small reward (Gapps, 2019). The story of the bravery of Yarri and Jacky Jacky was passed down orally to both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descendants through the generations. As Peter Smith explained, 'It's always sort of been known in the community – about what happened there, but it's not widely known throughout the country' (Personal interview, 4 February 2022). Ian Horsley also reiterates that, 'in the local community, it was it was always acknowledged … I'd say there were discussions taking place probably for 50, 80 years' (Personal interview, 2 February 2022). Sonia Piper agrees: 'It's been talked about in our community for years' (Personal interview, 17 February 2022).

However, for Sonia Piper, the story of Yarri and Jacky Jacky was shared with trepidation in a context of intense racism:

> *It was talked a bit, but in our community, with Aboriginal people, our parents were frightened to tell us a lot of things. Because they're thinking about the government is coming, and if we talked about it - we weren't allowed to talk about it at school. (Personal interview, 17 February 2022)*

Ian Horsley became conscious of the rescue through his own father, who shared the story with him as a young boy. 'So it was his interest that, at a very early age, hearing him talk about the flood and the rescue and everything, that sparked my interest' (Personal interview, 2 February 2022). His father attempted to recognise the rescue by donating a sundial in honour of Yarri and Jacky Jacky and naming part of their property Yarri.

There were several small community initiatives to recognise the contribution of Yarri and Jacky Jacky, which included the Council erecting a plaque in the 1980s. In 1990 the Aboriginal Land Council reportedly named a park in their honour. However, Ian Horsley argues, this 'was still not the recognition that we all wanted' (Personal interview, 2 February). It was not until 2017 that 'two of the greatest lifesavers in Australian history' (Gapps, 2019) received more formal and substantive recognition, culminating in a posthumous bravery award for the two men in 2018.

Despite the lack of formal recognition, local community Elders Sonia Piper and Phyllis Freeman had been actively keeping the story alive, travelling to local schools to share the story of the two men's bravery:

> *We'd ask them about Jacky and Yarri, and a lot of the children didn't know anything, and I think that should be taught in schools to the education department should have it all in schools, about those two. Because that's history too, with Aboriginal people. (Personal interview, 17 February 2022)*

According to Ian Horsley, over time there has been a 'a groundswell within the community of feeling that there should be much greater recognition, by way of a monument, to the heroism of the Aboriginals' (Personal interview, 2 February 2022). He believes that the construction of the sculpture means that 'it's got now a significant number of people aware of the story' (Personal interview, 2 February 2022). Peter Smith also believes that the sculpture has increased awareness of the story and built better relationships within the community:

> *I think it's made a big difference in Gundagai and as well as in the wider community … people will come now to see the statue and read the stories that's on the board that's behind the statue. And the knowledge is getting out there and we're going to keep telling the story for ever and ever because the more people know the better it will be. (Personal interview, 4 February 2022)*

While there had been several efforts to mount a sculpture in honour of Yarri and Jacky Jacky, without government or shire backing, they were not successful in securing funds. According to Miriam Crane, Manager of Community and Culture at Gundagai Council and a member of the Yarri and Jacky Jacky Statue Committee, in 2002 the Council developed a master plan for the main street of Gundagai which included a location identified as a place to recognise the flood heroes. Miriam Crane, who has worked for the Council since 2014, was responsible for developing these plans further (Personal interview, 17 Feb 2022).

It wasn't until 2014 that this master plan for redevelopment began to be realised, and this coincided with 'interest in the community in seeing a sculpture go up for Yarri and Jacky that was a significant piece of artwork and a significant recognition' (Personal interview, M Crane, 17 February 2022). The Council advertised in the local community for interested individuals to participate in a Yarri and Jacky Jacky sculpture fundraising committee, which received a 'good response' (Personal interview, M Crane, 17 February 2022). The committee that was ultimately established included six Wiradjuri and six non-Indigenous people. who worked collaboratively over three years, meeting 22 times from 2014 to 2017 to secure the funds for the artwork, as well as to design and execute it.

The committee 'brought together a cross section of the community with shire members being on the board with Elders and a few of the descendants of the people that were saved in the flood' (Personal interview, M Crane, 17 February 2022). For Elder Sonia Piper, who grew up on a mission, the experience of being on the committee was one of empowerment:

> *They made us feel as if we were welcome. And for us to have our say - there was lots of times in life, we were too frightened to talk up and have our say, we weren't asked. But in there – they all went around asking if we were okay with it, and what we thought and everything. So, we're so proud, yeah. (Personal interview, 17 February 2022)*

Committee member Ian Horsley explains that the committee was able to work effectively together because of the common objective of its members. 'Look, it was almost too simple, in the sense that … we all had a common interest, common intention' (Personal interview, 2 February 2022). Wiradjuri Elder and Sculpture Committee Chair Peter Smith concurs. 'Although we're all from different backgrounds, we all are the same and had like a mutual objective, so we all work together … all as one' (Personal interview, 4 February 2022).

While the committee worked constructively together there were moments of contention, particularly regarding the content of the interpretive panels that would be installed alongside the sculpture. Miriam Crane explains the debate that occurred:

> *We were talking about the information for the signboard. Sonia and Phyllis, I think, put together a draft of the information for the signboards and there was a few people on the committee … that found it quite confronting the information that was on the board and were like we don't want to have it written in that way, we don't want it put in that way … the other members of the committee, both the Wiradjuri Elders and the other community members that were involved said, 'Come on, we've actually got to tell the story in a way that is honest, in a way that actually reflects what happened, and we know that that's a bit controversial for some people. But that's what needs to be told'. (Personal interview, 17 February 2022)*

Wiradjuri members of the committee were quite explicit from the beginning about what type of artistic representation of the two men they felt was respectful and appropriate:

> *They were very, very strong right from the start that it had to be bronze, they wanted it to be bronze. They wanted it to be lifelike and they wanted it to be – it was about being an equal to the sculptures that were out there about, you know, Captain Cook or other people you know, and it was for them, it was about saying, you know this is not a lesser sculpture, it's not a lesser work, it's not lesser recognition, it's equal recognition and we do our heroes in bronze. So that's what we want our heroes done in. So for them it was, you know, it was very important. (Personal interview, M Crane, 24 February 2022)*

Members of the committee were also clear that the sculpture should be placed in the main thoroughfare of Gundagai so that it would be visible to anyone visiting the town. Committee member Miriam Crane explains, 'the committee members were very strong on wanting to see it be front and centre' (Personal interview, 24 February 2022).

According to Miriam Crane, there was very little wider community contestation about the significant funds that were allocated from the Council redevelopment budget for the sculpture and there was a general consensus in the town that the two men who saved the ancestors of Gundagai's current inhabitants should be honored:

> *So that to me just says that as a community, the community were on board with the project and the fact that they all turned out for the opening, I think it was broad based community support for the project. Everyone agreed that it was long overdue. Everyone agreed that it needed to happen and everyone agreed that it should be front and centre. (Personal interview, 24 February 2022)*

She argues that the building of the sculpture was a manifestation of a reconciliation process that had in fact been initiated by the actions of Yarri and Jacky Jacky, which created a culture of cooperation in the town:

> *I don't think there's been that sort of separation in the sense that there is in a lot of communities and I think you know that probably maybe does relate to that original flood incident … there was always that respect right from the start … instead of being a new thing for us, it's like this thing that's happened over the space of a few hundred years now. (Personal interview, 24 February 2022)*

However, it is also evident that the project came to fruition as a result of significant local political support, as well as the allocation of a portion of funding earmarked for a major redevelopment project in the town centre. Three councilors attended each meeting. As Miriam Crane explains, 'that shows the importance of the project, but it also means that any barriers that there are you can easily break them down. Because you've got the political support to make it' (Personal interview, 24 February 2022). She argues that as a result of the process, 'a lifelong mutual respect … was created between the people that were involved in the project … that still extends to this day' and that the project created 'a real sense of … shared community'(Personal interview, 24 February 2022).

Miriam Crane said that one of her favourite moments since the sculpture was constructed was when a Wiradjuri man from out of town came into the Council building to ask where the sculpture was so he could proudly show it to his two sons:

> *He came in and he said, 'I'm just looking for the sculpture of the Wiradjuri heroes.' And I said, 'Yeah it's just down the road there.' And he was taking his you sons to go and show them the sculpture of the Wiradjuri heroes and I thought, you know, that's why you get out of bed in the morning, isn't it? (Personal interview, 24 February 2022)*

Sculptures like this one, which embody respect for First Nations histories and identities, create a broader discourse of respect, which ultimately has mental-health benefits. Miriam Crane argues that:

> *Mental health is improved because people then have the pride to see themselves in a different way. As a result of that it's not just about the story being out there so that people can have respect, it's about then the flow-on effect of that on the people who are affected by the increase in respect that occurs in the broader population. (Personal interview, 24 February 2022)*

After the launch of the sculpture, members of the committee continued to work together to apply for a posthumous Australian Government Bravery Award for Yarri and Jacky Jacky. Miriam Crane explains the motivation for the application:

> *There's a strong belief in the community that [the story] should be in the national curriculum and so that was part of the reasoning behind the Bravery Award nomination was that … it would give it that significance to try and get it in front of the right people to get it on the national curriculum. (Personal interview, 24 February 2022)*

The Bravery Award application was initially refused, but the second application in 2018 was supported by influential sectors of the community, including politicians and the Brungle-Tumut Local Aboriginal Land Council, and was successful. On 10 April 2019, Governor-General Sir Peter Cosgrove presented bravery medals to Aunty Sonia Piper, from the Brungle community, and Roslyn Boles, a descendant of Yarri, at the annual awards ceremony in Canberra (Gapps, 2019).

The story of the two men and the events surrounding the flood have also recently been represented in the novel Bila Yarrudhanggalangdhuray (River of Dreams) (2021) by Anita Heiss. The Council is now working with the author to develop teaching resources in order to try and ensure the story is included in the national curriculum.

On 25 June 2022 several hundred people reportedly joined a commemorative corrobboree, 'a gathering of people from across nations and clans coming together to share dance and stories', organised by Elders from the Gundagai Aboriginal community, which was held to mark 170 years since the flood. The event organiser, Wiradjuri/Wolgalu man Joe Williams, explained the power of the event:

> *Many Elders have never had the opportunity to learn, practise or participate in these types of gatherings due to the generational challenges that followed the invasion … There were many local Elders who came up to me after the evening, some crying with immense pride. Not only because it was the first time they witnessed such an evening, but they got to watch their nephews, nieces, and grandkids partake in the cultural activities that they were forbidden to do. (Williams, 2022)*

Conclusion

This initiative is another example of changing attitudes over 200 years of Australian history. The place where the town of Gundagai is now located was known by Wiradjuri people as an important thoroughfare for thousands of years. When these Knowledge Holders informed colonial settlers that it was an inappropriate place to build, their advice was ignored. After the inevitable flooding eventually occurred, it was Wiradjuri men who saved a significant proportion of the town's population. The story of the heroism of the men known as Yarri and Jacky Jacky was passed down through the generations in the families of both Wiradjuri descendants and the descendants of settlers. Ian Horsley, a descendent of one the settlers who was saved in the flood, grew up with a sense of debt to the Wiradjuri men Yarri and Jacky Jacky. However, it was only very recently that local community consensus grew to the point where the Council was willing to give explicit financial and political support to a project to meaningfully recognise their fundamental contribution to town of Gundagai.

Nevertheless, the project to develop and design the sculpture lead by the Yarri and Jacky Jacky Sculpture Committee was a remarkable example of productive collaboration between descendants of the original settlers and members of the Wiradjuri community. The Wiradjuri Elders who were part of the sculpture committee clearly remember the time when they were forbidden to speak their language, and still feel the pain of racism at times. However, the opportunity to be part of a successful campaign to honour these men, both with the sculpture and the Bravery Medal that was awarded subsequently, gave these Wiradjuri members of the sculpture committee much pride, and they continue to campaign to have the story of Yarri and Jacky Jacky's bravery recognised in the national curriculum.

2. Interview Case Study: Mannalargenna Day festival, Tasmania

Mannalargenna Day is an annual event held to commemorate Mannalargenna, the leader of the Pairrebeenne/Trawlwoolway clan of the Coastal Plains nations at Tebrakunna (also known as the Cape Portland area) in north-east Tasmania. It was inaugurated on 4 December 2015 by the Melythina Tiakana Warrana Aboriginal Corporation (MTWAC), 170 years to the day after the death of Mannalargenna (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, no date). The commemoration of Mannalargenna Day has grown significantly since its inauguration as an event to bring people together to recognise past injustices and celebrate the continuing culture of the First Peoples of Tasmania. About 60 people attended the first event, most of whom were MTWAC members and family. By 2019 it was reported that the event was attended by approximately 600 people (Vinall, 2019). It has now moved to a larger site to accommodate the increased attendance.

Professor Greg Lehman, a descendent of Mannalargenna and Pro-Vice Chancellor at the University of Tasmania, explains the significance of Mannalargenna's leadership:

> *He represented the strength and resolve of Aboriginal people to defend their country against invasion. At the same time, he also represents a willingness to try and negotiate a diplomatic solution. He stands for resistance and cultural strength, but also a pragmatic desire to try and work out a way to live together. I think that resonates right through to today, 200 years later, with the ongoing need for reconciliation between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. (Shine, 2016)*

Mannalargenna worked with the British colonial official George Augustus Robinson for four years between 1831 and 1835 to negotiate or compel Tasmania's First Nations people to self-exile to Flinders Island, on the promise that the move would be temporary. Ultimately, Robinson broke his promise. After four years assisting Robinson, in late 1835 Mannalargenna was also moved to the Wybalenna Aboriginal reserve on Flinders Island. On 4 December 1835 Mannalargenna died of pneumonia.

Exile took place in the wake of an extended period of extremely violent conflict between British colonists and Aboriginal Australians in Tasmania, from the mid-1820s to 1832, which became known as the 'Black War' and directly claimed the lives of 600 to 900 Aboriginal people and more than 200 European colonists. Many other Aboriginal Tasmanians died as a result of disease, and inter-tribal conflict caused by colonial disruption to social processes. The conflict nearly obliterated the island's Aboriginal population, leaving only approximately 200 survivors, who left for Flinders Island (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, no date; Ryan, 2012; Clements, 2014).

Only 47 of the individuals who moved to Flinders Island ultimately returned to the mainland, but not to their homelands. According to former Tasmanian Governor Kate Warner, former patron of Mannalargenna Day, 'Mannalargenna negotiated the exchange of his sister and four daughters with [seamen] and it is through these unions that many Tasmanian Aboriginal families trace their heritage, and it is through these unions that Aboriginal culture has been kept alive' (Shine, 2016). Inevitably, these women's cultural practices adapted, but they continued to pass on their cultural knowledge (Office of the Registrar of Indigenous Corporations, no date).

Mannalargenna Day Festival

Mannalargenna Day was initiated by Aboriginal Elder Dr Patsy Cameron AO, one of Mannalargenna's direct descendants, along with other members of the MTWAC. It has been held at Tebrakunna Visitors Centre at Little Musselroe Bay, the site where Mannalargenna and other Aboriginal Tasmanians left the mainland for Flinders Island, since 2015. Nick Cameron, MTWAC Chair and Patsy Cameron's son, explains the significance of the site where the event is held. 'It was the last bit of country [Mannalargenna] saw, as he left by ship four weeks before he died – from that exact spot. So that piece of Country is enormously important for us' (Personal interview, 22 March 2022).

Mannalargenna Day is an opportunity to share this story with the wider community. Nick Cameron outlines the educative role of the day:

> *It's not everybody that knows about the story of Mannalargenna – they've obviously heard his name. They probably know he's a Tasmanian Aboriginal person, but they don't know his story. So it was very important for us to tell that story and to share that, not only with our young people and our community people, but also for the wider community so that that knowledge expands throughout the community. (Personal interview, 22 March 2022)*

Mannalargenna Day is also seen as an opportunity to celebrate the continuing culture and survival of Aboriginal Tasmanians, as well as an opportunity for the wider community to understand this history through cultural performances, food, walks, tours, storytelling and a formal lecture, which is held each year. In addition, it is an opportunity to share the 'significance of Country, understanding how Aboriginal people relate to Country, how Country speaks to us, many things that I think non-Aboriginal people find difficult to understand' (Personal interview, P Cameron, 21 April 2002).

Jo Cameron explains the way in which the organisers seek to engage visitors experientially to help them understand the concept of being on Country:

> *We ochre, we allow people to wear our ochre. I think it's a really important – again, it's about tangibly having part of Country on you and understanding that. They see our dance, they see our smoking ceremony. So all of those sort of practices I think are really important. (Personal interview, 2 May 2022)*

This experiential engagement and learning on Country becomes an ongoing process for some attendees:

> *One of the powerful things about Mannalargenna Day that I see every year is people keep coming back … so they see it as an ongoing learning process. They get so much out of it each year that they want to come back and connect again … we invite people to continue their learning. So we want people to feel like they can, outside of Mannalargenna Day, come and walk with the landscape and continue to connect with it as well. (Personal interview, J Cameron, 2 May 2022)*

Treasurer Lyndon O'Neil describes the way in which he believes the day is an opportunity for Aboriginal Tasmanians to embody a reclaimed cultural identity, free of imposed racial stereotypes, and for non-Aboriginal Australians to experience this as well:

> *Visitors would have to come away with a real different outlook on Tasmanian Aboriginal people … you know the media portrays Aboriginal people as a bit menacing, I think. And [that has] probably really lost the story of who we are, you know, in that cultural real, real sense of spirit, which is a shame …*
>
> *But I think it's awesome that Mannalargenna Day gives people the opportunity – I think it really gives them an opportunity to step back in time … to come to our place and experience it … Because it's real. It's not a show and we don't pretend to be something that we're not, or we don't pretend to be something that we think they want us to be, we're contemporary … we look different and we dress different and we survive differently. But we're the same people we're the same, you know? (Personal interview, L O'Neil, 17 March 2022)*

The day also has a more explicit political impact as it is patronised by senior political figures, including its previous patron, the former Governor of Tasmania:

> *We have some people that can make a difference. You know, we talk about how do we change the hearts and minds of the wider population through truth-telling. Sometimes it can be done just by having the presence of somebody that is held in high esteem by the general society. (Personal interview, P Cameron, 21 April 2022)*

Mannalargenna Day has received significant support from local business and council. Patsy Cameron's daughter, Jo Cameron, is one of those responsible for liaising with sponsors. A major natural resource management company in Tasmania provides volunteers while local small-scale private sponsorship provides important resources in terms of food and logistics. Jo Cameron outlines how the shift in attitude from the local council has been particularly significant, and this has ramifications during the year, with the Council flying the Aboriginal flag and conducting Acknowledgements of Country and engaging MTWAC Elders to conduct Welcomes to Country (Personal interview, 2 May 2022).

From the beginning, the ethos of Mannalargenna Day has been explicitly inclusive. Professor Greg Lehman, who is involved in assisting to organise the annual lecture at Mannalargenna Day, argues that, 'Inclusivity is one of the defining characteristics of Mannalargenna Day' (Personal interview, 31 March 2022). Nick Cameron explains, 'We allow people in and we allow conversation' (Personal interview, 22 March 2022). Entry is free and all attendees can participate in cultural activities such as wearing ochre, dancing, craft-making and eating traditional foods. Asking questions is encouraged. Women and men's circles are also run to share cultural activities. At the most recent events, a third circle has been introduced to accommodate people who are gender diverse or those who don't want to be segregated according to gender. For Patsy Cameron this change is indicative of the fact that, 'culture is dynamic. It's not static' (Personal interview, 21 April 2022).

Greg Lehman argues that the inclusive approach adopted at the festival is a reflection of 'the culture and the character of some of the key individuals – of all of the key individuals who have been involved in the establishment and the continuation of Mannalargenna Day' (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022). Importantly, it is also a response to divisive local politics, 'So Mannalargenna Day, is if you like a positive response to issues relating to inclusivity. A positive response to things like lateral violence and cultural safety' (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022).

Nick Cameron outlines the profoundly educative conversations that members of the MTWAC have with visitors and how this becomes a form of truth-telling:

> We talk to them about why we do this and we talk to them about the clans that lived on the lands that we're actually meeting on, we explain their story. We talk about Mannalargenna. We talk about the grandmothers … the women who went to the Bass Strait islands with the Straitsmen, where most of our ancestry has come from. And I think people feel totally comfortable to ask the questions and they go away with a completely different sense about our community and what it is … I think that's the advantage of it, and that's what we try to do. We celebrate Mannalargenna through trying to open up to people in a friendly and open atmosphere, and I think that's how we do truth-telling. (Personal interview, 22 March 2022)

The apparent success of this inclusive approach has led other local councils to initiate similar festivals, which try to create a balance between sharing culture with the wider community and protecting the autonomy and authenticity of this culture and the communities that practice it:

> *Mannalargenna Day was probably the first festival in Tasmania where we really said we want to be open to the wider community. And since then there's been other regional festivals that have started and they're following a similar framework, which is that they want it to be inclusive, that everybody's welcome to come, that what they share there is what they want to share in the wider [community]. They want to be educational, they want to be inviting. They want people to understand. But then they've got their own cultural days where they go off on Country just for their own mob. (Personal interview, J Cameron, 2 May 2022)*

At the same time, by acknowledging the role of Mannalargenna in the history of Tasmania and the removal of Aboriginal Tasmanians to Flinders Island, the day inevitably has a strong element of truth-telling, which can be confronting. According to Jo Cameron, it is the inclusive approach of the festival that she believes facilitates truth-telling by creating safe spaces for sharing this difficult history:

> *Mannalargenna Day invites opening the mind to the real story, which is bloody uncomfortable … truth-telling includes discomfort, of course, and it's really easy to kind of point the finger … my feeling is that when you learn, you need to feel safe and you need to feel like you can open your mind … you want to do that in a way that invites people to want to keep learning and keep connecting … I think that's one of the key factors of Mannalargenna Day. (Personal interview, 2 May 2022)*

Patsy Cameron makes a similar argument – that it is through inclusiveness and creating safe spaces for engagement that the perspectives of the wider community can be changed:

> *We're not going to get those things happening [like changing the date of Invasion Day] without the support of our wider community. We have to be clever and not only clever, we have to be honest and transparent, and we have to embrace people … [Being exclusive] has not done us any favours. (Personal interview, 21 April 2022)*

“We had this wonderful celebration of Mannalargenna’s life. And part of that, when we talk about truth-telling... was about telling the history of that place and for our people to understand what connection to Country means to us on the land of our ancestors."

Greg Lehman argues that that the inclusive approach of the festival facilitates reconciliation by creating the context in which empathetic and respectful listening can occur:

> *Reconciliation is about listening and Mannalargenna Day is very much about people having the opportunity to listen to others, not from a position of judgment, or authority, but from a perspective of respect for sharing and acknowledging and understanding the value of sharing. (Personal interview, 31 March 2022)*

By creating spaces for respectful engagement, it is possible for healing to occur:

> *It's a mutually respectful place … when people feel confident and free to be able to relate like that with other people then that to me is a really tangible sign of processes of healing at work, and you might contrast that with gatherings where Aboriginal people are angry. And that, to me is a is a mark of the need for healing and perhaps even an absence of healing. (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022)*

Therefore, truth-telling in general has 'to be based on a conversation' and it has to be 'experiential' and collaborative (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022). However, inevitably there is some risk involved in participating in a process of truth-telling, which needs to be managed by effective Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal leadership:

> *You have to step into it. You have to, as we say in Australia, put your two bob's worth in and see what happens. You have to stick your neck out. There has to be some risk and that has to be bolstered and motivated by leadership, which has to come from both sides, from Aboriginal people and from others. (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022)*

Mannalargenna Day seeks to model this type of collaborative engagement, the principles on which Lehman believes truth-telling should be grounded:

> *There is absolutely a voice for all people in the conversation … that Mannalargenna Day represents. It's OK to ask naïve questions, it's OK to accept an invitation to learn about Aboriginal culture, to listen in on storytelling, to share in Aboriginal cultural practices.*
>
> *And it's OK as an Aboriginal person to share those things with others. It's an environment which is based on generosity and reciprocity. (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022)*

However, there are no guarantees that truth-telling will deliver healing or that all individuals will be willing to participate:

> *I think this is one of the most difficult aspects of the expectation that truth-telling will offer progress and healing … some Aboriginal people will probably say, 'I'm not ready to be healed. I'm not ready for non-Aboriginal people to be healed.' You know, people who still feel a great sense of injustice and loss and trauma, you know, will legitimately find truth telling and reconciliation very, very challenging and you know some Tasmanian Aboriginal people reject the idea of reconciliation. (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022)*

There also needs to be recognition that reconciliation remains deeply contested:

> *You need to understand and accept that there will be Aboriginal people who are not there – they're not taking a stand for reconciliation or they're not taking a stand for non-Aboriginal people to have a voice in truth-telling because they don't feel that they've been heard. (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022)*

This is reflected in contestation about the inclusiveness of Mannalargenna day, which some see as failing to hold non-Aboriginal Tasmanians to account for colonialism and its contemporary legacy:

> *Mannalargenna Day also is judged by some Aboriginal people in similar terms. It's judged as a place where, you know, white people can go along, because Aborigines will be nice to them. People feel that that's letting non-Aboriginal people off the hook. People feel it's giving things away that should be worked for much harder, and harder won. (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022)*

However, for Lehman, its possible to have both the 'hard edge' of political activism along with 'the business' of generosity. This is in fact reflective of the complexity of Tasmanian political history.

Nevertheless, in order to get to a 'strength-based approach to identity where you can afford to spend more time, celebrating culture', it is critical to properly acknowledge the past. Otherwise, Lehman argues, Aboriginal Tasmanians are caught in a 'discourse of deficit', which becomes embedded in identity:

> *The problem with having to continually witness and evidence disadvantage and the experience of genocide and intergenerational trauma is that in many ways it refreshes all of those things. It also draws Aboriginal people into it, into a discourse of deficit. Uh, which in some ways can, it creates the illusion of empowerment, but it also starts to embed Aboriginal identity itself within a framework of deficit. (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022)*

For Jo Cameron, a key means to move away from a discourse of deficit and disempowerment is to recover the history of the strength and survival of Tasmanian Aboriginal people:

> *What's been missing is that real focus on the strength of our culture and survival through our ancestral grandmother's stories that come down through generations … It's not about forgetting, it's not about saying that the traumatic experiences [didn't occur]. It's about shifting the discourse, shifting the focus away from these deficits that really disempower … it's really important, I think as part of truth-telling, to actually talk about the fact they were fierce. (Personal interview, J Cameron, 2 May 2022)*

Greg Lehman concludes that while the past cannot be forgotten, Aboriginal Australians shouldn't be forced to stand in its shadow, to be indefinitely defined by it:

> *It doesn't mean we should be ignoring or getting over or forgetting about the past, but we shouldn't have to be standing in the shadow of the past. That shadow will always be there, but we shouldn't be required to have to stand in the shadow just to meet people's expectations. (Personal interview, G Lehman, 31 March 2022)*

Melythina Tiakana Warana (Heart of Country) Aboriginal Corporation (MTWAC)

In early 2008, Patsy Cameron gathered a group of six Aboriginal Tasmanians of north-eastern ancestry to discuss enhancing their voice in the area of cultural heritage and knowledge. By December they had registered as the Melythina Tiakana Warana (Heart of Country) Aboriginal Corporation (MTWAC).

Nick Cameron explains the motivation for the organisation as a result of several factors, including a desire for specific representation for north-eastern Tasmanians. In addition, 'there was a strong sense from our Eldership that their voice was not heard' in existing representative organisations, 'so they felt that the organisation would be an opportunity for our own voice to be heard, and it was developed with the focus of being a group that would encompass everybody' (Personal interview, N Cameron, 22 March 2022).

Another central motivation was to reconnect young Tasmanians with their culture as people had become increasingly dispersed from their traditional homelands and the Bass Strait Islands:

> *The Elders especially felt that there was a strong need to assist our young people in learning about culture. There was a lot of serious issues going around – mental health, suicide, all those general issues that happen within with any type of Indigenous community. So the Elders were very proactive in trying to develop an organisation that would support our young people especially. But with a very strong focus on culture, on trying to ensure that the cultural knowledge was passed on to the younger people. (Personal interview, N Cameron, 22 March 2022)*

Jo Cameron explains the strong matriarchal tradition that infused the organisation from the start:

> *We focus on Mannalargenna because he was our Bungunna, our clan leader. But we acknowledge the fact that alongside him and very much part of our survival was those clan women that were from his clan or the clans of the Northeast, as well, one of my ancestral grandmothers who was from Oyster Bay Nation, which is the east coast as well. (Personal interview, 2 May 2022)*

The organisation is also deeply guided by the wisdom of a Circle of Elders. As Chair and board member Nick Cameron outlines:

> *We have a board. It manages the organisation but we have what's called a Circle of Elders, which is a group who are our respected Elders and they give us a level of Elder leadership, if that's the right terminology, to help guide us as a board and an organisation in the direction of how we run our businesses for our members. So that's a very, very important body. (Personal interview, 22 March 2022)*

He explains the place of Elders in the organisation:

> *For us as a group our Elders are probably our most important group of people, along with our young people, to us they are the holders of knowledge. They are the holders of our stories. They grew up in a very divisive time. But they are the reason why we survive … it's because of their strength and courage we still survive today and our culture is still very, very strong and growing stronger. (Personal interview, 22 March 2022)*

The ethos of the MTWAC from the beginning was to create a safe and inclusive space for reconnection in the wake of a difficult history of dislocation and removal and the continuing legacy of contested identity, which this has left Tasmanians:

> *One of the things that we really established early was around our values, that we wanted to be an o rganisation that was a safe space for people to reconnect as a community … people continue today to reconnect after being removed or their parents removed. So they've been disconnected from their culture. So, we wanted to be a place where people could come, you know, and explore and learn and find out, discover who they were. So that's a big part of what MTWAC wanted to do. (Personal interview, N Cameron, 22 March 2022)*

Mannalargenna Day was born from this desire for reconnection not only to identity but identity in Country:

> *Mannalargenna Day kind of came from that very early on … we didn't just want to open the doors for people … to find out answers to these questions. We also wanted to do it on our clan Country. So a big part of that was, well, what do we want to do as a people to reconnect there, be on Country. So Mannalargenna Day started the first year as just us mob. Our extended families, which were about 60 or so people went the first time, it wasn't open to the public, we just went on Land and we wanted to be back in place. (Personal interview, J Cameron, 2 May 2022)*

MTWAC treasurer Lyndon O'Neil describes the significance of this experiential reconnection to identity and Country for him:

> *I've been very fortunate in the past five or six years to finally find my mob … so Mannalargenna Day to me it's pretty, it's a really a special day, it's a really incredible day … I've had a bit of a battle my whole life, I suppose connecting or not so much a battle connecting, but a battle in just finding my mob and reconnecting with my people … And Mannalargenna Day is crazy. It's like, yeah, just even going, even going up to the Land. It's like walking into a different place. Yeah, so it's like walking into a different area and the feeling was like nothing I'd ever felt before, I guess, even though I knew who I was. (Personal interview, 17 March 2022)*

MTWAC founder Patsy Cameron's ability to negotiate with a variety of stakeholders has been critical to the achievements of the MTWAC and in particular the organisation of Mannalargenna Day. In 2013 she secured a collaborative agreement with Hydro Tasmania (now Musselroe Bay Wind Farm) to establish and jointly manage the Tebrakunna Visitor Centre at Cape Portland, the site for Mannalargenna Day each year since 2015. Patsy Cameron describes how she negotiated this agreement with the then CEO of Hydro Tasmania:

> *We had a very quiet meeting together in a hotel in Launceston, and I said, 'you've got our land … and we want something, you need to do something for us' and he asked me 'what', what I'd like. And I said, 'I'd like to have a place where we can tell our story, the story of my ancestors and their deep time and relationships with that land' … I said, 'a big interpretation center'. And, he clicked his fingers and he said 'we'll do it'. From that moment, they were committed to building an interpretation center on that site with a beautiful outlook … for six years, at least we had Mannalargenna Day right there at the visitor centre. (Personal interview, 21 April 2022)*

She explains the events surrounding the first commemoration of Mannalargenna:

> *We wanted to celebrate and commemorate the passing of Mannalargenna. So it was as close to Mannalargenna's passing as possible, which would've been the Saturday, the 4th of December, 1835 when he died at Wybalenna on Flinders Island and he never came back. His remains are still there in a little burial ground with about 200 others at Wybalenna on Flinders Island. We wanted to commemorate him and to honour him … and we wanted to do our cultural opening before the official opening.*

> *Because, that was the right way … the cultural protocols demanded that we were able to claim [traditional ownership of our clan Country] – it was like a reclamation of that place. (Personal interview, 21 April 2022)*

The event became a site for truth-telling about Mannalargenna and the history of Tasmania, the significance of connection to Country that had been broken by colonial violence and the survival of a small group of Tasmanian Aboriginal women despite this violence:

> *And then we had this wonderful celebration of Mannalargenna's life. And part of that, when we talk about truth-telling, part of that was about telling the history of that place and for our people at that time to understand … what connection to Country means to us, on the land of our ancestors … so there was some truth-telling that day. There was lots of talking about Mannalargenna and our ancestral Grannies. From four of his daughters and his sister many of us descend in Tasmania today. (Personal interview, P Cameron, 21 April 2022)*

For Patsy Cameron, truth-telling is a self-reflexive activity:

> *So I think truth-telling sometimes starts with us understanding our truth. Who are we, and where do we come from and why do we call ourselves Tasmanian Aboriginal people? … There's something about actually acknowledging your Tasmanian Aboriginal heritage, which is the beginning of truth-telling I think. (Personal interview, 21 April 2022)*

Truth-telling is not simply about recounting the atrocities of the past but is also about a contemporary recovery of the heterogeneity of Tasmanian Aboriginal identity lost through colonialism:

> *It's not just going to be about truth-telling about our historical experience, about the terrible experiences of our ancestors during that colonial period of the war and dispossession, displacement and exile. But also for us to let Tasmanians know that there's not one community. We're many communities, that there's not one language, we had eight to 13 languages being spoken at the time of the invasion.*

> *In the late 1830s at Wybalenna when there were 200 of our ancestors surviving they were speaking eight to ten languages. That's amazing. And they were not making up one language or a Creole … they were teaching each other, each other's languages. So that's why … my belief that we should preserve our languages, all of them, as much as we can. So that notion that you hear all the time … that there's only one community in Tasmania, and that there's only one language – it's not true. So when we talk about truth-telling, let's tell the truth … (Personal interview, P Cameron, 21 April 2022)*

Truth-telling therefore is both educative and experiential:

> *I think there'll always be that day, one day of the year, Mannalargenna Day, which will be utilised … for us to share our stories, to share our knowledge and in order to keep the general public engaged and informed … so I think that's what truth-telling's about, isn't it?… Through experience, people can come and experience and see the connections to the land and the culture. (Personal interview, P Cameron, 21 April 2022)*

Jo Cameron makes a similar point about the experiential power of being on Country on Mannalargenna Day:

> *We wanted it [Mannalargenna Day] to be relevant. You know, being out on Country is a really powerful experience for our people. And we thought when you open that up to, to the wider community where they can actually literally walk on Country, not just theoretically. So that's that thing about making it real for people. (Personal interview, 2 May 2022)*

Describing one year when it rained and everyone had to crowd into one marquee, Patsy Cameron outlines the engagement and interaction this precipitated, 'just using it as, as a place to network and to bounce ideas off and to talk about our history and our experiences is just remarkable.' Therefore, 'we have to fill in the dots, you know, what it does is it starts the process. It gets people thinking about the land and the Country and what happened here, the truth, the story that's really what I think is important' (Personal interview, 21 April 2022).

Conclusion

The festival at Mannalargenna attests to the significance of the experiential aspects of truth-telling. It is through the experience of being on Country that the organisers seek to share not only the truth of the experience of Aboriginal Tasmanians and their banishment and near-destruction at Flinders Island, but their ultimate survival and resilience. By honouring the legacy of Mannalargenna, leader of the Pairrebeenne/Trawlwoolway clan, who is the ancestor of many Aboriginal Tasmanians today, the festival foregrounds the multi-faceted experience of colonialism, as Mannalargenna sought to ensure the survival of his community through negotiation in the face of the terrible impact of the Black War on the Aboriginal Tasmanian population. The inclusive approach of the festival draws on this legacy of compromise, negotiation and survival. The festival therefore seeks to model a form of collaborative engagement by seeking to create a 'safe space' in which mutual learning and reconnection can occur. In this context, the diversity and heterogeneity of Tasmanian Aboriginal experience can be shared and celebrated.

There are a number of factors that would seem to have contributed to the success of the Mannalargenna Day Festival. Prime among them is the strong leadership of the founder, Aunty Patsy Cameron, and the fact that the organising body, MTWAC, prioritises the voices of their 'Circle of Elders'. The organisation draws on a strong matriarchal tradition among women from the Bass Strait. Aunty Patsy's personal relationships with influential organisations, public figures and academics has contributed significantly to the viability of the festival. She has also been very active organising the day-to-day running of the event. At the same time as MTWAC values and recognises the leadership of Elders, there is also a focus on developing and nurturing the next generation of leaders; for example, Aunty Patsy now co-runs the women's circle with a younger woman. The organising committee's openness to a range of different organisations and individuals would seem to have significantly contributed to its ability to garner resources. Though the first gathering to commemorate Mannalargenna was intended primarily for MTWAC members, interested visitors were welcomed. Support and help from local businesses and Council has contributed to the significant increase in festival patrons over time, as well as contributing to the infrastructure to make that increase feasible.

The inclusive approach of the festival organisers has not been without its critics, including within the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. However, the organisers' continued insistence on incorporating a plurality of voices has arguably allowed the event to grow and increase in impact within both non-Indigenous and Aboriginal communities in Tasmania and beyond.

3. Interview Case Study: Women of Pearling statue, Western Australia

Introduction

A three-metre bronze statue of a pregnant female diver coming out of the water, pearl shell in her hands, was unveiled on Broome's Roebuck Bay foreshore in 2010. The $66, 000 statue was funded by Broome's Shire Council, and was officially unveiled on 26 November 2010 by Hon. Wendy Duncan MLC (Monument Australia website, Women of Pearling). The statue recognises the participation of First Nations women in the pearling industry and the significant exploitation and coercion these women endured. Pregnant Aboriginal women were forced to dive, often naked and without equipment, because it was believed that being pregnant improved their lung capacity. Many drowned as a result. The statue represents what has been described as a 'secret history', one that the sculptors Joan and Charles Smith hoped would be better remembered so as to avoid repeating similar mistreatment (Thomson, 2009).

The site chosen for the memorial is significant as it was a site for pearling vessels to dock, with camps for indentured labourers set up along the shore. The families of the pearling crews would wait at the foreshore for the vessels (called luggers) to return from their time at sea (Australia's Northwest website).

Kira Fong, Chief Operations Officer of Goolarri Media Enterprises, which facilitated the project to commission the statue, explains the significance of the current site:

> *They wanted her in Chinatown with the pearl diving men, and then the women in the community, Aboriginal women, said, 'No, she needs to have her own place'. So Bedford Park, where the monument is, is the place where the women used to watch the luggers sail in from the ocean. (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022)*

The plaque accompanying the statue reads:

> *'And precious the tear as that rain from the sky, Which turns into pearls as it fall in the sea.' Thomas Moore*
>
> *On the foreshore of Roebuck Bay we honour the contribution of women to the pearling industry. Their love, commitment, endeavour, strength and vision helped make Broome the pearling capital of the world.*
>
> *The location of this memorial is chosen because it is here that the wives, children, families and friends of lugger crew anxiously watched for the return of the luggers on the spring tide or watched as they sailed out to sea on the neap tide in search of the 'oyster gems of the moon'.*
>
> *Here the luggers would be laid up on the foreshore, where Asian indentured workers' camps were set up and families and friends visited. This was a favourite spot for children to play all day long.*

Aboriginal men and women were coerced into the pearling industry through the practice known as 'blackbirding', a 19th- and early 20th century colonial practice of forcing Indigenous peoples into various forms of exploitative labour, through deception and/or kidnapping (Encyclopedia Britannica 2020). While the term is often used to refer to the coercive 'recruitment' of Pacific Islanders to Australia to work, for example, on Queensland's cotton and sugar plantations, blackbirding practices occurred in other contexts, such as that of the pearling industry in Broome. Yawuru historian Sumi Kwaymullina has documented the terrible conditions endured by Aboriginal people coerced into the pearling industry along Australia's north-west coastline from the 1850s until the 1890s and the lack of recognition of both their economic contribution and the inhuman treatment they experienced (Kwaymullina, 2001). At first local Aboriginal people were forced to work on the pearling ships, but as profits increased, people from further north and inland (some of whom who had never seen the sea, let alone dived) were taken. The police and legal system were so deeply implicated in the industry that convictions of blackbirding were 'virtually impossible' (Kwaymullina, 2001, p. 58). Women were believed to be superior divers, but this did not stop them from being subjected to abduction, rape and forced prostitution as well.

Initial inspiration for the statue, and engagement of the sculptors, came from Kevin Fong in the early 2000s. He was then Broome Shire President and also the managing director of Goolarri Media Enterprises, an Indigenous media and communications organisation in Broome. He had grown up hearing family stories of the early days of the pearling industry (Personal interview, Kira Fong [no relation to Kevin Fong], 8 December 2022). While there were statues of three male Japanese 'hard hat' divers in Broome, Kevin felt that 'it was important that the history of pearling for women was also recognised' (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022). According to Kira Fong, when she started working at Goolarri in 2003, Kevin believed she would be able to implement his vision of recognising the women who were involved in the pearling industry. He had already commissioned two sculptors, Charles and Joan Smith, to create a statue and they had developed an initial design for it:

> *A pregnant Aboriginal woman coming out of the water and the water streaming off her and holding up the pearl shell with a pearl in it for her master and that was the reality of it, of that blackbirding era. (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022)*

In 2007, prior to the completion of the statue, Goolarri took over the running of the annual Shinju Matsuri festival (meaning Festival of the Pearl), and decided to adopt the theme 'Women in Pearling'. Bedford Park, where the statue was later unveiled, was the original venue for the Shinju Matsuri festival. The festival is held at the end of the pearling season in September when all of the pearling vessels would traditionally return to shore. The festival 'celebrates the four diverse cultures which have come together in Broome over the past century for the pearling industry: Japanese, Malaysian, Chinese and Indigenous Australian' (Project3 website). Many Broome citizens, including Kevin Fong, are descended from Aboriginal, Torres Strait Islander and Asian forebears. As Kira Fong explains, 'the multiculturalism from Broome has come out of everyone ignoring that White Australia policy' (Personal interview, 8 December 2022). Therefore, part of the desire to have the statue at Bedford Park, where the Shinju Matsuri festival previously took place, was to be associated with this legacy of multiculturalism, 'So … that's where we wanted the woman to be … so she's basically …'I'm standing here for all women' (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022).

Kira Fong explains how they hoped that a thematic focus on 'Women in Pearling' would help to address the substantial under-representation of this story:

> *We thought it would be great to have a theme at one of the festivals, 'Women in Pearling', because everyone tells the story of the men. We all hear the story of the hard hat divers and the Malay divers and them going out to sea for months and the cyclones that killed them. We don't hear about the women, that their men didn't come back on the luggers, we don't hear about the women that often died and got sent down – they free dived. (Personal interview, 8 December 2022)*

Unlike many male divers, Aboriginal women dived without equipment and often faced significant coercion:

> *So unlike the men that had the kit on with the pearling helmet that everyone recognizes, these Aboriginal pregnant women free dived and they weren't given a choice. So it was like, 'I'm your master, this is what you're doing' … [they] didn't get paid. And that was just the way it is, you know. Treated like slaves. So that story was there, and then we wanted to expand on that story. So yes, it was a memorial of a woman, you know, making people aware, because there's so many people that didn't know that happened. (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022)*

Development of the statue

While a design for the sculpture was commissioned by Kevin Fong, when the project was implemented by Kira Fong, there was a significant emphasis on community engagement and consultation around the actual execution of the project.

Kira Fong engaged an Aboriginal/Malay woman, Anthea Demin, who had a long family history in Broome, as a community engagement officer. She was responsible for discussing the idea of the statue with local women and ensuring they contributed to the design and the wording of the plaque accompanying the statue. Discussions with local women were undertaken in an informal manner:

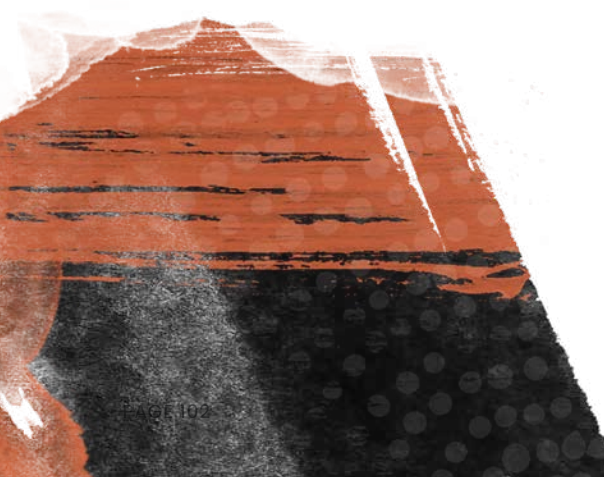
> *We didn't call it consultation … You know for government and for grants and stuff, yes we've got a consultation process and you know, community liaison and all the rest of it. We didn't think of it as community liaison, we just thought about it as catching up with the women and, and sharing those great stories and, you know, learning more. (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022)*

According to Kira Fong, the informal nature of the process facilitated engagement:

> *If we'd have made it formal, they wouldn't have been as involved as what they were, you know, they get together, have a giggle with their friends. Crack up … talk about the old days … And that's not the stuff that's written down. (Personal interview, 8 December 2022)*

Despite the fact that the consultation process was informal, it had a significant impact on the placement and naming of the statue. While there were initial proposals to place the statue in Chinatown to complement the statues of male pearlers there, local women were adamant that the statue needed to be accorded its own place to properly recognise the role of women in the pearling industry:

> *And we're like, no, this is about women. This is our spot. This is the women's spot. This is … where she needs to be. And so we did have to argue that point. And at the end of the day, we had enough local women in the fight – it wasn't really a fight – enough local women saying, This is where she needs to be. (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022)*



Kira Fong also credits the openness of the Shire President at the time, Graeme Campbell, for the fact that the women's choice of the statue placement was supported:

> *The wonderful thing about Graeme is he used to just wander around the streets and talk to the local people. He was fascinated with the local history, the local people, and keeping that alive. So he was very open to it. I don't know that that would be the case now: 'No, we want it here and that's where it's going'. Whereas, you know, there was this wonderful negotiation … there was this real reach out to us – 'We've got the money here, but you are the experts.' (Personal interview 8 December 2022)*

Another aspect of the sculpture where the women of Broome's input was important was in changing the name of the statue from 'Women in Pearling' to 'Women of Pearling' to honour all the women associated with the pearling industry:

> *They came back and said, 'No, it's "Women of Pearling". Because I never went off and pearled. I never graded pearls. I never sold pearls. I never did any of that. But I was involved in the pearling industry because I worked at the telecom station where I had to patch people through. I worked at the shop where they used to get the supplies from. I was the nurse where they brought people in when they had the bends.' So that's why it was changed to 'of', and that's why that story was so important, to make it broader and involve those women. (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022)*

Kira Fong emphasises the importance of consultation and engagement with local women in facilitating the discussion that led to this change in the name of the statue:

> *Because otherwise it'd be a very different perspective if we did not get the women in the community together. It was just getting everyone's stories and bringing them together with people that they trust and that are women … we had to get the words on the plaque approved by them all. And they had a few changes … 'That doesn't quite read right. It needs to read like this', so that the plaque itself took a long time. (Personal interview, 8 December 2023)*

These women were essential to the realisation of the project and it was profoundly meaningful for them:

> *It was the women of Broome, the older women of Broome, the women that had the memories, that contributed to the words that are on her [the statue], that contributed to the placement of her, you know, that were there when we launched her and cried because of how special that moment was that we were acknowledging all women of pearling. (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022)*

Thus these Aboriginal women's ownership of the story was critical. Some non-Indigenous people, such as professional historians, assisted to gather information about blackbirding that had not been properly documented or researched. However, 'People don't want white people telling their story, and that's a big thing … it needed to be Broome women telling this, telling the story of women of pearling in Broome' (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022).

At the same time, the project also relied considerably on the commitment and collaboration of two non-Indigenous sculptors, Joan and Charles Smith who developed designs for the sculpture in the early 2000s but remained involved throughout the ensuing years and facilitated the realisation of the project by waiving their fees. As Kira Fong explains:

> *By the time we started building her, anyone else, they would've charged double. But they were so engaged with us in the story and getting that story out there. It was a passion project for them. And really all they did was cover their costs and the freight, you know … So everyone kind of came on board as a love project. (Personal interview, 8 December 2022)*

According to Fong, the sculptors worked collaboratively with the women in Broome to realise *their* vision:

> *Charles and Joan didn't tell us how to tell the story. What they did was made the story visual. So we told them the story and they visualised that story and turned it into art … And they did a beautiful job of it. That was the incredible thing about what they did, was their ability to so fluidly tell that story and to comprehend that story … and how important it was and how amazing she had to be … it was what they took from us and then put into this. (Personal interview, 8 December 2022)*

Because it took a long time between the initial idea for the statue and its actual execution, the price of bronze had significantly increased, and a slightly less costly amalgam of copper and bronze was used. Nevertheless, as Kira Fong emphasises, 'She is beautiful. When you go and see her, there's something so special about her' (Personal interview, 8 December 2022).

Another way in which the women of Broome's agency was respected in the project was in relation to data sovereignty, the way in which women who shared information collected during the project were able to retain agency over how and with whom their stories are shared. An agreement has been negotiated that documents and information related to the consultation process will be held at the Broome Library but cannot be shared without agreement from the individuals involved. This includes the stories of older Broome women. On the one hand, this information is an important historical record:

> *We were able to get their stories and get their memories out of their head before they passed away. And that will continue to happen where we're going to lose those old Broome women. And … it's important that somebody's got this information stored. (Personal interview, Kira Fong, 8 December 2022)*

At the same time, the women are in control of how these stories are shared. Kira Fong explains:

> *They're their stories. They're not our stories to tell for commercial gratification. It's their memories and it's their stories. You know, it's their choice if they want to tell that story for [any] purposes. (Personal interview, 8 December 2022)*

She concludes, 'But to be a part of that old Broome community and to hear that, is really special' (Personal interview, 8 December 2022).

To this day, Kira Fong and Anthea Demin still have a personal relationship with 'our lady'. They visit her, and are proud that she's always treated with respect by visitors. The recently launched 'Jetty to Jetty' app encourages walkers to sit with the statue and reflect on the women that helped shape the town of Broome. Kira Fong feels that this is an important way to start a 'thought-provoking conversation around blackbirding' and encourages interested people to research not only history written by 'rich, white educated people', but also to discover that 'digital technology today is telling the oral history of our Elders' (Personal interview, 8 December 2022).

A unique feature of the statue that has also generated more interest is that when the full moon rises from the bay, it appears to be sitting in the pearl shell that the woman is lifting from the water, making the statue very photogenic for Broome visitors. However, Kira Fong emphasises the importance 'that that story is kept alive and it's not romanticised for commercial gain' (Personal interview, 8 December 2022). At the same time, this photogenic outcome has helped raise public awareness of a significant aspect of Broome's history:

> *So for us, that gets people to the spot and it gets people reading the history. And then it … makes people aware of Aboriginal women, pregnant women, and what they were forced to do … This is a modern history and this is our shared history and we need to remind people that this happens. Don't turn a blind eye to it. (Personal interview, 8 December 2022)*

Conclusion

The project that led to the final unveiling of the statue Women of Pearling again reveals the importance of consultation and collaboration in the development of truth-telling initiatives that seek to recognise unacknowledged aspects of Australia's troubled colonial history. It also demonstrates that these processes of consultation and engagement may take an extended period of time but that this is critical to ensure that the process and its outcomes are a legitimate and meaningful recognition of previous violations, and ultimately act as some sort of reparation, however incomplete, of the historical damage done.

Critical to the project was the foregrounding of the agency of the women of Broome, in whose honour the sculpture was being developed. This was realised through a consultation process that helped define a number of aspects of the project, including where the statue would be located, what it would be named and the inscription on it. At the conclusion of the project, the continuing agency of the women of Broome was recognised through an agreement that the stories recorded during the consultation process would remain in their control, to be shared at their discretion.

Again, as in many other examples of truth-telling, it was up to local stakeholders and local leadership to make this particular vision of truth-telling a reality. Kira Fong, through Goolarri Media Enterprises, worked to realise Kevin Fong's initial concept by securing the funds and sponsorship to execute the project and engage in a collaborative consultation process with local women. This initiative, like other truth-telling activities, also relied on voluntary support and participation based on ethical commitment to the project. Despite almost a decade of discussions around the sculpture, with an initial design developed during the early 2000s, the sculptors did not increase their initial fees. The collaboration of the non-Indigenous sculptors in the project and their investment in ensuring that this story of courage and violation would be shared speaks to the modest ways in which reconciliation can be built through locally grounded relationships and engagement with the country's history and the need for redress and acknowledgement.

4. Summary Case Study: Yagan Square and Wirin statue, Western Australia

Yagan Square in Perth was officially opened by the Western Australian Premier Mark McGowan in March 2018. The Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority billed it as the city's 'new heart', the first significant public precinct in any Australian city to recognise an Aboriginal person, a place that aims to offer a 'window into Noongar culture' (Bolleter, 2018). The planning process for the square involved the Whadjuk Working Party, the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, and First Nations artists. However, Dr Julian Bolleter (2018) notes that the 'success of Yagan Square from a cultural perspective will be whether it can transition from a space that "provides a window into Noongar culture" – perhaps principally for tourists – to one where Noongar people can assert their contemporary culture and have a consistent, real life presence in the space' (Bolleter, 2018).

A key feature of the square is an impressive nine-metre tall cast-iron statue of the Noongar warrior Yagan, entitled *Wirin*, designed by artist Tjyllyungoo (Lance Chadd). *Wirin* is the Noongar word for spirit and represents the 'eternal sacred force of creative power that connects all life of boodja (mother earth)' (Development WA website). In an interview, Tjyllyungoo described *Wirin* as 'a great representation of Yagan because it goes beyond just the man, but into the culture and the spirituality' (VEEM, 2019).

This statue and its prominence in the newly developed Yagan Square is in some sense an implicit recognition of the legitimacy of Aboriginal resistance to colonial expansion as represented by key figures like the Noongar warrior, Yagan, who resisted European settlement in Western Australia in the early 1800s and was killed in 1833 after colonial authorities issued a bounty for his capture (Lucev, 2010). Engagement with the legacy of Yagan has had a complex and contentious history in Western Australia. After his death he was decapitated and his head sent to Britain for display at the Liverpool City Museum. Many years of activism by the Noongar community finally led to the repatriation and reburial of Yagan's head in Western Australia in 1997 (McGlade, 1998). A statue erected in 1984 to recognise his legacy was vandalised on several occasions, including being symbolically decapitated while an Aboriginal delegation was in London applying for the repatriation of Yagan's head (Gregory, 2021). Artist Tjyllyungoo, who created the recently erected statue in Yagan Square, referred to the redress that the new sculpture represents by noting that when the statue was raised by cranes to look over Yagan Square, 'It was the last chance anyone had to lay hands on his head' (Tjyllyungoo, 2019).

Yagan (c. 1795-1833) was a Whadjuk Noongar warrior, son of the influential Elder Midgegooroo (Reece, no date). As in many other parts of Australia, Aboriginal resistance was a response to colonial expansion and increasing settler numbers who were given land grants by colonial authorities on what had been Noongar traditional country. In Western Australia, the government issued an edict forbidding Noongar people to 'trespass' on their traditional hunting and fishing lands, and meted out floggings to Aboriginal people who raided flour mills and vegetable gardens after access to traditional food sources was cut off (Gregory, 2021). In 1831, after a Whadjuk man was shot and killed by a white settler during a raid on a potato patch, Yagan reportedly led retaliatory killings. He was outlawed and eventually captured with two kinsmen. They were imprisoned on Carnac Island, but escaped. In 1833, Yagan, with his father Midgegooroo (Beeliar elder of the Whadjuk Noongar group), led what Gregory describes as 'the first significant Aboriginal resistance to white settlement' (2021, p. 578). Up to 40 Aboriginal men were reported as having ambushed and killed two men driving a cart-load of stores from Fremantle to the Canning River. Midgegooroo was later captured and executed by firing squad and Yagan was again declared an outlaw, with a bounty of £30 offered for his capture – dead or alive (Gregory, 2021).

On 11 July 1833, Yagan was killed by two young men whom he had befriended. He was decapitated and his smoked head (kaat) was transported to England and exhibited at fairs, sideshows and the Liverpool City Museum, until it was finally buried in a British cemetery in 1964 (McGlade, 1998). In 1997, after many years of campaigning by Noongar community members, his remans were repatriated. Once in Western Australia, Yagan's head remained in the State Pathology Centre until 2010, when it was buried in a private Noongar ceremony at Belhus near Perth, close to where his body is believed to be. The event was marked by the opening of the Yagan Memorial Park by Premier Colin Barnett (Lucev, 2010).

At the same time as efforts were being made to ensure Yagan's remains were returned to Australia, there were other initiatives that sought to recognise his legacy. One was at least partially precipitated as a response to the commissioning of a statue to commemorate the first governor of the colony, James Stirling, which was unveiled by Prince Charles in 1979 as part of Western Australia's centennial commemoration of its founding as a British colony in 1829. In response to protests by local Aboriginal communities at this celebration of one of the country's early colonists, discussions were initiated about the possibility of commissioning another statue, to commemorate the legacy of Yagan and his engagement with James Stirling (Gregory, 2021).

Although initially contested by the Western Australian government, a statue was finally dedicated to Yagan in 1984 at Heirisson Island, where it was believed that Yagan had first sighted Captain Stirling and his men rowing up the Swan River. However, the statue became an object of contention. Gregory notes that 'it was vandalised three times between 1984 and 1997' (2021, p. 580). On the first occasion, paint was splashed on the statue and the spear stolen. In September 1997, when an Aboriginal delegation was in London applying for the repatriation of Yagan's head, vandals removed the head from the statue with an angle grinder. It was replaced, but two months later the statue was again decapitated, this time by a self-proclaimed 'British loyalist' on the day of Lady Diana Spencer's funeral, reportedly in response to Noongar Elder Ken Colbung's alleged comment that her death was 'Nature's Revenge' for Yagan's killing by the 'English' (Gregory, 2021, p. 580). The head was replaced again shortly after this. Archie Weller's short film *Confessions of a Headhunter* makes reference to these events from an Aboriginal perspective (Australian Screen website).

5. Summary Case Study: Yininmadyemi sculpture, New South Wales

In 2015, Kuku Yalanji/Girramay artist Tony Albert was commissioned by the City of Sydney to construct a memorial honouring the contribution of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women to the defence of Australia through military service. Alberts notes that 'the Anzac legend is a potent and powerful figure in our national cultural identity. Wouldn't it be amazing if Indigenous servicemen and women were a part of that spirit?' (Reed, 2015, p. 60). The artwork's title, Yininmadyemi, is an Aboriginal word that translates as 'Thou Didst Let Fall'. It is a large sculpture with four standing bullets, representing conflict, and three fallen shells that represent those who sacrificed their lives (City of Sydney, 2014). The sculpture sits on a boomerang-shaped base, referencing the fact that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities often gave soldiers gifts of boomerangs, symbolising a safe return (Hocking, 2015). Its location is significant as it stands in Hyde Park, where the state's major ANZAC War memorial to commemorate the contribution of Australian soldiers has been located since 1934. It also recognises the fact that before colonial occupation, this site was once a ritual contest ground and an important site for ceremony, gathering and camping for the traditional owners of the land, the Gadigal people (City of Sydney, 2014).

Though little recognised before the 1970s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people have served in every conflict and commitment involving Australian defence contingents since Federation. Over 1000 Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians fought in the First World War (Australian War Memorial website, Indigenous defence service) and 3000 or more served during the Second World War (Department of Veterans' Affairs website). Increasingly, since the 1990s, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander service with the Australian armed forces has been recognised, largely through persistent protests from ex-servicemen and women, including groups such as the Babana Men's Group and the Coloured Diggers. Historian Noah Riseman argues this was propelled by the reconciliation movement, because its narratives around inclusion matched many Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people's experiences of feeling greater respect and equity whilst in the military (Riseman, 2012).

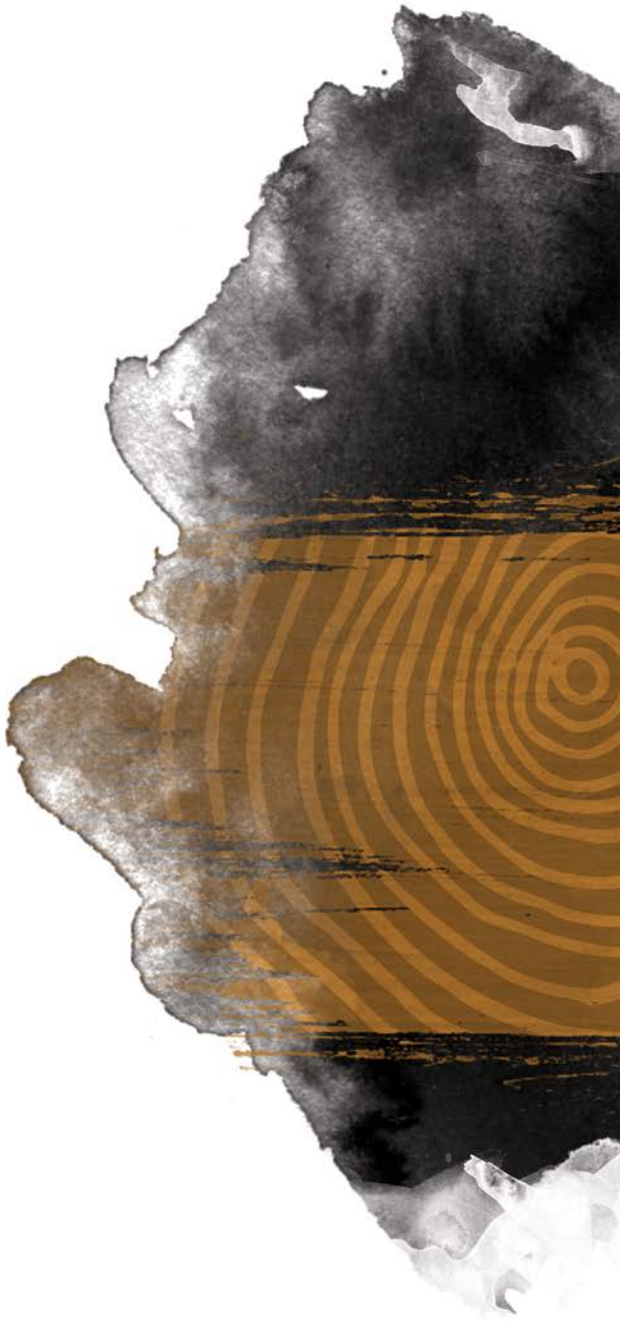
Tony Albert explains that a significant part of the inspiration for the sculpture came from the story of his own grandfather, Eddie Albert, who served as a soldier in the Second World War and was held as a German POW, but managed to survive. When Eddie was returned to Australia, 'Unlike other servicemen and women who were given land in recognition of their service, Eddie was not. In fact, his family's land was still being taken away' (Reed, 2015, p. 58). Through the sculpture Tony Albert sought to counter historical denialism and amnesia regarding Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander men and women's contribution to Australia's various war efforts.

Writing about his sculpture, Tony Albert states:

> *This work is as much about individual stories as it is about a collected history, which this country continues to deny. Indigenous soldiers were not paid for their services, nor were they given land grants. Some of our relatives were buried overseas, because after serving in the military they were not allowed back into Australia under the White Australia policy. These are things the Australian public need to know and need to reconcile. (Reed, 2015, p. 58)*

Tony Albert argues that his intention with the monument was not to glorify war, but to 'stir strong emotions' in visitors (Reed, p. 58) and it was inspired by a number of international memorials including the 'Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe'. He wanted the memorial's text to resonate with both the local and broader community, therefore Albert engaged Wiradjuri woman and former Chair of the Gadigal Information Services Anita Heiss to write it. The sculpture is surrounded by a native garden filled with plants traditionally used for smoking ceremonies to cater for First Nations visitors from different parts of Australia (Reed, 2015).

When the City of Sydney released the tender for the project, Albert had already been researching military service within his own family, who have collectively served over 80 years (Reed, 2015). Around the same time, he was also invited by the Australian War Memorial to undertake a tour of duty as an Official War Artist, and was deployed to North West Mobile Force (NORFORCE), where 60% of the personnel are Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. There Albert found that these service men and women did not know of the war memorial, and so decided to 'to literally write them into history through my artwork' (Reed, 2015, p. 60).



REDRESS, HEALING AND RECONCILIATION

Introduction

This section explores a variety of types of initiatives initiated by communities, but increasingly implemented in collaboration with a range of stakeholders, to grapple with, heal and redress the inheritance of colonial violation. These initiatives are very much about truth-doing. They seek to begin the hard work not only of articulating and recognising the truths of history but also directly addressing and seeking to transform these legacies. These initiatives are notable for the diversity and creativity of their engagement with these complex legacies.

In this section, we describe the work of two organisations who support the survivors and descendants of the Stolen Generations in New South Wales, conducting truth-telling and education around this traumatic violence and its ongoing impact. The extent of the violation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children was first formally documented and exposed by the work of the National Inquiry into the Forced Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, which handed down its final report in 1997 after hearing the testimony of hundreds of survivors of the government's policy of forced removal of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children. The Inquiry's final report, *Bringing Them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, found that 'Nationally we can conclude with confidence that between one in three and one in ten Indigenous children were forcibly removed from their families and communities in the period from approximately 1910 until 1970' (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997, p. 31). However, it took until 2015 for the first states to begin to establish reparation schemes to pay compensation to Stolen Generations survivors, with some states only establishing such schemes in 2022.

The removal of children from their families was part of a government policy of forcible assimilation into 'white' Australian society, which dated from the 19th century. From the earliest days of colonisation, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander children were kidnapped and exploited for their labour by settlers or targeted by government and missionaries to 'civilise' them with 'European values' and 'work habits' so they could be employed in the colonial economy (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997, p. 22).

In the late 19th century concern about the increasing number of people of 'mixed descent', who were seen by colonists as being in a state of 'cultural and racial limbo', led to an attempt to forcibly 'merge' 'mixed-race' children into white society by removing them from their families and sending them to work for non-Indigenous families (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997, p. 24). In New South Wales, Western Australia and the Northern Territory, many children of mixed descent were totally separated from their families when young and placed in segregated 'training' institutions such as Cootamundra Girls Home and Kinchela Boys Home, before being sent out to work (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997).

In the absence of formal government support and reparations schemes, organisations like Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation and the Cootamundra Girls Home Aboriginal Corporation are initiatives of survivors and the descendants of the survivors of the Stolen Generations who have worked together to establish organisations that could provide services and support to these communities, as well as work to educate the broader community about the experiences of the Stolen Generations and the policies that led to their forced removal. Central to the mission of the Mobile Education Bus established by the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation is the desire to educate future generations about this difficult history in the belief that truth-telling can help prevent a repetition of such violations in the future. Both initiatives also speak to the importance of place in healing. The Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation worked over a number of years to recover the site of the Kinchela Boys Home in order to transform this place of pain into a site of truth-telling and recovery. A similar initiative is underway with the campaign to save the Cootamundra Girls Home in New South Wales.

This section also includes an initiative to repatriate the remains of ancestors in South Australia to symbolically 'make whole' the violation their bodies and spirits experienced. This unique initiative was undertaken to lay to rest 130 First Nations people in a specially constructed memorial site called Wangayarta. The remains of these individuals had been stored in cardboard boxes in the South Australian Museum for up to 100 years.

This project sought to redress the damage done to First Nations communities throughout Australia through the colonial theft of the remains of thousands Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, as well as treasured cultural artefacts, over a period of 200 years. While initiated by local Kuarna Elders, the project became a collaborative effort between the South Australian Museum, Adelaide Cemeteries and the state government.

Also covered here is an artistic engagement with the statue of colonial politician and medical officer William Crowther in Hobart, Tasmania, which finally led to the statue's removal. The City Council sought to respond to Aboriginal community concerns about the statue of Crowther, which stood in Franklin Square in Hobart's city centre for more than 130 years. Crowther was responsible for the violation of the body of Aboriginal leader William Lanne, regarded as one of the last 'full-blooded' Tasmanians. This process of engagement began with an arts project in which four Aboriginal artists were engaged to create separate artistic responses to the Crowther statue, which was followed by a Council decision to permanently remove the statue as an act of truth-telling, recognition and reconciliation in 2022.

Another initiative that sought to redress the difficult legacy of museums and their implication in the colonial project in Australia is the permanent exhibition ningina tunapri, meaning 'to give knowledge and understanding', at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery, where the skeleton of Aboriginal leader Truganini was displayed for over 40 years. The new exhibition, first opened in 2007 and re-launched in 2012, was described as a 'progressive benchmark for Indigenous cultural representation in Tasmania' that 'cleansed and redeemed' the space in which Truganini and other First Nations people had previously been displayed and seeks to reflect the rich, varied and continuing contribution of Aboriginal Tasmanian communities to Tasmanian society (Lehman, 2018).

1. Interview Case Study: Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, New South Wales

Introduction

Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC) launched its Mobile Education Centre in 2020. It has been described as a 'a mobile "site of conscience" as well as a place of Indigenous resistance and truth-telling in White Australia' (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, McComsey and Porter, 2022, p. 184). It aims to deepen knowledge about the Stolen Generations and reconnect survivors with the communities from which they were taken. Young Aboriginal boys forcibly removed from their families as part of government policies of forced assimilation were subjected to systematic brutality and abuse at the Kinchela Aboriginal Boys Training Home between 1924 and 1970. Children were stripped of their names and called by numbers when they were brought to the home. They suffered extreme punishments for small infractions, such as being beaten or chained to a tree. Some were sexually violated.

The Mobile Education Centre (MEC) was set up in a disused commuter bus by survivors of the Kinchela Boys Home (KBH), in Kempsey on the mid-north coast of New South Wales 'for the purposes of truth-telling and healing, and to preserve the collective memories of KBH survivors for future generations' (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, McComsey and Porter, 2022, p. 185). In February 2020, the MEC was launched in Redfern, Sydney, Australia. In the front half of the bus is an exhibition space, while the back half is a cinema and yarning space where visitors watch a short animated film produced by the KBH survivors (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, McComsey and Porter, 2022, p. 188). The exhibition display has been developed in consultation with survivors (Wellauer, 2020). The MEC also has a recording booth where visitors can share their reflections and where community members 'who have stories relevant to KBH, the Stolen Generations, and related community histories can share and record them as an educational resource and record for future generations' (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, McComsey and Porter, 2022, p. 188).

Resources for the Mobile Education Centre were acquired from the New South Wales Government (Department of Education, Families and Community Services, Health and Aboriginal Affairs). KBHAC also worked closely with the bus operator CDC NSW, who committed $750 000 over three years to support the MEC. CDC began by helping to maintain the refurbished mobile education bus but became increasingly committed to the project. Some of the company's engineers were involved in designing elements of the bus and it provided drivers to help 'get the Uncles out there in their truth-telling journey' (Cotter, 2021). CDC will also be offering careers and skills development opportunities for First Nations candidates nominated by KBHAC and back-office support for the organisation. According to CDC's NSW CEO Edward Thomas, 'Partnering with KBHAC has been a learning experience for us at CDC. Every day we continue to learn more about Aboriginal culture and past experiences and how we can do our part to help achieve reconciliation' (Cotter, 2021).

According to KBHAC, 'the underlying philosophy of the mobile education bus is to connect with the hearts and minds of future generations' (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, McComsey and Porter, 2022, p. 187) and as a result the content and media are specifically targeted at a young audience, although the exhibition also speaks to a broader audience. It does this by creating:

> *A safe space for truth-telling that is structured as a yarning circle experience and which utilizes a range of resources: oral testimony, archival material and arti-facts, an animated film, visual images, audio recordings, and interactive materials including an online portal. (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, McComsey and Porter, 2022, p. 187)*

KBHAC CEO Tiffany McComsey explains the experiential space that the MEC creates and the the support that KBH survivors demonstrate for each other opens up space for meaningful engagement:

> *We set the context watching this animated film and things really start to drop or be felt at that human level with people and then the Uncles will go into more of their stories and I think it's the way in which the Uncles look after each other in that process that it allows people to feel safe to even ask a question. (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022)*

History of Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation

It wasn't until 1995, with the establishment of the National Inquiry into the Forced Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, that survivors of the Kinchela Boys Home began to come forward with their stories and recount the ongoing legacy of trauma and disconnection it had left them. Uncle Michael Welsh (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation Chair and Kinchela Boys Home survivor) describes what he lost when he was forcibly removed from his family:

> *Before they took me I used to dance around the campfire with my grandmother, my grandfather, my uncles and aunties. My grandfather played the violin, my mother played the piano, aunties played the bones, uncles played the gum leaves and we danced underneath the stars at the night time and then my world was just blown to pieces, never to be the same again. (Personal interview, 21 February 2022)*

Nevertheless, while at KBH many boys formed deep bonds with each other, which enabled them to endure the harsh conditions. This bond and the networks of support they established in the home continued in many instances after young men left KBH. In 2002, in the wake of the National Inquiry, a group of survivors came together and returned to the KBH site for the first time since they were boys. It was after this, in 2003, that the Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation (KBHAC) was established.

Tiffany McComsey explains how the National Inquiry into the Forced Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families brought a new level of visibility to members of the Stolen Generations whose stories had to some extent been marginalised within wider political struggles for rights and self-determination:

> *So with the Bringing Them Home report, at a sort of national level, being able to turn the focus back on survivors, allowed for the uncles and aunties to have their voice heard and listened to in a way that hadn't really existed at the community level … and the Bringing Them Home report allowed for the reconnection as a group and here in Redfern there were a lot of hearings related to that National Inquiry process.*

> *There were a lot of uncles who had gone through Kinchela Boys Home that were living in Redfern and it just seemed like the catalyst that allowed for that identity to be reclaimed in many ways and to restore visibility. (Personal interview, 21 February 2022)*

The enhanced visibility brought to the experience of survivors and the reclamation of this identity led to a renewed desire to connect and advocate for the needs of survivors. However, this was not an easy process, as it required former KBH residents to confront what for many had been a buried set of experiences:

> *And the first thing that came out was some of the uncles … said we need an organisation that's ours that looks after the brothers and looks after our families and that was the big catalyst for even bringing the uncles together, with all of the complexities of that and the pain and fear … (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022)*

Central to the way the past could be reclaimed was, paradoxically, a return to the site of violation as a site of truth-telling:

> *That then led right away to needing to go back to the site where Kinchela was and from that journey was wanting something ongoing with truth-telling … and that's how this organisation started and the hope that the truth-telling would really lead to change. (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022)*

KBHAC describes the vision of the corporation as being to 'improve the social, emotional, cultural, and spiritual well-being of KBH survivors and their families in meaningful ways, supporting the KBH survivors to restore their family structures by providing individual, family, and collective healing programs' (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, McComsey and Porter, 2022, p. 185). Importantly, KBHAC has, over time, developed a unique survivor-led approach to its governance and healing in which 'KBH survivors and KBHAC own their stories and healing, leading from a place of self-determination' (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, 2019). As KBHAC Chair Uncle Michael Welsh explains, 'We know how to develop the programmes that we need to be able to help the rest of the families and brothers feel in a safer place' (Personal Interview, M Welsh, 21 February 2022).

A critical focus of KBHAC's work 'centers on healing and truth-telling—so that what happened to the KBH survivors and Stolen Generations survivors does not happen again' (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, McComsey and Porter, 2022, p. 185). The belief of survivors in the power of truth-telling to both heal and prevent a repetition of violations is a hallmark of KBHAC work. Survivors, through their story-telling, viscerally embody the history of violation of the Stolen Generations, which as a result cannot be denied. As survivor Uncle Roger Jarett argues, 'We're here as living proof to tell the truth about what we went through' (Wellauer, 2020). Tiffany McComsey explains the way in which truth-telling can have a political effect through its impact on the emotions of decision-makers, which allows them to fully grasp and experientially understand the damage created by government policies of forced child removal:

> *We've had ministers who have been told … multiple times and then all of a sudden … they're like, wait, you were numbers, you didn't have names, its like people can't actually grasp what they are hearing in this truth and for so long it was sort of not believed or there was a politics about doing truth-telling and now there's sort of an acknowledgement and an acceptance. (Personal interview, 21 February 2022)*

However, there are no guarantees that truth-telling leads to meaningful change. In the wake of the *Bringing Them Home* report some of the promises of truth were disappointed:

> *All of the hopes of where that truth-telling could lead to, which was real change, societal change, family change, community change, was always sort of sidelined because of the politics of apology but the uncles were always there telling their truth and more people hearing or being willing to hear. (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022)*

Therefore, truth-telling in itself is not enough; it is a means to facilitate more fundamental change. Tiffany McComsey argues that 'truth-telling needs to be underpinned by a reparations framework that's going to bring the change that the truth-telling is asking for' (Personal interview, 21 February 2022).

The response to truth-telling therefore requires significant resourcing for substantive transformation:

> *The response is always, well here's money for counselling but an experience like this isn't just about counselling, its so much more, you're rebuilding a family structure, you're rebuilding a connection to community, that needs to be resourced all around to make that impactful. (Personal interview, T McComsey, 2 February 2022)*

Survivors themselves have to lead this process of change in order to ensure it is more than tokenistic:

> *Its not going to be able to make change if we don't have the survivors leading this process and being given more than just saying okay, its sorry day, which of the uncles can speak at this event. That's not what truth-telling is, this is about actual social change and consequences for what's happened so it doesn't happen again. (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022)*

Uncle Michael Welsh argues that, 'Without truth-telling there can be no healing. Our pain must stop with us' (Cotter, 2021). However, not all former residents are ready to embark on this journey of truth-telling. 'Other brothers are still in denial about their pain' (Personal interview, M Welsh, 21 February 2022). There are also significant risks associated with truth-telling. Recounting threats of violence he has experienced in his hometown as a result of his outspoken stance about the injustices experienced by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander residents, Uncle Michael Welsh acknowledges, 'I'm opening my doors to be unsafe by telling the truth' (Personal interview, 21 February 2022). He explains his motives for engaging in truth-telling as being complex, driven by a 'combination of strength and fear … the fear that it's going to happen again to our children, the fear that we can go by the wayside and not achieve anything' (Personal interview, 21 February 2022). Therefore, there is no simple route to reconciliation. Uncle Welsh understands reconciliation as being about co-creating a new type of 'conciliation' through truth-telling. As he explains, 'when we talk about reconciliation, there was no 'conciling' in the first place so the fact is that the truth needs to be brought out together' (Personal interview, 21 February 2022).

In a context of ongoing contemporary injustice, including the continued removal of children from First Nations families, this is a difficult but unavoidable journey for survivors:

> *We haven't got anywhere else to go except to finish this journey off and that's difficult at times because you've got the politics, the policies that they are still making, the thousands of children that they are still taking away from their families and so the trauma just grows and keeps on growing. (Personal interview, M Welsh, 21 February 2022)*

This is made more painful for Uncle Michael Welsh as a result of what he sees as the wilful refusal by governments to acknowledge the extent of the violation experienced by survivors now known as the 'Stolen Generations':

> *The serious point about all of it is that the government still hasn't identified the true pain that they have caused. We are only just a group that they call us the Stolen Generation, the kidnapped children … or the forcibly removed generation, all of the names but the point is that they know what they did, they know how many are left, they know everything about us, they've got records written and still they don't want to take the pathway of true healing. (Personal interview, 21 February 2022)*

The journey of truth-telling is associated with significant emotional trauma but also catharsis. 'We're understanding that talking about it is the only way to defeat it and heal it' (Personal interview, M Welsh, 21 February 2022).

Therefore, he adds:

> *We have to keep on doing what I'm doing. Talking is never easy because it brings back memories that I shut out for so many years but if we don't keep doing this it allows this trauma to grow so that's the strength that I gain from this and the journey of the KBH brothers when we are going through a difficult time. (Personal interview, 21 February 2022)*

It is the collective strength drawn from fellow survivors of KBH, what Tiffany McComsey calls an 'organic brotherhood', which make the journey bearable:

> *With no role modelling for love, family, belonging and safety, something was so deep in these uncles that allowed for these experiences which was about all of the brothers and if you were a KBH brother and you connected with each other at some point in life you were always there for that brother. (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022)*

On the other hand, the process of catharsis associated with truth-telling can be difficult and exposing. Uncle Welsh explains the shame and anger he still feels about the manner in which his family was characterised in official documentation as 'neglectful', which led ultimately to his removal:

> *I still haven't spoken to my children about it, they know little things and they've seen me on TV or whatever. I have a file but I haven't showed it to them because there's lies that are in those files that are totally disgraceful, its shocking the lies that they write about us, whatever the reason they take away, neglect or whatever it was. (Personal interview, 21 February 2022)*

Uncle Michael Welsh emphasises the importance of this work of truth-telling to break the cycle of intergenerational trauma. He and other survivors see it as their responsibility to prevent the repetitive cycle of personal and family dysfunction that can result from the trauma experienced by members of the Stolen Generations. Former KBH resident Richard Campbell explains, 'That is very important for our kids because they suffer from our trauma through intergenerational trauma and it's still affecting our kids at the moment' (Wellauer, 2020).

Therefore, the site of recovery and healing has to be the family structure, so decimated by colonialism and subsequent policies of forced child removal:

> *I hear governments saying for so many years that they want to heal communities, they can't heal communities, its not possible but you can heal families and if you heal families, a family makes a happy community. You can't have a community, while you're ripping children away from families because families become traumatic. (M Welsh, Personal interview, 21 February 2022)*

Tiffany McComsey explains the corrosive impact on families of silencing these traumatic experiences:

> *For so long so many of the survivors lived this experience in silence and didn't even communicate that to the families, what they had experienced and so that hidden pain was lived as a family and individual experience. (Personal interview, 21 February 2022)*

Sharing these experiences between descendants of survivors allows for the sense of isolation to be broken down, 'it's like this light bulb goes on and it's like, it wasn't just my family' (T McComsey, Personal interview, 21 February 2022). It creates a new understanding of the damage that has occurred:

> *I understand now why dad or granddad was this way and understanding where the source of this pain came from, it wasn't because he didn't love me, it was because of what he had been taught or not taught and what had been taken away from them in childhood and the relief that that brings, along with its own sense of pain. (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022)*

Therefore:

> *Being able to be part of community that shares that and can do collective healing work has allowed for changes to happen … even if a person sits in silence in that community and there are lots of Uncles who will never share their story before they pass but it's just being connected to this space of healing and understanding and belonging and safety that doesn't exist anywhere else in their lives that makes this so important and valuable. (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022)*

To address this intergenerational trauma, the truth-telling that is required is not simply a one-off event. 'You know we talk about multi-generational trauma and healing but it's multi-generational truth-telling [that is required]' (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022).

This is because the legacy of 'lies' and misinformation about why members of the Stolen Generations were removed from their homes needs to be addressed to protect future generations from these falsehoods:

> *If that doesn't happen with the survivor alive then you have the descendants of that survivor who have to try and make sense of a person who they know would never have done that but this record is there screaming at them that is supposedly the truth when its not and its like putting out all of these little fires and where does the truth-telling stop or how does the truth-telling come to change or healing. (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022)*

Therefore, the healing associated with truth-telling continues from one generation to another and needs to be associated with the site of original violation, the Kinchela Boys Home:

> *For those descendants where their father or grandfather, it's been decades since they've passed, finding us now is part of their own organic healing journey … which is why the truth-telling connects so strongly to the site [of KBH] and the need for ownership of that site because … until you walk on that site and an Uncle takes you there and tells you what happened, that some of the descendants can even start to … process. But without that it's just holding some sort of loss, grief and anger that you can't name because you don't know it. (Personal interview, T McComsey, 21 February 2022)*

Consequently, a key part of KBHAC's focus on truth-telling has been its campaign to seek ownership of the original KBH site on Dunghutti Country, which has been deteriorating through neglect over a number of years. The intention is to build a museum and healing centre at the site. This is seen by the survivors as a critical part of the healing process for them, as well as a means for educating the wider public about the Stolen Generations. Tiffany McComsey argues, 'the site, historical records and the memories and stories of the home's survivors … would provide tangible evidence of past assimilation policies and practices for the education and understanding of all Australians and to ensure that what happened to the Uncles and other Stolen Generations survivors never happens again' (Cotter, 2021).

In March 2022 this advocacy around the return of the site resulted in the listing of the Kinchela Boys Home on the 2022 World Monuments Watch as one of 25 heritage sites of worldwide significance 'whose preservation is urgent and vital to the communities surrounding them' (Kinchela Boys Home Aboriginal Corporation, 2022). While KBH was a place of enormous pain, survivors see reclaiming the physical site as a critical way in which they can reclaim their own lives. Former KBH resident Roger Jarret explains, 'If we can march back in there as [free people], we'd conquer our pain and hate that was in there, that we've conquered it because it becomes ours' (Rubbo, Poole and Ryan, 2020).

Reclaiming the site is about making this history, this pain and ultimately the possibility of healing visible on Country, inscribed in the landscape itself:

> *If you think about how these things became invisible in society when the policies were happening and children were removed and the amount of lies and stories about what Kinchela Boys Home actually was, if you continue to hold that history invisible in Country, you continue to grow that pain, whereas making it visible, making it so it's understood so it can't happen again changes that and the healing that comes from that is incredible. (T McComsey, Personal interview, 21 February 2022)*

For Uncle Michael Welsh, creating a permanent site of truth-telling is also a means to create a new sense of belonging and connection for those who have lost their 'homelands' as a result of their forcible removal: 'We're struggling with the idea of finding our homelands from where we are so if that becomes an heirloom place for us to heal … we will find we are a spiderweb that is connected to everybody' (Personal interview, 21 February 2022).

As a result of this desire to reconnect to the 'place' of KBH, former residents have been returning to the site on commemorative occasions, meeting at the base of an enormous Moreton Bay fig tree in the grounds of what was KBH, which is now a drug and alcohol rehabilitation centre. It was to this tree that boys were chained overnight, sometimes naked. However, the survivors see the tree as a place of redemption, a silent witness to their pain. It is literally reclaiming the bonds that once tied them to this tree. Roger Jarett explains, 'Every time we go back, the tree has grown over the chain.' Uncle Michael Welsh declares that he hopes he lives 'to see the last link of the chain disappear, swallowed up by the tree. "That tree is our power."' (Browning, 2017).

Conclusion

This case study highlights the complexity and power of truth-telling in addressing the inter-generational trauma of the Stolen Generations. Members of the Stolen Generations from the KBHAC invest enormous faith in the power of truth-telling to prevent a repetition of violations and create social change. On the other hand, they are aware of the significant toll that truth-telling can take on those who engage in this work, as well as the danger that it may not deliver all it appears to promise. For this reason, KBHAC CEO Tiffany McComsey underlines the importance of linking truth-telling to a concrete programme of social transformation and reparation. The story of Kinchela Boys Home also shows the enormous courage and resilience of Stolen Generations survivors, who take on the task of telling and re-telling their story of trauma in order to educate a new generation and seek to prevent a repetition of these violations. It is evident that those who take on this work need to be supported with a range of resources – financial, emotional and structural. Currently, members of the Stolen Generation provide remarkable and unselfish support to each other in order to continue the work of truth-telling. Individuals, families and communities have developed extensive experience, expertise and compassion that can and should inform broader state and national frameworks for truth-telling. However, it is also clear that a small number of survivors of the Stolen Generation cannot be expected to bear this responsibility of truth-telling alone indefinitely. Resources need to be provided to support institutional sites of healing and education such as the Kinchela Boys Home site. Moreover, truth-telling has to be linked to meaningful redress and reparation, as well as structural change, if this legacy of trauma and violation is to be meaningfully addressed.

2. Interview Case Study: Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation, New South Wales

Introduction

The Cootamundra Domestic Training Home for Aboriginal Girls operated between 1912 and 1969, training hundreds of young Aboriginal girls forcibly removed from their families to be domestic servants. Girls taken to the home suffered significant abuse and mistreatment, some of which was heard at the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families in the late 1990s. It was under these policies of forcible assimilation that the Cootamundra Girls Home was established. In 1914 the New South Wales Protection Board instructed Warangesda Mission Station managers that all 'mixed descent' boys 14 years and older must leave the stations to find employment and all girls 14 and over must go into service or to the Cootamundra Training Home for Aboriginal Girls, which opened in 1911 (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997). The Board expressed 'particular concern about the prospects of young Aboriginal women and girls' and as a result a large proportion of children removed from their families were female (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997, p. 37). These girls were sent to Cootamundra Girls Home, where they stayed until they were 14. They were then sent out to work, usually as cheap domestic labour. Many became pregnant while in domestic service, only to have their children removed from them (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997, p. 37). Generations of Aboriginal women passed through Cootamundra Girls Home until it closed in 1969. An anonymous statement to the Inquiry explains:

> *When the girls left the home, they were sent out to service to work in the homes and outlying farms of middle class white people as domestics … On top of that you were lucky not to be sexually, physically and mentally abused, and all for a lousy sixpence that you didn't get to see anyway. Also, when the girls fell pregnant, their babies were taken from them and adopted out to white families, they never saw them again. (Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission, 1997, p. 37)*

The NSW Heritage Listing for the site of Cootamundra Girls Home confirms that:

> *The former Cootamundra Aboriginal Girls' Training Home provides tangible evidence of the Government policy and practice of taking Aboriginal children away from their families and communities, severing all ties with their culture in order to assimilate them into mainstream Australian society … The Cootamundra Girls' Home provides contemporary Australia with physical evidence as a means to comprehend the pain and suffering of past assimilation practices. (Heritage NSW, 2012)*

The extent of trauma that girls experienced at the home is reflected in the fact that many survivors are only now beginning to talk about their experiences. Fay Moseley, now 71, arrived at the home when she was ten. She has never spoken publicly about what happened to her. 'It was too difficult, and it still is difficult' (Brennan, 2018). She explained her most significant memory of her arrival is of her plaits being cut off and her clothes removed and discarded, 'I grabbed my plaits and stuck them under my pillow and cried over them for two weeks' (Brennan, 2018). She and five of her eight siblings were picked up by welfare officers in 1956 in Leeton, on Wiradjuri country, on their way to primary school. Her parents were at work at a local cannery. At 14, Fay Moseley was sent to work on farms to wash, cook and clean for wealthy families in the district. She was told, 'Your parents didn't want you, they don't love you' (Brennan, 2018). She later found out her parents tried to visit numerous times, but were stopped at the gates of the Cootamundra Girls Home by staff. Fay Moseley met her mother again when she was 19, and later her father at her mother's funeral. 'He come up and asked who I was, and I said, "I'm Fay". He said, "I'm your dad". They were the only words we ever said' (Brennan, 2018).

Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation

In 2013 the Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation was founded by survivors and descendants of the Home to deepen and formalise the informal support that many survivors were already giving each other since leaving the Home many decades previously. Fay Moseley was involved in the establishment of the Corporation: 'We didn't know how to explain to our kids what happened to us, and how to be effective parents, because nobody said they loved us in the homes, nobody cuddled us, nobody praised us' (Brennan, 2018).

Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation now addresses a range of healing needs for survivors of the Home and their descendants, which includes a significant focus on truth-telling. The Corporation has three primary foci: Connection, Service Support and Action (Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation website). Connection includes tracing information on Coota Girls, keeping survivors linked, and offering connection to culture, including language resources for the twelve language groups that survivors are descended from (including two Queensland languages). Service support includes trauma-informed counselling and education and a range of other practical services such as Aged Care, housing, NDIS support, and financial assistance. Finally, Action is led by survivors' aspirations, and includes activities for survivors and their families and descendants, such as healing gatherings, and outward-focused actions like advocating for policy change, raising awareness of the impacts of intergenerational trauma and sharing the Coota Girls' stories with the broader community as an important form of truth-telling (Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation website).

Meagan Gerrard, Project and Communications Manager at Coota Girls Corporation, whose grandmother, Lorraine Peeters, is a Coota Girls survivor, explains the objectives of the organisation:

> *Coota Girls survivors identified early on that there was and continues to be a need for social, emotional, and spiritual wellbeing support, but also practical support for both survivors and their descendants. During the development of the 'All One' statement which highlights our survivors' aspirations there was also discussion around other key issues such as contemporary child removal, reconnection to culture, aged care and physical health. (Personal interview, 1 August 2022)*

A key role for the Corporation has been supporting the agency and voice of Coota survivors. Therefore, the organisation is survivor-led and seeks to follow 'survivor aspirations', while being 'acutely aware that our descendants are just as impacted' (A Bairle, personal interview, 17 October 2022). Most of the staff are either survivors or descendants of survivors.

Alicia Bairle, the Coota Girls CEO, explains the ethos of the organisation:

> *The biggest, key points for our Corporation is being able to advocate for the complex needs of our survivors and their family and subsequent descendants … to have a voice, around the impacts of what took place and the impacts that are still happening today. I think that a big part of the role of the Corporation is ensuring that the stories are out there, the information's out there and not forgotten, and it's not excused … so just being able to be that advocate voice. (Personal interview, 17 October 2022)*

A central principle driving all the work of the Corporation is the desire to facilitate 'reconnection' for survivors and their descendants. At the heart of the damage done as a result of the policies of forced child removal was a variety of forms of disconnection, for both survivors and their descendants. This includes disconnection from identity, family, community, place, language and culture. The Corporation seeks to address all these types of disconnection:

> *You've taken away culture, family, identity of someone at the core. 'Who am I? I don't know'… they weren't lucky enough to be raised by their parents … it's not just about removal from country. You've taken memories, you've taken information, you've taken knowledge away from survivors … And I think that's a key part of the truth-telling is that's what was taken … it was just all the things we take for granted in today's world … But the impacts are still there. It's still today disconnecting children from culture and community and family through the current practices. (Personal interview, A Bairle, 17 October 2022)*

These impacts are intergenerational:

> *There are multiple generations that were part of Stolen Generations, hence the 's' instead of just being singular because it went over 60 years that Act was in place. So you did have multiple generations of removal, multiple family members that ended up at Cootamundra, you know. The stories of girls being in the home with relatives that they never realised they were relatives and found out later, much later in life that they were actually relations. (Personal interview, A Bairle, 17 October 2022)*

The intergenerational impacts have been exacerbated by the silence and stigma that accompanied child removal. Many survivors did not talk about their experiences to their families:

> *So I guess it just shows that we don't talk about it, we don't highlight it enough to remove stigma to talk about what this means and what it's meant to our families … I'd like to see that stigma removed because it's not something we did to ourselves … it was something done to our families … and it's not something to be shameful of. (Personal interview, A Bairle, 17 October 2022)*

Meagan Gerrard's grandmother was a resident of the Home but it took many years and considerable suffering before she was able to share this information with her family:

> *For many years she was silent … it had to come to a point where she was triggered that she then had to go through that healing process which involved sharing her story and unpacking that trauma. We didn't find out until I was around seven years old and that's only because grandma was in visible distress and turmoil … she went through a pretty horrible phase and it was really upsetting to see, we couldn't comprehend it. So at that point we were sat down at the dining table and we were told, overtly so, what had happened to her as a four-year-old child … it was a pivotal moment in our families lives … to be a child and to think that happened to her at a similar age … just thinking back to that day now I remember walking away and going to my room and trying to process it through poetry. (Personal interview, 1 August 2022)*

This legacy of silencing means that many families only find out after the death of a loved one that they were actually a resident at Cootamundra Girls Home:

> *… many phone calls I took from descendants searching, looking for information. Their family member, their survivor had passed on. They found out by accident afterwards. And hearing them talk … it was like a black hole … and having people openly weeping around those questions they've got that will possibly never be answered because they're not with us … so they can't ask the questions to connect the dots. (Personal interview, A Bairle, 17 October 2022)*

“Before they took me I used to dance around the campfire with my grandmother, my grandfather, my uncles and aunties. We danced underneath the stars at night time and then my world was just blown to pieces, never to be the same again"

Because part of the goal of institutions such as the Cootamundra Girls Home was assimilation, it engendered a sense of shame in some residents about their identity:

> *And I guess that comes back to the racial issues within Australia around why people hide their Aboriginality from people to start with. I think it goes far deeper than just Stolen Generations impacts, that goes back to colonisation and where we are today in the … stigma associated with being an identified person. I think that that hasn't left at all, and that sits alongside the complexity of all the Stolen Generations community. (A Bairle, personal interview, 17 October 2022)*

In the context of this legacy of trauma, survivors, where they could, offered each other support. Meagan Gerrard explains this informal camaraderie between survivors, and their resilience:

> *The survivors reunited and kept in touch and they were kind of always around me growing up … sitting around and listening to their stories about being in the Home … even though it was such a dark place, there are a lot of funny stories that they were able to find humour in … for them to be able to find that laughter when they would sit around and yarn, I just found inspiring, that they're so strong and resilient … so I always wanted to nurture them in any way that I could. (Personal interview, 1 August 2022)*

The Corporation formalised this support and extended it to survivors and descendants that are now scattered across different states in the country, offering a healing space of reconnection. 'That was a big driver too, coming together, they had that sisterhood … their history, their story. They found comfort with each other and healing when they came together.' (Personal interview, M Gerrard, 1 August 2022)

The Corporation is a place where the stories of survivors will be listened to, held, honoured and passed down to descendants. 'And that's all part of that truth-telling space, being able to tell your story and have someone listen and actually care about what you are trying to pass down. Because that's what they're doing. They're passing down their knowledge of their experiences in that Home.' (Personal interview, A Bairle, 17 October 2022)

Therefore, truth-telling about the experience of being in the Cootamundra Girls Home is a key part of the role of the Corporation. This has recently crystallised with the production of a short film, Walking Our Songlines, documenting the stories of survivors and their descendants.

Alicia Bairle underlines the importance of recording the stories of survivors:

> *And I think that's a key part of that telling … being able to record their stories around their journey pre, during and post removal, hearing the stories of how they found family members many, many years later after leaving the Home. (Personal interview, 17 October 2022)*

In order to facilitate the digital archiving of the stories of survivors, Meagan Gerrard and Alicia Bairle have both received training in recording oral histories from the Department of Education and New South Wales Library. The intention is that they will train other descendants to record the stories of their relatives. Training survivors and descendants to record oral history enables 'our Aunts and Uncles to talk about their story, in a way in which suits them, and with safe people that they, they know quite well' (A Bairle, personal interview, 17 October 2022). It is also a way of recovering a tradition of oral storytelling as a means to communicate and educate. 'Being oral people, I think that's a really key point, is bringing back how people told stories and how we would've learnt from our Elders' (Personal interview, A Bairle, 17 October 2022).

The approach of the Corporation is deeply cognisant of the different experiences and needs of survivors with regards to truth-telling. As Alex McWhirter, Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation Project Officer, explains:

> *It's not as simple as survivors or descendants sharing the truth with external communities or broader Australia, it's actually, you know, in between and within the community as well because a lot of people didn't have the chance to hear those stories from their ancestors or their family members. And so making sure that those stories are shared in a sensitive way with people who are really connected to that story, is really important as well. (Personal interview, 1 August 2022)*

Therefore, before public-facing truth-telling can occur, truth-telling needs to occur within families, between members of the Stolen Generations and their descendants:

> *Some descendants weren't aware of their family history, so some are now going on this journey alone without their survivor … then we have our younger children who may not know the whole story. So there's that kind of community truth-telling with each other that has to take place, before going externally into the broader community too. It is just so complex. (Personal interview, M Gerrard, 1 August 2022)*

Different survivors are at different points in their recovery from the experience of being at the Home and their willingness to share this experience. Therefore, it is crucial that the survivors retain agency over how and when their story is shared:

> *Some find it easier to tell us, a camera, what happened rather than with their families. And later on it's up to them to decide how much they want shared with others, and not shared. But at least then they feel that they've had an opportunity to share with someone that will … be guardian of that information until they're ready to decide what happens next with it … Some survivors have been quite open with their families around their trauma and their experience and then others not as much. (Personal interview A Bairle, 17 October 2022)*

Alicia Bairle argues that this agency is supported by local-level organisation that understands the needs of a particular cohort of survivors, rather than a generic national approach:

> *It's about having their Corporation that supports them in the way which they wish to be supported … So being able to allow them to control, themselves, the narrative of what truth-telling means for them … just being flexible in allowing them to tell truths how they feel comfortable … and at least with the support of their Corporation around their particular Home, allows them some control and input into how that will happen. (Personal interview, 17 October 2022)*

Digitally recording stories helps with the task of balancing the desire to educate the broader Australian public about the experience of the Stolen Generations with the need to protect survivors by not placing an excessive onus on them to repeatedly recount traumatic stories:

> *When NAIDOC or Reconciliation Week and other significant dates come around we have many requests to have a survivor come out and yarn to workers or students. It's not often thought about, the impact that this has on our aging survivors … the gravity and burden of retelling and resharing over and over, whilst concurrently working towards their individual healing. (Personal interview M Gerrard, 1 August 2022)*

The responsibility of creating a digital archive is a large project, on top of a variety of other responsibilities, which could be significantly progressed with skilled personnel support. Alicia Bairle explains, 'We've got the relationship with the survivors. We know their needs, we know what their capabilities are and what they're willing and not willing to share, if we had the right resources to have someone on board that could help with that oral history' (Personal interview, 17 October 2022).

Another important component of truth-telling is access to historical records. However, this is a fraught and complex process that can divide families:

> *So it's a really fine line for us when we have people coming in asking for us for support. They're saying, my family won't give permission. There's actually nothing the Corporation can do about that. We don't hold those files, we don't distribute them, we don't have the practices all the time for that. (Personal interview A Bairle, 17 October 2022)*

Some of the information in these historical files can be confronting and even misleading:

> *These really old documents are really offensive in the terminology used … like talked badly about families … So being able to support people to understand – they may not, it may be triggering for them to, to read this information. There may be mistruths in there, there may be information in there that you don't know.*

> *So I guess that's part of the whole truth-telling is, you know, acknowledging that these records aren't always accurate, and quite often hold information that can be more damaging than useful as well. (Personal interview, A Bairle, 17 October 2022)*

Alicia Bairle compares the lack of protocols and procedures around access to this type of sensitive information to the processes and case work support that is currently in place for people who have been in out-of-home care and would like to access their files:

> *They need to have the right services and supports in place to be able to read and understand what they're actually getting a copy of … So I guess one of the big things I'd like to see advocated for is around social, emotional, wellbeing supports available for people who come in with those sorts of queries to sort of just step through the process. (Personal interview, 17 October 2022)*

Currently, Coota Girls Corporation does its best to refer survivors and descendants to the right government departments to access this information.

> *[We're] supporting those people with the information on how they can try and get access to information they're looking for. We're not the holders, but we can … pass on that information so they can at least attempt to get an understanding of what happened to their survivor. (Personal interview, A Bairle, 17 October 2022)*

The Cootamundra Girls Home site

Another central aspect of the truth-telling work that the Corporation engages in relates to the site of the Cootamundra Girls Home. Like the survivors of Kinchela Boys Home, the recovery of the site of violation as a place of healing and education is a central aspiration of former Cootamundra Girls Home residents.

Alicia Bairle outlines the role that survivors envisage the site of the Home playing in truth-telling about the experiences of the Stolen Generations:

> *I do know for our survivors, for the most part, they want to see education around truth-telling. They want to see that one day a site, if not the site, to be a place of education capturing the stories that took place for them and the journey that they led through that Home. (Personal interview, 17 October 2022)*

The Home itself received a NSW Heritage Listing in 2012; however, because there was no maintenance program for many years, the buildings have deteriorated. Nevertheless, Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation has been working with the New South Wales Department of Aboriginal Affairs and Young Local Aboriginal Land Council on a long-term project to turn the site into a place of education and healing (Hayter, 2021). The application for the heritage listing explains the importance of the site for survivors of the home:

> *The Cootamundra Aboriginal Girls' Training Home has strong social significance for the former residents and for the families and communities from whom the girls were removed. The place is associated with stories of deep personal grief and social and cultural dislocation and has also been demonstrated to be associated with ongoing health issues for some past residents. The Home buildings provide a tangible link to the past for former residents. Memories associated with the place whether painful or not, are revisited when former residents visit the former home. Some former residents speak of the healing process experienced when returning whilst others don't ever want to return. (Heritage NSW, 2012)*

In 2021 Coota Girls received a one-off grant from the NSW government to employ an interim caretaker and start restoration work at the site of the former Home. Cootamundra MP Steph Cooke argued that this funding for the restoration work was an important step for the community. She explained, 'This site is very significant to survivors of the Stolen Generations and to the community more broadly … It's a site of truth-telling and remembrance, so it's really important it is restored to the best possible condition' (Hayter, 2022).

Work was delayed due to COVID, but in 2022, 200 volunteers returned to the site to start work turning the home into a healing space, including planting a memorial garden and creating a yarning circle that included up to four generations of Cootamundra Girls Home survivors and their descendants. At this event, Cootamundra Girls Home survivors, Kinchela Boys Home survivors and their families – aged between three and ninety years old – planted native bush plants during a ceremony to honour all survivors of the Home (Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation website).

The Corporation rebuilt the weather shed where 'the girls used to tap dance and have precious moments of happiness together' (Personal interview, A Bairle, 17 October 2022). Megan Gerrard explains the significance of the restoration of the weather shed for the survivors:

> *Just little things like that … have such a big impact on them. And these are the tangible things that they're able to see before they pass on to the Dreaming and to know that, you know, their story is still being told and that we will continue to work towards their aspirations. (Personal interview, 1 August 2022)*

The reunion at the site of the Home was also meaningful because it was an opportunity for the reclamation of culture:

> *[The] ceremonial dance was such a big piece for survivors … it was punishable to practise any form of culture on that site for them. So to have children running free, playing, laughing, and then practising culture on the country with them able to sit there and witness that, that was really powerful. (Personal interview, A Bairle, 17 October 2022)*

According to Meagan Gerrard, 'There was a lot of sharing, a lot of storytelling, a lot of reflection. For us it was about taking back that control … It was just such a beautiful experience and one that won't be forgotten' (Hayter, 2022).

Alicia Bairle also emphasises the impact that the reunion at the site of the Home had in terms of the healing of the survivors:

> *I'll never forget that reunion and what it brought for our survivors to come together and acknowledge it and try and do some healing together and try and make new memories that were meaningful and positive, rather than holding onto the hurt that took place there. (Personal interview, 17 October 2022)*

She explains how her initial skepticism about why the survivors would want to return to the site where they were victimised changed over time through her engagement with them:

> *Part of me was sort of like, 'Oh, I don't think I'd ever want to be in that space after what's taken place there.' But … in the time that I've been privileged to spend on that site with other survivors, with my team, it makes sense that 'Let's go back to where it all started'. Because that's the one thing that holds all of us together … that one institution built the community in which we serve today. So I guess being able to go there, hear their stories, listen to them, learn, it's vital to that truth-telling and healing journey that they're on. And we're just lucky enough to be a part of that space with them. (Personal interview, 17 October 2022)*

There was also substantial support for the project from the wider Cootamundra community, with local schoolchildren assisting the work on site. Meagan Gerrard said she was hopeful the Home would not only be a place of healing for First Nations people but local residents too. 'They didn't have the facts, they were told these children were neglected and orphaned … They feel like they've been living that lie as well and there's a great sadness when they realise the truth' (Hayter, 2022)

Conclusion

The legacy and experience of the Stolen Generations continues to reverberate in Australian society. The violation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander families through forced child removal dates back to the earliest days of colonisation and has been reiterated and reformulated at different historical periods in pursuit of the desire to create a 'white' Australian society. Clearly, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians have tirelessly and courageously fought back against this, as evidenced by the survivors of Cootamundra Girls Home, Kinchela Boys Home and the many other institutions around the country where young people were forcibly incarcerated. Nevertheless, this struggle has had a significant cost to many individuals and families. While the Bringing Them Home report brought some of these truths to the fore in the late 1990s, the experience of the Stolen Generations has still not been systematically or formally recognised in Australian society.

There are no official museums or memorials in Australia to recognise, commemorate and mourn the Stolen Generations or make this experience explicit to the broader public. Nor have Stolen Generations communities been comprehensively consulted about how they would like this legacy to be recognised and remembered. It is left to survivors at a community level to advocate for the recovery of sites of former Homes as places of healing and memory and to document the stories of survivors. Nevertheless, there is much we can learn from the tenacity and creativity of survivors in how this memory work could be implemented as a local, embodied and experiential process, driven and conceptualised by survivors and their descendants.

In this context, Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation has been doing extraordinary work since 2013 addressing the complex needs of survivors and their descendants and advocating for their interests. In addition to the truth-telling work documented above, Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation runs a number of other programmes and activities. While part of the objective of institutions such as Cootamundra Girls Home was to anonymise and homogenise its residents, the Corporation has sought to reclaim the rich and varied identity of former residents by conducting meticulous work to identify the different language groups the residents come from and support reconnection with culture and languages among survivors and descendants so this legacy can be reclaimed. They are also running a youth programme to build connection between young descendants in order to help them understand the experience of their Elders and how they might respond to it. In addition, the Corporation supports survivors to meet increasingly complex health needs as they age, as well as providing for other social support needs.

However, the interviewees emphasise the increasing urgency of addressing the legacy of the Stolen Generations. As Alicia Bairle explains, 'our survivors don't have unlimited time with us to inform the different levels of government around what changes need to take place to ensure that this doesn't reoccur ever, ever again' (Personal interview, 17 October 2022). Many survivors have waited more than 30 years before any reparation has been made available to them by different states. For some, this reparation has come too late and a number of former Cootamundra Girls Home residents have passed on before they were able to access support and recognition for their experiences.

These delays have undermined the impact of reparations on the Stolen Generations as a whole. As Alicia Bairle outlines, 'By the time they did the reparation, so many had already gone. So it didn't really have the vast impact across many different family households that are impacted by Stolen Generations practices' (Personal interview, 17 October 2022). A significant number of the recommendations of the Bringing Them Home report have still not been implemented and it is organisations such as the Coota Girls Aboriginal Corporation that are critical role-players in facilitating the implementation of these recommendations in a manner that is driven and informed by survivors and descendants themselves.

Despite this urgent, unfinished work, the Corporation, like many non-profits, struggles to secure funding for its varied activities. Interviewees talk about the need to 'crowdfund', as well as shape their programmes to meet pre-defined government grant priorities, rather than being able to structure their activities in terms of the identified needs of survivors and descendants with whom they have been working for many years. The lack of official protocols and support for accessing historical records for survivors and their families is clearly a significant gap in the support for Stolen Generations that the Corporation is trying to fill but needs to be more formally supported. The struggle to find funding and support to create a place of memory and healing at the site of the former Cootamundra Girls Home is yet another area where the Corporation has stepped into a gap that should be addressed as part of a national reparations programme, so that the legacy of this policy of forced child removal can be properly recognised and acknowledged. At the same time, there is much to be learned from the nuanced and sensitive manner in which the Corporation has addressed the challenge of truth-telling by placing the needs and agency of survivors at the centre of the process of truth-telling and allowing them to dictate the pace and context in which these difficult histories are revealed, and to whom. These are lessons other truth-telling processes could very productively draw on.

3. Summary Case Study: Reburial at Kaurna Memorial Park, South Australia

In 2022, Linda Burney, Minister for Indigenous Australians, stated that the repatriation of ancestors 'is some of the most important work we can undertake as part of the reconciliation and truth-telling process' (Linda Burney, Minister for Indigenous Australians, 2022).

While attempts to repatriate First Nations remains date back as early as 1892, it wasn't until the 1970s that concerted efforts by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities around Australia led to increasing successes in the repatriation of remains. For many First Nations communities these ancestors are seen as the 'First Stolen Generation' (University of Tasmania, 2018).

For more than 200 years ancestors and objects were removed from their communities and placed in museums, universities and private collections in Australia and overseas. During the 19th and 20th centuries, medical officers, anatomists, ethnologists, anthropologists and pastoralists collected ancestors for 'scientific' research linked to explaining human biological differences. Other individuals removed ancestors and objects for the purpose of trade or sale so that they could be placed on display and exhibited as curiosities in collecting institutions (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts). The interest in the remains of First Nations people was fuelled by ideas about human social evolution, influenced by Charles Darwin's Theory of Evolution. Until well into the 20th century, the remains of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people were prized by anatomists and anthropologists, who believed they offered clues to humanity's evolutionary past. These beliefs led to terrible abuses of First Nations peoples. Museums and scientific institutions throughout the Western world acquired the remains of thousands of Indigenous people. Graves were plundered, and there were instances where the bones of men, women and children who had died in frontier clashes were transported directly into scientific collections. People dying under white medical care had their bodies dissected and given to curators and bone traders, rather than to family. Treasured cultural artefacts were also often taken, along with the dead, away from their homelands (University of Tasmania, 2018).

This theft from First Nations communities across the country has had a deep and lasting social, cultural and political impact that has led to a traumatic fracturing of the relationship between the living, the deceased and traditional Country so central to First Nations communities. The rupturing of these relationships has caused 'injury to individuals and the social body' (Fforde, Mckeown and Keeler, 2029, p. 7). Repatriation is seen as critical to the restoration and healing of these relationships and to the recovery of sovereignty, agency and self-determination over First Nations life.

Since 1990, over 1600 ancestors from nine countries and more than 2,850 ancestors and 2,330 sacred objects from Australian museums and collections have been returned to the custodianship of their communities, the result of significant First Nations activism that has been increasingly supported by government at state and federal level. It is unknown exactly how many more ancestors are being held in institutions locally and overseas but it is estimated that there are still at least 1,500 ancestors held by collecting institutions and private holders in more than 20 countries (Department of Infrastructure, Transport, Regional Development, Communications and the Arts).

Robyn Campbell, a descendant of the Bunganditj, Meintangk and Tanganekald peoples from south-east South Australia and Chief Executive of the Burrandies Aboriginal Corporation, who flew to Britain to receive the remains of an ancestor from south-east Australia, explained the impact of the theft of the remains of First Nations people:

> *First Nations peoples have continued to suffer from the atrocities and impact of colonisation. The theft of our ancestors taken from Country is a particular injustice. As First Nations people we never ceded our sovereignty nor gave consent to the removal of our old peoples' remains*
>
> *We have been made sick and worried about what happened to our old people, always knowing our relationship and connection to Country is the foundation of our culture and ways of living.*
>
> *Our ways determine the importance of always remaining connected to country, so the fact of our ancestors' removal to an alien museum environment has been a source of great distress and shame. The return of our old people is to fulfil our cultural obligations, and we hope will contribute to our recovery as First Nations peoples. (Harris, 2022)*

In December 2021 South Australia was the site of the historic ceremonial reburial of 130 First Nations people at a dedicated Kaurna Memorial Park called Wangayarta. The Memorial Park includes four burial mounds, one dedicated to the remains reburied in the first stage of the project and the other three for ancestors 'coming from the south, east and west'. Soil from all parts of the Adelaide Plains was scattered across the Memorial Park as Kaurna peoples wanted ancestors 'from across the region to find home in this new place – to be buried in their own soil with the smells of their own country' (Daley, 2021).

These ancestors' remains had been held by the South Australian Museum for over 100 years and had been stored in cardboard boxes at the Museum's warehouse for decades. The Museum is still the current custodian of approximately 4 500 Aboriginal remains but is reportedly working with First Nations communities to return these ancestors (Skujins, 2021; South Australian Museum, 2021).

Kaurna elders Aunty Madge Wanganeen and Uncle Major Moogy Sumner spoke to journalist Paul Daley before the reburial and described how they were preparing the skeletal remains of their ancestors for reburial. The bones were taken out of the cardboard storage boxes in which they had been kept and were unwrapped individually before being secured in brown paper and woollen twine to prepare them for ceremonial reburial at the Memorial Park, where they would be enfolded in traditional paperbark. Wanganeen and Sumner conducted archival research to determine where the Kaurna ancestors came from. Wanganeen explained the significance of this: 'It's never ever happened before – to know the stories of each one of them is just a remarkable thing … Sometimes … people out there just think of them as bones and now they are being recognised as human beings' (Daley, 2021).

The reburial in the Memorial Park was the result of a collaborative project to rectify some of the damage done through the theft of remains between Kaurna Yerta Aboriginal Corporation (KYAC), South Australian Museum, Adelaide Cemeteries and the Department of Premier and Cabinet, Aboriginal Affairs and Reconciliation (South Australian Museum, 2021). There was significant financial and in-kind support for the project from the state and the private sector.

The state government provided an initial amount of $300 000 for the Memorial Park to support a co-design process with the Kaurna community; community consultation; and most of the construction works. Adelaide Cemeteries made available two hectares of land for the Memorial Park and supported some of the construction costs (South Australian Museum, 2021).

However, the project was most significantly the result of more than a decade of sustained activism and engagement by Kaurna Elders, led particularly by Jeffrey Newchurch, Chair of KYAC. It was during a repatriation ceremony at Torrens Island in 2010, where Kaurna reburied roughly 70 ancestral remains, that he resolved to create a permanent burial ground for his people:

> *It's taken a while, but we've taken those hurdles of bringing our community together and building our team … We got to do it together, Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal, because then that makes it easy in that journey for healing. (Skujins, 2021)*

A spokesperson for the South Australian Museum explained, 'Our responsibilities to correct the injustices of the past are ongoing. The work is just getting started, and Kaurna are leading the way' (Skujins, 2021).

4. Summary Case Study: Crowther statue reinterpretation and removal, Tasmania

In August 2022, after decades of campaigning by Tasmanian Aboriginal people, the Hobart City Council made a historic decision to remove the statue of William Crowther from Franklin Square in Hobart's city centre, where it has stood for more than 130 years. Hobart councillors voted seven to four in favour of removing the statue. The statue of Crowther, a former medical officer and politician who was briefly Premier of Tasmania, was erected in Franklin Square in 1889 to recognise his 'political and professional service to the colony' (Murray, 2022). This is believed to be the first time an Australian council has decided to remove a statue.

The Lord Mayor Anna Reynolds explained the decision:

> *We're saying we're ready to have truth-telling take prime position in our premier civic square … We're also saying that we don't want to celebrate a time in our history when scientists and doctors wanted to prove theories of European superiority … [So this is] an important step towards reconciliation, and an important step towards telling a much more honest and truthful history of what happened in Hobart's colonial past. (Murray, 2022)*

When he was Honorary Medical Officer at Hobart General Hospital, Crowther was responsible for mutilating the body of William Lanne after Lanne's death in 1869. William Lanne was a well-known whaler who had been exiled as a child to the Wybalenna settlement on Flinders Island. He was the only member of his family to survive the exile and became an advocate for his displaced Tasmanian Aboriginal community. Lanne was regarded as one of the last 'full-blooded' Tasmanians, so was of great interest to colonial scientists and institutions such as the Royal College of Surgeons in London, on whose behalf Crowther was acting. Crowther broke into the morgue where Lanne's body lay, removed his skull, replaced it with that of another corpse and sent Lanne's skull to the Royal College of Surgeons. He was briefly suspended as a Medical Officer for his activities but within weeks he held the Hobart seat in the Legislative Council, and nine years later he became Premier of Tasmania (Monument Australia website). Aboriginal people have long campaigned for the return of Lanne's skull, which finally occurred in 1991 (City of Hobart website).

The removal of the Crowther statue was the culmination of a process of engagement around the statue in response to concerns raised by Tasmanian Aboriginal communities about the prominence of a statue to commemorate an individual who had been involved in acts that were so deeply offensive to Aboriginal communities. As a result of consultations around the statue, the City Council initiated the 'Crowther Reinterpreted' project, which sought to create a space for a response to the statue through a series of temporary art installations. The City Council stated that this project was part of their 'commitment to visibility and truth-telling across the city' and their response to the desire of Aboriginal communities that the story of William Lanne's mutilation should be recognised (City of Hobart, 2020).

In 2021 the City of Hobart commissioned four Aboriginal artists to create temporary artworks that were 'selected to present diverse perspectives and to acknowledge, question, provoke discussion', as well as increase awareness. The first artwork, Truth Telling, by Allan Mansell, temporarily transformed the Crowther statue into a memorial for Lanne. Crowther's head and hands were coated in red; he held an Aboriginal flag in one hand and a saw in the other, and a bone was placed at his feet. The original text on the statue was covered with an explanation about Crowther's actions against Lanne (City of Hobart website). The Lanney Pillar by Roger Scholes and Greg Lehman was designed to share an 'alternative narrative' by presenting evocative imagery, historical records and a film. Acclaimed Palawa artist Julie Gough covered the statue and plaque with a timber box, providing BREATHING SPACE for those 'pained by its presence' (City of Hobart website). Finally, Jillian Mundy conducted vox pop style interviews with people passing the statue to create the film Something Missing.

As a result of the 'Crowther Reinterpreted' project Crowther's great-great-great-grandson, Matt Drysdale, first learned about his ancestor's past and the story of what he did to Lanne. He explained that the story had not been shared openly in his family. 'I think that some of those things were kept from us, not only through a lack of knowledge but also through some form of embarrassment or shame … As you could understand, this is a highly sensitive thing to discuss in a family context' (Murray, 2022). In response Drysdale and his sister made a submission to the City Council asking them to remove the statue. He explained, '[Learning about Crowther's history] has been quite challenging and confronting … but for us the only thing that we felt that we could do is to support the Tasmanian Aboriginal Community in what they wish to do here. Rather than being ashamed, we have to own that history, so that we as a broader community can move forward' (Murray, 2022).

According to the decision made by the Hobart City Council, the statue will be preserved and taken to the City Council's Valuables Collection, pending a decision on a permanent location in a local collecting institution. On the site, temporary signage explaining the decision will be put in place. A new public artwork will be commissioned by the City Council, which, according to the Lord Mayor, 'tells a much broader, deeper, and more honest version of what was going on in that era in Hobart's history' (Murray, 2022).

Not all City Council members were in support of the decision. Some of those who voted against the motion said it still constituted an attempt to erase and sanitise the state's history. Alderman Simon Behrakis argued that 'we need to preserve our history as a society, as a nation, as a state and as a city, warts and all …Those appalling acts should not be minimised, should not be sanitised away, but I think removing the statue does just that, I think it does sanitise history' (Murray, 2022).

Cassandra Pybus, a prominent Tasmanian historian, pointed out that Crowther was just one of many colonial officials involved in the mutilation and collection of Aboriginal remains, which was in fact a systemic part of the colonial project and a widespread practice. Many former governors across Australia were involved in mutilating Aboriginal remains, either performing the act themselves or ordering others to carry out the task. According to Pybus, despite many examples' throughout history, only a few individuals, such as Crowther, are remembered. She argues that, 'As long as that remains the case, you're not going to have the truth-telling about what a shocking and complete process was going on. From the moment the settlers arrived and started killing Aboriginal people, they started taking trophies, usually the head' (Murray, 2022).

5. Summary Case Study: ningina tunapri, permanent exhibition at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery

The permanent exhibition at the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery (TMAG), entitled ningina tunapri, meaning 'to give knowledge and understanding', which opened in 2007 and then re-launched in 2012, is an example of the way in which some key cultural institutions have sought to redress their previous implication in colonial violation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples. On 15 February 2021, Brett Torossi, Chair of TMAG's Board of Trustees, stated that 'the Board of the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery on behalf of the whole organisation, wants to openly and whole heartedly acknowledge, permanently record, and deeply apologise for the institution's past actions relating to the Tasmanian Aboriginal people' (Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery website, no date).

The TMAG was the site where the skeleton of Truganini was displayed for over 40 years, from 1903 to 1947, as an artefact representing the 'last full-blooded' Tasmanian Aboriginal person.

The museum therefore played a central role in perpetuating the myth that Tasmanian Aboriginal people were an 'extinct' and 'primitive race' (Berk, 2015). This myth was perpetuated globally: 'The collection of Tasmanian Aboriginal remains by museums, royal societies, and universities (among others), frequently through illegal means like grave robbing, reinforced the myth of extinction'(Berk, 2015, p. 150).

Truganini (1812-1876), daughter of Mangana, a leader of the Bruny Island people, was declared to be the last 'full-blooded' Tasmanian Aboriginal by the Tasmanian government after her death. Truganini lived a remarkable life, carving out a path of considerable autonomy in a context of enormous hardship and oppression for Tasmanian Aboriginals. She was a survivor of the infamous Black War that accompanied European settlement in Tasmania from the mid-1820s to 1832, and which claimed the lives of many thousands of Tasmanian Aboriginal people. In 1828, the Governor of Tasmania, Lieutenant George Arthur, declared martial law, which led to an exponential increase in violence against the Aboriginal populations. By the time she was 15, Truganini's mother had been killed, her uncle shot, her sister abducted and her fiancé murdered (Ryan and Smith, 1976). In this context, Truganini met and began to work with George Arthur Robinson, the 'Protector of Aboriginals' in Tasmania, who was tasked with 'rounding up' the remaining Aboriginals in Tasmania to transport them to Flinders Island in the Bass Strait, allegedly for their protection. Truganini and her partner, Woorady, guided Robinson from 1830 to 1835, teaching him their language and customs, which he recorded in detail in his journals. Truganini played a key diplomatic role by engaging with the complex political realities of numerous remote tribes that Robinson was attempting to convert to Christianity. She later explained her decision to work with Robinson in the context of the devastation caused by the Black War. 'I hoped we would save all my people that were left … it was no use fighting anymore' (Butler, 2022). Truganini did not stay with Robinson for long. After accompanying him to the Port Philip District, she was charged with being an accessory to murder in 1842, after participating in a series of raids on settler huts, taking food and weapons, which led to a skirmish in which two whalers died.

Truganini was acquitted of the murder charges and then travelled back to her home country at Bruny Island where she resumed her traditional lifestyle for a number of years. She spent her last years in Hobart, living with the Dandridge family, where she met the Governor of the colony on several occasions (Onsman, 2004).

The myth of the 'extinction' of Tasmanian Aboriginal communities subsequently became part of official Australian history, taught in schools for many decades, and even reflected in international reference works such as Encyclopedia Britannica (Onsman, 2004). This is a narrative which has been rigorously and consistently disputed by Tasmanian Aboriginal people, who have continued to assert their presence and sovereignty in Tasmania through campaigns for the reburial of the remains of Truganini's body, which was exhumed two years after her death in 1876. Her skeleton was placed on public display in the Tasmanian Museum and Art Gallery for 40 years (Jones, 2020). These remains were returned to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community in 1976, when Truganini was finally cremated and her ashes scattered, as she had requested before her death. The 100-year journey to the scattering of Truganini's ashes has been described as 'the longest funeral in the history of the world' (Onsman, 2004, p. 39).

In her final years Truganini was well aware of the possibility that her body would be mutilated after her death and sought to make provisions to ensure that this would not happen to her. Immediately prior to her death in 1876, Truganini had asked her physician to promise that no mutilation of her body would take place, as had occurred with other Tasmanian Aboriginal individuals (Onsman, 2004). When Truganini died, her body was quickly buried within the high walls of the Hobart gaol 'so as to secure that protection from body snatchers' (Mckeown, 2022, p. 31). However, within two years of her burial, her body had been exhumed and her skeleton handed over to the Royal Society for 'scientific' purposes, before being put on display at the Tasmanian Museum (Mckeown, 2022).

Public efforts to have Truganini's remains reburied began in the 1930s and involved a range of religious, Indigenous, and governmental organisations. Individuals who campaigned for the burial of the remains included the Anglican Archdeacon Henry Brune Atkinson, the son of the minister who had attended Truganini before her death; as a child, he had been taken care of by her. In 1932, Atkinson revealed that Truganini's dying wish was also recorded in his father's diary: 'Sew me up in a bag, with a stone inside, and throw me into the deepest part of the d'Entrecasteaux Channel.' When Atkinson's father asked the reason for this request, Truganini reportedly replied, 'Because when I die I know that the Tasmanian Museum wants my body' (Mckeown, 2022, p. 31).

On 29 April 1970, as Australia commemorated the 200th anniversary of James Cook's arrival, members of the local Aboriginal community laid a wreath in Truganini's honour on the steps of the Tasmanian museum, where her remains, while no longer on display, were locked away in a storeroom. In 1974, the newly established National Aboriginal Consultative Committee called for her remains to be returned to Aboriginal people for reburial. Within a month, the Chief Secretary of the Tasmanian government announced that her remains would be reburied on 8 May 1976, the 100th anniversary of her death. Truganini's remains were finally cremated in Hobart on 1 May 1976, and were scattered on the following day, according to her original wishes (Mckeown, 2022).

However, it was only in 2002 that the Royal College of Surgeons in London repatriated a hair sample and skin from Truganini's remains, which it had received after her death. Other campaigns have centred around returning various effects belonging to Truganini, which were circulated as curiosities. In 1995 Exeter's Royal Albert Memorial Museum repatriated Truganini's necklace and bracelet to the Tasmanian Aboriginal community. It had held them since 1905. In 2009, representatives of the Tasmanian Aboriginal community flew to Britain to reclaim a bust of Truganini, along with remains of other ancestors still held by medical and academic institutions in the UK (Davies, 2009). In 2022 the bust has still not been returned, but it is no longer on display.

Berk argues, 'Through the collection and curation of human and non human cultural materials, the TMAG supported (and buttressed) many of the prevailing ideologies of Tasmanian Aboriginality, including nonexistence' (Berk, 2015, p. 251). Even after Truganini's skeleton was placed in the museum's storeroom, a diorama of a Tasmanian Aboriginal family that remained on display until the 1990s continued to perpetuate this myth of extinction. The diorama showed a small family group (physically modelled on Truganini and her partner Woorrady), intended to illustrate the 'life and habits of the vanished people' (Mercury 1931 cited in Berk, 2015). As Tasmanian Aboriginal artist Julie Gough explains, the 'scene freezes Aboriginal Tasmanians into 'no-time'; into an unknowable distancing space. In this it both justifies and illustrates the story of genocide, rather than dispelling it as a myth' (Gough, 2001, pp. 36-37).

The TMAG started to recognise the problems with this representation in the 1990s but it was not until 2007 that a significant change took place, when the old gallery was taken down and replaced by ningina tunapri, described by Berk as 'a concerted community effort that exemplified a broader reclamation narrative' (Berk, 2015, p. 153).

Tasmanian Aboriginal scholar and artist Greg Lehman also argued that ningina tunapri, 'with its strong focus on family, community survival and cultural continuity, established a progressive benchmark for Indigenous cultural representation in Tasmania' (Lehman, 2018, p. 31). A critical component of ningina tunapri was a Tasmanian Aboriginal bark canoe, which was constructed as part of a 2007 Commonwealth-funded cultural revitalisation project. The new exhibition was installed in a space that had previously housed the diorama and Tasmanian Aboriginal remains, including Truganini's. The museum's first Tasmanian Aboriginal curator, Tony Brown, and curator Zoe Rimmer explained how the presence of ningina tunapri 'cleansed and redeemed the space' (Berk, 2015, p. 154).

Lehman describes the way in which the new exhibition has fundamentally transformed the manner in which Tasmanian Aboriginal communities are represented:

> *The TMAG gallery offered, for the first time, a comprehensive account of Tasmanian Aboriginal history, with a vast sweep of cultural expression ranging from Pleistocene stone tools made before the last Ice Age, through to a series of late twentieth-century protest t-shirts. The extent of Aboriginal occupation of the island and use of its unique resources, such as the Phasianotrochus shells for manufacture of beautiful maireener necklaces, now make it clear to visitors that occupation and relationships to land are complex, extensive and continuing. The exhibition plays an ongoing and critical role in education of children and their families. (2018, p. 32)*

In 2013 a new exhibition, 'Our Land: parrawa, parrawa! Go away!' was opened at TMAG to tell the story of the defence of clan Country by Tasmanian Aboriginal nations against British invasion. Produced with a small budget, this examination of frontier conflict in Van Diemen's Land was the first significant project by a major Tasmanian public institution to acknowledge the Black War of Aboriginal extermination that occurred on the island between 1824 and 1832 (Lehman, 2018).

> "I'll never forget that reunion and what it brought for our survivors to come together and acknowledge it and try and do some healing together and try and make new memories that were meaningful and positive, rather than holding onto the hurt that took place there."

CONCLUSION: PRINCIPLES OF TRUTH-TELLING

At the beginning of this research, we asked the following questions:

What *methodologies* and *processes* of community truth-telling are most effective in contributing to:

- the recognition of the complexity of colonial history and its current legacy
- the redress of injustice arising from this colonial history
- the recognition of ongoing First Nations sovereignty
- the reconciliation and healing of relationships between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities and the broader Australian community

In our investigation of community truth-telling we did not start with a rigid definition of truth-telling, but sought to understand truth-telling as it has been practised, experienced, and realised across Australia. We endeavoured to understand how local communities have engaged with Australia's history and its current legacy in multiple and creative ways. We wanted to unpack the complexity and variety of these truths and the manner in which they have unfolded in local contexts. We attempted to understand and document the impact of these encounters with truth on both First Nations and non-Indigenous communities.

We undertook this research in the hope that the knowledge gained would help inform and strengthen truth-telling in local, state and national contexts. The truth-telling processes that we have documented make clear that there is no one truth-telling process that is most likely to lead to the outcomes outlined above. Crucially, however, there are some essential principles, which emerged through the research as extremely important for truth-telling that effectively addresses the questions of recognition, reconciliation, sovereignty and redress. We do not claim that is an exhaustive list of principles but hope that they can contribute to thinking about the most ethical and meaningful way in which truth-telling can be embarked upon. These are outlined in this section.

Centring First Nations leadership, agency and sovereignty

The most effective truth-telling processes are those that are meaningfully led by First Nations communities and are informed and shaped by First Nations world-views. Through this First Nations leadership, the agency and sovereignty of local First Nations communities is centred and guides the truth-telling that occurs, including identifying the harms that need to be addressed and the means through which this redress will occur. Non-Indigenous communities are 'invited into' this space of cultural authority and autonomy to build relationships that are reciprocal, healing and transformative. This centring of First Nations sovereignty can play out in many ways, which need to be determined at a local level. However, in the truth-telling processes that we have documented, data sovereignty emerges as a critical principle that needs to inform effective truth-telling. Unlike many internationally recognised transitional justice approaches to truth-telling, the truth-telling initiatives documented here have found unique and creative ways in which to ensure that those who tell their truths remain in charge of those truths. They choose when and how their truths are told and they maintain control of those truths after they have been shared.

Truth-telling informed by First Nations Knowledges

Many of the truth-telling initiatives documented here are informed by a relational and holistic First Nations world-view in which it is recognised that there may be multiple historical viewpoints, but foresee that these differing perspectives can be negotiated within relationships of trust and recognition. It is understood that truth-telling is multi-faceted and concerns addressing damage that is systemic, individual, spiritual, collective, physical and psychic. All of these aspects need to be taken into account in truth processes for them to be effective. Truth-telling therefore does not prioritise legal truth over experiential truth, nor is it linked to a single outcome such as reconciliation or forgiveness, or privilege healing over sovereignty, or redress. It is understood that the damage that truth-telling seeks to address requires attention to all of these aspects. Many of the truth-telling activities documented here grapple with all of these questions as part of a holistic approach to truth-telling.

Partnership with non-Indigenous Australians

Leadership by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander communities, in genuine partnership with non-Indigenous communities, emerged as an essential principle for effective truth-telling. First Nations participants in a number of the truth-telling initiatives that we documented underlined the shared responsibility for truth-telling between First Nations and non-Indigenous communities. First Nations communities are demographically a small component of the broader Australian public and should not have to carry out this enterprise alone. Truth-telling needs to be re-framed as a collective social commitment, which will enrich all Australians. It concerns the recognition of a colonial system and its ongoing effects, rather than the identification of blameworthy individuals. This is a system in which all Australians are entangled and from which all Australians need to find a way out.

Active partnership

The truth-telling that we documented demonstrates the effectiveness of 'truth-doing'. The interaction with Australia's history has been, and will continue to be, an active process. It does not simply concern a 'telling' of truths by 'victims' in front of passive witnesses, as has occurred in previous international truth-telling processes. Instead, it is about an active partnership between First Nations and non-Indigenous Australians. This active partnership requires self-reflective engagement with settler history by non-Indigenous Australians in interaction with the reclamation of agency, identity and sovereignty by First Nations communities. It also includes active redress and reparation for the damage of colonialism and more contemporary policies that have continued this legacy, as an integral part of the truth process, rather as a subsequent outcome, which may be delayed indefinitely.

Partnership founded on trust and collaboration

Genuine partnerships are built on principles of collaboration, respect, consultation and engagement. Truth-telling processes that have taken the time to build relationships of genuine trust, respect and understanding, and have found ways in which to embed these principles in their practices, have been able to have a lasting impact in their communities. This relationship building can take time. It requires humility and deep listening. Therefore, effective truth-telling prioritises respect for process over an emphasis on rapid outcomes or goals. These respectful processes are more likely to be transformative and help shape truth-telling that is equally impactful.

An open process

A number of truth-telling processes that have taken place internationally have been criticised for trying to impose an outcome on truth-telling, particularly an expectation that the outcome of truth-telling will be reconciliation or forgiveness between former antagonists. However, the truth-telling initiatives we have documented do not impose this expectation. Very few of these initiatives had an explicit goal of reconciliation, but in a number of instances these processes did ultimately deepen understanding and build relationships between communities. However, they did this by focusing less on the outcome than on the integrity of the truth-telling process and on creating an environment that enabled constructive engagement around histories of injustice. It is this open process of truth-telling that is, in fact, most likely to create the conditions for genuine reconciliation and the creation of new relationships built on trust.

A safe process

Safety is central to the effectiveness and integrity of truth-telling. Truth-telling that causes harm and trauma does not have effective outcomes and is deeply unethical. The question of safety plays out at a number of levels. On the one hand, it concerns the integrity and safety of the actual process of truth-telling. It requires engaging with cultural protocols and a genuine process of informed consent to ensure that all those who participate in truth-telling do so willingly and are supported, rather than re-traumatised. At a wider level, it also concerns the recognition that truth processes can cause harm in certain environments. There are contexts in which truth processes may not be appropriate and may exacerbate or inflame tensions. Sometimes these tensions can be managed with effective and sensitive leadership, but in other instances it may be appropriate to delay truth-telling until work can be done to prepare communities for productive engagement.

An experiential and pedagogic process

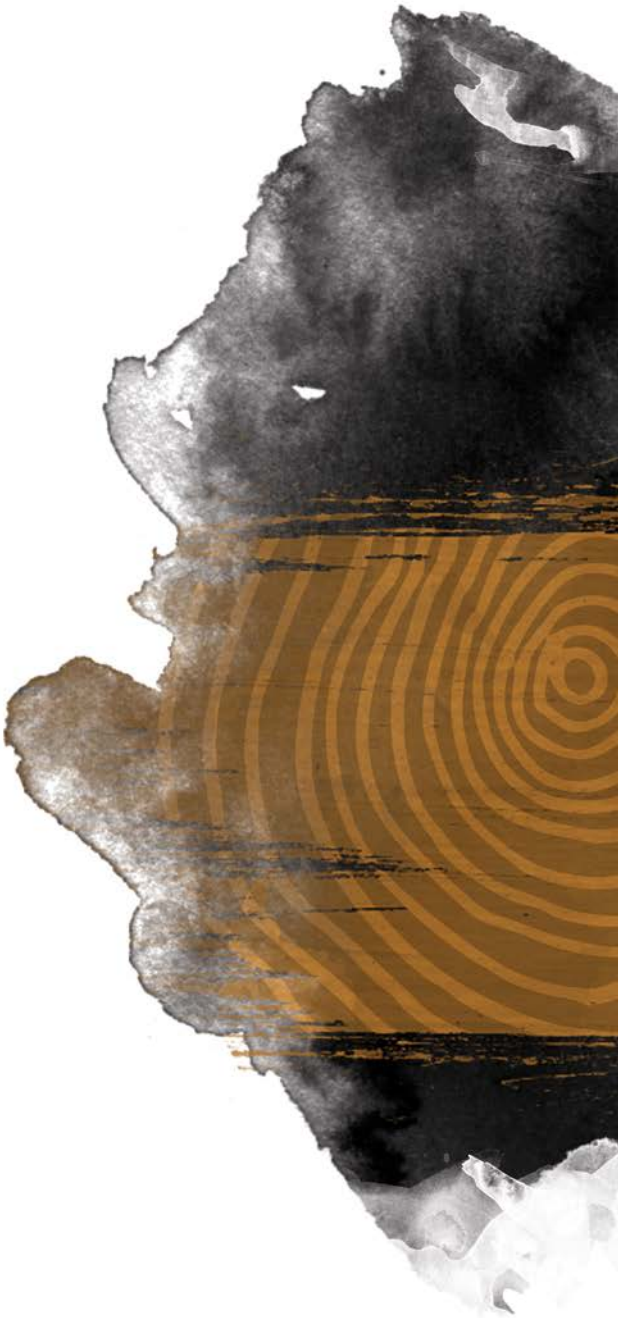
The truth-telling documented here made evident the enormous power of an experiential approach to truth-telling. This type of truth-telling seeks the engagement of non-Indigenous and First Nations communities, not only with the violations of history but with new ways of being and understanding that can be transformative and enriching for all participants. This process is pedagogical in that it seeks to 'teach' aspects of colonial history, however it does this through experiential immersion on Country and personal engagement between communities, so that participants in truth-telling have an embodied experience of what that history means both cognitively and emotionally, and, as importantly, the manner in which this legacy can be ameliorated to create new forms of co-existence and collective community.

An ongoing process

The most effective approach to truth-telling is one in which there is recognition that engagement with injustice through truth-telling involves an ongoing process of deepening understanding and redress. Truth-telling processes that are designed to be long-term and sustainable are most likely to be effective. The damage of generations will not be undone quickly or in one truth-telling event. This will require non-Indigenous communities to move away from a belief that we must close the door on the past in order to move into the future. This can shut down conversations and engagement with uncomfortable truths. This closing down of dialogue has occurred in detrimental ways in other settler colonial nations such as Canada and the US. Instead, effective truth-telling can draw on First Nations communities' cyclical and holistic understanding of time. In this perspective, the past and our ancestors remain an ongoing resource in the present which, along with future generations, need to be taken into account in our dealings with the present. This continuing interaction and deepening of our relationship with the past and understanding of its relationship to the present should not be seen as a burden or threat, but as a way of enhancing the lives and relationships of all Australians.

A localised process

Another crucial principle for effective truth-telling in the Australian context concerns embeddedness and appropriateness to local context. Here the concept of being on Country is a crucial principle informing the community truth-telling we have documented. Truth-telling is both deeply rooted in and is intended to deepen relationships to Country. This includes relationships between people and with their environment. The truth-telling initiatives outlined here show the importance of truth-telling processes that speak to the particularities of local history, that are cognisant of the levels of recognition or contestation in specific communities, that understand the willingness or resistance of different sectors or individuals to participate in truth-telling, that know what creative and material resources are available in each context, and how they can be mobilised. Many of the truth-telling processes we have documented have skilfully navigated these multiple dynamics to recognise the truths of their communities in effective and meaningful ways. Crucially, they have modelled and created new ways of being on Country based on a collective recognition of harm done and a more truthful relationship between community members and the Country on which they are located.



Diverse and creative practices of truth-telling

Another crucial principle for effective truth-telling is support for the generative capacity of diversity and multiplicity, rather than the imposition of rigid models of truth-telling. There are clearly numerous ways in which truths can be brought to light. If truth-telling is to be locally grounded, these contexts will require different means to grapple with local truths and a variety of forms of truth-telling. The truth-telling we have documented has drawn on both Western and diverse First Nations symbolic repertoires, practices and methodologies. They have creatively integrated these elements to create unique and heterogenous forms of truth-telling. Through this synergistic interaction, the power of truth-telling is significantly enhanced.

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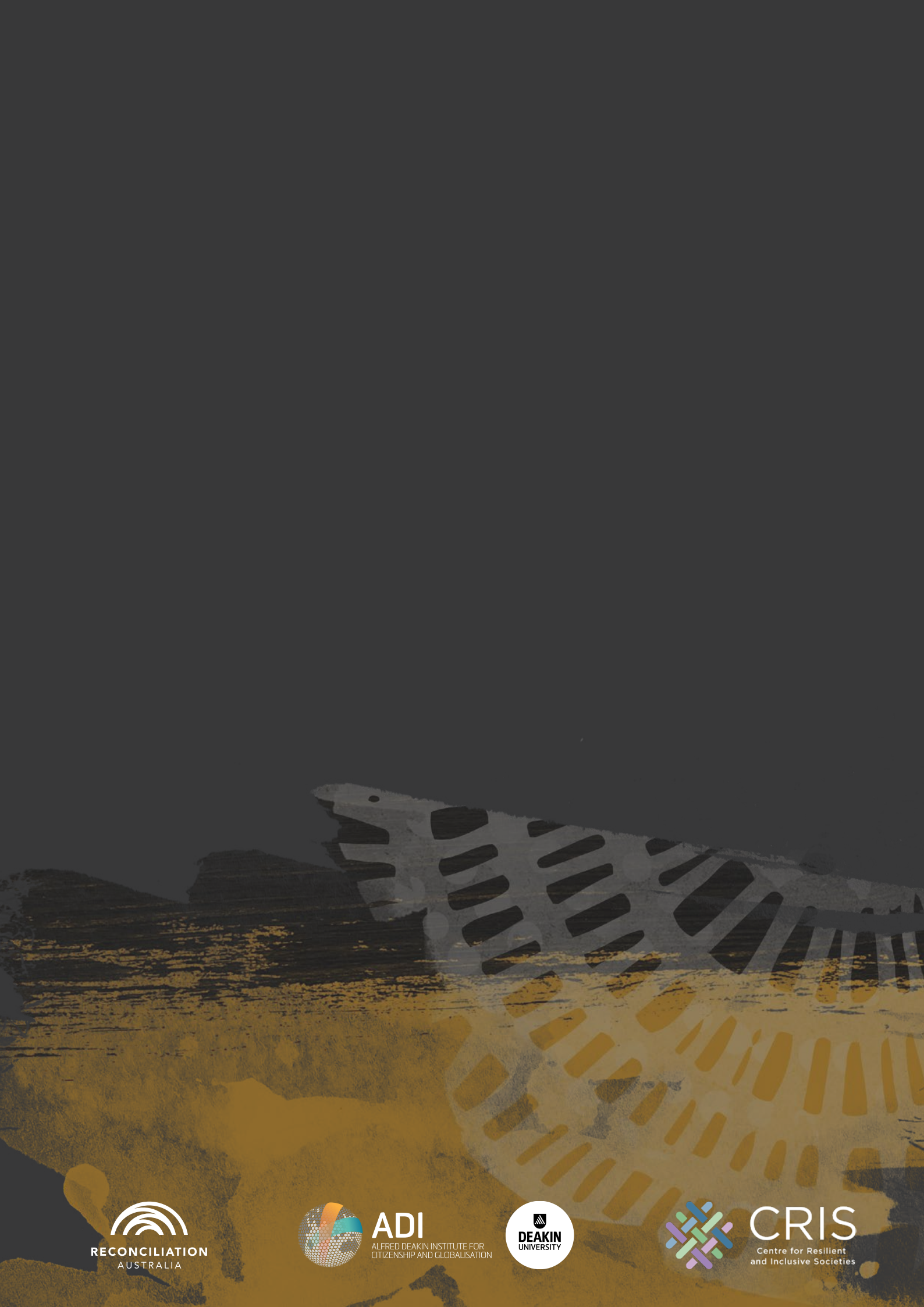
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