

# SOVEREIGN VOICES

Leadership, alliance and communications in the Yindjibarndi fight for a dignified life amid the Pilbara resources boom – in the work of Juluwarlu Group of Roebourne

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Communication Studies, Murdoch University, 2010



Plate 1: Founders of Juluwarlu Aboriginal Corporation – Lorraine Coppin and Michael Woodley with family at the Woodbrook Law Ground



## DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own account of my research and contains as its main content work which has not previously been submitted for a degree at any tertiary education institution.

.....  
Frank Rijavec



Plate 2: Rose Cheedy, the author, Ned Cheedy, Dora Solomon and Bridget Warrie around the worktable at Juluwarlu



## ABSTRACT

What are the pivotal factors underlying the development and viability of regional Indigenous organisations committed to preserving and promulgating the cultural knowledge of their people? This question is investigated in the experience of Roebourne-based Juluwarlu Group Aboriginal Corporation from 2002-08 as it grew from a small scale, subsistence-funded, cultural recording organisation, into an archiving, publishing, digital media, television broadcasting, media training, cultural consultancy, advocacy and Native Title management enterprise.

This study pays careful attention to post-World War II Pilbara history which featured the creation of the Roebourne Aboriginal ghetto and the mining boom that overwhelmed the region in the 1960s and 70s, and more recently was marked by Native Title, the conservative Howard Government, post-ATSIC administrative/political climate, and the resurgence in iron ore and gas stocks. Also examined are the effects, both on cultural practice in Roebourne and Juluwarlu's development, of the documentary *Exile and The Kingdom*, which was produced with the community by the author and Noelene Harrison between 1987 and 1993.<sup>1</sup> These histories inform both the reasons for Juluwarlu's emergence and the meaning of its achievements.

Key findings converge on the character and consequence of leadership and the generative efficacy of the Yindjibarndi cultural, social and ethical system; the advantage obtained via considered partnerships with collaborators; and the adaptive engagement of Indigenous tradition with management principles and communications and media technology – on Indigenous terms, rather than the labour-market-driven schemes that, for example, seek to match Indigenous disadvantage or development with labour shortages in the Pilbara resources industries.

This thesis diverges from other studies that have typically researched *Indigenous disadvantage* within the context of broader public policy/legislation and political economy, albeit these contexts inevitably inform it. Instead, primary attention is given to the experimental and *generative* capacity that Juluwarlu brought to *negotiating advantage* from public and private institutions, challenging their recalcitrance, and sometimes moving beyond them. Finally, *Sovereign Voices* records how Juluwarlu's responsibility for country and culture, and insistence on respect and equitable

acknowledgement for their custodianship, was charged by media and communications technologies, and how these in turn ramified its organisational wherewithal for the benefit of their community – both practically and a symbolically. Juluwarlu’s mediation and *giving of voice*, I contend, militated against the ‘silencing’ shroud of the corporate-state-media hegemony.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *Exile and The Kingdom*, Rijavec, Frank (director/producer), 16mm/video/DVD, writers Roger Solomon & Rijavec, co-producer Noelene Harrison, Feature Documentary, 110 minutes, Snakewood Films, distributed by Screen Australia, 1993. (Included as Addendum 1C)

<sup>2</sup> Exploitation, Derrick Jensen posits, is necessarily contingent on the condition of voicelessness or ‘silencing’. Jensen, Derrick, *Walking on Water: Reading, Writing, and Revolution*, Chelsea Green Publishing Company, Paperback, 2005. p74

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## ABBREVIATIONS

ABC	Australian Broadcasting Corporation
ACID	Australasian CRC (Cooperative Research Centre) for Interaction Design
ACMC	Aboriginal Cultural Materials Committee
AFC	Australian Film Commission
AHA	Aboriginal Heritage Act (WA)
AIATSIS	Australian Institute of Aboriginal and Islander Studies
AICA	Australian Indigenous Communications Association
ATAL	Aboriginal Training and Liaison (a department of RTIO's Pilbara Iron)
ATSIC	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Commission
ATSIS	Aboriginal & Torres Strait Islander Service
BIA	Binding Initial Agreement
BRACS	Broadcasting for Remote Aboriginal Communities Scheme
CAAMA	Central Australian Aboriginal Media Association
CALM	Conservation & Land Management (now Department of Environment and Conservation WA)
CDEP	Community Development & Employment Program
CNC	Central Negotiating Committee (later Marnda Mia CNC)
DCD	Department of Community Development
DCITA	Department of Communication, Information, Technology & The Arts
DEEWR	Department of Education, Employment and Workplace Relations
DEWHA	Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts
FMG	Fortescue Metals Group
GIFT	Global Institute for Tomorrow
ILC	Indigenous Land Corporation
ILUA	Indigenous Land Use Agreement
IBN	Innawongga Banyjima Nyiyaparli (Aboriginal Corporation)
ICC	Indigenous Coordination Centre
ICTV	Indigenous Community Television
IRCA	Indigenous Remote Communications Association
JTV	Juluwarlu Television (later renamed <i>Ngaarda</i> Television)
LNG	Liquid Natural Gas

MAC	Murujuga Aboriginal Corporation
NIRS	National Indigenous Radio Service
NITV	National Indigenous Television
NMA	Ngaanyatjarra Media Association
NTA	Native Title Act
NTRB	Native Title Representative Body
NNTT	National Native Title Tribunal
NTV	<i>Ngaarda</i> Television
NYFL	Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation Limited
ONT	Office of Native Title
PAKAM	Pilbara and Kimberley Aboriginal Media
PBC	Prescribed Body Corporate (designated to govern Native Title matters for any successful claimant group)
PNTS	Pilbara Native Title Service
PYLP	Pilbara Youth Leadership Program
PY Media	Pitjantjatjara Yankunytjatjara Media Association
GRAM	Queensland Remote Aboriginal Media
RIBS	Remote Indigenous Broadcasting Services
RIMO	Remote Indigenous Media Organisation
RTIO	Rio Tinto Iron Ore
RTO	Registered Training Organisation
TAFE	Technical and Further Education (College)
TEABBA	Top End Aboriginal Bush Broadcasting Association
TO	Traditional Owner
TSIMA	Torres Strait Island Media Association
UWA	University of Western Australia
WEL	Woodside Energy Limited
WMA	Warlpiri Media Association; aka PAW Media & Communications (Pintubi, Anmatjere and Warlpiri)
WOCLA	Whole of Claim Agreement
W&RC	Waters & Rivers Commission (later folded into Department of Water)
WY Program	<i>Warrgamugardi Yirdiyabura</i> (Pathways to Employment Program)
YAC	Yindjibarndi Aboriginal Corporation
YHA	Yindjibarndi Heritage Agreement

## GLOSSARY

bargunyji	olive rock python
Barrimirndi	creation snake that traveled from the sea creating the course of the Fortescue River and its permanent water sources, and which came to rest in the depths of Nhanggangunha (Deep Reach Pool, Millstream)
bayuwanarra	plains kangaroo ( <i>macropus rufus</i> )
Bilaa	thalu or increase site for seeds
binyari	fight, argue
Birdarra	the carpet of leaves laid at the threshold of the initiates' delivery to their families; also the name given to the Law practiced by Roebourne people (Yindjibarndi and Ngarluma particularly)
Buminyjinha	Tablelands Police Station or ration camp
burnda	hole in the ground; bed scooped out in the ground
Burndud	the place where the men sit and sing the Burndud song cycle, and around which the women dance in a circle for Birdarra Law
Galharra	system of relationship that divides all things in the world into four groups – Bananga, Burungu, Garimarra, Balyirri
gamari	food (gifts of ... placed on Birdarra for marngkaji)
Ganyjagayi Mirnu	keeping knowledge
Garnggu	mothers, fathers, uncles aunties of an initiation candidate
garri	alcohol, grog
Garruragan	blue winged kookaburra ( <i>dacelo leachii</i> )
gumbali	first cousin/ brother-in-law
gurnarn	black ochre
gurumarntu	Gould's Sand Goanna ( <i>varanus gouldii</i> )
gurrwa	freshwater mussels
Gurrwaying Yinda	pool on Booyemala Ck (place of freshwater mussels)
jalurra	dance songs (see also nurnda)
jarburrungu	eagle

jawi	songs dreamt and sung by the man to whom the song was given by the <i>Maarga</i> creation spirits
Jigurranha	Sherlock River
Jinangarli	the footsteps of the creation spirits
Jinbingalinha	Driller's Hole (one of the places Barrimirndi got up)
Jiirda	increase site for bush food, particularly the flour ground from seeds
jirdiwi	echidna
Jirnjanggnu	those who work to put a boy through Law; in grandfather or brother relationship to the initiate
Kujarala	on the other side; also the name for the Old Roebourne Reserve
Maarga	creation spirits
majgan	snappy gum tree
mali	grandson/grandfather
marliyarra	body adornment of Garnggu participants in Law
marnu	poor thing, poor fella (an expression of sympathy)
mawarnkarra	doctor, healer, medicine man
Migu	Michael Woodley
mirru	notched spear thrower that doubles as a musical instrument when played with a twig
Mithy	Lorraine Coppin
Malulu	initiation candidate (prior to initiation)
marngekaji	man in avoidance relationship with Law initiate's family
marni	body adornment of <i>Garnggu</i> in <i>Birdarra</i> Law symbolically representing <i>Yarndanyirranha</i> (Fortescue River)
mungularra	children
Murru Warru	John Pat (derives from waramurrunga, the flying fox, for the birthmark on his back that looked like a flying bat)
Murujuga	Burrup Peninsula (translates as <i>hip bone sticking out</i> )
nabaru	substitution name for the deceased
Ngaarda	Aboriginal person
Ngaardangarli	Aboriginal people
ngurrara	custodian of a place, ancestors of particular country
ngurra	ground, country, camp

Ngurranyujunggamu	creation time (when the world was soft)
nuha	marriageable partner (of the correct <i>section</i> )
Nuju	initiation candidate (after initiation)
nurnda	dance or 'corroboree', or dance songs (also known as jalurra); they are given to a man in his dreams by the spirits
nyambali	leader or boss
pinkeye	the hot summer months from December through February when workers got time off from station work
thalu	Sites in country where ceremonies to increase or grow various natural resources and phenomena were undertaken
thudungu	oldest sister; Birdarra Law is referred to as 'Thudungu', the big sister 'sitting on top' of all other Law
Tjuna	mischievous or harmful spirits (equivalent with 'barri')
tjuna stick	stick 2-3 feet long for fighting; a tool or 'accessory'
travelers	parties of Lawmen on assignment to other communities
Wajbala	<i>Whitefella</i> , white people
Wallijingha	Law practiced by Yindjibarndi neighbours to the south and south east; referred to as the 'top law'
wandalah	where, where are they, where is he/she
Wanggangarra	that which gives life
waramurrungga	flying fox
warlu	snake
warmulu	Law initiate (through an alternate initiation method)
Wuyumarri	Gregory's Gorge
yala	now, these days
Yalgu	contemporaneous initiates, brothers in Birdarra Law
Yanduna	old ration camp near Harding Dam
Yarndanyirranha	Fortescue River (downstream of Millstream)
yartha	bough sheds
Yawajunha	Lockyer's Gorge
yinda	permanent water
Yirramala	Maitland River
Yirramagardu	Roebourne





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Plate 3: Partners in the work of cultural production in the Roebourne community.

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\* See *Exile and The Kingdom DVD – Extras* for biographies of many of these elders (*Exile* : 1993)

It was Trevor Solomon's initiative in mounting the ten-year anniversary celebrations for *Exile and The Kingdom* (the documentary I made with his elder brother Roger and his elders) that led to my meeting with Michael Woodley and Lorraine Coppin in July 2002 – providence without which I may not have joined the efforts of a new generation of *Ngaarda* activists in Roebourne. Mick Broderick ministered for six years as my academic supervisor, friend and constant encourager, Josko Petkovic first suggested to me that a post-graduate candidature could assist my collaboration with Juluwarlu, and Murdoch University supported me with a stipend that allowed me to deviate from television documentary to community-based media development work. Rio Tinto, by agency of Mark Simpson, covered travel and expenses for a trip to Roebourne, and Ngarluma Yindjibarndi Foundation provided for some accommodation. Woodley and Coppin also supported me with necessities of life. To Juluwarlu's staff, present and past, for their comradeship, and to my brothers and friends, who over the years have lent an ear or shoulder, thankyou. I want to especially thank Michael Woodley, Jan Teagle Kapetas, Phil Davies and Peter Pitt for appraisal that improved my draft; my examiners Steve Mickler, Faye Ginsburg and David Tafler for their comments on the penultimate draft; and Bob Hart for his support and historical insight. Finally, I go here by grace of my family – Noelene Harrison, my closest companion on this *Yirramagardu* journey for over twenty years, and my son and sanity lookout, Breyten (*Yarndanyirranha*).

## **DEDICATIONS**

My mother's childhood and education in Slovenia was under the Italian occupation that replaced Austrian rule after WWI, and where her mother tongue was prohibited in public life. Her youth ended with WWII and her joining with the Yugoslav partisan resistance as a courier when she was 20 years old. She witnessed perfidy and violence that despatched many of her unlucky countrymen and women to fascist concentration camps and graves, and suffered the death of her closest brother who was assassinated by a shot to the head with a dum-dum bullet, and whose body, together with her father, she collected from a neighbourhood hay paddock. In 1953, eight years after her country was liberated, and with my two infant brothers, she left her homeland, a place where she 'existed', to follow my father Benedikt's (RIP) dream deep into the estrangement of post-war emigration in southwest Australia. My mother's spirit and

perseverance remains an inspiration; her love and unswerving support, a solace. My first dedication is to Ivanka Rijavec (nee Danečič).

Roger Solomon was eleven years old when the mining 'bonanza' of the 1960s changed his life and his town forever, and sixteen when the second wave of 'development' struck in 1972. He was a child of the most traumatic period in his community's history. Above all, Roger credited his grandfather, *Liverman* (Jack Fishhook), for passing on to him the cultural and spiritual inheritance that guided him in adult life, and that encouraged him to break with drinking in 1984. While working with Roger and others in Roebourne on the production of *Exile and The Kingdom*, my own problem with alcohol abated, not because of any prohibition, but through solidarity – I could no longer drink amid the damage of alcohol in Roebourne. Roger was a guardian in this passage. He understood that knowledge of culture, country and his peoples' history was of the essence, and *lived* this understanding in its most solemn and celebratory aspects. He was loved and respected especially by young men and women who found courage in his example. In 1992 Roger was diagnosed with mesothelioma contracted from the blue asbestos that was trucked through his community from Wittenoom. He died on Easter Monday 1993 just weeks after he launched *Exile and The Kingdom* in Perth. In dedicating this work to Roger Solomon I remember his friendship, kindness and humour.

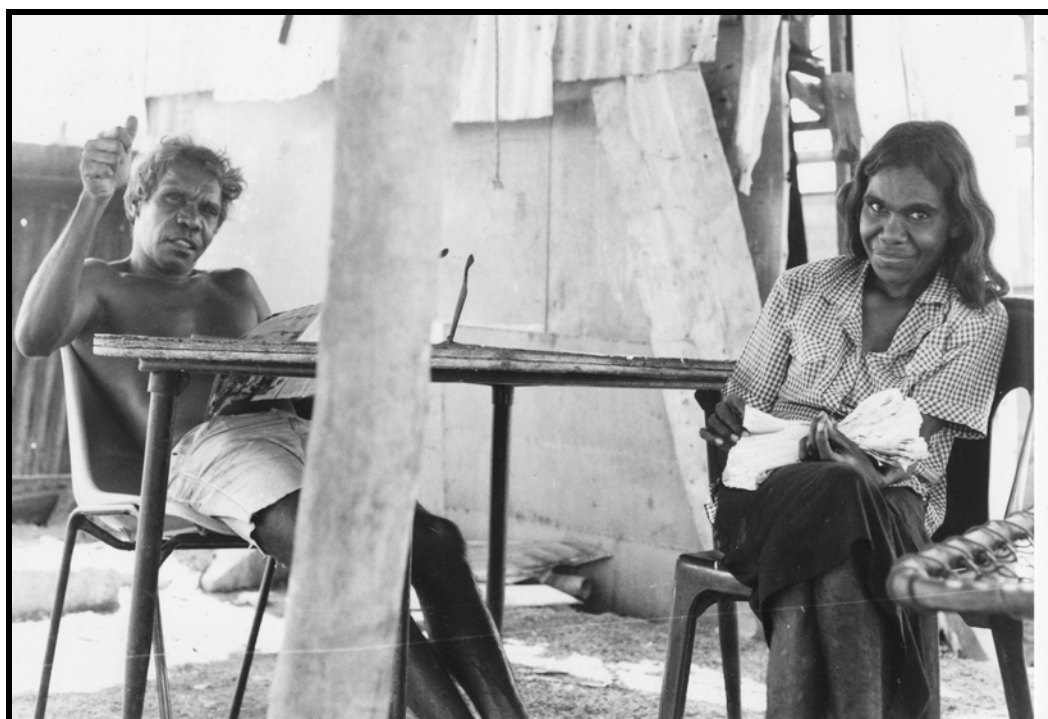


Plate 4: Roger Solomon with his wife, Esther Pat. [Snakewood Films].

