EFFECTS OF COLONISATION, CULTURAL AND
PSYCHOLOGICAL ON MY FAMILY

by

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PLEASE NOTE

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Acknowledgments

My story would not have been possible without the love and patience of my family, many of whom are still coming to terms with the knowledge that is between these pages and emanates from my artwork.

Many thanks also to my supervisors and friends who stood by me, guiding and helping me where they could.

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Certificate of Aboriginality

The written discourse of this thesis has not in any way been submitted for a higher degree at any other institution.

However, some of the artworks that are integrated in this thesis were submitted for a B.A. in Visual Arts at the University of Western Sydney, Nepean. These artworks have been noted throughout the thesis.
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SUMMARY

My research is a story about my family, my Murri (Aboriginal people of Queensland) family. It is about rebirthing my identity, my history and my culture. It concerns colonisation, the history, and the consequences that colonisation has rendered upon my family. My story divulges the secrets and problems from the past that continue to affect myself and my family today.

Even though it is about my family, our history concerns each and every person in Australia. Non-indigenous people need to understand that our spirits do 'belong' to this land, that we are a part of it. They need to understand what colonisation has done to our families. It is only through understanding and accepting the history of what has happened to thousands of Murri families, like mine, that our identities and place within our environment can become reality, in the minds of all non-Aboriginal people.

Because a written discourse is alien to my culture and to my psyche I have rebirthed my families stories in both visual and oral language. I have combined the visual and oral with the written so that people of other cultural backgrounds are able to read and learn from my research.

My art is a healing vehicle through which myself and my family reconnect with our culture. It is connected to my identity, my heritage. I have created images/objects that reflect what I have discovered of myself and my family. My creations are imbued with all that is natural, my palette is the land and its produce ie. trees, ochres, leaves, reeds, skins, grasses, thus reconnecting myself with my heritage, the land - mother earth.
Being Aboriginal

Being Aboriginal, is not only a matter of identifying with boomerangs, spears and bark paintings.

It is identifying with a Cultural Heritage and a belief in the Dreaming, that gives our spirit a special relationship with this land.

It is sharing a historical experience, that makes us unique to this country. It gives us a set of value judgements which guide our conduct.

It decides our relationship with people, attitudes to possessions, to time, family and death, etc.

It could be described as a way of thinking and relating in common to different groups of people.

Aboriginality is not the colour of one's skin and not only that we are of Aboriginal descent.

*Being Aboriginal, is a*

"State of Mind".

Charleville & Western Areas A.T.S.I.
Corporation for Health Services.
GLOSSARY

The following list is a definition of Murri clans words used throughout this story.

Amby, woman  Mia Mia, shelter
Bargie, grandmother, nanna Moodai, possum
Booglie, freshwater crayfish, yabbie Mullyan, eagle
Bunjal, goanna Murri, all Aboriginal people of Queensland
Dinewan, emu Numbardee, mother, mum
Goolabah, grey leaved box tree Piggiebillah, echidna
Goombeelghah, bark canoe Wahroogah, children
Goonah, shit Weebulloo, women's spirits
Gubberamunda, place of low hills Wirree, small oval shaped bark dish
Kooma, clan name Womba, mad
Mah, totem Yaraan, eucalyptus leaves
...Rebirthing our genetic history and our traditional art of story telling...

...Visually and orally...
1. Introduction

Why am I researching my family?
Why am I searching for my family?
Why am I searching for my culture, my identity?
What happened to my family, my culture, my heritage, my history?

When I was about 30 years old I found out my bargie (grandmother) was Aboriginal. Nobody could tell me anything. I found out I had a great Aunty Lena who was still alive! We met, she did not really want to talk about being black. I search for myself, to reunite my family connections, reconnect with my rightful identity, and learn about my culture.

Although there are still some stones unturned I have relaxed my onslaught of investigation, but not stopped, as my searching will never cease or come to an end. To uncover all that has happened to our family has been and is quite harrowing especially for those who still deny being Aboriginal even with the truth laid out in front of them. I have found it easier to write to my relatives first to let them know who I am and that I am trying to find myself, my culture, and family connections. I let them know that I am writing my thesis and that some of our stories and history would be included, but only if they agreed to it. Some of our history cannot be included because it is too personal and because I have been requested not to repeat some things that I have been told. I then left it up to my relatives to reply to me, some of whom haven’t. Those that have are relatives who have accepted or knew about our Aboriginality, or identify as being Murri.
I am now able to say who I am connected to and where I come from, something I could never do before. A special part of being Aboriginal and being accepted by Aboriginal people is to be able to say who you are connected with and where your traditional area is. When meeting up with Aboriginal people, the first questions asked are “where are you from, what’s your family name, who’s your family?” The answer to these questions immediately places you in your tribal group and land affiliation. They are some of the links to your identity. I now enjoy conversations and relating our history with many members of my extended family.

Our connections with our birthright, our culture have been decimated, we, my family live in a cultural void, neither black, nor white. We were a disjointed, ununited, fragmented, culturally neutral family, many of whom until twelve years ago weren’t aware there was a black side to our family! Our relatives had been hidden from us, I didn’t meet my great Aunty Lena until ten years ago, and it is obvious why, because you couldn’t mistake her for anything other than a Murri (Aboriginal)! So if Lena was Aboriginal and she was my bargie’s sister, what did that make me, what did that make my numbardee (mother) and brothers? Who, what am I, where do I fit, am I white, am I black, am I neither? I need to know who I am, where my identity belongs, how my family regain their rightful identities and heritage. The writing of these stories is one of the vehicles through which these questions are answered. The making of my artwork is another form for answering these questions.

...What happened to my family, my culture, my heritage, my history...
So the real reason for this research is to find out who I am. This may seem a selfish reason to some, however in the process of finding out who I am, I also begin to understand who my numbardee is and why she is like she is. Who my bargie was and why she was like she was. By finding out about me, about my culture, my identity, I begin to instil in my own children an understanding of myself, a knowledge of their inherited culture and identity and an awareness of who they are. I am therefore rebirthing our genetic history, and our traditional art of story telling, both visually and orally. Stories of our knowledge and culture that my children will pass onto their children. Our stories are essential to understand not only what happened to our ancestors but also to know ourselves. Reekie comments that “the autobiographies of Black women are especially valuable, given their silencing in the historical record.” (Reekie 1994, p.46). The history of my women ancestors has never been told to me or my relatives, it is as though my women ancestors were invisible.

My immediate family has become fragmented and isolated from our wider family web or group. There are many psychological problems, such as self imposed isolation, a lack of self confidence, the inability to understand the self, the inability to accept the self for who you are, the inability to parent in a culturally appropriate way, poor parenting skills passed down to the next generation - all these are the consequences of colonisation and enforced integration and assimilation.

To understand ourselves we must know where we’ve come from, what our culture and identity are within the realms of our society, not the society that was forced upon us by another culture. We have been taken out of our natural environment, our natural ecology, we have been subjected to social values that do not align with our social ecology. Ecology in this instance being the relationship we have with our environment, including physical, spatial and cultural characteristics. Social ecology is the relationship we have with our holistic view of the environment, and the individuals and communities, either family or social communities, and how they function or see themselves within that environment.
Aboriginal society has an holistic concept of life, time and space which is circular, the past, present and future are all linked, and integrate with the next time span. Whereas in Western society the concept of time and space is that the “dominant temporal sense is historical, assumed to be linear and nonrepeatable”. Clifford in Foster 1987, p.121

These diagrams are my way of visually linking what Clifford has said about the difference of histories and perceptions of time, and the relatedness of the individual to time, between indigenous and non indigenous societies. When talking about family, when talking about my families past, the past is in the present - its consequences are in the present, and will continue into the future. A non-Indigenous concept is to not deal with the past in the present, and to deny the consequences of the past in today and the future. The acts of colonisation present themselves not only in our family, but every other Aboriginal family in the present day and will still be felt by those families in the future.
I may have been born into a Western society and I may not look traditionally Aboriginal but my genetic makeup is Aboriginal, it has not been bred out and I believe cannot be bred out. The Colonisers believed that the indigenous skin colour and an indigenous mind would eventually be bred out, and indeed in our family we no longer carry a black skin, however Holland believes “you may be able to erase the black skin, but you cannot erase the psychological make-up”. Holland in NSW Aboriginal Mental Health Report 1991, Appendix A

“Recent scientific research into highly dilute solutions verifies that reducing a substance to a minute quantity, such as a single atom, intensifies the need and capacity of that atom to bond with others and to imprint its own energetic qualities on the surrounding shell of different molecules. In 1976 a council of Aboriginal tribal elders proclaimed that as their racial blood becomes increasingly diluted in the engulfing ocean of white blood, the spiritual essence of Aboriginal blood will increase in potency and cause the consciousness of the Aboriginal race to re-emerge”. Lawlor 1991, p.335

It seems that no matter how much intermarriage has occurred between us and non-Aboriginal people, from my own perspective and that of my brother and cousins we grow in strength with our identities as our knowledge of our history becomes stronger. For me the blood ratio has nothing to do with it. It’s as if the blood from my bargie and numbardee has taken over - that its strength is stronger than the European (blood) - that the Murri genetics are more powerful because they are tens of thousands of years old - they come from this land - they are a part of this land - they are more powerful.
The psychologies such as those used by indigenous cultures are considered *primitive* by Western society and in the enlightened European civilisation are considered underdeveloped and unsophisticated. Whereas "the Aboriginal perspective on health and illness is closer than that of Western medicine to the World Health Organisation's definition of Health - "a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity". Reid 1982, p.91

For me the theory of indigenous healing is the process of constructing, working and being. The act of participating in the creating is the healing aspect in Aboriginal culture. Health problems in Aboriginal communities are generally considered to be caused by external causes and not internal as in Western society. Traditionally in Aboriginal communities the pre-empting of problems was addressed and dealt with rather than trying to fix the problem once it had arisen. I use my art for spiritual and mental healing because it is "metaphysically attuned to laws of existence, not realistically attuned to external facts." McNiff 1992, p.20

"Patriarchal Europe paid a heavy price for its destruction and take over of the healing traditions. The Great Plagues of Europe spread unchecked in face of the vacuum caused by the destruction of ancient feminine knowledge. In spite of this, homoeopathic medicine, with its ancestral roots, was used in the cholera plagues in Russia and claimed a mortality of less than 10 percent, in contrast to the mortality rate of orthodox medicine, which reached 60 to 70 percent." Lambert 1993, p.130
The fear of knowing ourselves - a lot of my relatives are afraid to know the truth. They can't face up to it. This creates a lot of friction about our identity, our heritage, a lot of misunderstanding and isolation. For those who do identify it's worse because the others don't want to talk to us. This continues the cycle of dispossession and dislocation. It continues to rub at the scars that Mary, my great great great bargie, had as a result of what was inflicted upon her. Each generation has inflicted the psychological scars onto the next generation. This is why I am writing.

When I make my art it has a domino effect upon some of my relatives. They begin to talk about things - things that have happened to their families, they start to remember little stories they have been told. They start to feel some pride within themselves. They start to feel less self conscious about their identity and heritage. They also start to be proud of their numbardees. The visual imagery is a non confronting form especially for the older people in my family. When they see it they understand it, the visual is also a 'genetic way' of understanding what it's about, what the artwork is about. In a traditional way I am teaching my immediate and extended family about all the goonah (shit) that has gone on, and because it's non confronting it is easier for them to cope with. The act of doing my art reclains my history, my heritage, my culture, my family.

This is a teaching story, it is for my children, my future descendants. It is my numbardee's story, her numbardee's story, my numbardee's Numbardee's story, and my numbardee's numbardee's Numbardee's story. These stories were isolated from their traditions, from their homeland, from their Numbardees, from their context, when this country was Colonised. The stories need to be told so that we can teach our children and for us to know ourselves. Once the stories are told the healing will begin for some of us and continue for others. The healing process starts with objects and images created out of the history that my families stories arise from. My artwork continues our tradition of story telling . It continues the visual tradition and psychological tradition of healing. Like a healing stone, my artwork gives my family the spiritual key to healing.
It is also important that non-Aboriginal people read our stories so that they become aware of how past atrocities still cause pain and conflict to Aboriginal people today. How what has happened in the past is relevant to the present. I speak in this story about my great bargie who died in a mental hospital, so many of our people have died this way. However non-Aboriginal Australians do not associate my people's illnesses as a consequence of what happened to them because of the colonisation of this country. Therapies that are designed for non-Aboriginal Australians do not address the atrocities that my people have been subjected to. White Australia needs to understand our needs and where those needs surface from, so that we can develop culturally appropriate therapies.

Anne Brewster points to the fact that my people played an important role in the development of Australia. My ancestors worked on many pastoral stations in both unpaid and later paid labour. They shared their knowledge of the bush, childbirth and medicine with the colonisers, they did this willingly - they had no option. However, it made no difference how willing my ancestors were, or how much knowledge they shared - in the eyes of the whiteman they could never be his equal, they could never rise above the position the whiteman had placed them in.

"Aboriginal memory preserves the unwritten black history of colonisation, which has been emerging in the public arena in the form of life stories of Aboriginal women. Aboriginal memory is transforming public perceptions of the past in post-invasion Australia. This memory proves to us that Aboriginal people were not simply the passive victims or onlookers of modernisation, but rather the producers and makers of modern Australia through their labour and the knowledge of the country that they shared with the white 'settlers'." Brewster 1996, p.6
Many non-Aboriginal Australians believe we have no right to our traditional clan lands. As a descendant of a Murri clan I have an inherited right to the use of that land, just as a non-Aboriginal person inherits and has the rights to their family's property. Non-Aboriginal Australians put our culture and identity into an historical context believing that unless you live in a bark humpy and eat bush tucker you are not a real Aborigine. I want non-Aboriginal people of Australia to know my family story, to understand that being Colonised, Exterminated, Integrated, Assimilated and Reconciliated does not change me, does not change my genetic makeup, my 'genetic memory'. It does not change the need for my psyche to be bonded to my cultural spirituality, to be bonded to my land. What it has done is create an environment that makes it difficult to feed my cultural spirituality, to connect with my clan lands, to be true to my 'genetic makeup and memory'.

There are many non-Aboriginal Australians who do not have and do not understand our spiritual connections to the land. The land represents our survival, and the survival of non-Aboriginal Australians. Without those connections non-Aboriginal Australians are constantly destroying and rebuilding their environment - creating disunity and disconnection between themselves, their environment and our land - our numbardee.

"The process of cultural revival assists many people to find a new direction by seeing Aboriginality as a cultural reality, integral and substantive with a past, a present and a future." Creamer in Beckett 1988, p.89
...The act of doing my art reclaims my history, my heritage, my culture, my family...
...The land represents our survival...
2. **Methodology**

I start searching by contacting and writing to the Queensland University, to the Aboriginal and Islander Institute in Canberra, the John Oxley Library in Queensland, the Australian National University, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, State Archives of Queensland, Registrar of Births Deaths and Marriages in Queensland and NSW, Department of Family Services and Aboriginal and Islander Affairs in Brisbane and Pat O'Shane for a copy of an essay she wrote on the effects of colonisation. I scoured the electoral roles in every state for family surnames and wrote to over 200 people. I contacted and spoke with Anne Harris, the author of a book on Gubberamunda (low hills), the property where Annie my great bargie was born. When I found out that author Herb Wharton was a descendant of the Kooma people of S.W. Queensland, I wrote to him sending family pictures thinking he may be able to make family connections by seeing them.

I was informed by Family Services that they have no records on our family, but that this doesn't mean anything, because most of the records about our people where destroyed years ago, and the records they do have, they have only just started to put on their files.

Mapping, tracking, tracking is my form of searching, looking for signs, as you would look on a map. This is mapping the geology - the formation of the land, particularly the rivers, as well as mapping the tracks that my ancestors were forced to take for survival. The map focuses on all the towns, the pastoral stations, and the river where my ancestors descended from.
My researching is something like tracking, tracking in the traditional sense, like tracking an animal. Reading a word that sends me in a different direction or seeing people whose looks are familiar could mean that they might be related to us. Or it could be something someone has said to me, mentioning that so and so comes from a certain area could mean that person might know something that could help me. Word of mouth and Aboriginal perception has led me to find and uncover signs that guide me in the right directions.

One of my major dilemmas for this research has been recording my information. If I am speaking on the phone I find it difficult to jot down important facts, stories etc., because the phone is being used as a sharing and learning tool, my rel (relative/s) will be telling me something and I will be thinking about what they are saying and what my response will be. There is no space in my mind to take down notes as we are speaking. There is no record for the future, unlike letters or artwork, nothing of what is said has been recorded for prosperity. I am also aware that because most of my rels are interstate, the duration of our phone calls has to be kept to a minimum. To this end I have found the best way for me to gain knowledge of our families is to write letters. The letter is from me personally, it is about me, my family, I can take my time writing it which gives me room to think about what I want to say, and what I want to ask. The responses are the same, there is time to think questions through before answers are given. The answers may need to come from someone other than the rel I have written to, because the response is not needed right then and there, they have the time to find out the answers.
For some of my family this is the first time they've had the opportunity to express their emotions and tell their stories. This begins their own healing processes towards the recovery of their own identities. The recovery for some also means finding their own parents, the contact that I have made has created a domino affect within other family groups. Each family group in answering my questions, have been able to start answering their own.

My letter writing and correspondence is important to my family because being a marginalised and oppressed people, we have no written record and until now no oral record, of our family's history. I am using my letter writing "(e.g., "letters to friends and relations, jottings in a copybook") for understanding a particular class of women that has systematically been ignored." Hampsten in Reinhart 1992, p.216

Some of the letters were sent back to me with derogatory remarks. Even though I thought these people were related it turned out not all of them were, one lady wrote back to me with the comment "I am certainly not one of your mob". Another commented that "there was none of that in her family". I have weekly rituals now where I speak and write to new found rels. Finding things in common, finding out about ourselves.

..."I am certainly not one of your mob"...
Being True To My Rel's (my ethics)

Being true to my rels! What would happen if I wasn't? Well, I would not be told another story in my lifetime. Most of my stories came from my elders and I respect my elders. If I am asked not to repeat something, then I do not repeat it! Our story, our history, is very fragile, my elders and my ancestors have been through a very traumatic 200 plus years. I must therefore treat them and their stories with respect, if I don't I may tip the scales the wrong way, and instead of healing our family I would create further pain and anguish.

I have been very careful to keep out of this work anything that my relatives have asked me not to repeat here. They are our family stories and so I do know them, however they are either too personal or for our ears/eyes only. My numbardee has read through my writings and discussed her thoughts with me, she also let me know if there was anything I should not include. She also advised me that she couldn't understand certain parts, and because I am writing this in the first instance for my family, I needed to change these.

The stories that I am writing about and the way that I am telling them I have to tell them like this for them to hold true. This is how they were told to me so this is the way I have to relate them. I can't put our stories into traditional academic language because in the translation it changes the truth. It changes the meaning of what I am saying, or what is being told to me. My research "reads as partly informal, engagingly personal, and even confessional." Reinhart 1992, p.259
Healing Myself and My Family

The processes of my artwork and research for my masters, is part of my healing rituals in coming to terms with the acts of colonisation upon my family. It is not the masters piece of paper but the knowledge I gain in the process of doing that is important. When I create, and this can also be in writing, yarning, discussions, research, expressions, I am reinstating the rituals that my ancestors used in their daily existence. I believe art is the ritual of the everyday, that ritual creates the healing and “... helps to activate brain chemistry so that our conscious awareness is released from the domination of the central nervous system.” Lawlor 1991, p.381. Ritual heightens my psychic power allowing me to journey with and learn from my ancestors.

To commence my own healing and dispel the anger I had regarding the colonisers and their affects and atrocities on my family, my artwork became my solace, a refuge. To do this I create images and objects. Some of which are specifically made for particular women ancestors. These were created as a series of four. The number four relates to our creation laws and the creators of those laws. These laws revolve around Shadows, Spirit/Soul, Totem/Land and Dreams.

The four women are my two ancestral Bargies, my Numbardee and myself. In writing and telling our stories I have given voice to my Bargies - they now have a narrative through which they can speak. They didn’t have this before they died - they died with their stories, their lives, their existence - unwanted and untold - nobody wanted it told. They speak now to each other, to me, to their grand wahroogah (children), to their great grand wahroogah, to all their descendants, and to all other Australians.
My Creative Expression

My research is creating/process/action/listening/speaking/writing oriented - it is my life, myself and my family are my knowledge base. My research is original - it is original to me. It is multi disciplinary, it is interdisciplinary. I am utilising my creativity as an artist to journey into my heritage.

“There is little "methodological elitism" or definition of "methodological correctness" in feminist research. Rather there is a lot of individual creativity and variety. There is even creativity about the labels feminist researchers apply to their research projects, a characteristic particularly prominent in interviewing and oral history research.” Reinharz 1992, p.243

As Reinharz states I am using in my research my "creativity and variety". I am using my traditional culture, my ‘genetic memory’, my creativity, and my familial relationships as research methods.

My research is akin to our circular concept of life, that the past, present and future are all linked. In my searching and my research I cannot look at the past without seeing it in the present and the future, I cannot look at the present without seeing it in the past and the future, I cannot look at the future without seeing it in the present and the past. My methodology is circular and all linked, I go back to the past to know the present and to visualise what our future may be.
"I was looking for an approach, not a method, which would enable me to develop a rigorous yet playful style. To be true to the open metaphor, it was necessary to let the phenomena lead me, and to remain open to the experience of coming to know. This is not always easy, especially in the world of academe, where we are advised to play the game according to traditional rules."

Melamed in Reinhartz 1992, p.218

Because my research is linked to the past, present and future I cannot unlink it by presenting my thesis in an alien form. Therefore the circular concept carries on by informing the style of the presentation of my work both the written and the visual. Neither can be viewed without the other, the visual is linked to the written, the written is linked to the visual. My work is part of the spirit and soul of everything that we are.

...To present it in any other way would break the links that I have for so long been healing and rebirthing...
These links go back 10 years or more when I first started searching for my family. It was during this time, in 1992, that I completed my B.A. in Visual Arts. The art work for my B.A. was based on my search for my family, it is therefore from the past and linked to the present and the future, and has subsequently been integrated into my story. I could not disregard this artwork because it is part of the origin of my research and had to be included in my story. I have noted these artworks throughout the thesis with the year they were created.

The images of my artwork which I talk about throughout this discourse are in a sleeve in the rear cover of this document. These images are printed in a circular format that corresponds to our circular concept of life as discussed previously. I have designed them so that each circle forms part of a larger circle, which can be laid out as the following diagram illustrates. The central image is the Ancestral Numbardee image.

...The circle is symbolic of our culture...
I have designed my writing to flow from Mary of the Narran River, my maternal great great great bargie, and her women descendants - her daughter Hannah, her granddaughter Annie, her great granddaughter Mabel, her great great granddaughter Dorothy, and me, her great great great granddaughter. Because it flows this way it also becomes historical, it is our history, ebbing from the 1800's to the present day. Each woman's section speaks of her story concluding with and integrating the artworks I created for her and which I introduced on the previous page.

...Each woman's section speaks of her story...
...This is the first time they've had the opportunity to express their emotions and tell their stories...
3. Bargie - ancestral numbardee. Mary
and Hannah daughter of Mary
Colonisation

Mary of the Kooma clan.
Mah (totem) - Dinewan (emu)
Gives birth to Hannah, on the Narran River.
Spirit of the great great great bargie - smoking ritual.
Woman, ancestral numbardee,
spirit woman, soul - she begins it all.

Mary no name. Exterminate the tradition of the name.
Who are we? Where are we from? Mary is traditional.

Mary is the furthest ancestor I have been able to trace back to, and from where everyone of my known family has come. Mary was living a traditional life when her clan country was invaded by the colonisers. Refer to images 1, 2 and 3 for a visual representation of traditional life. The act of colonisation upon her and her family changed her whole life. She became an unwanted appendage to the squatters and their wives. She held traditional cultural and spiritual beliefs, unlike the colonisers where usually the only things believed in had to have definite tangible evidence. Mary’s daughter Hannah was born in approximately 1845 prior to Federation which placed an invisible but divisive border through the centre of Kooma land. It was Mary that was had by many white men.
Mary was on the Narran River when she bore her child in her traditional Murri way at a birthing site. Traditionally Murri women bore their children at special sites. Mary went to that site to give birth to Hannah and most probably used a birthing stone as part of the birth process. A birthing stone is used in the same way as a doctor induces labour. This was common practice within her clan. A midwife would have cut the umbilical cord with a mussel shell before laying Hannah, the baby, on a bark wirree (small oval shaped bark dish). Hannah’s body would have been covered with animal fat - bunjal (goanna) or dinewan (emu). The animal fat cleansed the body of the baby and made the smoke adhere to the body. The smoking was done so that any bad spirits that were around at the time of the birth couldn’t enter the baby’s soul. Mary would have squatted over smoking sandalwood leaves after the birth for cleansing of her own body.

“Smoking the baby with herbs and exposing it to ash have both hygienic value and significance for ritual purification.” Lawlor 1991, p.157

There was a fifty three year old white Irish man who had Mary, along with many other white men. I assume that he was Hannah’s father but I can’t be sure. Hannah’s marriage certificate names John Dowdan, an Irish convict from Dublin, born in 1783, as her father, and Mary - (dash, hyphen) her numbardee. This and Hannah’s death certificate, which states Hannah’s numbardee as ‘Mary - Aboriginal Woman’, are the only written records of Mary that I have. Refer to images 1, 2 and 3 for a visual description of Mary.

...‘Mary - Aboriginal Woman’...
"The Aboriginal women are usually at the mercy of anybody from the proprietor or manager to the stockman, cook, rouseabout and jackaroo.... If they have Aboriginal husbands who are likely to object, these.... are either employed on distant parts of the run or are sent away altogether. Frequently the women do all the housework and are locked up at night to keep them from their own people." Evans, Saunders, Cronin 1988, p.103

It was common practice for drovers to take Aboriginal women along on their stock drives as their concubines. The women had their hair cut short, and were dressed as boys so no-one would know that the drovers had a Murri woman with them, as it was officially outlawed for white men to have sex with or marry Murri women. This didn’t stop them from being raped, kidnapped from their families and held as slaves and concubines, however. Mary was ostracised from her tribe because she had sex, whether or not it was by consent, with a white man and had a child of mixed blood out of that relationship. She couldn’t go back to her tribe after Hannah’s birth, her family wouldn’t accept her back after being with a whiteman and may have killed her. Mary would have been scared, ".....She dare not go amongst most of the bush tribes, or they would kill both her and her half-caste child." Stone 1974, p.113

The times were times of bloodshed and rapid dispossession of land by squatters and their families.

...Times of bloodshed...
"Land was peremptorily seized, and indigenes found that their former territories, hunting grounds, burial and sacred sites had suddenly been endowed with the name of some 'station', a name that denoted an alien concept of 'private property' and implied, as they soon painfully discovered, that the original owners were henceforward banished because, for instance, even their 'smell' disturbed the cattle. Land, the entire focus and central tenet of Aboriginal culture was torn suddenly and forcefully from its axis and made, instead, the exclusive preserve of the grazing herd." Evans, Saunders, Cronin 1988, p.41

Australia was supposedly *terra nullius*, a Latin term meaning *no one's land*. The view of the colonisers was that because my ancestors had no permanent residences, and were hunter-gatherers they had no right to prior ownership. However when Sir Thomas Mitchell was exploring central Queensland with the help of Aboriginal guides and trackers, he came across 'well-beaten paths and large permanent huts … and it was soon plain we had entered the home of a numerous tribe.' (Mitchell in Lilley 1975, p.2). Obviously this was not *terra nullius*. It would not have mattered how permanent the huts were, or how well beaten the tracks were, nothing would have stopped the invaders from seizing our land.

At this time, the people of the Narran River, my ancestors, were moving up and out because of the dispossession of their land causing the connections to our culture and history to change and become lost within the family boundaries. Aimlessly wandering and looking for safety, if they were lucky they found a *kind hearted* squatter who would let them camp on *his land claim*. Eventually the enforced mobilisation found my ancestors working on Queensland properties around the areas of Cunnamulla, Charleville, Roma, and Blackall.
My people went wherever they felt safe. Some property owners allowed them to stay, others wouldn’t allow them past the newly erected fences. The colonisers used many methods to keep Murries off their land, one of these was to lace the flour that was handed out with arsenic because “...if you give the blacks phosphorous in their flour it only makes their eyes water, but if you mix arsenic with the flour, that’ll stretch them out.” (Markus 1994, p.50). What an horrific way to die, I can only hope that my bargie’s family did not go through that. Mary and her family no longer had access to their lands, they could no longer hunt their foods, visit their burial or sacred sites, they were banished to places alien to them. See image 2 for a visual representation of the horror my ancestors lived through.

Even though Mary had a mixed blood baby, if the baby had died or if the baby had been taken from her by other means, Mary could not go back to her family. Mary’s people had been moved, dispossessed. Even if her tribe had accepted her back, she still couldn’t go back because her family had been dispersed. She had no home any more.

“I heard white men talk openly of the share they had taken in slaughtering whole camps, not only of men, but of women and children. They would defend it thus’ They said that the gins were as bad as the men, and that the piccaninnies, all their tribe being killed, would die of starvation if not also put out of the way...private persons go out to kill blacks and call it ‘snipe-shooting’. Awkward words are always avoided, you will notice. “Shooting a snipe” sounds better than “murdering a man”. But the blacks are never called men and women and children; “myalls” and “niggers” and “gins” and “piccaninnies” seem further removed from humanity.” Evans, Saunders, Cronin 1988, p.78
It's no wonder that Mary instigated the secreting of her identity which she past on to Hannah, then to Annie, then to Mabel, then to Dorothy, and then ultimately to me. I don't know what happened to Mary. She could have been murdered or slaughtered. There is no record of what happened to Mary. What happened to her, after she gave birth to Hannah. It's quite possible that she could have been one of the Murries killed in retaliation for the Hornet Bank Massacre. At the time Mary and her daughter Hannah were living on an adjoining property on the other side of the Great Dividing Range called Tooloombilla. The massacre occurred because the Fraser men of Hornet Bank station were constantly kidnapping and raping the Murri women. It was because of this that the Murri women's husbands, fathers and sons retaliated. The search party that was sent out to find the retaliators came across the mountains, from property to property murdering any black they could find, and the remaining Fraser son "having permission of the government to shoot the murderers, had shot hundreds." Lalor 1991, p.43

Hannah's second child, Sarah Ellen, was born on Tooloombilla station, she died in infancy, I've been told that she is buried on Gubberamunda station, however there is no record of her death, no grave site, no headstone, no marker. The descendants of Gubberamunda don't know anything about her burial on the property. I was told that Sarah was buried under the big tree that you can see from the kitchen window.

I shall never know what it felt like to live her lifestyle, before the whiteman came. To be free of restraints and materialism. To be so close to nature and numbardee earth, to live a total existence with the land only relying on nature. I wonder what were my bargies thoughts when she saw a whiteman for the first time. Was she scared, did she go with this John Dowdan freely or was she taken? Did he live her way of life or was she forced to live his? I wish I could have lived then to hear her stories, for her to tell me of our tribe, of our totems, of our dreaming. When all my Murri family were proud of themselves, to be what and who they were, before they were forced to deny.
"In Queensland there has always been more destruction of the blacks in occupying new country than in any other colony...it has been wholesale and indiscriminate and carried on with a coldblooded cruelty on the part of the whites unparalleled in the history of these colonies." Fitzgerald in Fesi 1993, p.70

I know that Mary told Hannah our stories. Told Hannah about her birthing, being born in the bush under an open sky and brought into a totally natural environment. To learn from people of an ancient culture. How did Mary bring Hannah up, was she able to use her traditional ways? Did she teach her how to weave their baskets or how to spin hair and fibre for string? I wonder did Mary teach Hannah how to find the wild plum or blackberries, or the yams, or show her what foods were safe to eat, how to catch fish, or were there lots of relatives and cousins who did this? I wonder if Mary taught Hannah how to grind up the nardoos seeds for Johnny cakes or where to find the pepper grass and pigweed seed.

Many squatters had been saved from starvation and thirst by the local Murries. The outback was especially hard on white women and they were very dependent upon Murri women for help with their daily lives. The Murri women were used not only for advice on what bush foods could be eaten, their expertise in childbirth was often called upon by the white women. Hannah worked on Gubberamunda station, working for the squatters, raising their kids, bathing them, getting them ready for school, acting as midwife for the women squatters. Hannah bore her first child Annie on Gubberamunda, she would have had help from the other domestic Murri women. In her book about Gubberamunda Anne Harris refers to the "lubras" that James Lalor, the property owner, would fetch from their camp on the creek, to assist his wife in childbirth. "James brought a lubra up from the camp and made her scrub up with hot water and soap." (Harris 1991, p.41) This could have been Hannah, my numbardee could be the "lubra" who helped this woman give birth.
"At times Aboriginal women generously shared their skills with white women; in the absence of white doctors and midwives, their knowledge of childbirth, wet-nursing and child care were especially important." Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath, Quartly 1994, p.145

The whole person under Bargie is gone. The right to have your own name - all other rights - identity, the loss of the ability to speak your language - speak for your self are gone. This is about genocide and extermination. It’s about the loss of everything about your self - the way you dress, speak, act, think, learn. Refer to images 7 for a visual description.

Was Mary’s life changed forever, was she alienated from the other Murri communities as well as not being accepted by the white community? I wonder if she attended a gathering in 1866 in Roma when the local Murri’s got together and held their traditional ceremony, or was she alienated from them, because she wasn’t from that land? Did she make sure Hannah knew where her people’s land was, where her soul belonged. Now constrained by whiteman’s clothes, did she have to conform to whiteman’s law?

"By the 1900s the Murri population of Queensland had been reduced from over 100,000 to approximately 15,000 persons." Fesl 1993, p.105

...I journeyed back to the areas my ancestors had lived, to find my relatives, my history, my stories...
It was during my stay in Blackall that I faced my first major onslaught of racism. While walking down the street I noticed a woman on the other side of the road selling raffle tickets. I looked for a few seconds because she had our families features and my 'genetic memory' took over, I was sure she was related. At each town I came to I would go to the information centre and ask where the local Aboriginal Organisation was, or where I could get help from the local Aboriginal people. The woman in the information centre at Blackall, responded to my question by telling me "there is no organisation", she further said that "there are no black people in Blackall". I was shocked by this statement and politely said, "but there are Aboriginal people walking on the street". She replied to me, "no there are no black people here, they don't want to live in Blackall, they all live in Charleville".

I did not pursue the fact that she thought no black people lived there and that they didn't want to live there, and asked where I could go to get help in finding my relatives, she pointed me in the direction of the local newspaper. At the newspaper office I was amazed to find that the person behind the desk was Murri! That wasn't my only shock though. After explaining that I was looking for my relatives and informing her of our surnames, she told me that the woman in the street selling raffle tickets, was my cousin! She then went ahead and told me that I shouldn't approach her because if I did "I would be opening up a can of worms". My mind began to work overtime imagining all sorts of catastrophes that had befallen my new found family and what on earth it could be, that had made this woman warn me off approaching my cousin. I decided to heed her advice and write to my cousin when I got back home as it would be less confronting. This I did and have since met up with my family who have been extremely open with me. They were just as excited as I was to find their other relatives.
My cousins are a well respected family in Blackall, one of them is a nursing sister in the local hospital. She and her family are not seen as Murries by the local non-indigenous community. Their identities have been suppressed and secreted not only by themselves but also by the non-indigenous residents of Blackall. The woman in the newspaper office said to me “everyone knows they’re Murries, but no one says anything”.

I found it very easy to understand why my cousins didn’t identify. I thought if it is like this now, the racism, with my people not visible as Murries in the eyes of the non-indigenous community, then imagine what it was like when my bargies lived here. To be acknowledged and accepted in the community, to become the nursing sister of the hospital and keep the position, my cousins suppressed their identities. Their identities became invisible within their community, and they are accepted as long as they remain invisible. Refer to images 7,8 and 9 for a visual description of invisible and suppressed identity.

The “...can of worms”, was just that. When my cousins great great great aunty (not on my mums side) was a baby she was stolen by white people from her Murri family. Of course this did not bring about any reaction from the community until about three years later when the Murri family ‘stole’ her back. This made headlines in the local paper, “Sister Stolen By The Blacks” with the Murries who just wanted their child back becoming criminals!

It was because of the racism that I encountered in Blackall that I needed to bring forth my ancestral numbardee (Mary/Bargie) so that I and my relatives could be rebirthed from her, and thus regain our respect, our true souls and our identities.
Ancestral Numbardee

refer to image A

The ancestral numbärdee image was created from seed pods gathered on my journey that I took where I followed in the tracks of my women ancestors, looking for my relatives. Ancestral numbärdee who gave life to all of us, to all of our family - her blood running through the veins of each one of her descendants - we are all created from her. She connects us to our land, to our dreaming, to our culture, to our heritage. She is very powerful, a wise woman.

Linking our family back up with the extended family, removing the chaos that government policy placed upon our families. Dispossessed of family connections we are now all connected, creating the body of our ancestral numbärdee.

The pods one for each person descended from Mary, represent the womb which gives life. Each pod is like a birth. Underneath the image a piece of gauze symbolic of the womb collects the seeds that fall. The seeds, represent life, seeds falling from my ancestral numbärdee’s womb to the wombs of all her children. Symbolic of my women ancestors nurturing their families and keeping their families safe - disconnected family groups now connected, back in the womb of their ancestral numbärdee. Instils in my family a sense of connection, of belonging to our extended family.
The pods are full of life, life representing knowledge, culture, ready to give forth, ready to burst, to produce, to birth, to rebirth. Holding back, waiting for the right time to give birth, to be reborn.

We are vehicles for this knowledge to be given, to be passed on, to survive. The knowledge that my ancestral numberdee had, has survived. As each pod opens and the seeds fall out, the person belonging to that pod, begins to rebirth and regain their cultural identity and knowledge. The seed pods protect the essence of the person’s spirit and the connections with past, present and future.

My ancestral numberdee’s spirit manifested in the art form while it was suspended. Her spirit constantly kept the art form gently moving, causing the seed pods to shed their seeds, thus re-birthing the souls of her children, her descendants.

The seed pods were collected from Blackall in Queensland. They are Mimosaceae Albizia Procera Benth, or commonly called women’s tongues. They were given this common name because they hang in groups on the tree, and when the wind blows the pods clack together, apparently men think they sound like women chattering, hence the name.

The women’s tongues became the storyteller. They reconnect our family links. Visually they became a powerful form of saying, we are from this land, we are all linked. The women’s tongues allow my stories to be told. My women ancestors use their tongues to tell me our stories. My own woman’s tongue passes these stories onto my relatives, onto my children, and onto non-indigenous Australians.

...Women’s tongues became the storyteller...
Smoking Ritual (1992)

My bargies died on alien land, their weebulloo (women’s spirits) were in turmoil, they were not at rest, to send their spirits back to our totemic ground I performed a smoking ritual. To do this I gathered a very large tree trunk that had been washed up onto the beach where my numbardee lives, thus being a gift from her to her numbardee and bargies. Fresh yaraan (eucalyptus) leaves were placed onto hot coals which were under the trunk creating the ritual smoke which everyone walks through and around. The smoke came up through the wood gently cleansing the souls of those engaging in the smoking who were wanting the weebulloo to be sent home to rest. In Aboriginal society when death comes the person must be returned to their land which is their numbardee, the earth, the smoking caused their spirits to return to the homeland, their numbardee, thus completing the circle of life.

As the smoke permeated over and through me, I felt a release of the anger I had held about the atrocities that my ancestors had gone through. I knew at once that their spirits had returned to Kooma land, where they belonged, to their numbardee, the earth.

...Their weebulloo were in turmoil...
"Smoke is the symbol of spiritual existence that both precedes and follows life." Lawlor
1991, p.157
I wanted to find out more about Annie, so I wrote to Gubberamunda station where she had been born. I was informed that the property had changed hands, and that there were no records from the early days. Apparently the records had been burnt. It is probably just as well, because I found out that sometimes when a Murri baby was born on a property the child was listed in the horses record book. Murri births and deaths were generally not recorded. This was also a form of extermination, if there was no record of that person, then to the colonisers they didn’t exist. If Aboriginal people could be exterminated, by death or by any other method, the colonisers would have no guilt about taking what they assumed was theirs. Refer to images 4, 5 and 6 for a visual representation of extermination.

Why were you born on a cattle station, what made your numbardee travel to Roma – was it whiteman’s doing? Did Hannah your numbardee tell you stories? Did you know your bargie, Mary? Did you wonder, like me, about your bargie’s life before the whiteman’s coming? Did you wish you could turn back the clock?
Do you know our dreaming and how the rivers were made, how to survive with nature, how to live a traditional existence? Were you shown what foods to eat from the bush? How were you treated on the cattle station Gubberamunda? Were you forced to work, were you treated like a slave? Did your extended family celebrate your birth in the traditional ways and teach you of your heritage, or weren't they allowed? Were you called names, Were you subjected to racism? Did your Numbardee tell you of her life did she take you back to our traditional land? Or did you have to hide it?

Annie married a Swede, he became the black sheep of his family because he married her. Apparently his family disinherited him because he married a black woman.

Two generations after Mary, Mary's granddaughter, Annie had returned to the area, Coongoola station, where descendants of her clan were still living. There was not a total loss, not total disconnection from our roots - there were still familial connections with Annie. It wasn't until the next generation that those connections were severed, until now.

In 1916 Annie was working on Coongoola Station, the property where many of the descendants of the Kooma people ended up living and working. It was while she was working on this property that she heard of her daughter Stella's death. Stella was working at the time as a waitress in a cafe in Charleville. A position that she was lucky to have, not many Aboriginal people in the outback in Queensland were able to find decent work. It was probably because Stella was half-caste, that she was given work because "officials ... selected the girls with the lighter skins for positions as waitresses in hotels and cafes." (Rowley 1973, p.233) Stella was only 22 years old when she died from pneumonia, an illness which "was not usually fatal to Europeans". However this type of illness swept through the Murri people, because their immune systems had not yet developed against illnesses such as pneumonia. The illnesses that Murri people were afflicted with "encouraged an indifference among whites to the point of callousness ...". Evans, Saunders & Cronin 1988, p.96
When I found out that Annie, my great bargie, had died in Goodna mental hospital, in 1952, the year before I was born, I had to wonder was she really mentally ill. If the ancestors were talking to her and she was answering them, she would have been considered by the whiteman to be mental. Her culture, her spirituality, the horrors that she and her bargie had gone through, would have become her undoing and she became another victim of colonisation. As Pat O'Shane stated in a speech she gave to the Royal Australian & New Zealand College of Psychiatrists, “I recognised the things that happened to the thousands of other Aboriginal families like our family, and I marvelled that we all weren't stark, raving mad.” Spectrum, SMH. May 27 1995, Pg 7A. Refer to images 4, 5 and 6 for a visual description of victim, and image 2 for a description of the horrors they went through.

Annie named one of her daughters Charlotte Amby - Amby is the local language meaning woman. At the time Annie lived on Amby Downs station as a domestic - servant and house keeper.

“White women generally stood in the relationship of employer to black women, who performed a wide range of domestic labour for them, including cooking, waitressing, cleaning, gardening.” Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath, Quarterly 1994, p.144

I can't imagine what my bargies did for medical attention when they or their children got sick. If Annie had known of her traditional medicines she may have used them. However access to her traditional medicines had long since been denied her, by the taking of her traditional clan lands by the colonisers. She was now living on non traditional land and the medicinal plants were alien to her. Aboriginal people weren't allowed in hospitals, Murri women also mistrusted the role of the hospital for birthing. They would have been vulnerable and may have had their new born babies taken away, they had no way of protecting themselves or their babies. Reekie points out the conditions that Murri women were forced to put up with when they were allowed the use of a hospital.
“Aboriginal women were frequently denied access to the maternity hospitals, and usually were confined to a tin shed out the back of the hospital grounds if they were courageous enough to use the hospital facilities.” Reekie 1994, p.94

It was particularly bad for Annie who birthed her children near the Railway Stations in major towns. I can only assume that she wasn’t allowed to use the hospital and that being near the railway station, if she did need help, there would be people close by who might have come to her aid. I say might have come to her aid because even if she were allowed into a hospital the staff may have refused to attend to her.

“It has been a rule of the ... hospital ever since it has been in existence ... that aboriginals should not be admitted as patients - both from lack of separate accommodation for them and the absolute dislike - we might say almost refusal of the servants to attend upon them.” Evans, Saunders, Cronin 1988, p.97

In one generation we have gone from traditional culture to an alien culture that put invisible boundaries around what we were expected to be a part of. We were expected to be part of the wider community, a community that had hospitals built for their benefit, but we weren’t allowed the use of them!

When we are sick or alone we nurture ourselves, we envelope ourselves in something precious to us, we pamper ourselves. I needed to nurture Hannah and Annie, I needed to sing the praises of Annie, to chant to her, to raise her up above the dirt she had obviously been thought of. To allow her some pride in herself as a Murri and a mother. So I created a shroud of bark, to wrap her in, to nurture her in.
Annie's cape was the bark cape. This cape describes Hannah and Annie, it was made as a way of saying that these women - Hannah and Annie - belonged to this culture. A culture that they could no longer identify with because identifying in Queensland meant annihilation, both physically and mentally. The bark cape is an offering to my bargies - to Hannah and Annie. I am honouring them and the culture that they were forced to deny.

...Identifying in Queensland meant annihilation...
Birth Cape (1992)
refer to image 1

I constructed capes for the women in my family, the first being for my
great bargie who for all intents and purposes came from the
traditional ways. The bark cape was the end of the freedom to use
our culture and the ability to pass on our history. It belongs to
colonisation and extermination. It belongs to Bargie. It represents my
Bargie as she was. True culture, true to herself. It represents family
values, family culture, history, known history, known family history.
It was made with paper bark, traditional as it would have been. It
has a bone at the edge at the top to do it up. It is made from bark
and helped me to rekindle my ties with our land and spirits. Bark
capes were a traditional means of keeping the body warm, they were
spread upon the ground to lie or sit on and to wrap around the
babies. They were also utilised for sheltering under from the
weather, the hot sun, wind or rain.
I wanted to clothe my great bargie in her culture, wrap her spirit with the spirit of her numbardee, the earth. To understand where my numen belongs, to understand me. Because my great bargie was of our traditional society, bark was the only medium that could appropriately represent her spirit.

The cape covers the body, the mask covers the face.

I keep clothing each woman in the appropriate way to connect her back to how I vision her, see her now. The bark protects from the elements. This woman knew everything that I didn't. She knew about us. If she had been allowed she would have passed that knowledge down to us, to me. I guess everything I wanted to be and everything I wanted to know was in there wrapped in this cloak.

Made from organic materials, the cape will start to naturally break up, thereby returning to numbardee earth, a traditional and natural occurrence. In Aboriginal life everything must naturally be returned to numbardee earth to complete the life cycle - the afterlife is more important than the present day. So as the bark cape breaks up and disintegrates and if the resin starts to break off the mask - this is all part of my work, the occurrence of a living culture.

...A living culture...
The masks represent images of the women, images that describe what has happened to each woman. Expressive masks. I could feel the evil, I could sense the despair, I understood.

The soul is laid bare for all to see, the spirit of her culture, her numbardee the earth is seen. She is the soul of my culture. Her pain, her despair has taken over her image. The evil that came is seen. Embellished, ritually, with feathers from the dinewan, the clan totem for our family. The dinewan is such a fragile being, strong and frail at the same time, feathers so fine, like hair, eyes that pierce into you, reading your mind your soul. For the emu can see your soul, it is sacred, it is more than just an animal. It is a bird that commands reverence with eyes that pierce into you, reading your mind your soul.
...Eyes that pierce into you, reading your mind your soul...
Woman's Vessel
refer to image 3

Vessel as body. Fine, delicate, simple - takes a long time to make - my ancestors had a lot more time than us to create what was needed. From one simple grass a vessel is created to carry small foods, all natural material, native life - simpler, easier. It is called nutgrass. This was a staple food source, the tuber was cooked, roasted over hot coals.

Simple, peaceful existence - collect the reeds while the kids are catching booglies (yabbies, crayfish) and getting mussels for tea. A bag made from a natural material, no waste, it grows on our land, take only enough to make the bag. This woman knew how to make a bag to carry her special things, without destroying the environment or creating chemical and pollution problems, something that would naturally disintegrate with time back to the land from where it came. I decided to leave the heads on the reeds - this is natural embellishment, making attractive with the natural resource of the plant itself.
I found the tree that has the fruit on it that was used for birth control, these seeds I will put in Annie’s bag. Bags were embellished when used in ceremonies - ceremonial bags, food collecting bags, utensil bags. Inside the bag I placed ochres from the river representing the spirit of her land and a twist of my hair connecting her to me.

...Vessel as body...
5. Bargie - death cape. Mabel
daughter of Annie
granddaughter of Hannah
great granddaughter of Mary

Integration

Descendant of the Kooma clan.
Mah - Bandicoot

I knew you bargie, as my grandmother, or I thought I did.
You died with your secrets, just as you were told to do by your numbardee.
You lived your life hiding from the authorities, from your family, from yourself. I have found out a lot about you.

I know you are pleased that our Aboriginality is no longer a secret. No longer to be shamed of.

The integration policies caused my bargie and many other Aboriginal people to distance themselves from their family, and sever the connections between themselves and their culture. The implications of the integration policies meant that for many families it was safer to keep secret their identities. Refer to images 4, 5 and 6 for a visual description of secreting identity.
It must have been hard having to keep your history, your life, your family, a secret from everyone. Your life, your numbardee's life, your bargie's life must have been horrific to make you keep it all a secret, it must have been worse than what the books say. The books are only words, to live through it, to survive it, must have been an enormous achievement. I know you are happy that your wahroogah and grand wahroogah and great grand wahroogah are proud to say they are Mum. It is not something to be shamed of.

Your life must have been hard. What was it like to be sent to work for white people when you were only 8 years old when you were still a child yourself? You still needed your numbardee then, you weren't able to listen to her stories, she couldn't teach you your culture, you weren't able to learn from your numbardee. The bonds that you had with your numbardee were broken, you lived a lonely life on that property, with strangers who couldn't replace your family. They taught you to crochet! How did you love your own wahroogah when you weren't taught how to love? How did you teach your own wahroogah about love and family bonds, family commitments, when your numbardee wasn't able to teach you.

"An imperative of traditional Aboriginal culture is that the mother fill the void of the child's neediness with a world full of caring, constant affection, generosity, and a deep sense of compassion for all beings. This compassion is conveyed at the moment the infant, in the act of taking food, participates in the inexorable law of earthly existence: the source of one's life is interdependent with the life of everything around one and dependent on the sacrifice or death of others." Lambert 1993, p.139
My bargie was told to live and act white if she wanted to survive. She was sent to work on Maryvale station. She was told never to acknowledge her father in public, and that if she saw him in the street she was to walk on the other side of the road. She was forced to - sit like them, dress like them, live like them, speak like them, think like them, copy them, pray like them, dance like them, sing like them, read like them, write like them, eat like them, believe in them, celebrate like them, paint like them, draw like them, work like them, move like them, wash like them, cook like them, birth like them, name like them, bathe like them, run like them, play like them, learn like them, cry like them, laugh like them, remember like them, work like them, be happy like them, stand like them. She had to conform to outside pressures, pressures that the white society placed upon her (refer to image 7 for a visual description).

She survived by marrying a white man moving from one oppressive situation to another. Blind obedience - passed onto her from her numbardee. She allowed my grandfather who became her safety net, to take full control of her life, telling her what she should do and when she should do it. Because he was white he kept the hounds at bay. He brought her from Queensland to Redfern and then to a new house in what was then the outer suburbs of Sydney.

"If a lighter-skinned Aboriginal girl married a white man, this could be approved because it would lead to the 'breeding out of colour.'" Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath, Quarter 1994, p.288

Pressures of outside influences were felt by my bargie even when they couldn't be seen. Such as needing to keep the house spotlessly clean, her wahroogah under control at all times, always spotlessly clean and neatly dressed. "All Aboriginal people were subject to surveillance, even those living privately in houses in towns." (National Report 20.3.10)

My bargie achieved her high standards of cleanliness under the pressures of government policy which demanded her to "meet the ideal standards and be examined at any time, or your children will be taken away and made wards of the state."  

National Report 20.3.12
How would this constant fear of harassment and threats have affected my grandmother? To feel that someone may be watching, someone may be listening, all the time. My bargie worried all the time, she passed this onto my numbardee, my numbardee passed this onto me. Worrying over silly little things! Worrying over what people might say! Worrying breeds mental anguish, breeds phobias, never able to relax or feel calm - peace.

My numbardee told me that bargie "didn't like to go out in public, if she could get out of it she would, she didn't fit in". She must have been so fearful that someone would find out about her secreted identity (refer to image 6 for a visual representation of secreted identity). Numbardee related a story to me of when the people who lived next door asked her to sing for them, her numbardee wouldn't go with her instead she went into the closest room of her house and listened to her daughter singing by placing her ear against the wall. My bargie told me she thought her wahroogah would be shamed of her if they knew her identity.

Next door to my bargie lived a Greek family who lived by their culture, who spoke their language. I remember at certain times in the year they would cut the throat of a goat, then cook it and eat it. I was told that this was what they did where they came from - it was their culture. However right next door lived my bargie and her family, she wasn't able to use her culture - her language, she wasn't able to pass on to her children their culture and identity, because she had to keep it secreted away (refer to images 4, 5 and 6).

My bargie had to speak a proper English to get by with her secret. She had no relatives here to speak any of her lingo with, so what dialect she may have learnt when she was with her numbardee has died with her. She was isolated from her family. There was no family here to talk with, to discuss problems with, no numbardee to guide her, or for her to go to in times of need.
She couldn’t carry on the rituals of her culture where the women get together and talk about women’s business, which they did usually on a daily basis, even yelling and screaming their worries away. The therapy of women’s business helped to pre-empt any major problems within the family groups. Well my bargie had none of this.

I remember when I was staying with her one time, my uncle telephoned to speak to bargie about his problems. I answered the phone and when my grandfather heard who it was he adamantly told her “your not to speak to him Mabel, he’s made his bed let him lie in it”. I could see that my bargie was upset, she wanted to speak to her son, to help him, to comfort him. Now my numbardee says “he’s made his bed let him lie in it”, although she doesn’t carry it out, it’s just talk! So my bargie had no one here to speak to about her life, to give her courage, self esteem, or confidence that she needed to be able to control her own life. She had a double dose of oppression - she was “neither the dominant culture, nor the dominant gender.” Hazelhurst, 1994, p.21

My bargie would have been extremely vulnerable when her husband (the white protector) and her elder sons went off to war - all of a sudden this black woman is left with all these wahroogah and no protector. If she had put one foot in the wrong place at this time she would have blown the whistle on her family - inspectors were everywhere in these days waiting to swoop, if her home was untidy or floors weren’t swept then her wahroogah could have been taken away, “these inspectors snooped into wash baskets, kitchen and food cupboards, and ticked off on their forms whether children’s noses were clean.” Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath, Quartly 1994, p.294

The chance that my aunts and uncles could be taken away from their numbardee was great, they only had to be dirty from playing or fall over and hurt themselves and they would have been categorised as neglected wahroogah, and subsequently forcibly removed from their home.
Indeed the lighter skinned a child was, the more likely it was that they were taken away from their parents, so that they could be brought up as *Europeans*. But because my bargie toed the line and suppressed her identity her wahoogah were protected from their identity being known and thus removal from their parents and home.

The effect of identity suppression is showing up in psychological ways today in her wahoogah and grand wahoogah. Had she not suppressed her identity her wahoogah's history would be very different today, it would be like thousands of other Aboriginal wahoogah, who were forcibly removed from their parents, brought up in institutions, foster homes - even adopted by white families. Their cultural identity being denied them in anyway. My bargie had to suppress her identity for the survival of her wahoogah while the Colonisers denied the identities of the wahoogah they forcibly removed.

My bargie's Aboriginality was not visible within her family or within her boundaries. She was of a race that was unacceptable to the community as a whole. Race is a construct - therefore, all of bargie's life was constructed for her - not by her, because she was Murri - another race, her life was lived/decided for her. Race is constructed through relations of dominance and subordination. Race structures ways that determine peoples rights or lack of them.

Women have multiple identities within their boundaries - Numbardee on the one hand was a Murri woman, numbardee and wife, and on the other hand she was perceived by outsiders as a white woman, mother and wife.
"They were systematically excluded from the emerging nation: ... legally, through their subjection to a separate and inferior legal status; and culturally and psychologically, through an extraordinary forgetfulness, a voluntary amnesia which rendered them invisible within the nation." Stanner 1969; Smith 1981 in Pettman 1992, p.7

All of my immediate uncles remember things about their identity differently. Uncle Percy remembers his bargie telling him that she was Aboriginal when she was dying. Aunty Beryl didn't realise, but her husband thought “there must have been something”, because of her lips.

Uncle Allan was asked at work if he was Koori - he said “yes, how do you know”, the person replied, “I can tell”, he told my Uncle that his wife was Koori and where she worked. Uncle Allan proudly said “she might know my niece, she’s been working there” It turned out that this person was the husband of one of my friends. On one hand your recognised as being Murni/Koori on the other to recognise it openly yourself is to reopen the “can of worms” that the woman from Blackall was referring to and to re-open the scars that my bargie had secreted away. My interpretation of bargie secreting her identity is described visually in her woman’s vessel (refer image 6).

When my uncle related this story to me he said it with pride and proudly owned me as his niece. What then does Uncle Allan identify as, when he has been brought up without being given the freedom of identifying as Murni, his indigeneity has been thwarted As an elder he can feel a sense of pride, but what has he lost in not being able to feel that as a young person? What have all my uncles and aunts lost in the process of being denied their culture, heritage, language, their familial bonds? They have lost the ability to have compassion, understanding, patience, they are needy people, searching for love, searching for their identity.
One whole branch of my bargies family were all fostered out. Split up and fostered out after their numbardee, my bargies sister died at age 32. There were five wahroogah, the youngest only one month old. If all the families had not have been split up, if we had known our relatives, if we had been able to keep our family traditions, our culture, the families wouldn’t have let this family be torn apart. These cousins would have been taken care of, looked after by their family.

One of the boys, Frederick went on to father six wahroogah, five of whom were brought up in an orphanage! Two generations of family growing up without knowledge of their identity, their families, their kin. Two generations of lost wahroogah.

My cousin Stan, also an artist, was one of those wahroogah brought up in the orphanage, St Augustines in Geelong and St Catherines in Ballarat. Stanley was very young when he was taken, and does not remember much about his parents. He does remember being in a big bed with his parents and a police woman coming into the room. As he got older he was told he was in the orphanage for his own “care and protection”. He suffered a beating for trying to find his numbardee - they said to him “your causing trouble”. One of the orphanage brothers would pick him up by the hair and at other times he would be kneed in the face. On numerous occasions he had been hit in the back with a football. He knows where his brothers are living, but is not very close to them. No family bonding ever occurred in the orphanage. It was an institution and wasn’t set up to be a family environment. He doesn’t know what happened to his father or where he is, or even if he is still alive.

“In Queensland and New South Wales after 1915, children could be classed as neglected and institutionalised merely because of their Aboriginality. White authorities had control over the ‘care and custody’ of children.....” Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath, Quarty 1994, p.290
I remember my bargie's sister, Aunty Lena, telling me about her life. She worked all over central Queensland, living on the river banks, building the fences that contained the properties and that kept the Murries from their spiritual connections. I asked her why bargie had left Queensland and her family, she said to me "well they were still shooting us then!". When Lena told me this it was on one of her good days - her good days were when she felt good enough about herself to admit her identity. The atrocities she faced which were forced on her by a white society caused her to deny her identity in order to cope.

She was told she was no good and was sent away at the age of 7 to work on the property Gubberamunda. Here she minded the owners wahroogah and cleaned the house while the wahroogah were at school - she was a domestic. She was never taught to read and write. Fesi states that "from the age of nine years, girls were sent out to work in the homes of settlers as domestics" and "did not receive enough English teaching to be literate." (Fesi 1993, p.111). She was 80 years old when I met her and was still terrified the authorities would do something if they knew she was a Murri. Her house had every window barred and the doors had steel grates in front of them that she kept locked. No one could get in and no one could get out!

I often cried tears when thinking about my bargie and about Lena, tears of anger, of pain, of comfort. I felt the extent to which my bargie went to in order for her and her wahroogah to survive. My bargie didn't discuss her childhood with her wahroogah, didn't pass on acts of child play, didn't tell anyone of her growing years, her childhood secrets. I became entangled in her web of silence and secretiveness. I wanted the world to know of it. I created for her an armament of net, so that her spirit could at last relax, and so be at peace.

..."They were still shooting us then!"...
Death Cape (1992)
refer image 4

Mabel's cape is about the keeping in of secrets, the keeping out of everybody else. It is about protecting herself, her family, her identity. It is about my bargie protecting all that was sacred to her.

Cape of net woven with echidna quills pointing out, stopping anyone from touching it, from getting to what is on the inside. Death of culture, death of natural existence, death of safe existence. Keeping safe that which is on the inside. Nothing can harm the inside.

...The cape is a net...

Entwined within this cape of net is this woman's knowledge that she secreted away. This really meant the destruction and alienation of her relationship to her culture. You can see through it - you can capture something with this net, it's like the colonisers capturing all of her ancestors.

The echidna quills are woven into each knot. At every join - knot, there is a protective point - a needle sharp quill. Protecting my bargie and stopping anyone from getting inside the cape, including me. While she was alive she never disclosed any of her secrets to me.
While weaving the net, I could feel her hurt, her pain, her anger at the life she had to live. I could sense that at times her life was despondent, that she was confused with the role her numbardee had taken in her life. She had to keep her distance. This was her protective armour. She wanted to be able to speak of herself - now she can. I excised the anger that I felt for those who had treated my bargie so badly.

...She had to keep her distance. This was her protective armour...
Mask - Bargie (1992)
refer image 5

Her culture devoured by others stripped of all soul. Hiding that which was her life blood. Her soul withered away, no more culture. Her soul devoured, her culture stripped, eroded, denuded.

Angophora resin, blood red, silently weeping from the wound of its host. Silently doctoring the damaged limb. It is the feeling of serenity of knowing the forest and its trees. The forest owns me, it lets me have the resin when it wants to. To collect the resin is to know, to learn from the tree, to feel for that tree, if the resin is running the tree feels pain, you feel pain for that tree. Because of its pain it surrenders the resin to be used in other ways by myself, used to mend, to bond, to strengthen, as the tree does for itself, it mends, it bonds, it strengthens. My bargie eaten away, silently weeping blood red angophora tears - devoured by another culture - her substance still there, still there under the surface. Her spirit still comforted by her culture, still nurtured by the spirits of her ancestors. It is made from white ant eaten wood, angophora resin and has a dinewan feather attached

...Her soul devoured...
Woman's Vessel

collecting vegetation for Bargie's bag - prickly fine
needles all over it. Our culture secreted away inside this
vessel, feminine - women’s work to weave. The prickly
needles stopping anyone from delving into the inside
and keeping what is inside secret from the outside. You
can’t put your hand inside the vessel without being cut
and scratched by the thorns, what is inside cannot be
touched. Sealing her identity and culture in a thorny
haven.

Protective of all that is inside and alienating to all those
outside. Tantalisingly alluring, yet deceptively
captivating, like a lizard able to blend with its
environment for protection - this vessel deceptively
lures and keeps out all who touch, protecting its
contents.

...Sealing her identity...
A nest - protective, impenetrable by the invaders, by the predators. Natural predator control - a native called galvanised burr.

I build up walls, round and round, no beginning, no ending, Murri culture - no beginning, no ending. Murri culture - circular. Linked to our land - galvanised burr, natural - native to Murri land - protective of the environment, the introduced species, sheep and cattle won't go where it grows. Roos, dinewans, goannas, lizards live along side it.

Lying inside the vessel are ochres from the Narran river and a Dinewan feather. Ochres representing the land, the spirit of her land, the spirit of herself. The Dinewan feather representing the spirit of her people. You can't get to them, the prickles stick into you, they protect that which is on the inside.

...Murri culture - no beginning, no ending...
6. Numbardee - blanket cape. Dorothy

daughter of Mabel
granddaughter of Annie
great granddaughter of Hannah
great great granddaughter of Mary
Assimilation

Descendant of the Kooma clan
Mah - Moodai (possum)

When my bargin told me what our totems were and I passed this knowledge on to my numbardee, she immediately knew
which totem was hers. Special people in her life had always called her possum, they said it was because she reminded
them of a possum. My numbardee told me that she feels a connection with, and has a special affection for the possum.
Even though she hadn’t known her totem before this, the connections with her culture, her spirituality were within her, she
just hadn’t seen them.

Assimilation meant to my numbardee and her brothers that they had to be the same as everyone else. My numbardee was
absorbed into mainstream Australia which effectively exterminated her cultural heritage and her identity became invisible. I
visually describe cultural extermination and invisible identity in her blanket cape, refer to image 7.
You have told me lots of stories. Like when your numbardee scolded you for being out in the sun for so long. You would get a really dark tan and you couldn't understand why she was so upset. You didn't question your numbardee when she said to you, "you look just like a bloody Abo", you were never inquisitive.

..."You look just like a bloody Abo"...

When my numbardee was little she can vividly remember her numbardee rushing her to hospital because a boy down the road threw some sort of acid in her face, he said he didn't like the look of her. Could this be because this boy's parents had suspicions that my numbardee was Aboriginal, could they have planted the seeds of racism in their son? Treated like she was black, when she didn't know or realise she was black.

You were never taken to visit your Queensland relatives once you were old enough to wonder about them, you had respect for your numbardee and you didn't question. You told me people often asked if you had foreign blood in you because of your colouring and that the girl who lived across the road from you often called you a "dago". It must have been hard to not ask questions, hard to understand why you had to stay out of the sun, when a good tan was what most girls aimed for. When Colin was born with dark olive skin and later we all ended up with frizzy dark hair, it must have been hard not demanding that questions be answered.
“In Australia today there may be one hundred thousand people of Aboriginal descent who do not know their families or communities. They are the people, or the descendants of people, who were removed from their families by a variety of white people for a variety of reasons. They do not know where they come from; some do not even know they are of Aboriginal descent.” Read in Edwards & Read 1989, p.ix

My Bargie allowed her wahroogah to grow up without the knowledge of their identity. It was done out of a need to protect her wahroogah and her self. She was protecting them from racism - from being denied basic human rights, from being victimised at school, from being the other (refer images 7,8 and 9).

My numbardee told me that her Aunty Muriel said to her “your lucky you didn’t get big lips, you’ve got nice fine lips”. Big lips - people might talk, people might figure out where we are from. My numbardee then went through all of her brothers and sisters telling me who got the big lips and who got the fine lips! Big lips aren’t acceptable, big lips might identify us - big lips must be synonymous with being black. Just like women are suppose to be slim to be accepted by society, we have to have fine lips to be accepted. Imagine waiting for the birth of your wahroogah and all the time worrying what its features would be like

Many years ago numbardee had been told by a family friend that she looked like a “wealthy Italian women”, wealthy because she had a nice dress on and Italian because she had dark olive skin, brown eyes and dark hair. My cousin told me they thought they had Indian blood in them, because that’s what they were told by my bargie Annie. My other cousin Stan has been asked if he was Greek. It was okay to be anything other than Aboriginal!
Sally Morgan found when she was at school that it was "a terrible thing to be Aboriginal. Nobody wants to know you .... You can be Indian, Dutch, Italian, anything, but not Aboriginal." (Morgan 1987, p.98). So my family were acceptable to the white society as long as they thought we were foreigners, as long as they thought we were anything other than blacks, heathen, primitive blacks. White society couldn't see our family as blacks because we didn't fit their description - their stereotype of a black person. We weren't dirty, we weren't unkept, we weren't heathens, we weren't primitive, we lived in houses, we swept our floors, we kept our children's noses clean. We didn't fit their description of us, so we couldn't possibly be black. Our Aboriginality remained invisible (refer to images 7,8 and 9).

"By 1910 it was politically less important that Aboriginal children become carpenters or maids. ...whatever else the children grew up to be, they should not be allowed to grow up as identifying Aborigines." Read in Edwards & Read 1989, p.xiii

My numbardee didn't like our friends coming over to play, she didn't like them coming inside, she didn't like them seeing our home, or knowing about our business, a protective device I believe that has developed from her numbardee Mabel, in trying to keep her identity a secret. Mabel's sister Lena was exactly the same. They both developed a protective habit of isolating themselves, their families, and their identity from the surrounding community. The flow on from Bargie to Mabel, to my numbardee not only alienates my family from themselves, from their real identity, it also means they cannot defend themselves and their real identity from external criticism. This in turn continues the cycle of silence that creates ignorance and feeds intolerance.

...We didn't fit their description...
Numardee related a recent conversation with her best friend who was complaining about the Aboriginals "getting all that money". When I responded by saying "did you tell her that we don't get any more than anyone else", she said "well I thought someone should do something, you need to write into the papers and tell them all this". My response was "but you should tell her when she is talking to you", and numbardee replied "I can't say that."

My interpretation of my mother's silence is that she is scared of losing her best friend. That if her best friend finds out she is a Murri, she is scared of losing her, scared of what her friend will think of her, and this best friend is a christian!

So how does that make my numbardee feel? She knows her identity, she knows who her numbardee was, where she was from. Damned if you do, damned if you don't, or as Sally Morgan put it, "people talk, you know, we don't want people talkin' about us. You dunno what they might say!" Morgan 1987, p.78

She was sent to Sunday school each Sunday, her life was very neat and clean and tidy. Neat - Clean - Tidy, this is visually represented in images 7,8 and 9. My numbardee taught Sunday school and sang in the church choir. This was another way that bargie ensured her wahroogah fitted in. Everyone went to church! This in turn became part of my growing up, our childhood.

...And this best friend is a christian!...
Numbardee can remember her Aunty Doris turning up on their doorstep and wanting to stay with them. Numbardee reckons she didn’t know or wasn’t aware of her Aboriginality. Yet obviously she didn’t think it strange that her numbardee’s sister was dark skinned, or why her father wouldn’t let them stay. Grandad wouldn’t let them stay, because other people might ask and numbardee was sent with Doris to help her find somewhere to live. Yet at the same time her father would bring sailors from other countries home to stay for the night. My bargie’s family weren’t good enough they were the wrong culture, but any other was okay! Numbardee said her father made a comment like “let them earn their own way”.

My numbardee, aunt and uncles learnt that their numbardee’s family were different somehow, that they weren’t the type to be associated with. My bargie allowed her husband to denigrate and belittle her family, allowed him to continue the onslaught of colonisation. Why? If she didn’t, people might put two and two together, they might figure it out, they might uncover the secret! My bargie had been brought up believing she was different, believing these things that had been said about her, her family, her race.

My numbardee told me about the time her numbardee took her to meet her bargie in Charleville. The only time in her life that she ever saw her bargie. It was around 1934 and numbardee was about 7 years old. Numbardee said “it was the longest train ride I have ever taken” and that “it was a dirty, dusty place”. She remembers getting a big splinter in her foot from the verandah, she doesn’t remember her bargie, at all. Her brothers, my uncles, played with the local kids, they had billy goat races, the goats pulled the billy carts they were sat on. Even at this early age my numbardee had been inducted into white society’s idea of cleanliness, that dust is dirty, that her bargie lived in a “dirty, dusty place”.

This was the only time in her life that my numbardee met her bargie, and only the second time that she was to meet some of her other cousins, aunts, uncles.
My numbardee was like a lost sheep, following her ram. She did what her father told her to do. She did what her husband told her to do - blind obedience. The patriarchal hierarchy, all she knew was the life she had been born into, her and her brothers and sisters. Her numbardee was not equipped to deal with a patriarchal society, she could not teach my numbardee ways of dealing with the men in her life, because her numbardee hadn't been able to teach her. They were from an equal society, neither matriarchal nor patriarchal, men and women were equals.

My father's reaction to my numbardee's identity stunned us, his statement to me was - "I would never have married your mother if I had known". My parents had divorced when I was sixteen and my father had remarried. I believe it was because he was worried what his second wife might think that he made the statement about marrying my numbardee. He was the weaker partner in his second marriage and to protect himself from his wife's reaction he made a racist comment. When my father was in the war he had a lot to do with the indigenous people of Borneo and then later the indigenous people of New Guinea. He had never before in my life made racist comments about anyone - not the indigenous people of Borneo and New Guinea, nor the indigenous people of Australia, or for that matter the indigenous people of any country. He protected himself from what his wife and other people might think if they knew my numbardee was a Murri. If he appeared racist then other people would not look down on him for marrying a Murri woman. This created another division in our family.

We wahroogah found that we could not talk about our identity in any way with our father. We could not discuss the catastrophic circumstances of our ancestral history, we could not discuss our cultural heritage, we could not discuss our feelings, we could not discuss our selves with him even though we wanted to, and we could not invite him into our world, into our spirituality, he wasn't interested. Our history, heritage and spirituality is visually described in all images. My father became distanced and dislocated from us. My stepmother commented on a few occasions to my brother and I - "that's the boong coming out in you". This was when we had done or said something that she didn't want to or couldn't understand.
Thoughtless comments like these abound in the non indigenous society and I believe are founded on the fear of the unknown. If time was taken to learn from, understand and respect Aboriginal peoples, the fear and subsequently the comments would be ungrounded.

In 1951 the assimilation policy came into being in which all Aboriginal people were to be assimilated into white Australia, it promised equality, that we could expect the same rights as white Australians. However, we were to have the same customs and influences as white Australians - meaning we were to culturally change our lifestyles and beliefs (refer to image 7). Aboriginal people were to become "like us, adopting 'Australian' values, lifestyle and culture, without Australia having to change. It was not always clear what Aboriginal people ... were being asked to assimilate into." Pettman 1992, p.8

"By setting up an imagined model of Australia as a community of shared interests and beliefs, it again reinforced Aborigines in their place as 'the other', a people excluded. The assimilation policy offered a chance for Aborigines to 'fit in': the price was that they stop being culturally distinctive, that they learn to conform. White Australians would not have to change at all in their attitudes to Aborigines." Grimshaw, Lake, McGrath, Quarterly 1994, p.293

So our culture, our heritage, had to stay invisible within the white community for us to fit in. What culture, what heritage did we say we were then, what did we become if we weren't able to identify with our true culture and heritage? None, we copied what the white society said was right! My bargie couldn't say I do things this way because that is what my numbardee did. She couldn't give my mother a sense of ancestry, she couldn't say this belonged to my numbardee and I want you to have it. There was none, there was no familial line of belonging.
When my Uncle was at school his class had to line up each day to have hand inspection, and without fail each day his teacher would tell him to wash his hands because they were dirty, but they weren't, his skin was just dark. If your skin wasn't white you were accused of being dirty. "I can never tell whether your hands are clean or not because they are always black." Dunne 1988, p.105. But was it because his skin was dark? Or was it because his skin was different, was it because he was seen as different to the majority of his peers? His hands didn't fit in.

Even though they did not acknowledge or know about their Aboriginality, they were still treated as Aboriginal. People assumed they were, people treated them as Aboriginal.

..."That's the boong coming out in you"...
My numardee’s spiritual connections with her place, her people are still there, they are still inside her. Her ‘genetic memory’ took over when she just simply knew that Moodai was her totem. Her ‘genetic memory’ takes over when she sees my art work.

When my numardee sees my work I ask her if she knows what I am saying and the meaning behind it. Most of the time I have found this isn’t necessary because she can usually read it with accuracy. She amazes me by reading from my work aspects of story that I haven’t seen.

In an installation called ‘A Sense of Place’, I had made a goombeelgah (bark canoe) that was partly filled with water. Floating on the water were eight seed pods, four each with an image of myself, my numardee and my two bargies, and four filled with different coloured ochres from the Narran river. When I took my numardee to see the exhibition two of the seed pods had gone under and filled with water. I was a little upset at first and my numardee said to me “that’s right, we are on a different plane (level) to my mother and grandmother, they have died.” She understood the significance of the change in the artwork and was able to tell me what it meant. Her spirituality guides her conscious mind, her ‘genetic memory’ is very powerful.

My numardee was brought up under the assimilation act, under the guise of the other. Her outer body portrays all that the assimilation act meant while her inner spirituality defines her being. Refer to image 8 for a visual description of this.

...Her ‘genetic memory’ took over...

...Her inner spirituality defines her being...
Blanket Cape (1992)

refer image 7

My numbardee became blanketed in the assimilation act. Her identity was invisible. Her childhood was modelled on what white society expected of you, or what white society said was the right way to do things.

Grey government issue blankets were given to the Aboriginal people each year as a gift from the Queensland government. The Queensland blankets had the letter Q and an ↑ (arrow) stamped on them. This represented the Queensland police.

Cape made from grey blanket - new covering, clothing of a different culture. Numbardee’s initials embroidered on it, showing the different culture to which she had been assimilated, the ritual of sitting with a group of women, each doing work with their hands, sewing, embroidering, recreated the ritual of my traditional family. Numbardee’s initials instead of the Q↑represents the idea of a fine English lady which she had been assimilated into.

Embroidery was taught to the Aboriginal women in service on properties and who were in government run homes and orphanages. It was a women’s task, meant to civilise Aboriginal girls. Embroidery was something that bargie had been taught while she was in domestic service, and had passed on to numbardee.
Understanding my numbardee, understanding where she has come from, how she was brought up, has helped me have patience with my mother and her idiosyncrasies. Creating this work has given me the wisdom of understanding my numbardee.

...Civilise Aboriginal girls...
Mask - Numbardee (1992)
refer image 8

Highly polished, on first glance hard impenetrable refined surface, secrets hidden, secretive, false decoration, fake exterior.

Shrouded with a veneer, European outer, Aboriginal inner. She is the laminex, formica, chrome person. Always with makeup on, always dressed well, proper, a veil, hiding something, covering, secreting, but a very fine layering that peels with years. Appears to own no culture, but is very spiritual, appears to own the white culture, lived a very proper life, in a proper environment. If you look deeply you can see the inconsistencies, you can notice the awareness of self, you can see the spirituality. You can see the extent that my bargie went to, to ensure her wahroogah were safe.

...The eyes are the window to the soul and spirituality...
Woman's Vessel

refer image 9

The vessel is made from handkerchiefs - white linen, finely embroidered, my numbardee became what society required, what society stipulated. Bargie passed on her obsession about runny noses to my numbardee, the fear of the runny nose - that this was enough to lose her children. My numbardee made sure I always had a clean white handkerchief, this then passed on to me and I also insist the same for my own daughter.

There was no hint of her true identity on the surface. Beneath she has the spirit of her culture. The ochres inside the vessel represent the spirit, its relationship to land, to the very fabric that created numbardee. The dolly peg sits inside, separated from the ochres, separate from the ochres.

...The peg represents the servant - the boss, the husband, the father, the patriarchy...
Memories of my numbardee - soaking the whites, hanging out the clean washing, cleaning the house, ironing the clothes, sweeping the path. Everything had to be just right, you never knew who might turn up, who might be watching. My numbardee was a proud housekeeper.

...Everything had to be just right...
I have been told by my great bargie that I was to become a 'wise woman'. So I feel, not only am I learning about my identity and culture but that I am the vehicle for my bargie and great bargies to tell their stories.

be the element that allows our culture its freedom of rights within this society after being suppressed, oppressed, secreted and marginalised for so many years (refer to images 4,5 and 6 for visual description).

This means that my immediate family - numbardee, brothers, uncles, aunts, and cousins - grew up without or with little knowledge of their identity because for survival my bargie reacted by secreting her culture and identity, or by doing it the hite way to survive. My bargie felt shamed that she was Aboriginal.

...My bargie felt shamed that she was Aboriginal...
The aims of the reconciliation act are to develop, improve and further the relationships between non-Aboriginal and Aboriginal peoples. To further the understanding of our culture, history and the dispossession of Aboriginal people. Reconciliation is about creating an awareness of Aboriginal issues in mainstream Australia.

Striving for the connection of self and identity with the land, the culture, trying to show that it cannot be apart or disconnected from oneself. That where/what you are born of is why/what you are. To understand yourself you must know where/what you are part of. My visual description of connections and identity can be seen in images 10, 11 and 12.

"...the first thing is an urge which becomes so strong that eventually you have to find out who you are. It begins to take over everything; it's all you can think about, it's all you want to do. You know you can't get on with anything else in your life until you find out."

Edwards in Edwards & Read 1989, p.xxi

I found out, I always knew deep down inside me. I had unanswered questions, something, a part of me, was missing. I felt a need to be one with nature, to live a completely natural life. I always wondered where we got our frizzy hair and where my brothers, especially my older brother Colin, got their dark skin. No one had to tell me, when I found out, I knew it was true, it just confirmed my knowledge. I am proud to be Murri. They must be very strong, the Murri genes to be so powerful so many years after my bargie, ancestral numbardee. I can't go back but I can find out, I can walk through it, I have my dreaming time, the ancestors talk to me.
I hear my weebulloo of the Kooma clan, mah Emu from the Narran river.

I understand why my bargie couldn't talk about herself, about us. I was angry at first that it had all been kept such a secret from us, angry that I had not been allowed to grow up with my culture, my heritage. That we had our history locked away in the caverns of our bargies minds. The Colonisers forced my bargie to hide her culture, identity and family. While growing up we, my brothers and I, always felt like there was something missing, like a part of us was missing. We were always searching for something - always the odd ones out in whatever we did, whether at school or at play. The contact we had with our wider family was very limited. The little contact we had was always at a distance - reserved and cautious. My numbardee and bargie were very secretive, and her family always kept at a distance.
My great bargie said to me "you have to understand the past and the hurt that we went through". She told me "now the pain is yours to bear", that "the anger is in the past with the hurt and the pain". "It is your bargie's pain, now it's yours - bargie's anger is now your anger". She told me that with the pain, hurt, and anger "you can help heal the family, help people understand about us and our life". What happens today is a consequence of what has been and what will be.

When I was told this I understood what I had to do. I had to uncover everything and use what I learnt to guide our family back to their roots, their spiritual connections. To teach non-Aboriginal people about us. I understood it like this - that the pain and anger would be the vehicle that sanctions my learning, and that learning will create in me the wisdom that is passed on.

...My numbardee has brought me up as best she could...

I remember as a little girl, wishing that I was Italian, because the lady across the street who I called Aunty Mary was that or I thought she was (she was Lebanese), and her family seemed to have so much more than ours. As I saw it, they had wonderful ways with food - I tasted it, they had as I saw it, family love, family loyalty, family cohesion and kin. They had a most important thing - culture. They had so many relatives in every street that you couldn't count them. Most of my school friends were from somewhere! When I look back it was easier to be anything but Murri. People from other cultures could be open and honest about where they were from, what their traditions were, they could speak their language whenever they liked, and they did. They didn't have to hide themselves or their culture.
When I would ask my numbardee “where does Nanna come from”, I would be told “not to ask questions” or simply “Queensland”. I would retort with “but where does she come from”. I meant however, what country was she from, what was her culture. I knew that the only people who originated from Australia were the Aboriginal people, so thinking as a child does, I assumed that my Nanna had to have come from some other country. At school I was taught that Australia was colonised by the British, so I assumed that everyone in Australia was from another land. It didn’t enter my head that my bargie was Murri. I remember being told that my bargie’s father was Swedish and my grandfather was English, but I was never told what I was, what identity I was, what culture I was born into, what culture I am.

At school my brother had a terrible time of it. He use to think it was because he just didn’t belong or fit in. His teachers continually picked on him, he was always getting the cane. He found it hard to concentrate and digest what they wanted him to learn, he couldn’t sit still! He felt what he was being asked to learn had no relationship or connections to himself - he could not see what use it would be to him - as far as he was concerned, he would never have a use for it. Then when I came along they said “not another bloody Anderson”, and I was subjected to similar treatment, though not as harsh. My brother looks anything but white and has often been asked if he is Greek! We were treated and assumed to be something other than white. We weren’t aware of what we were, we weren’t aware of what people assumed we were.

We have become disconnected from, and been denied our land, our true life, our culture, our spiritual beliefs - the very essence of our being (refer image 7 for disconnection). We couldn’t touch our roots, we couldn’t feel our connections - we had emotional numbness. The genetic chord that connects our soul with our body and our spiritual world had been bypassed or rebranched to a cultural void, there was nothing that took its place. Our spirituality remained within us but was ‘paralysed’ from birth, it needed to be awakened, re-birthed, reconnected, and every so often it was. The sense of having been here before, knowing that in some way you are connected to a special place.
The times when the ancestors speak to me. We were lost children, we didn't belong where we were, and we didn't know where else we belonged. We knew we were children spirited in some way with our land, we were like piggiebillahs (echidna) burrowing into the rich red earth trying to find our place, our space.

What then was the cause of our discontent? Why was there always a spiritual restlessness, both with my numardee's family and mine? Our psyches kept saying, "but there's something more". Could it be the inherited deep seated biological genetics of our heritage, our 'genetic memories'?

Why didn't I see this - our Aboriginality? I didn't see it because - when I'm looking at numardee - she is just numardee - I'm not looking at her identity, I'm looking at my numardee. I didn't see anything other than - my numardee. It wasn't until I started to question, that I started to look deeper and see that my numardee was more than this physical person in front of me, more than just my numardee. I see that, yes, it was there and had been all the time. In us, over us, on us, under us, where we are, it is in our blood, our very being.

My best friend at high school was Aboriginal, however I didn't see or think of her as Aboriginal, she was just my friend. It wasn't until we uncovered our past that I thought, "oh, that's right, A..... was Aboriginal". I didn't have any reason then to wonder why we got on so well, neither of us said anything about being Aboriginal, it wasn't necessary, or thought to be important, or thought of at all. I remember visiting her bargie. She lived in a tin humpy. I remember at the time thinking that it was a fabulous place, it had a majestic ambience about it. I was in awe of where she lived. I thought it was so much grander and interesting than the brick flats where we lived. The brick flats were synonymous with the suburban dream while the tin humpy would horrify most white people. But not me, my sense of values were very different.
We did not know any other family apart from our immediate family. We grew up with no connections to any of our bargie's family. We did not know of the hundreds of other relatives we had. We were not allowed the privilege of knowing uncles, aunts and cousins who were just like us. Dispossessed of our rightful knowledge, our homeland. I cannot have an individual identity without the 'whole', that is our group, family, land identity - our roots. We "missed out on all the family bonding, all the childhood experiences that bind people together." Our "own personal history which is the bonding."
Edwards in Edwards & Read 1989, p.xxi

My identity has caused problems with some members of my family who still haven't come to terms with their Aboriginality. I couldn't discuss anything concerning myself or what had happened to our family with my father. He would ask me about my work, and then ask me why I needed to do it like that (the Aboriginal). It got to the stage with my father where I never mentioned anything about our identity, our culture, our heritage - our Aboriginality had to remain invisible in the eyes of my father.

It seems I had become too black for white in my father's eyes, and too white for black in the eyes of some Koori people. I was told by a Koori man that I was "just jumping on the bandwagon" to get a free ride and well-meaning strangers have commented "but you don't look it (Aboriginal), so don't say anything" and "why would you want to be?" It doesn't occur to them that my identity is in me, that I have been born of it, that it runs through my veins, that it is many many thousands of years old and becomes stronger when accepted and acknowledged.

"You can be really fair but that feeling of being Aboriginal is so strong. ... it's really hard because you feel as black as they look, but you don't look like that so it's a real problem."
Carpenter in Edwards & Read 1989, p.27
I have had some Koori/Murri people assume it was me who denied my heritage and grew up pretending I wasn’t Aboriginal. They don’t stop and think that it was what happened back in the 1800’s that caused my women ancestors to deny their identity, to deny the voice of their Aboriginality - about being Murries. I have had the accusation directed at me, that not identifying for part of my life cancels out my right to be Murri, that it makes me less Murri than someone who grew up knowing their identity. This is an argument that buys into the divide and conquer processes of the white policy makers. An argument as old as the Aboriginal Protection Board. It has its roots in the idea that colour and spirituality, and connectedness to land can be bred out. It is doubly painful when one of your own says it to you.

“I could introduce you to some very white looking Aboriginal people, but their Aboriginality is still very strong and these people are in the process of dealing with their “CROSS CULTURAL IDENTITY CRISIS”. Also, the people displaced from their families through government policies need help and support to “Link up” again with their roots, if they wish, and to encourage positive self esteem - “It’s OK to be Aboriginal”. Holland in NSW Aboriginal Mental Health Report 1991, Appendix A

A little while ago I met up with another cousin who I didn’t know about. She too is an artist. In our first conversation, or what I believed was our first conversation, she said to me “I’m sure I’ve met you, did you work on the Western Sydney Perspecta?” I answered “Yes, I helped one of the artists”. My cousin said, “were you on the bus that went to all the art sites?”, and I replied “Yeees”. “Well” she said, “I sat in the seat behind you on the bus and we were introduced.” She was with her very good friend, who it turns out, I had worked with on an art project. When I heard that she came from Queensland I remember thinking at the time - we could be related!

...We don’t know who our relations are!...
My new found cousin was taken from her numbardee when she was seven years old under care and control. She was adopted into a white family, and her numbardee was allowed access visits. She grew up very confused about her identity, because while her adoptive family brought her up as a Murri, her numbardee denied her own Aboriginality. Perhaps her denial was because she just wanted her daughter back. If she denied her identity, the authorities may have had a change of heart, and allowed her to be reunited with her daughter. The removal of children, sent to work, away from their numbardee’s, meant that those children didn’t know how to bring up their own children, they didn’t know how to bond, how to love their children. They had no role model. My cousins numbardee was my numbardee’s first cousin.

The disconnection of our identity, our culture, our heritage that I am reclaiming has to be grieved, has to be worked through, you have to get rid of the anger - that’s where it starts, well that’s where it started for me. Anger about the loss, the destruction, about not knowing my culture, not being allowed to know it. My way of doing this is through my art. I have found that “…when the soul is lost, art comes spontaneously to its assistance. When the soul is depressed, isolated, mad, and distraught, artistic images appear.” McNiff 1992, p.16

I have been womba (mad) and angry often while trying to uncover/discover my ancestral history, my culture, my rights. I needed to be able to vent this anger in a safe form, safe for both myself and my family. My artwork speaks out about our history and informs my family and relatives in a non-confrontational form. Because it is not oral the viewer does not have to have a conversation with it, they are not confronted by well-meant but often miss-thought of words. The only discourse is in the mind of the viewer, with the viewer.
When I see the erosion of the soil on the river banks I think of us, of our family. Soil erosion is like the erosion of our culture, of our family, of our heritage. Flesh deeply embedded under the earth, still there, spirits/souls still there, still looking after the land, seeing the devastation that has been forced upon it.

I see things differently now, since the ancestors have shown me. I mean the way I look at the land, the soil, the ochres, the trees, the insects - or do I? When I look back at my childhood, I see myself following a trail of ants to their nest, watching them climb the trees. My numbardee use to watch the ants trails too! Not wanting to tread on the cracks in the ground, because I thought it was bad luck, I don’t know where I got that from! I remember my brother and I building a mia mia. A mia mia is a shelter, it was also the name that my numbardee gave to our house. We built it in the paddock behind our house, that was our cubby, we cleared away the ground cover and had a nice dirt floor.
was always a grubby child, a bit of a disappointment to my numbardee, always getting in scrapes, hurting myself, and I remember being referred to as a tom boy.

All of us children were pretty close when we were growing up. We were always wandering off somewhere, pretending toosh, catching taddies (tadpoles). We were very free spirited children.

I used to eat the bulbs of the little purple wild flower that grew everywhere, how do I know that? I can remember weaving savages into miniature rafts and watching them float down the river that was near our home. I didn't think of the vegetation as possibly being a medicine or food as such, but I held it in reverence. The land and its produce was my playground, I was always using something from it. Forever, drawing in the soft soil with a stick, usually the same images all the time too! I draw those same images today.

I well remember when I was in first class at school I peeled the bark off a tree, I wanted to use it to put the wild flowers on hat I had picked. Well, I got caught by the headmistress and she gave me the cane!

I sense that this is my 'genetic memory'; that my spiritual connections have never been broken, they've always been there, waiting to be allowed recognition.

...My 'genetic memory'...
When I think back I realise there have been many times when my ancestors have been speaking to me and guiding me. For a long time I had wanted to go to the museum in the city to look at the artefacts from my area. I was amazed when I saw they were incised with the same images that I use to draw in the dirt as a kid. My ancestors had given me something special, they had shown me that in essence my spirituality and identity had always been there. That I only had to look inside myself to find the answers that had been plaguing me. One of which was, am I certain that Kooma is our traditional rea. Even though I had been told that it was by my bargie, I still had nigling doubts.

My ancestors leading me to the markings of my people brought back the memories of how long I have been drawing them, according them, that my feelings about my ‘genetic memory’ were true to me. I knew then that my identity was unquestionable.

My culture, my identity is within myself, in my person and that even after years of extermination, inflicted destruction, forced integration and assimilation, my spirituality and the spirit of my culture speaks to me, guiding me.

From time immemorial my ancestors lived as one with the land. Now it is my turn to feel the depth of natural matter, to learn to use what the great spirits left us to caretake and to pass this knowledge on.

My journey through the culture of my heritage has made me realise that it is the gaining of knowledge, the learning of life’s essences and the harvesting of nature’s resources that allow me to grow in spiritual awareness of my heritage. That to accept and live as one with the land can bring me the knowledge that my bargie had to keep secret. The knowledge that she was denied from passing on to her wahoogah, the knowledge that without the land, without our relationship with the land - we cannot survive. Yet it is the one thing that is used solely as a commodity by the white man, raped and pillaged the same as Murri women.
"The life-sustaining spiritual relationship between our selves and our natural habitat, which the Aborigines deem necessary for health, is the very thing we have desecrated and alienated ourselves from." Lambert 1993, p.131

I have never felt alienated from the land. I have always felt that I belonged and when I first set foot on Kooma land, again my 'genetic memory' took over.

I knew I was home. I felt linked to that land. My country, the Narran River, my tribal area, Kooma. I had been told by my great bargle that our lands had flat topped hills. I could see those hills, they formed a backdrop to the river where it breaks off from the Balonne. Flat topped, almost square, sand hills. The country appears very arid, but looking closely it is covered with an abundance of vegetation. Rust red soil, gum trees that are huge, shrubby mulga. To go home - a feeling of renewed life, renewed spirit. Thinking about my Bargies living on this land, not materialistic in any way, using and taking only what is necessary, assuring there is always some for next time and others.
I want to completely encircle myself with my culture, cover and nurture myself in my culture (refer to images 10, 11 and 12). We do not dominate the land, we belong to it, we are incomparable to nature, we are only a part of it. I am not greater than the whole, I cannot rule my land - I am in harmony with the elements of my land. My soul has been accepted and found peace with that country. The spirits of my ancestors are here, they call to me, they beckon me home.

When I am creating - I am healing myself through my art, I mean every way. That was part of the traditional ways. Each day the women would get together and talk about their problems. Their problems were the problems that were happening at the time - husbands, drought, no food, children. Problems weren't able to escalate out of control. They were pre-empted. They were dealt with on the spot. There was no room then for the present day stress related illnesses because they didn't have the environment to develop.

“Whenever illness is associated with loss of soul, the arts emerge spontaneously as remedies, soul medicine. The medicine of the artist, like that of the shaman, arises from his or her relationship to “familiars” - the themes, methods, and materials that interact with the artist through the creative process”. McNiff 1992, p.1

By using my artwork I am speaking my own language. My psychology activates and moves my soul to use its own language. My artistic images reflect this and encourage me to look and reflect upon my physical and psychological roots. Until that link is fully healed I cannot be whole, my family is not rooted to their land to their sacred ground. My concept of healing is not only about me. It relates to my capacity to convey our stories, to communicate meanings, to all members of my family. This means everyone descended from Mary my Ancestral Numbardee. My “images and the artistic process are the shamans and familiar spirits who come to help” my “people regain” their “lost soul.” McNiff 1992, p.17
My artwork is all connected, it is of one body, each piece is not separate from the previous or the next, but part of and connected to the previous and the next. The same as our culture - the past, present and future are all linked and present in each other. It is the healing agent for my family, the balm that is applied to our wounds. My art enables us to see the wounds and heal them, to become aware of them and so come to terms with them. McNiff explains that “the medicine offered by meditation on art is generally an infusion of imagination and awareness rather than a specific answer.” (McNiff 1992, p.3) The discourse or "meditation" that my relatives have with themselves when viewing my art creates in them an awareness that links to the beginnings of their healing.

The theory that our past, present and future is all linked, that it is circular, is I believe why I feel as I do. That our genetic heritage has passed on from each generation to the next. It is constantly re-birthing, re-generating, re-connecting, re-linking, re-discovering - it is in ourselves, in each of us.

To feel as one with my heritage, my tribal land, my artwork conveys my connections with all these things. With finding my true self, my clan, my bargies homeland. It must convey my searching and finding that which was taken away and denied me and what I have now found.

When I spin my hair as a part of what I use in my artwork, I have an incredible feeling of knowing my roots, my culture. My hair is the most profound, the most intimate thing I feel I have to give to my bargies, to appease their spirits. A knowledge so old, a craft so respected and sacred that to give of myself with my hair is the most sacred thing I can do. My art becomes imbued with the spirits of my ancestors, it becomes "metaphysically attuned to laws of existence" and in this way carries the continuance of my culture. McNiff 1992, p.20
My art is created from all that is natural. I use traditional mediums such as, grasses, resin, kangaroo sinew, branches, leaves, ochres etc. I use everything that is traditional in a contemporary form. The medium is natural, native to our land, so the artwork will break up naturally, it will decompose back into the ground from where it came. The cycle will repeat, I will return and use what has grown back, what has regenerated, this too will go back, and so the cycle continues. The past, present and future, continue through my artwork not only in the objects/images I construct but in the natural materials that I use. I take from the present that which has grown in the past, my work then decomposes and is given back for the future.

This has everything to do with contemporary culture. I use everything that is traditional in a contemporary way.

…I use everything that is traditional in a contemporary way…
Rebirth Cape (1992)
refer image 10

To completely encircle myself with my culture, cover and nurture myself in my culture. A cape of culture, a covering of Murri culture to replace the white exterior. I wear this cape when I am talking about my work, and telling my stories. It’s an ongoing piece. It’s rebirthing the traditional story telling, creating for a need, healing, reinstating ceremony. When I put my cape on, I become my ancestral numbardee, I become the ‘wise woman’ she said one day I would become. Refer to image 1 for a visual description of traditional.

The cape represents two cultures. The inside represents the white culture, the outside my true identity. The inside has maps of where all my ancestors were born, miniature images of birth certificates, death certificates, marriage certificates, none of which can actually be read. The inside represents today - and links the two worlds - the society that I was born into and my birthright.

The outside is made of skins, stitched together with kangaroo sinew. Printed on the skins were all my symbols and stories along with diary notes and photographs from my journeys. The ties of the cape are made from my hair. It is my offering to my bargies, and numbardee for the pain and loss they felt in the destruction and death of their traditional family and culture. A spiritual and ritualistic offering, somewhat like an umbilical chord joining the old and new cultures. Feathers from our clan totem, the dinewan, were attached to the braids of my hair to tie the cloak.
In the creation of the capes the anger I had held for those that had treated my Bargies so badly was excised and in its place an understanding of the cultural significance the works represented. In my bargies time most of this type of women's work was created within a women's group where the importance of sharing and communicating was an everyday ritual. I have clothed my ancestral women in their traditional culture, this being my gift to them.

...I have broken through the net/web of silence...
Mask - Rebirth (1992)
refer image 11

I see differently. My eyes see the soul, the spirit. Opening up, seeing the true soul culture, able to communicate with the ancestors, able to feel the spirit of my bargie.

This reveals my true identity.

My mask represents true identity, represents how I feel about myself, what I know about myself. It shows my true face, it shows myself, my spirit, my soul. It's made out of driftwood from the Narran River and white ant eaten wood, attached to a fine piece of plywood. With a spun braid of my hair connecting me back to my numbardee, ancestral mother. The mask says that I am part of my numbardee and my bargies. That their blood runs through me, their spirits are with and a part of me. A dinewan feather representing my clan totem, ethereal and mystifying, attached by tree resin, from the angophora tree, blood from the tree, healing our wounds, our spirits. I reveal my identity. My spirit, my soul, my connections with my ancestors, and my numbardees.

...I reveal myself...
Woman's Vessel

refer image 12

Vessels that portray the images of cultural values, the essence of women's knowledge in being the providers under our social forces. They connect our family back to our traditional lands by using the vegetation from our land - beginning with our land in great bargie's vessel and ending with our land in my vessel.

Inside the vessel are the ochres representing the spirit of our land and the Dinewan feather, connecting myself with my land and my women ancestors.

It is made from the Sandalwood tree, the Mulla Mulla plant, the Emu Bush, and the Goolabah tree (box tree). The Emu bush leaves were used as a medicine. For headaches, sores and colds the leaves were crushed and soaked. The Sandalwood leaves were used for smoking, to guard from mosquitos and for healing and cleansing after childbirth.

...Women are vessels...
Vessels used by my women, my women are vessels.

From these women come our blood links. Enclosing that which each woman held dear, utilised, needed - to learn from. The vessels inform what and who a person is - what their nature is, their likes, their dislikes. The truth about each of us. Receptacle, tote, container. Overflowing with everything I have found out - dispelling the secrets, the disclosing of all that has been hidden and was once so open.

...Dispelling the secrets...
Ancestral Numbardee Image

Represents myself, all that I believe in, all that I am, my connections to my ancestral numbardees, my bargies. I am speaking my language through my art, I am healing our spirits through my art. Somewhat like a ritual, the use of my ancestral image in my everyday life, gives me the power to be me, to understand me, to understand my life, to divulge to the world my culture, my heritage, my identity. This image is ritually used whenever I correspond with anyone. It is used in my artwork, in my drawings. I convey my spirit and my ancestors’ spirits to all those I connect with.

I reveal my identity through this image in my everyday life, I introduce myself through my ancestral numbardee image.

I have become the ‘wise woman’.

This image was given to me by my bargie, sent to me as a gift. I am the only one to use this image, it is now in my care. It refers to all that has been and all that will be. It is my logo, my signature. It is my identity.

...My identity...
...So much has been uncovered and discovered...

...The healing has not ended, it will never end...
8. CONCLUSION

"Issues of Aboriginal dispossession and claim and of colonisation are still unresolved in Australia. Hence academic writings and representations about the nature of pre-colonial Aboriginal society, the violence of the frontier, the mode of incorporation of Aboriginal people into colonial and contemporary society, their communities and the nature of Aboriginality, are not simply 'academic'. Rather they play a part in the politics of language and contest - about Aboriginal status and rights now, about whose country it is, and who should have rights within it". Pettman 1992, p.22

The effects of Colonisation, cultural and psychological on my family have been devastating. My numbardee and her numbardee and her bargie have all been unable to parent in their culturally appropriate way. My Bargies were forced to deny their Aboriginality in order to survive a hostile environment. This history of denial controls my mothers actions today. It has been the impetus that drove me to write this thesis.

Colonisation has driven an invisible but decisive line through many family groups and families. There is little familial bonding within our families, and there is no familial bonding with our extended family. There is no commitment for family bonds. Psychological problems within immediate family groups and wider family groups are many and varied. These include phobias about being watched, that our children were always the ones to blame when something went wrong, and obsessions about keeping everything spotless in case someone turned up on the doorstep. These social phobias which stem from colonisation and government policies I can trace back to my bargie and her obsessive cleanliness and secretiveness, passed on no doubt to her from her numbardee.
Most of my relatives have no spiritual connections with their lands and no proof of connection with their lands. It means you don't know who your relatives are, where you are from, or who you are.

"So much has been lost, so much has to be unlearned, so much has to be relearned; there may be something which, whatever one's history and experience, can never be recovered." Read in Edwards & Read 1989, p.xvii

Colonisation has brought about deeply embedded racism that began with the first foreign foot on Aboriginal land. The effects of colonisation remain today, in my own family my father distanced himself from us, and in the form of dislocated families, dysfunctional communities, lost souls. Most of my wider family today still don't know who they are, let alone coming to terms with this new knowledge. This crisis in identity will be passed on to their children. The cycle continues.

"An Aboriginal identity can never be said to be lost while people know the simple fact that they are descended from an Aboriginal parent or grandparent." Read in Edwards & Read 1989, p.xvii

Some of my relatives won't talk to those of us who do identify. I had a telephone call from a lady who I had written to asking her if she was one of my relatives, she politely told me that “she couldn't be related to me because there was no mention of that”. Another person responded to my letter saying “you are certainly on the wrong track, because I am not any of your lot, and I am certainly not Aboriginal”. Even today those family members who obviously look Murri, those family members who I have reclaimed as family, for a range of reasons are not willing to identify as Murri. A major cause of this is the fact that racism is still so deeply embedded within our society. Many of my relatives still feel if they identify they have a lot to lose. I have found this to be especially so in the small outback towns of Queensland.
It is in writing these stories, that the individual family members of many Aboriginal families across Australia can reclaim for themselves their identity, their culture, their history. The reclaiming of their pasts makes it possible for them to move forward with a sense of pride and not shame. It also challenges non-indigenous Australians to accept that the impact of colonisation is tangible and current.

“Aboriginal identity is recoverable.” Read in Edwards & Read 1989, p.xvii

My tracking down of family and their stories has begun healing myself and many members of my family. The stories and artwork described in this discourse have also helped friends and associates of the family to understand the need for healing, and through understanding to respect my views and those of my family who identify. If more indigenous families go through this process, then the capacity of non-indigenous families and individuals to be sensitive to the needs of indigenous Australians increases. This quote by Sally Morgan in the forward of the book ‘Lost Children’ shows the relationship of reconciliation between non-indigenous and indigenous peoples and the need to uncover indigenous individual and family stories.

“In the telling we assert the validity of our own experiences and we call the silence of two hundred years a lie. And it is important for you, the listener, because like it or not, we are a part of you. We have to find a way of living together in this country, and that will only come when our hearts, minds and wills are set towards reconciliation. It will only come when thousands of stories have been spoken and listened to with understanding.” Morgan in Edwards & Read 1989, p.vii
The journey and the tracking has not ended, it will never end. So much has been uncovered and discovered, that link my family back to their country and their culture through my work - my writing of this discourse, and through my art. The healing has not ended, it will never end. The healing began with the creation of gifts for my Bargies and my Numbardee. The healing continues with the completion of this thesis, and the reading of it by my family and the wider community. The journeys I will take for future research of our history will further heal the recovery of our family.

Our laws are sets of four. Before starting this I didn’t know about the significance of the number four to my people. I had already created my artwork when I found out about our four laws. The connectiveness of the four women, four sets of gifts, and the four laws has come together through my writing and the images, photographs and drawings that are woven into this document.

My art aids in the re-birth of my culture and it is the journey through the culture of my heritage that has made me realise it is not the outcome of my work that is most important, it is the process of - the gaining of knowledge, the learning of life’s essences and the harvesting of nature’s resources that allow me to create and grow in spiritual awareness of my heritage. To become culturally bonded, spiritually, mentally, and physically, to my genetic birthright.
...We have four lots of four...
...We have the beginning and we have the end...
...But it's never finished...
Fair Skin - Black Soul

Whitefella, you’re not listening. I am not like you we are worlds apart with little in common.

You look in wonder at my fair skin and think, AH he’s one of us.

Wrong again.

You judge me on pigmentation and not my inner being.

For despite my fairness I am black, I am a Murri from the Kunja Nation.

I am proud - spiritual and I resent the fact you think I am white.

I didn’t rape the land, the women.

I didn’t ask to be left pale of skin.

But now I DEMAND my cultural respect.

Whitefella, this is your doing, not mine.

You have the problem, not me.

You can only think in one dimensional terms.

You see but don’t feel, and whitefella you’re wrong.

I am black.

I am a Murri from the Kunja Nation.

And I stand proud.

Burraga Gutya
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