

SCHOOL OF MEDIA, CREATIVE ARTS AND SOCIAL INQUIRY

WARDANDI BOODJA: TRUTH-TELLING

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**This thesis is presented for the Degree of
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DECLARATION

I have read and understood Curtin University's policies on plagiarism and copy and declare that this assignment complies with these policies.

I declare that this assignment is my own work and has not been submitted previously in any form for assessment.

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ABSTRACT

Wardandi Boodja: Truth-telling is a mixed media project presenting a reconciliation and healing response to the *Uluru Statement From the Heart* (Uluru Youth Network 2022) call for 'historical truth-telling'. It is a collaborative effort with the Wardan Aboriginal Centre, Yallingup, Western Australia. *Wardandi Nyungar*¹ Elders; Bill and Nina Webb, give consent to share their story and contribute with yarning sessions and healing knowledge. Bill is a co-author of this project, a traditional healer and researcher who informs this project with his family knowledge of the 1841 Wonnerup/Minninup Massacre. The *Nyungar* tradition of yarning, oral teaching, is employed to support and inform the Methodology of Participatory Action Research. Employing Participatory Action Research endorses yarning, decolonisation, and collaboration to give *Wardandi Nyungar* People their historical voice, which has gone unheard due to colonisation. The project culminated in art and truth-telling workshops for the local community to talk about this history and heal together. The art created a 'third space' (Gallery space) for community discussion. This project asks; how can art and yarning assist with Historical Truth-telling for the Australian reconciliation cause as recommended in *The Uluru Statement from the Heart*?

Keywords: Reconciliation, Healing, *Uluru*, Statement, Artmaking, Truth-telling, *Makarrata*², Massacre.

¹ The largest language group of the Southwest are the *Nynugar* people. This word is spelt *Nyunga*, *Nyungah*, and *Nyoongar* and other variations depending on the preference of the family clan. Throughout this exegesis I have chosen *Nyungar* in respect of the wishes of Bill Webb.

² A *Makarrata* for is a Yolngu word for or agreement-making after a dispute
<https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/>

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I acknowledge Dr Michelle Johnston and Dr Kelsey Giambazi, for their support and guidance. I acknowledge the Wardandi Nyungar Elders, Bill, and Nina Webb, for consent and contribution to this project. I acknowledge and thank sound engineer, songwriter, and musician Simon Sun.

WARNING

This exegesis holds references to deceased Wardandi Nyungar People, and some content may be culturally sensitive and offensive. These are included to seek change, awareness, and reconciliation. I have consulted with Wardandi Nyungar Elders who have given their consent for the inclusion of this material.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT OF COUNTRY

I acknowledge the *Wadjuk Nyungar* People of the Perth region. I pay my respect to their Elders, past and present and on whose land, I work, live, and study. I recognise and acknowledge the disruption of their everyday life and culture that came with the arrival of the British colony of Perth.

I acknowledge the *Wardandi Nyungar* People, the Sea and Forest People of the Vasse area in the Southwest of the Western Australia. This is a *Wardandi Nyungar* story. I pay my respect to their Elders, past and present. This exegesis has only been possible with the permission of Wardandi Elders; Bill and Nina Webb. Their story features the 1841 *Minninup/Wonnerup* slaughter of their family. Without their support and permission, this project would not have been possible.

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We, gathered at the 2017 National Constitutional Convention, coming from all points of the southern sky, to make this statement from the heart:

Our Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander tribes were the first sovereign Nations of the Australian continent and its adjacent islands and possessed it under our own laws and customs. This our ancestors did, according to the reckoning of our culture, from the Creation, according to the common law from 'time immemorial,' and according to science more than 60,000 years ago. This sovereignty is a spiritual notion: the ancestral tie between the land, or 'mother nature,' and the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples who were born therefrom, remain attached thereto, and must one day return thither to be united with our ancestors. This link is the basis of the ownership of the soil, or better, of sovereignty. It has never been ceded or extinguished and co-exists with the sovereignty of the Crown.

How could it be otherwise? That peoples possessed a land for sixty millennia and this sacred link disappears from world history in merely the last two hundred years?

With substantive constitutional change and structural reform, we believe this ancient sovereignty can shine through as a fuller expression of Australia's nationhood.

Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be proportionally; we are the most incarcerated people on the planet. We are not an innately criminal because we have no love for them. And our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. They should be our hope for the future.

These dimensions of our crisis tell plainly the structural nature of our problem. This is the torment of our powerlessness. We seek constitutional reforms to empower our people and take a rightful place in our own country. When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish. They will walk in two worlds and their culture will be a gift to their country.

We call for the establishment of a First Nations Voice enshrined in the Constitution.

Makarrata is the culmination of our agenda: the coming together after a struggle. It captures our aspirations for a fair and truthful relationship with the people of Australia and a better future for our children based on justice and self-determination.

We seek a Makarrata Commission to supervise a process of agreement-making between governments and First Nations and truth-telling about our history.

In 1967 we were counted, in 2017 we seek to be heard. We leave base camp and start our trek across this vast country. We invite you to walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future (ulurustatement 2017).

Figure 2. The Delegates. *Uluru Statement From The Heart*⁴

⁴ <https://ulurustatement.org/the-statement/>

INTRODUCTION

In *Wardandi Nyungar*⁵ tradition, I am a male of Celtic-Saxon heritage including Scottish, English (Cornwall) and Irish and sixth-generation New Zealander.

Wardandi Nyungar Elders Bill and Nina Webb supply cultural consent for the use of family history and *Wardandi Nyungar* knowledge to contribute to this exegesis. The Nyungar Language Group is the largest in Australia, with 13 dialects, so for spelling this project is advised by Bill Webb.

*Wardandi Boodja*⁶: *Truth-Telling* focuses on Reconciliation in Australia. This project looks to answer the question, how can art and yarning assist with Historical truth-telling for the Australian reconciliation cause as recommended in *The Uluru*⁷ *Statement from the Heart*?

The Australian Reconciliation Cause is about the restoration of the relationship with First Nations People of Australia and the broader community. The *Wardandi Nyungar People* are the traditional owners of land in the Southwest of Western Australia and were colonised by the British under the protection of British soldiers from the 1830s. This culminated in the denied killings of Wardandi Nyungar People at *Minninup*⁸ and *Wonnerup*⁹ through February and March in 1841.

Wardandi Boodja: Truth-Telling is a community-based Art/photography project centred in the Margaret River region of Western Australia. The project works in collaboration with the *Wardan* Aboriginal Centre and the Webb family. The issue that this research addresses is the denial of the Minninup/Wonnerup Massacres of 1841. Participatory Action Research projects calls for community to find the most significant problems they face and then for research to respond, (Johnston & Forrest 2020 43).

In 2017 the National Constitutional Convention met at the Uluru Summit and called for historical Truth-telling (ulurustatement 2017) as a step in the recovery of

⁵ *Wardandi Nyungar* are one the First Nations People of the Southwest of Australia.

⁶ *Wardandi Boodja* is the concept of mother earth on the *Wardandi* Territory

⁷ *Uluru* is a central Australia landform and sacred place.

⁸ *Minninup* is a *Wardandi* place name.

⁹ *Wonnerup* is a *Wardandi* place name.

intergenerational trauma. This project took that hypothesis to the *Wardandi Nyungar* Elders, Bill and Nina Webb, the response was a resounding yes.

Cultural training and appreciation of Nyungar culture that informs this project occurred first with *Red Dust Healing*¹⁰ and then academic train units such a *Culture to Culture*¹¹ and then *Nyungar Culture and Identity*¹². These units and workshops ignited a profound interest in civil justice and historical truth-telling.

Participatory Action Research Methodology is employed as pragmatic and in person response to an unheard minority group. This Methodology, along with decolonization and Yarning are explained for those interested in working in this field of human endeavour. Essentially these inspire respect and listening, because this project does not speak about Wardandi Nyungar history without speaking *with Wardandi Nyungar* People. This exegesis includes references to leading Western Australian academics and First Nations writers such as Anna Haebich, Dawn Bessarab and Kim Scott and others who supply background on Western Australian history and culture, through their writings.

¹⁰ Red Dust Healing is a unique cultural healing and mental health program, written from an Indigenous perspective. 2022. <https://www.reddust.org.au>

¹¹ Culture to Culture is a university entry unit that introduces First Nations subjects to new students.

¹² Nyungar Culture and Identity is an elective unit that introduces the student to Nyungar language and culture.

CHAPTER ONE: BACKGROUND

Statement, History, Reconciliation, Colony and Wardandi

PART ONE

Part One ponders the competing factors that has created a modern 21st century society, in the information age that is oblivious of significant parts of its own founding history. Then in Part two we introduce the players in this story from the Southwest and conclude with Reconciliation as a path forward.

HISTORY

It is often said that history is written by the victors, once conquered, forever silenced. A position no longer sustainable in the information age, where local histories can be published online for the world to see. Grathon argues that classical Latin scholars of history had rules and were expected give honest accounts of researched past events, "Historia," which could supply lessons for humanity. There were other accounts, of course, which didn't rely on truth, these were called "Storia," also known as fables, (Grathon 2009 42-46).

Julianne Schultz, the editor of the *Looking West*, argues history can be balanced. She reminds us that colonisation was all about land and wealth and that Australia was founded on the principle of colonial powers and trading companies taking on perilous journeys and battles to secure land and resources (Schultz & Haebich 2015). While we can't undo history, this exegesis is interested in important historical events, which are generally unknown in Perth contemporary society.

Conservative Perth has always preferred a Euro-centric version of history, that excludes the *Nyungar* version. Sue Gordon argues 'Indigenous People were being written out of the history of Australia. History that was emphasising the courageous role of the bush pioneers' (Gordon 2014,15). A history that gives only a cursory mention of First Nations People, if any at all. In some cases, such as *The Augusta-Margaret River Shire History* (Cresswell 1989) describes a glowing relationship between colonialists and the *Wardandi Nyungar* People. 'It appears that the Bussell

family had good rapport with the aboriginal people' (14), showed by a domestic school the family ran for Aboriginal children. In addition, John Bussell 'contributed to recording tribal life' (15). *Kings in Grass Castles* (Durack 1997) tells of her family history in the Kimberley region of Western Australia and speaks her ancestors in terms of courageous bush pioneers. However, the First Nations labourers on their ranches were given demeaning names such as 'Melon head' (94) and 'Old Pumpkin' and she describes them as a 'rag tag group of dispossessed. A few were clad in cast-off rags, others in flapping possum skins. When the First Nations People are mentioned, they are disrespected by derogatory naming and descriptions.

However, (Trouillot 1995) believes that history creation is a 'preferential power' based deliberate act. He writes in *Silencing the Past*.

Silences enter the process of history production at four crucial moments: the moment of fact creation (making of sources) ...fact assembly (archiving)...fact retrieval (narratives) and retrospective significance (making history) (Trouillot 1995, 26).

Ravensthorpe (*Conconurup/Kukenarup/Carracarrup*)

Western Australian novelist and *Nyungar* man, Kim Scott, has centred three books around the *Kukenarup*¹³ Massacre of 1880, near the town of Ravensthorpe, 541 kilometres from Wonnerup, supplying a key research text for this project.

This massacre takes place in secret; there is a code of silence in the aftermath, making detection extremely difficult; and witnesses, assassins and survivors sometimes only acknowledge the massacre long after the event, when fear of arrest or reprisal from the assassins is no longer an issue (Hughes-d'Aeth 2021 177).

In his 2017 novel Scott differentiates from his earlier historical novels and sets *Taboo* in the present, as a psychological novel. Hughes-d'Aeth's essay on *Taboo*, claims Scott is informing us of the intergenerational trauma of these silenced histories that still resonates today. Hughes-d'Aeth quotes researcher Heather Burke.

the Australian frontier wars took place a century or more ago, their repercussions continue to resonate today in a variety of physical and

¹³ A massacre of *Minang Noongar* near Ravensthorpe, on the Dunn's property in 1880.

psychological ways, many of which are yet only partially understood (Burke in Hughes-d'Aeth 2021 179).

The silencing of traumatic histories of colonial murders, violence and war is nationally widespread and systemic to the extent that it has been named 'The Great Australian Silence'.

THE GREAT AUSTRALIAN SILENCE AND THE HISTORY WARS

The denial colonial frontier violence to Australian First Nations People is known as the 'Great Australian Silence.' Stanner first used this expression in 1968, to describe Australian Aboriginal history as white-washed, written out and absent in art and photography. Stanner in (White 2021 23) 'What may well have begun as a simple forgetting of other possible views turned into a habit and over time into something like a cult of forgetfulness practised on a national scale (135)'.

In conservative Perth colonial injustice is certainly not a hot topic and when can asked what I am researching led to conflicted conversations, verging on the History Wars.

The 'History Wars' debate was about Australian Colonial history and reached its pitch in 2002, when two historians debated and argued their versions of history publicly on Television. Keith Windschuttle in *Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Windschuttle 2020) disputed the extermination of First Nations groups in Tasmania. This was argued against by Mayne in his book *Whitewash on Keith Windschuttle's Fabrication of Aboriginal History* (Mayne 2003) and a controversial public debate ensued (Gordon 2014 115).

The 'History Wars' opened a national dialogue, and the silence was broken. However instead of acknowledging conflict and suffering, the nation-wide events were refuted and up for debate. Gordon explains this downside to the 'History Wars.' '[The Wars] polarised people and political parties and was one of the challenges to reconciliation in Australia' (Gordon 2014 99). Maybe explaining why there is still

denial in Perth of any nefarious treatment to *Nyungar* people, such as massacres here and in the Southwest.

Bruce Pascoe responded to the national dialogue with his book *Convincing Ground - learning to fall in love with your country* and adds to the public record concerning colonial frontier war and violence.

'Portland. Henty brothers and their sealers massacre large numbers of *Gundidjmarra*¹⁴ in battle over whales, women, and land' (Pascoe 2007 226).

Pascoe: A Bunurong man with Cornish ancestry, brings a First Nations perspective to the dialogue 'too often Aboriginal Australians have been asked to accept an insulting history' (ix). Pascoe's book is more than a historical account and as the title may allude to '*learning to fall in love with your country*'. It is a path forward through truth to reconciliation.

RECONCILIATION

'Australian Reconciliation' is commonly understood as healing the relationship between First Nations People and Non-Indigenous Australia. Gordon's description is:

Reconciliation is about the relationship between Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Peoples and non-Indigenous Australians. It includes Indigenous rights, especially to land, and the process of gaining the enjoyment of equal rights (Gordon 2014 99).

Reconciliation is linked to the 'History Wars' because it included an acknowledgement of the shared history of Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians, where previously this shared history had been denied. Gordon explains 'The old history rested and still relies upon the silencing of the Aboriginal narrative' (2014 114).

¹⁴ Gundidjmarra is the name of a First Nations family clan

Visitors to Perth, need only walk into the CBD on an evening, and visit Forrest Chase (city square) and see the furtive glances and restless *Nyungar* People to get a sense of a disenfranchised and traumatised people. While living in Perth will further expose you to an indifferent and desiccated attitude to the *Nyungar* Nation. This racial bias can be noticed in the colloquial slag for example the *Balga*¹⁵ tree or grass tree is referred to as a “Black Boy”. There are public places with racially offensive place names such as the towns of “Gin Gin”¹⁶ and tourist spot “Monkey *Mia*.”¹⁷ The facilitator of the *Nyungar language and Culture Bush Camp*, Simon Forrest’s dictum was ‘Call it [racism] out’. This was permission and empowerment for me to distance myself from the blatant cultural racism and the catalyst for this project. However, the tension between First Nations People and mainstream Australia goes far beyond casual racism. This paragraph from *The Uluru Statement From the Heart* captures two of the many problems; youth detention and adult incarceration.

Our children are alienated from their families at unprecedented rates. This cannot be proportionally; we are the most incarcerated people on the planet... our youth languish in detention in obscene numbers. (ulurustatement 2017).

The Uluru Statement From The Heart mentions causes, such as the ‘removal of children, and the sense of being powerlessness’. The Statement also offers solutions, one being historical ‘Truth-telling’. *Wardandi Nyungar: Truth-Telling* is a direct response to that call to non-First Nations people and is a project aimed at practical reconciliation. As the Statement asks, ‘Walk with us in a movement of the Australian people for a better future’ (2017).

ULURU STATEMENT

This project is informed by *The Uluru Statement From The Heart*.

This statement was created in 2017 by First Nations Elders and their delegates to propose key reforms to aid in reconciliation. The Uluru Statement From The Heart

¹⁵ *Xanthorrhoea*

¹⁶ Gin is a racist slur and normally is referring to an Aboriginal Woman who drinks.

¹⁷ Mia is a name for a hut, so is saying that primates, but not humans living there.

seeks three pillars, Treaty, Voice and Truth. The statements ethos is that the elders understand their problems and understand the solutions. This project takes on that ethos to listen and believe that the elders and community understand their problems and the solution best suited to themselves, and that the researcher's role is to listen and collaborate.

As a British colony, Australia stands alone of all the 300 colonies and landforms and 1/3 of humanity that Brittan colonized, as the only colony that received no Treaty. For example, the British set up the Treaty of Waitangi, in 1840. Then in 1867, the Māori Representation Act set up a permanent Indigenous Māori voice in their parliament, (Gordon 2014, inside cover).

Historical truth-telling, which known as Truth and Reconciliation Commissions or Truth Commissions have become popular worldwide, (Ross 2003).

Truth Commissions link together complex ideas about suffering, justice, human rights, accountability, history, and witnessing (Ross 2003 1).

However, the Coalition Government decided to ignore these historical precedents and, Gary Nunn reports that

The Turnbull Government in 2017 opposed it, arguing it would effectively create a third chamber of parliament. Turnbull also ruled out a referendum, fearing it wouldn't win (Nunn 2022).

There were also those in the Uluru delegation itself that expressed opposition, Nunn reports 'Of the 250 delegates who met in 2017, seven walked out in protest. They were joined by 30 supporters in their walk-out protest (Nunn 2022)'.

Nunn points out that seven in 250 is hardly a consensus, but Jacinta price the "the Coalition's only Aboriginal MP" argues.

it isn't a genuine reflection of what most Indigenous people want, although it's unclear on what statistical basis she is making that claim (Nunn 2022).

Regardless of some division I argue that First Nations Elders are the best candidates to appreciate their people's needs and know to address those needs. Any top-down management from Non-First Nations can be seen as neo-colonialism unless steeped

in an Indigenous methodology that empowers First Nations and their self-determination. This art/photography project therefore considers the call for historical truth-telling to aid healing intergenerational trauma and progress reconciliation in Australia.

PART TWO: THE WESTERN AUSTRALIA COLONY

Brittan set up, firstly an Albany colony and then the Perth colony in 1829 (Strong 2010,1). Janke, a First Nations lawyer, specialising in Indigenous culture and legal rights, argues.

The colonisation of Australia was like a tidal wave crashing into people's way of life. Taking over Indigenous land for settlement, agriculture, and extraction... (Janke 202112).

The British Government had become suspicious of French motives after the *Expédition aux Terres Australes* of 1800-1804 (Helling 1993 107). Fearing the French were planning a colony in Western Australia, the British rushed ahead with the colony of Perth. Captain Stirling promoted a paradise to attract those looking for a better life away from overcrowded Britain. This formula of a rushed settlement, a misrepresented environment, and no mention of an Indigenous population would create serious problems for the colonists and the *Nyungar* First Nations People. This land was not 'Terra Nullius' but a land that was occupied by First Nations People for over 40,000 years (Figure 3) and these people did not welcome newcomers to their fragile economy. Late arrivals to the Perth colony in 1829 discovered the land was sandy and the best land had already been taken. The lack of agricultural choice prompted a brave, greedy, or foolhardy group of 20 colonists, under the leadership of Army Captain Molloy¹⁸, set sail to start their own colony in the Southwest.

¹⁸ Molloy was permanent leave from his regiment, but still on half pay.

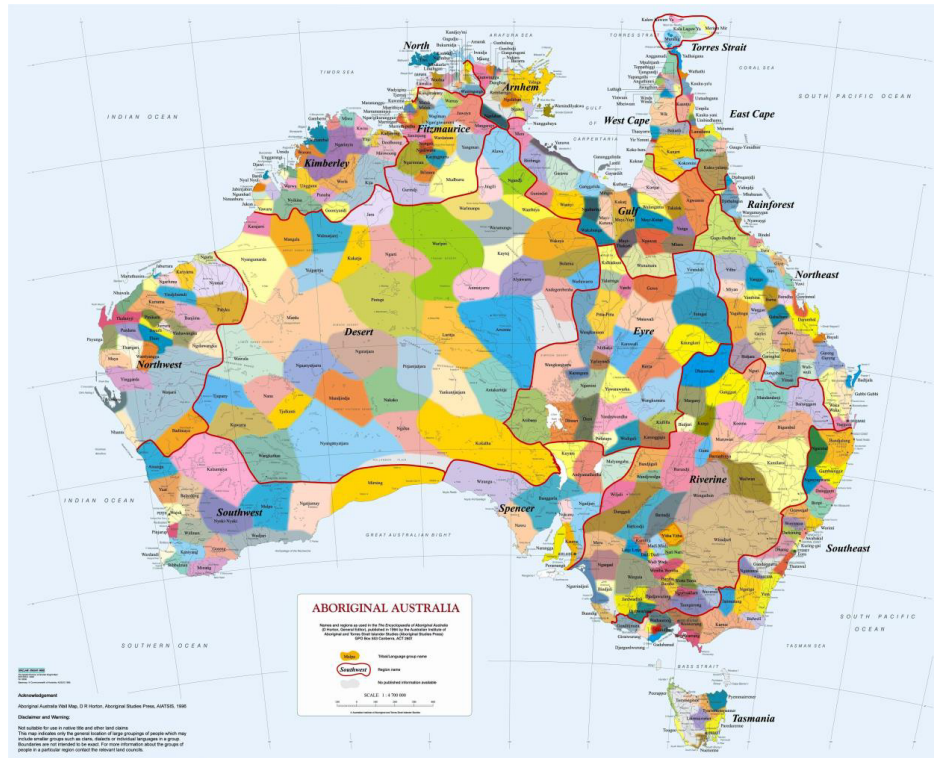


Figure 3. Dr R Horton, *Aboriginal Australia Map*, 1996. Reproduced from AIATSIS



Figure 4. Dr R Horton, *Wardandi Country*, 1996. Reproduced from AIATSIS

WARDANDI NYUNGAR (SEA AND FOREST PEOPLE)

Wardandi Nyungar Elder Bill Webb related the following about his land and people in one of our interviews.

We are the Sea and Forrest people. We have been here for 65,000 years and more. Our land is from Bunbury in the North, Augusta in the south, Cape Naturalist in the west and all the way to the Kaniyang Nyungar People eastward. (Webb 2021).

This research is part of Bills family story of colonization of his ancestral land as well as the devastation that the colonists of the 1800 brought with them. Prior to the commencement of this project in April 2021, Bill listened to the proposal to the research aims and goals for this project and gave permission to go ahead. Bill's permission was paramount. Janke explains to us the difference between Western thinking and Nyungar thinking.

'stories as part of culture that are owned by community and passed down,' (Janke 2021 298).

Bill is a spright, energetic man and natural leader. His lineage is to *Gaywal*, the leader and spearman of the family groups, in the 1830 to 1841. *Gaywal* was a central character in the history of Busselton that this research pivots around. Bill is fluent *Wardandi Nyungar* and English, as well as a teacher and healer in his culture. He has found memories of his father's house and being raised in the bush and hunting with his dog and a rifle. 'I was brought up in the bush as a hunter,' said Bill. But the authorities of the day saw things differently. 'In 1965, when I was 13 years old, they said "get those niggers out of the bush". They tore down our home and threw away our belongings' (Webb 2022).

Bill supplies a photo of the sack and tin house where he was raised (figure 5).



Figure 5. Unknown, *George's camp at 9-mile peg, 1965*. Courtesy of Bill Webb.

We are the sea and forest people. We have been here for 65,000 years and more. Our land is from Bunbury in the North, Augusta in the south and Cape Naturalist in the west (figure 4).



Figure 6. Mitchell Andrews, *Meeting at Wardan*, 2021. Digital image

In the 1950 and 1960s *Nyungar* children were at risk of being sent to nearby *Carrolup*¹⁹, 'Native Settlement and Native school'. Bill Webb had just avoided being one of the so called 'Stolen Generation.'

Bill's Great Grandmother is known as Granny Hill, nee Elizabeth Dawson, (Figure 7). Elizabeth was one of the few Wardandi Ngungar People who had survived and lived on in the Busselton District after the 1840s. Bill relates that she was a 12-year-old witness to the carnage, she was unharmed and survived because she had a white father. Bill wanted to tell her story because Elizabeth Had told the family, "Never let them forget the story of the Massacre" (Bill Webb 2022).

The *Wardandi Nyungar* voice informs this project, the same principle of self-determination through voice is used here. 'When we have power over our destiny our children will flourish' (ulurustatement 2017). Colonization caused the *Nyungar* people lose their voice and with it their power to defend themselves in court or in civil

¹⁹ *Carrolup* is a *Wardandi* Place name

society. Their culture was not obvious to the colonizer's mindset, due to the *Wardandi* being mobile and with an oral tradition culture.

As the *Wardandi* did not employ script and their voice and stories were not believed until firstly Mr. Kimberly²⁰ and now historians like White and Blight visited and spoke to the Wardandi Elders. Building on their work, this project brings *Wardandi Nyungar* history to the public through the words and voice of their Elders and descendants of those that survived the Minninup/Wonnerup massacres.

Concerning *Uluru Statement from The Heart*, (Morris 2018) argues that 'Voice ... addresses the ongoing problem of Indigenous constitutional vulnerability and Powerlessness' (ulurustatement 2017).

Putting Morris' argument in the context of history that did not recognize the *Wardandi Nyungar* People as people with a democratic right to speak has contributed to their past powerlessness.

To avoid my own Euro-centric bias and translation of events and to allow Wardandi Nyungar to be heard I have quoted Elder Bill Webb extensively from my notes of conversations and taped recordings. Morris explains why listening to a tiny minority group that does not have a democratic majority is disempowering (13). Morris' account states that 'this top-down constitutional dynamic leads to entrenched Indigenous powerlessness, repeated policy failures and injustice'.

Applying Morris's formula for Voice to Parliament to this research, this project takes the approach to hear and share the voice of *Wardandi*.

²⁰ Warren Kimberly mentions the *Minninup* massacre in 1896, in his *History of the West*.



Figure 7. Unknown, *Elizabeth Hill*, C.1850. Courtesy of the Wardan Aboriginal

CHAPTER TWO: BUSSELTON 1830-41

In this short but poignant chapter we hear from the handwritten diaries, official reports, and books on the lives of the colonists and the conflict with the Wardandi Nyungar people. However, maybe for the first time we will hear the Wardandi version through the words of Elders.

COLONISTS, MURDER AND MASSACRE

The Colonist leaders of the day were the Clergy, the Government, and the Military. Captain John Molloy stood for the Government and the Military. Bussell's stood for the Church of England. They were from the upper classes of England and the leaders of the Southwest Colony of the day.

Molloy was appointed Government officer for the Southwest, he was a Military veteran and the leader of the Southwest colony. Molloy, the Bussell Brothers and 20 others set up the colony of Augusta. However, after working tirelessly for three years, they realised the land was too treed and too rocky for success. This prompted a move, and the families walked the 100 kilometres north to set up themselves in what is now known as Busselton. The five Bussell brothers set up their homestead named "Cattle Chosen", with John Bussell being the Justice of the Peace for the district (Shan 1926 92). Charles Bussell, one of the brothers, writes to the Government.

Under the influence of terror of imminent attack, feverishly urges government action against the aboriginals to ensure that the smallest infringement by them of the property of the European would be punished by DEATH. Marian Aveling in (Shann 1926 Introduction).

Edward Shan was the Professor of History at the University of Western Australia in 1926. He studied the Bussell family and wrote Cattle Chosen, which describes the years of Busselton. Throughout the book there are accounts of shooting at Wardandi and on June 27th, 1837, notes that 'nine [Wardandi] killed and two wounded' (Shan 1928, 105). The Bussell brothers were building a wooden canon the next day.

Bernice Barry, writing about the life of Botanist Georgianna, describes Charles Bussell being acquitted for shooting an Aboriginal man as justified homicide. John Bussell 'accidentally' shot a Wardandi Nyungar girl in his own kitchen after she stole flour (Barry 2015 294).

Charles Bussell's threat 'punished by DEATH' (Shann 1926 Introduction) and of taking the law into the colonists' own hands was becoming a reality.

The murder by spear of Mr Layman occurred on March the 13th 1841 and the people of Perth began to read about troubles in the Southwest, with of the death of this colonist in the remote outpost of Busselton.

The father of a family is murdered by a savage, in the act of protecting his own property, and insisting upon the equal distribution of a portion of damper, or bread, given in consideration of services performed by another native (Perth Gazette March 13, 1841, 3).

White explains in *Paper Talk* (White 2017 2) that the language of the 1841 press was used is to engender a bias against Gaywal²¹ (Wardandi man) as a savage greedy for another native's bread and depicts Mr Layman as a father protecting his family. Today we can discover this account on the website of the University of Newcastle's Centre for the 21st Century Humanities, (Figure 8).

²¹ *Gaywal* was a *Wardandi* Elder and spearman

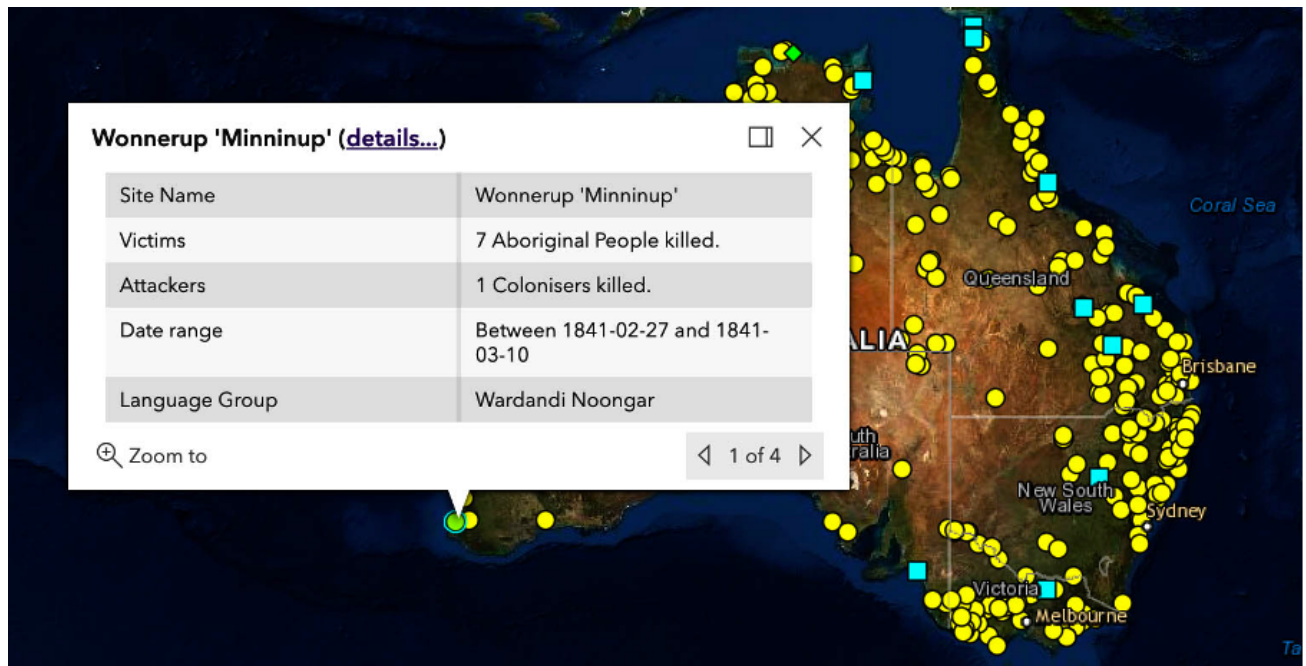


Figure 8. C21C, *Massacre Map*, 2020. Retrieved from Centre of 21st Century Humanities²²

Historian Blight who is currently researching the history in the Southwest writes.

On February 21, 1841, Gaywal and other Wardandi people were working for George Layman out at Wonnerup, helping harvest and thresh a crop. That evening around the campfire outside of Layman's hut a dispute broke out between Wardandi men, and intervened, telling Gaywal to share his damper, the wages for his work, with Dr Miligan. He pulled *Gaywal's* beard for emphasis, a huge insult in Wardandi culture, and *Gaywal* stepped back, shouted 'George!' and speared him. Layman ran back into his hut and died within minutes (Blight 2020)

Mary is relaying the generally accepted version of the start of what is now called the *Wonnerup* Massacre. However, Bill is, a direct descendant of *Gaywal*, disputes the recorded history and states instead.

²²<https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/>

Layman was Kart Warra²³ (Crazy in the head)! He had girls from *Gaywal's* family locked in his cellar. *Gaywal* went there to get the girls back. He was a spearman responsible for the protection of the family. Layman was breaking the law and was on *Gaywal's* land (Webb 2022).

The story has been turned on its head, *Gaywal* was a man protecting his family and land. Following the spearing of George Layman, runners to the Bussell family quickly reported the incident, interrupting their evening bible study (Shan 1926 117). The colonist version goes on to recount a fugitive hunt for *Gaywal*, making no mention of random killings of *Wardandi Nyungar* People. However, there is a report of the deaths of six *Wardandi Nyungar* People as a case of 'mistaken identity' in the dimly lit Ludlow Tuart State Forest. 'Five natives were shot, and the real offender escaped. It is hoped that he will be brought to justice before long.' (Perth Gazette, March 13, 1841, 3).

Gaywal is eventually caught and shot on capture by a colonists' servant, which is reported. However, what we don't hear is the treatment of his body afterwards.

They decapitated *Gaywal's* head and stuck it on a post on the outside of the village, and left it there for weeks and weeks, to scare people. It was barbaric (Webb 2022).

White, explains the language in the written reports of 1841 as phrased to minimize any notion of guilt or culpability on the part of Colonists.

As I pieced together these documents and attended to their language, I realised that the massacre had been depicted in such a way as to obfuscate John Molloy's role. I also came to understand that this role had been covered, uncovered, and contested over the ensuing years (White 20).

Bill's father, George Webb (deceased) passed on the story of Elizabeth Hill, and the day of the *Wonnerup* Massacre and witness to the slaying of George Layman.

²³ *Kart Warra* is a *Wardandi* term for mental illness.

She was 12 years old and friends with the Layman girl. She was visiting that day and saw the spearing of John Layman. They [Colonists] tied her up to the post in front of the Layman's house, all day so that she couldn't run away and warn her people. She could hear gunshots and screaming all day (Bill Webb 2022).

The posts, where Elizabeth was tied up, in front of the home of George Layman, can be seen in Willmott's photo of the original building '*Wonnerup House*' (figure 9).



Figure 9. Willmott, *Wonnerup House*, C.1900.

The gunshots and screams Elizabeth heard while tied up, would be the *Wonnerup* Massacre, as lake *Wonnerup* is next to the Layman House. She would have also heard more distant shots as the colonists and soldiers travelled northward shooting Wardandi People as they fled to Minninup.

However, this story is contested and even denied in its entirety. Vernon Bussell a descendent of the Bussell brothers, who took part in the *Minninup/ Wonnerup* Massacres, wrote in March this year.

There is no reliable evidence to support the white colonist "massacre claims," made by Billy Webb, Mary Blight and others at "*Minninup*" and places further south, and there is certainly no evidence in particular that Busselton's peace-loving founder John Garrett Bussell, who like his youngest fellow pioneer brother Alfred Pickmore Bussell [Mundal] had a great respect and admiration for the local *Nyoongar* people, ever killed anyone in his entire life' (Busselton/Dunsborough News March 16 2022).

Bill Webb subscribes to a different point of view, as passed down through his ancestors.

Elizabeth Hill was 12 years old, and she saw her father Dawson, Molloy, troopers and the Bussell brothers kill her relatives on horseback and wipe out the whole Wardandi People. The Wonnerup River ran red with the blood' and calls Minninup Sand Dunes an 'atrocious site!'. They [soldiers, colonists] had carbine rifles and bayonets and just started shooting everyone. People hid and fled. The people fled north along the road to Capel, approximately 23 Kilometres away. Then to save bullets they used bayonets. When the colonists got to Minninup they drove everyone into the sand dunes and just shot them there. Then they pushed the sand over them and went away. There could be 300 people buried up there in the Minninup Sand Dunes (Bill Webb 2022).

56 years later in 1896, Minninup would resurface again for public debate. The American colonial writer, Warren Kimberly paid a visit to the Southwest while doing research for a book ((Kimberly 1897). During that visit Kimberly interviews the local people and learns of the *Minninup* Massacre and so includes a 500-word description of the slaughter in his book. A small segment reads.

Into the remote places this party went, bent on killing without mercy. Through the woods, among rocky hills and shaded valleys, they searched for the black men. When they saw them, they shouldered their muskets, and shot them down. The soldiers and colonists pushed on and surrounded the black men

on the sand patch. The black men were killed by dozens, and their corpses lined the route of march of the avengers (Kimberly 1897 116).

The veracity of Kimberly's account was eventually challenged publicly through the newspapers 80 years later when James Battye wrote his History of Western Australia, (Battye 1924). White explains that Battye was criticised for 'Besmirching John Molloy's name' and described as a 'Tarradiddle' by Walter Dale the former Registrar of Western Australian (White 2017 9). The settlement of Perth had little interest in skeletons in the closet in the 1924, even from their first professor of History.

So, the story of the Minninup massacre was suppressed and condemned to be lost to history, because as the expression goes 'History is written by the victors.' However, accounts of the Massacres of Minninup and Wonnerup did not fade from the memory of the few survivors, some of which were spared because they had been fathered by colonialists and others because they fled the region.

Therefore, to fill in some of the gaps of history and to create an opportunity at discovering a more balanced and truthful version of colonial history events this project has chosen to sit and listen to members of the descendants of those survivors.

To accomplish a successful outcome for everyone, especially in a delicate cross-cultural subject such as a massacre it is best to learn protocols and methodologies. These protocols and methodologies are discussed next in chapter three.

CHAPTER THREE: ART PRACTICE

Part One in this chapter explains the protocols, methodologies and methods employed in this project. It is included to aid anyone considering a cross-cultural collaborative practice. Possibly the greatest adversary to success in projects such as this is the enemy within, our unconscious bias, white privilege, or a savior complex. Then in Part Two discussion turns to the most important ways of working that can help addressing our failings -De-colonialism and Yarning.

PART 1

Protocols, Methodology and Methods

Protocols in this project are designed to protect Wardandi Nyungar Culture from misuse. They also aid the researcher to keep sound integrity while working on a multi-discipline and cross-cultural project.

The Australian census 2021, reports new confidence and interest in declaring First Nations status, with a 25% increase in people acknowledging their heritage as First Nations People. The Census found 812,728 or 3.2 % of the population identified as Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander. This is an increase of 25.2 % since 2016 (ABS (Australian Bureau of Statistics) 2022). Eric Foulds, 72, of Bassendean, Perth explains his experience 'I was 48 [years of age], when I was told I was part Aboriginal. We just didn't talk about it back then (Foulds 2022 personal communication).

Bill is sceptical of the rise in Australian Aboriginality, saying 'where were they before' (Webb 2022). Implying that unwarranted interest can arise from those looking to capitalise previously undeclared DNA results, but with no connection or affiliation to any First Nations Group. The Australian Arts Council has developed a set of protocols to aid artists and First Nation People to work confidently together to achieve self-determination and protection including ICIP (Indigenous Culture and Intellectual Property).

The Australian Government Department for Art explains what protocols are in relation to ICIP.

Protocols are appropriate ways of engagement with Indigenous cultural material and interaction with Indigenous peoples and communities. They encourage ethical conduct and promote interaction based on good faith, mutual respect, and cultural values (Arts Council 2022).

As well as Art protocols, there are also research protocols as taught in the *Research Integrity-HDR 2020*²⁴ that informs this project and looks for an ethical and robust approach to research. which I applied throughout the year by seeking all voices in this history. However, Australian photographic law does not always accommodate and support First Nations perspectives. While it may be legal to photograph any open space with copyright, legal, walking on country and photographing certain landforms, without permission from the traditional owners may be problematic or unethical. I have used the words 'may be' because this can only be decided by the traditional owners. 'Under copyright laws, these rights are not always protected, and therefore we encourage the use of Indigenous protocols' (Arts Council 2022).

It is imperative to build an understanding of what best practice is for the family group through the relationship and bonds built with Elders in their traditional methods, of spending time in Yarning and relationship. Councils of Arts, recommend 10 guiding principles to inform protocols. Being respect, self-determination, communication, interpretation, Integrity, confidentiality, attribution, benefit sharing, continuing cultures, and recognition. How these principles inform the protocols of a project is further explained in (Arts Council 2022).

Action Research is a methodology and philosophy that aims to create positive change of self-empowerment and gives control and ownership to the Wardan Aboriginal Centre.

²⁴ The *Research Integrity HDR 2020*. Course is a compulsory unit that researchers must pass before starting their research and helps the student to negotiate moral and ethical dilemmas.

Stringer explains “The researcher, who might better be labelled a facilitator, does not work alone, but with a community or group who collaborate in the research, not as subjects but as participants and co-researchers’ (Stringer 2007 24).

To aid the facilitator, Stringer recommends “a cycle of observation, reflecting and then action or look, think, and act” (figure 10).

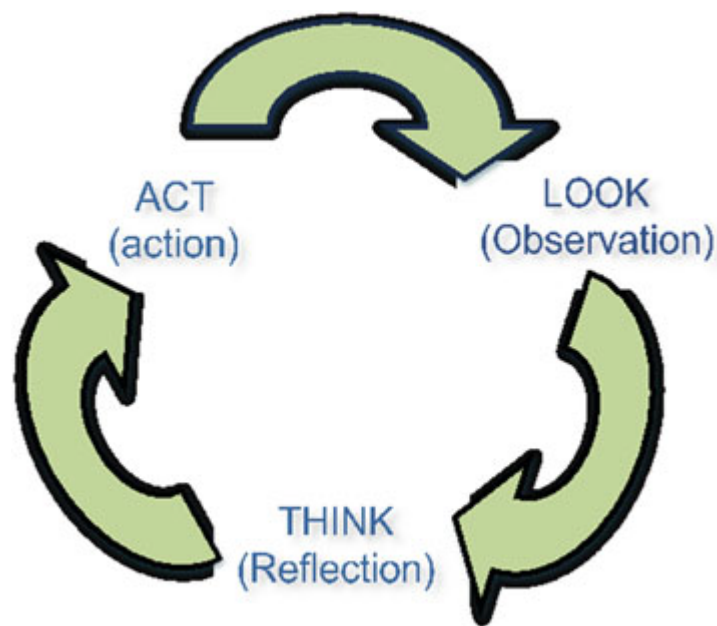


Figure 10. Ernest Stringer, *The Action Research Cycle*, 2007 Reproduced from Stringer 2008, p37.

Action Research, as the name suggests, seeks meaningful outcomes for the Wardandi Nyungar People – research that results in action. Even this exegesis is written to be inclusive. In the style of Action Research this paper it is written for readability, avoiding jargonistic or overly academic language. This research is not about the Wardandi Nyungar People but for and with them. Henrietta Marrie, in Janke informs us ‘Indigenous People are the most researched people in the world’ (Janke 2021 454). Marrie is a leader in Indigenous Cultural rights and describes Indigenous people as ‘Archival Captives.’

We have been documented, etched, photographed, filmed, probed, and interpreted. Our belongings taken as artifacts...we are captives, but we don’t own the archives, written records, and documents about our lives (Janke 2021 454).

Employing a Participatory Action Research philosophy of respect and collaboration can aid in avoiding these de-humanising approaches of the past. In Participatory Action Research, the community take parts and becomes co-researcher and co-designer and I help that transition from observers to participants.

PART TWO: Decolonisation and Yarning

Is a methodology, a lens to look through to inform a world view of the project. It is the unpicking of the colonial condition that affects all who are raised in the Antipodes under colonialism. This involves reading about colonialism and how it has affected the colonised and being open to alternative historical narratives and cultural experiences.

To understand, one must become aware of the impacts of colonisation, rather than misconstrue colonisation as something beneficial. Children in the antipodes were raised to romanticise about their brave, hardy, intrepid ancestors, that succeeded against all odds and that colonialism was a beneficial global event.

Historians, like Sue Gordon, are now revealing a more balanced narrative of what colonisation meant to the First Nations People of Australia.

The imposition of the coloniser's economy, law, and culture on Indigenous people. It involves the taking of land, resources, and labour of Indigenous Peoples (Gordon 2014 5).

Colonialism is about obtaining wealth for empire and business enterprises, (Gordon 2014 5). The British Empire had scant regards for anyone below the landed gentry, Clergy, Military Officers, and the Royal Family. The pillars of colonialism are racism, male chauvinism, and greed. Having the audacity to invade and enslave a third of the world's First Nations People is extreme institutionalised racism and hatred of other.

The British sense of entitlement to the world's resources, stems from the religious self-righteousness of the entitled wealthy classes (Gordon 2014 10).

Decolonisation for me means the rejection of those pillars, a rejection of racism, sexism, and greed. Decolonizing history means understanding The Great Australian

Silence (White 2021 23) and the myth of a peaceful Australian settlement are psychological states of denial. It also means asking what was lost during colonialism and what society needs back. In this project, what is missing is the Wardandi Nyungar Peoples version of the Minninup/Wonnerup Massacre.

There is a transformation that occurs for the researcher working in the cross-cultural space and reading about the colonised world and seeing the world through a different lens. Reading about colonisation from colonised Authors perspectives as well as attending First Nations workshops and meeting First Nations people breaks down unhealthy stereotypes and unconscious biases. After attending workshops and meeting with First Nations people, I became aware of the largely untold Aboriginal history of my home city, for instance with Rottnest Island prisoners.

Rottnest island is a popular holiday and recreational island just 19 kilometres off the coast of Fremantle, but most visitors are blissfully unaware that the Island was used to incarcerate First Nations men and boys for just under 100 years, (Green & Aguiar 1997).

This form of reading, walking and critical observation produces a decolonizing affect and helps to challenge our own essentialism and white privilege.

Keikelame & Swartz recommend decolonizing in areas of research 'To challenge the Eurocentric research methods that undermine the local knowledge and experiences of the marginalized population groups'... (Keikelame & Swartz 2019 1).

Another transformative space to experience personal and professional decolonization is spending time in a First Nations yarning circle. For this project it involved sitting around the outdoor open fire at the Wardan Aboriginal Centre. Being free to sit and listen and talk in an inclusive circle with First Nation People and their allies exposes the visitor to a wide range of ideas and perspectives. Then the researcher can discuss the history and experiences of the colonized. Case in point, there is a dichotomy between how European view land and use land as a commodity and how Australian First Nations people View land. The *Wardandi Ngungar* concept of Ngungar Boodja or a relationship with Earth, not as a community as such.

Understanding the difference between the Euro-centric ideology of land as a commodity and the Indigenous mindset of being in a relationship with land is

fundamental to decolonization. Walking can become a fundamental strategy to decolonization. Walking around an affected site in a contemplative state, considering the facts of the site, allows an imagining to occur and seeing through a non-western/colonial worldview. It is a meditative way to make a connection with a place to gather natural items and connect with nature.

Walking slowly through a space with a non-extractive mindset with critical observation of the lighting, shadows, sounds, and shapes drifting, allows the landforms to open, curiously exploring not really knowing what you will discover or what is missing. This contemplative walking is like reading a book as your imagination brings the words to life when you read. As does your imagination and memory of history can be revealed in the process, (Billinghurst, Hind & Smith 2020).

Australian oral tradition is known as *Yarning*.²⁵ This informal style of communication is used in this project by Elder Bill Webb at his fire circle (*Karla*), where he shares his family history. The principles of *Karla* Yarning as with an Elder, are listening, respecting, sharing, and letting be. Dawn Bessarab who is a *Bard/Yjindjabandi* woman contends:

Yarning is a process that requires the researcher to develop and build a relationship that is accountable to Indigenous people participating in the research...When an Aboriginal person says, "let's have a yarn," what they are saying is, let us have a talk or conversation (Bessarab & Ng'andu 2010 38).

Sitting in a Yarning circle means respecting the fire owner and listening to their lessons or history, sharing, and questioning and trying to understand is welcome. This experience builds bonds, when we are listening, we are acknowledging *Wardandi Ngungar*

People and their truth. Yarning builds trust, accountability, and knowledge' (38). Australia has yet to recognise the value of ownership of yarning as a cultural property that needs protecting through copyright' (Janke 2021, 84). However, there is another type of yarning that is going on and informs this work on an artistic level.

²⁵ *Yarning* is a term for teaching and sharing by storytelling in Australian First Nations culture.

Margaret Hughes and Stuart Barlo share its processes in the *Yarning With Country: An Indigenous Research methodology article* (Hughes & Barlo 2021).

This is especially relevant to this project because it includes photographs of Country. This text asks us how we work within a relational methodology with Country as a primary participant, 'that intentionally cultivating respectful relationship with Country is relevant more broadly, particularly for researchers working within a relationship framework' (Hughes and Barlo 2021).

CHAPTER FOUR: THE ART/PHOTOGRAPHY PROJECT

This Chapter in Part One speaks of those artists that have addressed this subject before and who have influenced this project, often in times when nobody seemed to be listening. Then in Part Two we look at my own creative practice led research that informed this project. And later in Part Three we consider how photography has informed colonialism.

PART ONE PRECEDENCE OF PRACTICE

McMillan remarks that artists are 'Finding [a] gentle and persuasive mechanism to address violent and traumatic histories (McMillan 2019 2).

Growing up in colonies, one does not hear the voice of the colonised until someone like McMillan asks us to stop and look at ourselves and our history.

McMillan writes on the affected colonial landscapes including the Ludlow Forest murders of 1841, which was part of the Wonnerup Massacre (figure 8). McMillan informs this project as an artist writer on the Ludlow Forest Killings, that preceded the Minnipup Massacre. Following her words and journey, inspired a visit to Ludlow State Forest and an introduction into sound recording and soundscapes.

McMillan uses the word 'unforgetting' to describe her study of memory and decolonising of the past, to push back at a one-sided view of that history.

McMillan's memory work began my quest to unlock the mystery of why Perth people don't talk history.

Raised in Perth and writing extensively on art as a means of remembering our collective past McMillan argues that 'contemporary artists have refused State authorised remembering and forgetting (2019 70). Seeing her work inspired me to continue my research and passion for lost history story telling through fabric and photography.

McMillan's art installations often involve photography and fabric, to trigger personal memories in her viewer (figure 11).

Haunted landscapes exist and operate through us in various ways, connected by links not always immediately apparent. Art—the making and viewing of it—can often tease out these complex relationships in ways impossible for other forms of text. It can also offer an empathetic pathway between people and places, essential to the process of remembrance (McMillan 2019 106).

Remembering the past is crucial for understanding ourselves, our families, and our families' histories. History informs us of who we are in connection to the values and culture of those families. As a Nation, we acknowledge events like World War One and Gallipoli, as an event to be acknowledged because it is supposedly informing us of the origins of Australian National identity. McMillan's use of photography in her fabric installations, (figure 10), incites memory of place. It's a memory trigger for the viewer of her installation, imbuing the work with place-centred meaning.

Photography theorist Sontag, argues there is a link between photography and memory, creating a photography is creating a souvenir. 'Photography is often associated with memory as it converts experience into an image which then becomes a souvenir to remember people, places and events (Sontag 2002 2).

However, McMillan's image is void of people and events and draw's attention only to place. This emptiness is in itself acting like a witness to tell us something is missing. 'As a silent witness, the land is the one constant that can bridge the past and the present...' (Jacket 2014).

McMillan encouraged this projects use of fabric and continued experimenting in eco-printing.



Figure 11. Kate McMillan, *History's debris*, 2006, Photography digital print on polysynthetic fabric, sound. Retrieved From [katemcmillan](http://katemcmillan.net)²⁶

An artist that first inspired me to explore photography to challenge a historical narrative, is Anne Ferran. Discovering her work in an art concepts class challenged my understanding of photography as a recording of an event. Farren utilises photography to present an alternative colonial narrative, known as an 'Archival Turn.' *Lost to worlds*, (figure 12) advocates for the lost women and children that suffered and perished under colonial rule. Ferran's photography informs us of the pregnant women that were sent to the Ross Female Factory Prison from 1847 to 1854 (Batchen 227) for punishment and retraining. This Colonial-era factory was where 'wayward' girls and women were sent to incarceration for crimes like getting pregnant while unmarried. Many a baby and young mother never returned from their forced labour in such factories. Susan Best critiques (Best 2012) *Lost to worlds*:

²⁶ <https://www.katemcmillan.net>

'Lost to Worlds' raises several questions about what can be known or communicated about the past by photography. In particular, the traditional understanding of photographic witnessing is transformed by Ferran's subtle evocation of the history of a site by images of emptiness (Best 2012).

Best is referring to our understanding that photography is capturing a moment in time. Rather than a decisive moment (such as the leap over the pond of water in the famous photo by Henri Cartier-Bresson image), Ferran's work eschews the decisive moment and favours an ambiguous moment. She is using photography to challenge the viewer to ask; 'what I am looking at'?



Figure 12. Anne Ferran, *untitled*, from 'Lost to Worlds,' 2008. Digital print on aluminium, 120 cm x 120 cm.

The decisive moment is inside the viewers mind if they do the work to discover the meaning of the photo.

Geoffrey Batchen explains that documentary photographers (like Alexander Gardner in 1862 and his vacant battlefield of Antietam), Ferran is employing the imagination of the viewer to fulfil her story. Batchen argues.

Ferran's photographs ... denying us the stability of perspectival depth or human subject to identify with or sympathize over, thereby making us (and our complicity in the history she conjures) the principles subject (Batchen 231).

Batchen goes on to point out that Australians probably do not know these hidden histories so to invest energy to learn about innocent babies dying through an institutionalised lack of care seems to place a burden of truth on to the viewer.

Rebecca Dagnall is a Western Australian photographer who has exhibited worldwide, and argues:

There is certain darkness in the Australian landscape that is tangled in a history that holds both a presence and an absence, a knowledge and yet a denial of past colonial deeds. It is as though this history haunts the landscape, like a 'ghost' with unfinished business (Dagnall 2019).

Dagnall informs this project via the psychological nature of landscape, in Australia. 'The bush as psychological space, the Australian gothic, and the ongoing investigation into peoples' relationships with their immediate surroundings' (Dagnall 2022). John Burger refers to a similar notion when he argues:

Photographs bear witness to a human choice being exercised in a given situation. A photograph is a result of the photographer's decision that it is worth recording that this particular event or this particular object has been seen (John Burger 1968 25).

By offering us a photo of a cliff face, near water, the viewer may ask why this cliff is important for us to look at. Burger expands on this idea by asking, 'What then gives the photograph as photograph meaning? What makes its minimal message?'

Dagnall is sharing this feeling of the Australian Bush as a haunted psychological place. This is a counter narrative to the great outdoors narrative of beaches and sunshine. John Burger describes this as the whole point of photography; to record and show the world how you see the world.

Every photograph is in fact a means of testing, confirming, and constructing a total view of reality. Hence the crucial role of photography in ideological struggle (Burger 1968 27).



Figure 13. Rebecca Dagnall, *The gorge*, digital Image. From rebeccadagnall.com²⁷

Dagnall draws attention to our relationship with our own history; this 'knowledge and yet a denial of past colonial deeds', as the unfinished business of the Frontier Wars of Australia. She supplies a subject matter for what is denied and what was not recorded. This acknowledgement is often missing in Australia.

Dagnall brings her conflict of the now and the before and of unfinished business to inform my project. Her sensing a contemporary problem that haunts Australia,

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<https://www.rebeccadagnall.com/absence-presence>

inspiring and informing me that an attitude of ignorance or denial over history isn't working and that this unfinished business is beyond written history.

For my project, this sense of unfinished business, is the acknowledgement of the violence of the violence, which is only possible with truth in history.

Katie West is a Western Australian artist, self-described as a 'decolonist' who works in fabric installations and video to create a meditation space and draws attention to the connection with country to help ease personal decolonisation. West uses 'Naturally dyed fabrics carrying the colour and scent of country [to] create a space... (West 2019), (figure 14).



Figure 14. Katie West, *Clearing*, 2019, from ²⁸ [Katiewularniwest.com](http://www.Katiewularniwest.com)

²⁸ www.Katiewularniwest.com

West's work with decolonisation workshops, aids individuals to respond to the Anthropocene²⁹. Carson argues that colonialism and the Anthropocene are linked with its beginning in the late 18th century by the industrial revolution and colonisation. Historian Alison Bashford places the origins of Anthropocene with colonialism and 'put[s] the Anglosphere squarely at the centre of the Anthropocene's origins.' (Bashford in Carson 2021:10) so Carson argues:

the British invasion of the world and of Australia registers as a climatic, geochemical, ecological, and demographic event of such magnitude that it has been suggested the Anthropocene be renamed the Anglocene or Capitalocene (Carson 2021: 14).

Carson also claims that colonial mindset and colonialism is still practiced today through politics and give the example of the Queensland Government catering to the fossil fuel industry.

Palaszczuk's Labor government extinguished *Wangan* and *Jangalingou* claims to 1385 hectares of Country situated in the Galilee basin right on the spot where the architects of the Adani coalmine project intend to locate their central corporate services (Carson 2021: 14).

Carson's example is neocolonialism illustrated by government not recognizing the First Nation People's land rights. But rather giving permission for the land to be exploited for financial gain. West's practice gently reveals and contemplates the ideas Carson puts forward. West illustrates through her publicly available exhibitions and mediation workshops a slow mediative 'walking on country' process to collect and gather items for her bundle dyeing process. This slow purposeful collecting is part of her connection to her traditional ancestral ways and a decolonizing walk. West teaches connection to the land through mediation and her use of biochemistry. This informs this project's connection to affected landscapes

²⁹ This contemporary period of history where mankind's negative influence on the earth is causing damage and climate change.

and decolonization. She also acknowledges intergenerational trauma and the power of art and mediation to heal.

West argues for learning personal decolonisation and advocates for its healing affect, (*Figure 15*).

Decolonist explores mediation as a way to decolonise way the self, where breathing out the traumas of colonisation and breathing in a decolonised state of mind (West 2016).

I am very interested in embodied knowledge, the memory of the physical experiences of our ancestors that we still carry – not only First Peoples, but all of us. As human beings we have senses, and we can trust our bodies to gather the knowledge we need (Keys 2016).



Figure 15. Katie West. *Decolonist Mediation*. 2016 Digital Video, 7 minutes.

West informs this project by acknowledgement of intergenerational trauma from colonisation and by her walking de-colonisation practice. Realizing that members of our society are suffering from inherited trauma and that addressing those issues

through art and therapy was possible was a revelation and inspired an attempt through this project.

West also shows that decolonisation can be taught, which empowers non-First Nations people, like myself, who may want to be part of Reconciliation but don't experience the trauma or know the problems. Decolonisation allowed me to enjoy and respect the authority of the Wardandi Elders and informed my decision to seek permissions to photograph and write about the Minninup/ Massacre.

PART TWO: Wardandi Boodja

My Honours exegesis, (Andrews 2020) informed the art and photographic practices and created a springboard for the development of this master's project called *Wardandi Boodja: Truth-Telling*. This project was moved down to the southwest due to not making a connection with the *Wadjuk*³⁰ *Nyungar* (Perth People) for advice, permissions, and collaborations.

This may have been down to my approach of introducing myself as a researcher, unaware of the historical relationship with researchers in Australia. From a First Peoples perspective 'The word research is one of the dirtiest words in the Indigenous world's vocabulary...' Smith in (Janke 2021 455).

During the honours year conflict sites were visited, photographs taken, history read, and experiments were made in diverse ways to express the nature of a landscape. Five local Perth massacre sites, from Rottnest Island to Success Hill, were used to explore combining photography and biochemistry³¹ to explore the hidden meanings of these sites and to find way to respectfully document this history. This innovation of combining of Eco-printing³² into the photography finally created the decolonised and affected landscape effect that was sought (Figure 16).

³⁰ The First Peoples of What is now known as Perth are known as the Whadjuk Nyungar.

³¹ Using the natural tannins and dyes in plants to make an imprint on fabrics.

³² Using fabrics and plants to make a print

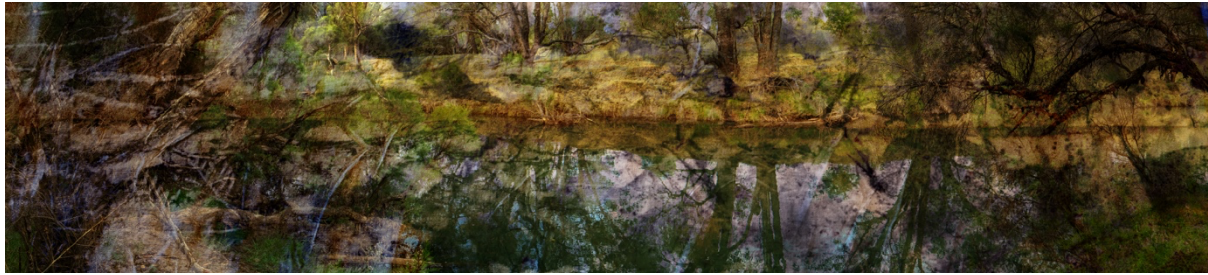


Figure 16. Stuart Andrews, *Pinjarra Massacre site*, 2020, Digital image with eco-print, 110cm x 23cm.

The Masters by Research project of 2021/22 brought with it new contacts following an opportunity to work in collaboration with the Wardan Aboriginal Centre. This allowed the development of real time protocols and lived experience, working with Wardandi Elders and community for their self-determination. Working with community broadened the project to include botanical colonisation.

Botanical colonisation is the supplanting of the endemic flora of land by the invading colony. It occurred in two forms with the first being the most obvious, the clearing of land to set up farms, roads, and towns and planting of non-Indigenous plants. The second and not so widely known is the biological specimen collecting obsession of Europeans in the 1800s.

The Colonists brought the European concept of land and its flora as a commodity, something that could be bought and sold. Anna Haebich, who has Nyungar Family connections, explains:

Flora spreading along networks of empire substantiated colonists' claims to ownership of Indigenous lands. Meanwhile the stealing of plant resources from the colonies combined with colonists' introduced crop and weed species contributed to destruction of the original people, their habitats, and their ancient accommodations (Haebich 2019 83).

This was at a time of insatiable demand for the new and exotic that the colonies could produce (Barry 2015). However, colonised Wardandi people would gain no acknowledgement, payment, or honour. No plant names are given by Wardandi in their language. However, the importers and European horticulturists that grew and

propagated and then sold on the plants and seeds often made their fortune by patenting new species and new scientific or medicinal uses from these species. This today is being described as biopiracy:

Scientists and researchers ignored Indigenous people's role in identifying biological and providing relevant information. This inevitably led to biopiracy, where Indigenous people's knowledge of biological resources such as plants were taken and commercialized without their consent, and without any profits (Barry 2015 229).

Wardandi Nyungar People have a deep connection to botanicals and land, which they called *Wardandi Boodja*.³³ Theirs is both a spiritual relationship with country and a physical dependency that comes from living off the land. Realising this dual relationship helps us understanding of the seriousness of the botanical collecting and supplanting that came with colonisation.

Being cognitive of the historical practice of destructive collecting for profit, informs my collecting for this project. The biochemistry printing, employed, fortunately works very well with dead leaves and fallen flora. Furthermore, a respectful relationship with country and permission from Elders, allows for snip of a flower or leaf. Meanwhile this can be a meditative form of decolonisation, as West suggests. Then once the fabric print is created (eco-print) it can be photographed and digitally combine with the landscape photo, (Figure 17).

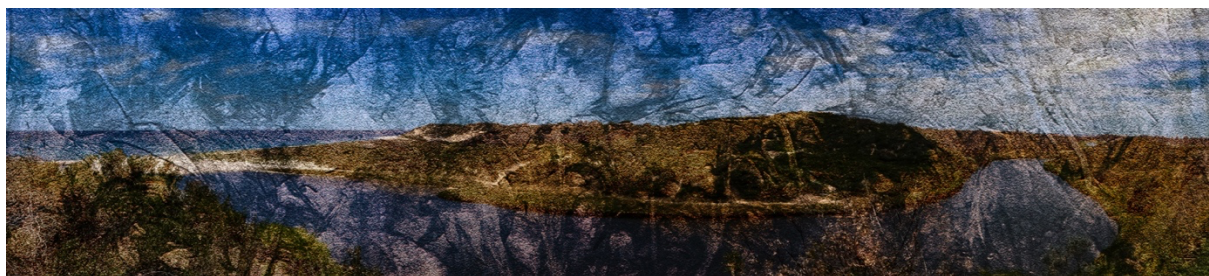


Figure 17. Stuart Andrews, *Minninup Sand Dunes*, 2022, Photography and eco -print combination, 110cm x 23 cm.

³³ Wardandi (land and sea people) Boodja (Mother Earth)

This is my visual language of decolonising landscape to allow Wardandi Boodja to speak through the medium.

PART THREE: PHOTOGRAPHY

Photography played a fundamental role in the colonisation of Australia, the new medium captured images to promote adventure and immigration by portraying a new and empty land for the taking Lydon explains: 'Photographic practitioners began arriving in Australia only two years after the invention of the medium,' that was 1829, year Perth was set up. The colonists came to cash in on the 'Global currency of science, romance, fascination and tourism' (Lydon 2015 2). (Figure 18) shows photographically the romantic notion of the brave pioneer.



Figure 18. Nicholas Claire, *Dandenong Moons Range*, 1876. Retrieved from Victorian Collections³⁴

The myth is of the intrepid pioneer, heroically carving out a new life by taming the wilderness with his axe in an empty wilderness. This is the template of Australian History until today. But when First Nations People were included, Yamatji woman and Research Fellow, Donna Oxenham whose grandfather was a Wardandi man from Busselton said:

Throughout West Australia's history - Aboriginal people have been recorded by photography. The reasons behind collections vary from an individual's fascination with a People dying out Oxenham in (Lydon 2015)

Crawford informs us how the early colonists perceived the Wardandi Ngungar in Perth in 1829. Public opinion was influenced by the earlier reports sent to England by the Sea Captains like Cook, Stirling and Naturalist Banks and Crawford argues that: 'Noble savage, debased man or mere brutes were commonly held concepts of Aboriginals in the first half of the century' (Crawford in Stannage 1981 10).

While slow to arrive in Perth that ideology was replaced by Social Darwinists, who believed in a hierarchy of human types, which were on the decline.

'Adherents to evolutionary principles were quick to identify Aboriginals as a relic population from a primitive stage in man's development' (Crawford in Stannage 1981 10).

Crombie argues the Australian photographer Fred Kruger explored these concepts and portrays (figure 19) the same family in 1875 as the 'Natives dying out', and then in 1876 as 'lords of a dispossessed landscape' (Crombie 2012, 88). Kruger was commissioned by the Government to record photographically the demise of a race of people and his photographs are that expression of government propaganda.

³⁴<https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/577b555cd0cdd10948ce10bf>



Figure 19. Fred Kruger, *Thomas Banfield, and family*. 1875, 1876 Retrieved from Crombie, Isobel. 2012.

Oxenham explains this type of photography in terms of 'An attempt by government bodies to prove that their treatment of Aboriginal people was the right one' (Lydon 2015 207).

This insidious propaganda against First Nations People to misrepresent them for the colonist's gain alerts my use of photography.

Another myth is that the First Nations people of Australia did not push back against this propaganda. Ginsburg argues that they did and do. Writing on the adoption of the Western visual culture by indigenous peoples argues that it has been adopted 'as a new form of collective self -production by Indigenous producers to mediate historical and cultural ruptures... (Ginsburg 1993 557).

Photography in the hands of First Nations People such as Mervyn Bishop has been a powerful tool in expressing and recording great moments and alternative supportive narratives. In this famous and iconic photo³⁵ of Prime Minister Gough

³⁵ <https://search.informit.org/doi/10.3316/tvnews.tsm201608190040>

Whitlam symbolically returning land to Vincent Lingiari and his people, Bishop asked the then Prime Minister to step outside to repeat his gesture for the camera. This photo is often used as symbol for reconciliation and land rights (Liddle 2016). Therefore, as a *Wedjela* (white man) the casual deployment of the medium is retrained, and instead the camera can be shared as a tool to record *Wardandi* struggle for truth, passing the camera around at workshops when a photographic record is needed, (figure 20).



Figure 20. Georgina Webb, *Eco print making*, 2022. Digital Image.

First Nations experts, Andrew explains the importance of historic photography.

Photography of First Nations People is an important link for them to reconnect to ancestors and to identify relatives. The old photos remind us that we can keep alive important histories-and make action for healing, inspiration and cultural worth' Andrew in (Lydon 2014 inside cover).

The Wardan Centre holds many historical photographs and Bill agrees and shows me a photo (Figure 21) of two Wardandi Nyungar Men, near Cape Leeuwin.

Look! Sam and his nephew, see we were here. We have been here for generations. We have always been. Some people try to tell me that we just came here (Bill Webb 2022).

Oxenham explains the importance of the few photographs of their relatives 'few traveling photographers visited Perth, and those that did rarely ventured south, these photographs are of great significance today to Aboriginal people' (Oxham in Lydon 2014).



Figure 21. Willmott, *Wardandi Men*. Courtesy of Bill Webb.

While in my project photography is used to document workshops and events, however the medium of landscape photography is the model of artistic expression of the affected landscapes. Like Ferran's *Lost To Worlds* landscapes of empty fields, the viewer is challenged to interpret the photo.

My landscape photography does not follow the euro-centric techniques and rules of landscape photographers (Figure 22).



Figure 22. Stuart Andrews, *Minninup Sand Dunes*, 2022, 110cm x 23cm.

There is no clear subject matter conveniently placed 1/3 up and 1/3 down to lead the eye (rule of thirds). The magic 'Golden hour' of dawn or dusk has been ignored. There is no clear 1/3 foreground, 1/3 land and 1/3 sky. The format is panoramic rather than the normal 8 x 10cm ratio. A photographic Judge may scratch his head and ask 'what is the subject here?'

As with Ferran, Dagnall, West, and McMillan, the photograph is focused on what is missing or unseen, the burial site of 300 Wardandi Nyungar people. Following protocols of respecting a troubled landscape the land was photographed from a distance. Aesthetics were not my main concern, and my aspect was parallel and pointing to Rottnest islands where troubled spirits should find rest. The use of the panorama format reflects a journey through life with the camera informing decisions. Working with country informs those decisions. Positioning oneself and observing to see what nature presents and allowing that nature to be present in the artwork is also part of this process. This presence of nature is brought about through the process of eco-printing which uses biochemistry, to print from collected flora, foliage, and flowers. The flora is wrapped in a fabric bundle and are heat-treated in water and vinegar to produce the eco print (figure 23).



Figure 23. Stuart Andrews, *Ghost Drapes*, 2022, Eco prints on cotton. Wardandi Boodja: Truth-telling. Curtin University.

This printed fabric is photographed, and that photo was layered over the landscape photo. This method is used to create a sense that the country is speaking out of the photo - speaking of a haunting over the land (figure 24).



Figure 24. Stuart Andrews, *Affected Minninup*, 2022, Photography and Eco prints, 110cm x 23cm. Wardandi Boodja: Truth-telling.

The piece above is a collaboration of many hands that collected, placed, and made the bundle. Physically creating can release a sense of having contributed this is community reconciliation art.

CHAPTER FIVE: HEALING AND EXHIBITION

This chapter looks at a First Nations perspective on the art of healing, through the voices of First Nations leaders, healers, and educators and then in part two we show how we applied those principles of meaningful collaboration and connection to land to create our community exhibition.

PART ONE: HEALING

There is a great need to heal First Nations People in Australia. 'Harm done by generations of dispossession, powerlessness and rejection' (Haebich 2015 16). Haebich contends that 'First Nation People understand healing as Aboriginal philosophies of healing as spiritual understanding of self, identity, love, belonging, family...connection to land' (Haebich 2015 16).

These basic human values of family love and being on your own land were systematically dismantled by the murder of family groups, incarceration of leaders and the forced removal of children. Darryl Kickett runs Red Dust Healing, a healing workshop. Haebich argues 'Red Dust Healing works through respect and support and being able to tell stories' (Haebich 2015 16).

Bill also is an experienced *Wardandi Nyungar* healer, who is often called on to carry out healing ceremonies. He conducts these during smoking ceremonies in which peppermint leaf is ignited and a smouldering bundle is brought towards a person and the smoke is waved over the person as they stand there, and words of protection are spoken over them. When asked about healing, Bill answers, 'There are many ways to heal, through music, art, talking' (Bill Webb March 2022). Webb performed a cleaning ceremony for me and others after we had handled returned artifacts. Green and Aquire explain these smoking ceremonies (figure 25).

A traditional Nyoongar³⁶ [Nyungar] ritual used to not only cleanse and purify a specific area, but it cleanses the spirit, body, and soul whilst you are on Noongar Country (Green & Aguire 1997 93).

³⁶ *Nyoongar* or *Nyungar* meaning the language group from Western Australia. This word has different spelling variations depending on the family group preference.



Figure 25. Neville Green, *Smoking Ceremony*, 1997. Digital image. Retrieved from (Green & Aguire 1997.93)

From a Ngungar perspective Marion Kickett explains 'One of the major ways of healing is, for many Nyungar people, when they tell their story,' Kickett in (Forrest & Johnston 2017 10). Listening to Elders such as Kickett is fundamental to the philosophy of this project.

A sentiment often touted in Perth is that First Nations should forget about the past. However, Kim Scott in (Haebich & Shultz 2015, exemplifies the healing power of coming together and talking about early colonial violence. Scott relates his 'visit to a taboo region infamous for the killing of *Noongar* People in the late nineteenth century' (Haebich & Shultz 2015 213). Scott on a cultural book tour to schools, relates that while his team was in the region, they were invited onto the property where a massacre had taken place.

They prepared a barbecue for us, offered a speech acknowledging prior ownership by our community and expressing their grief at horror of shared history, it meant a great deal to the Elders in the group, on Country, acknowledged and honored (Scott in Haebich & Shultz 2015 213).

“It meant a great deal to the Elders” are important words. Words of self-determination. The elders know what is important and Scott facilitated the visit. Janke describes self-determination as being in control of your own destiny: ‘The power to have a say in how their cultural future is determined’ (Janke 2021,30). The Busselton Truth Walk is a step toward healing and empowerment for the Wardan Aboriginal Centre to decide their own outcomes. Events like the Truth Walk and the truth-telling art workshops express self-determination.

Tardin-Coelho argues ‘the Role of the Universities is support because Government doesn’t support human rights there...’ (Tardin-Coelho 2022). She is speaking of her role with marginalized groups in Brazil.

This principle of supportive collaboration occurred for us on the 22/02/2022, as Elders and Academics, including myself, spoke together about the remembrance of the *Wonnerup/Minninup* massacres in the town of Busselton.



Figure 26. Stuart Andrews, *Busselton Truth Walk*, 2022. Digital Image. Personal collection.

The truth-telling art workshops were held over the Easter Holiday weekend the April 17th, 2022, at the Wardan Aboriginal Centre. There was a range of artists present, music was made and with me as facilitator of the truth-telling exhibit, visitors made art on paper plates and talked about the Minninup Massacre (figure 27).



Figure 27. Stuart Andrews, *Eco-print making 2022*. Paper plate and flora.

During the art and truth telling workshops visitors took part in a simple bundle dyeing exercise. We placed flora, leaves, nuts, and bush foliage onto paper plates. Next, we treated them with vinegar and rust water and iron oxide. While we worked with our strange pallet of bush leaves and vinegar, participants had an opportunity to chat about the *Minninup* massacre. McMillan say creating art can be a powerful way to bring up personal memories.

In many instances, the act of physically making work about broader societal forgetting has triggered an act of remembering personal moments (McMillan 2019 105).

Reflecting McMillan's words, people taking part raised personal antidotes of bullying and trauma while creating art at the workshops. One person had been bullied because of her German ethnicity and blamed for what Hitler had done in World War II and another talked about lost friends.

To sum up, under Bill and Nina Webb's leadership, the community embraced this project of truth-telling about the *Minninup/Wonnerup* Massacre and organised public walks, made songs, recorded soundscapes and organised public workshops for art and truth telling. This was Bill's way of creating a coming together to talk after a time of conflict. This is the essence of action research: together naming a community issue and working under the elders prompts and suggestions (self-determination) to include and aid a community.

PART TWO: EXHIBITING WARDANDI BOODJA: TRUTH-TELLING

From 19/05/2022 to 20/05/2022 Wardandi Boodja: Truth-telling took place. This exam was recorded by MCASI film students, and a copy is attached to this exegesis and viewed at the Wardan Aboriginal Centre for the community to experience the exhibition.

How this work is understood, discussed, and interpreted is best left for Bill and Nina the *Wardandi* Elders, because it involves personal family history and the sharing of cultural information. Janke explains that 'non-Indigenous interpretations are often Eurocentric: they privilege western ideas and value systems (Janke 2021 25). However, some insight is supplied as it pertained to installation and my experience.

The Fire video,³⁷ centered on the floor is of Bill tending his *Karla*³⁸ (Fire circle). This is offered as an invitation to experience the Wardandi yarning culture and learn

³⁷ <https://youtu.be/oESFKPt1cyk>

³⁸ A *Karla* is a *Wardandi* term for an outdoor fire that people can sit around and yarn.

history as it is practiced today and has been taught for thousands of years. Entering the exhibit, you are entering a *Wardandi* Elders, *Karla* circle.

This fire, (Figure 28) is informed by action research protocols of respect and listening to elders, as is traditionally done around their fire. This fire video was created of Webb tending his fire circle so his visitors and himself could sit into the evening and talk. This fire centres and connects to many other items in the room. It is where the fabrics were burnt, and paper plates were heat pressed and where discussions and yarning were conducted. This fire had been burning for nine days when I last left to return to Perth.

This is where we sit, talk, and learn *Wardandi* history and culture in a style called yarning. A yarning circle would traditionally be after the activities of the day. It continues to be part of *Wardandi* culture as it has been for 30,000 years.



Figure 28. Stuart Andrews, *Fire circle*, 2022. Video. Digital Image.

Un-Settled by Simon Sun and Bill Webb was written in February/ March 2022 in response to this truth-telling project and sung at the *Minninup* Truth-telling on 22/02/2022. The voice over interviews of Bill and Nina Webb sharing their reflections on the *Minninup/Wonnerup* Massacre which were recorded in April 2022 for the exhibition. The significance of the visitor to be able hear an oral account (Yarn³⁹) can't be understated because it is empowering for the speaker and informs people that history may be written by the victor, but alternative versions such as yarning also exist. Johnson argues that since the year 2000 Yarning has become a recognised research Methodology (Forest & Johnston 2020 65).

Nina Webb chose a personal memory of her mothers in situ search for evidence to verify the truth of violence and relates to how they involved the police. Who have the evidence collected and tested and Nina goes on to recount the police officers' words which include the phrase a girl's skull from the "massacre times"?

This casual response by police seems to testify to what some have described as particularly strange Australian psychosis, where we normalise the terrible to the point of forgetting terrible historical events and justify them with 'that was just the way things were back then', a common phrase in Perth. McMillan calls it a 'broader societal forgetting...' (McMillan 2019 1).

Nina doesn't report any further action taken by the police.

While outside the scope of this artist project, Nina's statement directs the attention to evidence butchered young people for forensic archaeologists or the like to investigate.

Bill chose to recount the yarning version that he gained from his elders and possibly from his own research into his family history. These are the stories that are passed down from generation to generation and are owned by the family.

The acrylic painting entitled "Black Man" by Bill Webb was painted at the *Wardan* Aboriginal centre. Then during the truth-telling workshops of 2022 March, Bill brought this painting out for many hands to apply our eco-printing technique to. The Participants laid the painting on the side to symbolize a resting man lying at rest over the *Minninup* landscape (figure 29).

³⁹ <https://www.theyarningcircle.com/face-to-face/>



Figure 29. Stuart Andrews, *Black Man*, 2022. Eco-print and acrylic on cotton.

The Sand and Driftwood installation was designed to replicate the natural sand formation of the *Minninup* Sand Dunes. More than just a context and reference insulation, it was conceived to be a tangible presence of an iconic symbol to Australia, the beach. However, in this case this beach seemed to resist all. Trying to visit the Minninup Sand dunes is thwarted by physical barriers. The west side borders the Indian Ocean, the south side the Capel River, from the north there are kilometres of beach with no access, and from the east, one is confronted with barbed wire (figure 30). Even *Wardandi* Elder Bill warns 'don't go there alone'.



Figure 30. Stuart Andrews, *Sand and Wood*, 2022. Sand and wood installation, 3 x A4 prints.

The *Eco Paper Plates* Art and Truth-Telling workshops gave people an opportunity to explore the subject of the *Minninup Massacre* of 1841 in more detail. Eco prints on paper plates are the collective work of the Wardan Aboriginal Centre, friends, and local community. Created as part of truth-telling workshops, they signify the collective interest in this project. Paper plates, processed to the point of destruction were arranged beginning from the *Minninup* panoramas. Then less damaged plates came down the wall and onto the floor, until more intact paper plates lead to Webb's Karla, (figure 30). Representing the release of trauma as we Yarned by the fire.



Figure 31. Stuart Andrews, *Eco-plates*, 2022. Eco-print on paper plates.

Of the three panoramas featured in the exhibition of the Minninup Sand Dunes, and the first public revealing of the location of the slaughter of 1841. The series reads from left to right, normal, decolonized, and haunted psychological place. The first panorama (figure 22), having already been discussed. As has the second (figure 24). However, it would be remiss, not to mention the eerily placed lens flares that went with the twilight panorama shoot. Expressing the moodiness of the evening, reminiscent perhaps of Ferran's "lost to Worlds" (figure 12).

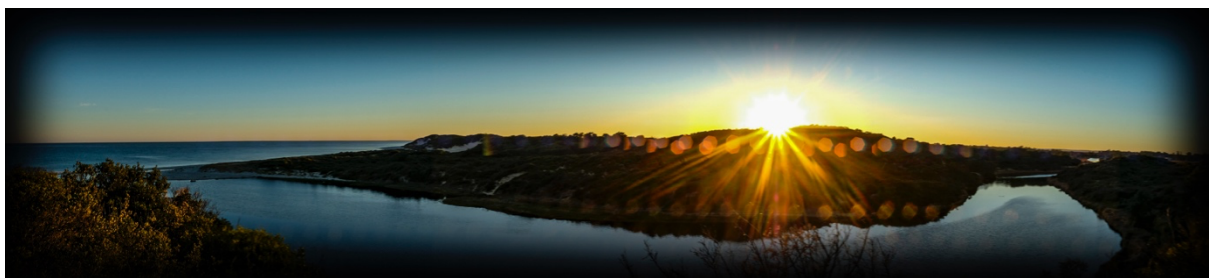


Figure 32. Stuart Andrews, *Sunset Minninup*, 2022, Photography, 110cm x 23cm.

EPILOGUE

The *Wardandi Boodja: Truth-telling* exam exhibit generated a lot of interest and was viewed by a steady stream of visitors, some Lecturers also brought in their students. Also, on July 14th, 2022, we held a private viewing of the *Wardandi Boodja: Truth-telling* exhibit at the *Wardandi* Aboriginal Centre for Bill and Nina Webb. Webb thought the year had gone well - 'It was brilliant! The workshops and acknowledging what had happened and coming together with community to talk about the way forward. Connecting with people, sharing, and caring' (Bill Webb 2022).

The exhibit crossed disciplines and cultures and told the Wardandi Nyungar story of the *Minninup/Wonnerup* Massacre history through the voice of Bill and Nina. The visitors to the exhibit appeared to show respectful listening and curiosity. People leant into the artworks and then very slowly walked through the exhibit. Interest in truth-telling was shown at the truth-telling walk and workshops. Much of the collaborative art was made at those workshops at the Wardan Aboriginal Centre. A Margaret River man made a paper plate design and interpreted it 'It's my brothers and then a barrier and then my Nyungar brothers. He then became emotional and welled up. It appeared that it wasn't just Wardandi Nyungar that wanted to talk truth and healing through art' (Personal Communication 2022).

One momentous outcome was Busselton community publicly, peacefully, and openly speaking on *Minninup/Wonnerup* Massacres of 1841, this was organised by Bill Webb and the community.

Bill and Nina have indicated their preference for further exhibitions in Margaret River, as well as another Truth walk and truth-telling workshops.

My reflections of this project are as a first-time Action Researcher *Wardandi Boodja: Truth-telling* stands for a year of tremendous personal growth. Transitioning from a photographer and archival researcher into a Participatory Action Researcher, facilitator, collaborator, and ally. By working with local community and experiencing Yarning I have gained insights into protocols and community issues. Seeing people respond positively to an opportunity to created art, yarn about painful histories convinces me of the power of the Human spirit to heal, with we just listen to the Elders.

CONCLUSION

The Uluru Statement from the Heart implies that Australia cannot have reconciliation without truth and that Australian history is not the full truth. *Wardandi Boodja: Truth-Telling* listened to the officials and historians of colonial yesterday, however the *Wardandi Nyungar* People of the Southwest want to add their version of history. Working collaboratively with Wardandi Elder and friends of the Wardan Aboriginal Centre, we together have re-told the story of the Minninup/Wonnerup Massacres of February and March of 1841, a part of history that has been suppressed, told, denied, buried, and re-told in the words of *Wardandi*.

In 1841 the Bussell's and Molloy possibly saw the *Wardandi Nyungar* People either as disinherited heirs of their own land destined to be replaced or as a defunct race of humans nearing the end of an evolutionary line. John Bussell was trained in Theology and was destined for the Church of England until a speech impediment blocked that path. Captain Molloy was a seasoned sniper, and experience in the Peninsular war had trained him to solve difficult problems with violence. Establishing colonies with ex-military men as government officials alongside fervent religious businessmen was a common modus operandi for expansion of the British empire.

In the National dialogue, the word Reconciliation is used, but with little progress for the First Nations People. Progress on reconciliation is measured in a yearly government report 'Closing the Gap', which looks at the health and life expectancy of First Nations People. The 2022 report showed that the gap was getting worse (CTG report 2022). The significance of this project is to show that a decolonized practice that helps First Nations self-determination under the leadership of an Elder can be successful.

The Great Australian Silence (White 2021 23) explains reasons for the ignorance of frontier violence in the Southwest. Perth man Erik Foulds recounts his experience 'We were taught English and American history at school [1950-70s]. I am just learning Aboriginal history now' (Foulds 12/07/2022 personal communication). The History Wars explain the confusion and conflict in talking history in Perth, as people took sides. However, is not the "history Wars", which creates insult to injury to those

that have lost so much. While this project looks at the written history of the southwest most importantly to listens to the elders and the traditional owners of their family history who describes the *Minninup* site as an 'Atrocity site' (Bill Webb 2022 personal communication).

In 1841 the voice of the Wardandi Nyungar people was silenced, and survivors scattered. In 1896 Kimberly wrote about the "worst event on colonial soil" and today researchers like McMillan and White have brought the *Minninup* Massacre to a less gullible public.

However, this project discovers what the *Minninup/Wonnerup* massacres mean to the rest of the *Wardandi Nyungar* People, through the unsolicited voice of two of the Elders, Bill, and Nina Webb. I asked Bill if the *Minninup* Sand Dunes should be a memorial or grave site. He said 'I want people to know about the massacre and for it to be taught in schools' (Webb 2022).

This was Bill Webb's *Makarrata*, an opportunity to gather and talk and begin to heal. The story started by investigating a six-person shooting in the Ludlow State Forest and grew to the *Minninup* Massacre, which began at the *Wonnerup* Massacre.

Today Bill speaks of other massacres. Bill estimates that from the 1830s to 1850s up to 10,000 Wardandi Nyungar men, women and children were driven to their deaths over cliffs or shot and buried in shallow graves. This is not a massacre of 300 people in *Minninup*, but the start of the 'Massacre Times'.

Wardandi Boodja Truth-telling highlighted a community's appetite for historical truth-telling, indicative from the attendance at the public rally and truth walks, through Busselton, when over 300 people attended. This is their history and part of a greater Australian and world history. When Great Brittan colonised one third of the world similar histories followed.

This project asks the question: How can art and yarning assist historical truth-telling in Australian. This project contributes to the knowledge of colonial frontier violence against *Wardandi Nyungar* People, in Australian history. Today researchers and the public can access different versions of history, including short videos, podcast⁴⁰ or

⁴⁰ Sam Carmony creates a podcast to share his investigation into Busselton History. The ghosts are not silent - ABC News. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2021-09-17/wonnerup-minninup-massacre-the-ghosts-are-not-silent/100458938#:~:text=In%20the%20iconic%20south%2Dwest,remain%20largely%20unknown%20and%20unacknowledged.>

Ted talks. Platforms such as the Colonial Massacre Map⁴¹ from the University of Newcastle are researching and sharing important historical events. Building on their research and then collaborating with Wardandi Elders, we combined art and yarning and reached out to an interested community. The *Wardan* Aboriginal centre supplied a safe place for interested people to express their emotions through leaving a mark on canvas. These marks, recordings, music and visitors contributed to a powerful exhibit that is telling the public, that while painful the, The *Wardan* Aboriginal Centre does not want their history to vanish, it is important for history to full and truthful. This exegesis contributes to a move across Australia for truth in history so we can reconcile our past and walk together as one Australian people.

⁴¹ <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/map.php>

IMAGES

Figure 1. Delegates. 2017." Uluru Statement From the Heart." Retrieved from [https://. www.ulurustatementment.org](https://www.ulurustatementment.org)

Figure 2. The Delegates. 2017.The Uluru Statement from the Heart. Retrieved from [https://. www.ulurustatementment.org](https://www.ulurustatementment.org)

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Figure 4. Horton, R. 1996 "Wardandi Country". Retrieved from [https://. www.AIATSIS.com.](https://www.AIATSIS.com)

Figure 5. Unknown. 1965. "George's camp at 9-mile peg." Courtesy of Bill Webb.

Figure 6. Andrews, Mitchell. 2021. "Meeting at Wardan." Retrieved from personal file.

Figure 7. Unknown. C.1850 "Elizabeth Hill." Courtesy of Wardan Aboriginal Centre.

Figure 8.C21C.2020. "Massacre Map." Retrieved from <https://c21ch.newcastle.edu.au/colonialmassacres/>

Figure 9. Willmott. C. 1900." Wonnerup House." Retrieved from personal file.

Figure 10. Smith & Dean.2009. "The Iterative Cyclic Web." Retrieved from (Smith & Dean, 2009, p.20.)

Figure 11. McMillan, Kate. 2006. "History's Debris" reproduced from [https://www.katemcmillan.net /](https://www.katemcmillan.net/)

Figure 12. Ferran, Anne. 2008. "Untitled from 'Lost to Worlds.'" Retrieved from <https://anneferran.com/photographs/lost-to-worlds-2008/>

Figure 13. Dagnall, Rebecca. "The Gorge." Retrieved from <https://www.rebeccadagnall.com/absence-presence>

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Figure 15. Andrews, Stuart. 2020. "Pinjarra Massacre site". Reproduced from personal file.

Figure 16. Andrews, Stuart. 2022. "Minninup Sand Dunes." Reproduced from Personal File

Figure 17. Claire, Nicholas. 1876. "Dandenong, Moons Range." Retrieved from <https://victoriancollections.net.au/items/577b555cd0cdd10948ce10bf>

Figure 18. Fred Kruger. 1875, 1876. "Thomas Banfield and family." Retrieved from Crombie, Isobel. 2012.

Figure 20. Wedd, Amanda. 2022 "Eco print making". Reproduced from Personal File.

Figure 21. Willmott. C. 1890. "Wardandi Men." Courtesy of Wardan Aboriginal Centre

Figure 22. Andrews Stuart. 2022. "Minninup Sand Dunes, plain" Reproduced from Personal File

Figure 23. Andrews, Stuart. 2022. "Ghost Drapes." Reproduced from Person file.

Figure 24. Andrews, Stuart. 2022. "Affected Minninup." Reproduced from Personal File

Figure 25. Green, Neville. 1997. "Smoking Ceremony." Reproduced from Green & Aguire (1997.93)

Figure 26. Andrews Stuart. 2022. "Busselton Truth Walk." Reproduced from Personal file.

Figure 27. Andrews Stuart. 2022. "Eco-print on paper plate workshop." Reproduced from Personal file.

Figure 28. Andrews Stuart. 2022. "Fire." Reproduced from Personal file.

Figure 29. Andrews Stuart. 2022. "Black Man." Reproduced from Personal file.

Figure 30. Andrews Stuart. 2022. "Sand and wood." Reproduced from Personal file.

Figure 31. Andrews Stuart. 2022. "Eco plates." Reproduced from Personal file.

Figure 32. Stuart Andrews. 2022 "*Sunset Minninup*." Reproduced from Personal file.

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