



# The Australian Journal of **INDIGENOUS EDUCATION**

This article was originally published in printed form. The journal began in 1973 and was titled *The Aboriginal Child at School*. In 1996 the journal was transformed to an internationally peer-reviewed publication and renamed *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education*.

In 2022 *The Australian Journal of Indigenous Education* transitioned to fully Open Access and this article is available for use under the license conditions below.



This work is licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License. To view a copy of this license, visit <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/> or send a letter to Creative Commons, PO Box 1866, Mountain View, CA 94042, USA.

## Section C: Tertiary Education

### Towards Reconciliation: Teaching Gender and Music in the Context of Indigenous Australian Women's Performance

**Elizabeth Mackinlay**

*Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit  
The University of Queensland, Brisbane, Australia*



#### Introduction

This paper addresses issues related to the conflicting paradigms of Western systems of knowledge and Indigenous systems of knowledge within the context of teaching about gender and music in Indigenous Australian women's performance practice. I will first describe the subject which I am currently teaching at the University of Queensland. I will then discuss the theoretical concerns related to teaching about gender and music in terms of the differences between Western and Indigenous ways of knowing about these concepts. I will then examine the conflicts which arise in the context of teaching Indigenous studies within a non-Indigenous framework. Finally, conclusions will be drawn in regard to the reconciling the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing and the implications for teaching this type of curriculum on an international scale.

#### Description of the Subject

The subject title is 'Women's Music and Dance in Indigenous Australia'. It was first taught at the University of Queensland in 1995 as a subject offered through the Department of Anthropology. While this subject was designed as an interdisciplinary code subject, as are the other subjects that are taught by staff of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, particular circumstances at the time resulted in it being more expedient to offer it as an Anthropology code subject. The subject has always been taught by staff of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit.

The subject aims to extend the broad understanding students have of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people and their current situation by examining the roles of music and dance in Indigenous Australia. More specifically, this subject provides students with an understanding of the role of Indigenous Australian women in the performance, maintenance and nurture of music and dance. While the subject is credited towards a major or double major in Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies or in Anthropology at the University of Queensland, by necessity it involves an ethnomusicological understanding of the relationship between music and culture.

The subject explores the complex relationship between women, music and dance. Women's music and dance is considered as education for living, as a reflection of cultural continuity and social change, and as expression, nurturance and maintenance of identity. The largely Western constructions of 'traditional' and 'contemporary' cultural and artistic expression are examined, followed by an investigation of those legal and political issues, including documentation, copyright and cultural appropriation, which are of direct relevance to teaching and learning in this area.

The objectives of the subject are to relate Indigenous Australian performance practices to broader social, historical and political contexts; to understand the complex relationship between gender and music in Indigenous Australia within the context of anthropological and ethnomusicological frameworks of inquiry; and, to interpret and critically analyse the performance practices of Indigenous Australian women.

The nature of the subject demands a flexible schedule which can adapt itself to take full advantage of the availability of visiting teachers. During this period, students receive instruction from members of remote Aboriginal communities, as well as local and interstate urban-based performers. The performing arts industry creates a demanding and somewhat unpredictable work schedule for many Indigenous musicians and dancers. Similarly those teachers coming from remote communities must balance the demands of their 'tradition' oriented lifestyle, which often requires their participation in community events that can arise at short notice, with the responsibilities of a teaching program. Rather than being haphazard, this approach to scheduling realistically reflects the nature of the subject, and is designed to enhance maximum student involvement.

The subject has two major teaching and learning components: problem based learning and experiential. Problem based learning or 'PBL' is the first major teaching and learning component of this subject. The PBL approach has grown out of research that demonstrates that adult learners understand material better and retain it for longer if they engage with it actively. Active engagement usually entails the student taking on the

responsibility to work through some real-life or near to real-life situation. The student has to decide what the situation is, what they need to know to understand and work through this situation to the stated goal, and then take on the responsibility of doing what is necessary to reach that goal. A more formal PBL session integrates the practice of skills and the development of understanding through the exploration of a series of exemplary 'problems' that stimulate students to self-directed inquiry. The situations presented are problems only insofar as our own ignorance prevents our understanding them (Jolly, pers. comm., 1997).

In practical terms, what this means for students is a way of working that they may not have previously encountered at university. During PBL sessions students work in small groups, undertaking independent research and sharing the results of that research with peers who are dependent on each other for a satisfactory understanding of the situation at hand. Students are expected to undertake active participation in these small group discussions. My role as lecturer is to facilitate the group's work, and there are occasions when students may pose questions I am unable to answer. I am there to help students to find an answer through suggesting routes of research, arranging for visits from experts and sometimes providing resources. More detail on the process of PBL is given as the subject progresses. Most students find it an enjoyable and stimulating change from the more traditional 'chalk and talk' methods (Jolly, pers. comm., 1997).

The second teaching and learning component involves students in experiential learning of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music and dance as taught by the Indigenous custodians of these cultures. Under the tutelage of those who have authority to teach certain aspects of Indigenous music and dance, students will participate in a learning process aimed at cultivating their recognition of and respect for cultural property rights, as well as understanding the politics of how information is authorised for sharing with, or transmission to others. Through this process students develop an awareness and respect for authorisation of knowledge in an orally-transmitted environment. This aspect of the subject gives credence to the validity of experience as a

means of both learning and increasing cultural awareness. Through participation in the teaching of Indigenous music and dance by Indigenous performers, students are encouraged to come to terms with the complexity of both the structures of these expressive forms and the manner in which they can learn and retain this orally-transmitted knowledge. Ultimately this leads to a re-evaluation by students of their own methods of learning and retaining knowledge. Students are encouraged to attend public performances and films by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, to read works by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander writers, and to see films about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander music and dance.

## The Gender Question

Women have always been present in anthropology, due primarily to anthropological concern for kinship and marriage. The problem therefore is not one of empirical study but that of representation and the Indigenous Australian context is a good example of this. A significant theoretical concern therefore within the context of this subject involves discussion of gender relations and the status and role of women in Indigenous Australian society. Any discussion of women in the context of Indigenous Australia is necessarily also a discussion about men, although this has not always been the case in anthropology. In the early years of colonisation, gender roles and the status of women in Aboriginal Australia were scrutinised by many different scholars. Merlan (1988: 1) writes that with the exception of the ethnographic accounts by Phyllis Kaberry (1939), Catherine Berndt (1950, 1965, 1970, 1983) and Jane Goodale (1971), prior to the 1960s much:

Aboriginalist literature had been highly androcentric in its [tacit or explicit] assumptions that men's activities were the most salient, and that little different or additional remained to be said about women. There had been a tendency to equate certain aspects of male life with wider sociality, and to treat as secondary women's contributions in these domains.

Patriarchal superiority, gender bias and colonialism were but some of the cultural baggage carried by male observers and have often resulted in the presentation of an outsider's perspective which blinds the researcher and the reader to the realities

of Indigenous culture. A growing body of literature relating to Indigenous women in the latter half of this century has witnessed an attempt by both non-Indigenous and Indigenous female ethnographers to redress this gender imbalance; however, there appears to be little agreement amongst anthropologists, ethnographers and other observers regarding the status of women and men in traditional Indigenous Australian society.

The new 'anthropology of women' began in the 1960s by confronting the problem of how women were represented in anthropology and many female researchers in Australia set out to redress the male bias inherent within anthropological literature. Catherine Berndt (1970) stated that the roles of men and women in traditional society were explicitly defined in a relationship of 'interdependence-dependence', that is different yet complementary. In contrast, Cowlishaw (1982) claimed that Indigenous women were completely under the domination of men, acknowledging women's religious practices and ceremonies as a form of dissent in response to subordination. White (1970) argued that although women are partners of men, they assume the more junior role in the partnership, thus acknowledging the existence of a separate female sphere and simultaneously presuming such a sphere to be less important than men's. Hamilton (1980), by comparison, posed the theory of a dual social system asserting that men and women appear to maintain separate lives completely contained within their own gender spheres. Rejecting all theories and approaches posited by her peers, Bell (1983a, b) stressed the importance of focusing on how Aboriginal women see themselves, understand their own role and their status within society.

To further illustrate the question of gender and the status of women in Indigenous Australia, I would like to turn briefly to gender relations in the Yanyuwa community at Borroloola in the north of Australia where I have been working. Throughout my fieldwork in the Yanyuwa community at Borroloola, it became evident that women view themselves as playing an increasingly significant role in the maintenance of culture, including performance practice. This role arises in response to Yanyuwa women's perceptions and experiences of social change within their community. Prior to colonisation, gender relations in Yanyuwa culture

were based on complementarity and equality between women and men. Contact with Europeans brought many changes to Yanyuwa society, particularly in relation to established social and sexual arrangements between women and men. The 1950s saw the beginning of a process whereby the social authority, status and gender roles of Yanyuwa men as hunters gradually became eroded, largely through restricted access to country and culture. In contrast, Yanyuwa women were able to maintain the elements of social authority and status in their established gender roles as nurturers of culture, despite such dislocation and social upheaval.

It is argued that Yanyuwa men were affected more in a negative sense than Yanyuwa women through contact with Europeans. By taking land, Europeans destroyed Yanyuwa men's livelihood as hunters and removed them from country which enabled men to develop life skills essential for cultural maintenance. The vital link between continuity and social structure was broken when Yanyuwa men were taken for employment by station owners. Men lost their authority, their social foundation and their traditional male roles. Moreover, during the 1950s Yanyuwa women were provided with greater opportunity to nurture their musical creativity and cultures, whereas it could be argued that Yanyuwa men were not.

However, the implication is not made that Yanyuwa women did not undergo their 'fair share' of denigration, suffering and shame at the hands of the colonists. Like many of their Indigenous sisters, Yanyuwa women also suffered varying degrees of abuse and appropriation. They were victims of rape and sexual exploitation, they became mothers of white bosses' children and they too had their children taken away by Welfare. Despite this, Yanyuwa women have emerged from these painful experiences as strong representatives of their people. Grimshaw (1981: 90) suggests that:

It was not so much the equality of women which carried over into the contact period ... but the continuing importance of that strong, separate, 'women's sphere', and the female consciousness which accompanied which was crucial, in a situation where the traditional male sphere was

seriously undermined or destroyed ... It is often observed in culture contact situations that the men of the culture which is disrupted by a more dominant culture, have in a sense further to fall, and hence suffer worse shock and dislocation in terms of identity than women.

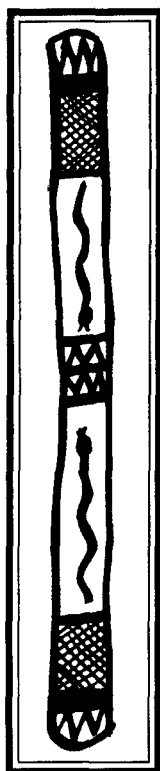
What Grimshaw is implying is that Indigenous women have been better able to cope with dramatic cultural upheaval and change as a result of contact than their male counterparts. This is as a result of

a continued separate women's sphere of responsibility and independence, largely in terms of established domestic roles. Today Yanyuwa women see their collective role as having great importance in cultural maintenance and view themselves as the sole remaining preservers of past times. These women take great pride in their independence and 'in fact they perceive their role in society as being even more important than that of the men as aspects of their culture are eroded away by the effects of contemporary living' (Bradley 1992: 617).

In summary, then, it is evident that prior to colonisation Indigenous women and men enjoyed a gender status and role which was based on equality and complementarity. The mistake of the anthropology of women and many white feminists in the past has been the presumption that women are the same everywhere and that there is a universal construct called 'women'. The imposition

of a foreign white Western framework for gender relations has disrupted this state of balance between women and men in Indigenous Australia. Since the 1970s Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women have struggled to have a voice in the anthropological and feminist academic debate. In this context the politics of representation are of great concern to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women, in particular the continued legitimisation by white feminists of the right of white experts to speak and write about Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women's culture. Huggins (1994: 76) writes:

Male anthropologists who entered the field failed to recognise that their work operated within the limitations of their own gender biases as well as the gender restrictions within Aboriginal and



Torres Strait Islander societies. So do white female researchers operate within certain limitations and expectations relating to both indigenous cultures and their own cultural realms.

As a result, Indigenous women are developing their own theoretical understandings of their conditions which represent an understanding based on their individual lives and communal experiences (Larbalestier, 1990: 153). O'Shane (1976), Lucashenko (1994), Beherendt (1993) and Huggins (1994) have directly questioned the relevance of the white feminist movement to Aboriginal women, suggesting that issues of racism take precedence over sexism in the lives of Indigenous women both past and present. Through her anthropological and political writings Langton (1981, 1996, 1997) has actively enforced Indigenous Australian women's powerful position in pre- and post-invasion society, while Huggins (1987-88; Huggins and Blake 1994) in her capacity as historian has illustrated the experiences of Aboriginal women under colonialism. Indigenous women's writing takes many forms and genres such as autobiography, biography, collaborative works and life history writing, and is emerging as an important arena through which Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander women tell their stories. By necessity then, the teaching of women's music in Indigenous Australia is about an examination of women's performance practice in relation to men's performance practice.

## The Music Question

When I first went into the field in 1994 to talk with senior Yanyuwa women about music related concepts, I had a long list of questions aimed at providing me with Indigenous terms for Western ideas about music. These included finding words which described musical activities and techniques such as beating accompaniment patterns, dance movements, ceremonial performances as well as defining in Indigenous terms aspects of musical structure such as melodic progression, singing the same tune, and using syncopation. When I sat down with these women to ask these very specific questions, I spent an afternoon talking not only about musical performance but musical performance as it related to the people, community, country and culture as a whole. For me this experience highlighted the vast differences between Indigenous ways of knowing about music and Western concepts of musical performance.

For Yanyuwa people, there is no single word which translates readily into English as 'music'. Transferring Yanyuwa ideas about music into a single English word or phrase tends to lose some of the essence which is Yanyuwa music. In the business of cultural translation, there is a mismatch between words and the worlds they name (Hastrup, 1995). It is not possible, therefore, to disassemble Yanyuwa perceptions of music into separate musical components which Westerners understand such as melody, rhythm and style nor is it feasible to isolate cultural matter from an embedded text. The Yanyuwa concept of *ngalki*, however, presents an Indigenous way of making sense of the complex relationship between the people who make music, the process of music-making and the sound which is music. *Ngalki* is a Yanyuwa term sometimes translated as 'skin' which means the 'essence' which marks individual identity. For example, the scent of a flower or the taste of food is the *ngalki* of that phenomenon. In terms of musical structure, the *ngalki* of song is often described by Yanyuwa people as the melody. Ethnomusicological analysis shows further that the *ngalki* of a song also includes the type of beating accompaniment used, the particularly types of rhythmic patterns attached to song, the way in which these are fitted onto a specific melodic shape and the way all three components are combined during the act of musical performance. The *ngalki* of song and musical performance also embodies the character and the activities of the person who originally created the song so that sonic elements become strongly associated with particular human or spirit beings. The link between creator and music is intangible, the essence of the original composer is always there. Through the original creator, links between song and country are established. Specific areas of country and features of landscape to which that being is associated either directly or indirectly become an integral part of song performance and song knowledge. Complex links are made between the soundscape and the landscape. Tracts of country associated with specific song performance in turn provide further connections between people, and serve as a focal point for networks of kinship. Thus music in Indigenous Australia is considered to be an integral part of that complex whole which is culture, to the extent where an Indigenous understanding of music is inherently knowledge of landscape, kinship and spirituality.

Further, in the context of Aboriginal Australia, a knowledgeable person is one who has an extensive understanding of tradition and, by extension, music. In relation to Yanyuwa culture Bradley (1997: 26) explains:

For the Yanyuwa, the content of their tradition is very broad. Firstly, it comprises laws, objects, songs and ways of acting which were first revealed by the Spirit Ancestors. Secondly, it is the interpretations of this revealed knowledge, the myths, legends, historical narratives, ethical and metaphysical teachings, rituals, practices and observances which amount to a whole way of life.

As mentioned by Bradley (1997), an integral part of understanding Yanyuwa tradition is possessing knowledge about song. Song is embedded with knowledge and thus inherently powerful. Further a Yanyuwa person who has extensive song knowledge takes on a status that is based on this understanding of Yanyuwa tradition. In the context of Yanyuwa performance, this achieved status is associated with certain rights and responsibilities that in turn may endow that person with certain degrees of power. Thus the concepts of authority and power are inextricably tied to ideas about status and knowledge. Sargent (1994: 36) explains that status is a position in society which endows a 'certain degree of prestige on a person in the perception of other people', and further, status implies expected behaviour. A distinction is often made between 'ascribed' status (characteristics each person is born with such as sex and race which give them a social status) and 'achieved' status (characteristics such as occupation and education which give a person the chance to earn status). Whether ascribed or achieved, status confers authority and hence a certain type of power. The authority and status of a person is in turn connected to knowledge. Knowledge is familiarity with facts, truths or principles as gained from study, research, experience or report. If used or implemented correctly, knowledge based on authority becomes power.

I recently attended a seminar where a group of prominent Australian Western art music critics spoke about the role of the music critic in contemporary Australia. All emphasised the importance of technical proficiency as an essential part of a successful musical performance. Tonal colour, intonation, rhythmic accuracy and melodic line were but some of the qualities outlined as

essential for a successful performance and a glowing review. In this sense then, the music performance is disassembled and compartmentalised into various categories for appraisal. Nettl (1989: 3) uses the analogy of an industrial factory to discuss the production and performance of art music culture of Western society. On the one hand the 'music factory' is a hierarchical institution for producing musical perfection. It embodies musical systems and repertoires, types of ensembles, composers, conductors, both male and female performers, and audience. Each of these sections in the music factory works together in a hierarchy of roles to produce a performance which is assembled in the correct way. On the other hand, the products of the music factory have the capacity to reflect the '[w]onders of musical complexity, the stimulus of innovation' and present Western art music '[a]s a great thing with metaphorical extensions' (Nettl, 1989: 15). This is the essence of music in a Western sense of the word.

Defined today as the study of music through culture, ethnomusicology provides the academic interface between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing about music. Ethnomusicology sets out to understand the complexities of the relationship between music and culture and embraces the disciplines of both anthropology and musicology. Ethnomusicology therefore has both a role and a responsibility to ensure that this complex relationship is fully understood. Robertson (1993) uses the concept of ethnomusicology as midwifery to describe this task. In Robertson's framework, midwifery is used as a metaphor for the translation of information from one set of cultural realities to another. That, in a sense, is the business of ethnomusicology — cultural translation. The task undertaken by the midwife is to ensure that safe arrival of a newborn child and the task of the ethnomusicologist is to 'give safe passage to musical perceptions that might easily be dismissed, simply because they do not fit our habits of thought and interpretation' (Robertson: 1993: 107). She writes:

Midwifery also involved bringing something — a child a tradition, a belief, a 'different' human being — from the periphery of awareness to the center of attention (embraces the idea of mainstream and marginalised).

In fact, ethnomusicology is all about mainstream and marginal, or in anthropological terms, it is about a constant negotiation and re-negotiation of

emic and etic perspectives of knowledge. Robertson (1993: 123) writes:

The ethnomusicologist is often engaged in a dance of midwifery. She can coach or nurse the tradition she studies into public perception, but she may not excise its limbs when they do not move to the rhythms of the scholarly world. She is not the parent of the tradition; she is merely the facilitator. Yet how she brings the tradition into the light may determine its survival and its acceptance. This is an awesome responsibility. Here, the birthing technique of the midwife is negotiated through her own cultural politics and her own willingness to address central cultural issues that have been rendered invisible by the theocratic codes of our disciplines.

As Robertson suggests, while ethnomusicology can provide the tools to bridge gaps between Indigenous and Western ways of knowing, issues regarding representation of Indigenous in academic circles remain contentious. The danger of any ethnomusicological explanation for the connection between 'music and that complex whole' (Nettl, 1983: 131) is that such representations run the risk of constructing situations which never existed.

### 'Doing' Indigenous Studies

I began teaching Women's Music and Dance in Indigenous Australia at the University of Queensland in 1997. At the time I was in the final stages of completing my PhD in ethnomusicology which focused specifically on women's performance practice in a small Aboriginal community in the north of Australia. Having had extensive experience in the field learning how to sing and to dance from a select group of senior Indigenous women, I found that my role as a student was reversed in the University setting where I was expected to play the part of the teacher. For me this raised several concerns, all related to the question of how do I as a non-Indigenous person teach Indigenous studies without losing the essence and the integrity of the body of knowledge I am attempting to teach?

Indigenous studies in Australia is still in the early stages of definition and development. Aboriginal studies is defined by Attwood (1992: 1) in three ways:

first ... the teaching, research, or display of scholarly knowledge about indigenes by European

scholars who claim that the indigenous peoples cannot represent themselves and must therefore be represented by experts who know more about Aborigines than they know about themselves; second, as a style of thought which is based upon an epistemological and ontological distinction between 'Them' and 'Us' — in this form Europeans imagine 'the Aborigines' as their 'Other', as being radically different from themselves; third, as a corporation institution for exercising authority over Aborigines by making statements about them, authorising views of them, and ruling over them.

One of the major issues in teaching this Indigenous way of knowing then is, do non-Indigenous people value this approach and way of knowing? Further, are the differences between the two systems of knowledge reconcilable?

At the very heart of this debate is the nature of knowledge. There is a general acceptance that knowledge does not exist without interpretation and it is knowledge which creates 'truth' and 'reality'. Knowledge is always situational, it is always sought after by certain individuals for varied reasons. Knowledge is always based on relationships of power, of domination and subordination. Aboriginal literary writer and analyst Colin Johnson (1987: 28) writes that Indigenous knowledge, like many colonised voices, is the subordinate form of discourse. Indigenous knowledge must always be presented in the form of the dominant discourse by way of the process of translation or assimilation. Often these two discourses are in conflict. Johnson (1987: 31) believes that Aboriginal people need to have control of the discourse in order to be in control of their lives. He suggests that the voices of Aboriginal people must be heard in their fullest sense, without the frameworks and intrusions of the dominant discourse. In this way the presentation of Indigenous knowledge will remain authentic and the cultural integrity of this way of knowing will be preserved.

Indigenous people often express concern that once their system of knowledge and transmission enters into the dominant discourse, this knowledge may not be honoured and that access to traditional ways of knowing may be abused in one or more ways. Generally teachers tend to apply the rules from their own discipline and culture in terms of how they manage, learn and impart types of



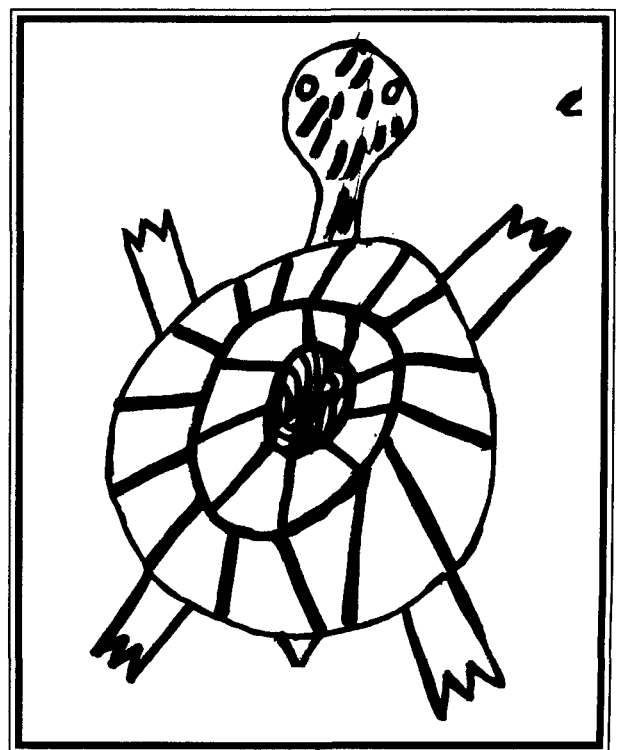
knowledge. Indigenous people are concerned that these Non-Indigenous people in positions of authority become the so-called experts of this knowledge, because by their taking it and translating it into the dominant framework, this then makes the knowledge legitimate. This process also legitimises the teachers as those with the authority to impart the knowledge.

This issue is extremely relevant in my own situation. One of the ways in which I try to honour the Indigenous knowledge which Yanyuwa people have shared with me is by only discussing aspects of that knowledge which I have been given permission by them to discuss in a public setting. Further, it is not appropriate for me in my ascribed role of so-called expert to make reference to the knowledge and intellectual perspectives of other Indigenous Australian groups, because this knowledge is outside my realm of experience. When using information which has been documented by other researchers about Yanyuwa and other cultural groups in a written or visual format, my students are encouraged to ask questions of the material presented and to not be afraid to challenge the power of the dominant discourse which so often manifests in the written word. In this way, we all may come to a closer understanding of the hidden voices of Indigenous and other subordinate groups represented in an implicit or explicit way in these documents.

If a non-Indigenous person is deemed unsuitable to teach Indigenous studies does that necessarily mean that an Indigenous person is more qualified? Williams and Trigger (1997: 11) write that the proposition that '[i]dentity (and implied ancestry) endows persons with a superior understanding of their own culture' is problematic, raising the issue of whether insiders to a culture can necessarily understand their society better than outsiders. Williams and Trigger (1997: 11-15) outline four major points for consideration. First, it is generally accepted that an insider holds a more substantial body of knowledge internal to the culture in which they were raised than does an outsider. Second, the ability of the insider to externalise the knowledge they hold into a full understanding rather than a tacet sense of knowing is paramount in an educational setting. Third, there may be a significant difference between what the insider knows about a given culture and the information

the ethnographer holds in field notes about the same culture which was given to them by senior members of a culture over many years of field work. Finally, given that most Indigenous studies is taught within an anthropological framework, the idea that only Indigenous people are qualified to teach Indigenous studies belies the inherent anthropological assumption that cross-cultural understanding is indeed possible (Williams and Trigger, 1997: 13).

It is evident that the current debate about 'doing' Indigenous studies in Australia is driven largely by Indigenous efforts to assert a voice from a relatively powerless position (Williams and Trigger, 1997: 15). Overwhelmingly, the message from Indigenous peoples (Bin-Salik, 1993: 12) is that as institutions heavily involved in the construction of knowledge, universities need to consider very carefully their role in Indigenous studies in terms of determining the type of knowledge they are constructing and what their responsibilities are to Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. Those who are in positions of power regarding the production and dissemination of knowledge about Indigenous Australians must be subject to greater accountability.



## Conclusion: Back to the Classroom

I firmly believe that it is possible to reconcile the differences between Indigenous and non-Indigenous ways of knowing about gender and music. The solution is based on the idea of a two-way conversation and agrees with Toomey's (1994: 14) view that a 'shared experience is a powerful reconciler of differences — even of world views'. It takes place between myself as the so-called non-Indigenous expert on Indigenous women's music and dance, and my students. It takes place on another level between the Indigenous women who participate in my class in their capacity as experts, and my students. In this forum, Indigenous women are allowed to assert their voices in a very positive and affirmative way. By participating directly in my class, these women involve the students in a direct dialogue which serves to break down the divide between 'Us' and 'Them'. The two-way conversation also takes place between Indigenous women and myself as we work together collaboratively to present a picture of women's music and dance in Indigenous Australia which retains cultural integrity. This conversation represents an on-going cultural exchange and, by necessity, it is a process of constant negotiation and re-negotiation. It has the ability to challenge, change or maintain perceptions of Indigenous Australian peoples and cultures, as two different ways of knowing about women, gender and music are reconciled. Further, this two-way conversation does not need to confine itself to classrooms in Australian universities. It has a character which is truly global in that it defies all geographical and cultural boundaries, and the more involved themselves in this conversation, the greater are our chances for cross-cultural understanding and respect for all ways of knowing.

## References

- Attwood, Bain (1992). 'Introduction'. In Brian Attwood and John Arnold (Eds), *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*. A special edition of *Journal of Australian Studies*: Melbourne: LaTrobe University Press in conjunction with Monash University, pp. i-xvi.
- Beherendt, Larissa (1993). 'Aboriginal women and the white lies of the feminist movement: implications for Aboriginal women in rights discourse'. *Australian Feminist Law Journal* 1: 27-44.
- Bell, Diane (1983a). 'Consulting with women'. In Fay Gale (Ed.), *We are Bosses Ourselves: The Status and Role of Aboriginal Women Today*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, pp. 24-28.
- Bell, Diane (1983b). *Daughters of the Dreaming*. Sydney: Allen & Unwin.
- Berndt, Catherine H. (1950). 'Women's changing ceremonies in northern Australia'. *L'Homme* 1: 1-87.
- Berndt, Catherine H. (1965). 'Women and the "Secret Life"'. In Ronald M Berndt and Catherine H. Berndt (Eds), *Aboriginal Man in Australia*. Sydney: Angus and Robertson, pp. 236-282.
- Berndt, Catherine H. (1970). 'Digging sticks and spears, or, the two-sex model'. In Fay Gale (Ed.), *Women's Role in Aboriginal Society*. Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, pp. 39-48.
- Berndt, Catherine H. (1983) 'Mythical women, past and present'. In Fay Gale (Ed.), *We are Bosses Ourselves: The Status and Role of Aboriginal Women Today*. Canberra: Australian institute of Aboriginal Studies, pp. 13-23.
- Bin-Salik, Mary-Ann (1993). 'Aborigines and universities: are they compatible?' The Eighth Frank Archibald Memorial Lecture delivered at the University of New England, Armidale, 8 September.
- Bradley, John (1992). With Jean Kirton and the Yanyuwa community. *Yanyuwa Wuka. Language from Yanyuwa Country. A Yanyuwa Dictionary and Cultural Resource*. Unpublished document.
- Bradley, John (1997). *Li-anthawirriyarr, People of the Sea: Yanyuwa Relations with their Maritime Environment*. PhD thesis, Northern Territory University.
- Cowlshaw, Gillian (1982). 'Socialisation and subordination among Australian Aborigines'. *Man* 17(3): 492-507.
- Goodale, Jane (1971). *Tiwi Wives. A Study of Women of Melville Island, North Australia*. Seattle: University of Washington Press.
- Grimshaw, Patricia (1981). 'Aboriginal women: a study of culture contact'. In Norma Grieve and

- Patricia Grimshaw (Eds), *Australian Women. Feminist Perspectives*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, pp. 86-94.
- Hamilton, Annette (1980). 'Dual social systems: technology, labour and women's secret rites in the eastern western desert of Australia'. *Oceania* 51(1): 4-19.
- Hastrup, Kirsten (1995) *A Passage to Anthropology. Between Experience and Theory*. New York: Routledge.
- Huggins, Jackie (1991). 'Letter to the editor'. *Women's Studies International Forum* 14(5): 505-513.
- Huggins, Jackie (1987-88). "Firing on in the mind": Aboriginal women domestic servants in the inter-war years'. *Hecate* 13(2): 5-23.
- Huggins, Jackie (1994). 'A contemporary view of Aboriginal women's relationship to the White women's movement'. In Norma Grieve and A. Burns (Eds), *Australian Women: Contemporary Feminist Thought*. Melbourne: Oxford University Press, pp. 70-79.
- Huggins, Jackie and Thom Blake (1994). 'Protection or persecution? Gender relations in the era of racial segregation', In Kay Saunders and Raymond Evans (Eds), *Gender Relations in Australia. Domination and Negotiation*. Sydney: Harcourt Brace, pp. 42-58.
- Jolly, Lesley (1997). Personal communication. Conversations and documents provided to author, march-April, University of Queensland.
- Kaberry, Phyllis M. (1939). *Aboriginal Women: Sacred and Profane*. London: Routledge.
- Langton, Marcia (1981). 'Anthropologists must change'. *Identity* 4(4): 11.
- Langton, Marcia (1996). 'The Hindmarsh Island bridge affair: how Aboriginal women's religion became an administrable affair'. *Australian Feminist Studies* 11(24): 211-217.
- Langton, Marcia (1997). 'Grandmother's law, company business and succession in changing Aboriginal land tenure systems'. In Galarrwuy Yunupingu (Ed.), *Our Land is Our Life. Land Rights — Past, Present and Future*. St Lucia: University of Queensland Press, pp. 84-116.
- Larbaleister, Jan (1990). 'The politics of representation: Australian Aboriginal women and feminism'. *Anthropological Forum* 6(2): 143-157.
- Lucashenko, Melissa (1994). 'No other truth?: Aboriginal women and Australian feminism'. *Social Alternatives* 12(4): 21-24.
- Merlan, Francesca (1988). 'Gender in Aboriginal social life: a review'. In Ronald M. Berndt and Robert Tonkinson (Eds), *Social Anthropology and Australian Aboriginal Studies. A Contemporary Overview*. Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, pp. 15-76.
- Nettl, Bruno (1983). *The Study of Ethnomusicology. Twenty-Nine Issues and Concepts*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Nettl, Bruno (1989). 'Mozart and the ethnomusicological study of Western culture (An essay in four movements)'. *Yearbook for Traditional Music*: 1-16.
- Robertson, Carol (1993). 'The ethnomusicologist as midwife'. In Ruth M. Solie (Ed.), *Musicology and Difference. Gender and Sexuality in Music Scholarship*. Los Angeles: University of California Press, pp. 107-124.
- Sargent, Margaret (1994). *The New Sociology for Australians*, 3rd edn. Melbourne: Longman Cheshire.
- Toomey, Vanessa (1994). 'Live performance as a teaching and learning resource and a way towards reconciliation'. *Journal of the Aboriginal Studies Association* Dec: 14-17.
- White, Isobel (1970). 'Aboriginal women's status: a paradox revisited'. In Fay Gale (Ed.), *Women's Role in Aboriginal Society*. Canberra: Australian institute of Aboriginal Studies, pp. 21-29.
- Williams, Michael and David Trigger (1997). 'Anthropology's canon and Aboriginal knowledge in Australia: the politics of doing Indigenous studies in the 1990s'. Unpublished paper, prepared for American Ethnological Society Conference, Seattle, 6-9 March.

**Elizabeth Mackinlay** is a lecturer with the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Studies Unit, The University of Queensland. Her research interests centre on women's music and dance in Indigenous Australia. □