

Warramiri Yolŋu cosmology: an introduction

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Introduction

Even within the western academic tradition, cosmology is a complex and contested domain; fields of science, philosophy and anthropology all utilise the term in particular ways, to highlight specific concerns. Interactions with Indigenous cosmological theories and practices further stretch and challenge any attempt at an inclusive definition. For present purposes, we have positioned this introduction to Warramiri Yolŋu cosmology in the metaphysical realm of definitions, interacting with systems of ontology (reality, what/how of existence), epistemology (truth, what/how of knowing) and axiology (ethics, what/how of value). Regarding Indigenous cosmologies, Keen offers a helpful distinction: ‘Cosmology’ means the body of concepts and doctrines about the origins and properties of the world and its inhabitants. ‘Cosmogony’ refers specifically to doctrines about the origins of things’ (Keen, 2004, p. 210). Whilst clarifying the definitional sphere of the term for this paper, it becomes readily apparent that cosmology is still a *very* broad concept, covering the origin of all matter and its inherent properties and relationships. By this understanding, almost all ethnographic terms utilised by twentieth century *Balanda* (white) researchers such as kinship, creation ‘mythology’, totemism etc. can potentially be incorporated into a discussion of Aboriginal cosmology. However, this paper is located within a specific research project, namely ‘Aboriginal Cosmology: what this means for women and gender public policy¹’ and functions as both an initial literature review for the project and a forerunner for the methodological principles pursued throughout. Furthermore, to ensure meaningful, generative outcomes, the small Warramiri community at Gäwa was chosen to situate the research project, thus very broad issues of cosmology have been given a specific locale as a focus. Overall, in honouring the commitment to transdisciplinary and ‘bothways’

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research methodologies in Yolŋu communities, we focus on local perspectives and narratives from the homeland community at Gāwa to outline an introduction to Warramiri cosmology.

Methodology

For a Balanda who can only learn from books, this is not enough. They can't get the real meaning of Yolŋu life from books because the social and religious aspect of life is so diverse, that sometimes, we can only learn about one side of the story, or one aspect of the Yolŋu ontology, but there are other areas, so diverse, that all fit in one whole universe... (Anthropologists) had the privilege of learning about our life. But they wrote it down and recorded it as if it were from a fairytale, as if it were dead... (and) presented the knowledge in a box, like a coffin with the name "dreaming" on it. It was like a dead corpse in a box delivered to the wider society. (Marika-Munungiritj, 1991, p. 22, 24)

This significant quote from renowned Yolŋu educator and philosopher, Marika-Munungiritj, raises immediate methodological challenges for our introduction to Warramiri cosmology. Firstly, many of the 'classic' texts which have engaged with Yolŋu cosmology and could inform this paper, are the specific anthropological works she critiques. Secondly, she squarely raises the question of whether there is *any* value for *Balanda* in such literature informed introductions; 'they can't get the real meaning of Yolŋu life from books'. Lastly, she alludes to the difficulty of comprehending the Yolŋu cosmos overall, the interconnectedness of the various elements necessitating a holistic (and therefore detailed and lengthy) approach. Indeed, Rudder, who spent decades living and learning at Galiwin'ku, reflected that 'it is extremely difficult if not impossible to take any single element of the Yolŋu cosmos and examine it in isolation. No part of the cosmos exists in isolation but all are related in many directions to other parts. Each specific identified element becomes the focus of a set of relationships which links other elements as part of the overall network; each of these in turn links to other elements and this pattern of interrelated elements continues without boundaries or limits' (Rudder, 1993, p. 26). Nevertheless, we believe that some form of basic introduction to the history and cosmology of the Warramiri will enable the *Balanda* members of the research team to best analyse and *apply* their understanding for positive outcomes in relation to gender, women and public policy, which is the ultimate focus of the project. Indeed, as Marika-Munungiritj advises in the same work, *Balanda* researchers should use 'their learning to help Yolŋu in their battle for cultural survival... (to) provide help for the future development of Yolŋu' (Marika-Munungiritj, 1991, p. 25), and we believe that an appropriate literature review should facilitate this priority. However, the question remains; how to conduct a literature review that engages with the inherent challenges outlined above? In this regard we argue that an appropriation of some elements of the 'bothways' educational philosophy and the transdisciplinary and generative research methodologies as developed by Christie and associates at Charles Darwin University with Yolŋu collaborators over many years is highly appropriate². Indeed, as has been noted in relation to Yolŋu research methodology from a community development project at Galiwin'ku, that 'the act is primary, whether it be gardening, or talking about a garden... there is no difference between the correct ways to do negotiation, and the correct ways to do gardens' (Christie, 2013b, p. 52), then, we argue, 'doing a literature review' should attempt to also follow these 'correct ways', as possible. Thus, some of the guiding principles for our 'bothways' literature review have been modelled on key themes from long-standing collaborations with Yolŋu researchers and are summarized in brief:

- Foreground the local, Warramiri perspective. In particular, we utilise extensive quotes to retain the specific language and imagery utilised by Warramiri Elders, if possible in Warramiri language itself; 'sticking to your own language is a sign that you are taking your ancestral responsibilities seriously and can speak on behalf of land' (Christie, 2013b, p. 47).
- Avoid generalising, even with regard to an overall Yolŋu cosmology, as 'every Yolŋu claims

² Significant multi-year research projects such as 'Indigenous Knowledge Traditions, and Digital technology' (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/ik/ikhome.html>), 'Teaching from Country' (<http://learnline.cdu.edu.au/inc/tfc/index.html>) and 'ICT and Capacity Building in Remote Communities' (<http://www.cdu.edu.au/centres/inc/>) all directly involved Yolŋu co-researchers and Guthadjaka specifically.

and celebrates their identity through (their) land-based language and culture complexes... you can only tell your own story...(with a) focus on particular themes, concepts, viewpoints etc., at the expense of others' (Christie, 2004, p. 5). In fact, the aim is to build 'shared understandings around particular cases, rather than a general theory of what's going on... the ambiguity of the situation may help everyone to rethink or renew' (Christie, 2013, p. 10).

- As alluded to above, the review should be part of a ground-up, generative process, 'we are activists, and as such our work is useless if it does not address the public problems of people's life ways' (Christie, 2013, p. 11). In this case, the substantive project analysing and advocating for quality public policy in regards to women and gender issues is the rationale for the review.

- Reject notions of 'epistemic equality' as Yolŋu dismiss 'the idea that anyone can potentially know anything, and everyone knows in the same way...they also rejected the assumption that everyone does or can know the same things in the same way' (Christie, 2013b, p. 49). In this instance, although Warramiri Elders at Gäwa routinely involve *all* community members in decisions (e.g., Guthadjaka, 2012), as 'each participant occupies an expert opinion... and communication entails building shared understandings among positions' (Christie, 2008, p. 41), the Elders themselves assume the role of speaking on behalf of the community and are the ones quoted.

- Maintain, where possible, a narrative focus because 'beginning with a story plunges us to the core of the work involved in philosophy and dialogue, already enmeshed in detail' (Verran & Christie, 2011, p. 24).

- Overall, explicitly acknowledge that the 'transdisciplinary' nature of Indigenous research will provide only partial satisfaction to either party's knowledge traditions. Particularly, 'non-Indigenous academics must guard against any attempt to exhaustively define Indigenous research (for to do so would in itself be an act of colonisation or appropriation) or to claim all its results. We can never know fully' (Christie, 2006, p. 80).

Thus, we will not attempt to categorize Warramiri Yolŋu cosmology by topics (time, space, birth, relationships, death etc.) nor will we focus on cosmogony narratives *per se*, but will foreground (largely unpublished) conference presentations and formal speeches by Elder Guthadjaka and/or local Gäwa and Galiwin'ku narratives which shed light on Warramiri metaphysical foundations. Below are assembled a number of stories and texts which form the basis of the paper. Support from reflections from past Warramiri Elders, such as Burrumarra (already in the public domain), will also be considered, and previous studies (by Yolŋu and *Balanda*) which have engaged with Yolŋu metaphysical categories will be referred to in a 'bothways' fashion. Our ultimate hope is that out of the interplay of these sources, new understanding may emerge: 'our experiences may not provide many take-home messages for others in similar contexts beyond those they know themselves. They may however strengthen the resolve to work on research truth and method as both fundamentally local' (Christie, 2009, p. 33).

Context and positionality

Compared to many Yolŋu clans, there is a significant body of work on the specific cosmology of the Warramiri; the *yirritja* clan of the coral reef and the deep sea (Burrumarra, 1977).

Figure 1. The many faces of David Burrumarra



Drawing by Julia Blackburn

This is almost exclusively due to the charismatic figure of David Burrumarra. In a lifetime spanning pre-Mission contact, all the way through to the 1990s debates on reconciliation and republicanism (McIntosh, 1994), Burrumarra contributed heavily to the incredible transformation of Yolŋu society in this period. It is well acknowledged that his life and work ‘had a marked impact on the history of Arnhem Land’ (Williams, 1994, p. 121). Furthermore, he actively courted anthropologists, linguists, missionaries, teachers and psychologists in a concerted attempt to both understand the new *Balanda* culture and, crucially, to help *Balanda* understand and appreciate Yolŋu. Throughout this process he organised for much sacred/secret ‘inside’ knowledge of Warramiri to be made available to the general public. These were often highly controversial moments, and Burrumarra’s initiatives (reflections on identity) serve as integrated exemplars of a Warramiri cosmology, outlining the Warramiri belief that they, amongst the existing *yirritja* clans ‘have a mandate for mediating relations with outsiders’ (McIntosh, 1997, p. 43); of negotiating the interplay between traditional cosmology and public policy directives.

Burrumarra’s ‘vision of the future in which the world will be as it was, but with Aborigines having all the conveniences of the twentieth century’ (McIntosh, 1994, p. 27) including access to and learning of traditional Warramiri land and culture, bilingual education and Christianity simultaneously, was just becoming realised at the time of his passing. For, around the same time, Guthadjaka, following the instructions of her clan-father, and supported by various kinship relations began the process of establishing Gäwa homeland, a significant Warramiri ancestral estate on the tip of Elcho Island, as a settled community. It is an inspiring narrative of practical perseverance, resilience and partnership (Baker, Garngulkpuy & Guthadjaka, 2014; Nungalinya, 2017). As of 2018, Gäwa community is well established, with its own permanently staffed school (Gäwa Christian School), (mostly) all-weather road, airstrip, barge landing and registered Aboriginal Corporation to support micro-enterprise development. In the educational sphere in particular, Guthadjaka readily acknowledges that she has continued the work of Burrumarra (‘we all have leaders and my leader was David Burrumarra’; Guthadjaka, 2018c) through both sharing Warramiri cosmological foundations and leveraging support from educational institutions and organisations who share like-minded goals to enhance the Gäwa community. She has recently been recognized³ for decades of contribution to community development at Galiwin’ku and Gäwa, and

³ Guthadjaka (Gotha) is the Senior Australian of the Year, for the Northern Territory, was awarded an MBE for services to education and community development and an honorary doctorate from Charles Darwin University, all in 2018.

in education explicitly, for elucidating bilingual and intercultural, Warramiri cosmological implications for policy and practices. It is a number of her formal presentations and speeches in receiving these accolades that we draw upon. Building on Burrumarra’s theorizing, she has also shared various ‘metaphors’ to outline the foundation of negotiated balance and mutual progress between pairings such as community-school, teacher-student, English-Warramiri. These include key concepts such as *lonydju’yirr* (being side-by-side), *rrambanji marŋgithirr* (together learning) and *gumurrkunhamirr* (establishing relationship) which have been analysed elsewhere (van Gelderen & Guthadjaka, 2019a).

Ben van Gelderen lived and worked at Gäwa and was inculcated into the Warramiri ‘bothways’ educational philosophy through team-teaching with Guthadjaka. Throughout the last decade they have collaborated in designing the Warramiri website to house digital resources for the transmission of traditional Warramiri language and culture, and have co-authored a number of presentations/papers based on community research at Gäwa on homeland ‘on country’ education and ‘bothways’ approaches (van Gelderen & Guthadjaka, 2019b). Ben was adopted into the *gurrutu* kinship system as Guthadjaka’s son, and believes this was highly strategic. It established him as a ‘caretaker’ for Warramiri interests at Gäwa, but without any direct land affirming rights, positioned him to listen, learn and respect Guthadjaka’s perspective, and most importantly, allowed him the freedom of a ‘child’ to ask simple questions when he should know better by now! In short, although Ben still feels inadequate to understand and convey Warramiri cosmology, he is confident, after a number of years of iterative conversations and interactions, that he (in conjunction with the co-authors) can assist in structuring Warramiri sharings for other interested *Balanda* to be introduced and better appreciate the Warramiri cosmology.

Land axiology

Guthadjaka’s first published academic text emanated from her work with the ‘Teaching from Country’ program. In a summary session for the initiative, she shared her understanding of the vital connection to country in a child’s growth into identity. Some excerpts:

<p>Ga manymak. Dayi ŋuli djamarrkuli Yolŋunyndja ŋunhaldja wāŋaŋur ga marŋgithirr, ŋayi dhu djinawan’ ŋunhal nhanŋu mulka’yirr ga marrparanḏhirr ŋayi dhu marrtji.</p>	<p>Okay. So, when the Yolŋu children learn on country, they are safe inside themselves, and confident to go forward.</p>
<p>Dunhi nhakun walal marŋgi, wāŋaw, wāŋaw walal marŋgi, ga wataw, ga gapuw, nhātha dhu ŋurruthirri, ga nhātha dhu ranjithirr, bili wāŋaŋur walal ga marŋgithirr ŋunhili banydji, ga ŋayiny marrtji walalan ŋuthan ŋurunyi marŋgithinyaray.</p>	<p>So you see, they know the land, they know the land and the breezes, and the water, what time the tide will be in, when it will be out, because they are learning on country, and he grows with them, by means of that learning.</p>
<p>Ga dhuwandja nhakun Balanda teaching, ga dhiyala yaŋara’ŋur gapuŋur walal ga nhina, ga dhipuŋur walal ga educationdja märram, waŋgany yān, dhipuŋur bili, dhuwal gapu, nhakun dhuwandja Balandaw gapu maŋutji, dhuwal ga marrtjiny ga walalndyja ga dhiyala djurryurr gapu yaka full gapu, nyumukuniny walal ga märram, marŋgikunhawuy.</p>	<p>But in Balanda teaching, they are sitting in the water tributary, and getting education from there, just from the one source, like it’s the Balanda spring flowing here, so they just get a little trickle, not a full stream, they get a little knowledge.</p>
<p>Dunhi one nhawi picture, ga dhuwal rrakal dhāwu gurruapan waŋganydhu old man Māpuru’ŋur ŋayi ga dhāwu lakaram, dhuwandja nhakun buku’u wāŋa, ga wakuluŋgul ŋayi dhiyal nhina malany, gādany, ga gapu ŋayi marrtji dhipal, bala dhawatthurr ŋayi ga gapu dhipuŋurdja.</p>	<p>That’s one picture, and here is a story given to me by one old man from Māpuru, from around there are hills there, with the mists and spider’s webs, and the water goes to there, and then the water comes out from here.</p>

<p>Raypiny gapu bala wanawanany ŋayi li djäma dhuwal ŋunhi dhipal bāpurruw marrtji gapu, ga dhuwal dhipal, dhuwal dhipal, bala ŋayi ga continue marrtjin badaknha yän, ga dhiyal dja, bala manda ga gumurr-bunanhamirr raypiny gapu, ga damurrun' gapu. Dhuwandja.</p> <p>Bala gumurr-bunanhamirr, ga marŋgikunhawuydja ga dhiyaŋ bāpurruy märram, ga dhiyaŋ, ga dhiyaŋ, dhiyaŋ gāna'kana, warrpam' muka gapu dhuwal Yirritja walalaŋ wāŋa, balanya nhakun Madarra, Warramiri, nhawi Gandaŋu malany, Meliway, dharrwa dharrwa bāpurru' malany, walal ga gapu dhipuŋur märram, yaka yän waŋgany gapu.</p> <p>Ga wandirri ŋayi li ŋunhi gapuny, damurrun' ŋurdja bala ŋayi li ŋunhi luku-nhirrana ŋunhiliyi. Djalkimirra dhärran ga nhakun.</p>	<p>Making fresh water in all the little branches belonging to the various clan groups, to there, and continuing on, to there, and they meet, the fresh and the salt water. That's it.</p> <p>They meet, and those different tribes receive learning, this one and this one and this one, Yes, all the different Yirritja waters, like for the Madarra people, the Warramiri, the Gandaŋu, Meliway, many many clan groups, they get water from here, not just one water.</p> <p>So, the water runs, and at the sea, it places its feet down. Standing with its foundation.</p>
<p>Dunhi ŋurruŋun bittja ŋarra milkuŋal, ŋunhi djalkimiriw. Dhiyal gan ŋäthinyamirr yolŋu'yulŋu. Balanya nhakun ŋunhi scriptureŋur ga lakaram, 'By the rivers of Babylon', ŋunhiyi ga teaching märram, ŋunhi walal ga ŋäthinyamirri walal ŋayi dhu gapman'thu bitjan waŋa-</p> <p>'Ma' dhäwu napurruŋ gurrupull'</p>	<p>But that picture I showed you before, the students are without foundations. Crying there to each other, just like the scriptures say; 'By the rivers of Babylon', getting the teaching, when they were crying together, and the government says:</p> <p>'Okay, give us a story'.</p>
<p>Ga walaldja ŋuli waŋan djamarrkuliny, 'Nhaltjan napurr dhu dar'taryun wāŋaŋurnydja, nhawi manikaynydja, dhuwandja napurr ga mulkurunŋur wāŋaŋur dar'taryundja, nhawi nhinan, bāyŋu napurr dhu dar'taryun wo dhäwu lakaram, wo marŋgikum, bili ŋurunŋiyi ŋayi romdhu djaw'yurr gapuy.'</p>	<p>And the children say: 'How can we sing a song in this place, here singing in a strange land, we can't sing or tell a story or teach, because that law of the (Balanda) water has taken it.'</p>

(Guthadjaka, 2010, p. 26-29).

In 2013, as part of community research into the 'bothways' philosophy of education at Gäwa, Guthadjaka also shared a re-working of the classic 'Djuranydjura' tale concerning 'Macassans' visiting Yolŋu lands for trade.

This is the Djuranydjura story; the Macassans came here and built their houses and they said: 'Do you want blankets?

'No, I have paperbark'

'Do you want some shoes?'

'No, I have my feet.'

'Do you want rice?'

'There is food for me in the bush. I am looking after the land, so the land will take care of me.'

There are many Djuranydjura stories, Macassan stories. Like the Balanda, as they come in, their thinking is to build something here, in the Yolŋu community. But they don't ask first "What do you need?" It's just like they are bringing new ideas, from the 'mainstream'. And they end up failing, feeling bad, packing up their things and leaving. And they leave because they had come with their own thinking. And here, when Balanda come into the school with a new law, they need to talk backwards and forwards, bring 'both ways' communication first. And then we can move together.

And s/he changed language there (at Nanjinyburra homeland, next to Gäwa) from Gupapuyŋu to Warramiri because of the breeze. S/he said: 'I'm going to stay here at Nanjinyburra because it was the wind that brought me this way'... Yes, we need the wind of the Spirit as a cleansing for us. (van Gelderen & Guthadjaka, 2019a, p. 252)

Space does not permit a detailed analysis of Guthadjaka's sharings, and we wish for them to speak for themselves. However, at the broad level, it is clear that a profound educational philosophy is espoused, that a *foundation* for all learning is being situated upon one's ancestral estates; an 'on country' and 'through country' homeland fundamental. It is interesting to note that this focus is contrasted to *Balanda* practices of only receiving a 'trickle' of knowledge, inside the classroom walls, compared to exposure to the full streams which stem from traditional interactions of the various Yolŋu clans. This theme of the deep sea Warramiri water and the complex interactions with the fresh water's journey has also been outlined further in terms of cosmological lessons for conflict resolution and governance among Yolŋu clans (Guthadjaka, 2015). Furthermore, from the Djuranydjura narrative we learn of the reciprocal relationship with such ancestral estates (*I am looking after the land, so the land will take care of me*), and that there is an expectation that *Balanda* will enter into some of the same kind of negotiation and balancing of priorities (*need to talk backwards and forwards, bring 'both ways' communication first*) that is characteristic of Warramiri agreement making. Suffice it to say, the story of Gäwa and the local school situated there is a living embodiment of the pre-eminence of land (and sea) in the Warramiri axiology; the value and 'rightness' of caring for it, of learning on and through it and of learning *from* it for other interpersonal and interclan relationships. In this regard, there are strong parallels with the work of Marika-Munungiritj who centres her 'Yolngu Djalkiri Cosmology' (Marika-Munungiritj, 1991, p. 20) on the image of *djalkiri*, which 'literally means foot or footprint, but it symbolises the foundation, where the human being actually comes into contact with the land, his or her environment. The hidden meaning is our core, or foundation' (Marika-Munungiritj, 1991, p. 18). Indeed, her words resonate with Guthadjaka's:

From the Yolngu perspective of the land we learn from the start of its fundamental importance and how we learn to value the land for the abstract, deep and common knowledge that is derived from the land, giving us meaning and identity. The spiritual, religious and social order of connectedness to the land gives us meaning and identity through the knowledge of understanding everything that is linked to one another. (Marika-Munungiritj, 1991, p. 22)

In line with the methodological framework pursued, we now broaden out the lens to incorporate other Yolŋu and *Balanda* theorists. Many of Burrumarra's initiatives had as their foundation a desire to further *Balanda* appreciation of land (and sea) rights of Warramiri and other Yolŋu. He was nicknamed the 'father of Aboriginal sea rights' (McIntosh, 2015, p. 224) and in his famous 'Flag Proposal', Burrumarra constructed a new 'national' flag design, with sacred Warramiri images (of *ringitj* ancestors) but also including the Union Jack, as the sacred symbol of the *Balanda* (Figure 2). Burrumarra spoke of the flag initiative as a 'Treaty' proposal; a path of reconciliation:

Birinydji in the past dictated that we must honour him and follow his law... Today, people live as one group... We live by a new law. Our histories have merged. (McIntosh, 1999, p. 75)⁴

4 Burrumarra's collaboration with McIntosh forms the most significant academic literature concerning Warramiri cosmology. Biographical essays of Burrumarra (McIntosh, 1994), evolved into a detailed doctoral thesis (McIntosh, 1997), a monograph concerning Warramiri cosmology in the context of the Australian reconciliation movement (McIntosh, 1999). Lastly, a string of articles directly inspired by his work with Burrumarra, but enhanced by recent archaeological and historical discoveries has been published; *Between Two Worlds: Essays in Honour of the Visionary Aboriginal Elder, David Burrumarra* (McIntosh, 2015).

Figure 2. Warramiri 'Flag Treaty' Proposal



McIntosh, 1997

A further, pertinent symbolic example occurred at a press conference held during Burrumarra's own funeral in 1994. The *Manbuyŋa ga Rulyapa* proposal was released (to alter the Land Rights Act (NT) whereby Indigenous ownership only extended as far as the shoreline⁵), outlining a plan for joint management of the Arafura Sea (where significant Warramiri ancestral stories lie through the whale and other beings); 'to see both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal knowledge combined in the management of the sea and for the Warramiri and other Aborigines to progressively reassume responsibility for various levels of its care, based on customary law' (McIntosh, 1997, p. 34). In the same era, Gōŋdarra also summarizes the profound ethical, reciprocal responsibilities by explaining 'the land is my mother. Like a human mother, the land gives us protection, enjoyment and provides for our needs-economic, social and religious' (Yule, 1980, p. 8). However, the remainder of the *'My Mother, the Land'* booklet demonstrates how this is a generic metaphor largely for the benefit of *Balanda*; various *mala* (clan) leaders outline the complex, overlapping, interconnected responsibilities towards land emanating from the *gurrutu* kinship system (with associated historical/political caretaker roles) determining ethical responsibilities to speak (or not to speak) on behalf of, and care for, numerous, very *specific* portions of land. Of course, all Yolŋu ceremonial performances comprise of both land and sea song series (Magowan, 2001), and the interaction of salt and fresh water, sea currents and wind, moon etc. are particularly powerful exemplars of the overall Yolŋu cosmological emphasis of diversity within unity; 'co-substantive essences allow groups and individuals to identify themselves as distinct yet united' (Magowan, 2001, p. 32). Or as Tamisari notes: 'Yolngu repeatedly remarked to me: 'We are the same', or 'we are on the same line, share the same songs and dances and the same sacred objects, yet we are different'. As the Yolngu refrain goes 'one and many, together and alone, close and far apart' (*wanggany ga dharrwa; rrambangi ga gaana, galki ga barrkuwatj* respectively)' (Tamisari, 1998, p. 260).

Thus, there is clearly a nuanced and continually re-negotiated, lived-out 'tension' between the clan and the whole Yolŋu cosmos (as alluded to in Guthadjaka's water story) in relation to land. Indeed, as with many Aboriginal cosmologies (from a strict cosmogonic point of view), the land *pre-exists* the great, shared creation narratives such as the Djaŋka'wu (*dhuwa*) and Wawilak (*yirritja*) sisters. Creation is never *ex nihilo*, or as Williams quips: 'And then there was the word' (Williams, 1986, p. 27), signifying both the land's eternal, pre-existence, but also the vital 'role that Yolngu give words, especially names, in the cosmology that validates people's rights in land' (Williams, 1986, p. 27). The ultimate impact of these unifying, holistic creation narratives (with associated song, dance and artistic symbols) are land-affirming rights, coupled with a kinship system whereby everyone is connected to everything in the cosmos through

⁵ The issue of sea knowledges and rights will undoubtedly be of increasing importance to Warramiri interaction with public policy as the the people of the coral reef and the deep sea (Burrumarra, 1977). However, presently the famous 'Blue Mud Bay' High Court decision confirms Yolŋu sea rights applies only to the *intertidal* zone.

the moiety affiliations. It is a 'logic of meaning that specifies transformations of time and agency, so that cosmogony, cosmology, and ontology are embedded in a single matrix' (Williams, 1986, p. 22). However, the Yolŋu cosmology is not a static, uncontested domain. For example, early anthropologists focussed significantly upon the Djanŋka'wu ceremonial song-cycle, (as allegedly the 'most important of all rituals relate to Djanggawul' (Berndt & Berndt, 1954, p. 10) and when noticing differences in observations, considered them regional variations (Yirrkala versus Milinjimbi) or omissions, 'apparently most of the beginning of the Djanggawul myth was unknown to Warner's informants' (Berndt, 1953, p. 49). However, later anthropologists convincingly demonstrated that substantial differences in the basic Djanŋka'wu narrative were known and common place between clans: 'the central and apparently unique event occurred at the country of the person relating the story, but people were of course aware that details told by others were incompatible... Yolngu did not appear to seek a unitary vision of the world' (Keen, 1994, p. 61). Such clear and sustained examples of difference do not necessarily create disharmony, but, rather, elucidate a Yolŋu epistemological/cosmological principle of multiple realities: 'two or more groups possessed a form in common such as the programme of a complex ceremony... but each could include specific elements of its own, and each attached different significance to its sequences of dance and song. They could thus co-operate in a performance while each retained its particular identity, ancestry and connections with country' (Keen, 1994, p. 38). In a similar fashion, although clan country is vital to the Yolŋu cosmology, it is not as stable and unilaterally defined as early anthropologists suggested: 'Yolŋu contested the definition of country, as well as rights over it... people sometimes competed for control of country, each trying to make his or her accounts of its significance prevail' (Keen, 1994, p. 102). Thus, although many narratives are shared between Yolŋu clans; unique, relative perspectives are tolerated and, in fact, celebrated⁶ and negotiation concerning differing claims to rights of land is significant.

Such a conclusion brings us back to the importance of local, Warramiri perspectives and so we briefly outline two local stories which interact with the pre-eminent land axiology:

Stories

In her address upon receiving her honorary doctorate in October 2018, Guthadjaka shared the following story:

Long, long ago, when the spring tides surged on stormy seas, an octopus and a stingray found themselves in the small fresh-water hole at my homeland Gäwa. The stingray and the octopus thrashed about, arguing over the waterhole. They eventually tired of this, settled down and reached agreement. Now, the stingray is very smart at finding his way, even when the waters are muddy. We call him Gundjurru and he is very knowledgeable. The octopus is also very smart and can reach in or out to handle many things at the same time. They decided together that the octopus would sit in the hole as guardian and the stingray would swim in and out on the big spring tides and so they went their separate ways in peace.

Now, to understand this story, you will need to know that my people identify themselves with these animals. The octopus and stingray represent the two Warramiri clans. Long, long ago, two brothers, one at the head of each clan, made big trouble for each other. When they came to the water hole at Gäwa, they remembered that their totems had made peace in that place. Today, their descendants live together at peace in the homeland they share. Sometimes we visit the waterhole just to remember to accept one another with all our differences... We feel most comfortable in our own fields of work, yet we do not thrive in isolation. We thrive when we live and work together across many fields, in agreement and cooperation. Our connections, agreements and friendships are vital to our prosperity as a nation that highly values education.

I would like to quote from Isaiah 11:6 from the Bible:

⁶ Identities must be preserved and foregrounded in the production of knowledge which depends crucially on identifying, acknowledging, and actively maintaining the differences of language, dance, art, etc., among various contributing totemic groups' (Christie, 2004, p. 5).

Djupalim ṅarru wakinjum, maḍakarritjma wungan ga boḍinyma wäyin lämma barkthu yaki rrambanjin nyinay, wakaljin barkthu nyin, ga yothuyu buliki'yum ga läyindhuma ṅarri yaki rrambanjin mulmum ṅukay, ga yolṅun yumurrku barkthu yaki banya djäkam wäyin'kum mala.

Then the wolf shall be a guest of the lamb, and the leopard shall lie down with the young goat; the calf and the young lion shall browse together, with a little child to lead them.
(Guthadjaka, 2018b)

The issue of negotiation of land rights amongst the 'branches' of Warramiri at Gäwa is of crucial concern; it is a long and fascinating story which is briefly alluded to here by Guthadjaka. However, the important issue, in sharing with *Balanda*, is not the detail of the conflict or how exactly it was resolved, but that resolution was achieved and that the land itself (through the much older story of the stingray and the octopus) facilitated the outcome. In the negotiation process, in the coming together of differences, peaceful progress was made with an ultimate goal of life on the Gäwa homeland; in such progress we thrive.

A second, recent story comes from community life at Galiwin'ku, with Guthadjaka as one of the Yolṅu researchers involved. In short, a proposal by the international Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) was put to the Northern Territory government to establish a community garden in Galiwin'ku. The Charles Darwin University Yolṅu Aboriginal Consultancy Initiative was tasked to undertake community research on local opinion about the garden possibility. From many years of experience, Christie and the team were committed to 'transdisciplinary' research (Christie, 2006) 'which did not compromise the methods or epistemologies of Yolṅu knowledge making' (Christie, 2014, p. 58). The resulting methodology is briefly described:

Firstly, a group of six Yolṅu consultants were chosen, 'all connected through webs of kinship to each other, to the whole population of Galiwin'ku and to their various ancestral estates on the island and on the mainland' (Christie, 2014, p. 58). Nevertheless, the consultants all agreed that Buthimanj who had run a banana plantation for many years and was considered the expert Yolṅu gardener should be talked to initially. He advised them to "think about the land first". Each piece of land belongs to particular people, managed by particular other people, and everyone has one kind of relation or another to every named place. When we listen to a new idea, Buthimanj said, we need to begin with the connections we already have' (Christie, 2013b, p. 47). As Christie highlights, this was not just a matter of courtesy to the existing gardener, but the process of the 'right people talking to the right people in the right place at the right time in the right order' (Christie, 2013b, p. 49); it was fundamentally a rejection of the notion of *epistemic equality*, as alluded to in our Methodology section. Although the community was to be consulted, due to kinship relationships, not everyone's voice would carry the same authority; 'everyone is related to Buthimanj and to his land, but in many different ways' (Christie, 2013b, p. 50), or expressed more fully, 'wherever the garden is placed, the old people made clear, the land belongs to someone. The way that people relate to the vegetables would be understood in terms of their kinship links to that land and its owners' (Christie, 2014, p. 60). Christie concludes that the Yolṅu researchers turned technical 'community' questions (how many people would support the concept, was \$30 reasonable to sustain the business, where should it be positioned etc.) into 'a collective moral problem... embracing the difficult, complex and authoritative work of listening to everyone differently' (Christie, 2014, p. 50).

For present purposes, we argue that it was a clear example of contemporary re-negotiation and re-enactment of cosmological principles founded on the pre-eminence of land determining theoretical and practical processes to a small-scale public policy issue. In the end, though there was general agreement that a community garden akin to the Mission days would be a good idea, consultants reported back that it had to be properly negotiated and built on what was already established. That is, 'while the government essentially wanted the Yolṅu to predict what a viable community garden would be like, the Yolṅu were concentrated upon how we could work towards a community garden together in good faith' (Christie, 2013b, p. 51). Sadly, the garden never progressed beyond the research phase, the holistic cosmology; 'the staggeringly complex interrelatedness of Yolṅu life, land, and history' (Christie, 2014, p. 61) proved too much for government decision makers and the project was abandoned.

Inside/Outside epistemology

Perhaps to understand the complexity of the ‘garden’ story, government *Balanda* needed some introduction to the broader epistemological foundation, that land is profoundly connected to knowledge and truth. We return to Guthadjaka’s session from ‘Teaching from Country’:

<p>Dunhi dhu ŋanyany luŋgurrmay boy’yun, ŋayiny dhu bitjan ‘Yakay, yal’yurra ŋarra dhika’, bitjan ŋayi li.</p> <p>Luŋgurrma ga djalathanj manda wata ŋunhi gurruŋ’ manda, balanyaray. We need that, nhakun, teaching limurr dhu mǎrram.</p>	<p>When the north easterly blows, he will say ‘Ahhh, I’m feeling cool and relaxed’, he says.</p> <p>The north easterly and the south westerly are gentle winds. You see, we need that, we get teaching from them.</p>
<p>Ga manda Dhuwa manda wata, bǎrra, ga dhimurru, ŋunhi rirri’rirri. Bapmaram walal dhu, dry-kum ŋula nhaltjan, ga still ŋunhi li ga ŋorra, marŋikunhawuy limurruŋ, ga bulu ŋayi li dhiyanj lakaram dhǎwu, mayali’mirr dhǎwu, ga ŋayi dhu djamarrkuli pick up ŋunhiyi, beŋur nyumukuniny’ŋur.</p>	<p>And the two Dhuwa winds, the westerly and the easterly are rough.</p> <p>They buffet and dry things out, but still there is knowledge there for us, and so it tells its story, full of meaning, and the story will be picked up by children, from when they are very young.</p>
<p>Nhakun mǎrrma’ ga layer ŋorra, waŋgany inside, ga waŋganydja outside.</p> <p>Marŋithirr walal dhu warraŋulwuy dhǎwu, ga bulu djinawa’ walal dhu marŋithirr dhiyaldja, metaphor-ŋur ga bulu gurruŋu ga dhǎwu ŋunhiliyi.</p>	<p>You see there are two layers, one inside, and one outside.</p> <p>They will learn the outside story, and they will learn the inside one too, through the metaphor, its kinship and stories.</p>
<p>Yaka yǎn mulkurruw ŋanydja dhiyak ŋayanuw, birrimbirruw, mǎrruw, ŋayi ŋunhi li dhuwandja mǎrram, manda dhu yuwalk nhǎnhamirri, ga gurruŋu maŋutjij guŋga’yunmirr. Ga balanya.</p>	<p>Not just for the head, but for the inner being, the spirit and for good faith, if he gets it, the inside and outside will truly come together and help each other through the perspective of kinship.</p>

(Guthadjaka, 2010, p. 30-31).

The key concept expressed in this excerpt is the revealing of the ‘layers’ involved in Warramiri growth into knowledge. It is sometimes referred to as the *inside-outside* dynamic: ‘the inside:outside distinction is an all-pervasive one in Yolngu culture. Almost everything has an inside and an outside form or can be divided into inside and outside components’ (Morphy, 1991, p. 78). In his exegesis of Yolŋu art, Morphy elaborates on this Yolŋu standpoint which flows from ‘a worldview in which everything ultimately stems from ancestral power and ancestral design... an underlying metaphysical basis’ (Morphy, 1991, p. 83). In essence, reality is comprised of both ‘outside’ expressions and experiences and ‘inside’ sources of power (usually connected to ancestral design (*minyŋji*) and objects (*raŋga*) initiated by ancestral-beings (*waŋarr*)), and truth is a layered continuum based on ever-increasing sacred/secret revealings or levels of understanding. As an epistemological foundation, ‘the ancestral world extends into the everyday world, the inside flows into the outside. Outside forms are in a sense generated by inside forms and are not separate from them’ and thus, ‘certain things are secret because they are powerful rather than the other way around’ (Morphy, 1991, p. 80, p. 95). Guthadjaka refers to this in at least two ways. Firstly, she takes up the example of the winds to demonstrate that there is an ‘outside’ understanding of directions and extents, which impact on hunting and other homeland life-choices, but there is also the ‘metaphor’ as to what the winds teach about ‘*kinship and stories*’. It is not necessary for *Balanda* to understand these metaphors (and often it is excluded explicitly), but the *layered* nature of knowledge is the vital distinction. Secondly, Guthadjaka highlights how learning is therefore both for the ‘head’ and ‘*for the inner being, the spirit and for good faith*’; another connected layering of truth. And clearly, the wind is only one small example, relating back to the vitality of living and learning on ancestral estates to experience all the land’s teachings. Or as Rudder argues: ‘as all named things in the outside world are transformations of elements of the inside of reality, then the whole cosmos and every discrete element of it becomes an unbounded vehicle of religious knowledge’ (Rudder, 1993, p. 61).

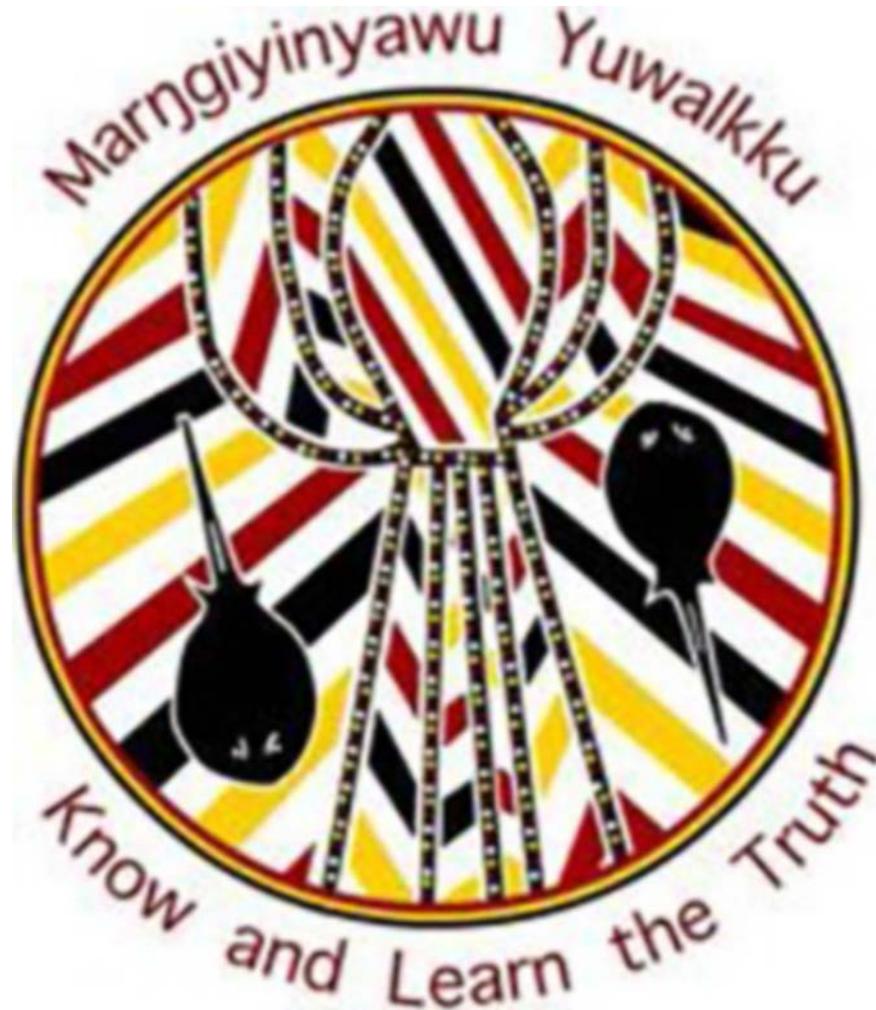
As we shall see below concerning Guthadjaka's sharing of the *djurwirr*, although the inside-outside dynamic is most obvious in terms of levels of meaning of clan narratives (*dhāwu*) with restrictions applying to women and uninitiated men, it is not limited in application to discussion of Yolŋu religious substance and power. As Morphy notes, it 'can be used as a logical schema that can be applied to many situations, for example, to formulate an argument, to put forward a proposition, or to attempt to grasp the essential structure of something' (Morphy, 1991, p. 80). Indeed, its potential to integrate *other* cosmological systems and accommodate change is of profound importance. For example, Williams records an old man at Yirrkala asserting that the 'Macassans' were expected by Yolŋu when they first appeared because when the ancestral beings were investing the world with meaning 'spirit-macassans had appeared. They brought with them in spirit form the things the "real" Macassans would later bring and explained their use to Yolngu... (thus) the cause of change can be attributed retrospectively and the integrity of the cosmos sustained' (Williams, 1986, p. 28). In a similar vein, Bos, in his dissertation on the adoption of Christianity amongst Yolŋu and the Christian 'revival' at Elcho Island in the late 1970s specifically, follows through the inside-outside dynamic literally as links of logical suppositions, concluding 'that which is new and true is simply a revelation of what has always been' (Bos, 1988, p. 371). Indeed, the inside-outside dynamic is a powerful force for social harmony and adaptation of Yolŋu to the incredibly rapid change their social structures have been forced to accommodate over the last century. As Rudder concludes:

The Yolŋu Cosmos is a viable and living structure, which while as the Yolŋu say of it that it "is unchanging" yet it is capable within that "unchangingness", of constant adaptation to changing circumstances and experiences while at the same time providing stability and a secure perception of identity through that change. (Rudder, 1993, p. 33)

More recently, in relation to religion (2005), science (2003), homelands (2008) and, in particular, evolving funeral practices (2012, 2016) the Morphys have begun to expound a more general theory of 'relative autonomy' whereby 'both within Yolngu society and in its articulations with the encompassing world, this autonomy has always been relative rather than absolute... rather than becoming "intercultural," Yolngu systems and subsystems remain relatively autonomous. They change in response to external pressures while maintaining their own distinct trajectories' (Morphy & Morphy, 2013, p. 177). Indeed, there is a provisionality even within the inside-outside dynamic in that changes over time naturally occur; 'the content of the categories changes: what was once restricted becomes public and what was once public becomes restricted', and 'a particular interpretation is inside only until one has been told a further interpretation that is said to be more inside', and content and form issues can separate 'what may be restricted is knowledge that a painting was done, not knowledge of the painting itself' (Morphy, 1991, p. 76, p. 78).

Stories

Figure 3: Gäwa Christian School logo



We have briefly looked at the story of the fresh-water hole at Gäwa, as shared by Guthadjaka. However, it is pertinent to note that when Ben lived at Gäwa in 2009-2010, this story was not widely shared, the literally 'inside' jungle area of Gäwa was generally considered a no-go zone for *Balanda* and he knew of the story, but only due to its visual representation on the school logo (Figure 3). During 2013, the school did have an 'excursion' to the fresh-water hole and a version of the story was shared by the 'old man' of the Warramiri, Ceremonial Custodian, James Wälun Bukulatjpi. Recently, in October 2018, Ben returned to Gäwa to record some further community research on the history of Warramiri interactions with seafaring outsiders over the centuries. Wälun again suggested we visit the water-hole and he explained the presence of the *djamban* (tamarind) tree, which had come from a seed from Miliŋinbi and purposively planted near the fresh water as a reminder of the 'Macassan' trade period. In talking to the school students, and the researchers, he also hinted at some further stories relevant to the water hole, including references to the enigmatic *walitha-walitha* (little people) and some fighting/trouble that had occurred nearby. What was most interesting was when Wälun paused and asked a well-respected *Balanda* (who had been adopted into the Warramiri clan in the early 1970s) whether he should tell these particular stories to the children... Wisely, the experienced *Balanda* proffered no opinion either way, and we left to explore some further local sites of historical interest. Thus, the episode demonstrates the clear inside/outside dynamic of secret/sacred definitions changing over time, of age and maturity as relevant factors, and of the emerging dynamic of technology altering the process of the intergenerational transmission

of cultural stories. As Wälun̄ has stated in relation to a graduation ceremony as part of the Warramiri cosmology project:

The times are changing. Our old people have passed away, that's why I say it's time to write down the stories—so the new generations will not lose them. We have paintings that tell our stories (and I teach my own children to understand some parts of the paintings, but some parts are secret.) Ceremony tells the story with symbols and dance that everyone can enjoy, but still some things are restricted. The understanding is not given in video or audio for everybody, although everybody can watch and dance, not everybody will understand. I want the understanding recorded on paper, so it is not lost when I die... The more an older person understands the meanings, the more they will value them. I hold the stories of the Duck and the Whale because the old people trusted them to me. But still all Warramiri use the stories; they are partly preserved by use.

A second pertinent example concerns women explicitly and leadership roles in modern Yolŋu society. The inside-outside dynamic is often predicated upon the exclusion of women to access 'inside' objects, images and narratives. Indeed, there is a narrative justification for this exclusion from some of the 'big' *dhäwu* (stories), such as the Djaŋka'wu sisters, who had their sacred objects stolen by men, who 'seized control of certain ultimate manifestations of the inside, which thereby gave them the power to act in ritual' (Morphy, 1991, p. 97). This is a fascinating area for analysis concerning the interplay of cosmological beliefs and current practices for a number of reasons. Firstly, even in the 1970s, there was ambiguity around women's exclusion to 'inside' knowledge and power. Morphy records that women still extensively utilised the dynamic as 'a logical principle for talking about the world, and they gain access to things that are inside relative to other things' and, in fact, also partook of the layering of secret/sacred; 'women in particular gain increasing access to restricted knowledge according to their age, status and interest they show in ritual matters' (Morphy, 1991, p. 96, p. 76). More profoundly, there were hints (likely 'inside' interpretations of some of the big *dhäwu*) of an identity connection between 'inside' and women as a cosmological fundamental. Thus, Morphy records Narritjin often claiming "really women are the inside"... referring both to the fact that inside meanings often refer to female things, (and women)... as generators and sources of power' (Morphy, 1991, p. 97). Williams concurs from her land rights fieldwork at Yirrkala, as senior men explained 'that the profoundest and most sacred meanings of many of the spirit-beings are female or else have an important characteristic (or property or activity) that is associated with women' (Williams, 1986, p. 50).

Guthadjaka notes the importance of the Warramiri decision in the 1980s in relation to the *mala* (clan) town council:

My leader was David Burrumarra... none of the other clans had a female on their group. David Burrumarra... he chose me to be on the council to represent women, but there was no other women to represent their clan. (Guthadjaka, 2018c)

In fact, it was not Burrumarra's first foray into 're-adjusting' male/female power roles, as the (in)famous Memorial of the 1950s, where sacred emblems had been put on public display (as discussed below), saw many women rush to the bush, fearing death as punishment for viewing their clan's sacred emblems. Indeed, it is undoubted that the impact of the large-scale adoption of Christianity was a distinct, epistemological challenge to the gender restriction of the inside-outside dynamic. In particular, protestant, evangelical Methodism with its emphasis on the 'priesthood of all believers' ensured early women missionaries taught (adult) Sunday school classes and preached in formal church services (McKenzie, 1976; Kadiba, 1998; Wearing, 2007). Keen is explicit on the historical adaptation that occurred: 'the move towards inclusiveness through Christianity threatened to erode the power of the older men, which rested on the constitution and control of secret religious knowledge and practices, for Christianity challenged the very separation of 'inside' and 'outside'' (Keen, 1994, p. 287). How exactly this adaptation evolved in terms of Yolŋu women's involvement in public decision making seems to have also depended on the localised Mission leadership approaches, and thus some regional differences are apparent. Williams notes at the time of her fieldwork that 'women do –and must– participate in religious activity and political decision making, and that senior women are expected to act as leaders and are admired for being strong. Not all Yolngu men share this view of the importance of women's public roles,

however; Keen (personal communication) says that men at Milingimbi expressly deny it' (Williams, 1986, p. 51). Whereas both Keen (1994) and Bos (1988) argue that the Mission leadership style at Galiwin'ku had a profound impact as a necessary precondition for the further gender-equitizing Christian 'revival' of the late 1970s. Of course, the pertinent question remains as to how the inside-outside dynamic has altered and/or continues to impact public policy regarding Yolŋu women in present communities.

Multiple ontologies

From her prepared acceptance speech for Senior Australian of the Year, 2018 (Northern Territory), Guthadjaka relied on djurwirr (Great bowerbird, *Chlamydera nuchalis*) nesting practices:

Figure 4: Djurwir



1. Ancient generations of djurwirr made their nests from sticks and grass and decorated them with shells and pebbles. They kept a special pattern for their nest.

2. Today the colors and content of the decorations have changed. Some keep colored glass, some like green, some like blue—some even keep a mobile phone and a bit of cash handy. Everything is mixed together and the bird is living in two worlds, filled with mixed treasures from old and new.



3. There are guardians and protectors outside – to stop theft of the treasured knowledge, but this can also protect and manage too much impact from outside influences and/or not acknowledging the authority of the guardians.



4. Not everything is accepted and the pattern has not changed. *Djurwirr* keeps a clear pathway and line of vision from its nest.



5. My people are like *djurwirr*. Warramiri are colourful people, yet we discern. The clear path needs to be made; when you have a clear path you can organise and see clearly. Then treasured things can be kept safe and valued, and some can be shared, to give comfort or teach us valuable lessons in both worlds' (Guthadjaka, 2018a).

In typical style, Guthadjaka's image is appealing and memorable, but also layered. The 'metaphor' clearly highlights the Warramiri foundation of *selective adaptation and adoption*, but also alludes to the secret/sacred knowledge domain ('treasured things can be kept safe and valued, and some can be shared') and the 'protective' function of Elders ('manage too much impact from outside influences and/or not acknowledging the authority of the guardians') to, ultimately, negotiate the future vision ('when you have a clear path you can organise and see clearly'). In many ways, the *djurwirr* image can be considered an elaboration of the lesson in Guthadjaka's other published parable, *Yuṭa Gonydjuy (The New Wax)*. In this true-life story, native bees began to use the tar from newly sealed roads in Galiwin'ku to make their honey. This was a mistake! The concluding section of the story reads:

<p>Bili Godthu djanalingu gunyan marimi ŋuwakurru gonydjuy' djāmawu, mādjanal ŋarru djāma ŋamaŋamayun djanalinguway djanal ŋayi, ga guku ga waripu malany ŋuwatjuman bayiŋuya gonydjuy'yu.</p> <p>Ga gukum ŋarru marimin latjun dhākayma.</p> <p>Ga bilanyaya bili nhawun Godthu gunyan ŋalmalingu ŋuwakurru rom. Māŋalma ŋarru djāma nyena, ga garryunmi ŋunhuŋ nhāwu ŋuwakurruwu romgu.</p> <p>Dalma ŋarru bukma buku-manapanmi ga waŋganydji nyena waŋgany mala ga yaka buku-gānaŋ'dji. Dalma yaka bitjan nhawun banya guku dawurr malany. Banya djanal yaka mulkuruyun romdhun nyena djinaŋ bala.</p>	<p>God already gave them everything that is good, they only had to look around hard and use their own skills for making the sugar-bag, using the natural wax from the flowers that blossom in the bush. Take care of this way well and the sugar-bag that comes from the bush will be sweet and beautiful to taste.</p> <p>In the same way God already gave us a good law to live by and built a foundation for our identity. In this way we can come together and live as one people. Not out by ourselves, chasing our own ideas. Let us not be like the honey bees. These days many people are very excited and influenced by new ideas and laws coming into our lives.</p>
<p>Ga nyākulim banya bitjana maŋŋ'thun gam.</p> <p>Bili djinaŋum bala ŋalma yaka marimin goŋmiyi ga nyāku'yunmi yuŋawun ga mulkuruwun romgu, bilanya nhawun guku dawurr malany. Bawalamiwun ŋalma yaka malthunma mulkuruwun romgu.</p> <p>Ga yaka djuwanma ŋuwakurru ŋalmalinguru yumurru'wu. Dalma ditjunna balayan ŋalinguwaywuli djukali ga romji, banya nhāyiny djanalingu ŋalapaŋmiwu rom. Nhalpiyan djanal yakan nyenan ŋarrin ŋoy-gurru'm'thu ga māgayayu romdhu. Ga bilin djaŋu dhawar'yuwannan.</p>	<p>To me it appears that today we are so happy holding on to new ways, but already they have brought lots of confusion, and we are very frustrated in this difficult position between old and new. It is not good for us and our children. Let us go back to our ancient paths and follow our ancestor's footsteps and work with peace and joy.</p> <p>This is the end of the story about the bees.</p>
<p>Yow, Garrayma yaka garryun nhumalingu bitjan, bayyiguya warrawu banyaya nyeli nhanguway yolŋu'-yulŋu warra.</p> <p>Nhāŋa ŋarriya rangaŋ bayikuyam banya djukawum dhunupawum, dhāwirrkayunmiya ŋarriya.</p> <p>Dala djika djuka ŋuwakurru wal'ŋu. Banyayam banya nhan Garrayu nyipan ŋātjiil?</p> <p>Darriya bayiyiwitja bili djukamurru mānhunu ŋarru nyena yaka ŋayaŋum wurrkurruŋan romŋa.</p>	<p>Jesus says to you people who belong to him:</p> <p>'Stand at the crossroad and look; ask for the ancient paths, ask where the good way is, and walk in it. Then you will find rest for your souls'.</p> <p>Jeremiah 6:16</p>

(Guthadjaka, 1998)

Thus, *Yuŋa Goydjuy* embodies the message of the *djurwirr* bower that 'not everything is accepted, and the pattern has not changed'; not all of the 'new ways' are productive. However, by implication of the story, Christianity itself is *not* one of these 'new ways'. Indeed, it is impossible to miss the references to faith and God throughout Guthadjaka's presentations, including the (Holy) Spirit in the conclusion of the Djuranydjura re-working, the crying by the waters of Babylon/*Balanda* education practices, and the lion and the lamb negotiated agreement imagery from Isaiah.

Figure 5: The Memorial, Galiwin'ku



Such an integration, a synthesis of co-existent ontologies is certainly also to be seen in Burrumarra's life and work. Back in 1957, Warramiri and Wangurri elders (with a young Burrumarra as the key agitator and spokesman) convinced a number of other clan leaders (both *dhuwa* and *yirritja*) to reveal many sacred designs, often combined with Christian iconography, on a series of carved and painted wooden posts at Galiwin'ku- dubbed the 'Memorial'. In his fascinating monograph on this 'adjustment movement' Berndt attempted to unravel the complex and varied motivation behind the revealing of sacred/secret knowledge. Of Burrumarra personally Berndt surmised that:

On the one hand he wanted change from outside with greater rapidity. On the other hand he did not want them to overwhelm his own society and culture... If this loss of identity were to be avoided then some re-orientation of traditional life would be necessary. (Berndt, 1962, p. 39)

Thus, the movement was both a political statement and a deeply spiritual one; in essence, it was a 'conscious attempt at redefining social organisation. The Yolŋu were to be a single unified block of clans and Christianity was put forward as legitimizing the unity of Dhuwa and Yirritja moieties. As a cooperative group, the Yolŋu would be in a stronger position to voice their demands vis-à-vis the Welfare Department, missionaries, and developers' (McIntosh, 1999, p. 70). There were also very practical benefits desired too, understood as an exchange for revealing the sacred knowledge. Burrumarra asked: 'these are the most precious things we have (the *rangga*). Why can't we get a big school?' (Berndt, 1962, p. 78). Interestingly,

in later years Burrumarra reflected back in typical enigmatic fashion: 'The Adjustment Movement was wrong but we had to do it...there is no pleasure looking back on it, but it served its purpose' (McIntosh, 1994, p. 110). But, at the same time: 'I believe in both ways, the traditional and the Christian life, but we have so many questions. That's why we talk and discuss meanings. We search for the purpose of life in our history and in the land itself. And now we have the Bible as well' (McIntosh, 1994, p. 77).

The concept of 'bothways' in regard to synthesising Christianity and traditional Yolŋu ontologies is certainly not restricted to Warramiri Yolŋu. Gongarra outlines theological arguments supporting such integration in a number of revealing texts (1986, 1987, 1992, 1996), most famously in *Father, you gave us the Dreaming* (1988). Practically, the outworking of such a cosmological foundation is most clearly seen in funeral practices, both now and in the past. Early anthropologists were fascinated with the 'mortuary rituals' of Yolŋu and wrote extensively on the formal ceremonial elements involved (Warner, 1937; Thomson, 1949). However, the most poignant moment in Warner's classic ethnography was his description of the death of a Warramiri man and his kinsman's last actions; the more spontaneous and personal elements of his passing (Warner, 1937, p. 404). Indeed, later works reflected on the fact that the funeral ceremonial practices/performances, the 'song cycles', were never uniform, sequenced rituals, akin to a Catholic mass, for example, but vital opportunities to reaffirm Yolŋu ontological truth. Firstly, the profound connection between named reality and identity: 'the webs of human and land relatedness—that is, the things which have built that individual, and which are identified by that name—are actually constitutive of a person's identity, and a person's death signifies a radical rupturing of the whole network of human meaning' (Christie, 1994, p. 28). And thus, the ceremonial leaders' responsibilities are to best negotiate and *select and order* the songs, designs and dances: 'to link particular groups of people together by reference to their land, totems and ancestral history' (Christie, 1994, p. 31). Indeed, there are 'various possible routes for a song journey from the ceremonial ground to the spirit place... (the one chosen highlighting) the links which the deceased had with the many different related groups who have come to say goodbye, and the love and respect in which that person was held' (Christie, 1994, p. 31). Thus, a form of multiple ontologies was always demonstrated in the negotiation and contextualisation of ceremonial songs, in conjunction with clan leadership of both moieties, the land the actual ceremony was taking place upon, and individual personalities. The Morphys' studies of more recent funeral practices (2012) also indicate the profound combination of traditional Yolŋu song cycles and dance sequences, 'Macassan' influences, Christian iconography and speech making, and idiosyncratic elements to best capture the individual, their relation to the land and related clans and their impacts on the broader *Balanda* world. However, the key is to understand that the rituals:

are not hybrid creations made up through combining elements that history has brought into contact. Rather they are the product of a regional ecumene, which has at its center distinctive value creation processes, beliefs about the nature of being, and ways of structuring action to express these beliefs and values. (Morphy & Morphy, 2012, p. 53)

Therefore, it is no so much that Yolŋu have adapted core beliefs about existence to suit new influences (hybridity theory), but the 'fundamentally recursive and incorporative' nature of Yolŋu ontology (as expressed in mortuary rituals) has *enabled* Yolŋu 'to adapt to new contexts and seize opportunities while appearing to carry the past with them' (Morphy & Morphy, 2012, p. 58). Thus, in returning to Guthadjaka's 'selective adaptation and adoption' from *djuwirr*, it would seem to be clear that the Warramiri make explicit what is a more generalised Yolŋu cosmological foundation. In considering the impact and change to Yolŋu society through various waves of contact with outsiders, culminating in yearly 'Macassan' trade voyages, the Berndts concluded that Yolŋu were; 'absorbing into their own culture certain new elements, rejecting others that could not readily be adapted to the existing pattern' (Berndt & Berndt, 1954, p. 188). Likewise, regarding the 'adjustment movement', Berndt summarized 'that we can legitimately speak of rapprochement between the alien and the indigenous: the one is in the process of being adapted to the other... inward-looking in terms of traditional integrity, outward-looking beyond the confines of linguistic unit and clan territory, cross-cultural dimension' (Berndt, 1962, p. 14). Overall, Yolŋu seem to have applied such an approach to large scale interactions in terms of incorporating the *mālk* (skin) system into older *gurrutu* kinship patterns (Shapiro, 1981) and the assimilation of Mission 'leadership' into existing conflict resolution procedures (Williams, 1987). In fact, it has been argued that a multiple ontologies foundation is characteristic of Yolŋu cosmology; that 'ambiguity and relativism' (Keen, 1994, p. 38) have long been the prevailing structural principles for both practical organizations of Yolŋu society (clan, country, leadership)

and theoretical positions (knowledge, religious communication). In this, ceremonial interactions are the profoundest enactments of the overall ontology; though groups shared a common form, it was highly differentiated:

each could include specific elements of its own, and each attached different significance to its sequences of dance and song. They could thus co-operate in a performance while each retained its particular identity, ancestry and connections with country... (and within groups themselves) shared forms current among one public, and distinctive interpretations among a variety of less inclusive publics and individuals. (Keen, 1994, p. 38)

In his thorough exploration of the Warramiri cosmology specifically, and the various 'branches' with connections to other 'clans', McIntosh is equally adamant: 'identity therefore is something that is constructed for specific purposes and is a matter of agreement by all concerned, rather than something unambiguous or "fixed"' (McIntosh, 1997, p. 24). Such a position certainly finds support from the extensive work that has developed out of the 'bothways' Yolŋu educational philosophy from the 1980s. Stemming from Yolŋu educators outlining a fundamental cosmological foundation: 'there is negotiation of meanings between the two moieties, Dhuwa and Yirritja, which can be applied to negotiation between Yolŋu and Balanda cultures to find the common ground that makes up the two way curriculum' (Wunungmurra, 1989, p. 13), a string of profound 'metaphors' were then shared from kinship structures (*yothu-yindi* connection, Marika, Durruwutthun, & White, 1989), water commingling (*garma*, *milŋurr* and *bala-lili*, Marika-Munungiritj, 1990) and ceremonial negotiation between clans (*garma* and *galtha*, Marika-Munungiritj, 1991). In further works, the ceremonial context was particularly highlighted, and a shift from a pedagogical constructivism (which was most apparent) to an *epistemological/ontological* constructivism was argued for. Christie utilized the *garma* and *galtha* images to elucidate co-existent multiple ontologies: 'in the playing out of the Galtha... the objective world attains reality only through the received meanings which, through negotiation, we choose to foreground the pattern of our relatedness' (Christie, 1994, p. 33), as there is 'no split between language and materiality. Talking, singing, crying, dancing, and painting all actively participate in the creation of new worlds as they have always done since the ancestors first talked, sang and danced the world into existence' (Christie, 2005, p. 64). Verran also explicitly draws parallels with western-philosophical histories: 'the concept of *garma*... a distinctive Aboriginal epistemology that has something in common with European constructivism, except that place is a crucial determinant of knowledge' (Verran & Christie, 2007, p. 218) and 'a *Garma* can be understood as working like a Deweyan public, called into existence by a 'public problem', an issue of substantial or serious significance' (Verran & Christie, 2011, p. 29).

Conclusion

Mention of a 'public problem' is an appropriate place to conclude, for we reiterate that the function of this introduction has always been to facilitate analysis and production of appropriate public policy for issues of women and gender in the local Gäwa and Galiwin'ku region. From the *garma* image we learn that Yolŋu have long been engaging in this process themselves, balancing profound duties and responsibilities to land and sea, layers of knowledge and inside/outside power realms between clans and genders, and commitments to incorporate new realities in reaching agreements. In *Balanda* philosophical terms, issues of axiology, epistemology and ontology are in a perpetual relationship of negotiation, and Warramiri Yolŋu, Burrumarra and Guthadjaka in particular, seem generously disposed to share their cosmological foundations with interested outsiders. In conclusion, we share one last story as it draws together many of the themes of this introduction to Warramiri cosmology. It is a story told at Gäwa (with some humour), but mostly concerns Mayawun'pirri (Stevens Island), one of the ancestral estates of the *Budalpudal* 'branch' of the Warramiri (McIntosh, 1997) and boyhood home of Wälun. The island was one of the first places to have an airstrip, built in the Mission days under Harold Shepherdson who actively encouraged Yolŋu to remain on their ancestral estates; their homelands (Baker, 2018). In his home-made airplane he would fly to the homeland family groupings, facilitate some trading arrangements and often conduct a short Christian service. By the early 1990s the 300m airstrip on Mayawun'pirri was earmarked for refurbishment by Marthakal Homelands Resource Centre. Warramiri families travelled out to the island and mowed the existing strip while a Missionary Aviation Fellowship (MAF) pilot flew out to test

the surface for compliance and future potential usage. The testing went well except that the pilot advised that making the strip just a little but longer would be greatly beneficial, larger planes could land taking more passengers and more weight. Some further clearing would be necessary, including the removal of a Pandanus tree at the end of the airstrip. After some thought, Wälun told the pilot that it couldn't be done as the Pandanus tree represented something quite important in an old story connected to Mayawun'pirri. The pilot was insistent; what could be more important than facilitating consistent access to the land, to your ancestral country? The old man chose to share some of the layers of the truth; the tree actually represents *Balanda*, (from a typically fascinating Warramiri story of when a *Balanda* and shark fought at Mayawun'pirri). Indeed, the Pandanus *is* the *Balanda*, it *is* the *Balanda* access to the land as an ontological fundamental; knock down the tree and the *Balanda* role in any on-going story (including the possibility of flying in planes and all that could entail) would also be gone...The airstrip was left as it was.

We hope many other positive outcomes and stories are generated from the interplay with Warramiri cosmology, women and gender into the future.

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