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WESTERN MAPS/YANYUWA MEANING: an INTERVIEW with JOHN BRADLEY

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Abstract

In July 2003 an important one-volume text, *Forget about Flinders: A Yanyuwa atlas of the south west gulf of Carpentaria* (Yanyuwa Families, Bradley & Cameron, 2003) produced in a limited edition of 14 copies, returned to Yanyuwa country and to the families who collaborated with John Bradley and artist Nona Cameron on the project. Subsequently, a second edition of 20 copies has been released, mainly to institutions. It is the most comprehensive attempt yet to restore Yanyuwa names to country and to produce a multilayered, dynamic, history-rich, and bilingual representation of how country is known in this community, and how the central song cycle texts intersect with Yanyuwa tradition. What follows is a condensed and edited interview with Frances Devlin-Glass, in which John Bradley discusses the motivations, the hybridised methodologies employed, the innovations of this new genre, and the pedagogical ends served by this latest iteration of Yanyuwa song cycles.

Introduction

That the *Atlas* is actually in the present and potentially an important educational resource for Yanyuwa people (and for outsiders) has been made clear through a series of interviews and focus groups I conducted in Borroloola in September 2004 with elders and middle generation users of the *Atlas* (Devlin-Glass, 2005). It is being used, as it was designed, for teaching traditional knowledge intergenerationally. Its image-rich format is richly and immediately communicative to both children and those who are not literate or insecurely literate. By being frank about the lacunae in knowledge and disputed knowledge, it generates productive discussions about Yanyuwa identity, kinship, politics, and how cultural loss is to be compensated for. Much of its narrative and song content is bilingual, an important political manoeuvre in a culture where the number of first-language speakers of Yanyuwa is fewer than 10. In refusing the disciplinary distinctiveness of Western epistemology, it serves not only as a rich compendium of Yanyuwa knowledge, but also, and more importantly, as a demonstration of the interrelated forms of Yanyuwa epistemology in which language, narrative, geography, ethnobiological knowledge, kinship organisation (disciplines which in the West would be separate) all combine to give witness to the sacred, or, as Bradley prefers to call it, the "supervital", in which the literal and secular is continuous with a modality suffused with potency, supercharged with meaning and with the sacred (Bradley & Tamsari, in press).

Although the community has as yet not decided to release the *Atlas* more publicly than its present limited distribution, its potential for educating non-Indigenous Australians and others in Yanyuwa forms of epistemology is significant. As I argue elsewhere (Devlin-Glass, 2005), this collection of an Aboriginal culture's myths is unique in Australia. It is rivalled only by T. G. H. Strehlow's (1971) monumental *Songs of central Australia*, which collects the song cycles of the Arrernte. Unlike Strehlow, however, this collection does not seek to assimilate them to Western artefacts (in particular, the epic oral song cycles of European prehistory), but rather demonstrates the inter-relatedness of country and kinship, ethnobiology, ethnobotany, landforms, history, language, storying and ceremony. Unlike Strehlow, this collection is a collaboration with Yanyuwa men *and* women, and commissioned and auspiced by them. Further, it is a multimedia compilation which uses the power

of European-style map-making and cartoon-style graphics, but it reinscribes the maps with Yanyuwa knowledge, restoring names to country, mapping songlines graphically as a dynamic epic trek across country, which humanises and confers significance on it. This sacralising of country confounds Western disciplinary categories, as well as constructions of the sacred, and for this reason constitutes a major and challenging artefact and resource.

An unedited transcript of this interview is available at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies (AIATSIS) Library. Changes have been made to the oral version of the interview in consultation with John. Since the interview was recorded, all three senior song-men and a woman referred to by name in the interview have died, and readers who might be offended by this deviation from a common Indigenous protocol are warned of this fact. Yanyuwa elders have indicated their willingness, indeed desire, to name recently deceased people in this article and in the *Atlas*, and have chosen to leave photographs in situ in the *Atlas*.

■ The interview

FDG: The *Atlas* began with the question of what you do with piles and piles of maps, notes, tapes and photos. In a community like Borroloola, it became even more urgent, especially during the late 1980s and early 1990s, when so many people were dying, especially the men. You realised the knowledge that those people were taking with them, and that at least part of it lived in those notebooks, the maps, and photographs. How do you give back?

JB: I attempted many things. I attempted maps of large-scale with, you know, just place names and dotted lines to represent Dreaming paths. I attempted recording song cycles on maps where I just had numbers and then you had to cross-reference to a verse, but none of them were really suitable. They were good for me. They helped me sort out how to start collating my work. In 2001, when I got quite ill, Nona [wife] said "Well, you know, let's just look at this. If this illness weren't arrested, what would I do with all this stuff? I have no idea how to sort it out".

The same year I went to Kangaroo Island to work on a land claim, and I began to talk to people and ask "what out of everything I've got do you want back?" And the common response was "the maps, the names of the countries". That's a really important issue because a name is more than a name. A name brings forward a whole sensual experience; it's about spirituality, history, and humanness. It's about land itself as

a quasi-subject, as a self-reflexive object, which people respond to. So, it didn't surprise me. That was during the proofing of the land claims, so the next year was going to be the actual thing. So between that time, I took those maps back, and I showed people. They were only little A4 maps, and that's the beginning of what the *Atlas* is now.

Those maps became an instant hit because they could see. There was a whole lot of engagement. What was wonderful was watching how people shared them. Old people with young people; young people making their own commentary. I think that they found the cartoon-style quite engaging. So it was obvious there was something there.

FDG: So even at that point you were putting the cartoons on the maps?

JB: Yes, that's where we began. Cartoon is a simplistic word, but I mean cartoon in the full art sense of the word. I used leftover consultancy money to employ Nona [Cameron] as a research assistant, so we could begin the journey. Then, of course, the senior women came down to teach at UQ [University of Queensland], and we got lost in the car. Karrakayn was in the back seat saying "what are you two fighting over?" We were fighting over why we'd got lost and where we were and we brought the Refidex [street directory] out. [Imitating Karrakayn's voice:] "What are you looking at? What? What's that book". "Oh, that's a book about this country, and it will tell us how not to get lost". And it was afterwards, when we were sitting out on the deck here, that she said, "Well, I want a book like that, about my country". Well, in retrospect, there was a whole lot of serendipity that would lead us to bring things together.

Nona [Cameron] was employed three days a week to work on the maps, and, piling through all the stuff that I had, trying to make sense of it. "You've got one place name spelt five different ways. Which way are we spelling it?" I typed up the texts. How do you represent the texts? What do you do? How do you show the importance of this? I don't think there's any easy way. I'm still not convinced there's any right or wrong way.

What I wanted to do was to highlight the importance of the central narrative, the Dreaming narrative. Because I equate that with the European sense of common law, and then that's surrounded by commentary. I went back to my own tradition – Talmud. A page of

Talmud is actually set up so that you have a central body of authoritative text surrounded by commentary. I would have loved to have made each page of text look like a page of Talmud but the computer people advised me it would have been very difficult to do. They would have had to construct a program to make it.

The commentary is the subsequent tradition, or the reasons why, and you're never told Dreaming stories in Yanyuwa without a reason why. A good storyteller will begin to tell the story, but will interject all the time with "and that name now belongs to so and so" or "that's why people don't go there" or "so-and-so died there" or "this is where that happened". So the Dreaming narrative is central but it is always interspersed with other events. Or you get older men who are very good at song cycles who would intersperse the whole telling of the story with the song cycle verses that relate. For me the commentary was critical because there is no story without commentary. The text occurs in square boxes and is surrounded by commentary. And it also helped to deal with issues of avoiding freezing tradition. One could also register the competing voices [and traditions] and that became a very important issue to allow people to read, if they could read them, that there were always dissenting voices. It's the inoculation against being frozen. And that's why in the *Atlas* you read that there is dissension. There never was a pure form.

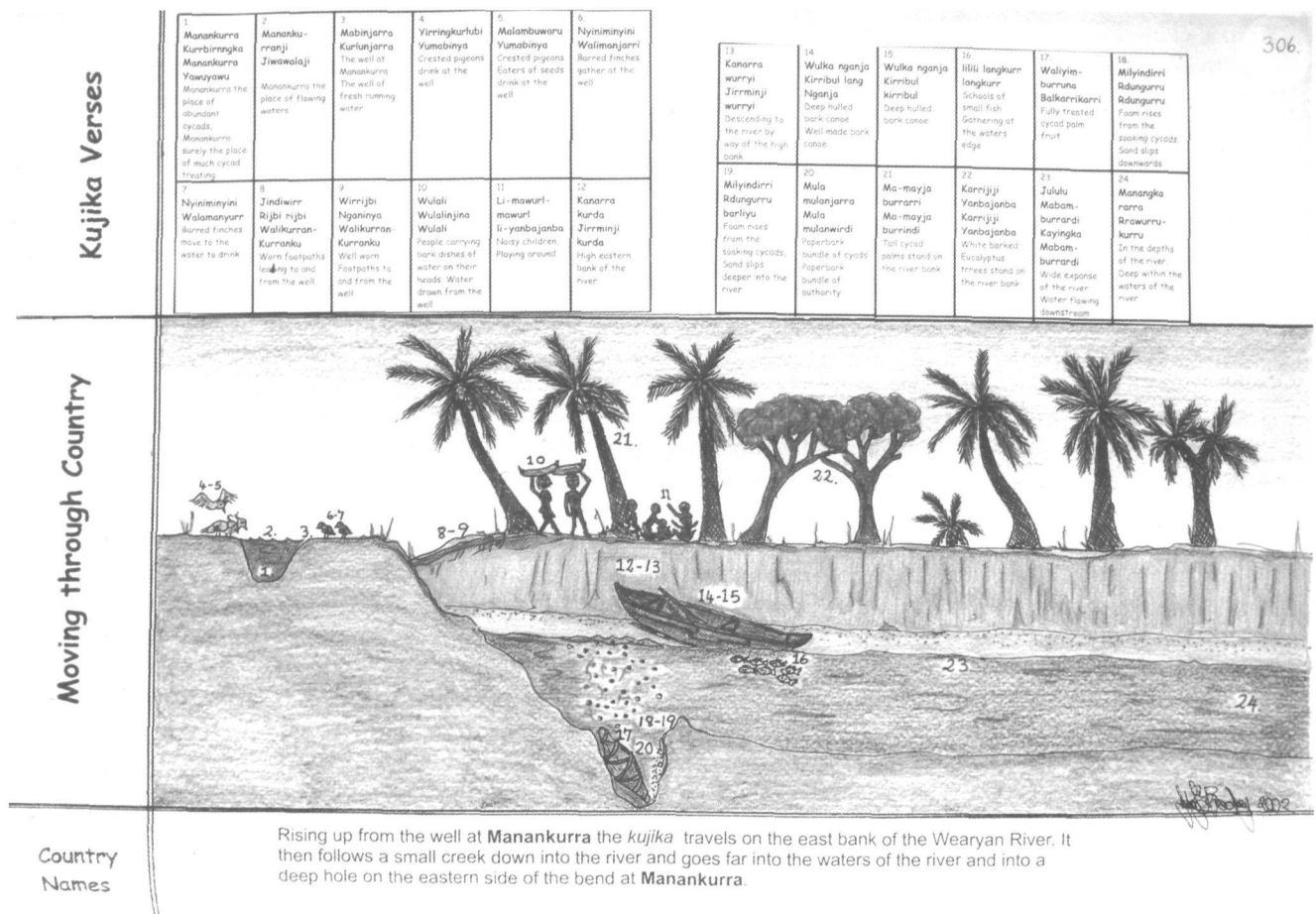
Now the text, of course, is translated from many, many different versions. Some of those stories have five or six different versions ... And old Pyro is the senior *Jungkayi* (owner) [recently deceased] for the *Ngabaya* [Spirit Man] and I would say "I've got all these different versions: what do we do? How can we pull one out of it?" And he worked very hard with me to try and stabilise a version. Because he could understand why. Pyro [was] very critical of youth. If you go back to the [Yanyuwa] dictionary, he recorded a story in '89 about young people not learning songs. He [was] a very severe critic. Although in some respects he thought it was a waste of time, he would do it. He [was] a very interesting man: he [was] prepared to say "look I don't think it is really worthwhile doing, because these kids aren't interested". But I can say "look, all over Australia, eventually, these kids, or maybe their grandkids, or their own kids, will want to know ... might want to reclaim it" and I think that's the joy of tradition. It can actually resurge in ways we never expected before.

In the early times, the *Atlas* in my head was just text and maps. It was only after the women had been down, and they usually come to my office for say half a day and just pour through everything I've got – tapes, all my photos. And it became apparent that photos were going to be an important part of this, and that was a whole new logistical ballgame. So I actually got those women to choose the photos of people and work out how they should go in, and make sure all the names were correct. And there was no dissension at all amongst those women or even when we went back to Borrooloola about using the images of the people. I went to Billy Miller – no problems. I even went to Mavis Timothy and said "I want to use images of your deceased sister and your mum and dad, and all your brothers", and she said "you have to, because our kids have got to know". So that was a very pragmatic view – this was going to be a text that spoke of where we've all come from. Then, I was confronted with how do I then put the song cycles in? I knew from the very beginning that the song cycles were going to be critical.

FDG: What were the basic choices that you had with those?

JB: First: what can people know about? Because there are song genres people can't hear, that immediately excluded, for example, the song cycles of the Groper, Sea Turtle, Whirlwind Rainbow Serpent, and Dreaming Women. They're restricted. So that selection was made quite easily. What you are left with are the song cycles that can be sung during initiation ceremonies which women actually know. They don't sing them publicly, but they know the verses. They know what is being sung, but increasingly they actually sing them in front of certain people because there are not many men left to sing them. How can you actually make hundreds of verses available to the people in a way that isn't just text? And this was a critical part of the *Atlas*. How can a non-literate person still gain value out of the *Atlas*? That was a critical point. So I sketched, I drew because I eventually realised the *kujika* (Yanyuwa sacred, sung narratives) is actually a three-dimensional process. Maybe more dimensions than three, but it's about moving through country, seeing country, experiencing country, the whole sensual engagement with country. I tried panoramic photos on the ground and from a helicopter but you needed hundreds of them. It just didn't work because the panoramics ...

FDG: Putting them together must have been a nightmare.



Rising up from the well at Manankurra the kujika travels on the east bank of the Wearyan River. It then follows a small creek down into the river and goes far into the waters of the river and into a deep hole on the eastern side of the bend at Manankurra.

Figure 1. Cross-section of a page of the Tigershark Dreaming Kujika, showing bilingual song cycle and details of landscape referred to in song verses (Yanyuwa Families, Bradley & Cameron, 2003).

JB: Well it was more than that: it didn't include all the things that were sung. And if you're looking at community, how do we teach our kids what's sung? You needed to show all those things. So, photography was out. Then I just meditated on songs for a month or so. I literally sang because I can sing these songs and I sang for a month easily. I walked around everywhere ... singing. But I wanted to reclaim the experience, to work out what was happening when we sing? ... And I realised that what happens when you sing is that you're moving in time and space and you see all of these things. So I tried to draw song as it would live in a three-dimensional box. But it became too hard trying to draw because it was as if the box also had to be twisted. It was multidimensional, it was more than just a cube. It was like a Picasso-oid cubistic expressionist painting, it was going everywhere. So I had to then say, alright, I'll cross-section it (Figure 1).

That was an easy way to show movement, to show everything that is sung, and it enabled then to put the song text, the pictures, and also the text of how the song moves through country. So

there was a multidimensionality there as well. And the country in some detail, as much as you can do to keep the clarity there.

There were a whole lot of other choices that had to be made which are historical. The Wurdaliya group, who own the Ngabaya song, all the men are either dead, have remained in town, or gone to other places. Not even Pyro or Isaac or Dinny [senior men who died in 2003 and 2005], who [were] *Jungkayi* for that song, remembered it in its entirety. I'd recorded a lot of verses with old Tim Timothy who was also *Jungkayi* for it. Dinny remembered quite a lot, so I had verses from him. Isaac remembered some, so I had verses from him. Pyro wouldn't contribute; he just said "look, it's gone". But the important part was that it was an important text for the Wurdaliya people. They wanted to reclaim it somehow because the Wurdaliya people now use mostly the Mara song cycle which is far, far away from Yanyuwa country, and it didn't make sense to incorporate it, even though they use it, because it didn't fit into this idea of the *Atlas* [of specifically Yanyuwa country].

So I wanted to work on it. And I worked on it with old Dinny. And then I took all those song cycles back, after we'd done it all. Would people like them? Thelma's response was ecstatic for her own song cycle ... the Ngabaya. Dinah and others loved it, and other Rumburriya people, like Mavis and Philip Timothy, old Wylo thought the Rumburriya one was amazing as well. And they worked. The best demonstration of them working happened with Dinny when he opened a page of a song cycle, didn't matter which one, because he knows them all. He looked at what was on it, he pointed to the images and he just started to sing. And he tapped his fingers on time with the text of the *Atlas* as if they were boomerangs and he just moved through. Turned the page and just moved through. So it worked. I could sense that there was something working there. And everyone, people like Mavis, for example, looked at her father's song cycle and got very emotional because she said "I'd heard my father sing this text, the song, many times but only now by looking at this do I really understand what he was singing". So I think it's a successful journey. I'm still not happy with it, but it works for what it is at the moment. And this is what Dinah and people like that say, these songs are the critical text. Anything else is nice but the *kujika* are the critical text.

When you have a look at them, you get the sense of who the big families are, and who held those songs. The song cycle that goes from Vanderlin Rocks and ends up in Lake Eames isn't complete, we know that. But it was a wish of Johnson Timothy that he wanted to record as much of it as he could remember. And he did ... not long after his father died, and I think he partly did that to come to terms with his father's death. So it's not complete, and I've got the tape where he sings and he says "I can't remember how it goes here". So it's not all there, but it's a representation. This is what people are prepared to do. They want to demonstrate knowledge. They want to show that there are things still there, and do it as fully as their memory will suffice and acknowledge the gaps.

FDG: Is there much interest yet in the middle generation do you think?

JB: Song cycles, I think, are fiendishly difficult things and I write this in the *Atlas*. There is no sound in the *Atlas* and song cycles particularly have to be surrounded by people to talk about directionality, to talk about what can be sung, to explain what is being sung because every one of those song cycle verses is like keyhole into

another dimension of knowledge. But the *Atlas* can't go there, because some of it is secret sacred knowledge. So if you don't speak Yanyuwa as a first language, those songs are an incredibly hard thing to learn. The sounds are archaic, their style is quite complicated, the music is alien to some people, and to really know them you have to move over country. And if you've got people living in exile country, for whatever reason, and they don't know that country, then they're singing a song that in some respects is academic. There's not that emotional link to it. I've been privileged because I've been paid to travel across all of that country, in other jobs, so I had a privileged upbringing as it were in that country to be able to move over all that country – in helicopters, in cars, in boats, working with men who loved their song and wanted to put it down. It was interesting talking to Johnson Timothy once, he said "when I was a young man I had no interest in my song. I didn't like it, I found it was really boring, I found it really difficult. But then one day I listened to my father and something happened. And then I knew I had to learn it". An epiphany if you like. But there are no old men left ... Although these [cartoon-style maps] are the first maps everyone talks about, even the Yanyuwa adults, what are of critical importance to the old people are ... [the maps which restore the Yanyuwa place names]. The names are critical. The names are what create country. We look at this and say "there's Vanderlin Island". But with the old people, like Tim, or even Johnson, they don't just say "there's Vanderlin Island". Even Steve Johnson when he's talking about Yanyuwa way of knowing country, he doesn't talk like "this is Vanderlin Island". He says "all right, where do we start? Okay we start where I live at Yukuyi. Okay, which direction are we going to head? Are we going to head north or are we going to go east? All right, we'll go east. Okay, we are at Yukuyi. Okay, you go around and there's this small point Liwulbarnda. And just off Liwulbarnda to the South is that little reef and it's Mungkuwalyanga. All right, we keep going east, we get to Murruba. Okay, we come to that point, Nungkanawukungka. Okay, look South, there's that Island, Karruwa. And Karruwa had another name from old people, Bunguntha. Okay, just off Karruwa is a reef Nungkulhanba. Okay, let's go north, Ngarrurrunjiji. Okay, we look West back onto the mainland Wurlka, Yinjinji, and then all that reef country there Mungkuwarladajiya". And that's the way they tell country. That's the sense that country is not talked about as a block.

And so this is where the name of the *Atlas* came from, because when Nona went to Yukuyi and Steve's nephew lives up here in Base Bay, right

up to the north, Archie came down and he was blown away by this map. He loved it. He said "All the old names are there again. The names that I heard the old people use. We can just forget about Flinders". Because Flinders was the namer of the big names. And Steve too, they were both blown away. This map alone and all these place names were five years in the proofing. There are so many names here. So for the old people, maps that restore place names are the critical maps; the Dreaming maps are interesting and visual, and immediately interactive, but the place names are critical.

FDG: Is there an index of these place names?

JB: That's the one thing we didn't get time to do. I started it. To index all the place names in alphabetical order, their location, if the name translated ...

FDG: How would you do location without doing longitude and latitude?

JB: Oh, just where it is found – something more general. Whether the name translates into English, because many of these names do, and what clan owns it. And then what Dreaming is associated with it. But it's a huge job and it probably will be in the appendix. It's all setup to go. But it would be a slim, print-text volume, it wouldn't cost much to produce. It's really important to understand that you cannot just dismiss the place name maps. They are absolutely *fundamental* to understanding.

FDG: If you could speak Yanyuwa, then a lot of the place names would have an etymology?

JB: An interesting point. Sometimes the Yanyuwa people themselves don't recognise the etymology. With my little scientific gaze I can go, "if I look at this word, *Nungkandawukungka*, it's a perfect Yanyuwa ablative noun that means *the place of her nose*". Karrakayn or somebody might reply, "It might be, but it's *Nungkandawukungka*, it's the name of the country". So I can ask questions (this method is preferable to making presumptions), "why would it be called *Nungkandawukungka*?" "Maybe because we know that the little rock wallaby that jumped all around there was female so that it would make perfect sense to say her nose is there". But equally at Goat Point on the southern end is *Nungkandawukungka*, which literally is an ablative form of *the place of her back*, but we know the little wallaby presumably didn't go there. So you can do this, but how useful is it?

FDG: So it could be a lost etymology? This part of the story that relates to her back might have been lost?

JB: It could be, but it's still worth doing. Like Yiji this little Island here, *Yiji* is also the name for a friable white sandstone ... *Mungkuwaliyangka* is actually an imperative ablative form, *With the long seagrasses!*, but it's an imperative. "*Mungkuwaliyangka. It's there! It's there!*" There are all sorts of grammatical forms in these place names which don't translate into English grammar. *Akarrunda* literally means *in the east*, which it is. But *Nungkalumulungka* means *place of their mouth*. So it's possible [to read some of them etymologically]. I like to do it, but, how useful it is, is another question, when the present-day Yanyuwa speakers know that I can do it and we play the game, but there's no sense-making really going on there. Though there are other place names, things that they do recognise. For example, at North Island *Kandanbarrawujbi* literally means *her eggs fell down*. And everyone says, as soon as they say the place name they'll say "because her eggs fell down". So they recognise that name has that meaning.

FDG: That might be another thing to add to your index, if you do know ...

JB: You'd actually mark it as to whether it's a recognised etymological breakdown or whether it's not. So the index is in process. Both White people and Yanyuwa people really like the cartoon-style keys. They love them because they are visual, they can see all those little things there. And if I had more time, I would have made this text completely bilingual. I would love to have done that but it would have been huge. So at least here the text is bilingual and people can see what something means.

FDG: The visual maps, the ones with the images on them, get really crowded. Was that a big issue? You had to be strategic?

JB: I'd say "Look at this map. It's got to have this, this, and this on it". And she'd say "but how?" But she did it, because you can't not do it. So, Nona had to reduce images. Probably the most crowded map is that one of the Robinson mouth to Sandy Head with the farting Ngabaya (Map 8) (Yanyuwa Families, Bradley & Cameron, 2003, p. 164). It's incredibly busy, but that's what is there (Figure 2).

FDG: Could you have done a more simple map with the particular song lines numbered?

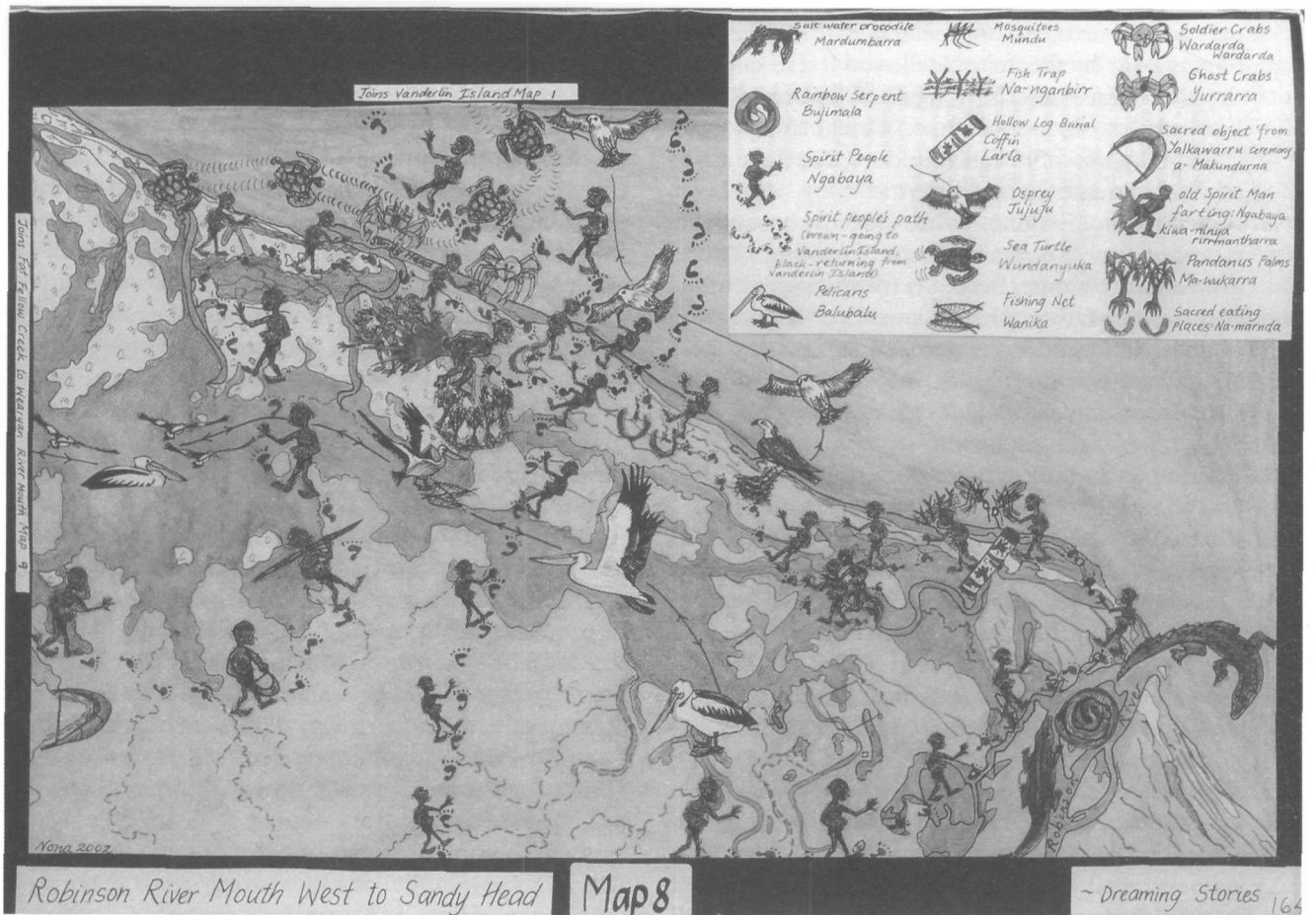


Figure 2. Map 8 which represents via animations how the Ngabaya men move across country near the Robinson River mouth (Yanyuwa Families, Bradley & Cameron, 2003, p. 164).

JB: I tried it for the Manankurra map, and in the end the map gets totally covered in text and you don't know there's a map there anymore. It's easier to go to the stories and, look ...

FDG: And the stories have a lot of directionality ...

JB: That's a Yanyuwa feature. What happens is you learn as each Yanyuwa person would learn. You're not given everything at once, you can't be. In many respects you are given too much too quickly in this book, but even so you just don't get everything at once. You've got to search; you've got to wait, so in the *Atlas* you've got to search. You've got to wade through pages, you've got to jump backwards and forwards so it creates the sense of "I'm not going to get this easily, I've got to juggle this text in whichever way I find best so that I can understand it" and that's the way of it.

FDG: You've also resisted the European way of doing it, which is what we did with the website stories, which was to follow a whole story through. This *Atlas* version is governed by country, and the pragmatics of getting it onto a page.

JB: It's governed by the pragmatics of getting it onto a page, but it is also governed, in some respects, by that way of learning too. Like it just, if this is a community document, you've somehow also got to represent what people feel is a legitimate way of giving knowledge. And so ... it's only from country that you can know.

FDG: In what ways is this text innovative in its ways of representing myth?

JB: It's people working together. It's not writing about. It's people journeying together to create a text. That is an interesting way of doing it. The maps are unique. I haven't seen anything like this. It's a Western map saturated with Indigenous meaning. People query me and say why didn't you use their own art? They don't have an art form to draw country, a visual art form, because they have a sung art form that creates country. The art form that does exist lives within the realms of ceremony, or within the realm of sorcery. So people are forced to make decisions: if we want to represent things here, what do we do? So we can create, if you

like, a default means of doing it. We utilise White skills and White people to create. There's real innovation in that way of thinking.

It's a very intimate document, and that scares me because there is an enormous amount of knowledge in the *Atlas* that no one Yanyuwa person would ever acquire, unless they reached a very ripe old age. Because it's not just the Dreaming narrative, it's not just the maps, it's all the other stories that are incorporated in here, the social stories, the stories of fights, the stories of death, the stories of travelling country, the stories of what people did and why they did it, then the song cycles. I think there's an immense intimacy in here, that if anyone ever really spends time gains a very intimate window into a knowledge of another group of people. And I think *that's* an incredible innovation as well. And I think the other innovation is that we are not going to get it all at once. You either work with the document, you fight it, you wrestle with it, but you're not going to get it all at once. And that's just the end of the story. As anthropology, I think, a part of its innovation is that I haven't excluded myself from it, because I had to put myself into the text. I am not this so-called objective observer. It's a totally subjective document and it has to be. My role and what I've done in the community is equally a part of my lived experience, it's not just an academic journey.

FDG: It would scare some anthropologists, wouldn't it?

JB: It has already. There are anthropologists who have said, "Why bother, it's not academic?" There are others who have said, "Well, it defies the academy, but it's scholarship". There are other anthropologists who have looked at this and said "The precedent you have set is enormous and dangerous". So once you start getting comments like that you know that there's innovation but it is how that innovation is judged that's the issue.

FDG: What do they mean by "it's enormous and dangerous"?

JB: Basically, you can ask any anthropologist who has spent many years working in an Indigenous community, "are you then prepared to try and construct something similar, or are you going to live with all your photos and your maps and everything you've recorded and then one day put them in nice little boxes at the Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies, and maybe no-one can understand

them, and the Indigenous community just lose track of their own knowledge?" There are really big issues about who owns what here. This isn't my knowledge. It's become a part of me because it was force-injected – I learnt this material by being present at ceremonies, being treated like an initiate, required to demonstrate my learning back to those who taught me. I was placed in the same situation as those around me, and because I was interested, people kept telling me things, and then, as I say in the *Atlas*, I was asked to dance and continue to demonstrate knowledge. But ultimately it isn't mine and yet has profoundly affected the way I deal with the "world" around me in my work and home life.

We talk about this term *postcolonial*, I don't believe we live in a postcolonial country but there are processes which we can adopt and act in a postcolonial manner. And I would suggest that the innovation in the *Atlas* is that it is a postcolonial text in a true sense, because it has given back a whole lot of knowledge which isn't any one person's, but the person who gives it back also is trying to respond in a way that isn't an old way. It's trying to avoid all the "Strehlowesque" issues. I don't want to die with a whole lot of notebooks; I'd rather my notebooks now be burnt because there's nothing in them that isn't here now. I've looked at Elkin's notebooks, and some of them you can barely decipher. My field notes are exactly the same. If I were to give them to you, I know what they mean because I cognitively constructed them, but unless you speak Yanyuwa, you're not going to understand a word of them. They're not going to make much sense to people. They're untidy, rough jottings. At least this way I've clarified them in a way that people can understand. I don't know whether innovation is the right word, it's a different journey. It's a very different journey. I know now there is nothing in Australia like this. People say, "it's got to be published, it's got to be published", but I don't know whether it can be. That's a decision that the community has to make, and if a publisher decided that it wanted to, that publisher themselves and not me can go to the community and ask. I don't want to be in that position. I'm quite happy to live with this as it is.

FDG: In a sense you've relieved yourself of a huge burden.

JB: Yes, but it's not a closure because even though I like to think I've emptied my head, it's all still there.

FDG: Do you want to speculate on how it will be used?

JB: Well, I've seen how it's used already because we have taken copies, draft copies of maps and text back to the community and we've seen it, it's a group experience. People sit around together and read it and that's why it's in an A3 format. It's big, because people, three or four people, want to sit together and look, and enjoy it. So we've seen that happen and it was a fantastic experience to watch these people engaging with this text. It's going to go into the camp. Each one of these volumes will go to a family member who is deemed to be a head of the family and it will walk, it will go everywhere. This is a book of power. Dinah used two words to describe this text when she was down here last. One was *Wurrama* which means *authority*. It's a text of authority. And the other one was *Wirrimalaru* which means spiritual power. And, therefore, if it has *spiritual power* it can affect people, for good or ill. It can cause grey hairs. Who knows, there may be dissenting voices. We'll have to wait and see. I haven't struck dissenting voices amongst the youth who have seen this, because they can see its value as well. So it will be an interesting journey.

FDG: You speak as if you're involved in a juggling act: you talk as someone who does believe but is also outside the culture. You made the same distinction a little while back. You said "this is not my knowledge".

JB: Yes, the issue is one of knowledge, and it's one of respect. If you spend a greater part of your adult life, all of my adult working life, travelling and working with people who emphatically believe this, that there is no lie to it, I have tried on many occasions to speak against people who say they are fairy stories and lies. And I'm constantly recording, because somehow there's value in this. I'm in no position to say I don't believe it. And there's a sense that I've been privileged to see this at all levels. I've seen it at the level of landscape, of the species, from the level of the social construction that this undergoes at both pragmatic secular level everyday, but also to the high art form of ceremony and song. And you realise that it's equal to any tradition in the world the West may believe in. I can say I am an observant Jew, but my understanding of God may not be the same as the next person's understanding of God, but it's something. Well, equally, this is something. It's not so much a balancing, it's saying there's something there. And the landscape is saturated with it. I

remember talking to Philip Timothy about this, a young Yanyuwa man. We were sitting on South West Island. He's got a tertiary degree, he is well-educated. He doesn't speak Yanyuwa as a first language, he's travelled the islands extensively, and he said to me "how can you look out to Black and White Craggy [Islands] and not see those Dugong hunters?" Their environment is saturated with it. And I don't think that many people really understand this. The maps don't even convey this in some respects, but every part of that environment is saturated with this knowledge, and there's no easy way to describe that. The song cycles come closest to express that ultimate saturation, but it gets back to the idea that country can be addressed as kin. Every living thing that is in that country is kin. And not just in the country but in the sky, the sun, the moon, the stars, the seven sisters, the rainbow. All of these things are addressed as kin, the weather, the wind that's blowing now. I think the *Atlas* actually comes close to demonstrating the total saturation of people in place and everything that place contains. Everything. There's nothing devoid of meaning ...

FDG: Nothing too low to note, even the louse.

JB: Exactly. Nothing too low, from the sandfly which you can hardly see when it bites you.

FDG: Another interesting feature of the *Atlas* for me is the lack of distinction between Dreaming stories and historical stories. The commentary around has stories that are sometimes Dreaming stories but sometimes not?

JB: Yes, but that's the way life is. It gets back to this point of saturation. You can be in the midst of a Dreaming story which is all told in the past tense, and then all of a sudden there will be a word of "well, he is really still there now", so the Dreaming all of a sudden moves from past to present, "and we buried your grandfather there and his grandson is over there, and he's walking there right now, and his name is _____ because he came from there". There's the immediacy always. It's always an immediacy of the present and so you're left wondering, well the past is always present, the present is related too ... It's not the same way for us. And it gets back to linguistics too, in that when these stories are told properly, there's a very special suffix that is only used for matters of cultural importance that are given to these texts. It's really very difficult to translate that suffix. But you would translate it as saying, even though it's past tense, it's saying that these things always have relevance.

FDG: What is that suffix?

JB: Let me put it into a word for you. If we look at Map 8 (see Figure 2), Robinson River mouth West to Sandy Head. The *Ngabayas* come through here. There is a ritual object, the a-Makundurna from the Yalkawarru ceremony. Now you would say *inya*, the customary law past tense suffix that is added to verbs, and the root [-*rama*-] to hit, "they always hit her". And this is this prefix that designates past tense but it indicates that it is going to continue happening. So it's a very important tense, dense with particularised Yanyuwa meaning. So you could translate *karralu-ramanthaninya* "they hit her" in a Dreaming text but it would not be adequate as a translation because the tense refers to both the past and present. The temporality issues in Yanyuwa are different from our culture's sense of temporality.

I can still remember sometimes when I look at my field notes exactly the instances when I recorded this information as a new understanding. I remember being at the goanna Dreaming place and recording about the goanna, cooking a goanna, and then an old lady, old Ninganga, then just breaking off and saying "and that goanna's got a lot of names", and just listing them. Then she listed, just not the names of all the different goannas, but the anatomy as well. So it's that kind of emphasis, the reason the goanna has all of these names is also because it's very important: "The reason we cook it like this is because we are here where this important goanna was". So everything has a link. It's what I call the invisible threads of connection. At another level you could say this is the mystical. It's a nice word, but it's totally pragmatic as well.

FDG: I'm curious about why the *kujika* are named not by their "actor" names, but by country?

JB: Well, that's the way they're talked about because you've got to remember that not all *kujika* have primary actors. You look at the Manankurra one. The song, the *kujika* is sung backwards. You don't sing the shark's actual journey. The shark is said to have stood up and then sent his song back down where he came from. But then it doesn't go all the way back along his path. The song is always living. Songs are never talked about as past tense, this is the big issue. When you tell a Dreaming story, it is always past tense, except if you are talking about where the Dreaming is now. If you talk about a song text, and you can see it here at this song text, it is always present

tense. The song is always embedded. So when you go back to the Manankurra *kujika* ... and to the written texts at the bottom of the page, they are written in present tense. In Yanyuwa they say "the *kujika*, *ja-wingkayi*, he is going', *ja-wujbanji* he is flowing, *ja-wulumanji* he is running, *jiwini ki-awarala* the *kujika* is sitting there. It's present always, always ever present. This is why this temporal shift signifies an utterly different understanding. So, people call it the Tiger Shark *kujika* because he's the primary singer of it, and he projected his voice back over the sea. But, then the dingo *kujika*, of course, is a dingo all the way, that's easy. But then you get something like the Mambaliya *kujika*, which is incredibly abstract. There is no *one* Dreaming, that carries that *kujika*, and in fact there are many Dreamings that are inside it. So it is never called by any one name. So these are always referred to by country names. Like, "Oh that's the Marrinybul *kujika* or the Nungkajabarra *kujika*", because there is no actor. I remember Pyro once saying, "this *kujika* travels by himself, there is no Dreaming that carries it. The Brolga doesn't carry it; the Wedge-tailed Eagle doesn't carry it. It moves by itself but it picks those things up".

FDG: So, they are very much based in a location and what you find in that location?

JB: Yes, because they're place names. You get to a place name and this is what's there, and next place name and this is what's there. It's a geography. It's the song cycle that talks about country being totally saturated with geography, species, Dreamings, and people. Everything is there. The song cycle is the ultimate text. If you can sing this song, you have the ultimate text. There is no other text that can transpose the song. It is the ultimate text.

FDG: So, Yanyuwa has a sacred text tradition?

JB: Well, other groups have it too, but I would argue that for the Yanyuwa, their art form is in their language. Song is the primary text ... Music and song, music and words, combine to create ultimate text. And in ceremony, then you have visual text put with it as well, when body designs are worn or objects are created. But, I asked the senior men, whether we could have put with each map the public body designs that go with them, to give an illustration of that kind of text. But they wouldn't go that far, even though they were public, there were too many issues, because they are also an ultimate way of owning. As I say in the introduction of one

of the texts in here, people would give me the songs but they wouldn't give me the tunes. And it is the tune that activates; it is the tune that actually creates what's important. The words are important but it's the tune that creates and sustains.

FDG: More so even than the body design?

JB: Yes, because the body designs actually have to be sung onto the body using the *kujika*. They are not separate, but entities that go together. The Mambaliya *kujika*, for example, actually is the closest you can get to a sacred text, really secret and sacred because the rainbow serpent, the whirlwind, is actually a really critical ancestor for the Kunabibi ceremony. What they do is sing him backwards [in the public version, he is sung coming westwards, but the *kujika* is travelling eastwards]; they don't sing him in the direction he is sung in the Kunabibi ceremony. The song actually picks him up and leaves him and picks him up and leaves him. These are points where the ambiguity between the secret and sacred, and just the sacred, are played out, but a casual [listener] is not going to hear that. So again this text can reflect these and a Yanyuwa person can understand something totally different.

FDG: You mentioned something similar before when you talk about Wurlma reef, north of Vanderlin Island where two song cycles come together. Would a kid in situ be told "you'll learn more about this"?

JB: No, it's just passed over. If they ever see the ceremony, then they will be told. That's the way it works. This is an issue for this community. If ceremonies are no longer performed, you have no right to know. End of story. You have no right to know unless you are in situ. So the *Atlas* clarifies that a little bit because there's a lot of stuff in here that doesn't fit there, but is implicit in that kind of conversation. So there are tensions in the text. We are all worried about them, including Dinah and other senior people. But at the same time, there's a desperation too. These old women and men talk. They know what's happening. I remember last time I was at Borroloola, I called Billy [Miller] over to show him the map of Kangaroo Island and he looked at it and he immediately said "ooh, you kids, get here now". And he called all of these kids over, his grandkids, and he said "here's the story I was telling you last night. Here it is, and now you've got to believe me". There's a sense that they're playing out a really important journey

for themselves – how do we keep and how do we bond future generations to what we know? There's no genetic knowledge here. Just because you're born, it doesn't mean you're going to know it.

FDG: What ideally can Whitefellas make of this? Where will these copies reside?

JB: In the camps with people. There's one at AIATSIS, and the rest will go to the community. And there'll be one with me and there's one with you. But I think the whole issue of White access to this is really important. Because, even if a person went to AIATSIS to read it, after 23 years of dealing with this stuff, to really work with this material, you actually have to be prepared to relinquish a part of yourself, to remove a part of yourself to allow it to come in, and to actually move with you. It's not enough to come at it with the arrogance that Western knowledge is supreme, and that somehow this is not that kind of knowledge, or a useful kind of knowledge. I think you will only see its use, its richness, its intimacy, if you can actually remove a part of yourself to allow it to come into yourself. I really believe that. I think, for me, that's one of the fundamental issues and what I actually learnt very, very early on in my time at Borroloola. If there was going to be any communication here, I actually had to suppress a whole part of who I was. And that didn't mean giving myself over to people, but the information can only come in if I enabled an opening to take place. It might sound different but if you've got a bridge in there that says this is all just "Blackfella nonsense" and it's not really going to go far, you're not going to acquire anything. And this is what Jean [Kirton, Summer Institute of Linguistics] said too, her filter was the Christian filter, the desire to create a Bible. So when she brought words in, it went through a filter, a filter of knowledge. And she used it for what was needed. Well, I had no other ambition as to why I should acquire this, except I was fascinated by it. I didn't go there as an anthropologist. I didn't go there as an archaeologist. I didn't go there as a Bible translator. I went there as a young naive schoolteacher who had decided, if there is another language being spoken in this place, I'm going to learn it. That's the only filter I applied to it. And with the language comes the rest of the journey.

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Associate Professor Frances Devlin-Glass collaborated with Li Wiridiwalangu Li-Yanyuwa (Yanyuwa elders – notably Annie Karrakayn, Dinah Norman, Jemima Miller, Thelma Douglas and Dinny McDinny), and also John Bradley, Richard Baker, Elizabeth Mackinlay and Adrienne Campbell in constructing the Yanyuwa website, *Diwurruwurru* (<http://www.deakin.edu.au/arts/diwurruwurru>). She is currently working on an ARC-funded project investigating new definitions of the sacred in Australian literature with Associate Professor Lyn McCredden and Professor Bill Ashcroft.

Dr John Bradley has worked extensively on Yanyuwa language, song cycles, land claims and Yanyuwa ethnobiology and ethnoecology for over 26 years. In 2002, The Yanyuwa Families, Nona Cameron and himself published in a limited edition a comprehensive atlas of Yanyuwa Dreaming narratives with commentary and scholarly apparatus. It is an innovative mapping of an Aboriginal culture.