Karijini Mirlimirli is a collection of writings by 39 indigenous people, particularly Punjima, Yinhawangka and Kurrama from the West Pilbara. The histories weave a rich tapestry of life from the early 1900s until this decade. Wakuthuni, Millstream, Marando, the Karijini National Park, purple hills, red ground and golden spinifex are the backdrop against which the life stories are woven.

Through this collection of histories readers may experience something of the richness of Punjima, Yinhawangka and Kurrama cultures. Contributors talk of country, law, the importance of initiation, language, ceremony. They talk of childhood, hunting trips, droving and dogging but also of the welfare and stolen children. Many people speak too of their removal from traditional lands as both the pastoral and then mining industries expanded. Now many live in Roebourne and Onslow.

Noel Olive, with considerable help from Traudl Tan who now works at Pundulmurra Aboriginal College in Port Hedland, recorded and transcribed this collection. Olive has a long history with indigenous people. As a young man he worked in the pastoral industry where he witnessed the effects of the removal of Aboriginal children from their families. As a lawyer in the 1980s he represented Aboriginal families before the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody. Then in the early 1990s he worked as co-ordinator of the Karijini Aboriginal Corporation.

This organisation was set up in the 1980s by the Punjima, Yinhawangka and Kurrama peoples as a means of pursuing a claim for their traditional homelands. While the traditional lands of the Punjima and Yinhawangka include the Karijini National Park it is important to note that Karijini is not the name of a tribal group. That readers might misunderstand this is a concern for some people. It was in 1993 and 1994, while working for the Corporation that Olive recorded this collection of lifestories. Whose stories were included was largely determined by who was available to sit under a tree and speak at the time.

Kinship systems are generally identified as a marker of Aboriginality. Within a tribal group personal relationships between people are determined according to a skin system. However, much of what the non-indigenous population knows about these systems comes from anthropological works that map out the different relationships but often fail to represent the community dynamics that result from who can marry who, or speak to who. These dynamics are not lost in Karijini Mirlimirli.

Each person's history in this collection gives details of tribal and skin groups. For the Punjima, Yinhawangka and Kurrama peoples there are four skin groups: Banaka, Burungu, Karimarra and Milangka. Traditionally families decide who children marry to maintain straight relationships. It is the skin system that provides rules for how all members of the group must be treated, and what respect must be shown to whom. Joyce Injie gives specific details about 'nyiri', people it is forbidden to talk to; for instance, a mother-in-law cannot talk to her
Reviews

son-in-law. While skin groups are very much about social ethics they are also the source of some fun, especially when the presence of one's nyirti allows a person to get out of doing something they did not want to do, but that someone else would have to do. I have myself fallen victim to this much to the amusement of others around.

While much is said in the media about the loss of culture in Aboriginal communities, reading this collection one has a strong sense of the importance of and the steps being taken to maintain language and culture. Nellie Jones, a Kurrrama woman, does speak with sadness at the loss of language her children suffered around the 1950s through having to go to whitefella school, but there are now language maintenance programs in schools. It is her work with language awareness and retrieval programs that Lorraine Injie, a Yinhawangka woman speaks of. And, while she too sees the school system as being most detrimental to language maintenance she works to change that system.

After reading these lifestories one has a strong sense too of the continued importance of law time and initiation for boys. Ruben Mills a Noongar/Punjima man tells of being a bit of a trouble maker, particularly in relation to young women. This caused the old people much concern especially as he was newly arrived in Roebourne. Ruben’s father, Ronnie Mills, had been taken from the Pilbara as a child and had not returned to live there until Ruben was 15. When he wanted to marry a Punjima girl the families were worried. He was only able to marry after going through the law and being initiated.

Ruben tells of being out bush for seven months learning his culture from the old people. This ensured his status as a respected member of the community. And, as he says, it changed his attitude so that respecting his community, culture and people is his first priority and also provides the basis for bringing up his own children.

Each history gives the reader a sense of the strength of Punjima, Yinhawangka and Kurrrama cultures. The important message is that culture is dynamic, it changes over time as it always has. Any desire on the part of non-indigenous people to define an Aboriginal culture is naïve and primitivist. So that whether people choose to put their children through the law or to adapt descent lines to the dominant patriarchal system is a matter of cultural negotiation not cultural degradation.

Doris Cooke’s lifestory demonstrates very clearly why culture must be adaptable. Like most other contributors she tells of her strong connection to country, particularly Rocklea Station, her family’s traditional land. Since Mabo, Punjima people traditionally from Rocklea have successfully negotiated with the pastoral lease holder and obtained his support in a bid for native or freehold title to land in the area of Wakuthuni, Doris’ grandfather’s hill. This account of negotiation between traditional owners and pastoralists also provides a positive counterpart to many of the negative assertions that continue to be made about land rights and the impossibility of co-existence.

For readers wanting some knowledge of the link between ‘traditional’ and contemporary; the significance of land for indigenous peoples; the ways in which cultures are both maintained and adapted; of the rich and varied lives of
Pilbara people, *Karijini Mirlimirli* gives all this and much more. However, readers who are particularly concerned with the details of individual lifestories, for instance a person's age or the number of children they had, should check these details by contacting the Karijini Aboriginal Organisation. In the collecting and transcribing of oral histories, especially of people whose first language is not English or who are unfamiliar with this process, inaccuracies can and have occurred.

For me this book provides a great deal of pleasure as well as a wealth of knowledge. Much of the pleasure comes from being transported, while reading, to a country and people that I already have a relationship with. Julie Tommy's history and her description of Roebourne as a place that gets to you, where people always see the worth in others and accept you for who you are, echoes my own thoughts. And at this point nostalgia causes me to reach for the tape recorder and listen to the Blackstone Ramblers, a Roebourne band, sing of country, people and life.

*Murdoch University*  

KATHRYN TREES