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BBus, BA (Media) Honours

PhD Exegesis

Wadjemup:
Rottnest Island as Black Prison and White Playground

Murdoch University

2015
Declaration

I declare that this exegesis 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.

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Glen Paul Stasiuk
Abstract

The Island of Rottnest is commonly known to Noongar people as Wadjemup, “place across the river” or from its colonial connections the “Isle of Spirits”. Rottnest is located approximately 18 km off the coast of Western Australia, near Fremantle, and is world renowned as a tourism precinct. Less well known is its hidden history related to Aboriginal incarceration, dispossession and death.

This PhD study includes a film documentary entitled: Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground and an exegesis. These two parts examine the Noongar cosmology and spirituality related to the Island and its surrounding landscape and its cultural significance to Noongar knowledge and history. They document the role of the Island as a colonial prison and the traumatic impact on Aboriginal prisoners. Contemporary and proposed approaches to reconciliation via cultural activities, museum exhibits and monuments are also discussed.

The documentary and exegesis ask: Can investigation of the history and cultural context of a colonial prison for Aboriginal inmates facilitate production of a film, documenting the memories and trauma, which will significantly assist in the reconciliation processes via museums, monuments and other cultural activities?

The study answers this question by investigating seven key areas or themes: cosmology; colonization; resistance; Aboriginal imprisonment; memorialisation and remembrance; tourism; and healing and reconciliation. The research emphasizes the period of Aboriginal incarceration on the Island highlighting the significant repercussions that alienation and dispossession had on Aboriginal families and cultural systems in Western Australia, and the lasting legacy of this on contemporary Aboriginal society.

The significance of this research lies in the way it addresses the problems and processes of reconciliation within three levels: structural, theoretical and ideological. The study exposes the Island’s history and unravels the key linkages between critical characteristics and the institutional responses towards reconciliation providing challenges for political practice and history. It engages with a body of literature concerned with the critical analysis of post-colonization and the manner in which this can engender ethical responses towards colonised and dispossessed members of the community. It utilizes numerous oral histories and interviews, including material drawn from the case study of the Rottnest Island Deaths Group and the discovery of skeletal remains on the Island.

By situating the broader public’s views in relation to Aboriginal responses, with film playing a major role, and contextualising these views within theoretical debates this study provides a unique opportunity to chart the linkages between the structural, theoretical and ideological aspects of Indigenous reconciliation and healing.

1 AKA Nyungar, Noongah, Nyoongah, Nyoongar, Nyungah, Noonga and Yoongar
Acknowledgements

To say that this PhD (particularly the written exegesis) has been a long ordeal would be, quite frankly, an understatement! The conditions that I have been privy to whilst undertaking this research project would have tested the bravest of souls – birth, illness, tragedy, deception, bullying, loss, pain, divorce and death all presented themselves directly (and indirectly) whilst I was on this journey. I suppose when one takes on such a tragic and soul-searching topic such as Wadjemup and its Aboriginal Prison history (and all of its related subject matters) one is expectant that it will not be a happy uplifting journey but I was not prepared for the overarching feelings of bewilderment, despair, devastation and depression. But thankfully, through the quagmire of negativity, there was (and is) one emotion that is evident in regards to both my journey and the research project itself (thus the topic of Rottnest Island) and that is: hope. Hope that common sense and reason will be reached and that healing and (active) reconciliation will be sought and brought to fruition – much like my self...

To ALL of the Aboriginal prisoners sent to Rottnest/Wadjemup and our Aboriginal ancestors who were affected by colonization I dedicate this research project to you.

To ALL of the people who were involved in this extraordinary journey with me – whether actively, or in moral support – I thank you so much.

To ALL of the people [a detailed list and description is found within the appendices] who gave their time and energies to share with me their own personal and/or family stories during this project I am forever grateful and indebted to you.

Thanks also to Harriet Wyatt, Peter Hill and Paolo Amaranti of the Rottnest Island Authority, the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, the Rottnest Island Deaths Group, and the Australian Research Council who provided the funds for the project.

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To Christine Brewer who helped compile the references that I utilized into the bibliography and Andrew Turk who patiently formatted this doctorate I thank you. To Anya at PeopleSense thank you for listening to me. To Dr Sean Gorman cheers for being a great role model. To Mira Cohen and Jindee Simmons who assisted me administratively and transcribing the hours of interviews that I conducted I am ever so grateful. To Dennis Simmons your support as a Noongar was both uplifting and appreciated. And to my generous and diligent supervisor Kathy Trees – without you and your constant support and encouragement I would never have been able to complete this mammoth project – I will forever be in your debt.

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To my musical *muse* I would like to pay tribute to Bon Scott, Jim Morrison, John Lennon and Johnny Cash; No more true inspirational words than ‘Ain’t No Grave Can Hold This Body Down...’ have been spoken for this project and subject matter. To my cinematic *muse* I pay tribute to Peter Weir and Rolf de Heer here in Australia and Coppola, the Coens, Eastwood, Hughes, Kubrick, Leone, Lumet, Payne, Scorcese, Spielberg, Tarantino, Zemeckis (abroad) and to George Lucas who with his film *Star Wars* inspired me to be a filmmaker.

During the darkest of my days I have sought refuge in the mate-ship and great game of Australian Rules football. To my two clubs and the brilliant team-mates within them I thank you for your support and allowing me to play the game I love: Lynwood Ferndale Football Club and the Vic Park Pigs.

To my mates Macca, Slim, Chris, Marcus, Dion, James, Marty, Jabba, Dacca, Chook, Fitzy, Ash, Nic & Craig, who are always there for me no matter what, I want to say I am immortally grateful. To my neighbours John, Laura, Nic, Marty and Cally plus Sue & Eden and family thanks for being there.

To *ALL* of my Noongar *moort* (family) I would like to thank you all for supporting me, inspiring me and showing me strength and love. Particular appreciation to my uncles and aunties, and my Elders (living and deceased): Dada & Nanna Keen, Uncle Jim & Robin, Aunty Beryl, Shirley, Nanna (Marie), Mavis, Mitty, Jeanie, Julie, Jennifer and my guardian angel Aunty Stella. I would also like to acknowledge Ken & Dr Bill Hayward who have been cultural supporters of mine throughout the journey – and to *konk* Bill thank you for some wonderful memories on our ‘trip of a lifetime’ and for being there.

To my Grand-dad I cannot implore enough what an inspiration and strength you are to me and my brother. You truly are a perfect example of what it is to wise, gracious, noble and respectful. And to Nan you also were one of the inspirations for this PhD and I am heartbroken that you were not able to see me complete this – but your spirit is felt.

To my bro Shane, though I will always be your big brother, it is you who have helped pick me up so many times in the past and for that I will be forever grateful and I hope that we can keep ‘picking each other up’ on this journey that we call life...

To the mother of my children. Rachel you started this journey with me and though our love withered I do know that our bond in life and spirit is eternal. We share the two most beautiful girls in the world and that, to me, is greater and more rewarding than any PhD or film can ever be. And to Jindee, you shared this journey with me and experienced the pain, anguish, frustration and desperation. You were given to me with the blessing of my mum’s spirit (and Aunty Tjalarinu Mia) and I thank you for standing along side me.

Finally to the reason that I am here on this earth and the two people who gave me the best and most loving of childhoods; I wish to thank my Mum & Dad. Words cannot do justice to the pain and grief that I feel everyday as a result of your passing – there is not a *single* day that I do not think of you both – I miss you and love you so much and I only hope that I was a good son and that you are proud of me.

Which brings me to the two most important people in my life – my beautiful daughters Maya and Lowana. You are the reason that I get up every morning and then thank the spirits when I close my eyes at the end of the day. You are *everything* to me and your love is the greatest of all creations in the world. I love you both so much – *Eternity.*

*We live, we die and death not ends it…*  
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This exegesis contains the names (and images) of deceased people. This may cause some readers some concern or distress. They should exercise caution when viewing this material and content.
Prologue: Setting the Scene

Scenario

“A Country that is able to confront its past is a country that can overcome it.”
- Hillary Rodham Clinton, U.S. Secretary of State – November 3rd, 2010

As I am handed my Rottnest Express ferry ticket at B-Shed Fremantle ferry port I am both surprised and intrigued to be presented with a Rottnest Island Authority endorsed brochure entitled: Wadjemup – Message Stick. The brochure has a dark skinned hand slightly out of focus reaching out and touching a photographic image of a group of Aboriginal men in traditional garb resting in a natural landscape. Upon opening this brochure it becomes evident that the men are Aboriginal prisoners detained on Rottnest Island between the years 1838 and 1931. The brochure now has my full attention. Further reading highlights that ‘…breathtakingly beautiful and casual resort of white sandy beaches and sparkling, translucent waters’ the island possesses ‘…another personal history barely conceivable to most. This other history contains an ancientness of attachment…’ between the place known as Wadjemup and the Whadjuk Noongar, ‘the Sea Eagle people of the traditional Aboriginal custodians of Derbal Yarragan, the land of the Swan River coastal plain now home to Western Australia’s capital city of Perth.’

I read further, engrossed by the brochure as it explains succinctly the cosmological link of the island with the local Aboriginal clan and the geological importance of the island before and after the sea levels rose separating the island from the mainland. Then the text shifts the reader from the ‘…living association that speaks of a cultural history spanning tens of thousands of years’ to the near one-hundred year period of 1838 to 1931 in which ‘this cultural connection was harshly distorted as English settlers, having already claimed this deeply spiritual landscape for their own, used Rottnest Island to imprison Aboriginal men and boys from all over Western Australia.’ I now know that my journey to Rottnest Island, or more culturally correct, Wadjemup, is not just about sand, sea and fun but that a whole ‘other’ world exists on this tranquil isle – another history if you like. The document supports this notion by explaining that ‘A legacy of this time remains in the colonial buildings of the Settlement, many of which were constructed using Aboriginal prisoner labour.’

My anticipation at departing on the ferry to begin my cultural journey and investigation of the content represented within the brochure reaches new heights when an announcement alerts the passengers that it is time to board the ferry. A smiling Rottnest Express worker at the ‘gang-plank’ greets me and I eagerly find my seat to continue reading. The brochure continues to inform the reader about the Aboriginal prison period and then delicately explains that ‘…nearly 400 are known to be buried here, their mass grave a sacred site of remembrance and sorrow, making Rottnest Island a place of deep significance to Aboriginal people across the State.’ I am about to read the current Rottnest Island Authority (RIA) plans to consult with the State’s Aboriginal

2 Greenwald, Glen. Secretary Clinton: The Past must be confronted, November 3rd 2010 [Source: http://www.salon.com/2010/11/02/clinton_96/]
4 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
communities regarding ‘…a blueprint for the Wadjemup Burial Ground’s restoration in recognition of its status as a site sacred to Aboriginal peoples...’ when the Captain of the ferry requests our attention as the boat’s crew explain the safety procedures.

Immediately following the safety briefing, a video production on screens scattered throughout the ferry begin to play. Images and narration explaining the serene and idealic nature of the Island are intertwined with the island’s iconic features. Then on the screen images of Aboriginal men chained by the neck and feet are highlighted and the narrator informs the ferry’s audience of the Aboriginal prison period and the harsh and cruel conditions that they had to endure whilst incarcerated in the Quod. Surprisingly the production also informs the public that the Quod, throughout its prison history held over 4000 Aboriginal men and boys is now known as the ‘Lodge’ or more formally the Rottnest Island Resort. So once where, on average 6 men resided crammed into unsanitary cells ‘…measuring only 3 metres by 1.7 metres’ with nothing more than a dirty thin blanket, there are now resort rooms that comprise 2 to 3 cells (the intervening walls having been removed long ago), with ensuites, televisions, bar fridges and clean double beds.

A montage of images of Aboriginal prisoners concludes with a commemoration and a request from the RIA and an Aboriginal community member (he looks like a well known and respected local Noongar to me) to pay respect to the burial site and its spiritual and cultural significance to the Aboriginal people. The location and boundaries of the Aboriginal burial site are clearly highlighted, making my cultural journey that much easier to locate and embrace.

As the sea begins to throw the ferry around in the ocean’s swell I divert my attention from the television monitors back to the RIA brochure. It informs me that the Wadjemup Burial Ground ‘…welcomes visitors with interpretive elements to explain the site’s history and sanctity and allow for personal reflection’ which, as the brochure goes onto poignantly to explain is ‘…a far cry from its previous use as a camping ground…’ The brochure embraces reconciliation and highlights the Bringing Them Home report, tabled in the Parliament of Australia on the 26th May 1997, and the formal national apology on the 13th February 2008 by the (then) Prime Minister Kevin Rudd. The back page of the brochure makes the reader aware that in 2008 the RIA established its first Reconciliation Action Plan which ‘…aims to reunify Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal histories through collaboration, not coercion, cultural recognition, not relegation and economic development, not decay.’

As the Captain announces that we have arrived at our destination and are docking at the Rottnest ferry terminal I finish reading the brochure with a feeling of contentment and optimism, particularly as I read:

Through this partnership the Rottnest Island Authority proudly shares the custodianship of Wadjemup (Rottnest Island) with the Traditional Owners the Whadjuk Noongar, the country and the world. Through

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6 Ibid.
7 Quod is a British slang word for prison.
10 Ibid.
11 AKA Wadjuk, Whadjuk, Wajug, Wadjup or Wadjuck
this partnership comes also an enduring reconciliation of peoples, history, land and an abiding spiritual accord.  

As I walk off the ferry and approach the Rottnest Island Visitor’s centre at the end of the main jetty I am greeted by a large blue sign with an Aboriginal design of a whale and the words: Wanju WADJEMUP – ‘Welcome to the Place Across the Water’ from the local Whadjuk Noongar. The sign explains the ‘Mamong Dreaming’ – a Noongar ‘Dreaming’ story related to the whale:

When the sea level rose around 10,000 years ago it trapped many spirits under the sea. The only way these spirits can return to the land is through the whales. It is said that whenever a whale calf is born one of these spirits attach themselves to the whale calf. The whale will take the spirit on a journey for up to eighty or ninety years around the ocean before returning to the Western Australian coast. The whale will naturally want to beach itself. The Noongar people know that they beach themselves to return the spirit being carried by the whale back into the land where it belongs. The Noongar men knew when the whales were coming in and would prepare a ceremonial knife called a daap. When the whale washed up on the shore the daap was used to cut the whale open and when the blood from the whale ran into the land the people would be satisfied that the spirit had returned.

My cultural journey has most definitely begun as I imagine the Wadjuk Noongar dancing jubilantly around the dead carcass of the Mamong (whale) singing the ancient spirits from the mammal back into the boodjah (land) as they begin to feast on the flesh celebrating its life and sustenance. Behind the WADJEMUP sign a few feet away on the grass area out the front is a newly constructed sign with a push-button activated mechanism that allows the public to clearly hear a traditional custodian of the Island welcoming them in Noongar dialect and explaining the significance of Wadjemup from a Noongar perspective.

I enter the Rottnest Island Visitor’s Centre and am respectfully informed that the Indigenous bus tour and guide will depart from the main bus depot on ‘the hour every hour’. A Wadjuk custodian delivers the tour. It encompasses the cosmological Noongar history of the Island; the current traditions and protocols still practiced on the Island (for instance the cultural practice of ‘Shooi Shooi Warra Wirn...Yorl Koortliny Quoppardar Wirn’; taking a handful of sand down to the water’s edge of the ocean and asking the bad spirits to go away and the good spirits to come in peace; and, the use of the distinctive Rottnest Tea-Trees (Melaluca Lancedata), known to local Noongar as Booree, for bringing rain as part of an ancient rain ceremony. The guide explains the Island’s significant landmarks. He explains the concept of Kurannup or Koorannup, the place of rest or ‘The heaven (that) lay west of the great Mama Waddurn (father sea), under which their kaanya (spirit of the newly dead) must journey to reach koorannup-nyirganup (their heavenly home)’. He also talks about the Aboriginal prison period and the awful conditions the prisoners had to endure; and, the (unmarked) cemetery where those unable to endure the heinous conditions of incarceration are buried.

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12 Ibid.
13 Courtesy of Noel & Greg Nannup, traditional custodians of Wadjemup (Rottnest Island).
14 Thankyou to Noongar Elder Vivian Hansen who provided this information.
As I have time before the bus (with its striking aquatic blue Aboriginal designed motif of the whale and a mother and joey quokka, designed by Noongar artist and musician Mark Radloff16) departs, I decide to wander to the burial site. I am greeted by a bright, rustic wood sign painted in the official Aboriginal colours black, yellow and red declaring:

ROTTNEST ISLAND
ABORIGINAL PRISONER
CEMETERY

This sign is accompanied by a more modern and conventional sign, which explains that:

This site is sacred to Aboriginal people

They see sons
Beyond this point lie the bodies of more than 370 Aboriginal men.

They see fathers
For almost 100 years between 1838 and 1931 Rottnest Island was a prison for at least 3,670 Aboriginal men and boys.

They see brothers
The men were transported to Rottnest Island from many areas across Western Australia. They became brothers and were imprisoned at the Quod, located just west of this site.

They see leaders
Many of the men imprisoned on Rottnest Island were leaders, warriors and Lore men of their homelands.

They couldn’t understand why
Prison sentences were for crimes they didn’t understand.

They didn’t see them again
Those who died on Rottnest Island remain here, buried at the site in front of you. Their spirits are part of the Island.

Please observe the sanctity of this area17

I look respectfully across the vast area that constitutes the Aboriginal prisoner burial site. I am drawn into its poignancy and consciousness through a garden of stones. In Noongar culture, rock or stone – known as boya – is a cultural resource that was (is) physically used to grind ochre (wilgee), plant or food sources, and played a key part in art design and the trade and exchange process. Symbolically and spiritually these eternal rocks were known to house ancient tribal totems18 and be a place of reflection, cleansing and energy. That is why most of the places of memorial for Aboriginal servicemen and women throughout Australia (such as Kings Park and Collie in W.A. and the Australian National Memorial in Canberra) are represented by way of a large rock from the area where the monument resides.

Within the burial site compound the ‘Garden of Stones’ lies dormant – much like the hundreds of senior Aboriginal lore-men buried under and around the stones – the majesty of the rocks and the whispering wind through the tree-line gives the area a sense of

17 Rottnest Island Authority Aboriginal Burial signage (words courtesy of Reg Yarran).
18 For instance the Ballardong Noongar believe the great water serpent Wargl or Waugal rests under the monolith known as Boyagin or Boojin – near Brookton in the South West of Western Australia.
honour, dignity and respect. As I walk on the prudently lined pathway into the burial site I am awestruck by the change in landscape and fauna of the site. A sign informs me that the buried men in this sacred site were, in the majority, senior lore-men responsible for traditional lore, hunting and rituals in their respective areas and were incarcerated and sent to Wadjemup from all parts of the State. Moreover, the burial site I am walking through has rock/stone and traditional designs from these distinct areas to represent the diverse cultural and geographic areas of these buried men. Dark and brown hues of the rock in front of me gives praise and memory to the first men incarcerated on the island – the Noongar while the white rugged limestone indicates the men who came from the coastal areas of the South West and Geraldton region. The yellow limestone immediately reminds me of the natural wonder of Cervantes and north through to the Murchison. Rich red and orange rock pays respect to the men from the desert regions of the Goldfields and Gibson. Multi-layered rock infused with different colours and textures indicates the southern Pilbara area and the ridged blue and orange stone captures the essence of the Pilbara’s northern areas and Kimberley. This burial site, though simple in design, encapsulates the whole of the State and in one defined area proudly proclaims a site of remembrance and respect and a defined symbol of reconciliation and healing.

When walking back through the burial site I am reminded of the violent colonial history of this nation and more specifically the Swan River Colony and settlement. I am though, buoyed by the reconciliatory and collaborative nature of this burial site and what it stands for; respect to the Aboriginal men buried here, acknowledgement of the Rottnest Island Aboriginal prison, declaration that it is the largest Aboriginal deaths in custody site in Australia, and that through confronting our past a clearer more just future can be galvanised.

**Realities**

The above description of my experience of Rottnest Island is a **FALLACY**. The handing over of the brochure at point of ticket sale, the DVD montage and audio explanation on the ferry, the sign explaining the Whale ‘Dreaming’, the Aboriginal coloured sign at the burial site and the ‘Stone Garden’ do not exist and did not happen. Most of it is fantasy. The reality is that the general public is not presented with an explanatory brochure related to the Aboriginal perspective of the Island at point of sale. The brochure does exist but is relegated to a cabinet in the Rottnest Island Visitor’s Centre and part of the accommodation pack presented to overnight visitors. The DVD presentation that does play on the ferry has a small section dedicated to the Aboriginal perspective of the Island, the former prison and current burial site; however, it is engulfed by the topical images of tourism, amenities, logistics…and quokas! There does exist a sign on the main ferry that greets the near 500,000 visitors to the island each year, but regrettably it does not contain as much information as I fantasized and there is no sign explaining the richness and beauty of the Whale ‘Dreaming’ and other significant and defining Noongar cosmology. Fortunately the sign with a push-button activated Noongar speaker is currently present on the island (in front of the Visitors Centre) but unfortunately the voice is muffled and it is common for it not to be working at all. There did exist a Noongar (Elder) operated bus tour on the island – and the bus did have the Whale

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19 It is estimated that during 2000/2001 of these half a million people 347,045 travelled by commercial ferryservices and aircraft, the remainder by private pleasure craft. About 125,000 of these visitors were from overseas and interstate. These numbers remain consistent today. [Source: Touristic, Vol 16, Number 2, 2000 in Rottnest Island Authority: Annual Report 2000/2001, Government of Western Australia: 5]
‘Dreaming’ insignia over its striking ocean blue ochre colour scheme – but since 2011, the tour has not operated.

Most disappointing, in both a cultural and public sense, is the tragic non-existence on Rottnest Island of a significantly presented Aboriginal Prisoner Burial Site. Yes, the sign explaining the significance of the site is present and via words beautifully and thoughtfully provided by RIA Project Officer (and Noongar Custodian) Reg Yarran the public does feel the destitution and remorselessness that these men were exposed to. No, the Aboriginal coloured sign – which rightfully declared: ROTTNEST ISLAND ABORIGINAL PRISONER CEMETERY does not exist anymore. For many years this rustic wood sign would draw the public to the burial site with its striking colours Black, Yellow and Red of the Aboriginal flag. It could be seen from afar and stood out amongst the other signage on the island. But it is regrettably locked away somewhere in the care of the RIA. And yes the ‘Garden of Stones’ is a figment of my imagination – it does not exist – and has never been considered as a defined memorial for the burial site. Thankfully the current modern signage has a proposed plan for the burial site but it is not apparent or documented in any of the RIA Year Review documents, RIA Management Plans, or the RIA Reconciliation Plan(s) [in any great detail] if any proposal (or action plan with funding) has been made for the future design and memorial of the burial site. For now the utilisation of cultural symbols and resources to pay respect to the buried prisoners will have to remain where it is…in my imagination and in my heart.
Chapter 1: Overview of Research Project

1.1 Introduction

Rottnest Island has had many (Colonial) names, many stories attached to it regarding European discovery, shipwrecks and settlement, and many stories from modern visitors enjoying the delights of the Island and its tourist vista. But what is often neglected and ‘pushed to the side’ is its Aboriginal – or more specifically its Noongar – history, cultural importance, cosmology and name: Wadjemup. What is harder to disregard, (even though over the years attempts have been made), is its Colonial history attached directly to the Aboriginal community; namely the Rottnest Island prison in the 19th and early 20th Centuries. These stories are regrettable and sorrowful. Fortunately they have been recorded, archived and made publically accessible. What this research project and film production does for (probably) the first time is expose all of the aspects of Wadjemup; Cosmological, Spiritual, Anthropological, Ethnographical, Colonial, Incarceration, Remembrance, Memorial and Reconciliatory, from an Aboriginal (Noongar) perspective, in both written and filmic form. With this it is hoped that efforts to commemorate and signify the Aboriginal spirit, trauma, pain, and finally hope, on the Island will, as a result of this research and film project, gather further momentum and the public consciousness (both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal) will be further awakened to the desperate plight of healing the Island, from a local point-of-view, to providing an ‘epicentre’ and beacon of memorial, healing and reconciliation for the State and Nation. A grander vision, though not unrealistic and/or unobtainable, is for Wadjemup to be respected and acknowledged as is Robben Island, where Nelson Mandela was imprisoned in South Africa, and that in the not too distant future Wadjemup could also be acknowledged as a World Heritage listed site of Colonial oppression but also a place of collective hope and understanding.

1.2 Research Question

Can investigation of the history and cultural context of a colonial prison for Aboriginal inmates facilitate production of a film, documenting the memories and trauma, which will significantly assist in the reconciliation processes via museums, monuments and other cultural activities?

Australia’s history can be termed via a three-fold transition; firstly a pre-colonial past, sometimes phrased as ‘ancient’ or ‘prehistoric’, colonial past, often referred to as ‘modern’ or ‘historical’, to the third stage classed as ‘Postcolonial’ or ‘Postmodern’, in which repatriation (of Ancestors, History and Culture) or more suitably reconstruction (of history, culture and memorial) is the basis of our ‘new world order’.1 Thus Australia was “Possessed, dispossessed, [and is now] repossessed.” 2 This current ‘post-modern’ third-phase is where the ‘true’ accounts and alternative narratives of Australian (Aboriginal) history can be (re)written without fear of reprisal or mockery. A period, where post-Apology, 3 promotes the true aspects of our history, the

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2 Ibid: 100.
3 On 13 February 2008 the then Prime Minister, the Hon Kevin Rudd MP, moved in the Federal Parliament a motion of Apology to Australia’s Indigenous Peoples with specific reference to the Stolen Generations. The Prime Minister described it as an occasion for "…the nation to turn a new page in
recognition of Aboriginal struggle and colonial resistance, so the scars of the past can be healed and the spirit of reconciliation nurtured and fostered. I envisage (via this exegesis and docu-drama film production) that by confronting the past, exposing the multi-narratives (and alternative view-points and memory) that exist in the community, and the trauma that is manifested when the story (and respective action) is neglected, that finally the Government and its authorities can be open and honest about what happened at Wadjemup to foster a climate for the sharing of the truth, of black and white history. This ‘post-modern’ period has seen a “…quickening of interest in Aboriginal culture…[and] this national heritage should be protected ‘for all Australians.’”

It is now time to utilize and position Wadjemup as a national focus for healing and reconciliation.

“...I think the title of this documentary [Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground] is very appropriate to remind people that you can’t dance on the history of our people and you can’t dance on justice and on the grave of justice, history and the truth...”

1.3 Research Methodology

One of my principal objectives with(in) the research project (and hence a grounding for the treatment and script (drama) of the docu-drama production) was to compile an extensive literary review of as many key Aboriginal texts and non-Aboriginal, documents and newspaper articles that I could, and more so from a Noongar perspective; to collate as many of the published sources that I could find. It was often believed that Noongar published material was scarce and/or inadequate, but, as can be attested within this exegesis, there exist many excellent and high quality publications related to Noongar cosmology, history, culture, practice and post-modernity. This, despite the traditional means of communicating information and ‘story-telling’ being of an oral or ceremony nature, is I feel, an accomplishment of this exegesis that I am most proud of.

1.3.1 The Interviews

Oral teaching is the most common way of passing on stories, knowledge of significant sites, cultural practices, social rules and more for Aboriginal people. As such the exegesis incorporates oral testimony: via recognized and respected knowledge holders or key figures in organizations, academia, history, art, community, and governmental industries. The most common criticism of documentaries is that the interviews (thus

Australia’s history by righting the wrongs of the past and so moving forward with confidence in the future. We the Parliament of Australia respectfully request that this apology be received in the spirit in which it is offered as part of the healing of the nation.” The Apology passed with bipartisan support from the Parliament and received a standing ovation from the floor of the House of Representatives as well as from the public gallery. [Source: http://www.dss.gov.au/our-responsibilities/indigenous-australians/programs-services/recognition-respect/apology-to-australias-indigenous-peoples]


6 NOTE: The interview quotes that I conducted for the film will be in italics so as to illustrate the primary research material (in contrast to the secondary research material).

7 That being; Traditional Custodians and Elders, Rottnest Island Authority, South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, Rottnest Island Deaths Group, State Government, Academia, Historians, Community Representatives from Noongar AND Kimberley regions, Wadjemup Prisoner descendents, The Quod Project, and a self-confessed whistleblower (and former private detective).
the overall film) presented only incorporate one-point of view. Hence it is important that ‘two sides’ of the story be told, so where possible interviews were conducted with both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal persons who represented varied and ideologically motivated positions. These interviews are integral primary sources of information that strengthen and complement the secondary research materials. I approached the interview process like a director would for a narrative film, that is, I chose or ‘cast’ my interviewees (AKA ‘talking heads’) based on their expertise and their characteristics and public personas. The film, to best represent the eclectic subject matter, needed to have certain areas represented, for example, the peak Noongar body – the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council – State Government, the Rottnest Island Authority, Noongar Elders, Kimberly representatives, Rottnest Island prisoner descendants, Aboriginal activists (or sympathizers) and academic experts. I also felt that based on my filmmaking style and ideology, and the film’s subject matter, that Aboriginal ‘talking heads’ needed (also) a ‘voice’ – so where a representative from the Rottnest Island Authority or State Government was speaking on behalf of their organization, an Aboriginal person within (or attached) to the same organization also speaks:

“…you have to let us tell our own stories first or you make us voiceless and powerless...”

In my opinion the most informative and surprising of all of the ‘talking heads’ was Paul Allardyce, self-confessed amateur historian and former private investigator. I still to this day do not know how he came to approach me but his role as the ‘whistleblower’ within the film helps give the binary countenance to the political and branding speak that some of the interviewees (predominately from State Government and the Rottnest Island Authority) sprout. Having someone that was ‘on the ground’ when the skeletal remains of the prisoners were first made public, then being able to discuss the respective ‘differences’ with the State Government and the Authorities that arose and his passion towards the Aboriginal cause, makes for an excellent source and interviewee. [For a more detailed description of the interviewees see Appendices – Section 7.2.4]

1.3.2 The Film

“There are a 1000 ways to tell a story – but you should stick to just one…”

During my Media studies degree I vividly remember a lecturer proclaiming the above statement in earnest several times throughout the semester. It is also one of the cornerstones that I utilized for this film documentary. I always envisaged that the film would be comprised of two key parts; structured studio interviews and constructed docu-drama re-enactments. The studio interviews would provide the narrative, living characterization and binary argument(s). The re-enactments would provide (further) characterization, reinforce and strengthen the narrative information and influence the drama and emotion [visually and sonically].

Once I established this, I was able to answer core film production questions; “What is my film actually about? What is the style and approach of my film?” Next I needed to address the importance of paying respect to, and gaining strength from, cultural storytelling as it is an integral part of life for Aboriginal Australians. In the past, stories were shared verbally around the fire, and now in modern times these stories are

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archived via multi-media and production means. Part of my film ideology is to attempt to work within these two paradigms, and at all times encourage Indigenous perspectives. One of the most important aspects to my standpoint is to nurture Aboriginal representation within my film productions, as in the past Aboriginal Australians have often criticized the representation of our people in film and production as offensive or insulting. Aboriginal people and communities have for over a hundred years been the subject of films, documentaries, news reports and productions but unfortunately the experience has been mixed, with perspectives and the gaze (predominately) being exploitive and/or stereotypical. One of the important aspects to counter this unfortunate circumstance and foster this ideological position of ‘self-representation’ is to have an element of control (as writer, director and/or producer) within the collaborative process that filmmaking allows (and in fact demands).

For me finding this ‘truth’ and ‘self representation’ within film has (to this point in time) best been achieved via the documentary form. Documentary film is a powerful medium of constructed imaginings and filtered creations and it is this film form (and film mode) that I utilize to display and cross the many diverse representations of Aboriginality that exists in this land.

1.3.3 The Exegesis

A key aim of the exegesis is to give a background to all of the information collected, analysed and theorised – whether it was cosmological, spiritual, cultural, historical, colonial or post-modern in content and nature. The extensive (and descriptive) ‘back-story’ allows a clearer understanding of why the Island is important to Noongar; why the Noongar did not immediately resist the Swan River Settlement; when resistance did occur why it happened in the manner that it did; and why it was always doomed to fail. Why the deaths of Midgegooroo and his son Yagan, was so important to the ultimate surrender of the Wadjuk Noongar and why the Pinjarra Massacre and the ‘Frontier’ into the East and Northern tribal groups ultimately led to the formation of the Rottnest Island prison establishment in a designed attempt to swiftly curtail Aboriginal resistance and begin the period of Governmental control and repression are also explored. This extensive background information, complements the oral testimony, giving valid reasons why the Island of Wadjemup is important in today’s post-modern context and why the Island deserves greater recognition and memorial in today’s political, social and cultural landscape.

1.4 Description of Chapters

In this exegesis I felt that it was important that an extensive background be given to best describe the Aboriginal/Noongar perspectives in relation to the narrative of connection to country (cosmology and spirituality), understanding the events that European settlement brought, the need for resistance and the ramifications of these actions, the settler’s reasons for establishing the Rottnest Island prison, the traumatic and inter-generational affects of this prison, the post-modern tourists phase, activism, and remembrance, and finally the importance that healing and reconciliation plays in the psyche of the Aboriginal community, and on a larger scale the State and Nation. Thus chapters related to the pre-colonial past, [‘Dreaming and Noongar ‘Dreaming’], the colonial past, [European Settlement, Conflict, and Penal Colony] and the ‘Postcolonial’ period [Alternative histories, Cultural Awareness, Memorial and Reconciliation] formulate the classic 3-Act structure of narrative: “Possessed, dispossessed, [and] repossessed.”
1.5 Final Considerations

“[A] Film is not meant to be read but to be seen…”

The above is another key statement that I constantly recall from my Media studies. Hence it is important that the exegesis and the film be treated as separate entities, even though there is discussion and reference to the film within this written document. I am realistic enough to know that (probably) the reading audience will be fewer than the viewing audience of my film – particularly once the film is premiered, shown at film festivals and broadcast on national Television – and that those who both read and view my film will be of a small number. But what the exegesis and production achieve both together (and seperately) is they tell a story of an Island that predominately has had its Aboriginal history (whether cosmological, spiritual, colonial, and/or post-modern) ignored or vanquished to inferior status. Both aspects of the research project attempt to disclose and give validity to the importance of the Island – historically and culturally – in which a great deal of trauma, repression and harm was (is) attached to the Island, and the manner in which this needs to be addressed, reconciled and memorialized in both a written and filmic manner.

Actor Curtis Taylor in the production of _Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground_  
[Writer & Director: Glen Stasiuk – BLACKRUSSIAN PRODUCTIONS 2013©]
Chapter 2: History of Perth Area

2.1 Introduction

The first aim of this chapter is to present the cosmological and spiritual aspect of Aboriginal culture in the macro and then, from a micro perspective, a descriptive study of the Noongar cosmology, legend, myth and spirituality – with a particular focus on Wadjemup – its varied cosmological stories, its relationship to the other Islands in its vicinity, and its connection to the Anthropological theories based around the mainland and surrounding ocean front. The chapter goes on to summarize the history of the Perth area from the first visits by Europeans then through the period of settlement.

2.2 Before European Settlement

2.2.1 ‘Dreaming’ & The Noongar ‘Dreaming’

Kooralong Koora Nyitting Ngallak Noitj, Nidja Noongar Boodja
(From the beginning of time to the end, this is Noongar country)

The majestic and magnificent Rainbow Serpent – known to Wadjuk Noongar\(^1\) as the Waugal\(^2\) – moves effortlessly at speed through the Derbal Yerrigan (Swan River) westward towards Walyalup (Fremantle) where the mouth of the river meets the Wardan (Indian ocean). This creator of the hills, rivers, ranges and water holes is the protector of Noongar, both its people and lore/law. It is aware that a threat is present off the coast, known to Noongar as Derbal Nara (Gage Roads, Cockburn Sound). The mighty Waugal, guardian of the fresh water smells the unusual aroma of salt in its waterways and knows that another spirit being has come into its territory. Yondock\(^3\), an ancestral crocodile\(^4\) has travelled down from the north, causing floods and disturbances and is now waiting in the ocean waters between Wadjemup (Rottnest Island) and Walyalup (Fremantle) to challenge the Waugal to a duel.

As the Waugal approaches the mouth of the river it passes spiritual caves in what is now known as North Fremantle and a fresh water spring at East Street Jetty – presenting the Waugal with advice, confidence and strength. Finally, the two giants and powerful spirit beasts meet eye-to-eye and a great battle begins…

…the ocean is awash with rage as the Waugal and Yondock roll over the top of each other thrashing and biting creating a huge ocean trench, that is still visible today off the coast of Fremantle. As they fight their powerful and gigantic tails break up the land leaving the three islands (which exist to this day); Wadjemup (Rottnest Island), Gnooroomayup (Carnac Island) and Meeandip (Garden Island). As the battle ensues and with the fate of its people, lore, waterways and ranges in dispute the Waugal overpowers the Yondock and bites off its tail and places the tail across the mouth of the river to prevent salt water from ever entering the fresh water of the river again (the former bar removed in colonial times, near where the WA Maritime Museum now

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1 The Aboriginal custodians of the area encompassing the Perth metropolitan (including Rottnest Island, Fremantle, the Swan River, North to Yanchep, East to Midland, South to Rockingham, and the western side of the Darling Range or kaarta mordo)
2 AKA Wagyl, Wargyl, Waarkal, Wogyl, Wogal and Woggal
3 AKA Yoondok, Youndok, Yoon-doong, Yundung and Yoon-duk
4 Also known in Noongar dialect to mean: ‘as a species of guana’ or iguana/lizard
stands). The body of *Yondock* remains as *Meeandip* (Garden Island) and to this day its body – minus tail – can be seen from the mainland sitting low in the water with its teeth and snout facing north, from whence it came…

From then, and for all eternity, the *Dwerte Wirnitj* (Dingo spirit) watches from *Dwerte Weelardinup* (Cantonment Hill) to ensure that the spirit of the *Yondock* is never reunited with its tail. The victorious *Waugal* travelled back eastward through its country, via the *Derbal Yerrigan* (Swan River) and then *Goguljaa* (Avon River) to the *kaart* (hills) at *York* (*Ballardong boodjah*) and down through to *Boojin Boya* (Boyagin Rock) at Brookton where it rests to this very day…

*Our story is in the land.*

*It is written in those sacred places…*

Bill Neidjie, Gagadju Man

*Noongar*, like other Aboriginal tribal groups, passed down their cosmology and spiritual stories orally through hundreds of generations over thousands of years. It is as important to be guided by ancestors, who have passed away, as it is by the Elders who are living. It is as crucial to respect the stories of the ‘old people’ as it is to teach the children the ‘right way’. It is as important to learn the rituals, as it is to protect them and pass them on at the correct time (and place). These oral accounts become part of the fabric of the tribal and family group(s). In a post-modern context these stories are commonly known as ‘Dreaming’ stories. Host and Owen represents these ‘Dreaming’ traditions as “…like other creation stories…ways of making sense of the world and one’s place in

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7 The term ‘Dreaming’ is sometimes used interchangeably with ‘Dreamtime’ to refer to the primordial and eternal time of creation. However, it can also refer to the particular spirituality and beliefs of an individual or group.
Host and Owen argue that the notion of *Noongar* mythology and their cosmological stories may seem ‘quaint and fanciful folklore to Western minds’ but that the myth and its true place in the spiritual and cosmology paradigms of the *Noongar* is not ‘meaningless’. It is no ‘…more imaginative than the myth through which Christians make sense of their existence’ and that like the Christian myth and religious doctrine ‘…it is a matter of belief rather than of proof.’

Until the 1980s the term ‘Dreamtime’ was generally used by non-Aboriginal writers, including Ainslie Roberts in his series of Aboriginal Legends. However, since 1988 the term ‘Dreaming’ is more commonly used, particularly by Aboriginal writers, to denote that the creation stories are not related to a mythological time. Today many Aboriginal writers and artists use the term ‘Dreaming’ to refer to cosmology generally. Individuals and groups use specific terms, such as ‘Jukurrpa’ when referring to their own cosmology. These stories of creation are vast and varied but uncannily, despite thousands of kilometres in distance and multiple climates, terrains and landscapes there exist ‘Dreaming’ stories that share a common thread or theme. One factor is evidently clear – it is a colonial term implemented to assist audiences/readerships to better understand the (seemingly) intangible and eternal qualities of Aboriginal creation and cosmology.

According to Storm, the term ‘Dreamtime’ was first used at the very end of the nineteenth century. One report described that the postmaster of Alice Springs used it as a translation of the Arrernte word Alcheringa or Altyerrenge; another version is that the famous Australian anthropologist Baldwin Spencer coined the term. According to Vlahogiannis in *Endless Path: Dreamtime*, a study of Aboriginal Australian mythology including religion and legends, the core of Aboriginal life, is ‘Dreamtime’, or an individual’s ‘Dreaming’, a rich body of mythology that explains the world, past and present, to the Aborigine. Vlahogiannis argues that: “‘Dreaming’ merges with ‘Dreamtime’ and together encompasses the Aboriginal cosmology and history, maps out the physical and metaphysical landscapes of every aspect of the land and nature, and serves as a system of beliefs, controlling religious beliefs, rituals and social behaviour and customs.”

Noongar Elder *Munyari* encapsulated a key concept of ‘The Dreaming’ to Aboriginal people – and in this instance Noongar people – when he said, “We have always been here, and we will always be here.” In essence *Munyari* is describing the concept of ‘Dreaming’ as being conceived in the cosmos, time immemorial, where time extends beyond the reach of memory, record or tradition. This conceptualisation of ‘Dreaming’ or the ‘Dreamtime’ might also be translated as ‘from all eternity’.

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9 Ibid.
10 Ibid.
11 Ainslie Roberts is perhaps best known for his interpretations of Aboriginal legends in the best-selling book *The Dreamtime*, written in collaboration with Charles P. Mountford. Through his works Roberts tried to communicate the sacredness of Aboriginal people and culture among the white people of Australia. [Source: http://www.ainslieroberts.com/]
13 Dr Nicholas Vlahogiannis cited in Ibid: 11.
14 Dr Nicholas Vlahogiannis cited in Ibid.
Elder, Munyari explains this general idea of Dreaming from a Noongar perspective. He says:

“Being Nyungar is being part of a family, sharing with the others all the things we believe in. We feel these things very deeply, they join us together, and to our old people. All of us are like one. Our spirits are in the trees and the hills and the rocks and the waterways. And in the...animals. When you’re born you come from the land and when you die your spirit goes back to the land.” 17

“If you haven’t got any story, Mrs Boss, you got nothing”.

[Australia]18

Hence the concept of ‘Dreaming’ bonds every Aboriginal person to their country or ‘tribal’ boundary or (in some instances) boundaries and gives meaning to their existence and the existence of those before them. It is the very essence of their being. It is part of the inner belief of being Noongar – of creation and the after-life. Further, Munyari’s explanation makes clear that the Aboriginal world-view is circular not linear in nature. It has a circular balance and one element is as important and countered by the other. In the Noongar cosmology the male moon (Meeka) is as important an element as the female mother sun (Ngark). Everything envelops the other and has a purpose in life and beyond. The cosmos, the ancestors, the spirits, the stories, the physical elements all are interlinked and as important components as each other to form the essences of life, before, during and after. What may appear unclear or discombingulating to non-Aboriginal and some Aboriginal people, is a way of viewing the world.

Storm describes the formation of the physical world as being when “[t]he Ancestors assumed the forms of humans, animals and super-humans, and moved through the grey featureless landscape (and the seas and sky) shaping it with their bodies, creating humans, animals and plants and inspiring a vast network of stories” 19. Noongar describe the creation as occurring in the Nyitting – the cold times when the earth was flat, grey, lifeless and cold. Munyari described the creation of the Noongar landscape during creation times as a result of the great water snake, the Warkarl (or Waugal). “The Warkarl made the rivers, swamps, lakes and waterholes.” 20 Collard further describes the Waugal (Warkarl) in a descriptive manner utilising both English and traditional Noongar dialect; “Sometimes it went kardup budjar (under the earth) and sometimes it went yira budjar (over the earth) and it made bilya (river/s), the kaart (hill/s) and ngamar (the waterhole/s).” 21

Historian Dr Neville Green, supports the profound and unwavering belief that Noongar had, and have, in the ‘Dreaming’ when he wrote in his widely recognised novel Broken Spears that:

17 Winmar, Walwalinj: The Hill that Cries: 1.
18 Australia, Twentieth Century Fox Film Corporation, (Dir: Baz Luhrmann, 2008, 165 min)
19 Storm, Endless Path: Dreamtime: 38.
All Nyungar traced their origin to the Dreamtime, some claimed that their ancestry had been carried to earth on the backs of crows, while others told that their people had sprung from emus. This illustrates the kinship that the Nyungar have with the creatures of the environment and manner in which Aborigines regard themselves as inseparable from the eternal process of nature.

To Munyari, and many other thousands of Noongar before, during and after colonisation, the concept of the ‘Dreaming’, the creation serpent Waugal (Warkarl), and its connection to the land and spirit is not negotiable. It has not changed for hundreds of generations as acknowledged by Justice Wilcox, who during his findings related to the Single Noongar Claim (May to October 2004 and March to April 2005), proclaimed that “…there was a high degree of consistency in relation to the most widespread beliefs (the need to appease the spirits, wirrniitjs, the creation snake story, wagyls, wudatji, mabarn). This says something about both the unity of the people across the claim area and their adherence to traditional ways.”

Though heavily criticized by the anthropology fraternity at the time, and critically debated by many academics since, the work of Daisy Bates, who worked among the Noonga population during 1904-1910, did much to recognise and record the traditional society of the (Bibbulmun) Noongar and its tribal belief systems at the onset of the Western Australian British settlement, including its belief in a mystical and all-powerful water serpent called the Waugal:

Suppose an ordinary inquirer were to ask a native of the South-West who or what the woggal (mythical snake) was that haunted a certain tree or cave in his district, the native would probably tell him, “Oh, that woggal big fellow; he make beela (rivers), kata (hills), boornas (trees) everywhere; and if the yoon’ar (natives) are wakkain (bad, immoral, disobedient) he make ‘em minditch (sick) or might be he kill ‘em, big yan’ga (spirit) that one woggal.” From this statement the questioner would infer that the woggal was imbued with the powers of a Supreme Being...

Bates, as did Storm, Vlahogiannis and others, noted that ‘Spirit Serpent’ is a universal belief amongst many tribal groups across a vast geography:

I have, however, discovered that in every tribe there is a profound belief in some “spirit presence which dwells in tree,

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23 Quoted in Host, Owen, and South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, ’It’s Still In My Heart, This Is My Country’: The Single Noongar Claim History: xxi.
24 Bates, and others like Richards (The Bibbulmun), claim that the collective south-west Aboriginal clans are the tribal group Bibbulmun meaning ‘the land of many breast’ – ‘bibbi’ meaning breasts and ‘bula’ meaning many. Some Elders still stand by this term and its meaning but the majority accept the (14) tribal boundaries [of which Bibbulmun is one] as determined by recorded Noongar oral history and documented by Tindale and now the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council (SWALSC).
25 According to Moore in Vinnicombe, Patricia. Goonininup: a site complex on the southern side of Mount Eliza: an historical perspective of land use and associations in the old Swan Brewery area,1989: 9. The name Waugal is derived from the word Waug meaning soul, spirit, breath whilst the word Waugalan is interpreted as meaning ill, very sick, or under the influence of Waugal.
hill, waterhole, or cave in some part of the tribal territory, the home of such spirit being “sacred” or “forbidden” ground for ever, to all except the elders and sorcerers of the tribe. This spirit takes various forms, the principle one being that of a huge mythical snake which has its home in some mystical gloomy spot whose surroundings lend themselves to the mystery and fear attached to the belief.  

Storm summarises this cultural consideration by claiming that, “The cult of the Rainbow Serpent is one of the longest unbroken spiritual traditions in the world. Different groups (across the continent) tell a number of stories about (the serpent) and it is known by many names including Almudji, Julungul, Galeru, Ungur, Wongungur, Worombi, Yurlungger, Kalseru, Langal, Ngalyod, Ungud, Wullunqua and Muit.”  

Aboriginal people believe that the many significant and distinct boulders, stone formations and major monoliths scattered across the continent are people the Rainbow Serpent turned to physical forms for ignoring its command and laws or are where the ‘Spirit Snake’ itself resides in sleep or rest. There are several unique and significantly sized rock formations in the Ballardong boodja, particularly in the Brookton region (approximately 100 kilometres south-east of Perth). It is a common Noongar legend that once the main business of the Waugal was complete it made its way out of the Avon River (Goguljaa) at York and ‘went up over the hill and went Boyagin Rock way’ where it is resting to this very day underneath the massive monolith.

In fact until the building of the Swan River colony in 1829, there sat at the foot of Kaart Ginniny Bo (or Kartagarrup, Gargatup or Karrakatta) – named Mount Eliza by the colonists and later Kings Park – profound large round stones that Wadjuk Noongars referred to as the excrement of the Waugal. Hence the name where these stones reside: Goonininup, the place of the Waugal’s goona (goona being the Noongar word for excrement). Settlers in the colony misinterpreted the stone formations throughout the Swan River region as the eggs of the mythical serpent snake. Green recognises this by recording their account as:

On the banks of the Swan River, at the foot of King's Park, there were several round stones symbolising the eggs of Waugal, the spirit of the water snake that haunted salt and fresh water pools.

Francis Armstrong, the first Government interpreter in the Swan River Colony who wrote in 1836, supports this:

There are certain large round stones, in different parts of the Colony, which they [the Aborigines] believe to be the eggs laid by the waugal. There was, lately, one such stone on the shore of Currie’s Bay, near Mount Eliza, which has since been removed, by some of the settlers probably. On passing such stones, they are in the habit of making a bed for it, of the rushes of the blackboy…

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28 Storm, *Endless Path: Dreamtime*: 221.
Daisy Bates reports that without proper guidance from locals “No Aboriginal visitors who were strangers to a tract of country would go near powerful Waugal places” and that local Noongar “...always scattered rushes or leaves from the Grass Tree at a particular spot...” whilst on their journeys past sacred Waugal spots for fear of being punished by illness and even death. The local Noongar would cry out:

“Ngain-ya ye-ya kooling” (I am coming now)
“Nyal winjala nyinde?” (Where are you?)

As they spread the rushes near the sacred spot they would utter:

“Ngaija noono daranya gongin kalaguttuk nganya mamma”
(I your bed carry countryman me father).

Bates explained (in Vinnicombe) that when the local Noongar were queried on why they did this they simply remarked that, “it was the Law and had been done for all time”. She wrote that where the Waugal rested in the Southwest was “…made known by the presence of lime, which was its excreta, and certain salt pans now found in inland districts were formed from its urine.”

There are clear markings of the legendary Waugal strewn throughout Perth and its surrounding hills. In York according to Nyungar Elder Munyari you can see where the Warkarl (sic) left a track when he came over the hill.

“He came over the hills at York, and his tracks can still be seen. He came down the Avon River to the nanuk (neck) of the river at Guildford, where there is a bend. When he finished he went to a great underground cave in the river. He did not go on because the water further on was salty.”

According to Noongar legend the Waugal created a limestone bar across the mouth of the Swan River at the entrance of Fremantle which separated the fresh river water from the salty seawater of the ocean. According to various Aboriginal accounts, once the mythical creatures had completed their creative works they returned to the earth, ascended into the sky, swam out into peaceful waters, or, in some instances merged with the physical features of the landscape that they had created. It is commonly believed that, though dormant, their spirits are still at work and still have the power to affect the lives of individuals within the tribal group, or even the tribe itself. They also have the power to affect the life of non-Aboriginal people.

During the founding of the Swan River Colony, the rock bar was a physical barrier preventing maritime passage from the ocean, through the mouth, and to the settlements inland. And so it was, as Janey Dolan – Curator of the Walyalup Dreamings exhibition and publication – writes that:

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32 Ibid: 17.
33 Ibid: 18.
34 Quoted in Ibid: 9.
36 The City of Fremantle, Walyalup Dreaming: 11.
In an act that links two iconic ‘creation stories’, one Nyoongar (sic) and one Wadjela,\(^37\) that same rock bar, the tail of a great ancestral figure, was blasted and destroyed during the 1890’s in order to create the Fremantle Harbour, one of C.Y. O’Connor’s\(^38\) great engineering achievements. This process of the destruction of the rock bar and the creation of the harbour allowed the port of Fremantle and the city of Perth to develop and to become a successful colony.\(^39\)

Wadjuk Noongars do not view the blasting of this ancient rock bar by C.Y. O’Connor as an achievement. They see the event as desecration of the mythical battle site between the Waugal and Yondock. According to a local Noongar Elder, with ancestry from the Wadjuk, Ballardong and Yuad regions, and former Indigenous Principle Advisor to the Deputy Premier – Neville Collard states:

“…when C.Y. O’Connor dredged that estuary and if he would have gone a hundred metres back to the east he would have dredged that through clear sand and made an even better harbour but he didn’t he dredged all that limestone out so he changed the eco of the swan river and then he built the water pipeline to Kalgoorlie and because he didn’t pump the water from one station to the other... he came back on the train jumped on his horse at Perth station rode down to South Beach and shot himself. The Noongars reckon that was the retribution from the ‘blackfellas’ for the damage to the Derbal Yerrigan, to the mouth of the river, because he destroyed the most important site to Noongar people and that was the Derbal.”\(^40\)

The late Bishop Salvado, in his History of the Natives of Western Australia, mentions the natives’ belief in the presence of a mythical snake (Waugal), which inhabited a deep pool in the neighbourhood of New Norcia. Dr. Salvado’s account (recorded by Daisy Bates) illustrates the great fear the natives held of the Waugal:

“One evening, he says, I was seated in my room after a long and trying day, when a voice from without called me. I went out and found several natives who had come in from a long day’s hunt. “Give us some water,” they said. I gave them all I had, but they asked for more, more! “Go down to the pool,” I said, “and drink all you want.” “No,” they replied, “you come and get it for us.” “I am tired and can’t go,” I said. They conferred together, and presently one of the Elders came to me and said: “We cannot take water from that pool, it is winnaitch (forbidden, sacred), and if we go there the wagal (sic) will kill us, but if you go, you are a ‘janga’ (white man “spirit”), and the janga wagal won’t hurt you.” There was nothing for it to rise and go with them. We

\(^{37}\) Wadjela is the modern day Noongar word meaning ‘whitefella’ or a non-Indigenous person

\(^{38}\) An Irish engineer who in 1891 became the Engineer-in-Chief of Western Australia and where he was responsible for the construction of the Fremantle Harbour and the Goldfields Water Supply Scheme project that supplied water to the Eastern Goldfields. [Source: http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/oconnor-charles-yelverton-7874]

\(^{39}\) The City of Fremantle, Walyalup Dreaming: 11.

\(^{40}\) Collard, Neville "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project," [BlackRussian Productions, 2011].
went along the track towards the pool, the natives walking in single file behind me. I reached the pool, filled the vessels, and brought them to where the natives waited a little distance away, as they would not approach the pool. On our return to the house the same mode of single file was followed, but this time the natives went in front of me, so that should the spirit of the pool chase us, I would become its first victim and they would have time to escape.”

Daisy Bates described Fanny Balbuk as the ‘last’ ‘true full-blood’ Perth district Noongar (Bibbulmun) woman. This highlighted the naïve view that Bates held regarding the Noongar who had a European lineage as a result of settlement within the Swan River region. Fortunately Bates was able to record the views, recollections and stories of Balbuk – including the Waugal legend. Balbuk told the story of a deep waterhole and “…a yoongar (native) that killed some goomal (grey possums) and cooked it up on the banks of the waterhole and the woggal (sic) ate him – vomited him up – find daaja (meat food) for him – warra (female kangaroo) yon’gar (male kangaroo), goomal (possum) and weja (emu) and feed the woggal. Then he bulya-ed (looked magically) and covered him with kooloo (lice) – scratched and scratched holes in his breast and side – he nooitj (died).” Bates continues the legend of the Waugal by writing that, “Sometimes the woggal (sic) is in the sea, and sometimes in the rocks and hills; but his favourite homes are the deep waterholes. He can carry swamps and bulrushes on his back, for he is of enormous strength.”

So it makes perfect sense that throughout the regions and tribal boundaries of the Noongar, the Waugal was seen as a creator, lore-keeper, guardian, avenger or healer – dependent on the story and legend being told. Regardless of the (slight) discrepancies of the Waugal story (and its spelling) throughout Noongar boodjah (country) the one constant is that “…none deny its enormous size and all agree in their description of its supernatural strength and powers.” And that the “…Waagle (sic) is central and crucial to the stories of creation and existence of the river and remains a potent and revered figure for Nyoongar (sic) people.”

Songlines or ‘dreaming’ tracks are integral to Noongar (and in the macro: Aboriginal) being and existence. Noongar song-lines speak of the first ancestors that appeared and gave names to the places (some of which still exist in vocabulary today). They tell of where the ancestors came into existence in the mortal world in flesh and name. Storm explains the existence of Aboriginal essences and song-lines (or ‘Dreaming Tracks’) as created by the Ancestors or Ancestral Spirits as being the very first beings that “…emerged from inside the earth, from the sky or from across the seas.”

Evidence of Noongar (Nyungar) existence has been recorded by archaeologists at various sites throughout the south west corner of Australia, including sites at Devil’s Lair, near Augusta, 29 000 years before the present (B.P.) and in the Swan Valley near Perth 38 000 years B.P. However, although archaeologists and anthropologists have agreed upon Noongar habitation beginning around 40,000 years BP, Noongar origin is
noted by senior Noongar and Elders as being since time began and via story form for thousands of years. For thousands of years, hundreds of generations, Noongar society has been sustained through strict ‘song-lines’ and cosmological and spiritual belief in the *Waugal* (the creator), cultural-lore, traditional practices and environmental symbiosis.

Mountford writes that these myths (or legends or stories or ‘song-lines’) are accepted as a record of absolute truth, an answer if you will, to all of the questions that arise in the ceremonial and daily life of the Aboriginal people and its culture by claiming that:

As it was done in the Dreamtime, so it must be done today.  

This statement by Mountford is an excellent representation of the concept of Aboriginal – and for the purpose of this written piece, Noongar – mythology, legend and the ‘Dreaming’. It is eternal, and it is insurmountable. The ‘Dreaming’ links the Noongar to the Aboriginal creation and gives (them) not only an affinity with the land but a personal relationship to it. It is an existence in which Aboriginal people have both place and purpose: a place determined by kinship and a purpose that everyone recognises and acknowledges. Laws regulate the concept of ‘Dreaming’ and song-lines and customs passed down through the generations and interpreted by the senior (lore) men and women.

Noongar mythology and lore had, and still has, its inner essence in the creation of the country – *Ngulluk Koort Boodjah* – the Heart Land of the Noongar – and the sacred sites that stem from this eternal legacy and ‘Dreamtime’ ancestry. For time immemorial the Noongar and other tribal groups throughout Australia have had a deep seeded interest in the universe above and about them, that is the stars, the sky, the sea and in particular, the earth itself. As Mountford so eloquently surmises: “Out of this timeless interest has grown a rich heritage of myths and beliefs…”

**Dedication (Our Mother – This land)**

*Since the ‘Dreaming’ immemorial
the dancing spirit’s creativity
wove the mystic’s lore and rule
formed our Mother, land eternity
drawing flesh to feeding breast.*

Graeme Dixon

According to Green, Noongar territory was the fertile triangle of Western Australia’s south-west extending from the Geraldton district south along the coast to Cape Leewin, continuing south-east almost to Esperance and then in a line north-west to rejoin the coast at Geraldton. The South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council (SWALSC), the peak body of the Noongar nation, utilises Tindale’s cartography and recognises fourteen (14) Noongar tribal groups; *Wajuk* (Perth region), *Amangu, Yuat, Balardung*,

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52 Norman Barnett Tindale (12th October 1900 – 19th November 1993) was an Australian anthropologist who is best remembered for his work mapping the various tribal groupings of Indigenous Australians – including the mentioned Noongar territories. [Source: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Norman_Tindale]
Pinjarup, Wiilman, Wardandi, Kaniyang, Bibbulman, Minang, Goreng, Wadjari, Nyaki-Nyaki, and Kalaamaya, over an area estimated to be almost 3,000,000 hectares with 1600 kilometres of coastline along which there are dotted a few distinct islands.

The largest of these islands are Garden, Carnac and Rottnest lying just off the coast of Fremantle, in the water known as Gage Roads, and although uninhabited at the time of colonisation in 1829, Noongar legend, from the creation times, says that these islands once formed part of the mainland. Between 6,000 – 7,000 years ago, as the Ice Age began to ease, the earth’s polar ice caps melted, and millions of cubic kilometres of water poured back into the oceans, which caused the sea levels to rise about 90 metres. The seas around the Australian continent began to creep forward and the coastal plain of the South-west diminished and hill tops became islands; Rottnest Island (Wadjemup) is the best known of them.53 The Noongar people would have known Wadjemup or Wadjem as a long limb of land projecting from the coast – with its highest peak being an obtainable hill – that marked hunting grounds or fishing rocks once favoured but which became “radically altered”.54 According to Green, the Noongar told George Fletcher Moore in 1838, that a long time ago in the past Rottnest and Garden Islands had been joined to the mainland.55

Some of the Traditional Wadjuk Noongar share the story of Nytinny when the islands from Garden to Rottnest were joined, forming one big island called Biidjiigoordup or Biidjigurdu-Nguni and when the Derbal Yerrigan (river) ran through in northerly direction east of this formation. Two spirit brothers – Nguunti Gudjaal-ba – in the cold times (Koora Koora Nytiny or Ngiiadinyarra) lit a fire (kaarla) to keep warm. The fire lit by these two spirit boys spread quickly through the caves beneath the surface of the land mass and burnt with such intensity that the bedrock and stone of the land mass melted and then, through the cooling of the ocean, cracked into three distinct islands. This resulted in the separation of ‘Biidjiigoordup’ forming the islands we see today: ‘Wadjemup’ (Rottnest Island), ‘Ngooloomayup’ (Carnac Island) and ‘Meeandip’ (Garden Island).56

Wadjuk Elder, Cedric Jacobs, a direct descendent of esteemed leader Midgegooroo,57 describes another Noongar mythology and narrative connected to the island Wadjemup:

“...Wadjemup is a very interesting word actually. From my understanding...it refers to the Emu. It’s the Wadj, the Waitch or the Waitchemup, and that is in reference to the Emu...on closer inspection of the topographical maps you can almost identify the shape of a bird...on the outline of the Island. So its significance is pretty important, it had mythological significance and it is quite interesting to know that Waitch features in the nights winter sky in the Milky Way.”58 59

54 Wiltshire, Trea. Gone to Rottnest, 2004: 15.
55 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 6.
56 This story was first shared with early Europeans Robert Manli Lyons and George Fletcher Moore. More recently this story has been sustained by Wadjuk knowledge holder Barry McGuire. [Told to author via traditional oral storytelling]
57 Wadjuk leader who played a key role in resistance to the Swan River Colony. Best known as the father of resistance fighter and warrior Yagan and the only person to have been formally executed by firing squad on Australian soil. Died 22nd May 1833. [More on Midgegooroo later]
58 Also referred to as Djinda, Djindooon or Jindee by Noongar.
Noongar Elder, Neville Collard, interprets his, and his family’s, recollection of the Island and its place and connection to Wadjuk Noongar cosmology and mythology thus:

“Wadjem means a place on the other side of the river...(and) Wadjem was called that because the river actually ran through between Wadjem and Fremantle heads, and it also ran right down to the end of where Point Peron is, the end of Garden Island. And the river also went right out between Carnac and Wadjem, and the Noongar name for Carnac is called Ngulah Mia, and Ngulah Mia would mean the place of Brother in laws or sister-in–laws, that was their Ngulah.”

Collard continues with his interpretation of the cosmological story related to the island, the story shared by many Wadjuk Noongar with a cultural and spiritual connection to the island and immediate ocean region, the Waugal vs the Yondock:

“Koora (long time ago) they reckon that...Garden Island, was a place where the crocodile came down, and he came down to Manjarée, and the Noongars confronted him, and they said, ‘hey what you doing here’, and he said ‘my name’s Miandip’, and they said ‘what’s that?’ and he said ‘I’m the crocodile I come from Nambyart, that’s my country’, and they said ‘well we live it pretty tough down here and there’s not enough food...for you to be here’, but he wouldn’t leave, he said ‘no I’m not moving, I’m staying, I like it here, this is good country and I’m staying’, so the Noongar’s had a corroboree and they summoned the spirit of the Waugal, and the Waugal came out of the ocean and the Waugal and Meandip – the crocodile – they had a big fight. And they fought from Fremantle and they rolled over, and over and over right across the ground to Carnac, and to Meandip where Garden Island lays now. And when they got out there, the Waugal he got him into a strangler hold and he pulled a whisker out from his whiskers and he tied him up, and ever since from then to now, created the Garden Island. And if you go to the hill on Fremantle there, and Booyeeannup Hill you can look back out there and...you’ll see that crocodile he’s there. And you can see his jaws up this end of the northern end, and if you look back you’ll see the crown of his head and if you look back a bit further you’ll see the hills that create the body and tail of Meandip and I reckon the Noongar name for the crocodile was Meandip, that’s why the Noongar name for Garden Island was Meandip...(and that is)...why Cockburn Sound is all flat and level and shallow, that was caused from the fight of the Waugal and Meandip rolling over and over and over and over, that just flattened that all out. So that’s why Cockburn Sound is all sandy and flat and nothing grows there because they destroyed everything

61 Also known commonly as Fremantle Cove or Bathers Beach – a very special meeting place for Noongar.
62 Located at Mt Brown, Cockburn – also referred to as Boyran Bura
there in (that) fight.” 63

Noongar Elder and former Indigenous Tourist Guide on Rottnest Island – Dr Noel Nannup – gives another interesting viewpoint:

“Wadjemup means to me, a place where the spirits are, across the water...Wardaan is the sea. So Wadjemup is a place where the spirits are taken...because we believe when a person dies, here on the coastal plain, their spirit goes and sits on a very special tree. That tree we call moodjar, and it flowers when the strong easterly winds are blowing...and of course, that’s the time of the wildfires. And as that spirit sits on the tree – it could be early in the year a person dies, but it might be right through until towards the end of the year, before their spirit leaves when that plant’s flowering, that tree. The winds blow, the strong easterly wind, and all the smoke from the fires – which is a cleansing smoke – takes the spirits out across the sea and that’s the warra spirit, the bad spirit. The good spirit is left behind here on the mainland, and the bad spirit’s taken out there over the sea. And to me that’s what Wadjemup means – the place across the water where the spirits are.” 64

Due to the phenomenon that fact is often stranger than fiction, Europeans once dismissed the Noongar claim that Rottnest, Carnac and Garden Islands had been part of the mainland, until Western science, nearly a century later, confirmed it. 65 Host et al write that, “Europeans have always been reluctant to take Noongar knowledge seriously...” 66

The Chief Executive Officer of the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council (SWALSC), and a descendent of the Wiilman Noongar, Glen Kelly says:

“Well I guess as I understand it, it’s [Wadjemup] (a) spirit(ual) place and it’s really interesting because when Europeans first ‘lobbed up’ and set up this colony here they thought that, and many people still do think that, Noongars – the people that were here at that time – were you know sub human, pretty unintelligent...didn’t really have a grasp of what was going on and basically they looked down on them. Now one of the things that happened in the early part was that they [Settlers] were inquiring with the local Noongars about the country and what was going on around the country and I understand there was a point at which one of the early settlers sat down with a few of the Elders and they were looking across the sea at Wadjemup and they were telling this person about how Wadjemup use to be connected to the mainland and about how...the story when the sea rose up and what that represented. Now of course the settler feller thought this was

63 Ibid.
65 Host & Owen and South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, 'It's Still In My Heart, This Is My Country': The Single Noongar Claim History: 191.
66 Ibid.
pretty funny and noted it all down…but obviously (he thought it) ridiculous because (in his view) it was never connected to the mainland…but now however we know that it was and that’s really interesting because it tells you that Noongars memory…the cultural memory of Noongar people is extraordinary. That place [Wadjemup] was...part of the mainland what five...six seven thousand years ago and Noongar people as a culture remembered that and they were frowned upon and [the settlers] thought that story was ridiculous but what they actually demonstrated to that feller that they were telling that story to was about how connected to the country those ‘fellas’ [Noongar] at that time was, and about how this cultural memory of Noongar people is more outstanding really than anything that anyone has encountered before.”  

Kelly continues, and provides a Noongar perspective to this theory of ‘cultural memory’, with a direct reference to Wadjemup:

“Wadjemup is a beautiful example of cultural memory and we’ve [the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council] said this a lot to the people of the state [Western Australia] – and I have actually used this line – ‘if we can remember Wadjemup being connected to the mainland six thousand bloody years ago, we can remember our culture and our places from a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago.’ You know that’s a tiny...tiny... short piece of time and if we can remember something you know before Jesus Christ was even thought of, if we can remember something that existed thousands of years prior to agriculture...then we (Noongar) can remember stuff that happened a hundred and fifty years ago, it’s as simple as that.”

Further, according to Wiltshire, “Ancient artefacts found on the island attest to the fact that Wadjemup – ‘the place on the other side of the water’ as it became known to Aborigines – was once part of the mainland territory of the Nyungar people.” And that through extensive archaeological, scientific and anthropological research and studies that recent “…finds of prehistoric stone tools suggest the island could be Australia’s oldest human cultural site.” Wiltshire continues explaining, “Although prehistoric Aboriginal artefacts have been found on Rottnest, it is doubtful that anyone lived on the island once it had been isolated by the ocean.”

According to Hallam in the publication: “It’s Still In my Heart, This Is My Country” between 15,000 and 5,000 years ago, patterns of territorial attachment were dramatically disrupted, often in the space of a decade, as the planet warmed, ice shelves melted and seas rose. At 8,000 BC, Rottnest, Garden and Carnac Islands were part of the mainland. By 3,000 BC they were cut off by rising seas and half the coastal plain was lost, the inhabitants driven back into the territories of others. As the land

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68 Ibid.
69 Wiltshire, Gone to Rottnest: 3.
70 Ibid: 7.
disappeared into the sea, so did much of the evidence of what Hallam calls the ‘first phase of settlement’. 71

Neville Collard explains Noongar peoples fracture with Wadjumup before colonization:

“...when they [settlers] first came here they [Swan River Noongar] told them the Derbal Yerrigan and the Swan River (went) way (to) the other side of Rottnest...So there’s no doubt this was all forest right out and beyond Rottnest where the Derbal Yerrigan emptied into the sea. And in recent times they found out that there is a big canyon there and they estimate it is bigger than the Grand Canyon and they attribute it to the Swan River...So there is no doubt the sea rose, only about six and a half thousand maybe seven thousand years ago. So that was (where) this...knowledge passed down to generation and generation of my people and so they still had that knowledge when the white man came here and they passed it on to them and to the traditional owners from here. So their spiritual connection is no doubt that (they)...would have been born there and they would have lived there...died there and been buried there, so their graves are all under water...” 73

Karen Jacobs, a direct descendent of the Wadjuk Noongar and a (former) board member of the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA) sustains the Wadjuk cultural memory and story-lines passed down through her people and (other) family members:

“For many years Wadjemup was used by Wadjuk people [Noongar] for celebrations and spiritual healing as well as other ceremonial purposes, taking boys through men’s business and then women through their own business as well. So it’s had a varied history for thousands and thousands of years...I know Aboriginal people had access to the island prior to the sea levels rising...(and that)...As an Aboriginal person it comes under the traditional ownership of Wadjuk people. Backing that up in evidence is that the island [Wadjemup/Rottnest] was once connected to Wadjuk country and was purely only separated by a river and even then it was still joined, south of that river, it was

[71] Host & Owen and the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, 'It’s Still In My Heart, This Is My Country': The Single Noongar Claim History: 38.


still joined to the mainland. So it has always been that it [the island] comes under the custodianship and the traditional ownership of the Wadjuk people.” 74

The above selection of Noongar ‘Dreaming’ stories related to the island of Wadjemup, show that while these varying creation stories have a common motif and thread they have been interpreted differently by various family groups (direct descendents of past ‘keepers of the stories’). In two significant accounts, the physical formation of the island Wadjemup is explained in different ways; the ‘battle’ between the Waugal and Yondock contrasted with the Spirit Brothers lighting the great fire under the bed-rock of the one Island, Biidjiigoordup, from which the three islands that exist today were formed. According to Walyalup Dreamings curator – Janey Dolan – this discrepancy does not constitute a problem as:

“These [‘Dreaming’] stories interconnect, some are replicated and some have differing nuances. The beginning of one story might also be the middle of another. A passing character or ancestral figure in one might be the key protagonist in another.” 75

Dolan described that during the research and design of their publication of ‘Walyalup Dreaming’ stories they (curators, artists and Elders) “…were trying to come to agreement about which version of the Walyalup Dreaming story was the ‘correct’ one to use.” 76 However:

“Eventually we arrived at a rather liberating realisation that as each version had come from a different point in an overall web of stories, each seen and understood differently at different points in time and space, there could be no right or wrong version for this project. The knowledge of what is correct about a story is an individual thing determined by the time, the place and the people first involved in its telling.” 77

This is also supported by Richard Wilkes (Bulmurn Mumunbullawilak) – Noongar Elder and Custodian of the Swan River and the Swan Coastal Plains – who explained that he, “…noticed that everybody has a different way of depicting the Yondock and especially the Waagle, and I respect this is their view”. 78 Further he acknowledged the importance of these stories being carried on via cultural methods adhering to cultural practices:

“The old people of yesterday who looked back through the windows of yesterday have and will tell you the word-of-mouth spiritual stories they know and have passed on this information so we know these are Dreaming stories ourselves. So that we too can pass these precious stories on to our own clans and family and extended families that are ours.” 79

75 The City of Fremantle, Walyalup Dreaming: 10.
76 Ibid.
77 Ibid.
78 Ibid: 3.
79 Ibid.
Even Elder Wilkes’ story is slightly different to that of other stories told about the great battle between the *Waugal* and *Yondock*;

“A *Yondock* was a reptile creature that looked like a crocodile. This *Yondock* swam down from the North and challenged the *Waagle* (sic) to a duel – winner take all. The *Yondock* lost the fight to the *Waggle* (sic) in the *Derbal Nara* (Gage Road). As they rolled about when fighting, their tails broke up the land leaving only islands which still exist to this day; Garden Island (*Meeandip*), Carnac Island (*Gnooroolmayup*) and Rottnest Island (*Wadjemup*).  

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2.2.2 Noongar People, Country and Kurannup

Daisy Bates, describing the Noongar, stated “The largest homogenous group of aborigines in all Australia were the Bibbulmun of the South-West, whose territory covered the whole coastline...” and that “The same marriage laws, absence of circumcision and similarity of dialect (with local variations) marked these people as one race.” 81

Bates explained further that the marriage laws of the Noongar (or Bibbulmun race as she liked to refer to them) could be explained in a simple manner – Manitchmat for the White Cockatoo and Wordungmat for the opposite Crow. Within this simple marriage law were the two fundamental moieties into which the Noongar were divided. Every child entered by birth into one or the other of these divisions. If she were a Crow she married a White Cockatoo man (who was always either father’s sister’s son, or her mother’s brother’s son) and if she were a White Cockatoo she married a Crow man. And Bates further declares that, “...this was the fundamental legal marriage law amongst them” 82...and that...“There was only one ‘straight’ marriage law, and if a young man or girl broke that law, the brother of either must kill the law-breaker. Their simple marriage laws were kept on pain of death”. 83

It is therefore evident that the Noongar (Bibbulmun), in fear of their creator – the Wagyl – and the senior Elders kept their group’s marriage and totem laws intact and pure, so that when the first white man stepped on the shore of the Noongar he, in the words of Bates, “…came into the country of the straightest and most law-abiding groups in all Australia”. 84 There is no doubt that this is a very romantic notion, but Bates is correct in one respect, Noongar culture, laws, protocols and rituals were invariably intact and adhered to in dreaded fear of reprisal, and that the discussion of European contact (in future chapters) affecting the Noongar to the degree that it did (and does) needs this detailed explanation to give it its true context.

Further, the Noongar had no tribal king, nor chief, but instead senior lore-men whom upheld the law and were dictated by the guardian spirits of their totems, of their totemic food laws, and their marriage laws. They lived in harmony with the land and in constant fear and respect for the ‘Great Magic Snake’, 85 who was described by Bates as “…omnipotent and omniscient, (and) whose “home” was everywhere – in the land, in the rivers and hills and valleys, in the caves and in the great sea that surrounded their groups lands”, 86 and who “…dealt out the punishment” 87 if any of these laws were broken by the men or woman of the tribe.

Throughout the south-west there are sites that have special significance for all the Noongar because they provide evidence of their ‘Dreamtime’ ancestry. Prior to colonization specially chosen men 88 were responsible for the care of these sites and, hence, they had the authority to conduct the ceremony or sing the songs associated with these sacred sites. 89 Thus as each tribe validated their existence through their own

82 Ibid.
84 Ibid: 59.
86 Ibid.
87 Ibid.
88 Aborignal societies previous to colonisation were predominately patriarchal
89 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 19.
stories, they believed that their boundaries were fixed and determined by their ancestors, and therefore there was no reason to desire or try to possess the tribal lands of another group. As their own stories only related to their respective lands it would have been meaningless to ‘invade’ and interfere with another tribe’s country or territory. In a different territory (the Central Desert), where similar laws prevail, Aranda men explained this disinterest in other land:

Our fathers taught us to love our own country, and not to lust after the lands belonging to other men.  

So over thousands of years distinct Aboriginal tribes established lands in tribal groups until all of the country was (predominately) occupied. The senior members upheld the ancient beliefs and laws, which in effect, gave stability and peace to the accepted boundaries, incorporating tribal hunting areas, sites of significance, song-lines and cultural land marks as set (given) by the ‘Dreamtime’ law. According to Richards the tribal groups within the Noongar (or Bibbulmun) lands never tried to take possession of the land beyond their boundary:

Their land, their food, their people, their watering places and all of their landmarks – rocks, valleys and trees – their fish, animals, reptiles and birds were given from the Dreamtime, from creation time. They grew up knowing from infancy, all of these; they were taught by songs, stories, dances and through their initiation, the laws. And they walked their piece of land over and over so that their land and all it contained became part of them. They were part of it. The overriding law that governed their life was the preservation of their boundaries, their land and all it contained – for their children and those unborn – for all time.  

For all time, since time immemorial, it has been conceptualised by ancient cultures that “Every living thing is believed to have both a mortal and an immortal soul.”  And that after the death of an Ancestor the immortal soul will customarily return to a predetermined sacred site of that Ancestor. The mortal soul, on the other hand, fades away.

Noongar believed that the sea faring explorers, (and eventual colonisers) that they sighted off the coast and in the bowels of the Swan River were dead ancestors who had reappeared in life-form as Djanga – ‘white spirits’. Green explains that “…the story was reinforced in its telling by the occasional sighting of strange white apparitions that approached the coast from the west and carried on board Djanga, the spirits of the dead.

Noongar Elders and leaders were known to say:

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90 Also referred to as the Arrernte, Arunta, or Arrarnta
93 Storm, Endless Path: Dreamtime: 88.
94 Ibid.
95 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 5.
“This is djand ga…the spirit of a man from gora – of our tribe long ago. When the spirit goes across the mammart to nyguranganp the skin is made more wilban by the salt.”

One spiritual concept that Wadjuk Noongar shared across their vast geography was the concept known as ‘Kurannup’ – the home of the dead – which, in the words of Noongar Elders and Spirit Men “…lies beyond the Waddarn Goombar or Great Sea from whose farther shores they believed the jang-ga had come…” In Noongar cosmology Kurannup was reminiscent of the Christian ideal of heaven. In Daisy Bates’ writings it was told that the Noongar “…died in the faith of his Bibbulmun and looked forward to Kurannup and reunion with his kind as earnestly and hopefully as the most devout Christian looks to the heaven of his desire.” Bates describes the esteemed Noongar Elder Joobaitch reflectively and quietly watching the Swan River settlers and that he would comment that these settlers were “…the jang-ga that his fathers told him were the returned spirits of his own dead.”

Joobaitch, who Bates described as being ‘strong with the law,’ was nearing death and informed Bates that the spirits of his dead relatives would be “…sitting and waiting to welcome him, when he stepped upon the Kurannup shore after his long journey under the sea.” Superstitiously the one desire Joobaitch had was to “…die on his own ground, so that his kaan-ya (spirit) should pass over familiar surroundings to Kurannup, and he would see the same kalleeep (fire, hearth, home) when he opened his eyes on Kurannup shore, and find his own people smiling at him…”

“No!” “I must die on my own ground, and not in a jang-ga house. When I die I shall go through the sea to Kurannup where all my moortutung (relations) will be waiting on the shore for me, waiting with meat and drink for me, my mother and my woman, my fathers and my brothers, all my dead people and I must go to them, and my kaan-ya must be free to rest on the kaan-ya tree (Nuytsia Floribunda) before it journeys through the sea. Since Nyitting (cold) times (long time ago) all Bibbulmun kaan-ya have rested on this tree on their way to Kurannup; and I have never broken a branch or flower, or sat under the shade of the tree because it is the kaan-ya tree only winnaitch (forbidden, sacred).”

The Moojoor tree has always been sacred to the Noongar across all of Noongar country (boodjah) as it “…was the only tree on which the spirits of the newly dead rested on their way to Kurannup.” Also known to Noongar as the kaan-ya tree (and known to wadjela as the ‘Christmas Tree’) no Noongar child was allowed to ever play among its branches or gather the flowers that covered it. No adult Noongar would use the branches of the moojoor for fire-making or would camp under its canopy. It was sacred to all Noongar (Bibbulmun), and, as recorded by Bates, “…when in the still night

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100 Ibid: 56.
101 Ibid.
103 AKA Moojar or Mudjar
or dawn a branch of the Kaa’nya moojoor was heard to break and fall, those who heard it knew that a Kaa’nya had rested there and had broken the branch to let the relations know that one or more of their number was going to Kurannup.”  

The spiritual and mythological importance of Boodjah (country), Kalleep (home-fire), and Kurannup (‘Heaven’ or resting place) was not lost on Ballardong Elder Boyerman who pleaded:

“Take me back to my own boojoo (ground)...If you do not quickly take me back to my own kalleep (fire) I shall die here and my kaan-ya (soul of the newly dead) will not go to Kurannup but will ‘sit down’ down here to do you evil. This is not my kalleep.”

Buyerman’s kin were so frightened by these words that they carried her on a stretcher some eighty miles east to Kellerberrin so that she could lay to rest in her Kalleep and pass over to the Kurannup. Her wishes were in accordance with the law, the way it had been for thousands of years, hundreds of generations.

And so these natives went on, age after age. They had their food and many kinds; they had their freedom; they had their laws and, for them, they were good laws and worked well; they had their friends of their colour. All this the natives of the South-West lost when civilisation came among them.

Then colonization occurred. After an initial period of respect and interdependence, the colonisers influenced the lifestyle and cultural proceedings of the Noongar and, in the words of Hammond, they were “...made to imitate the white man”.

Aboriginal peoples, the Noongar of the fourteen tribal groups, had occupied the southwest for millennia before Europeans arrived. During those millennia they had no doubt experienced many catastrophic events. For example, the loss of land that resulted from the rising of the seas, floods, fires, drought and changes to their flora and fauna, but these were insignificant, and paled in comparison, to the advent of Europeans, the colonisation of their lands and the dependence that would manifest itself on the Noongar people.

Upon European settlement or, in the minds and collective memory of many, invasion of the Noongar lands was an irreversible phenomenon. Green surmises this dramatically by declaring, “…culture went into irreversible decline...their [Noongar] vital harmony with their land and the ‘Dreaming’ irreparably shattered.”

A change had come…

105 Ibid.
106 Ibid: 12.
107 Hammond, J.E. Winjan’s People: the story of the South-West Australian Aborigines, 1933: 43.
109 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 117.
Doomed Prophecy

Tall warrior standing erect
Proud chin held high
A manner to defy
Scarred chest fully expanded
Back, straight and strong
Gazing out to sea
At a shape that was alien
To an ancient memory
Says down to his yorga\textsuperscript{110}
Standing sheltered in his shadow
“\textit{I feel a change, Kirra,}
\textit{Is about to come}”
But he smiled
For he knew
They had eternity on their side...

\textsuperscript{110} Yorga – Aboriginal Woman.
\textsuperscript{111} Dixon, Graeme, \textit{Holocaust Island}, 1990: 27.
2.3 European Settlement and Conflict

2.3.1 Early Years of Colonisation (1827 to 1835)

Re-enactment

They sailed around the worlds
In sailing ships of old
They sailed around the world
Cruel, unrelenting, bold
They came a second time
These men with golden locks
They came a second time
Bringing alcohol and pox...

Graeme Dixon

By the 1820s, on the other side of the continent (the ‘Southland’ or ‘New Holland’) navigation to, and exploration of, the eastern seaboard had already been in progress for many decades. The local inhabitants, like their western seaboard counterparts, had seen from the shore the white sails of the British and other European boats for many years. An important example of these explorers was James Cook who wrote in 1770 his impressions of the Aboriginal people that he saw whilst sailing north along Australia’s eastern coast:

From what I have seen of the natives of New Holland they may appear to be the most wretched people on Earth, but in reality they are far more happier than we Europeans; being wholly unacquainted not only with the superfluous but the necessary conveniences so much sought after in Europe, they are happy in not knowing the use of them. They live in tranquility, which is not disturbed by the inequality of condition. The Earth and sea of their own accord furnished them with all the things necessary for life, they covet not magnificent houses, household stuff, they live in a warm and fine climate and enjoy a very wholesome air, so that they have very little need of clothing...In short they seemed to set no value upon anything we gave them, nor would they ever part with anything of their own for any one article we could offer them.

The crew of the Endeavour made attempts to communicate with the Aborigines at Botany Bay but were unsuccessful. ‘All they seemed to want...was for us to be gone.’

On the west coast British exploration and investigation continued and in 1802-3 Mathew Flinders anchored in the bays and sounds of the South coast where he came in contact with the tribal Noongar group [Menang] that occupied that part of the country. Though neither understood the other, Flinders and his men remained courteous with the

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113 Jacob, Trevor & Vellios, Jim. Southland, the Maritime Exploration of Australia, 1987: 56.
114 Ibid.
native inhabitants and though watchful developed a harmonious relationship with the Noongar.

In fact Flinders was so appreciative of their good behaviour that “…he gave a special parade of his men in their honour, the marines being attired in the striking scarlet and white uniforms of those days.” Flinders and his command as returned spirits of the dead or jennuk, held a ke-ning or corroboree because they “…felt that the jennuk were friendly.” This ceremonial dance, known as Kurannup ke-ning, would not have been given unless the Noongar thought the strangers were “…friendly spirits.”

Despite Flinders contact with the west coast mainland and some of the local inhabitants, and his preparation of detailed maps of the south coast, no effort was made at that time by the British to colonize the area. The start of settlement on the Southern coast occurred in December 1826 when Major Edmund Lockyer established a military base, initially called Frederickstown and re-named Albany in 1832, at King George Sound.

On the Southern West Coast in 1827 Captain James Stirling, who later became Governor of Western Australia, in her Majesty’s ship Success, retraced elements of Flinder’s voyage and spend fifteen days in the Swan River area generating enough interest in his findings to prompt him to lobby intensively for the area to become a British colony. It was during this visit that he “…made a journey up the river as far as his boats could go.” Navigating the thick vegetation and tree line the party journeyed overland, in that time naming the Canning River, Mount Eliza, Ellenbrook and the Darling Range. Near the shallow waters of Claisebrook, Stirling’s group first encountered the original inhabitants:

The first day of our sojourn here was marked by a visit of three Armed Natives…they seemed angry at our invasion of their Territory…by their violent gestures [but] they eventually retired…

It is important to note that Stirling, in the above extract of his diary, acknowledges that the land belonged to others (historically the Wadjuk Noongar also known as the Swan River Noongar) and that he felt they were ‘invading’ their territory. According to Statham-Drew, Stirling’s experience in the South Americas taught him that, “…invasion led to ownership, and that ownership by Britain was a desirable position.” This type of attitude and fortitude was to have dire repercussions for the relationship between white authorities and the Aboriginal population for centuries.

116 AKA Jennga, Djenak, Djennak, Djannga & Djanga.
118 Ibid.
120 Named after the then British Prime Minister – Noongar call this river Djarlgarra.
121 Named after Governor Darling’s wife – the Noongar call this area Kaart Jinniny Bo or Kaartagarrup.
122 Named after Stirling’s wife – Noongar call this area Gyunning – The Noongar warrior Yagan resided often in these areas.
123 Named after the then Governor Darling – Noongar call this range Kaarta Moorda.
125 Ibid.
Stirling also made a chart of Cockburn Sound\textsuperscript{126}, including naming Gage Roads\textsuperscript{127}, and two other islands lying a little south of the already named Rottnest\textsuperscript{128}. These islands were named by the French in 1801 as Isle Berthelot and Isle Bauche, Stirling renamed them Carnac\textsuperscript{129} and Garden Island\textsuperscript{130} respectively.\textsuperscript{131} Upon leaving the coastal region of the Cockburn Sound Stirling made particular note of Rottnest Island and he described the island as “…offering very little inducement to settlement.”\textsuperscript{132} Stirling and his crew also made note of the presence of a “…large number of small kangaroos (wallabies).”\textsuperscript{133}

It was feared by the established colonies in New South Wales that the French would see \textit{Terra Australis} as a site for a possible colony on the west coast. It should be noted that from 1606 the continent was declared ‘the Southland’, then in 1644 Dutch Navigator Abel Tasman proclaimed the continent \textit{Hollandia Nova} or ‘New Holland’.\textsuperscript{135} The eastern section was renamed ‘New South Wales’ by Captain James Cook upon its discovery on his first voyage in 1770, and in 1801 Mathew Flinders declared the continent \textit{Terra Australis}, which became officially in 1824 \textit{Australia}.\textsuperscript{136}

The inducement for the British to explore, navigate and colonize the west coast seems to have been word from a British envoy that the French Government were again taking a serious interest in what they termed Western ‘New Holland’. Hence the more British Settlements that could be established around the coastal regions of the continent the better they could deter this happening, and as such major settlements King George Sound (the Albany region\textsuperscript{137}) and the Swan River Colony (the Perth region) were established.\textsuperscript{138}

From the very first month he returned back to Britain, Stirling began lobbying vigilantly to the Colonial Office, besieging authorities “…with letters pointing out the value of the

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{126} Named for his Patron – Noongar know this area traditionally as \textit{Derbal Narra}
\item \textsuperscript{127} Named for his ships Admiral – Noongar know this area traditionally as \textit{Derbal Narra}
\item \textsuperscript{128} As explained previously this area was known as \textit{Wadjem} and then the island became known as \textit{Wadjemup}
\item \textsuperscript{129} Named after his first Lieutenant John Rivett Carnac – Noongar knew this island as \textit{Ngoogooloormayup}
\item \textsuperscript{130} Thought to be given this name because of the garden planted there before they left but more likely named because of the shelter that the island offered vessels – Noongar knew this island as \textit{Meeandip} – see the related story in section 2.2.1.
\item \textsuperscript{131} Statham-Drew, \textit{James Stirling and the Birth of the Swan River Colony}: 15-16.
\item \textsuperscript{132} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{134} [Source: http://www.rotnestisland.com/about/flora-fauna/quokkas & http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Quokka/]
\item \textsuperscript{135} From the time of Captain James Cook’s discovery, the western part of the Australian continent was generally called ‘New Holland’.
\item \textsuperscript{136} Jacob & Vellios, \textit{Southland, the maritime exploration of Australia}: 12-13.
\item \textsuperscript{137} The (town) area was initially named Frederickstown in honour of Prince Frederick, Duke of York and Albany. In 1831, the settlement was transferred to the control of the Swan River Colony and renamed Albany by Governor James Stirling.
\item \textsuperscript{138} [Source:http://www.historicalalbany.com.au/history.htm http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albany,_Western_Australia]
\end{itemize}
Swan River site and suggesting ways in which it could be settled at minimum costs.”  

Finally, after much debate and opinion, the Colonial Office announced the following on the 13th November 1828:

The Sulphur Bomb vessel at Chatham to be brought forward with all dispatch for the service of conveying settlers to the Western Coast of New Holland.  

On Sunday the 8th of February 1829 the Parmelia and the Sulphur left the shores of Portsmouth and began their anxious journey to found and establish the first private British colony since the Americas, a century before. The journey was not uneventful with several births (including Stirling’s second son), storms, pirate ships, fatalities and sickness. However the voyage across the Indian Ocean was relatively smooth, with only inclement weather inhibiting Stirling’s desire to settle the new colony on the ‘glorious First of June’.  

In actual fact the official foundation of the Swan River Colony began with the earlier arrival at Cockburn Sound of the frigate HMS Challenger on 25th April 1829, under the command of Captain Charles Howe Fremantle, with orders to take formal possession of the western coast of ‘New Holland’. Fremantle had been relieved to see that no French flag was visible on the mainland and for seven days those on board the vessel spent time exploring Garden Island. On the 2nd May 1829, Fremantle and his crew (in a cutter) negotiated the rock bar that blocked the entrance of the river mouth and finally the Union Jack was hoisted on the south head of the river in a brief ceremony to claim, in the name of King George IV, the whole of the western coast of ‘New Holland’. Fremantle and his party continued up the Swan River and they had their first encounter with a group of curious, but friendly, Aborigines and, after continuing on as far as the Canning River, the party returned to the mouth of the river, spending their final night at Rous Head.  

According to Carter, it was recorded in Captain Fremantle’s diary, that he and his party were not welcome by the Swan River natives. “We rowed up the river a considerable distance and saw and heard natives on both sides, who halloa’d to us very loud and appeared to cry out “Warra, warra,” which I supposed to be “go away”. I took no notice but proceeded up the river…”  

Fremantle’s second contact with the local Swan River Noongar is regarded by most historians as a different sort of affair. Fremantle and his party heard shouting and saw some local inhabitants running along the hills and towards the river bank. Fremantle assumed that they were friendly and he ordered his crew to row ashore. According to his records “One came to the boat and I gave him a biscuit which he eat (sic) immediately and he made signs for my hat, which being very old I gave him and he gave me in return a bit of string with which his hair was bound around, as I wish’d to shew (sic) him that it was our intention to be friendly.”  

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139 Statham-Drew, James Stirling and the Birth of the Swan River Colony: 20.  
140 Ibid: 22.  
142 James, Ruth Marchant. Settlement of the Swan: The Birth of Perth, {year unknown}: 34.  
The Swan River colony was something that was radically new in Australia. For it was to be for free settlers only, and the intention of the British government was for their involvement to be minimal, that is “…no more than the provision of a Governor, a few civil servants, and a detachment of troops”. The major capital and resourcing of the colony would be provided by private enterprise and investment, primarily a syndicate of four gentlemen, but eventually only involving Thomas Peel, being allocated 500,000 acres of land, conditional on his arriving in the colony before the 1st November 1829 with 400 settlers. According to Berryman these negotiations and arrangements were completed “…only days before Stirling and his family left London for Portsmouth to embark on the Parmelia, which sailed for Western Australia on 5 February 1829”.

The ceremony of the naming of the town of Perth took place on the King’s birthday, the 12th of August 1829. Governor Stirling, in company of all of his Officers went up the river, and fixed upon a spot near Mount Eliza (now known as Kings Park), about fifteen miles from its mouth. At half-past four the ceremony commenced, with Mrs Helen Dance, the only lady who ventured so far up the river, given the honour by Stirling to christen the town, which she did by holding an axe, and with the Governor guiding her hand, she gave one blow with it upon a large sheoak tree, which was cut down for the purpose. The colony’s soldiers fired an official volley, and all present gave three cheers. The town of Perth, Western Australia was born and the surrounding area proclaimed a Crown Colony of Great Britain.

The Admiralty Secretary, John Barrow, often credited as the person responsible for the British government’s final decision to colonize Western Australia, remarked that the coastal plain between the Swan River and King George Sound “…may be estimated to contain from five to six million of acres, the greater part of which…may be considered as land fit for the plough, and, therefore, fully capable of giving support to a million of souls.” From this statement there was never any doubt that the British were intending to stay permanently, without care or consideration to the local inhabiting Noongar, who had existed for thousands of years in this, as one anonymous British writer described, ‘land of promise’.

Regrettably for the Noongar population the ‘invading’ settlers not only had the intention of procuring and ‘taming’ the land but also sought the “…laudable intention of preaching the word of God to the degraded and long neglected natives of that (this) fine and extensive country.” The settlers neglected to acknowledge and understand that the local Noongar inhabitants had an already established and self-sustaining spirituality and cosmological doctrine.

Much interest was being generated about the local Noongar with the first settlers of the colony making particular note of the Swan River Noongar hunting and other activities:

147 Ibid.
148 Wife of the Captain of the Sulphur.
149 Berryman, *Swan River letters Volume 1*: 69.
150 The name suggested by Sir George Murray (member for Perthshire in the British Parliament) and for the respected Scottish town: Perth.
152 According to Berryman it was more than likely the writer was James Stirling himself.
The natives may trouble us a little, but they are not in large parties from the absence of sustenance – they live by spearing fish and birds, grow nothing, are naked, and fear the water, having not even a raft or canoe.\(^{155}\)

Another anonymous writer also makes particular note of the Swan River Noongar, and interestingly the limestone bar that is noted as an inconvenience; but to the local tribal groups this bar was integral to one of their cosmological stories\(^{156}\):

\[\text{\ldots the appearance of the country, in that direction, is most beautiful; it is certainly a splendid place when you reach it, but the difficulty of getting over the bar at the entrance is very great, there being only three feet of water. This River abounds with wild ducks and black swans; the latter are very shy. The natives visited us occasionally while the Challenger was at Swan River; they appear to be the same race of people as at Botany Bay, and are very jealous of their women, not one of them having been seen by our people; they were very friendly, but completely destitute of every necessary of life...}\]

As the ships of the colonist of the Swan River Colony straggled into Gage Roads on the 25\(^{th}\) April 1829 the local native inhabitants – Wadjuk Noongar – looked on with awe and amazement. Who were these strange creatures? Were they devils? Or ghosts? Or both? What did they want? Why had they come?

Descendant of the Wadjuk Noongar Leonard Collard writes that:

\[\ldots One can appreciate the dilemma of the early Nyungars confronting Wedjelas a group with no relationship. There would have been a significant level of priority given to identify the relationship of the strangers to the inhabitants. How might one behave in the presence of these strangers if such relationships were not known? It would seem then, that if the Wedjela did not know their relationship it was up to the Nyungar to provide them with a basic education.\]

Further, Noongar tribal groups would not only feel obligated to educate the strangers on the shore as traditional custodians but a more significant reason is advanced for their acceptance of the arrival of Wedjelas or more correctly described at the time of settlement as Djennak. Collard summarizes this:

\[\ldots a stranger simply did not arrive in another person’s karleep or home fire and assert ownership unless they had some form of relationship with that land in a previous existence. The Nyungar dealt with the dilemma by accepting that the strangers as Djanga,\]

\(^{155}\) Ibid: 56. [Extract of a letter from a gentleman who sailed for the Swan River, on board the Parmelia, from Plymouth, on 8\(^{th}\) February, being the first ship that left England with the emigrants]

\(^{156}\) As discussed in more detail in previous chapter(s)

\(^{157}\) Berryman, Swan River letters volume1: 68. [No date given, but probably early September 1829 - the writer of the letter is neither named nor described but due to the quoted arrival date of 8 June 1829 indicates that he was a passenger on the HMS Sulphur]

or dead spirits of the dead. In some parts of the south west the term was openly used to refer to the outsiders.159

Daisy Bates, during her contact and travels with the south-west Noongar recited and recorded a story told to her by a local elder regarding the religious and sacred importance of the ‘Djennak’ belief:

All their relations who had gone to heaven before them knew that they were on their way, and watched for them on heaven’s beach. As soon as they saw the spirit they all ran to him to welcome him, and they greeted him with food, and then while he slept his relatives took off all of his skin and his nails, and when he woke up he was a kurannup spirit. All kurannup dwellers have white bodies.160

Vilma Webb, Wardandi Noongar Elder, recounts a Djennak story that was recited to her (in 1993) by her grandmother which eloquently describes the spiritual and historical context of the first contact between the British and Noongar at the beginning of the Swan River Colony, and proceeding exploration into the south west:

“The old Aborigines used to say that years ago there used to be a bird (that) lived down around this part of the country and he was a huge white bird. One day the bird flew away and went across the sea and then they didn’t know where he went to. But when they seen the ships coming in with the big (white) sails up, they thought it was the bird coming back. So they all went down to greet the bird that was coming back and the white people landed on the shore….”161

Hence, in the very first instances of contact with the white people the Noongar basically accepted these strangers because they believed that they were “…relatives returning from the land of their dead.”162 Historian Green adds succinctness to these observations by explaining that: “Until well into this century (20th) when Wadjala was adopted, the common word for whiteman was a variation of Djanga. The ships that they came in were called Wanda-buri; Wunda, the shield like sails of the ships and buri for the roar of the cannon.”163

Though the local custodians accepted the strangers, with curiosity, they were also accepted without anger. Collard follows the earlier quoted paragraph about Djennak with the claim that “This may also explain why there was often little anger or resistance to the arrival of strangers.”164 Popular belief often regarded Noongar as being aggressive, savage and barbaric, yet the opposite seems a more appropriate description. Collard describes Noongar as having been “…amongst the most obliging group of Aborigines in the history of Wedjela occupation of Australia.”165 He continues by explaining “From the outset they acted as kin and or guides to direct the Wedjela expansion by showing them Noongar bidis, roads or paths, karleep mia or camping

159 Ibid: 47.
161 Collard, An Analysis of Nyungar Influence in south west Western Australia: 111.
162 Ibid: 47.
163 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 33-34.
164 Collard, An Analysis of Nyungar Influence in south west Western Australia: 48.
165 Ibid.
places and *gnamma* or water-holes. These places were to become as important to the *Wedjelas* as they had been for the *Nyungars.*”

Being hailed as a father, or a brother or mother of the Noongar, was, at first disconcerting, to the early Swan River colonists but after a while it “…was accepted with a great deal of humour and paternalism.”

Captain George Grey in his journal [recounted in Green’s *Broken Spears*] described how an old woman greeted him:

…at last the old lady emboldened by my submission, deliberately kissed me on each cheek…! She then cried a little more, and at length releasing me, assured me that I was the ghost of her son, who had some time before been killed by a spear wound in his breast.

Grey believed that because Aborigines, in this instance the Swan River Noongar, never left their homeland permanently and certainly never gave up their favourite water holes or camping spots they could not conceive of others doing so. Therefore, these Noongar were convinced that the Europeans must be Noongar spirits returning to the beloved *kaleep* or campsites that they had frequented during their lifetime.

There was however one recorded historical incident that went against the above notion when a senior Noongar lore-man did, in fact, give up a beloved *kaleep*. *Yallagonga*, one of the most senior of Noongar men in the Swan River region had a friendly reception and encounter with Captain Irwin that “…paved the way for the tranquil settlement of Perth…” and considering the *Wadjuk* numbered near 1,500, whilst the pioneers and their families scarcely numbered 200, the “…tremendous issues hanging on the first meeting between the two men will be appreciated fully.”

“In the past and you know…stories about them old fellas…the most significant ones I can recall was when Yellagonga was laying down at the Kanyanningup and it was in (the) October afternoon 180 years ago (1829)…he was laying there (with) his woman…his dverts (dogs), them yokines (young woman), he had his koolangahs (children) and he was laying down dozing and he heard the sound of the oars on the boat rowing up the river and it stopped to where he was laying down and he got up and when he looked he seen the red coats getting off the boat and the Wadjella put his hand out, he (Yallagonga) didn’t know what he put his hand out for so he put his spear and boomerang on the ground and he had his booka (kangaroo coat) on and he shook hand(s) with the Wadjella and he went like that (stretching his arms out) and he indicated that ‘this is your land, this is our land,

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166 Ibid.
168 Ibid.
169 Ibid.
171 A spring on the Mount’s Bay side of what is now King’s Park – also known as Barragurt
172 One of the ‘Red Coats’ was Captain Irwin – a detachment of the 63rd Regiment
this is your land’ and he packed up his kids and his dogs and his woman’s and he went back over to Nookemburra to Darlup at Lake Monger, cause that was the Bennel family and the Bennel’s are his moort (close relations) so he went back over there (and) left the Wadjellas living in his mia mia’s (huts) because he had water there see...”  

According to Bates, regarding the above story, “…there must have been some tradition handed down from Yalgunga’s (sic) ancestors, of Vlaming and other earlier arrivals of ‘janga’…for there was no fear in Yalgunga’s heart as he stood beside the ‘janga’, only a great wonder and awe at the verification of the old traditions.” Bates reasoned that perhaps Yallagonga thought that the settlers (or djennak) would come and go, as they “…had came and went in the long ago, and the use of his camp and water was theirs while they remained his guests,” what he did not know was that these settlers (djennak) had come to stay. Bates also stated that, “…under Noongar law a handshake was only exchanged between groups meeting after the death of one of their members.” Making the exchange between Yallagonga and Irwin all that more poignant and historical.

But with this one kind gesture it appeared that the settlers mistakenly took the liberty of setting up homesteads all along the banks of the Swan, including farms with fenced paddocks and cleared plots. Bates conveys that:

These little farm-steadings were naturally built in the most fertile spots on the river banks, and very few of the new workers gave thought to the people whose camping grounds they were annexing ...(and) whose title to the Swan banks and springs...dated back through hundreds of generations, yet was abolished for ever at the first axe stroke of the white man...

There is no doubt that the appearance of Wedjela or Djennak whenever a boat landed or an explorer appeared tested Noongar protocols. Further, though they remained vigilant and cautious in their approach, the local Noongar also remained humanists at heart and in times of trouble or stress they would reach out to the strange men that had landed on their territory. Local Elder, Neville Collard, recites a story that had been passed down through his family over several generations:

“...We (Noongar) have been very successful in integrating into the whiter community and you know all that historical value went all the way back there because those links the Nyungar knew that Captain Fremantle...run aground in Cockburn Sound there on the banks...they was there three days until the tide come and they floated off but Noongar knew they was there (as) they was watching them from Manjaree and Fremantle on that flat

173 At Goordandalup kaarla (fire) & Goordandalup gappi (water).
176 Ibid: 57.
177 Ibid: 50.
180 Noongar know the Fremantle area as Walyalup and the bay as Manjaree. It was an important meeting and trading place, and was at the crossroads of a network of tracks that crossed the landscape.
At the beginning of the colony the settlers were overly cautious in developing their relationships and they took appreciative care not to cause offence or upset the local inhabitants and their respective leaders. In fact as part of Lieutenant Governor Stirling’s proclamation one important clause dealt with the Indigenous inhabitants:

“…if any Person or Persons shall be convicted of behaving in a fraudulent, cruel or felonious Manner towards the Aborigines of this Country, such Person or Persons will be liable to be prosecuted and tried for the Offence, as if the same had been committed against any other of His Majesty’s subjects”.  

The following are journal or diary extracts from various Swan River Colonists in regard to the local Noongar inhabitants. These writings highlight the inquisitive nature of both parties – black and white – and the apparent co-existence and reasonable amicability between the Wadjuk Noongar and the settlers, even if the local inhabitants are described as thieves one time too many…

“Very few natives have been seen, but there are some traces of their slight shelters from the weather which are very inartificial and imperfect; those that have been seen appeared very harmless and inoffensive.”

“…there does not appear any land to be found; there is not even any native fruit, or anything to eat. There are a great many natives, but they are very harmless; they are a small race of men…they are quite naked…(and) they appear to worship the sun, as they point to it, and do not appear after sunset.”

181 Collard, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
183 Berryman, Swan River letters Volume 1: 16. [DATED: Port Louis [Mauritius], 19 October 1829 SOURCE: Cross series I p.16 … NOTE: The writer of the letter appears to have been a merchant or shipping agent, living at Mauritius, but cannot be identified]
184 Ibid: 159. [DATED: Cockburn’s Sound, Western Australia, 13 February 1830 SOURCE: Brighton Herald 30.10.1830 NOTES: the writer of the letter is described as a passenger in the Hooghly and is acknowledged as Elizabeth Devenish]
“The natives eat snakes and lizards – they do not appear in great numbers. The men go about entirely naked – none of the woman have been seen. Their weapons are the spear and throwing-stick, and the stone hatchet or hammer. They are remarkable for cunning, and are the most imitative race I have ever seen. They are universally friendly, but a little addicted to thieving.” 185

“The Natives, it is agreed by all who have traversed much of the country, are few in number and contemptible as to their means of annoyance; they are now very familiar with our Settlers, whom they frequently meet, – sometimes a solitary settler, far from any assistance, –yet they have never been guilty of the least ferocity or ill treatment, or even approach to it, but seem very harmless, good-natured, cheerful, timid race, extremely afraid of approaching our dogs, horses, or horned cattle…(yet) delighted at all the novelties we show them, and very peaceable and quiet in their demeanour, – but great and expert thieves.” 186

Some of the settler’s writings however begin to hint at the impending confrontations that would develop between the colonists and local Noongar, and within the context of the written passage there is evidence of derogatory and oppressive remarks calling attention to the commonly held belief of the colonizers that Aboriginal people were somehow inferior and ‘sub-human’:

“They are by no means a fine race of people, nor do they resemble the African blacks. We have never met any of their females or children. These they keep out of the way; the former, no doubt, from feelings of jealousy.” 187

“I have not as yet seen a great deal of the country, as we must proceed in bands, for fear of the natives, who are a poor wretched race of beings. A few days ago three of them came to the settlement of their own accord, and it was a most laughable farce. They are the best mimics in the world, and appear to take a pleasure in shewing [sic] it, as they invariably imitate every action; – laugh, they do the same; – make any particular sound, they will instantly repeat it. 188

“The natives have visited us several times. They are in a state of perfect nudity, of a dark copper colour. The chief of the clan has a large hook through the nose, and a band of feathers round his head. In general they are oiled all over their bodies. Their females have

185 Ibid: 103. [DATED: Cockburn Sound, 9 November 1829 SOURCE: Morning Herald 3.7.1830, Cross series III p.21 NOTES: the writer of the letter is neither named nor described, but is probably Alexander Collie]
186 Ibid: 156. [DATED: Perth, February 1830. SOURCE: South African Commercial Advertiser 17 & 21.4.1830 NOTES: the writer is described as ‘a military officer attached to the troops at present stationed at Swan River.’]
187 Ibid: 86. [DATED: Swan River, 13 October 1829 SOURCE: Cross Series II p.24; Extract of a letter from one of the new Settlers]
188 Ibid: 84. [SOURCE: Glasgow Courier 13.2.1830 The writer was a naval officer with the HMS Sulphur]
never been seen. The native men bring their children down frequently; they are very civil and harmless. They have no dwellings, but wander from place to place…Notwithstanding they at present appear to be inoffensive, I am not at all sanguine that they will always continue so; but should they not at some future period show hostilities…” 189

The above extract mentions the anxiety that was becoming more apparent to the settler in regard to the expectation of hostilities and violence from the local inhabitants. Even though race relations were seemingly peaceful and cordial within the colony, the preordained mindset, perhaps influenced by reports from other colonies and/or cultural ignorance, of the settlers was becoming evident in their attitudes and writings:

“The Natives are getting very familiar – much more so than I approve of; I fear before long they will get so troublesome that some dispute will take place, and that they will be as bad as the Natives in Van Diemen’s Land. They appear to be very intelligent, and might be got to do a little work perhaps at times. The other day 22 of them paid a visit to Perth; they pry into every corner to steal what they can. They will repeat any word they hear as correctly as possible, and will repeat any short sentence.” 190

Before colonization, Aboriginal society was generally simplistic in nature. The notion of needing to self-sustain would have been a stressful scenario but typically life, “…ensued at a leisurely pace…” 191 and offered the simple pleasures of eating after hunting and gathering, teaching children, performing ceremonies or rituals, gossiping, copulating, and sleeping. Generosity and communal discourse was dominant, and successful hunts were willingly shared with others. 192 Tragically the coming of the white man to Australia was to bring this idyllic existence and lifestyle to a ‘point of no return’. Stevens expresses that; “The finely balanced indigene ecology, on which the people depended not only for their sustenance and continuity, but also for spiritual inspiration, was shattered.” 193

It would not so much be a ‘clash of arms’ that would be the cornerstone of the Noongar race being exposed to terrible ills and threat of existence, though clashes in Pinjarra, Perth and York would do irreparable damage. Rather, it was settler exploitation of the land which was formally able to sustain human life at a virtually subsistence level, that would shatter the world of the Noongar.

The concept of the inferiority of the Aborigines was clearly cast into the framework of European dominance. This dominant theory is evident in Ethnocentrism, a popular

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189 Ibid: 123. [DATED: Freemantle, Swan River, Western Australia, 12 December 1829 SOURCE: Cross Series III p.6. NOTES: the writer of the letter is described as the wife of a settler whom arrived on the Atwick and was granted 18,500 acres – part of which had been taken up on the Canning River – the letter is the more interesting as it is a female perspective and account of the ‘natives’]

190 Ibid: 110. [DATED: Freemantle, 14 November 1829. SOURCE: Cross series III p.4. NOTES: the writer of the letter is named as Spencer Trimmer. He arrived in the colony on 19 October 1829 in the Atwick]


192 Ibid.

193 Ibid.
form of prejudice and superiority that followed the ‘noble savage’ ideal. It is defined as “…the belief that one’s own culture is superior to the cultures of other people, that members of one’s own culture are superior to members of other cultures, and that these beliefs provide justification for discrimination…” Stevens argues that it was this theory that premeditated “…the conclusion that the European must efface the black race; the only question was with how little violence to humanity this effacement could be attended”.

So even though an amicable co-existence was being established in the early periods of contact, this scenario did not exist for too long as when settler buildings, dwellings and personnel were becoming well established did “…the military and legal vulnerability of the Noongars become apparent.” Collard writes, that in his view, this seeming (early) co-existence had “…a great deal to do with the hospitality of Noongar kinship obligations and the Wedjela dependence on the Noongar ways of doing things.” Even though the phenomena of Djennak was to have effect for near on a decade, the relationship between the colonists and Noongar worsened and the inevitable and unfortunate situation of the local Aboriginal population having to rely on the settler became apparent.

Green adds that many settlers only tolerated the presence and annoyance of the Aborigines because “…Stirling had declared the local inhabitants to be British citizens and entitled to the protection of British laws.” In fact in 1829 Stirling was inspired to report confidently to Sir George Murray, the Secretary of State for the Colonies, that the “…Aborigines offered no opposition to settlement.” That was until the settlers tried to obtain permanent control of Aboriginal lands.

There was no doubt that there were differing views of land, and land ownership, between the Swan River Noongar and the colonists. Traditionally the Noongar would hunt and gather nomadically for sustenance within a defined 6-season calendar. The land and its many traditional ‘secrets’ were only held in custodianship, they were not written down but rather passed down through the generations orally. There was no sense of agricultural farming or penning of livestock, whereas with the European settlers there was. The land and ownership or deeds to the land were an indicator of wealth, power, privilege and status. The colonizers sought to own, exploit and profit from land for personal goals, without any forethought as to the original inhabitants or cultural protocols that existed prior to settlement. “Of all values dear to the Noongar and

194 Foster, Elizabeth. *The Aborigines: From Prehistory to the Present*, Inquiring into Australian history, 1985: 26. Based on the French philosopher Rousseau who stated that ‘humanity’s best state of existence was after it developed from a primitive ‘cave-man’ life to established language and family relationships, but before it became too civilized through industry and agriculture.


197 Collard, *An Analysis of Nyungar Influence in south west Western Australia*: 49.


199 Green, *Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia*: 53.

200 Ibid: 54.

201 These are Birak (Dry & Hot – December/January), Bunuru (Extreme Heat – February/March), Djeran (Cooler Weather – April/May), Makuru (Cold Fronts & Wet Weather evident – June/July), Djjiba (Peak Flowering & Grass Growth – August/September) and Kambarang (Warming & Blooming Period – October/November). Each of the six seasons represents and explains the seasonal changes we see annually. [Sources: http://www.bom.gov.au/iwk/nyoongar/ & http://www.noongar.org.au/images/pdf/Forms/IntroductiontoNoongarCultureforweb.pdf]
the Europeans it was their divergent and incompatible concepts of property that brought about the most serious and lasting conflict.”

Stevens argues further that besides clear acts of open brutality it must also be noted that other factors were to play a significant part in the decimation of the Aboriginal population, namely “…neglect, malnutrition and disease.” Stevens declares, “In most instances it is difficult to determine which was the major cause. Early reports on the European contact situation indicated that the introduction of exotic diseases took almost immediate toll.” And that, “Whatever the cause, be it ignorance, stupidity or intent, within one hundred years of the arrival of the First Fleet, the Aboriginal population of Australia had been decimated.”

Bates, who infamously predicted that the Noongar ‘race’ was heading for inevitable extinction, and hence the white population should do no more than ‘smooth (or soothe) the dying pillow, writes in Aboriginal Perth: Bibbulmun Biographies and Legends, that:

As the jangga came in ever increasing numbers fear and enmity came with them, for some were believed to be the spirits of dead enemies who might be coming back to kill. Then the fast arriving jangga became so many that their “dead” odour filled the nostrils and lungs of the living and killed them, and from this arose the Bibbulmun saying “Jangga meen-ya bo-mung-gur” – “the smell of the jangga is killing us” – and singly and in groups they turned over and died.

Before colonization the Noongar society, with its predominantly homogenous tribal structure, shared a common bond, purpose and religious doctrine. However, upon the settlement of the Swan River Colony the Noongar were exposed to an unfamiliar and alien race of people who came from differing parts of the United Kingdom, with differing class structures, wealth status and religious dogma; a view that could be described as disoriented and unbalanced. As the colony settled and expanded and a common cause prevailed and manifested itself, it was the original inhabitants – the Noongar – that became discombobulated, fractured and dispossessed. In the words of Green the Noongar were “…a people without a future.” Resistance, violent or otherwise, would need to occur for the Noongar to survive.

Where?
Where have they gone
I often wonder
Those great Southern Tribes
Where is the culture
The lore
The legends
Those haunting Didgeridoo vibes
Where are the grey old ones
To educate
To enlighten
The youth in the ways of old

202 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 54
203 Stevens, Black Australia: 9.
205 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 55.
Where has it all gone
The traditions
The land
Has it all been stolen and sold
Surely they have left us a little
Those invading Europeans
Just a place
To call sweet home
And fulfill our Noongah dreams
Or is it far too late
To worry
To wish
Our lifestyle had remained unchanged
And do we have to learn
To live
To survive
In a world that’s been re-arranged?

Graeme Dixon

206 Dixon, Holocaust Island: 43
2.3.2 Noongar Resistance and Resilience

We are indeed a civilizing race…
when we came here, the aborigines covered these wide plains in thousands.
Where are they today? We have ‘civilised’ them – they are dead.

David MacDonald in *Gum Boughs & Wattle Bloom* 207

There is no doubting that early in the ‘birth’ of the Swan River Colony there was an apparent peaceful co-existence between Noongar and British colonizers. However, as with most periods of inception, once the notion that the colonizers were not going to leave and would be permanent residents in the Swan River territory (including the Fremantle, Perth, Guildford and York regions), and the livelihood and cultural protocols of the Noongar would be endangered, there was no option left but aggressive resistance.

The events post colonization (1829-1834) did not occur in a vacuum. Noongar resistance along the south and west coast, in retaliation to the spread of colonial settlement, follows a pattern that is, in retrospect, evident in the record from the earliest days of colonization. Noongars throughout these territories would cautiously observe the settlers as they moved into new territory and traditional sacred country. This same behaviour was evident on the eastern seaboard. Where there was no effort by the settlers to share land, and hence access to wild game, fresh water, regular food supply and sacred sites Aboriginal resistance was to be expected. According to Prentis, “The resistance was at its height, over the whole length of south-eastern Australia and the south-west of Western Australia, in the 1830s and 1840s, when the frontier was being extended very rapidly everywhere.” 208

It is a part of history that when the first fleet landed in Botany Bay in 1788, conflict was both unavoidable and almost immediate, despite King George III directing Governor Phillip to “…live in ‘friendship and kindness’ with the native people.” 209 The British, at this stage in history were experiencing the industrial revolution and therefore they did not see any need to negotiate or make a treaty with the native inhabitants of the new colony. For, in their eyes, the natives lacked any apparent political hierarchy, materialism, agricultural system and no domestic qualities. The British had “…very clear notions of the supposed superiority of their ‘civilization’.” 210

The main area of conflict was, and still is, land.

Noongar poet and writer Graeme Dixon reinforces this concept in his publication *Holocaust Revisited – killing time*:

To a free country the British brought an enslavement mentality and applied it, with equal fervour, to people, plants, animals and the

210 Ibid.
land itself. Land became ‘property’ given as reward or incentive to ‘free settlers’, our Mother bought and sold at will. \(^{211}\)

The British who landed upon these shores had no sentimental or emotional attachment to the land. For them the land was nothing more than a commodity to be bought, exploited and ultimately sold. The settlers and early colonists were mainly driven by profit and loss. The acquisition of land was the basis of wealth, and it was measured in terms of property – and property was sacrosanct. \(^{212}\)

In the opinion of Neville Bonner AO, renowned as the first Indigenous Australian to become a member of the Parliament of Australia\(^ {213}\), “The colonists with their sheep and cattle, not only drove natives from their land, which gave them life and reason for living, but exacted swift retribution if resistance was encountered.” \(^{214}\)

According to Elder, in his book *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788*, “The fatal moment (when colonists stepped ashore) was the moment when the conflict began. There was no spear thrown; no musket fired. But the course of events was set upon its inexorable path. The two cultures were so different. The value systems were so polarized.” \(^{215}\) Elder writes that the result of conflict and eventual massacres (or ‘battles’) between the colonizers and native inhabitants was ‘inevitable’ and that in the ensuing early years of colonization “There was no possibility of compromise…” \(^{216}\) and that once the British stepped foot on the soil of the Aboriginal nation “…the process of corruption, antagonism, brutality and viciousness had already started. There was no turning back…” \(^{217}\)

Neither the Governing bodies (in Britain or in the new colony) nor settlers sought, nor received, permission from the Aboriginal (Noongar) leaders and custodians to take possession of the lands. Collard makes the poignant point that,

> It is also important to realise that the *Wedjela* colonization of Australia was distinctly different from that of New Zealand, Canada or of the United States, for in each of those countries treaties were negotiated between the colonists and the indigenes. Thus the rights of the invading colonists and the Nyungar custodians were defined not by treaty or legislation, but rather by an alien imposed foreign model of government, by military and civil legislative powers. \(^{218}\)

Elder reports that Lieutenant William Bradley, of the First Fleet in Sydney Cove, archived that:

> The natives were well pleased with our people until they began clearing the ground at which they were displeased and wanted them to be gone. \(^{219}\)

\(^{212}\) Elder, *Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788*: 2
\(^{213}\) [Source: http://www.australianbiography.gov.au/subjects/bonner/]
\(^{216}\) Ibid.
\(^{217}\) Ibid: 4.
\(^{218}\) Collard, *An Analysis of Nyungar Influence in south west Western Australia*: 48.
\(^{219}\) Ibid: 5.
This same notion and grievance was eventually felt, and expressed, by the local Noongar who complained that the activities of early colonial expansionists were regarded as an intrusion.

Noongar traditionally followed a pattern of nomadic existence. In the winter, or cooler (rainy) seasons the Noongar would head away from the coast to the protection of the ranges and foothills. In summer, or the warmer seasons, including spring, they would return back to the coastal plains. Included as part of this nomadic lifestyle was the traditional practice of fire-stick burning (burning parts of the country) as they moved from region to region. This would cause exceptional disruption and damage to the settler’s property – including fire damage, escape of livestock and disruption to farming activities as a result of the volume of smoke. Reports indicate that this action “…brought the first problems of contact.”

The consequences of cattle and sheep on native pasture and the Noongar kangaroo herds were clear from the beginning to both sides. Whilst the displacement of kangaroo (and other wild game such as emu and goanna) by cattle and sheep, exacerbated by the clearing of land and the hunting and export of kangaroo skins, forced the Noongar to depend upon the colonist. It was only a matter of time before guerrilla attacks on livestock and homesteads eventuated. As Elder Neville Collard so succinctly expresses:

“…so the Noongars how did they survive? They survived by spearing the pigs, the cattle, sheep, chickens…”

Noongar raids leading to the destruction of sheep or stores in significant quantities began to occur with more regularity. The Noongar would demonstrate both their numbers and authority to the settlers by raiding homesteads in the late afternoon or evening, which correlated usually when the men (and their guns) were absent, and only women or servants were present. If the Noongar were caught during the raid and harmed then the guerrilla war that followed was mediated by Noongar ideas of ‘payback’.

‘Payback’ is defined by the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council as:

A system of retributive justice or payback. If a lore was broken, swift payback would be carried out. The severity of payback depended on the significance of the lore broken. ‘Under traditional law, payback took the form of reprisal against a family deemed responsible for an offence under customary law. The identity of the specific offender was relatively unimportant’.

This lore did not only apply to other Noongar or Aboriginal tribal groups, it also came into effect if a settler was deemed to have harmed or killed a Noongar. If this was the case then under the thousand years old tradition of payback Noongar would target the settler or settler’s family, hold them responsible for that injury, or more especially death, and they would be attacked and speared.

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220 For both the purpose of hunting the wild game and to regenerate the vegetation.
221 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 71.
223 Host, Owen, and South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, It's Still In My Heart, This Is My Country: The Single Noongar Claim History: 57.
All of the above notions are best summarized by an extract from a letter written by settler Jane Dodds on January 1832:

You have, no doubt, heard bad accounts of them (the Noongar), but in almost every instance the settlers have been the aggressors; the one I am about to record you may rely on is true. A party of natives drove off several of Mr Browne’s sheep in sight of the shepherd, calling out ‘Kangaroo, kangaroo’, which was a plain way of saying ‘you have killed our kangaroo, now we must have yours’, but the sequel is dreadful to contemplate: they were followed, and the soldiers and others fell in with them about midnight (it was supposed their number exceeded two hundred men, women and children), seated round several large fires, at which were roasting about ten sheep; the followers all fired into the midst of the thickest groups, killing some, and wounding many; however, the others fled in the greatest confusion, leaving all they possessed behind them…In the course of a day or two some of the natives returned, and murdered the shepherd, which created no small sensation in our neighbourhood, but it appears they will have a victim should any of their party fall, and they always aim at the quarter from whence the blow comes upon them, so that the innocent often suffer for the guilty.  

Attitudes were very much changing within the Swan River Colony. Governor Stirling had endeavoured, since his proclamation, to foster a harmonious relationship with the local original inhabitants, but regretfully this situation was drawing to a close. Resistance to the colonizers, by the Wadjuk Noongar and surrounding tribal groups, began to increase. Stirling’s reaction to this was to establish a number of small garrisons of the 63rd Regiment in scattered settlements throughout the colony for increased protection and safety. By the end of 1831 there were troops at Perth, Augusta, Mandurah, the Upper Swan, Clarence, Albany and Kelmscott. At Perth there was a mounting fear that a mass Aboriginal attack, in an attempt to wipe out the settlers and destroy the capital, was being hatched. This was never a realistic expectation due to the diversity of the social and political structure of the tribal groups (Wadjuk, Ballardong, Yuad and Bindjareb), which effectively meant there was no union between the tribes. However, the fear of attack by hundreds of Noongar would have been of grave concern for the settlers at the time.

Due to the nomadic existence of the Noongar people it is impossible to accurately assess the Noongar population at the time of colonial settlement. According to Green, in all probability the Noongar population for the entire south-west “…was less than 10,000.” These numbers would have been far less in the small area of the Swan River Colony. Turner, reporting in a Canadian Anthropological publication that:

Midgigooroo was the headman of the aborigines who lived on the south side of the estuary in the land of Beeliar, which extended from the Canning branch west to the sea and south to a line

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224 Berryman, Swan River letters Volume 1: 233-34. [DATED: no date given; probably January 1832. Source: Morning Herald 4.9.1832. This letter is from Jane Dodds who came to the Swan River on the ship Rockingham]
225 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 75.
226 Ibid: 8.
somewhere in the vicinity of Safety Bay east to the Darling Scarp. This was a large group, perhaps totaling (in two groups) a total of 58 persons. From the estuary northward to Gyngoorda (the Gingin Brook area?) and from the sea to the Upper Swan and Ellen’s Brook was the territory of Yellagonga, who had a following of only 27 persons (including 5 children). This was known as Mooro. East of the Swan and the Canning, extending to the foothills, was Beeloo with a group of 32 led by Munday. Such was the small aboriginal population in the vicinity of the early Swan River Settlement.  

Wadjuk Senior Elder, Cedric Jacobs, a direct descendent of Midgigooroo and other senior Noongar men from the time of first settlement, explains the importance of these cultural ties and the records kept about the Swan River people by the colonists:

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228 Contained in: Eggington, Robert. *Bulyer Boona Noodja, Koora Kooralong Ale, Nyoongah Myar*, [date unknown].
“I’m an Elder from the Wadjuk people, the Wadjuk region is the Perth metropolitan region basically, and my ancestors goes (sic) back to first contact in Western Australia with Stirling’s party. The records are fortunately...there for us to...access in the archives. The names of the people are clearly recorded, that’s one good thing about the English people is that they did record almost everything they did. And fortunately they included the names of Aboriginal ancestors in those areas. So we are able to trace back, and without hesitation, positively identify myself as an Elder from the Wadjuk River People in Perth.” 229

Elder Collard also acknowledges the anthropological evidence and the recorded history of the Swan River Noongar at the onset of settlement and colonization:

“...and you know when you think about the early settlers time here under Stirling, when George Fletcher Moore came out as an early farmer and he was a historian and... so that’s a very historical part but it had links right back through the Noongars that lived along the Canning (river), you know there at Shelley Bridge, the Noongars camped there, they camped all up and down the river. Yellagonga and his mob at Kaarnyinningup where the East Perth spit is...and the Bennell’s all around there cause they his moort...and that was their run right down to Fremantle Mooro...Midgegooro was a Beeliar man...Munda he was Yagan’s brother but he was also a great warrior...that’s all his land – Mundaring to what the Noongars call Minerying down to Mundijong – that’s all his land all up through there that’s how come they named that (place) Kalamunda and that’s all got links right through to Fremantle and that estuary because our old bridiar Yagan he knew all that land and his land that he acquired through his mother Moiran Moorarch [who] was from Wireless Hill where his scar tree is and his look out right down to Belvoir at Upper Swan and they know that was his land because it was recorded by the early settlers.” 230

Hence, as more of the colony settlers came into contact with the Swan River Noongar (and other tribal groups of the south-west) and the conflicts increased, eighteenth century ideals of the ‘noble savage’ gave way to nineteenth century feelings of disgust and contempt for the local inhabitants:

I have heard again and again people say that they were nothing better than dogs, and that it was no more harm to shoot them that it would be to shoot a dog when he barked at you. 232

229 Jacobs, Cedric "interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground Project."
231 The term noble savage expresses the concept of an idealized indigene, outsider, or "other" and is a common, romanticized stereotype of various indigenous peoples
[Source from: http://rationalwiki.org/wiki/Noble_savage]
Rather than an attempt to understand the ways of the Noongar, the settlers still “…believed in quick retribution according to the white man’s laws.” 233 According to a settler’s record: “…I was for having them caught and treated according to law, but my friends were for more summary proceedings, the end of it, a spring gun was set for several nights – at last a man (native) was shot in the act of opening the door to steal bread…” 234

Robert Menli Lyon235, condemned the settlers actions, and their aggressive nature against the technologically inferior Noongar in an impassioned speech:

“You have seized upon a land that is not yours. Beware, and do not as a people, add to this the guilt of dipping your hands in the blood of those whom you have spoiled to their country.” 236

Few colonists sided with Lyon, and very few considered them in the way George Fletcher Moore237 did when he wrote:

What a singular race of beings! Shrewd and intelligent…utterly ignorant of art or science, yet able to obtain a ready livelihood where a civilized being might be starved; knowing nothing of any metal, possessed of no mechanical tool, and yet able to fashion weapons of a most formidable description; having neither house nor home; domesticating neither bird nor beast…cultivating neither grain nor fruit, naked, yet unwilling to bear the trammels of clothing; looked upon as the lowest in the scale of human beings, yet proudly bearing themselves, and condemning the drudgery of the man who despises them; confiding, cheerful, kindly of disposition…Here is a people truly singular as their own vegetable productions – unique as their animals – and in condition as rare in the world as their own swans. They are a race worthy of the study of the philosopher, meriting the attention of the philanthropists, and requiring the aid of the missionary. 238

In fact the opposite of the above sentiment had began to become the norm among the colonists from Fremantle, down river to Perth, further east to Guildford, over the range to York, out to Kelmscott and down through to the King George Sound. Although, they had been appointed by the Governor to watch after the Aborigines’ interests, some Protectors of Natives showed impatience and anger with their charges, and the Noongar’s seemingly newly developed reliance on settler rations, produce and thieving. Peter Barrow, the Protector at York, summed up his work during 1840 thus:

…in return for all my efforts to impress in their minds the advantages of civilization, and of a peaceful, industrious and well-

234 Ibid.
235 A pioneering Swan River settler who became one of the earliest outspoken advocates for Aboriginal (Noongar) rights and welfare in the colony. He published the first information on the Aboriginal language of the Perth area (recorded during his time spent with Yagan on Carnac Island).
236 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 76.
237 A prominent early settler in colonial Western Australia, and a key figure in the colony’s ruling elite. He conducted a number of exploring expeditions and was responsible for one of the earliest published records of the language of the Australian Aborigines of the Perth area.
238 Rielly, A Time of Trial : the Colony of Western Australia, 1839-1850; 28.
spent life...I could only elicit from them the well-known and all engrossing desire: ‘Flour, give it ‘em.’ 239

Despite the apparent schism developing between the settlers and the Noongar, with sporadic instances of violence – including deaths - the settlers had important reasons for desiring friendly relationships with the Noongar. Apart from the preservations of their flocks, herds and crops, fewer ships and labourers were coming to the colony, and therefore an acute labour shortage and lack of progressive trade within the Swan River Colony occurred. Green, notes that “The settlers reasoned that if the Aborigines could be brought to understand and accept European values through training and education they would provide a useful indigenous servant class.” 240 Many Noongar – including Yagan – disagreed. Some two years after the arrival of Europeans the tempo of the conflict quickened and the names of Yagan241, and his father Midgigooroo242, were frequently linked with the Noongar resistance.243

The records indicate that Noongars Midgigooroo, Yagan, Munday, Weeip, Migo244 and Calyute245 were leaders and men of great importance and repute. These great men also “…resisted, with all of the means at their disposal, the forced annexation and occupation of their country.” 246 Their stories of brave resistance and resilient defiance have, more than often, been disregarded by the history books and writings of white historians, despite the fact that their exploits are recorded in the archives.

By the end of 1830, 57 settler boats had arrived depositing 1800 immigrants along with a detachment of soldiers; the “…dispossession of the Nyungar was well under way…” 247 According to Newbury, “Eighty years later it would be complete.” 248

In their own country the Noongar were often fired upon as they moved about through their tribal lands and sacred hunting grounds. Against European technology and centuries of warfare experience, the Noongar resistance was to prove ultimately futile. Green encapsulates the desperate situation of the Noongar thus: “…the Noongar of the south…had never developed the defensive techniques necessary to maintain a successful or prolonged guerilla warfare…” 249 All that seemed to eventuate from the small persistent raids and random spearings was to “…merely provoke armed settlers”. 250

Once settlement began to take a real and permanent foothold the good relations Charles Fremantle had established with the local Noongar soon deteriorated. With the loss of significant traditional land to settlers and the realization that the disruption to their way of life was permanent, Aboriginal resistance began, led by tribal chief Midgigooroo, and his son Yagan.

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239 Ibid.
240 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 78.
241 AKA Egan, Yeagan, Yagen & Ya’gan.
242 AKA Midgeegaroo, Midgigoorong, Midgigooro, Midjigoro, Midgecarro & Widgegooroo.
243 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 79.
244 AKA Miagro or Miago.
245 AKA as Gcalyut, Kal-yute, Kalyute, or other similar variations.
247 Ibid.
248 Ibid.
249 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 76.
250 Ibid.
Yagan, a tall and daring figure, was expert with the use of a spear, and on his right shoulder was a distinctive tribal tattoo (apparently resembling a lightning bolt), identifying him as a man of high degree in tribal law. According to Noongar Senior Elder, Ken Colbung, it was in 1827 that Yagan first encountered the white man – none other than Captain James Stirling – who described the Bibulmun leader as “…one of the most intelligent men I’ve met, black or white.” Yagan was described by George Fletcher Moore as “…burley faced, moody, the spirit of evil and daring.”

Robert Menli Lyon, an idealistic evangelical who spent much time with Yagan in conversation, saw him as “…courageous, a patriot, the Wallace of his age, of savages the most savage, a prince, but possessed of a violent temper.” This he no doubt inherited from his father Midgigooroo who was recorded as having thrown a spear at a Fremantle storeman because “…he was not satisfied with the amount of biscuits he had been given.” And in the words of The Western Mail (16th July 1915) “…appears to have been angry at his son’s (Yagan) friendship with the white people, and on one occasion after Yagan had his face shaved, ordered him to be beaten by the women of the tribe.”

The impatient and temperamental disposition of both Yagan and Midgigooroo was to show itself in the month of December 1831. Some Noongars raiding a potato patch were ambushed and a friend of Yagan was shot dead. In a revenge raid, based on the tribal law of ‘payback’, a farm worker was correspondingly speared to death. Inside the house were Entwhistle and his two boys. Entwhistle, after hiding his children under the bed, opened the door to discuss a peaceful resolution. He was instantly speared to death and one of his sons (then aged about ten) was to recall:

“I saw a tall native, called Yagan, throw the first spear which entered my father’s breast and another native, Midgegrooro, threw the second spear which brought my father to the ground.”

Six months later a group, led by Yagan, ambushed two farm labourers, William Gaze and John Thomas and killed one – Gaze. The two farm hands were sowing a wheat field along the Canning River. Yagan was proclaimed an outlaw by the English establishment, with a bounty on his head of 20 pounds, but he was able to elude capture for many months until he was overcome whilst fishing with his companions Donmera and Ningina. They were shackled and led through the sandy streets of Perth. “Crowds gathered to stare at the man whose name evoked fear throughout the colony,” and eventually Yagan and his friends were secured at the Round House in Fremantle.

Yagan, with the assistance of the outspoken Lyon, who argued on his behalf, had been spared the death penalty after his 1832 capture by successfully claiming he was a prisoner of war. Lyon became known as an advocate for the Noongar and argued that

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251 Tribal or ‘Bush’ name: Nundjan Djiridjarkan
252 Colbung, Ken & Montrose, Bhavna. Yagan Aboriginal heroes of Western Australia, 1992: 2.
253 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 79.
254 A 13th Century Scottish patriot who united the clans to drive out the English invaders, and who ironically like Yagan was finally betrayed, executed and his corpse mutilated. An Academy Award film about Wallace, directed by Mel Gibson, was produced in 1995.
255 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 76.
257 Allbrook, Malcolm and Jebb, Mary Anne & Associates, Historical research into the Execution and Burial of Migegoooro at the Deaneiry site Perth [for Palassis Architects], 2010: 15.
258 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 80.
Yagan should be ‘…treated as a prisoner of war captured in the defence of his country, not as an outlaw.’ Yagan, with Donnera and Ningina, were released into the custody of Lyon, and in October 1832 they were all exiled on Carnac Island, approximately 8 kilometres off shore from Fremantle. It was during this period that Yagan explained, in considerable detail, the language, society, places and family boundaries of the Swan River Noongar. Lyon accompanied Yagan for the purpose of “…civilizing him through ‘Christianising’.” Despite the best efforts of Lyon, Yagan was a proud and staunch Noongar leader and warrior, as evidenced by this encounter with a soldier on the island, described by Lyon:

One morning, the soldier, for there was only one on the island with me at the time, very injudiciously called Yagan to work before he had finished his breakfast. Yagan, still recollecting that he was a chief did not choose to be so unceremoniously dealt with and refused. The soldier threatened till Yagan’s temper began to rise while the one ran for his musket and the other for his spear. It was a critical moment. I ran to the spot and rushed in between them not knowing but I might receive the bullet of the one and the spear of the other. But the moment I gained the dangerous position, Yagan with a dignity and grace I shall never forget, surrendered placing his spear and with that his life in my hands. Upon which, at my desire, the soldier returned his musket to its place in the tent and in a moment all was quiet. But like the troubled state of the ocean in a calm after a storm there was a feeling of distrust in the minds of both which made the prisoners ever-after uneasy and ultimately determined upon planning their escape.

Several weeks later Yagan, with his companions, seized an unattended dinghy and rowed back to the mainland and freedom.

Yet Yagan did not hide away. In fact he did the opposite and was recorded as walking, without incident through the streets of Perth and the colony. In August of 1832 Stirling had left the colony for a period of two years. During that time Captain Frederick Irwin was in charge. Irwin decided that the best way to handle the Noongar was to treat them with humanity, and that “…Britain was morally obliged to help the Aborigines, who had been forced into a different life,” this view of Irwin often went against settler’s demands. This attitude lead to Yagan being invited, despite being a fugitive, to meet with two Aborigines from the King George Sound region, brought by officials for the purpose of “…encouraging amicable relationships on the Swan like those at the Sound.” Yagan impressed European spectators when, in a spearing contest with the southerners, he “…struck down a walking stick placed upright in the ground twenty-five paces away.” Further, Yagan, in front of Irwin, held a...
**corroboree** in the middle of Perth for the enlightenment of the settlers. He was described as “…a fine master of ceremonies.”

Wadjuk Noongar became extremely frustrated trying to make it known to the British and the settlers that they were illegally occupying land. One incident, that occurred in May 1833, (after the execution of Yagan’s father) is described by George Fletcher Moore, the Advocate General appointed by the colonial Government:

> Yagan again stepped forward, and leaning familiarly with his left hand on my shoulder, while he gesticulated with his right, delivered a sort of recitative, looking earnestly at my face. I regret that I could not understand him, but I conjectured, from the tone and manner, that the purport was this: ‘You came to our country; you have driven us from our haunts, and disturbed us in our occupations: as we walk in our country, we are fired upon by the white men; why should the white man treat us so?’

Yagan’s mother also held a negative attitude towards the colonialsists, however hers was conveyed in a much stronger and outspoken manner than that which Yagan used. She was a powerful matriarch known as Moyran who had warned her people from the beginning that no good would come of their extending a welcome to the settlers. She did not believe in the concept of Djenneka or ‘white spirits of the dead’ and had not seen, nor recognized, any trace of Aboriginal (Noongar) origin in the settlers. According to Carter she would day and night, from the time the settlers arrived, wail:

> “Djang meenya boomiggur” (“the smell of the white man is killing us”).

Fanny Balbuk (also known as Yooreel), was born on Heirisson Island, and had a negative attitude towards the settlers and some of her own kind. Balbuk, to the end of her life, was known to not mix with ‘half-caste’ Aboriginals (Noongars) – she said, “…they smelt worse than the white people.”

In April 1833 Domjum, regarded by Yagan as a brother, was shot dead whilst breaking into a store in Fremantle. Eerily the head of Domjum was “…hacked off by a settler named Hall, and in 1837 it decorated a shelf in…the office at the Swan River Guardian”. The following day, avenging the death of Domjum, Yagan, Midgegooroo, Munday, Migo and about 40 other Noongar ambushed a supply wagon heading out on the road between Fremantle and Canning, and fatally speared two brothers – Tom and John Velvick. This considerably upset the local settlers, as according to Green, “…the body of one (killed) bore the marks of more than a hundred jabs.”

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268 In Noongar it is known as Kening, keneny, ganna, kaana and kaaning or also kobori, & kakarook.
269 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 12.
271 AKA Moirah Moorarch
272 Carter, Nyungah Land: Records of Invasion and Theft of Aboriginal Land on the Swan River 1829 - 1850: 45.
275 Green, Yagan, the Patriot: 3.
Despite his previous intent to treat the Noongar with reasonable compassion Lieutenant Governor Irwin immediately declared Yagan (written as ‘Egan’) an outlaw and a reward of 30 pounds was put on his head. His father Midigooroo and his uncle Munday, each had a bounty put on their life of 20 pounds, for aiding and abetting Yagan:

NOW therefore I the Lieutenant Governor, do hereby, in virtue of the power in me vested, pronounce and declare the said “Egen” to be an outlaw deprived of the protection of British laws, and I do hereby authorize and command all and every His Majesty’s subjects residents in any part of this colony to capture, or aid and assist in capturing the body of the said “Egan” Dead or Alive, and to produce the said body forthwith before the nearest Justice of the Peace:- AND I do further as an encouragement offer a reward of THIRTY POUNDS to any Person or Persons so producing the said Body in manner as aforesaid. AND whereas there is every reason to believe that two other Natives well known by the names of Midgigooroo and Munday were present, aiding and abetting the said Yagan in the perpetration of the said Murder;- I do hereby further proclaim the said Midgigooroo and Munday to be outlaws, deprived of the protection of the British Laws, – and I do hereby offer a Reward of TWENTY POUNDS for the apprehension of each of them, the said Midgigooroo and Munday dead or alive. GOD SAVE THE KING!!

It was clear that Irwin was adamant that his government would send out a warning to the Wadjuk Noongar by targeting these three leaders. ‘Intimidation’ was the term used by Irwin to describe the strategy under which he and his authority would act.

Midgigooroo, accompanied by his son (known as Billy or ‘young Midgigooroo’) who was about five years old, was captured in May by Captain Ellis and a detachment of troops. Upon his capture he struck out at the soldiers with broken spears and called out loudly to Yagan. Finally he was overpowered and taken to Perth where he was placed in a prison cell, whilst his young son was taken aboard the Government schooner Ellen as a hostage. Midgigooroo’s outlaw status combined with his stature among the Noongar and the damning evidence of the boy Entwhistle, who had allegedly witnessed his father’s murder some two years earlier, at the hands of Midgigooroo, deprived him of the right to a trial. In the absence of a Sherriff the warrant was directed to the Perth Magistrate to immediately proceed to carry out the sentence of execution.

On the 22nd May 1833, the death warrant was read outside the (old) Perth jail (the current site of the Anglican Church Deanery), and Midgigooroo, on seeing that preparations were being made to severely punish him, yelled and struggled most violently to escape, and he was then:

…pinioned and blindfolded, and bound to the outer door of the Jail. The resident then reported to his Honor the Lieutenant Governor, that all was prepared – the warrant being declared final – he turned around and gave the signal to the party of the 63rd [all of which had

277 Allbrok & Jebb, Historical Research into the Execution and Burial of Migegooroo at the Deanery Site Perth: 7.
volunteered] to advance and halt at 6 paces – they then fired – and Midgigooroo fell.  

The process from sentencing to execution took less than half-an-hour. The method of execution by firing squad, as far as can be ascertained, is the only time in the history of colonial Australia that an individual has been officially executed by this means. According to Jebb, “Even in the early nineteenth century, hanging was the preferred method of execution. In the British world, firing squads were sometimes used to execute prisoners of war, and thus it is tempting to classify Midgigooroo as such.” Head of the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, Glen Kelly, agrees with this interpretation of colonial history:

“Migegooroo gets shot by firing squad, the only person on Australian soil ever to be shot by firing squad and from there on relations went sour and...relationships got bad, subsequently his sons were killed, one of which was Yagan and the history and story of that is well known and he, as we understand, Midgegooroo, is buried in or around the Deanery of the Cathedral which is on St Georges Terrace across from Government House, so right there on the main street of Perth is a Noongar man buried across the road from Government House – the only person ever to be shot from firing squad on Australian soil. From then on relations weren’t that good...then the ‘war’ started and things got worse and worse and people started getting transported to places like Wadjimup and then people started getting put onto reserves and then there was this big social engineering thing that happened in England where people would be convicted for ridiculous things, put on a boat, bought out here and given there ticket of leave virtually getting off the boat and when this wave of settlers came in that’s what really started to displace Noongars...because (the settlers would have thought) ‘we have to get these Noongars out of the way’...”

Karen Jacobs, whose Swan River Noongar ancestry includes Migegooroo, confirms Kelly’s notion:

“Absolutely, I believe that these men that were incarcerated were a real problem...and this is purely my opinion, and looking back over history that the government of the day probably would have wished that they would have all been killed (during battle)...”

To satisfy the colonists desire for revenge the leader of the Beeliar received “…3 balls in his head, one in his body.” With cheering still echoing from the jail grounds by the large crowd of settlers that had gathered to watch the execution the “…corpse was taken from the jail door and hung from a tree in St George’s Terrace. It was left

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278 Macfaull, Perth gazette and Western Australian journal
279 Allbrook & Jebb, Historical Research into the Execution and Burial of Migegooroo at the Deanery Site Perth: 8.
280 Kelly, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project,"
281 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
282 George Frederick Moore, 24th May 1833, in Jebb and Associates, Historical Research into the Execution and Burial of Migegooroo at the Deanery Site Perth: 9.
swinging there for several days as a warning…” 283 The effect and sorrow of Midgigooroo’s execution is still felt today by his direct descendents:

“...they took him (Midgegooroo) to Pier Street there and that is where the firing squad stood down near Pier Street facing west and he was facing east up against the door – a wooden door or something – that is where they shot him and I think they took so many paces back from him [records show that they took several paces forward] and they took aim and fired and the other thing was they didn’t release his body for his tribe to bury his body in the traditional way he was hung up by the neck there on a tree, his dead body for a time and then he was taken down and the white people buried him there and that was the barracks of course and the soldiers guarded over him so they (his family) couldn’t take him and bury him properly and we are still fighting for that today to happen, that he needs to have a traditional burial, and so far we haven’t had that today you can see how many years that is...as I say what is it?...about one hundred and seventy eight years I think...and we still haven’t been able to do it (bury his body traditionally) today.” 284

A week after Midgigooroo’s execution Yagan, Munday and Miago and several other armed Noongar presented themselves at George Fletcher Moore’s farm in the Upper Swan. A surprised, and somewhat shaken, Moore (and two companions) were questioned by Yagan, wearing a soldier’s coat under his kangaroo skin cloak285 indicating Yagan’s attacking frame of mind, as to the whereabouts of his father; “Midgegooroo shoot?” “Walk?” Quickly realizing that Yagan did not know his father had been executed Moore searched for the words to tell Yagan, when a servant interrupted the conversation by declaring that the “…old man was a prisoner on Carnac Island.” 286 Despite being assured by one of Moore’s servants Yagan wanted a response from Moore. When Moore gave no response Yagan, with “…extraordinary vehemence of manner, distinctness of utterance, and emphasis of tone…” 287 warned Moore: “White man shoot Midgigooroo, Yagan kill three.” 288

Once Yagan’s party left Moore’s property he immediately alerted the military, nevertheless admitting;

The truth is, every one wishes him taken, but no one likes to be the captor. How could any person, unless a professed blood-hunter, spring upon a man in cold blood, and lead him to his death? How could any one who has a heart fire upon him treacherously from a secure ambush, though he be an unfeeling and reckless savage?”
There is something in his daring which one is forced to admire. 289

283 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 13.
284 {Corunna interview, 2011} Corunna claims that Midgigooroo is his great great grandfather from the oral account from his great grandmother as told to her from her mother – the young wife of Midgigooroo in 1834.
285 Known to Noongar as a Booka.
286 Green, Broken Spears : Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 87.
287 Fforde, "Yagan," {page unknown}
288 Green, Broken Spears : Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 87.
289 Fforde, "Yagan," {page unknown}
Those savages would come in the form of two brothers – William (18 years) and James (13 years) Keats, who worked as cattle herders for Mr Bull (a successful and well revered cattle farmer), at Bull’s farmstead in the Swan Valley. Yagan, despite being hunted throughout the colony by a military posse, had survived until Thursday the 11th of July when he came across the Keats boys minding some cattle near Bull’s property at Guildford (approximately 13 kms north-east of Perth). William immediately recognized Yagan and Yagan recognized the brothers, asking for some flour. That morning, William had asked for some bread, and when quizzed as to what purpose he is alleged to have said; “you’ll know when the gun goes off.” The Perth Gazette (13th July 1833) notes that Keats “…frequently expressed determination to kill Yagan…” most likely for the £30 reward and a passage back to England for him and his brother.

According to James Keats’ testimony, which was reported in the Perth Gazette on the 13th July 1833, Yagan was persuaded to turn back (perhaps with enticement of the bread William carried) from Bull’s farmstead and spend the remainder of the morning with the brothers. During this time William Keats once attempted to shoot Yagan (unawares) but the gun jammed half-cocked. The brothers and Yagan then went to a place where some other Noongar were making dampers, and were then escorted by them over to the Swan River. Yagan at this stage, flustered, refused to go any further and becoming more agitated threw down his fire brand and digging stick and presented himself in a threatening attitude. James pleaded with his brother that, “…if you wish to shoot him, now is the time…” but refusing William waited until they had joined the rest of the party. On reaching them William Keats cocked his gun, laid it over his arm, pointed the muzzle towards Yagan, pulled the trigger, and shot Yagan in the head. Yagan directly fell dead. Other Noongar, who had heard the shots, immediately spearred William. Heegan, as he attempted to throw his spear, was mortally wounded by James, but Weeip and three others managed to surround and spear William and “…appeared to be driving their spears into his body.” James Keats escaped by swimming the Swan River and, after claiming the reward for Yagan, left for Tasmania.

Though some settlers and military personnel were overjoyed to hear of Yagan’s death, the editor of the Perth Gazette was appalled that Yagan’s trust had been dishonored by the brothers and commented, “It is revolting to our feelings to hear this lauded as a meritorious deed.”

In a macabre action Yagan’s head was hacked from his body by one of Bull’s men, for the purpose of preserving it. They also flayed the skin off the back of Yagan to preserve the distinctive tribal mark that Yagan was renowned for. Yagan’s severed head was first stuck on a fence post at the Bull’s farmstead, an action that had “…a gruesome parallel with the medieval custom whereby executed outlaws’ heads were set above the gates of English towns as a warning.” Later, Yagan’s head was “…suspended…for three months in a hollow tree, over a fire made with the wood of the Eucalyptus…and during this process of smoking, the nose and features generally shrunk.”

290 Ibid.
291 Perth Gazette (13.7.1833) in Ibid.
295 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 15.
296 Described by Dale in 1834 in Fforde, "Yagan," {page unknown}
head was eventually taken to England by Ensign Dale as a ‘specimen of curiosity’ and exhibited as a trophy at English shows. Yagan’s head was acquired by the Liverpool Museum and it was, sometime around the 1960s, buried with the bodies of orphans in an unmarked grave. It was not returned to Western Australia until 1997.

Bibbilmun Senior Noongar Elder Ken Colbung (AM MBE JP), who devoted part of his life to the return of Yagan’s head (kaart in Noongar), says:

“The taking of Aboriginal remains, which included the beheading of Yagan’s body and the transportation of his head to England, was savagery, dehumanizing the Aboriginal people. It was an example of the invaders’ attitude that Aboriginals were not to be regarded as part of the human race. The white invaders went about cutting off their heads and sending these curiosity’s with their collections of boomerangs and spears to the northern hemisphere where they were regarded, it seems, as trophies, or spoils of the victors.”

Austin, in his text A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia 1829-1929, declares that Yagan’s headless corpse was “…buried in a paddock in the Swan Valley.” Austin, further explains that, due to Yagan’s body not being intact, he could not rest in peace according to tribal lore, “A ceremonial fire at the grave must smolder through the night. When the morning mist wafted with the fire smoke, the dead one’s spirit should rise through these vapours to be set free in limitless cosmos.” Hence, Yagan’s spirit could not complete its final journey, until his head was placed with the rest of his body. Senior Elder, Albert Corrunna, agrees with Austin’s deduction, but gives reasons for Yagan’s body being ‘stolen’ and buried by his own relations. He also talks about the eventual burial of Yagan’s skull (kaart) and burial of his remaining body some 176 years after his murder:

“…Yagan…we’ve given him a tribal traditional (ceremony), buried the skull like what was brought back as I say and we couldn’t actually find the actual grave…he was given, (that) he was buried by his tribe in the first place…that’s a true story, most people reading what’s in the books and the head was stolen from his grave, that’s the true story, the white man’s story will say they buried him but they didn’t…his people buried him. They killed the person who killed him and then they buried him (Yagan’s body).”

According to Newbury, had Yagan and Midgigooroo lived a little longer and learnt of the barbarity of the Pinjarra Massacre, they “…might have been inclined to challenge the moral ground taken by their accusers.” Colbung agrees and surmises that Yagan not only represented the early colony’s Noongar resistance narrative but is a modern day icon for the Aboriginal community:

297 Gapps, Front pages that shaped Australia: 100 of the nation’s most influential cover stories and newspaper headlines, from 1629 to 2009: 86.
298 Colbung & Montrose, Yagan Aboriginal heroes of Western Australia: 3.
299 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 16.
300 Ibid.
301 Ibid.
302 Corunna, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground Project."
Many things have been said about Yagan. Many things need to be said, but he stands out as a man among men in Western Australian history as a brave Aboriginal warrior who fought actively and vocally against the injustices to his land, his culture and laws which governed him and his forefathers. Yagan should be remembered as an inspiration and a rallying point for Aboriginal people of today.

There is no doubt that the deaths of Yagan and Midgigooroo had sent a decisive and threatening warning to the Noongar of the Swan River Colony. Captain Irwin acknowledged this notion by claiming, with great satisfaction and resilience, that the deaths of the two Noongar leaders and warriors “…had intimidated the tribes of the Swan and Canning rivers.” Albert Corunna describes the situation:

“...and so it is a tactic by the British how they eliminate our leaders from the country so that this is how they think it is easier then to take over the country or to kill the rest as though there is less resistance for them to occupy the land and that’s what we are – a land under occupation.”

Though the colony was seemingly in a state of relative peace and amicability after the deaths of Yagan and Midgigooroo, there still remained an overarching feeling that another uprising would eventuate. The Swan River Guardian on January 11th 1838 wrote:

The British Government took forcible possession of the West Coast of Australia, enticed settlers here and deprived the Aboriginal inhabitants of the lands of their Forefathers, of their game, of their fish: and left them to roam through the wilderness; a wandering race of beggars! The deed has been done and we must endure the consequences.

Many are familiar with the names of Native American heroes and warriors including Chief Sitting Bull, Crazy Horse, Geronimo and others. But how many have heard of the heroes of the Aboriginal resistance? Names like Pemulwuy and his son Tedbury, from the Bidjigal clan of the Eura people, renowned as the first resistant fighter against the First Fleet settlers at Botany Bay. Or Tunnerminnerwait and Maulboyheenner, famous freedom fighters from Tasmania, who wreaked havoc against the Melbourne authorities in 1841. And of course, as written in this chapter, the resilient and warrior like Noongar group consisting of Yagan, his father Midgigooroo, Munday, Weeip, Miago and the fierce Bindjareb warrior Calyute. Up north there was none more recognized for his efforts in resisting the Kimberley pastoralist and police than Jandamarra, who met his death in 1897. These are just a handful of Aboriginal freedom fighters that were proud and brave enough to resist the colonisation and settlement of their country and ancestral lands.

But it is a sad comment on Australian history, and particularly upon the way Europeans regarded Aboriginal people in the nineteenth century, that little is written about these men and their efforts, and most of the general public believes – incorrectly – that
Australia was settled without significant resistance and in a relatively peaceful manner. There are also few contemporary accounts of the many horrific massacres against Aboriginal people that occurred during the settlement of this nation. So many of the massacres have been forgotten. So many live on as memories and folklore. So many have been dissolved by time and death of Elders. That was the way it was in the colonies; on the frontier. But the Aboriginal community has not forgotten these stories of resistance and massacre. The bloodshed was real, the resistance evident and the stories that were passed down through generations are true. They live on in the Aboriginal memory; the stories are told and re-told. Elder, proclaims that, “…these stories of massacre are like fossils. They lie dormant, waiting to be exposed.”

The archives and historical publications might have called it the ‘Battle of Pinjarra’ but like all of the massacres of Aboriginal people it was more a case of wholesale slaughter.

**Death of the Innocent**

...Then Stirling came one fateful day
With weapons of Death to blow you away
They crept around and trapped you in
Old men, women and children young

Shots were fired and you screamed
Spears no match for bullets of lead
More shots, more screams, and you flee
But powerful bullets knock you dead

The river ran red with your innocent blood
The spilling of which was lauded right after
Many were shot in that terrible massacre

But “The ‘battle’ is won!” said Stirling with laughter...

Lesley Morrison

Soon after the establishment of the Swan River settlement between Fremantle, Perth and Guildford, colonists began arriving and settling, in what is now called the Peel region. Thomas Peel had hoped to secure land near Perth, the hub of the colony, but his late arrival to the colony meant he was granted an area further south. The land included 250,000 acres on the coast from Cockburn Sound south to the Peel Inlet, and inland along the right bank of the Murray River as afar as Pinjarra and almost to the Darling Range. The new settlement at Pinjarra lay some 80 kilometres south of the Swan River settlement.

Almost from the moment that Peel and his syndicate (said to number up to 400 settlers) entered the Mandurah and Pinjarra area, the local Noongar – collectively known as the **Bindjareb** – began to make a name for themselves as the strongest, most capable and

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309 The Peel region is located about 75 km south of Perth. It consists of the City of Mandurah, and the Shires of Boddington, Murray, Serpentine-Jarrahdale and Waroona.
least willing group to relinquish control of their lands. As claimed in Contos, they “…would not be easily intimidated”. 311

It is reported that due to this resilient behaviour and their seemingly aggressive nature, Peel, upon his arrival in the colony, quickly developed a distinct and strong dislike for the local inhabitants. He struggled with his cattle herding and production and is reported as declaring that the Noongar, “…were the single most important cause of settler’s failures.” 312 According to him, and several other disgruntled settlers, the natives “…destroyed stock, crops, equipment and buildings with their strategically lit fires” 313, and were often accused of stealing cattle.

The Bilyidar 314 Bindjareb Noongars are thought to have included three family groups, each of whom had a main camping area. One group, of about thirty to forty people, was loosely based in the area we now know as Mandurah 315. A Noongar warrior, and senior man, by the name of Calyute may have been this group’s leader. Concentrated in the Pinjarra area may have been the second, and largest group, with about forty people and containing the Noongar warrior Nunar - possibly a senior man. The third group was centered more in the North Dandalup area, and numbered only about fifteen to twenty people. 316

Trouble between the Bindjareb Noongar or ‘Murray’ region Noongar was evident from the outset of the colony, in fact Stirling is recorded as saying that the “…murders and outrages committed by the Murray or Mandurah Tribes were various.” 317 The group was commonly held responsible for what was thought to be the first death of a settler (MacKenzie), killed near the Murray River as a result of Noongar resistance. Private George Budge was ambushed in February of 1832 by several Bindjareb Noongars, and speared to death near Peel’s garden. In the following July, Sergeant Wood of the 63rd Regiment was speared and nearly killed. The next month, the military post at Mandurah was again attacked by a strong force of Noongan warriors. 318

Captain Ellis, Superintendent of the Police, made the decision to cut flour rations to the Nyungars in the early part of the year 1834. Up to that point the local inhabitants had been receiving flour and other small rations, considered by the Noongar as an exchange payment by the settlers for the use of their land and resources. As a result of this change to the flour rations the Bindjareb were incensed at being deprived of their rations. 319 Threats of violence resulted, including marching on to Peel’s property, and pointing a gidgi (spear) to his son’s chest.

In April, a group of the Bindjareb, reputedly led by Calyute in company of Ye(y)dong, Gummol, Wamba and Monang, raided Shenton’s Mill in South Perth, containing a vast

311 Ibid: 12.
312 Ibid.
313 Ibid.
314 AKA Beeliar/Beeylia meaning River – in this instance the Murray River – known to Noongar as Bindjareb Beeliar.
315 Noongar named the area Mandjar (‘meeting place’) or Mandjoogoordap, pronounced man-joo-goord-daap, (‘meeting place of the heart’). After European settlement the name changed, possibly due to mispronunciation, to Mandurah.
317 Stirling, Sept 1836: 13 in Ibid.
supply of flour and others rations. Offended that the Bindjareb had breached into their boodja (country – tribal boundaries) the Swan River Wadjuk aided the police. Captain Ellis and a party of the 21st Regiment quickly set off in pursuit to capture those thought to be the offenders. Laying in wait at Mandurah, they eventually caught several of the raiding party, including the ‘ringleader’ Calyute, who was taken to Perth and publicly flogged, receiving an agonizing 60 lashes. \(^{320}\) The Perth Gazette, on May the 3rd 1834, observed: “…we have every reason to expect the example which has been made of them will not be without its beneficial effects.” \(^{321}\) This action from the establishment did not deter the Bindjareb – if anything it steeled them for their course of resistance – the situation within the Mandurah/Pinjarra region was escalating.

In July of 1834 the Bindjareb hatched an elaborate plan to lure Peel into the bush to search for one of his missing prized horses and then in ambush to spear and kill him. Instead of Peel however, Edward Barron, wanting to purchase the mare, and a 19 year-old servant (Hugh Nesbit) ventured into the scrub (about a mile towards Lake Goegrup) with twenty Noongars in company\(^{322}\) including Calyute and his sons Monang and Unia. \(^{323}\) A while into the bush the group split in two. The Bindjareb placed their gidj (spears) into their mirra (throwing sticks) and three spears hit Nesbit, taking him to the ground. Barron took a spear to the kidney but was able to escape and retreat back to Peel’s settlement. \(^{324}\)

The following day a party of soldiers went in search of Nesbit’s body. It was found with countless spear wounds, some apparently after death. The Bindjareb had ritually mutilated Nesbit. \(^{325}\) The killing of Nesbit and the apparent plan to murder Peel prompted fear and anger throughout the colony. A call for punitive action began to swell within it. The editor (McFaull) of the Perth Gazette wrote on the 26th of July 1834:

> …this unprovoked attack must not be allowed to pass over without the infliction of the severest chastisement; and we cordially join our brother colonists in the universal call – for a summary and fearful example. We feel and know from experience that to punish with severity the perpetuators of the atrocities will be found in the end an act of the greatest kindness and humanity. \(^{326}\)

Further derogatory and inflammatory comments were reported at the time. Charles Bussell, a contemporary of Peel’s from Busselton (to the south), commented that it would be “…absurd to hope to dwell in peace in that country…until the aboriginal inhabitants have been subdued.” \(^{327}\)

\(^{320}\) Perth Gazette, 3rd May 1834 in Ibid.
\(^{322}\) Woodan, Merega, (Jack), Womban, Nundja, Moat, Nunar, Yadong, Yunga, Calbourn, Wongup, Buggar, Gweerup, Denmar, Erit, Calliere, Yanmer & Berehan and others.
\(^{323}\) Peel to Stirling in April 1st 1835 according to: Pinjarra Massacre Site Research and Development Project: report for stage 1/ by Natalie Contos; in conjunction with Theo A. Kearing and the Murray District Aboriginal Association and Len Collard and Dave Palmer: 14.
\(^{324}\) Ibid: 15.
\(^{325}\) Ibid.
\(^{326}\) Ibid: 16.
\(^{327}\) Ibid: 17.
The colony, with the might of Stirling behind it, wanted the *Bindjareb Noongar* out of the way.

**Run to the Hills**

_White man came across the sea_
_He brought us pain and misery_
*He killed our tribes, he killed our creed_
*He took our game for his own need*_

*We fought him hard, we fought him well_
*Out on the plains we gave him hell_
*Murder for freedom the stab in the back_
*Woman and children, a cowards attack*_

*Run to the hills - run for your lives_
Run to the hills - run for your lives...*  

### 2.3.3 The ‘Battle’ of Pinjarra – The Pinjarra Massacre (1834)

As a counter act to the resistance and widespread hostilities of the *Binjareb Noongar*, Stirling formed a party of about twenty-five colonists. The group was a mixture of police, soldiers and a few settlers. Their plan was to 'punish' any *Bindjareb* people in the local area in order to drive home the message to that tribe, and other tribal groups within the colony that settlers and their cattle must not be attacked or speared. One account of the massacre explained the rationale for the attack as simply that, “…the movement was considered propitiously favourable for punishing the perpetrators of such and other diabolical acts”.

The attitude towards the Noongar, from many settlers within the colony, had changed considerably since they first arrived on the shores of Western Australia. It is reported that one settler expressed openly that he was prepared “…to watch and attack the natives, and kill, burn, blow up and otherwise destroy the enemy.” Another settler from Van Dieman’s Land (now Tasmania) expressed vehemently, upon seeing some [unoffending] Noongar on the road, “Damn the rascals…I’ll show you how we treat them in Van Dieman’s Land”, [and immediately fired on] the unsuspecting Noongar – [hitting one] with his discharge.

On the 27th of October 1834 the well armed party, led by Governor Stirling, arrived on the banks of the river adjoining the swamp country of Jim Jam, about two and-a-half hours ride from Pinjarra and close enough to the *Binjareb* to make an early morning strike. The party camped at Jim Jam and at first light heard the native “coo-ee” calls across the eastern bushland, along with the jabber of *Binjareb* voices. The early morning of the 28th October 1834 dawned to stormy skies and drizzling rain as the party,

328 Songwriters: Steve Percy Harris, © Universal Music Publishing Group: [Source: http://www.lyricsmode.com/lyrics/i/iron_maiden/run_to_the_hills.html]  
329 Green, *Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia*: 99-101. The party comprised several key figures of the Swan River Colony; Surveyor General, John Septimus Roe, Captain Ellis of the Mounted Police, and Mr Thomas Peel.  
330 Many people in the Noongar community would use the word massacre.  
332 Ibid.  
weapons readied, moved into Pinjarra at 5.30am. Fog lying close to the ground allowed
the party and their horses to move up to the camp of the Binjareb almost undetected.
Stirling sent Peel to scout ahead and try to establish whether Calyute and his other
warriors were present, and to attempt to have them return for talks with Stirling. Peel
eventually returned with news that about 70 Binjareb were gathered on the far side of
the river, but none had heard him attempting to get their attention, due to the camp’s
noise and persistent rain. According to Nairn:

> A ford was found, and it was decided that Captain Ellis, Norcott and three mounted police, would cross the river and detour to come up from the rear. Roe, accompanied by four soldiers, was given the job of guarding stores, equipment, while the remainder of the party would lie concealed at the top of the river bank, from where they had an overall view of the noisy tribe below.

At this point in the ‘battle’ Stirling divided the party and attempted to encircle the
fleeing group. Ellis and his small party rode in on the camp and came across a surprised
group of some seventy Bindjareb. Elder says that when the Bindjareb “…showed signs
of retaliation, Stirling and his men opened fire.” The Bindjareb men immediately
sprang into action releasing a hail of spears, the woman with children, attempted to flee
into the bush. Ellis and his party replied with musket fire, and “…five natives fell to the
ground.” Ellis, during this confused fight was either hit by spear, felled by club or simply fell off his horse as it bucked abruptly, and hit his head violently. Suffering concussion he would remain in a coma for two weeks then die on the 11th November and was buried with full military honours.

The Bindjareb were easy targets for the cross fire from Stirling’s party above and Ellis’
party near the river. Nairn writes that, “Many of the natives were women and children.
Children cringed against mothers. Mothers, screaming and whimpering, crouched
against the branches of scrawny trees, and among the rushes along the river bank.”
There were miraculously some Bindjareb that got away, among them (leader) Calyute.
Most others were trapped in the water. The British caught the Bindjareb, which included mothers and children, in a cross fire from each bank. With marksmen
positioned on both banks of the Murray River the fleeing Binjareb, “…were all easy
targets and were soon picked off …”

As a ten year old George Winjan witnessed family members being shot in the ambush,
never forgetting the massacre of his people at Pinjarra. [As an old man he told a white
friend, James Cooper], “They shoot-em man, they shoot-em gins, shoot-em piccaninnies
and they shoot-em dogs too…”

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335 Nairn & Pash, Western Australia's tempestuous history. Volume 1: 19.
336 Elder, Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788: 249.
337 Ibid.
338 Known as a wanna or dowak in Noongar.
339 A folk ballad, The Jackets of Green, honouring Ellis, was later composed and sung around Guildford and Perth taverns – At the WA Police Academy in Joondalup Ellis is the first name on the WA Police Honour Roll [Memorial].
340 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia's tempestuous history. Volume 1: 19.
341 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 104.
342 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 21.
There was intense gunfire during the heat of the ‘battle’ but the “…troops noted with amazement that despite their desperate situation no Noongar called for surrender. They held on to their spears…and never ceased to try to take the offensive…” 343 As the ‘battle’ began to subside eight woman and a group of children were taken prisoner and then the remaining survivors were hunted through surrounding bush land. There were no men taken prisoner; all wounded male Bindjareb were shot. Roe, who stayed at the ford, “…heard the cries of the survivors (and wounded) as they were caught and shot.” 344 None survived.

Then, with the scent of victory in his nostrils, Stirling called out for the bugle to be sounded and for his troops to cease firing. In less than an hour and a half from the first shot the ‘battle’ was over. Elder writes that, “The Aboriginal people may not have seen the massacre as a ‘battle’ but Captain Stirling, who had seen action in the West Indies, South America and the American war, declared his forces victorious.” 345

Those Bindjareb that had been taken prisoner were soon set free. Stirling decided to do this “…for purpose of fully explaining to the rest of the tribe the cause of the chastisement, that had been inflicted.” 346 Stirling also gave a terrifying speech that echoed his warning to the Swan River Noongar, Weeip the previous month. If any settlers should be killed by the Murray tribe in retaliation he declared, “…not one would be allowed to remain alive on this side of the Mountains.” 347

No-one knows for sure how many Bindjareb were killed. Estimates vary from fourteen to thirty. Stirling reported only fifteen dead. Roe mentioned fifteen to twenty in his records, whilst Captain Daniell, who was ordered to survey the ‘battleground’ after the engagement, found several mass graves. The victors acknowledged killing only “…one woman and fewer than a dozen children.” 348 [Quoting a member of the attacking force], The Perth Gazette reported that, “…between 25 and 30 were left dead on the field and in the river…it is however very probable that more men were killed in the river, and floated down with the stream”. 349 To this day it is unlikely that we will ever know exactly how many Noongar died on that fateful day – the 28th October 1834.

Both Stirling and the settlers regarded the ‘battle’ as a success; it certainly did much to break the will of the local Bindjareb, and to some extent, once word got back to the Swan River colony, the Wadjuk Noonga. Grassby & Marjihill write that, “Captain F.C. Irwin, who was lieutenant governor in Stirling’s absence…(expressed) that the battle was needed to demonstrate to the Noongar ‘their inferiority in power to the whites’.” 350

In March 1835, with Munday and Miago acting as interpreters, the Murray River Noongar leaders, led by Calynte, “…pledged their support for the present and future decisions of the governor…” 351 The Swan River Noongar also pledged the same. The

343 Grassby and Hill, Six Australian Battlefields: the black resistance to invasion and the white struggle against colonial oppression: 195.
344 Ibid.
345 Elder, Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788: 250.
346 Ibid.
347 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 104.
348 Grassby and Hill, Six Australian Battlefields: the black resistance to invasion and the white struggle against colonial oppression: 198.
349 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 21.
350 Grassby and Hill, Six Australian Battlefields: the black resistance to invasion and the white struggle against colonial oppression: 198.
351 Ibid: 199.
collective Noongar were told that provided that they abided by the Government directions and stopped robbing farms and stealing colonial property “…their people would not be shot…” 352 “There were no concessions, no recognition of land rights and no guarantee that the Noongar would ever be consulted again.” 353 The Noongar never were again consulted until the negotiations between the State Government of Western Australia and the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council regarding native title in the late part of the twentieth century. In Pinjarra today, there is no memorial to the slain Bindjareb, “we cannot list the victim’s names, we cannot call it a Massacre Site.” 354

2.3.4 After the ‘Battle’ of Pinjara (1835 to 1850)

After the massacre at Pinjarra and the subsequent (peace) meeting of the Noongar leaders, with Stirling, in 1835 the Noongar on the Swan, Canning and Murray rivers were now clearly oppressed, with their land now completely occupied. Significant leaders like Midgegooroo and Yagan had been executed and murdered and the food sources of the Noongar had been mostly destroyed and they were now tragically dependent on the British newcomers for rations. A ration depot was established at the foot of Mt Eliza355, though Noongars were constantly being discouraged from entering the Perth town area. It was also made clear to them frequently, “…that if they did not behave in a way approved by the British they would be shot.” 356

This was the beginning of tight legislative and bureaucratic control of Aboriginal people in Western Australia. Subsequent policies would emphasize:

(i) Targeting of Aboriginal resistance to colonization through removal from homelands (sometimes in chains);
(ii) Forcing compliance of Aboriginal people with colonial government directions;
(iii) Opening of Aboriginal prison on Rottnest Island;
(iv) Enactment of rationing (food and blankets) as a way of regulating Aboriginal freedom of movement;
(v) Prevention of Aboriginal access to European towns and properties;
(vi) Use of Aboriginal people as (unpaid) labour;
(vii) Removal of Aboriginal children. 357

There were many that opposed this type of ‘murderous’ justice and mercy of the British law, but they were in the minority, with the majority of the colonists supporting the government action at Pinjarra, including the Perth Gazette, which wrote, “This…proceeding will no doubt, bring…the cry of unjustifiable homicide. Be it so.

352 Allbrook & Jebb, Historical Research into the Execution and Burial of Migegooroo at the Deanery Site Perth: 8.
353 Ibid.
354 Pinjarra Massacre Site, as part of the ART ON THE MOVE National Exhibitions Touring Structure for Western Australia, Department of the Culture and the Arts: 2.
355 Where once the proud Noongar leader Yellagonga camped, hunted and shared with his people and family.
356 Carter, Nyungah Land: Records of Invasion and Theft of Aboriginal Land on the Swan River 1829 - 1850; xi.
357 Allbrook & Jebb, Historical Research into the Execution and Burial of Migegooroo at the Deanery Site Perth: 8.
Bring any one of the cream-faced objectionists in the same position and see would they not do the same thing were they in the same place.” 358

According to Reilly the period between 1839 and 1850, although marked by intermittent bloodshed, was an era during which, “…the settlers and the Aborigines gradually came to terms with one another and left one another in peace…” 359 The relationship between Noongar and Colonists may have been (relatively) amicable and cordial but it was apparent that over the next two decades the Aboriginal population around the Swan River was now dispossessed and demoralized. Children were taken from their parents, a special prison for Aboriginal people was established on Rottnest Island, and for all intents and purposes, the Noongar were a conquered people.

Black Death

They sat midst the dirt and flies
Alone and in disgrace
But behind those sadden eyes
Are angry words and screaming
Aimed at those in uniforms
Who killed those of the Dreaming.

Graeme Dixon 360

2.3.5 Penal Colony and Need for a Prison for Aboriginal Inmates

Of all the major colonies established by Britain in Australia the Swan River colony in Western Australia was the least successful. Attempting to pre-empt any plans that the French may have had regarding establishing a settlement on the west coast of the continent the British effectively secured the western third of Australia with the Swan River colony and the colony at King George Sound. The colony itself in the Swan River, however, was an initially abject failure. 361

The Chief Executive Officer of the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, Mr Glen Kelly, reinforces this notion:

“It’s pretty clear from a lot of the history work that has been done that the colony was a bit of a scam and it was sold by Stirling and a couple of his comrades as being this extraordinarily rich place and amazing soils and great agriculture and all this sort of stuff...and he sold it to people – to get people here – he sold it to people as something it wasn’t. Now after a few years people figured that...the soil was rubbish to start off with and the wealth that had been promised to them by Stirling was not going to materialise and when this happened there was a lot of discontent...in the early colony.” 362

358 Rielly, A Time of Trial: the Colony of Western Australia, 1839-1850: 30.
360 Dixon, Holocaust Island: 5.
361 Berryman, Swan River letters Volume 1: 1.
362 Kelly, ”Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
The colonists within the Swan River Colony, had by 1843, began to feel the pressures of establishing the colony amongst hostile inhabitants, climate and conditions. The settler’s crops had failed, the weather was deemed too extreme, the land of the Swan River colony was valued as not being cost effective, plus the fear of the Noongar on top of loss of live stock caused the settlers to become depressed and gravely concerned, with many believing that the “…only answer was to turn Western Australia into a penal colony.” 363

Berryman reports that, “The flow of emigrants and capital from Britain ceased abruptly in January 1830, and many aspiring colonists either returned to Britain or departed for New South Wales and Van Diemen’s Land.” 364 Therefore, the first settlers, who had originally (vehemently) opposed the colony containing convicts, after years of toil, hardship, debate and heart-searching finally relented. In November 1849 citizens of Perth were “…officially notified that Western Australia was to lose her freedom to become a penal settlement,” 365 with the first influx of prisoners arriving from Pentonville prison in England. According to the authorities back in England these prisoners would be “…men who had not committed serious crimes, and would be accompanied by their families and would be pardoned on their arrival at Swan River.” 366 This seemed like a good proposition to all involved – to the colony as they desperately needed labour, and to the British Government – as they were fast running out of colonies to receive their unwanted convicts. The opportunity of using the Swan River colony as a penal settlement “…was too good to miss.” 367

Between the years 1788 and 1855 the British courts would send to Australia and its convict settlements at Sydney Cove, Van Diemen’s Land (Tasmania) and eventually the Swan River Colony (Perth) 160,000 convicts on 825 shiploads. 368 Western Australia had failed as a free colony and on the 1st May 1849 the Swan River Colony was nominated as a penal settlement by Order-in-Council.

The vessel Scindian arrived in Gage Roads 88 days after leaving England. On board it carried 75 convicts and 188 free immigrants. 369 Over a period of 19 years from 1849 to 1868 9,668 male convicts were transported to Western Australia. 370 They worked as convict labour establishing such modern icons as the Fremantle Gaol 371 and the Round House at the headland of Fremantle. Most of these convicts were paid for their work and most received tickets-of-leave soon after they arrived. 372

This was to also have an adverse affect on the Noongar within the colonies of Western Australia as now there was the need for further gaols, courts, police stations and police. Stricter laws were now in place due to the increase in penal labour, and the British system of justice was already bewildering to the Noongar, not to mention prejudiced against them, with little or no regard to their own cultural laws and practices. According to Carter, “The number of Aboriginal people appearing before the courts

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363 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia’s tempestuous history. Volume 1: 35.
364 Berryman, Swan River letters Volume 1: 1.
365 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia’s tempestuous history. Volume 1: 35.
366 Rielly, A Time of Trial: the Colony of Western Australia, 1839-1850: 64.
368 Nicholson, Australia Locked Up: 8.
369 Ibid.
370 James, Ruth Marchant (year unknown) Settlement of the Swan: The Birth of Perth: 38.
371 Based on the massive 1842 built Pentonville Prison in London.
increased markedly in the 1840s…" and no doubt into the following decade. An article in the \textit{Perth Gazette} explained that the marked increase to the courts by the local Noongar was because “…the courts were used as a tool by the British for domination rather than justice…” \textsuperscript{374}

\begin{quote}
"…they (British establishment) had told convicts and European settlers from very early in time to go out and claim the land, set up farms, ‘here’s some cheap seed. Go and claim your land, plant your seed, set up your farms,’ and as the pastoralist moved in and claimed in then the remote areas, Aboriginal people were a problem. They would break fences, they would steal livestock and as a purpose to that they objected to these white people now living and claiming their land as their own. They never gave the land away, they never voluntarily gave up access and rights to their land but yet this assimilation process started from 1826 when Aboriginal people were constantly being marginalised and being moved out and out and out and further away and those that refused to move were often slaughtered or killed (in battle) and it was purely…because they were protecting their homelands. So those peoples that were left over from massacres and battles were a problem, ‘so what do we do with them?’, we need to build prisons to house them to make sure they don’t go back and constantly fight against what we are trying to do in the right thing of European settlement. So, I don’t doubt that it was a form of genocide to slowly pick away at the Aboriginal numbers where Aboriginal people were causing affront to any movement of European settlement during those years." \textsuperscript{375}
\end{quote}

These poignant words from Karen Jacobs, daughter of \textit{Wadjuk} Senior Elder Cedric Jacobs, succinctly express the beginning phase of the ‘incarceration period’ of dealing with the ‘Aboriginal problem’. Early in the colony there was an element of amicability and co-existence, slowly dissolved by the disappearance of traditional hunting grounds and game, and the establishment of farms and fenced livestock. Once relations turned sour and spiteful between the Noongar and colonists the instances of violent clashes (deemed massacres by the Noongar – battles by the colonists) became more common. Once the resistance of the Noongar (particularly Bindjareb, Wadjik and Ballardong tribal groups) was broken the next stage of controlling the Noongar nation (and then respectively other Aboriginal tribes throughout the state) was via aggressive and institutionalized imprisonment. It is striking how this frontline, so much in evidence between 1840 and 1890 in the colonies, is the instigator of the policies and politics of the early 20\textsuperscript{th} Century that regretfully is an evident stigma of Aboriginal and white relations today.

In his publication \textit{Broken Spears}, author Neville Green articulates that by 1850 the Noongar had come completely under English law:
\begin{itemize}
\item They could be punished even with death for crimes against Europeans and Aborigines.
\end{itemize}

\textsuperscript{373} Carter, \textit{Nyungah Land : Records of Invasion and Theft of Aboriginal Land on the Swan River 1829 - 1850}; 118.
\textsuperscript{374} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{375} Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the \textit{Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground} project,"
They could be excluded from towns and from their own tribal areas.
They were forbidden to appear naked or carry weapons in the streets of towns.
They could not light fires on former tribal lands.
They could not drink alcohol (a tragic consequence of colonization ‘to erase the memories of other days’).
A man was forbidden to claim his bride if she was at a Christian school or employed by a settler.
He (an Aboriginal) could be punished by flogging, by sentence to road gangs, or by imprisonment, for crimes that he neither knew of nor understood.  

When interviewed in 2011 for this research project and documentary production, *Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground*, Dr Green also reiterated that:

“When you consider the crimes and the sentences of the Aboriginal people [at the time]...there’s mandatory sentencing. [If] the persons found guilty, the judge has a range of sentences, and if you kill someone the sentence is life imprisonment or death. And no Aboriginal served a life sentence, and a life sentence usually meant ten years or earlier. But the nature of the crimes changed with the shifting frontier, in the southwest, in the early years the men were arrested for, or even boys, for breaking into someone’s house and stealing a handful of dough. Someone was charged with stealing wheat because he was wearing the bag as he would wear a kangaroo skin cloak, and when he was challenged he said, well you know there’s no kangaroos left and so I found the bag and I wore it. But the prosecutor said, ‘well when that bag was last seen it was full of wheat and so obviously you stole it and there is the evidence’. So sometimes it (British justice) was quite trite.”

The record of conflict between settlers and Aborigines in the south-west of Australia provides an interesting insight into the deterioration of the relationships between the two groups. The Noongar had long ago rejected the colonists as Djenneka visitors, these new settlers were not dead relatives of the past, but simply a new race of people intending to conquer, settle, farm and stay permanently in traditional lands.

Kelly, surmises the changing face of the Swan River Colony and the change in both the mindset of the Noongar and the Settler:

“...when it became obvious to Noongars that...these Wadjellas aren’t going home, this concept that people could leave their country and not go back there, was and still remains pretty bizarre in Noongar culture, then when this realization happened the conflict started, the real conflict started to happen...because you have got people killing cows and sheep and this sort of stuff and remember that the colony was so poor because Stirling had sold people a ‘pup’ that any death of a bull or a cow or a sheep or something might of

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376 Green, Broken spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 177.
377 Green, Dr. Neville “Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
meant the difference between life and death for some of the settlers – so the stakes were genuinely very high.”

As the Djennak phenomena was being rejected the settlers were also beginning to grow weary of the Noongar activity – fire stick burning, stealing livestock, begging for flour and thieving rations and supplies. Over the period of 1826 – 1852 it is estimated that there were:

30 SETTLERS KILLED and 34 WOUNDED
121 NOONGARS KILLED and 52 WOUNDED

Director of the Dumbartung Aboriginal Corporation, Robert Eggington, encapsulates the ‘new world order’ that the Noongar had to endure and the future that their children would have to encounter: “Our old people could see the bloodshed of the massacre grounds, our young stolen children could see the high walls of the missions, our incarcerated could hear the haunting screams of our enslaved”

According to Green, it was not only the Noongar and surrounding tribal groups that would be subjected to this harsh period of colonization and dispossession but that the, “The young colonials, the children of the first settlers, were then moving into the Victoria district and successively in the 1860s and the 1870s into the Pilbara and beyond that in the 1880s to the Kimberleys.” These ‘modern’ colonists did not consider the rights and wishes of the northern Aborigines. The attitude towards these traditional custodians was ‘less than humane’. The colonists, pastoralists and policing body saw the Aborigine merely as “...either a source of labour or if they were not prepared to come to terms for labour, then as a nuisance to be driven out or transported south to Rottnest.”

Green concludes by claiming that, “Hundreds were shot, executed, hung, beaten or died in prison as a result of the white expansion into the tribal lands.”

The Noongar and all of the Aboriginal population throughout Western Australia were now subject to two legal systems; the British legal system, which the Aboriginal did not comprehend nor respect, as well as traditional law. Over the next one hundred years many Noongar men and tribal groups from within Western Australia who were deemed to have broken British law would be chained and transported to a new prison on Rottnest Island...

85
All for the Land
(Part I)

It is written “Go forth…multiply!”
the pen is mightier than the sword
Thus we shall re-write the law!
Trespassing across this land is now an
defence...punishable by imprisonment
To Rottnest!
Thus reached out colonial claws
grasping Indigenous men around the
throat with searing chains
marched across their ancestral homelands
Oh! The bitter sorrow and bloody pain
to never see lands or people again...

Graeme Dixon

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385 Dixon, Holocaust revisited : killing time: 55.
2.4 Conclusions

Much history and discourse related to the Settlement (nee ‘Invasion’) of the Australian continent, including the Swan River Colony, pertains little to the notion of resistance. Despite the best efforts of many (hundreds) of Aboriginal tribes across the country to oppose and defy Colonial repression, the mere fact that settlement did occur and the frontier became dominated by pastoralists should not negate the Aboriginal effort to continue traditional lifestyles and practices. That is why it is important for me, in both the exegesis and film documentary, to give evidence of Aboriginal resistance and background information as to why and what occurred as a result of it. From the Wadjemup perspective, it is important to relay that once the Colony and Authorities defined an Aboriginal problem, renowned Noongar leaders including Midgegooroo, Yagan, Munday, Calyute and Jandamarra (to name but a few) established a conscious defiance against the Settlement leading to execution, beheadings, massacres and police man-hunts. In fact the actions of these cultural warriors (archived via historical records, traditional oral-testimonies and in the film; conventional ‘talking heads’) instigated the next stage of Colonial aggression – massacres dressed up as ‘Battles’ including the Pinjarra and Forrest River Massacres – once word got around regarding these heinous events only pockets of Aboriginal resistance were evident. It is therefore palpable that the ‘final solution’ to the Aboriginal ‘problem’ (at least in Western Australia) was imprisonment on Rottnest Island. This effectively diluted and removed any bastion of Aboriginal resistance that remained. This is a major factor of both exegesis and film, and highlighted in detail in the previous chapter(s) and poignantly described in the film via interview and reinforced via dramatic re-enactments (as below). One could remark that a ‘picture tells a thousands words...’

Actors Curtis Taylor, Phil Cox & Elder Paul Hansen (and Wayne Davies on horse) in Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground
[Film Production pictures by James Kerr ©]
Chapter 3: History of *Wadjemup* (Rottnest Island)

3.1 Introduction

This chapter is effectively the ‘body’ of the exegesis and as such most of the historical background to the Island is presented; including visits by European sailors, its settlement and post-settlement purpose, the Rottnest Island Prison establishment (and its respective history, conditions, deaths and timelines) and finally the utilization of Rottnest Island as a final bastion to break any resistance throughout the ‘Frontier’. The final stage discussed is its transition and transformation to ‘Holiday Island’ and its current status as a ‘white playground’.

3.2 Geography of *Wadjemup*

Rottnest Island is 18 kilometres (11 miles) off the Western Australian coast, very slightly north of due west from Fremantle. The island is 11 kilometres (6.8 miles) long, and 4.5 kilometres (2.8 miles) at its widest point. Its total land area is 19 square kilometres (7.3 sq miles). It has a maximum elevation of 46m (151 ft) and its Coordinates are: 32° 0’ 7.2″ S, 115° 31’ 1.2″ E
3.3 Before Europeans

**Solid Rock**

*Well they were standin’ on the shore one day*
*Saw the white sails in the sun*
*Wasn’t long before they felt the sting*
*White man, white law, white gun*
*Don’t tell me that it’s justified*
*Cause somewhere*
*Someone lied*
*Yeah, well someone lied*
*Someone lied*
*Genocide*
*Well someone lied…*

Before colonization, the people now collectively known as *Noongar* or *Nyungar* had a strict cultural hierarchy yet they had neither king nor chief, nor principal ruler; but they had the guardian spirits of their totems, who guarded all their totem food laws, and saw that the food rules were strictly observed; and they also had the ‘Great Magic Snake’ — the *Waugal* or *Wagyl*, all powerful and all knowing, whose ‘home’ was everywhere – in the land, in the rivers, in the lakes and hills and valleys, in the caves and in the great sea that surrounded their group lands. ² The *Waugal* protected those that were law-abiding in one instant, and strictly punished those who broke totem food law or marriage law in the next, by inflicting fatal sickness, called “*woggalung*”, upon the offenders. ³

To defy these laws and all that the ancient ancestors and spirit beings had set down was to risk the inevitable extinction of the tribe. Then the white man came in their great ships, with their great white sails, across the ‘*Coomber Warrdan*’ (the great sea). The Noongar people, the largest group of related peoples in all Australia, whose group territory extended along the coast from about, what is now, Jurien Bay to some point east of what is known as the town or district of Esperance, nearly became extinct eighty years after white settlement had taken place in the South-West. ⁴ The coming of the white man would put, forevermore, unbelievable pressures on this way of being.

3.4 First Visits by Europeans

Many ships of Dutch, Portuguese, French and British origin were to visit the shores of the West Australian coastline between the 17ᵗʰ and 19ᵗʰ Centuries. One of the most discussed, due to its historical significance and written record, was the ship *Roebuck*, captained by William Dampier in 1699, the namesake of the northwest town. Dampier, on his first visit to the western coast in 1688, described the land and the Aboriginal people as: “The land is dry, with sandy soil, destitute of water…the inhabitants of this country are the miserablest people in the world…” ⁵ This assessment was based on his

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³ Ibid.
⁴ Ibid: 5.
⁵ Jacob & Vellios, *Southland, the Maritime Exploration of Australia*: 54.
first impressions and observation that the local natives had no harvests, domestic animals, cultivation and abode. It was a typical thesis among Europeans that the black race was an inferior one. The need therefore to “civilize” these inferior peoples was often advanced as one of the major justifications for European control and colonization of nations such as Africa, Asia and ultimately Australasia.  

The notion that both the land and native people of this new strange land were virtually useless was also maintained by the Dutch commander of exploring ships Arnhem and Pera, Jan Carstenz, who said that, “This land is barren and arid plain, where no fruit trees grow, nor is there any growth fit for use of man,”  following his inspection of the west coastal fringe of Western Australia. Further, he wrote, “The natives are barbaric and coal-black. They are utterly unacquainted with gold, silver, tin, iron, lead, and copper, nor do they know anything…”  Carstensz was amongst the first Europeans to land on our soil, and like most white men of his period he had no wish to return to our ‘useless’ South Land, as it was then named on Dutch charts. The vast, seemingly endless coastline was described as the most dangerous in the world. Since 1622, the W.A. Museum reports, that at least 1,200 ships have met disaster along the coastline, many during voyages from Europe to the trading colonies in what is now Indonesia.  

For more than a century after Dampier the Dutch were the only recorded European visitors to the West Australian coast. Commander Willem de Vlamingh of the ship Geelvinck (Yellow Finch) whilst navigating and exploring the northern coastline discovered a seaman’s pewter plate hammered flat and nailed to a post inscribed with the words:

1616. The 25th October there arrived here the ship den Eendracht of Amsterdam; supercargo, Gils Miebais of Liege; skipper Dirck Hatich of Amsterdam. On the 27th she sailed for Bantam. 

This inscription described the landing of the Dutch vessel Eendracht (Unity) on October 25th 1616 of the northern tip of the island Dirk Hartog, which now bears his name. In 1697, some 81 years later, first mate Michiel Bloem discovered Hartog’s plate, de-nailed it, and took it on board the ship. Vlamingh, recognizing the historic value of the plate and inherent proof of his ancestors’ exploratory spirit and resourcefulness, chose to take the plate and deliver it to the Dutch authorities in Batavia (Jakarta). In its place Vlamingh left a replacement plate inscribed with details of his own visit in conjunction with Hartog’s original details. 

The French claim to have landed on our shores in 1562. There are also Portuguese claims of visiting Australia during the sixteenth century. Yet there is no ‘recorded proof’ of a landing prior to Hartog’s. 

What is most probable is that a Dutchman was the first white man to land upon the coast of what is now known as Perth, Fremantle and the Island of Rottnest. But it was

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7 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia's tempestuous history. Volume 1: 1.
8 Ibid.
9 Name given by the Dutch Navigators to the coast-line of Western Australia.
10 Ibid: 2.
11 Ibid: 1.
12 Ibid.
not, as most people believe, Vlamingh or one of his crew that ‘discovered’ this coastal region and Rottnest; for it was a member of the crew of the ship *Waeckende Boey*. On January the first, 1658 the Dutch East India Company of Batavia sent two galliots, the *Waeckende Boey* and the *Emerloort* to search for the lost Dutch vessel *De Vergulde Draak* (*The Gilt Dragon*), which had 68 survivors left behind in the ‘South Land’.  

An earlier rescue attempt had met with disaster and in early 1658 a second attempt was made by *Waeckende Boeij* and *Emeloort*, which also had problems. A storm struck the coast and the *Waeckende Boeij* was swept south to become separated from the *Emeloort*. Eventually the storm abated, and the ship was safely anchored off the northerly point of an island. The ships master’s report indicated that the location was “…in slightly under 32 degrees S. Latitude...”  and according to Nairn this latitude gives indication that this large island was Rottnest due to the fact that “…the most northern point of Rottnest lies about 31 degrees, 59 minutes...” He also adds that “…and slightly more southward there is another small island…This has to be Carnac Island.”

On this haphazard voyage the Island of Rottnest was seen by white man for the first time. For thousands of years the local Wadjuk Noongar would access the ‘mountain’ area across the river mouth, known as Wadjem or Wadjemup for hunting, ceremonial and protection from the elements. However, once the last ice age ceased and the world’s ocean levels rose this sacred area became separated from the coastal geography and became the island of Wadjemup. Though able to be viewed by the Nyungar it was not able to be accessed and habited. So there is no evidence of white man ever having set foot on Rottnest until 1658 when there were at least four landings from the Dutch merchant vessel, *Waeckende Boeij*. Hence for thousands of years since the last ice age, and since Wadjuk Noongar habited the area for hunting and ceremonial purposes, no human had mingled among the native flora and fauna of the Island.

Anchored off the north of Rottnest, ship-master Volkersen dispatched a boat ashore on March 19, 1658. Following the boat’s return, he recorded: “…the steersman reported it well wooded but that no good landing place had been met, with the coast being well surrounded by rocky reefs. Two seals were seen there, also one wild cat, and the excrement of other animals.”

March 20, 1658. “A boat was sent ashore, well-manned. The following day several signal guns were fired (so that possible survivors of the assumed ship-wrecked *Vergulden Draak* might be notified), and in the evening the boat returned to the ship bringing with it a piece of the mast of the *Draak.*” Despite this piece of the wreck of the lost ship being discovered, none of the lost ships crew and/or their remnants was found, the fate of the 68 survivors of the *Vergulden Draak* is still a mystery to this day.

The following is a translation of an extract referring to Rottnest from the manuscript in the Royal Archives at The Hague – ‘Description of the West Coast of the Southland’ by Sam Volerson of the *Waeckende Boey* (Boeij):

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15 Nairn and Pash, *Western Australia’s tempestuous history. Volume 1*: 5.
16 Ibid.
17 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 Ibid.
20 Ibid.
In nearly 32 degrees South latitude there is a large Island nearly three leagues from the continent with some rather high mountains covered with woods and thickets, which render it difficult to pass across. It is dangerous to land there on account of the reefs or rocks along the coast; moreover one sees many rocks between the continent and this Island and also a smaller island somewhat to the South. This large island to which I have not chosen to give a name myself, thinking it right to leave the choice of a name to the Honorable the Governor General, may be seen from the sea on clear day at seven or eight leagues distant. I presume that both fresh water and wood will be found there in abundance, though not without considerable trouble.

Apparently very little importance was attached to the discovery of the island by the Honorable the Governor General of Batavia, for there is no mention of a name being given to it until its re-discovery by De Vlamingh in 1696. 22

In December 1696 anchored off Rottnest Island within sight of the coastline that now forms part of metropolitan Perth and Fremantle were the ships, Nyptang, Geelvink and Wesel under the command of Willem de Vlamingh. 23 An account of Vlamingh’s visit to Rottnest was translated into French, which was then translated into English. It begins: “At midday on December 29, 1696, we saw the Isle of Girls before us and steered for it.” This term to describe the island as the “Isle of Girls” is correctly translated from ‘Ille de Filles’, yet it is likely there was a mistake with the first translation from the Dutch. For certainly there would not have been any ‘girls’ on the island or in its surrounding waters! It has been suggested that the Dutch word ‘Mist’ was mistaken for ‘Meisje’, the former meaning ‘fog’, the latter ‘girl’. In a diary entry, Vlamingh describes the island as “Mist-Eiland” (Fog Island), a title almost as discreditble as ‘Isle of Girls’, or ‘Rottnest’ for that matter. Vlamingh sailed toward Rottnest at high noon on a summer day, so fog is unlikely. According to Nairn, and most other historians, a heat haze is a more likely occurrence. 24 Wiltshire agrees with this deduction and claims that “Vlamingh’s first fanciful description of it (Rottnest) as the "isle of mists" perhaps evokes the summer haze that can dissolve the horizon, making the island appear illusory, suspended between earth and sky.” 25

Whatever the mistaken name(s) given to the Island it becomes apparent that Vlamingh took a strong interest in the island before any attempt at approaching the mainland was made. The following is an extract of the translation of the journal kept by Skipper Wilhelm de Vlamingh during the voyage with the ship De Geelvinck, Nijptangh and the Weseltje to Trestan da Cunha, the Cape, the Islands Peter and Paul, the Southland and back as far as Batavia from the 3rd of May 1696 to the 20th March 1697:

…The 29th December 1696 Saturday26…In the evening we steered to the island, got a depth of 30 fathoms sandy ground, then we sounded each half hour and found ourselves going on dry ground at 10 fathoms, there we cast anchor for Heaven’s sake on 10 fathoms

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21 Watson, Rottnest Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 2.
22 Ibid: 1.
23 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 27.
25 Wiltshire, Gone to Rottnest: 8.
26 On the 29th December 1696 Wilhelom de Vlamingh anchored his small fleet of the south coast of Rottnest. This was probably about 1 and half miles situated at Salmon Bay…
beautiful sandy ground. We sent our boats in order to sound if there was some foul ground, but nothing was found. We thanked the Lord in Heaven for our safe voyage.

The 30th Sunday in the morning the wind south, slight topgallant sail breeze. We resolved to send the boats, namely our boat (off the galliot) and the boat off the hooker to the shore to sail round the island in order to look for ship-wrecked persons or something else. Our boat with our book-keeper, chief mate and commander with 12 soldiers should cross the island to see what would be there. In the evening the little boat came back and our book-keeper reported that he had crossed with his people the whole island. He had made a close examination, that there were no other animals except woodrats; they shoted (sic) some of these rats and brought them on board, together with many kinds of trees with an agreeable smell. After they had looked for water a long time, they found at last a place, where they made pits out of which they got very clean and fresh water. They brought a proof of this water on board, which I thought very good. After sunset our second mate came again on board with our big boat and reported that he did not find any remainders of ship-wrecks. Wind as before with topgallant sail breeze till the morning…

The 31st Monday in the morning, the wind W.S.W. by S. stiff topgallant sail breeze. After the meal I went ashore with our book-keeper and sent our boat with some people to the land to fell fire-wood, that you get there in large quantities and that smells very find as rose tree-wood. With our boat I let bring some cargoes of this wood on board and ordered that our book-keeper should make a closer examination of the island.

None of Vlamingh’s description of the island is derogatory. In fact upon reaching the inner shoreline of the island he regarded the island as being like a ‘terrestrial paradise’:

…Here it seems that nature has spared nothing to render this isle delightful, above all others that I have ever seen…the coast swarms with fish. There one hears the chatter of birds which make these odorous woods resound with their sweet songs. Thus, I believe that of so many people who seek to make themselves happy, there would be many who would appear to them a terrestrial paradise.

He also described herbs that “…resembled in smell those of his own country…” and ground that “…is covered with little or no soil, but chiefly with white and rocky sand…” and in his opinion little would be able to be “…adapted for cultivation…” The one lasting legacy of his visit was his observation that “There are a very few birds there, and

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27 This was the first time that Vlamingh had set foot on the island and it is often recorded incorrectly that he was the first white man to do so…this is incorrect as he preceded the day before by members of his crew and 38 years before by the seamen of the Waeckende Boij (by 38 years).
28 Letters from Batavia 1698, fol. 655-658, Colonial Archives No. 1475 in Watson, Rottnest its tragedy and its glory
no animals, except a kind of a rat as big as a common cat, whose dung is found in abundance all over the Island.”  

After penning this somewhat varied description he finally labeled the island, “Rats’ Nest” (originally written as Rottenest which was to become the more anglicized ‘Rottnest’). Interestingly it would be more than a hundred years before the ‘wood rats’ that Vlamingh so eloquently described would be correctly identified as marsupials, and ultimately labeled Quokkas.

Vlamingh’s voyage to this part of the Southland was not only important for its nomenclature but that the island was recorded on the charts. Other Dutch navigators, and obviously the British, would utilize the legacy of maps Vlamingh left behind when they established the Swan River Colony.

Before leaving Rottnest (or ‘Rottenest’), Vlamingh recorded that his crew found signs of a shipwreck from his native Holland and the first signs of human life on the adjacent shoreline of the coast:

On return to shore the crew found a piece of wood from our own country, in which nails still remained. It was probably from a shipwrecked vessel…and three or four leagues from us some smoke was seen to rise at different points off the mainland. On the first of January 1697 the crew went to seek for fuel and saw smoke rising at different points on the mainland. They observed the flow and ebb and our sail master found on the shore a piece of planed wood about three feet long and a span broad. On the mainland we again saw smoke arising; on the third; after sunset we saw a great number of fires burning along the coast line.

On the fourth of January 1697 De Vlamingh’s boat made sail for the mainland. Wiltshire writes that “…if their arrival had stirred interest among Aborigines on the mainland, there was little to show for it; when parties went ashore, they found only the embers of abandoned camps.” Vlamingh anchored a few hundred metres offshore from Cottesloe Beach, and three boats filled with armed seamen rowed ashore where no opposition – native or otherwise, met them.

According to Nairn, Vlamingh and his party continued their navigation and exploration which ultimately led to the naming of the Swan River due to his sighting on the river of een soorte van swarte swanen – that is sighting of the majestic and unknown (in Europe) Black Swan. Vlamingh captured several black swans in an attempt to take them back to Europe to prove his discovery but unfortunately they died in transit.

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31 Ibid.
33 AKA Kwoka & Kwokurr. The name "Quokka" comes from the name given to the animal by the Noongar living in the Augusta and King George Sound area of the south-west of Western Australia. [Source: http://www.rottnestisland.com/about/flora-fauna/quokkas]
34 This was probably a remnant of a Noongar dish used to collect wild berries and bush fruits – known to Noongar as Mirlkoorn or also from the northern word; Yandi.
35 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 5.
36 Wiltshire, Gone to Rottnest: 8.
37 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia's tempestuous history. Volume 1: 1.
38 Ibid. This account may possibly have been written by Victor Victorson the almoner who accompanied the de Vlamingh expedition.
Except for a few kind words in appreciation of the beauty of Rottnest his report was derogatory, as it was with all early navigators. Sailing away from Australia, bound for Batavia in 1697, his parting words were: “…a signal of farewell to the miserable South Land.”  

Although the Dutch later renamed our continent “New Holland”, they had no designs of populating, or of exploring anywhere further east of the western coast. It was as though it was non-existent, and many years elapsed before Europeans set foot east of W.A.  

After De Vlamingh’s visit in December 1696 the silence of the ages again settled on Rottnest for a century, a silence broken only by the eternal crashing of waves upon its limestone crusted coast. Until came Captain Hamelin of the French ship Naturaliste, who visited its shores around the turn of the 19th Century. The French government envisioned that this voyage would investigate the possibility of establishing a port in the southern seas before the British. Hamelin and Captain Baudin, of the Geographe, along with their crews, undertook extensive mapping of the coastlines of Australia (and New Guinea), with many names along the south west coast bearing their ships moniker.

In the late 1700s and early 1800s many French, and then British, ships sent men ashore on the ‘New Holland’ continent, with some recording contact with Aboriginal people. Two French captains, Baudin and Freycinet, in fact, explored deep into the Swan River in 1801 and gave Heirisson Island its name, in honour of French explorer and midshipman François-Antoine Boniface Heirisson, who was on the French ship Le Naturaliste, which between the years 1801 and 1804 undertook a scientific expedition (led by Nicolas Baudin). Several journeys up the river from Fremantle in long-boats were made during this expedition and as a result so were the first maps of the Swan River. An interesting side note is that Baudin is often described, as the man France held responsible for its failure to colonize Australia. Rumour has it that Napoleon Bonaparte said of him: “Baudin did well to die, on his return I would have hanged him.”

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40 Ibid: 1.
43 [Source: http://www.wanowandthen.com/Nicholas-Baudin.html]
3.5 Early Colonial Period and Establishment of Prison (1840s and 1850s)

3.5.1 The Need for a Prison on Rottnest Island

Wadjemup (waadjermup)

Snatched from the heartland
Driven from the song
Awoken from the Dreaming
Accused of being wrong
Tethered like beasts together
Herded to the coast
Shipped to an alien place
Where the icy, death wind blows

Imprisoned by the cruel regime
Not understanding why
As around them they witnessed
Their brothers die like flies
The cold wind like a scalpel
Cut right through their spines
Chilled the Elders to the Soul
One could only wonder why?

Why did they treat so cruelly
This race who survived so long
Far from civilisation’s brutality
Singing the sacred song
Till one dark day in history
With greedy hands they came
Offering gifts of misery
And jewels of searing chains.

Graeme Dixon

As described in Chapter 2, the arrival of European settlers in what were to be called Fremantle and Perth caused a dramatic change to the societal structures and lifestyles of the Noongar. Thousands of years before, during the rising of the sea levels, many Noongar tribal groups were displaced and dispossessed. Hence, it was both natural environmental variation and colonization that caused major changes to the ways and lives of the Noongar. However, the sea levels rising, and the creation of new geographical landmarks – like Wadjemup – were gradual changes over hundreds of generations. When change is gradual, as these climatic changes were, cultural groups can adjust to it. But when it is sudden, all-encompassing and belligerent – as the ‘settlement’ of the Swan River Colony was – traditional knowledge is disrupted, foreign diseases introduced, physical barriers implemented, and bloodshed inevitable.

The Native Prison established on the island of Rottnest/Wadjemup was the final tool that the colonists utilized to quash any of the remaining elements of resistance by the

44 Dixon, Holocaust Revisited: killing time: 77.
Noongar population. The ‘King of Perth’ Yallagonga, had long since abandoned his prized Kallep Mia (home camping ground) at the bottom of the colonially named Kings Park, and with that lost respect amongst (some of) the Swan River Noongar. Midgigoorooh had been apprehended, put on trial, blindfolded and executed at the Perth jail. His son, the feared and respected resistance warrior Yagan, was betrayed by two white settlers and shot dead in cold-blooded murder. Furthering this indignation, Yagan’s head was hacked from his body, and sent to England to be displayed as a trophy of colonization. Munday, Yagan’s uncle, was resigned to his fate by joining other Noongar families in queuing for rations at the Mount Eliza depot; the very sacred spot that Yallagonga had given up some years before. The fierce resistance of the Calyute led Bindjareb Nyungar, of the Mandurah and Pinjarra regions, had been crushed in one instant when Stirling and other armed police rode into a large Bindjareb camp on the banks of the Murray River and massacred most of the men and some woman and children. The once feared Bindjareb were now bound by the ways of the colonial administration, and living in constant fear of another visit of retribution by Stirling and his men.

Both Stirling and the settlers regarded the ‘battle’ of Pinjarra in 1834 as a success; it certainly did much to break the will of the local Aboriginal people. A pocket of violence had occurred in the York and Swan Valley regions after the ‘battle’, but these were mere blips in the process of furthering the dispossession of the Noongar.

The settlers felt that one of the (if not the) major barriers to the continued prosperity that the colony was then enjoying was “…the resistance of the Noongar.” Once the colonists had quelled the violent resistance movement of the Noongar the next phase of complete domination of “…a strong and proud culture spiritually incarcerated into the shackles of a dominant bondage,” was to impose the British Law and all of its subsequent consequence and penalties upon the Noongar peoples. The notion that Aboriginal people could be, and wished to be, ‘civilized’ “…was widespread among the British colonisers.” Therefore it was only a matter of time before the Noongar population was subjugated to justice British style and stemming from their increasing court appearances, a specific jail was established to finally ‘break their spirit’.

“Deeply was the British flag stained; and long will the affair of Pinjarra cause the Noongar of the Derbal and Murray to mourn.” But the hell that awaited the Aboriginal prisoners of Rottnest was to not take one or two hours of anguished pain and misery, as the ‘battle’ of Pinjarra had taken. No, it would take nearly one hundred years of incarcerated banishment and humiliation on the Island of Rottnest. This dehumanization, of one of the oldest and proudest races in the world, was the final ‘straw that broke its back’; Rottnest Prison would have a lasting legacy on the Aboriginal peoples, tribes and communities of Western Australia. Generations later the prison, and everything that it represented, would be described as being “…seen clearly in the contrary pride and strength in the blood stained eyes of our great warriors that were shackled and chained and forced into the forbidden lands.”

45 As the Perth Gazette described him on several occasions.
46 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 120.
47 Eggington and Corporation, Hamburgers for Masterpieces: {page unknown}
48 Carter, Nyungah Land: Records of Invasion and Theft of Aboriginal Land on the Swan River 1829 - 1850: 129.
49 Ibid.
50 Ibid.
Colonization of the Noongar at the Swan River, and the extended colonies in Albany, York and the Bussel area, would inevitably and permanently shatter the Noongar society, and this tragedy would incomprehensibly be accomplished “…within the span of one human lifetime.” According to Green:

Change is a characteristic of human societies and when the members of a society agree to the change and have time to make the necessary physical and psychological adjustments the change may advantage them. However when a society has no control over the nature and intensity of the change its customs, laws, and its very existence are in jeopardy. And this happened in Australia after the arrival of European settlers.

In simple terms, within the wide expanse of the continent, even before federation of the states and territories, European colonization “…denied Indigenous peoples their autonomy.” A progressive force of arms within the colonies and then respective administrative controls and policies – like the establishment of the Rottnest Island Prison – plus the imposition of British law and order, ensured that there was “…no chance that autonomy could be regained, at least in the short term.” To a once proud people, free to roam nomadically for thousands of years, the irony was that at the onset of colonization, land was given as reward or incentive to free settlers. The British “…brought an enslavement mentality and applied it, with equal fervour, to people, plants, animals and the land itself.” Dixon, further writes that Aboriginal people were, “…increasingly prisoners in their own country,” and that the British had brought with them a new concept to the wide expanses of this land; the prison.

Prisons were used as a means to combat and undermine Aboriginal resistance, both in areas where the frontier was expanding and in the territories already under colonial occupation. Imprisonment was a terrifying punishment for Aboriginal people as there was nothing that remotely resembled it in Aboriginal society and law. The dichotomy between Aboriginal law and British law was simple; whilst both enforced punishment for wrong doings – including capital punishment of some form or another – Aboriginal law did not have, “…the system of incarceration and confinement that characterized British law or such extensive instruments of enforcement by police, magistrates, courts and prisons.” British law brought with it arbitrary arrest, chaining by the neck and inevitably these, “…'Jewels of searing chains’ would confine not just the body but eventually the soul.”

This was now the new world order for the first inhabitants of the country; nothing was ever going to be the same again:

“...the sadness of Wadjemup comes through, and it only comes through when we hear the story of why it was created, and we

51 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 21.
52 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
58 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
begin to empathize and live the life in our spirit and in our soul of the people who were brought away from their home country around the state...incarcerated into trucks and imprisoned in penal prison colonies, the colonial system, which we have never ever signed an agreement for that to happen and in my understanding...I would hold the government accountable to the fact that it is acting illegally on an international footing...our sovereign dignity is being stolen, and they have purposely tried to breed out the soul, and spirit and culture from my people from within us and from within the land.”

A brief obituary in the Perth Gazette, on the 10th of June 1843, ended the first chapter of Noongar colonial history. Yellagonga was dead. Fortunately the old Noongar Elder and leader was spared the anguish of witnessing the despairing dispossession of his tribal group, which had lost all rights within the Perth town precinct. According to Green, the generation that followed Yellagonga retreated to the lakes and swamps on the outskirts of the capital (and neighbouring towns) and it was here that these ‘fringe-dwellers’ from the Canning, Murray and York tribal groups, eked out an “...existence by foraging and begging.” Legislation was introduced to monitor and dissuade the unnecessary movement of these ‘fringe-dwellers’ and firing the bush became a capital offence, with guilty parties being given up to 36 lashes, and imprisonment. Movement across, and/or camping on, a settler’s farming area was strictly prohibited and “...seven years’ penal servitude on Rottnest Island,” awaited any Noongar who was found guilty of spearing a settler’s livestock or stealing any rations.

Historically the imprisonment of Aboriginal people has gone hand in hand with the process of colonization. Prisons, along with other institutions of forced confinement such as reserves, missions and secured hospitals, have served to incarcerate and institutionalize Aboriginal people for over two hundred years. Ronald Berndt, quoted in, “It’s Still in My Heart, This is My Country,” wrote that ‘The establishment of Rottnest Island prison in 1839, the removal of children from their parents and increasing “mixed-blood” population, all contributed to the destruction of traditional culture.” Mark Bin-Barker, also known as Jawundi, from the Kimberley, and a descendent of three tribes (Gidga, Goonian (or Gooniandi) and Jarlu) and a ‘stolen-generations’ descendent, poignantly expresses the Aboriginal viewpoint of incarceration, removing children and colonial institutionalization:

“...its evil and it’s sinister and it was clearly engineered to eradicate Aboriginal people, in fact the fact remains (that) the notion of ‘smooth the dying pillow’ (was) to get rid of the ‘full-blood’ Aboriginal people, and assimilate the ‘half-caste’, and basically to eradicate Aboriginal people from this continent.”

60 Jacobs, Cedric "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground Project."
61 Green, Broken Spears : Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 120.
63 Host, Owen, and South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, 'It's Still In My Heart, This Is My Country': The Single Noongar Claim History: 19.
64 Bin-Barker, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
Genocide

Two hundred years of white occupation.  
Two hundred years of BLACK desolation.  
Two hundred years on the Europeans’ menus.  
A million bloody tears still the genocide continues… 

Graeme Dixon 65

3.5.2 European Settlement of Rottnest Island

In 1829 Western Australia was proclaimed a Crown Colony of Great Britain, and just two years later a settlement was started on the Island of Rottnest. A town site named Kingstown was surveyed by Surveyor Smythe and 177 lots offered for assignment. Daniel Scott, R.M. Lyon and Charles Norcott took up these early lots. Afterwards, in the same year, lots were assigned to T. Thomson and W.N. Clarke, J. P. Armstrong and C. Spyers. 66 Of all of these men attempting to make Rottnest their new home only Clarke and Thomson were to endure the restrictive regulations and settle on the island in any effective capacity.

Clarke requested directly to Governor Stirling for permission to raise sheep on the island, to utilize the natural deposits of salt from the many salt lakes on the island and to attempt to set up a fishery. 67 Stirling verbally agreed to these requests on the condition that Clarke establish a Pilot for incoming ships; and if fulfilled he would receive a sum of £200 per annum. At his own expense Clarke achieved this but upon the arrival of the new Governor Irwin, Clarke was informed that this verbal agreement would not be honoured. Clarke had no option but to abandon his Rottnest plans, and the Government brought the holdings of Clarke from his creditors. 68

Robert Thomson, with his wife and large family of eleven established dwellings at Rottnest in early 1831. Thomson, it appeared, lived in constant dread of the local Noongar and was reported, in a letter to the Colonial Secretary, to have desire to settle on Rottnest Island “…in consequence of my large family, which I do not choose to expose to the savage barbarity of the natives at so early a period of settlement, and the many precautions and sufferings which we have to encounter.” 69

Thompson’s attempts to grow crops, establish fishing activities and graze sheep failed for various reasons. Inclement weather on the island, in conjunction with limited supplies and colony contact, made farming very difficult. 70

Back on the mainland, within the Swan River Colony, Robert Menli Lyon, was “…a continual thorn in the side of the establishment of Governor Stirling.” 71

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65 Dixon Holocaust Island: 22.
66 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 5.
68 Ibid.
69 Ibid: 8.
70 Ibid: 10.
71 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia’s tempestuous history. Volume 1: 41.
continually sent correspondence to the British hierarchy and to the major English newspapers and magazines. The subject that Lyon was constantly alerting British audiences to was the Swan River Colony’s poor treatment of its original inhabitants. As a result Stirling was often required to defend the Colony’s actions from the hostile responses from England.  

Ironically, because of his wretched description of Carnac Island, Noongar prisoners were not sent to Carnac but were chained and enslaved on the mainland. Whilst overseeing the imprisonment of Yagan at Carnac Island, Lyon made the small island appear “…worse than Devil’s Island.” When it was decided to open an Aboriginal prison establishment for the Colony, due to insufficient lock-ups, it was not Carnac that was considered, due to its already disparaging reputation, but Rottnest Island. Humanitarian Francis Armstrong, competent in the Noongar dialect, advocated that Rottnest Island should be utilized as a settlement for Aboriginal prisoners. He expressed that, “…the island would give the natives freedom of movement.”

This contrasts with the Herald’s description of the island prison in 1875 in which they described Wadjemup as the “Black Man’s Grave”. Indeed it remains to this day the largest site of Aboriginal deaths in custody in both the state and the nation, with an estimated 370 men having died on the island. The majority of those Aboriginal prisoners that died on the island did so by serving “…a slow death sentence.” In First Australians, it is written, that the Rottnest Island Prison Cemetery is one of the largest Aboriginal cemeteries in Western Australia - along with the Derby Leprosarium and the Moore River Settlement cemeteries. Wadjemup is also one of the largest nineteenth and twentieth century Aboriginal burial sites in the nation.

3.5.3 First Prisoners Taken to Rottnest Island

About a decade after the foundation of the Swan River Colony, in 1838, the Rottnest Island Prison was established and served as a place of both punishment and exclusion of Aboriginal people. Before this, however, the Roundhouse at Fremantle was established to detain and hold prisoners. Recognized as Western Australia’s oldest surviving building, the gaol still dominates the main street of the town of Fremantle and it was, at the time of settlement, the first architectural structure glimpsed from the sea. Built from limestone quarried nearby, the twelve-sided building comprised a gaoler’s residence and eight cells opening onto a central courtyard (where stocks were later installed). The gaol’s construction took just six months to complete from August 1830.

After the completion of the Roundhouse other buildings were progressively added to the site; including a courthouse (1837), two lighthouses, and cottages (for the harbour master and personnel) and the complex was renamed Arthur’s Head. During the 1830s

72 Ibid.
73 Ibid.
74 Ibid.
76 Kwaymullina & Hay in Ibid.
78 Ibid.
the gaol was also used as a hospital and a temporary asylum for the insane. This complex was to become an important area to the local Noongar in the early days of settlement, though for different reasons; the Round House (imprisonment) and the whaling station (feeding off the succulence of the mamang (whale) flesh). Yagan had been locked up in the Round House before being exiled to Carnac Island and relatives of the great warrior and leader and other Aboriginal prisoners would, at night, talk to them from outside the walls. Men, woman, boys and Aborigines were kept in separate cells and it became notorious as the last place Aboriginal prisoners were kept before being taken to Rottnest where many died in custody.

Death of Aboriginal prisoners was not only confined to Rottnest but was also prevalent at the Round House, as indicated by this report from a visiting Doctor: “[O]ne native died yesterday in [the] local jail (the Round House). There are now thirty in quarters unfit for half that number, [the] stench [is] very bad and [there is an] urgent need for their removal to other quarter.” After the Fremantle Prison was built in the mid-1850s, the Round House’s role changed from a gaol for short term offenders, to a police lock-up, and in 1900, to living quarters for a constable and his family.

In the early days of the colony, when an Aboriginal was taken prisoner for an offence, they were “…almost invariably sentenced to long terms of imprisonment.” Causing Governor Stirling grave anxiety was the frequent escape (and re-capture) of Aboriginal prisoners due to the lack of prison facilities. Hence, the decision was made for the first batch of Aboriginal prisoners to be sent to Rottnest. On Friday the 17th of August 1838, during Stirling’s last year as Governor, and at the end of the winter season, Constable Lawrence Welch left Garden Island, in charge of a small party of six Aboriginal prisoners. They were Buoyeen (assault), Mollydobbin (robbery), Tyoocan (robbery), Heli (murder), Cogat (stealing), and Goordap (stealing). Welch was accompanied by Corporal Fulcher of Her Majesty’s 21st Regiment of the British Rifles and two other soldiers.

It was reasoned that provided the prisoners did not gain access to a boat, they should have “…complete freedom of the island.” However, no such kind of liberty was given to the six prisoners. They were kept chained together, and on arrival there was “…not even a sheet of canvas under which they could take shelter.” Established in a cottage (with sheds) was the previously mentioned Thomson family. The prisoners and guards encountered weather that was cold and wet and they sought refuge at the Thomson’s. The family had been granted land on the island because of their fear of

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81 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 116.
85 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 12.
86 To accommodate the increasing number of Indigenous prisoners a temporary (floating ship) prison was established off Garden Island.
87 In Green’s Broken Spears he writes that there were 10 Aboriginal prisoners, as does Nairn in Western Australia’s Tempestuous History (vol 1), however Carter in Nyungah Land and Austen in A Cry in the Wind (and Green & Moon in Far From Home) correctly state that SIX Aboriginals were sent to Rottnest as the first prisoners on the island - as verified by the report in The Perth Gazette, September 1st 1838.
88 Sentenced to Rottnest Prison for stealing butter!
90 Ibid.
91 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia’s tempestuous history. Volume 1: 41.
92 Ibid.
natives and, consequently, they did not welcome Aboriginal prisoners and settler Thomson refused to help in any way. A heated argument erupted between Welch and Thomson, who reluctantly allowed Welch the use of a cave, near what is now known as Bathurst Point. Near the cave a bullock chain was attached to a tree around which the shackled prisoners were forced to form themselves into a circle. Attached to the bullock chain were smaller individual chains, each with a shackle clasped to a prisoners’ ankle. The nights were intensely cold and wet weather was common throughout the day. The prisoners had no change of clothing or blankets, and though Welch felt sympathy for the prisoners he had his strict orders to establish a prison facility. Extracts from his diary highlight the heinous conditions that the Aboriginal prisoners had to endure and the empathy that he felt:

August 17th. “Arrived at Rottnest. Got the provisions into a cave.” 18th. “Coe and the natives employed in thatching up the entrance of the cave.”
19th. “Sunday. The natives got some roots and frogs.”
22nd. “Weather too bad to work.”
On August 22nd “The day was too wet for the natives to work. That night they were chained to a tree with a trace chain. The night was intensely cold. In the darkness, chained like dogs to a tree, the poor unfortunates huddled together in a procumbent position seeking to keep warm.”

The prisoners had endured less than a week of these horrific conditions when one of the senior men told the others (words like):

“KOU-BIDJ-AH YUG-GYN-EE CHANG-ER YUG-GYN-EE DABBEE-YET NG-UNG-AN” (The Island is no good. White man is no good he will kill me.)

It was decided by the senior men that they would burn through the tree and escape to the mainland in the only boat on the island – owned by Thomson. They achieved this escape in the dead of night when there was no fear of pursuit. To manage the boat they utilized their training whilst interned at Garden Island, and began to push off from the smooth waters of Thomson Bay with one steering and the other four rowing. Once clear of the Rottnest coastline they encountered a heavy rolling sea and the small craft tossed and turned in the swell, with one of the youngest men becoming terribly sea-sick. He threw himself onto the bottom of the boat calling out in anguish and in fear:

“GABEE-WAR-DARN KUR-RANG NG-UNG-YA MIN-DYTCH, WAD-YE-GADAK” (The sea is angry. I am very sick and frightened.)

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93 Combination of Watson, Rottnest Its Tragedy and Its Glory and Green and Moon, Far From Home : Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931.
94 Watson, Rottnest Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 14.
95 Ibid.
96 Ibid and Bindon, Peter & Chadwick, Ross and Western Australian Museum., A Nyoongar wordlist : from the south-west of Western Australia, 2nd ed. 2011.
97 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 15 and Bindon, Chadwick, and Western Australian Museum, A Nyoongar wordlist : from the south-west of Western Australia.
 Somehow they managed to keep the vessel afloat and after about four or five hours of desperate rowing they neared the mainland. Suddenly one of the rowers shouted joyfully:

“GIN-ONG! GIN-ONG! BOU-JERA! BOU-JERA!” (Look! Look! Land! Land!) 

Soon they heard the noise of the surf breaking on the long white beach to the North of Cottesloe. As they approached the beach the boat capsized in the surf and one man (Helia) was drowned. Later the relatives of the deceased, following tribal customs, attributed his death to a fellow escapee, Molly Dobbin, but when he could not be found they fatally speared his brother (Gorrdap). The first reports of the escapees came from Weeip (described by the Perth Gazette’s Editor as the native ‘Governor’ Weeip), who, according to the paper’s report, saw them near Guildford. There were five of them, and still in their irons. Weeip reported that Helia was dead. He also told the old man’s relatives, for they soon left Perth to seek revenge and some hours later killed Gorrdap.

In addition to the Gazette’s account of the escape, George Fletcher Moore’s diary indicates that white settlers also witnessed the rough landing, during which one of the natives was drowned, and “...still chained together, the natives then made off into the bush.” Nairn, describes the escape as “…one of the greatest escapes in the history of the Colony.” However the native escapees new found freedom was not to last long as a few days later they were recaptured and resentenced. Watson writes that from this event onwards the Island of Rottnest, in the year of 1838, began a period of, “…martyrdom of aboriginal prisoners that lasted for 74 years.”

Once the prisoners were returned to the island, other Aboriginal prisoners followed, and Welch began the process of building temporary huts for the prisoners and his crew. The prisoners began burning stone for lime, hewing firewood, and cutting sandstone for building purposes. Welch also started a garden, and appears to have been humane in his handling of the prisoners assigned to him. Unfortunately another escape of native prisoners during the next year caused the Governor to remove him from his position. He was succeeded by Henry Vincent, the Chief Gaoler of Fremantle Prison.

And so began the most horrific and brutal period of the native prison on Rottnest.

3.5.4 Establishment of the Rottnest Prison

In January 1839 John Hutt succeeded Stirling as Governor. He was of the same opinion as Stirling in regard to sending Aboriginal prisoners to Rottnest, but believed that the presence of Thomson and his family was detrimental to the freedom he wished the native prisoners to enjoy. He therefore, in 1839, decided to resume all the land alienated at Rottnest, and the Government brought all holdings, with a warning given

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98 Ibid.
99 Ibid.
100 Editor, Perth Gazette, August 28th 1838 cited in Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 167.
102 Green and Moon, Far From Home : Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931: 73.
103 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia's tempestuous history. Volume 1: 41.
104 Ibid.
105 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 15.
106 Ibid: 16.
for all boat-owners to “...keep clear of the island.” 107 Hence the Government requisitioned Thomson’s land on the island, and the family had to return to the mainland. Thomson received a total of six hundred pounds for his land and improvements. He was further granted a town lot in Fremantle and a land grant of 243 ha, which he took up at Cookernup. 108 Green, found the circumstance of Thomas and his family having to return to the mainland to make way for Aboriginal prisoners ‘ironic’ considering that he and his family went to Rottnest to avoid the potential contact of Aborigines within the colony. 109

Hutt was a very different man to Stirling. Hutt, when discussing the local Aboriginal population and the treatment of them “…seemed intent from the start on angering the settlers.” 110 The settlers from England felt relatively empowered with the treatment that Stirling and his administration had dealt out to the Noongar – particularly in Pinjarra – and had been “…brought up to look upon crimes not only with indifference, but even as meritorious, which in England would be punished with death.” 111 Hutt disagreed strongly and counter-argued that Aborigines “…were a unique people, with their own standards and laws, and to punish them according to the white man’s customs was unjust.” 112

Further, Governor Hutt saw that there were special problems in putting Aboriginal people behind bars. In 1840 he wrote that he wanted to “…ensure the safe keeping of prisoners of the Aboriginal race, and at the same time to relieve them from the close confinement of a jail, which had been found to operate most prejudicially to the health.” 113

Governor Hutt’s instructions to the Rottnest prison Superintendent are worth quoting:

“It is the instruction and improvement of the natives that is desired more than their punishment. With this end in view, firstly endeavour to teach them the acts and habits of civilized life, and secondly, their employment be directed to making the establishment pay its own expenses, but employing them as far as possible in erecting buildings, in procuring fish, in collecting salt and in the cultivation of the land, the knowledge of which may be advantageous to them after their release from imprisonment.” 114

Hutt’s words were all well and good, with the best of intentions and humanitarian goodwill, but Watson paints a more realistic and encompassing picture when he wrote in his novel Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory:

If such a fiend as Satan ever existed, how he must have chuckled when he saw the well intentioned Governor forward these instructions to the Superintendent. Hell, paved with good intentions,
became a hot spot for the aborigines and that spot was Rottnest from the year 1839 to 1849 and from 1856 to 1866.\footnote{Ibid: 13.}

In August of 1839 Governor John Hutt gave Government approval and proclaimed Rottnest Island as an official prison territory for natives.\footnote{Nairn and Pash, Western Australia's tempestuous history. Volume 1: 41.} In the words of Hutt; “…a prison with no walls but surrounding ocean.”\footnote{Ibid.} The prisoners already on the island, and the new arrivals were immediately put to work erecting cottages for themselves on the island, collecting salt from the lakes, cutting fire wood, growing grain and vegetables, and fishing and hunting.\footnote{Ibid.}

Hutt had two major stated reasons for placing Aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest. Firstly he believed that the island would give prisoners a degree of freedom and thus they would suffer less, and secondly the prisoners would be trained in farming and building procedures so that they could fit better into European society upon their release.\footnote{Rielly, A Time of Trial: the Colony of Western Australia, 1839-1850: 3.}

Kwaymullina refutes this claim and declares the intention to train prisoners for farming work on the mainland “…cynical at the very least, since there was no obligation to pay Aboriginal people for their work until the 1967 referendum.”\footnote{Ibid.} He further claims that, “…despite the official rationale, it seems clear that the colonial government was complicit in the enslavement of Aboriginal people, and that it was a ‘slave mentality’ rather than the work ethic that Rottnest was meant to instil.”\footnote{Ibid: 110.}

“So therefore they (Aborigines) were rendered absolutely useless to the new system. But still out on country and resisting and therefore it was in the best interest of the new people to take them. Round them all up – chain them together and bring them to places like Rottnest Island – Wadjemup. And that’s exactly what happened…”\footnote{Ibid.}

Despite Hutt attempting to show a humanitarian compassion to the Aboriginal Prisoners they were being transported to Rottenest in chains and inmates were chained as punishment until 1885. The custom of chaining blacks around the neck was common although this was not done to the white convicts.\footnote{Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project,”}

“So, it was this time spent on the chain that would be long, often fed by the women who were brought along as the witnesses to their crime, and they hunted and gathered and the men were fed along the way. So it wasn’t a very pleasant experience of arriving at the port of departure for Rottnest Island.”\footnote{Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."}

A Noongar Elder and Traditional Custodian of the Wadjuk area – including Wadjemup – expresses succinctly and movingly the sorrow and pain that his forebears and other country men would have had to endure upon their incarceration and subsequent imprisonment on Wadjemup:

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“Well firstly, when the police went out and arrested our leaders and our heroes, our warriors and elders in the bush, they chained up the prisoners with chains around their necks, around their hands and shackled their hands and around their legs. Then after doing that they were marched, well, they were walked in gangs, all chained together for miles. I even read an account of the weight of the shackles and the chains. The administrators were discussing what weight would bring the greater hurt to the people...which chaffed the necks of the people and the arms, and the people couldn’t stop, they couldn’t go to the toilet by themselves. And even at night when the officers had their sleep the people were chained to trees and stuff. So there you go, it’s very sad – I could almost cry, I could cry... I relive the story all the time, especially when I know...we’re talking about what happened on the very land I walk today...”  

Blaze Kwaymullina, in his journal article: Wadjemup: Holiday Paradise or Prison Hell-Hole, explains his intolerance of the colonial viewpoint of the island prison with his assertion that, regardless of the best intentions, the island “…was a death camp where prisoners died in their hundreds. From the moment of their incarceration to their eventual release, they endured horrendous conditions.”

The recorded statements by Aboriginal prisoners who endured the island’s penal conditions reinforce Kwaymullina’s argument. A good example is the statement by prisoner Widgie-Widgie (Johnnie) who told a government inquiry:

“I do not like Rottnest, it makes me ill...I have been two winters here, I came in the steamer. I had a chain around my neck all the way down.”

I am cold in winter, my blanket is no good, it is old. I do not know when I am going back but I shall be very glad to go. I expect to go by and by.

Henry Vincent, ex-army, and campaigner in the Napoleonic Wars, in 1831 was appointed Gaoler at Fremantle. In August 1839 he was transferred to Rottnest and appointed Superintendent of the penal establishment for native prisoners. He was forty-two and was known to possess an uncontrollable temper and be “…devilishly cruel.” The prisoners named him KOKO-BUT – “One-eyed” (as he lost an eye in the war and was forced to wear a patch over it) and under his control they suffered despicable cruelties for a period of twenty-two years. Watson described Vincent as an “…egoist of the first water.”

“...they look at him and they go oh my goodness, he’s a bad one this one, and they knew they were in serious trouble, because he was driven by an ego. Not only that he had this (pause)...had this ‘Warrah' spirit in him, really bad and they would have been so
A few days after his arrival Vincent, with the utilization of prisoner’s labour, set about building the main buildings along the waterfront. These consisted of a prison and a dwelling for himself and his family. These dwellings (in some capacity) still stand today on the island. Watson claims that, “When we consider the early years of the Colony in which they were built we must admire the solidity of the buildings and the convenience of their arrangement.” The construction of other buildings that Vincent was to oversee, utilizing the labour of Aboriginal prisoners, were the original lighthouse (seven years to complete), the sea wall facing the mainland, the salt-house, several cottages, the ‘causeway’ and eventually the Governor’s retreat.

All of the prisoners feared Vincent as he had no hesitation in chaining the prisoners together at night. The prisoners would barely be able to move or relax in any capacity, making sleep almost impossible. Watson writes that during one of Vincent’s many cruel episodes the native prisoners would cry out in unison:

“YUG-GYN-EE (this no good)...GIN-ONG KOURAH MAHRA, YOU-RIE KOOOR-LINY CHAN-GER DWERDA KUR-RANG” (Look at his eyes and his hands; go softly; this white man is as savage as a wild dog.)

Paul Allardyce, self-confessed whistleblower and former private-investigator, spent many years working on the island during the 1980s – including the period of time when Aboriginal prisoner’s skeletal remains were discovered – and he spent many years battling the authorities (including the State Governments) to have the burial site nationally recognized and further development of that area ceased. He also spent many years researching the conditions and authoritative measures that the prisoners were exposed to:

“Vincent was the harshest jailer in probably not only West Australian history but in Australian history. His son doesn’t appear to be much better...he is described by his peers as being the ‘Son of Satan – a disciple of the devil’ and that’s where I think Wadjimup went terribly wrong, the original idea was they – the colonial people – the Wadjella’s, they soon recognise when you lock up the free spirit of (the) Aboriginal it was detrimental to him. The original idea of Wadjimup was where they would still be in prison but they would have a sense of freedom to roam, that all went terribly wrong with Henry William Vincent... the prisoners use to call him Kok-Butt Dwarda, which means ‘one eye dog’ and I think that’s quite a nice expression about him. If you read...his peers’...examination of (his) character he was an evil man and eventually he went insane and he got his just deserts...and I think that’s probably a good thing...”

132 Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
133 Watson, Rottnes:t Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 18.
134 Ibid and Bindon, Chadwick, and Western Australian Museum., A Nyoongar wordlist : from the south-west of Western Australia.
135 Allardyce, Paul "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project," Allardyce was a ‘whistleblower’ and informant.
Vincent was a hard taskmaster, and unreceptive to advice from the mainland to be more lenient towards the prisoners. Moore suggested that the chaining together of prisoners at night should be discontinued, but Vincent simply ignored this request, as he did with Armstrong's suggestion that, “…the number of stripes is now limited to 36 and I would respectfully suggest that if possible it might be reduced to at most half that number.”

Vincent continued administering the brutal and life-sapping 36 lashes. Swan River Elder Albert Corunna declares:

“…and also they used to in the middle of that Quad there, they use to flog them with a whip too there and some of them they hung there too. It was to put fear into them...so they (Aboriginal prisoners) lived in fear and trauma and in very harsh conditions…very harsh masters who ruled over them...”

Vincent did not accept anybody from the colony interfering in his methods, which was to put the fear of Rottnest into the Aboriginal prisoners that had the misfortune of being incarcerated there. He stood for “…discipline and cleanliness.” In January of 1840 it was reported that Vincent had insisted on cutting the hair of Aboriginal prisoners, who were used to a thick covering of greased ochre, which kept the sun off their heads in the hot sun of the bush or open plains. When the shorn men were made to work in the open hot sun most became sick and one prisoner died whilst a doctor called from the mainland miraculously saved two others. Corunna continues:

“I would like to say some other things about the treatment of the prisoners there cause apparently when they arrived there they had to have all their hair cut off their head and they were given no hats and they were given no adequate clothing, so they either froze in the winter and they died of heat stroke in summer...well they call that natural causes, well I don’t call that natural causes when a person is forced to have their hair removed and forcibly made to work in the hot sun without a hat or anything like that. I don’t call that natural that is (an) unnatural thing...So these are all the things that happened and the diet I heard was just some porridge they had a ‘billy’ and porridge boiled cabbage and that was their ration for the day. They got that in the morning and that lasted them for the full day.

Green notes that no meat was included in the prisoners diet as it was considered “…sufficient to permit the men to hunt in the late afternoon and supplement their diet with a few fish, some frogs and an occasional quokka and snake.” When being interviewed for this research project and film production he elaborated that, “…the food in the early stage was very grim, green vegetable gruel with grain...in the later stages it improved but it still wasn’t satisfactory...”

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136 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia's tempestuous history. Volume 1: 41.
137 Corunna, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground Project.”
138 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 40.
139 A *billycan*, more commonly known simply as a ‘billy’ and is a lightweight cooking pot which is used on a campfire or a camping stove.
140 Corunna, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground Project.”
141 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 170.
142 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
It would be offensive enough to consider that men were being conditioned and exposed to these types of brutal conditions but it was abhorrent that children too were being sent to the island. The *Perth Gazette* published a statement by an eleven-year old Aboriginal boy who was sentenced to two years for a petty offence – being caught in the vicinity of a slain sheep – which he denied killing and that he was hungry but, “…I only eat fat…” On the Island he was heard to complain that, “…there were four of us about my age. I no like Rottnest, they only give cabbage flower and soup…’black-fellow’ hungry plenty…”

This was in contrast to the report by the Advocate-General and the Protector of Aborigines who visited Rottnest during 1840, and declared, “All the prisoners appeared to enjoy very good health and spirits. Their hours of work did not exceed five and their labour was not continued after the middle of the day. All the rest of time was at their own disposal and was generally directed to strolling about the Island in search of game or their own amusements.”

Critics (mainly ill-advised settlers and pastoralists) of the prison maintained throughout its long history that a term on the island did little more than “…fatten prisoners and teach them to become more skilled at crime.” Providing a contrary view to this line of thinking was Henry Trigg the engineer and designer who oversaw the building of the first lighthouse on the island. Trigg provided a first-hand insight into the depressing psychological impression Rottnest had on prisoners:

The prisoners will sit down and weep most bitterly, particularly old men, or those who have left wives and children on the main: and when they see smoke from the fires at the place where they have accustomed to meet when unshackled and free, memory wanders over the scenes of bygone days, they seem intensively alive to their lost Freedom, and lamentably bewail their captivity.

Historian and novelist Neville Green, reiterated Trigg’s recollections and expanded on the ‘unknown’ psychological trauma that Wadjemup prisoners would have been exposed to, particularly Noongar captives, when he spoke to me for the project:

“...in the early years for the Noongarr, observed by Trigg was that they would sit on the beach at Rottnest, looking across the mainland and they could see the fires burning and they would know exactly whose home country that was on. So looking at the smoke on the horizon they were really projecting their mind into their camp, into their friends, into their family and not knowing whether they would ever see them again. And that depression of not knowing is like throwing away the key: you don’t know when you’re going to be released. So that was terrible. And of course disease and deaths, we can move on to later on, but I think it was the not knowing and

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143 Some as young as 7 or 8 years of age
146 Rielly, *A Time of Trial: the Colony of Western Australia, 1839-1850*: 3.
148 Aborigines over fifty were described as unsuited for the Island as they pined so much. Moran, *Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup*: 50.
Years imprisoned on the island passed slowly and excruciatingly for the prisoners. Some “...were sentenced for life...” and, “...awoke each morning to face a day of hard labour and many petty cruelties.” Monotonously, regardless of day, month, or year, the prisoners, who once walked free in their tribal lands, endured the loss of two things that all men regardless of culture or ethnicity value most; soul and spirit. There is no doubt that the Aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest had lost their freedom of body and mind, and slowly, but surely they were being stripped of their soul and spirit. Cut off from their women and children and deprived of liberty through the restraints of brutal captivity, manifested thoughts of hopelessness, depression and fear. Three Noongar men who spent considerable times incarcerated in maximum security at Fremantle Prison are Chris, Lindsay and Graeme Dixon (deceased and who’s poetry is utilized thought this exegesis) who can empathise with Wadjemup prisoners, explaining that their Fremantle cells – like the Wadjemup cells, “...were stinking hot in summer and freezing cold in winter,” and that “their [Wadjemup prisoners] experience would have been a hell of a lot worse than ours because, half of them hadn’t seen water in their days let alone be surrounded by it...and they [Aboriginal prisoners] could see from where they were the fires and all of the goings on [on] the mainland and it wouldn’t have been very good at all...” Graeme’s younger brother, speaking on behalf of himself and his deceased brother, comments that, “Yeah it would of been hell for them, really bad. It’s a lot of trauma and real bad dealings to our Tribal people...they didn’t deserve any of that. They were castrated off their land... There’s nothin like freedom...”

Engineer Henry Trigg, again gives a reasonably detailed and sympathetic account of the Aboriginal prisoner’s mundane and closely controlled routine in the summer of 1842:

5.30 a.m. The cells were unlocked and prisoners release to the open.
6.00 a.m. Six men were sent to cut grass, two directed to check the fishing lines, two sharpened axes, and one was detailed to warm up breakfast which had been pre-cooked the previous evening. Other chores included cutting wood, gathering stone for buildings, cow dung for the garden and thistles for the rabbits and pigs. If the tools were damaged or the quantity of work was poor, the order was ‘no breakfast’, a sentence that was invariably received in sullen silence.
7.30 a.m. After breakfast, twelve men were employed grubbing land, six digging the foundations for the lighthouse, two on home duties and two were sent fishing.
3.00 p.m. All the prisoners returned to the depot.

150 Dr Green, “Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
153 Lindsay Dixon, “Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the short-documentary Razor Wire (2012)”
4.30 p.m.  All were called to dinner, which, like breakfast, was taken in absolute silence except for the scraping of bowls and sucking of fingers. After dinner, the men were permitted to hold a short corroboree.  

Not only did Native prisoners have to endure a monotonous routine and existence on the island but also the Superintendent constantly exposed them to cruel acts of discipline and subsequent punishment. The year 1843 saw Francis Armstrong, the native interpreter of the Perth colony, being sent by Governor Hutt, to report on the native establishment at Rottnest. Armstrong reported back that Vincent’s administration was “…satisfactory in many respects.” He admitted, however, that Superintendent Vincent “…spared neither himself nor the natives.” It was noted that, “Several native prisoners have died and their comrades attributed their deaths to the fact that they were made to work while ill.” The evidence of Vincent’s cruel regime was mounting and Armstrong concluded his report with: “I can say nothing in favour of the apparent severity with which the natives are treated at Rottnest.”

It was at this period of time in the colony that the name Henry Vincent became the embodiment for all that was brutal and cruel. More and more eye witnesses were prepared to share their stories and go on record as observing Vincent’s anger and cruelty first-hand. Harry Tichborn, Gravedigger of Perth, told the following story:

“I was once at Rottnest for a cargo of salt. While there I saw Superintendent, Henry Vincent, brutally ill-treat a native by tugging viscously at his beard with a pair of blacksmith’s tongs.”

Vincent’s cruelties on the Island had been overlooked for years, but finally an overseer by the name of Joseph Morris brought the heinous incidents to the attention of the Governor. The Governor called for an enquiry, which was chaired by Charles Symmons (Protector of Aborigines) during the month of August 1846.

During the enquiry, Samual Mottram, a private of the 51st Regiment of British Rifles, swore on oath: “On the morning that natives had been killed by Mr Vincent and buried without the knowledge of anyone but the Superintendent, two natives and Corporal Dunn.”

It was not just testimonies that were being recorded regarding the poor treatment of prisoners by Vincent himself, but that the Superintendent was also intentionally turning a blind-eye (no pun intended) to brutal punishment and discipline against the prisoners by some of his guards. A Private from the 51st Regiment, John Williams, swore:

“I once saw Corporal Alcock, Acting overseer, strike a native named Boyingat with his fists three successive blows, and on the same day strike another native with a stick, and one day Alcock brought into Barrack’s a pitchfork which was broken near the top. He said he wanted to mend it, having broken it across a native. On
the 31st July I saw Mr. Vincent pull a native by the beard, who was in the shafts of a cart. I also saw Mr. Vincent give a blow with his fist on the head of another native for disobeying his orders to pick up certain stones. About 15 months ago I saw part of a native’s ear lying on the ground, which I heard Mr Vincent has pulled off. Mattram (a co-worker) saw the occurrence and brought the part of the ear to the Barracks.”

Further, Thomas Longworth, another Private of the 51st Regiment, said, “I have seen Mr. Vincent strike some of them in a manner which appeared too severe. I have seen several bruises given to the natives but no blood drawn. I saw Mr. Vincent take hold of the ear of a native named Peter (obviously English name – Traditional name unknown), pull the ear rather severely, and then shaking his fingers, as if to throw away something off his hand, wipe his fingers on his trousers; later in the day I saw Peter with the gristly part of one ear wanting.”

Dr. Green, when being interviewed for this research project, indicated that:

“One man claimed he was beaten by Henry Vincent and part of his ear was pulled off dragging him around by the ear. The investigation could not establish positively that he beat anyone to death although that suspicion has lingered but later in the century he was relieved of his authority, I think in the 1860s when it seemed beyond doubt that he was beating people, but again it couldn’t be positively proven.”

Vincent’s barbaric behaviour did not stop at manhandling prisoners but also included the use of firearms. During the investigation it was (again) reported by Private Longworth, who had since left his duties on the island, that:

“...some natives ran away into the bush. We went out, Mr. Vincent with his gun. It was dark; I heard a shot fired and shortly afterwards the runaway natives ran up to the gate of the prison and Mr. Vincent let them in. When they were being secured two of them were found bleeding about the legs and hips, the bleeding appeared to come from small shot wounds. One of the natives had been hit halfway between the calf and the heel and bled freely. The other had been struck on the hip and had received only a few shots. Mr Vincent said he had only fired at the legs of the natives.”

Another Corporal (Davis) from the regiment assigned to Rottnest summarised the treatment that prisoners regularly received from Vincent and reported during the inquiry:

“I consider Mr. Vincent treats the natives very severely. I have seen him beat the natives more severely than I thought necessary. He used to hit them with all of his might. Mr. Vincent has a gun with him in

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162 Ibid.
164 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
the prison yard when I saw the natives bleeding. None of the soldiers took a gun out of the Barracks that night.” 166

Despite Henry Vincent irrefutably proven guilty of gross cruelty towards the native prisoners, no action was taken against him. Hence, Vincent continued to control prisoners on the island despite the Governor apparently responding that Vincent ‘used much violence’. Despite inquires into Vincent’s methods he stayed in the job for twenty-seven years; but not before he was again at the centre of another controversy, and yet another investigation. His conduct towards prisoners was again censured at the end of 1866 and this time, at the age of 69, he was retired on half pay.

In 1865 Governor Hampton paid a visit to Rottnest. Whilst present on the island many complaints of cruelty towards Aboriginal prisoners were aimed at the Assistant Superintendent William Vincent – the son of Henry Vincent - who seemed, in Watson’s words, “…to have inherited his fathers’ uncontrollable temper.”167 The Governor warned the young Vincent that should there be any further reports of cruelties against native prisoners on his part, he would be fully investigated, and if deemed appropriate, charged.

On the evening of the 5th of October 1865 an extremely ill native prisoner, by the name of Dehan, aged between sixty and seventy, was:

…forcibly, but not unkindly, removed from the large association cell to one of the smaller cells. He did not want to leave his companions and began to cry and struggle against the natives who were instructed to remove him. The Assistant Superintendent approached and ordered the native to cease crying. When the sick man continued his cries William Vincent shouted out: “Hold your tongue, damn you!” I’ll soon stop that noise:” and struck the native who had fallen to his knees, two blows with a bunch of prison keys, one on the forehead and again across the nose. The insensate brute also kicked the sick man in the side. After being kicked the native coupled up and never wept again. He was then forced into a cell with two others. Dehan died that night. Next morning his dead body lay on the floor, a large swelling protruding where he had been kicked and the face and nostrils clotted with blood. Dehan was wrapped in a grey blanket, thrust hurriedly beneath the cemetery’s concealing sand. 168

Seven days after Dehan had died, Doctor Shipton was instructed to examine the exhumed body. In his report he stated that, “…the body was too decomposed for him to make any strict examination.” 169 This did not inhibit the Doctor however of making the crude judgment that Dehan’s death was attributed to “…natural causes.”170 Governor Hampton was unconvinced and ordered that William Vincent immediately leave the island. He carried through with his previous threat to the young Vincent and committed him for trial.

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166 Ibid.
167 Ibid: 22
168 Ibid.
170 Ibid.
On the 5th of January 1866 William Vincent’s trial took place. In the words of Watson the “…evidence given by warders and white prisoners seems full of evasions and half-truths. The only reliable evidence came from two native prisoners whose simple narratives seem to contain the truth.” 171 The Judge’s report summarized that he was: “…inclined to deal leniently with him (Vincent), but such conduct could not be allowed to go unmarked. He hoped at the end of his sentence he would reform his life, but he would never again be eligible for Government employment.” 172 William Vincent was found guilty and imprisoned for three months hard labour. Vincent spent most of his sentence working at the Police stables, and inconceivably was appointed to a position in the police force, some years later. 173

Watson claims that, for the Governor to set such a poor precedent and appoint a known criminal to a position on the Police Force, there must have been an underlying reason. Henry Vincent was succeeded as Superintendent of the Island by Captain Jackson who, “…always believed it was Henry Vincent who killed Dehan with the bunch of keys, and that William Vincent assumed the blame to shield his father.” 174 Jackson was the Pilot at Rottnest at the time of the assault, and the source of Jackson’s information “…could only have been the native prisoners, who were present at the assault.” 175 Anybody that had any involvement with the island and/or the investigation believed that ‘everyone of the Island accepted this view’. 176

Upon his son’s sentencing to three months imprisonment, Henry Vincent became “…more and more vindictive towards the prisoners.” 177 Dr Shipton, the island’s assigned medical officer, reported to the Governor that so violent and uncontrollable had Vincent’s nature become that Vincent needed to be removed “…from Rottnest, and from the prisoners.” 178

The Aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest knew that once on the island there was little chance of escape. That did not deter prisoners from attempting to escape from the island, or from the vessels that carried them there. In 1848 two prisoners jumped from the coaster Albion and tried to swim to Mandurah but they tragically drowned close to shore having been weighed down by the heavy leg irons. Interestingly the news of the attempted escape was conveyed by the captain to the authorities on shore in a bottle thrown overboard. 179

According to Green there were eight attempted escapes from the Island prison during its history. A descendent of a Wadjemup prisoner, Charmaine ‘Tammar’ Walley, gives insight into the notion that prisoners were regularly enticed to try and escape the island, including her own Grand-father:

“I do know of one little story of something that happened there when there was supposed to be an escape happening and he was

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172 Ibid.
173 Ibid.
175 Ibid.
176 Ibid.
178 Ibid: 25.
179 Rielly, *A Time of Trial: the Colony of Western Australia, 1839-1850*: 42.
going to be part of it but I think they were found out so that didn’t happen.” 180

There have been many stories circulating throughout the Aboriginal (particularly the Noongar) community regarding escapes from the island. Most families who had descendents incarcerated on the island, via oral histories and family folklore, believe that their kin were involved, and or, succeeded in escaping from the island. Green refutes most of these claims, stating that, “There are many Aboriginal people who believe a relative swam from Rottnest to the mainland. Unfortunately, there is no evidence to support these stories…” 181

In his novel Bulmurn: A Swan River Nyoongar, Darbalyung Noongar descendent Richard Wilkes, based on stories that were passed to him in the tradition of oral story telling, informs his readers that,

…it is believed that Fred ‘Knayel’ Winmar182 was the last prisoner to escape from Rottnest Island jail, in the death camp of hundreds, perhaps thousands of Aboriginals. Granny defied the odds in escaping. He swam through heavy seas over the twelve mile distance, only to be captured on Coogee beach near Fremantle. As he lay exhausted his tormentors said, ‘don’t run or we’ll shoot’. The authorities took him straight back to the island jail. Granny Knayel’s courage typifies the strength and tenacity of so many other prisoners of war in trying to escape, only to lose their lives. 183

Green declares that, “As far as can be ascertained, thirty Aborigines, three Europeans, two juveniles and three German internees – a total of thirty-eight – reached the mainland.” 184 Most of these escapees, Green adds, were recaptured and returned. In fact Green claims further that, “…no one swam the 20 kilometres to the mainland.” 185

Ironically, today many thousands of people take part in an annual event called the Rottnest Channel Swim (now sponsored by health fund organisation HBF), which sees swimmers leave the Cottesloe beach and swim the 19.7km distance to Thomson Bay – Rottnest. The first official Rottnest Channel Swim was in February 1991 but the first known solo swimmer to Rottnest was Gerd von Dincklage-Schulenburg on January 24, 1956. 186 Again how ironic that in the previous century Aboriginal prisoners were doing their most earnest to get off the Island and now a century or so later participants do their best to swim to the Island!

In another interesting twist to the tale of escape, some prisoners managed to flee the prison grounds and Quod area whilst under lock-down but didn’t manage to secure a vessel and decided to stay hidden on the island; but to no avail:

182 Recorded by Green in Far From Home as Freddy Winmar (or Windmar, Windar or Windanar) – prison number 203. There is no mention of him having ever escaped (or attempted) to escape from Rottnest. Green records the last escape attempt from Rottnest being Willie Mattico and Wangardura on the 28th November 1916. Ibid: 78.
185 Ibid.
"...one of the prisoner’s names over at Rottnest Island was Abraham" and that being my family name...I think it was in the book by Edward Watson: Rottnest its Tragedy and its Glory. Abraham and another guy, Alick, said in one of the books, they had escaped from the Island and made it look like they had actually left the Island. They had the Police set up in Freo (Fremantle) and all the other sites, sort of...looking out for them but I think it was one of the warders sort of had an instinct that they never left the Island and after a week or so later thought they would get hungry and they would come back. Sure enough a week later they found them starving in a cave. Which is a funny story in itself."

Though Abraham’s story is recorded in Watson’s text, this story and Wilkes’ are not recorded in Green’s book Far From Home. Kwaymullina disputes Green’s recorded evidence, as being from “existing but incomplete archival records,” and that Green’s book is “not therefore conclusive.” Kwaymullina continues to argue that; “...any attempt to arrive at an accurate figure without consulting Aboriginal oral testimony must be flawed.” It is a common oversight of non-Aboriginal historians to base historical accounts purely on archival research, that is often challenged by Aboriginal oral history. Kwaymullina directly challenges Green when he writes that, “He (Green) shows little interest in Aboriginal oral histories, yet those histories clearly challenge his conclusions...” This is why the above oral testimonies from both Wilkes and Abraham are included here. But Kwaymullina also makes the gravest of research errors when he seems to disregard the importance of colonial archives and base his findings on the testimony of Aboriginal Elders and sources only. Unbelievably he reports that a guillotine was used on the jetty at Wadjemup to ‘illegally’ execute prisoners when “...new prisoners arrived.” This, like his claim that Aboriginal prisoners remains were “...ground into powder and mixed with mortar used for buildings...” are both fabled nonsense and ridiculous statements, without evidence or proof.

Returning to the escape narratives, it appears that those Aboriginal prisoners who did manage to steal and navigate a boat to the mainland caused much confusion amongst the settlers as to the difference between a freed prisoner(s) and an escapee. Hence the Governor ordered that freed prisoners carry a discharge document, although most, if not all, released prisoners did not preserve this document; another failure of the colonists to understand the nomadic lifestyle of the first occupants.

Other oral stories regarding the ‘escape’ of Aboriginal prisoners from the island have also been passed down through the generations of (Noongar) families. One of the more popular stories discussed is the one involving a Mobarn man or Bollyar Guddark. In the

187 According to Green’s Far From Home Abraham was issued with prisoner numbers: 918, 922 & 287. Ibid: 100.
189 Written as Alec by Watson in Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory but actually recorded as Alick in the official records.
190 Abraham, Aurora "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project," 2011. [Abraham is a descendent (granddaughter) of a Wadjemup Prisoner]
191 Kwaymullina, "Wadjemup: Holiday Paradise or Prison Hell-Hole;": 113.
192 Ibid.
193 Ibid.
194 Ibid.
195 Ibid.
colony these strange and powerful men were simply described as ‘witch-doctors’. Elder Neville Collard explains the story:

“...old Yelacich (his grandfather) told me about one old Noongar bloke, he’s an old Mobarn man, he had the Bollyar Guddaark, and he used to visit Nan and Pop in Boojin,...and my mum was only a little girl, only 2 or 3 years of age. He used to come down there, come there especially to see her, love her, carry her around, mind her and my Pop was very suspicious of this old bloke, because he had the Bollyar Guddaark see, and he used to just come out of nowhere - he’d just lob. I think the old boy used to hear stories about this old bloke, (that) he was a Waardong. So Pop watched him the next time he come to visit...and take mum and talk to her, and when he said “Yelakiny yunyala waylt kawl”, “now I gotta’ go Tom” he said, the old boy followed him and tracked him and sure enough when he got down the road a bit, drag marks and old Waardong, he’s flying around, flying around the sky...and he swore to the day he died that he seen that old blokes footprints between the two drag marks and he flew off. Now that old bloke, just on the next hill at Boojin there, he murdered his old woman, two woman’s, chopped em’ up and put em’ in a tree stump there. So he went to prison over Rottnest. Now the story continues about that old man, remember I said he could turn into the Waardong, he escaped from there, and when this boat came back, the supply boat came back from Rottnest to Fremantle there was a Waardong sitting on the handrail of the boat, and when that boat hit the land…that voyager flew off...”caark caark”, and he...flew away. They never ever caught him, they never ever seen him again from that day till this.” 196

It is not clear if Wilkes (in his story about Fred ‘Knayel’ Winmar) was talking about the same Mobarn man that Collard describes, but the description and narrative, have uncanny and eery similarities, Wilkes describing Bulmurn as being a “Mobarn mamarup boylla gudjuk; a powerful man who had special powers to heal his people. He was an Aboriginal doctor.” 197 Throughout the colony, from York, Brookton, Beverley, through to Guildford, Perth and Fremantle, “…stories were told of Bulmurn’s prowess as a Mobarn boylla gudjuk by the Nyoongar people who had seen him change into shapes of birds, animals and solid objects. Yes it was true: they believed he could make any change at will… it was rumoured that often Bulmurn changed into wardong, the crow.” 198

Noel Nannup, who has Aboriginal lineage from both the North-West and Noongar country, and who has spent many, many, years on the Island of Wadjemup, also speaks of the legend of the Waardong (crow):

“But in some instances it was possible for the old people to put their spirit in that Waardong and tell it “take it home”, particularly Noongar and they could get it back here.” 199

196 Collard "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
198 Ibid: 16.
199 Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
3.5.5 The Ongoing Clash of Laws

Justice

So long as the Natives are unacquainted with the elementary principles of civilized society they ought not to be judged by the laws of the society.

Some will say, that the Natives know the difference between right and wrong; yes. They know it, but with this difference, that what the jury think right the native think wrong, and what the jury think wrong the Natives think right.

For example, the jury think it very wrong to spear and kill another man.

The Natives say it is their law and practice, and that it is right so to do.

Louis Giustiniani 1837

The terror and anxiety generated by the prison establishment on Rottnest Island was one of the most powerful and destructive facilities that the colonial government possessed in dealing with the Aboriginal population, and any respective resistance to the colony settlement or expansion into the ‘frontier’ of the east and north-west. When any of the Aboriginal population, either as individuals or a collective, resisted dispossession they immediately lost legal protection and were denied due process. Rowley, quoted within *It’s Still in My Heart, This is My Country*, which focused on the single Native Title Noongar claim in 2005, saw “…the court as an instrument for sending the Aborigine to gaol rather than ‘a place where he defended himself against unproven charges’.”

Noongar Elder Ben ‘Cuimara’ Taylor, describes the harsh treatment that was afforded his people when it came to British law and punishment:

“Life was hard and cruel back then, they were the days when they put chains around our old fella’s necks. My poor old grandfather wore a chain. He was skinning a kangaroo and they reckoned he stole a sheep so they locked him up on Rottenest Island for a crime he ever (sic) committed. It didn’t matter if you were innocent or guilty…they just liked to lock you up!”

Wilkes surmises that the schism and repeated clashes between the white man’s law and the black man’s law (two laws and two peoples) is as a result of, “…both parties (being) ignorant of how the other law worked.”

Noongar Elder, Rita Dempster, was born in Albany in 1935. Well before her birth, and then tragically during her young years, the police were riding out from Gnowangerup (and other such places) to catch Aboriginal people and take them away. Her

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200 Carter, Nyungah Land: Records of Invasion and Theft of Aboriginal Land on the Swan River 1829 - 1850: 111.
grandfather, Jack Mindum was sent to Rottnest Island Prison but was one of the lucky ones because he escaped and returned to his country and family:

“They went out to catch my grandfather, Jack Mindum because they reckoned he was an outlaw in his time. I think they used to blame him for stealing sheep and things like that, that’s what the white people thought. My grandfather got sent to Rottnest Island Prison, but before that he’d already spent time in the old Albany jail for the same kind of crimes. They said he was an outlaw, but really he was just standing up for his rights. But the police, they wouldn’t listen, the used to have it their way all the time. After grandfather got out of Albany jail the police come out to Ongerup and picked him up again and took him to Rottnest Prison for another crime. But he never stayed there, this time he escaped. He got to Fremantle then went back down to Ongerup They never caught him again after he was back home with his family. Some people saw him as a criminal in his time, well that is how the police put it, but in the Nyoongar way he was a clever man, very clever. I feel proud to know he escaped from Rottnest and got home to his family again.”

As the colony expanded into the neighbouring regions beyond the Swan River, the opportunities for missions, under the guidance of various religious sects, grew, with many Aboriginal children being removed and sent to these devout institutions in the hope of teaching them white ideals and Christian values. Naturally many Aboriginal fathers and guardians resisted this movement and sought to have their children returned to their appropriate homelands and family circles. Tragically however, what seemed a natural and expectant action by these men (and in some instances women), was deemed a criminal offence by the authorities and harsh punishments were evident:

“My Grandfather was sent to Rottnest. His name is Emanuel Jackamarra. He was one of three of the Aboriginal Elders that led a riot against the nuns in New Norcia Mission. To get their kids out of there and for that they put him in Rottenest...no Aboriginal people thought that may have been a crime, but to us, to his family, to me he was one of the earliest activists, you know fighting for our rights, fighting for rights for Aboriginal people...so what was a crime for one, was not to another...”

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204 Green, in Far From Home, reports that Mindim, escaped by boat from Rottnest in company with Marbyamarra and Wenyie. For some weeks the escapees followed the railway to Kalgoorlie and then separated company. Marbyamarra and Wenyie were recaptured and sent back to Rottnest, but Mindim avoided recapture and settled in the South West. [Green and Moon, Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931: 227.]


206 According to Green’s Far From Home, Emanuel Jackamarra (AKA Manuel Jackimarra) was prisoner number 7308. He was sent to Rottnest from New Norcia on the 15th January 1907 and freed from Rottnest on the 9th April 1907 [FPRD – Fremantle prison receival & discharge register 13D]. He was again interned to Rottnest, from Moora, on the 13th September 1916 [FP – Fremantle records 20]. He reported on the escape attempt by Mattico and Wangardura 28 Nov. He left on the SS Penguin 7 Dec 1916 RDOB [Rottnest Island daily occurrence book]. On the 9th Mar 1921 he was transported from Moora to Rottnest and freed (for final time) on the 13th April 1921 [FP 21 – Fremantle Prison Records]. Green and Moon, Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931: 191 & vi.

Though some men were sent to Rottnest for brutal crimes, including murder and rape of whites, most of the men (and boys) were sent to the island prison for crimes of a tribal nature – incorporating the previously discussed tribal law of ‘payback’ – whereby the victim or deceased were themselves Aboriginal, or for stealing sheep, cattle or flour. Hence, Aboriginal people were expected to understand and comply with British law, a subject that they knew nothing about or cared for. These tribal men were not going to abandon their own law that had sustained them for hundreds of generations.

In most instances the arrests of these prisoners were without warrants, with early morning raids on the assailant, who were then chained and often made to walk hundreds of kilometres to their trial. Those who ran in terror from the camp were seen as “…attempting an escape and were sometimes shot.” 208

These traditional men and boys were seldom represented in court by a legal counsel and were “…more likely to be convicted than Europeans.” 209 Though they were ‘protected’ under British law, they were also prosecuted under it, which ultimately was the greater circumstance. The discrepancy between British and Tribal law was argued by Mr Clarke (council to the native prisoners) whom:

…objected to the prisoners being tried by a jury wholly composed of white men; according to the British Law, he considered that, for the trial of natives, at least six of their countrymen should be impaneled, to equalize the jury. The Chairman stated that the aborigines were British subjects, and that a jury of British subjects were there to try them. Mr Clarke was proceeding, but was stopped by the Crown intimating that they would allow no further interruption or useless loss of time. If Mr Clarke’s mistaken views had been listened to we think the Court would have found some difficulty in procuring six of the white population to sit by the side of the native gentlemen, in their usual attractive costume, perfumed with their favourite essences of rank fish oil, and besmeared with wilgy 210 – to say nothing of their portable entomological specimens. 211

The settlers of the colony and the ‘frontier’, under the control of the governing administration, rarely understood (or wanted to understand) Aboriginal anger if white justice was imposed in instances of traditional law or retribution. From the Aboriginal viewpoint “…a black taking the life of another black was not a matter for white interference.” 212

This was never better displayed than in the case of Binjareb warrior Weewar 213 who was imprisoned, and recognised in Western Australian law history, as the first Aboriginal person convicted under British law, for killing another Aboriginal man 214. Under a jury Weewar was sentenced to death which was then commuted to

208 Green in Kwaymullina, "Wadjemup: Holiday Paradise or Prison Hell-Hole,": 112.
209 Ibid.
210 Noongar word for ochre – the coloured rock used for ceremony and dress.
212 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 58.
213 AKA Wee war, Wee-war or Wee wa.
214 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 164.
imprisonment for life on Rottnest Island. On the same boat as Civil Engineer, Henry Trigg, who was overseeing the construction of the first lighthouse on Rottnest, Weewar was recorded by Trigg (using a mixture of signs, broken English and Noongar dialect) as saying:

“I cannot understand why the Governor is sulky or severe with me, if a white man kills a white man we never interfere – sometime back the white man killed many of the natives and the Governor took no notice, now why should the Governor take any notice of me if I kill a fellow native that steals my wife, or kills my brother, when it is according to our law. I admit for me to kill a white man is wrong, but not for me to kill a man who kills my brother.”

Once Rottnest Island became established as the prison for the Aboriginal population other new prisons were established within the expanding colony and frontier. However, Wadjemup remained as the ‘epi-centre’ of this incarceration expansion. In the South West of the colony, prisons were established in Guildford (1841), Albany (1850), and York (1852), and then some decades later, Bunbury and Busselton (1879). Within the Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia, Kwaymullina and Hay argue that “…these prisons typically contained ‘native cells’ used to segregate Aboriginal people from other prisoners, which functioned as a ‘prison within a prison’.”

Colonists in 1870s began the aggressive push into the areas north and east of Perth, particularly the North West, where four prisons were set up. This occurred in Roebourne (1881), Derby (1887), Wyndham (1888) and Carnarvon (1890), and in association with the other south-west prisons they “…formed a colony-wide network of incarceration that ran from Wyndham in the far north, east to Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie, down to the bottom tip at Albany and far west to the central prison on Rottnest Island.”

Aborigines within the colonies and the widening ‘frontier’, found themselves subjected to instant trial and punishment for many violations of white law but on the more serious charges of murder and rape they had to wait for a full trial. In fact even layered burning of country (a thousand year traditional practice) was deemed a serious charge and a waiting period before trial was set down for this offence. In lesser cases according to Austen “…two or more justices of the peace, of whom one must be a protector or local resident magistrate, could inflict half a year in jail with an optional twenty-four lashes.”

For prisoners sentenced to Rottnest it was an excruciating waiting game full of dread and confusion. Most prisoners did not understand the severity and technicalities of their sentences. In many instances their jail terms were modified for the worse and lengthened.

“...And to a sentence that may be a year, might be two years, might be ten years and they never really knew, the only one who knew was the warder who had his record and the wardens who could read the

215 Weewar is making note of the Pinjarra massacre in 1834.
216 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 166.
217 Kwaymullina & Hay, in Gregory, Gothard, and Batt, Historical Encyclopedia of Western Australia, 2009: 35.
218 Ibid.
219 Ibid.
220 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 44.
tag around the persons neck, that had a number, and that number corresponded to the entry in the register. But of course as exchange of gifts – which is common in Aboriginal culture – you exchange a gift of food for something else...so you exchange it for a bit of food and sometimes a prisoner might be released because he's wearing the right number but not be the right person.” 221

Green, within his text, also explains the cultural practice of trade and exchange, in this instance gift giving of food, clothing and identification tags. These identification tags were worn by the prisoners on their shirts or around the neck with string, and when a prisoner gave another prisoner his tag (they resembled a small coin) it confused the authorities and often the wrong prisoner was given freedom of release. 222

3.5.6 Temporary Closure of Rottnest Prison

In October 1849 the Governor gave orders to temporarily close the prison and transfer the Aboriginal prisoners to Perth, where they were employed in gangs, making roads, repairing infrastructure, and preparing foundations for the key buildings of the ever-expanding colony.

During this time Henry Vincent was appointed as the Gaoler at Perth. Both his reputation and his record in poor treatment of Aboriginal prisoners was to follow him to the mainland. In 1850 the Perth Gaol was reported to be so over-crowded and in such bad condition that it was “…inhumane to suggest that it might fit the regulations for prisons, and was a disgrace similar to ‘the black hole of Calcutta’.” 223 Within two rooms measuring a paltry 18x12 feet and 15x12 feet forty Aboriginal prisoners were confined, with one small window and a bucket. These unfortunate and miserable prisoners were chained and unable to move about at night, and as a result there were reported deaths in the jail complex. 224

In the meantime the Rottnest Prison was closed from October 1849 to January 1856 and the island was leased to J.M. Dempster for £80 per annum. Most of the prisoners remaining on the island to assist in building the new prison were white, with only a handful of Aboriginal prisoners based on the island. 225

On the mainland Aboriginal prisoners, sent from Wadjemup, were suffering from their incarceration due to being continually chained. In desperation Governor Captain A.E. Kennedy, who had succeeded Captain Fitzgerald, reported in a dispatch on the 5th of September 1855 that, “…In retaining these wretched savages at Perth it was necessary to keep them chained and manacled in the most inhuman manner to prevent them from making their escape which in defiance of all vigilance they frequently effected, Prison confinement to these people is equivalent to sentence of death.” 226

As a result of the heinous and inhumane conditions of the Perth Gaol, and no doubt due to the heavy expense and abundance of escapes (or attempted escapes) from the road-

221 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
222 Green and Moon, Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931: 27.
223 Perth Gazette 23 Aug 1850 cited in Allbrrok & Jebb and Associates, Historical research into the execution and burial of Migegooroo at the deanery site Perth: 34.
224 Green and Moon, Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931: 84.
225 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 30.
226 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 171-72.
gangs, Aboriginal prisoners were once again sent to Wadjemup. Governor Kennedy gave reason for re-opening Rottnest as a prison, stating that, Perth Jail had resulted in natives being chained “…like wild animals to prevent their escape.” 227

Therefore, after much debate, the Government authorities concluded that in spite of some drawbacks, it was better to allow prisoners to go unchained on Rottnest rather than to be kept in chains on the mainland. As the evidence below suggests, however, the Aborigines incarcerated at Wadjemup, though physically unchained, still felt spiritually isolated on the island:

“I was born at Kojonup and brought up at Beverley. I can read a little. I have been two years on the Island. I was here for twelve months before, about five years ago. I do not like Rottnest, because I am not the same as if I was in my own country. If I was out I would be my own master. I would rather be imprisoned on the mainland, as this is a bad place in the winter: it is cold, and when a man gets wet here he has no clothes to change. The food too is not as good as I should get if at liberty; there is plenty, but no change, we get the same from one end of the year to the other…There are two others besides myself in my cell; it is close and the smell is bad in the morning…I think Rottnest is dreaded by natives. I do not wish to come back again…Natives do not like the sea voyage.” 228

In 1856, a mere six-years since it was closed, “…the penal establishment was re-opened…and Henry Vincent returned with added glory as Superintendent of the Island and Head of the Penal Establishment and farm at a salary of £200 per annum, a sum then considered a handsome income.” 229 Shortly after the re-establishment of the prison the Governor’s cottage was completed, but it was the next completed building that would effect the lives of hundreds, if not thousands, of Aboriginal Prisoners for the next 50 years; the Quod.

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228 Interview with Aboriginal Prisoner Bob Thomas reported in: The Enquirer, 12th JULY 1848, P2. Cited in Haynes and History Association of Western Australia., W.A. Aborigines, 1622-1972: 28-29. [Source: Aboriginal Commission, Appendix I. Evidence and information collected with regard to Rottnest Island Prison. W.A.V.P., 1884, paper 32, p12]
3.6 Main Prison Period (1860s to 1920s)

3.6.1 Epidemics, Enquiries and Gradual Improvement of Conditions

“Our old people could see the bloodshed of the massacre grounds, our young stolen children could see the high walls of the missions, our incarcerated could hear the haunting screams of our enslaved”

Robert Eggington

Completed in 1864-5, the newly built Rottnest Native Prison was designed to accommodate one hundred and fifty prisoners. Constructed in an octagon form, and containing thirty cells, with requisite offices, this newly constructed prison replaced the old prison, which due to extensive fire damage, was redundant as a place for the confinement of convicts.

Built by Henry Vincent, the Quod was described by E.J. Watson in the ‘History of Rottnest’ thus: “The largest room (19ft x 12ft) was used as a dining room by white prisoners who acted as cooks and bakers for the prison. The large cells were 14 feet 9 inches by 8ft 6 inches, the smaller 10 feet by 5 feet 6 inches. The only commendable feature was the height of the walls, 11 feet (about 4 metres).”

Green explains succinctly that, “In the remaining twenty-eight cells, each less than two metres by three metres, were kept the 148 Aboriginal prisoners, four or five to a cell, giving each man a sleeping width of less than 60 centimetres.” When the prison was overcrowded the number of men placed in the larger cells could number ten, with up to seven in the smaller cells. It is no wonder that the few holes bored into the top of the cell and the cell doors for ventilation were not adequate. No cells contained a stretcher or bed, so prisoners ‘slept’ on the cold floor (sometimes covered with hay) covered with one, and if lucky two blankets. It wasn’t until after the 1890s that a ‘slop’ bucket was allowed into the cells, with a bucket of water being ‘slushed’ across the floor for sanitation. Moran surmises the grave conditions by stating that, “Words can not paint the picture without being offensive.”

These poor and decrepit conditions did not end there. Within the Quod, one small cell was termed a ‘Refractory Cell’ and within it Vincent placed an iron bar set into the wall and into the floor, to which offenders were chained with a foot on each side of the bar. This mechanism was intended to be cruel as in this position unrestrained movement or casual rest was almost impossible. To make the punishment more effective a ration of only bread was instructed and was recommended for a period of one week. This iron bar remained in the cell until 1882 when Lord Gifford (Colonial Secretary) ordered its removal.

Apart from the psychological effects and trauma of being locked up, Aboriginal prisoners crowded together in jail were very likely to catch infectious diseases.

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230 Eggington and Corporation, Hamburgers for Masterpieces: [page unknown]
231 Approximately 6 metres by 4 metres.
232 Not quite 5m x 3m.
233 Approximately 3m x 2m.
234 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 64.
236 Watson in Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 64.
237 Ibid.
Nicholson claims that, “Illnesses which made Europeans sick for a few days or weeks could kill Aborigines because they had no immunity.” 238

Upon the retirement of Henry Vincent, in 1867, Captain Jackson, an ex-ship’s pilot, was appointed the new superintendent of the Rottnest Island Prison establishment. The general feeling from the prisoners was both relief and gratitude that Vincent’s days as Superintendent on Rottnest were over. Watson claims that some native prisoners described Jackson as “…a good ‘CHANG-ER’ (a white man with a white heart)” and that Jackson “…did all he could to alleviate the lot of the unfortunate exiles sent to Rottnest during his administration. He gave earnest consideration to the improvement of the health of the natives and endeavoured to improve their mental outlook.” 239

Though Jackson was reported as being far more lenient on the prisoners than Vincent, unfortunately his administration was also lax and somewhat inadequate and as a result this slackness “…eventually allowed an influenza epidemic to take a firm hold on the prisoners…” 240 before authorities on the mainland were alerted:

Sir, I have received with regret the intelligence contained in your Despatch [sic] No.65, of the 30th of August, reporting the occurrence of an epidemic of influenza at Rottnest island and the death of 37 native prisoners. I have not failed to observe, from recent information, that further inquiry into the state of the Prison at Rottnest appears to be desirable, as well as into the means for ensuring a more regular and systematic supervision over it, and I approve your proposal to appoint a Commission with a view to a thorough inquiry and report.
I have, etc.,
DERBY 241

Following the epidemic, Jackson required that the cells to be washed out daily and a greater air of cleanliness prevailed. Although the prisoners health generally improved, as “…they were no longer sent out to work in the rain, but on wet days kept indoors or working in the barns and stables” 242, a dreadful second epidemic occurred in 1883-4. This influenza epidemic “…carried off sixty natives…” 243 with the Aboriginal prisoners susceptibility increased as a result of the ridiculous and inhumane cramped living conditions, which made it impossible to isolate the afflicted.

The lack of sewerage facilities and the problem of the disposal of human waste also prevailed on the mainland at this time. This brought indescribable pestilence upon the population and many deaths from typhoid resulted. In addition, an outbreak of measles followed the influenza and typhoid epidemics.

238 Nicholson, Australia Locked Up: 29.
239 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 36.
240 Ibid.
242 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 35.
243 Ibid.
In the winter of 1883 it was as if the grim reaper himself was positioned on the island permanently with more than sixty Aboriginal prisoners, out of approximately 150 dying a gruesome and painful death from influenza. Obviously the insanitary conditions of the prison Quod, combined with the susceptibility of Aborigines to infectious diseases – introduced by the European settlers – was the major cause of so much suffering and death. But it should also be considered that those tribal Aborigines brought south from the warmer habitats of the tropical and desert regions of the north-west were prone to cruelly suffer “…in the bleakness of [the] island environment.” Eventually the conditions on the island become so dire that an inquiry was made by the Government, with *The Inquirer* newspaper reporting on it’s visit to the island, and specifically the Rottnest Prison Hospital, on Wednesday June 27th 1883:

> …As you approach the door a subtle yet sickening odour assails you, makes your head reel and gives you a feeling of intolerable nausea. As you get nearer heart-rending groans may be heard which burst into a piercing shriek of unendurable agony, but which sometimes shrinks into a low wailing of bitter despair… Afflicted with almost constant diarrhoea, suffering from almost incessant vomiting, he rolls about…[and] lies wallowing in the filth that surrounds him like a pig in a neglected sty. The whole sight is so frightful that shocked and disgusted you hurry away into the open air…the smell is unbearable – it was impossible to remain in the room.

Karen Jacobs, gives an insight into the severity of the situation and the archaic disease ridden conditions that prisoners were privy to:

> “The prison had a hospital attached to it. The Hospital in the beginning was a hospital, (however) in the end…during the mid-term of the prison it purely became a morgue. Men were left in the hospital purely to die because the doctor they had on site at the time, couldn’t deal with infectious diseases…”

Further, in describing the sparseness of the Quod the readers of *The Inquirer* get a sense of the desperation of the situation and the isolation and emptiness that the forlorn Aboriginal prisoner must endure whilst incarcerated on the island:

> A large room, or rather a cell is before you. It is bare of any kind of furniture, not a table, not a chair, not even a stretcher is to be seen… Look! There…lies the figure of one who once stood erect in his pride of manhood, having stamped on him the dignity of one who was made in the image of his ‘Divine Creator’; but look at him now, and what a wretched, degraded, brutalised being he seems.

A young Watson, witnessing this ‘hell on earth’ first hand, describes in vivid detail one of the many Aboriginal prisoners rolling in anguish on the floor with his limbs and

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244 The number of deaths attributed to disease is inconsistent due to the inconsistency of the sources and records.
245 Ibid: 85.
246 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 85-86.
248 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
249 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 85-86.
joints twisted in extreme pain, all expressed in appalling cries and moans. He rhetorically asks ‘who is the subject of this horrid reality’…? "He is a sick native lying in the Rottnest penal hospital…”250 he solemnly answers. Watson continues that, “…to realise the dreadful condition of the native prisoners in 1883 you should have seen them as we did. Have you ever heard about thirty or forty natives coughing and expectorating the wailing with a quavering, long-drawn cry, like the howl of a dingo…?”251

No wonder Watson described the [Quod] prison doorway as “…the entry into the valley of the shadow of death.”252 This was reiterated by Noongar novelist Richard Wilkes who wrote that: “The Nyoongar feared Rottnest because when they entered the Quod, they entered the ‘Jenark’s Mia-Mia’, the home of the evil spirit.”253

The Quod and its cells were simply too small for the number of men that were present in it, and when confronted with inclement weather (which in winter was all the time) the prisoners, once wet, had no change of clothing and had to dry their clothes the best they could. In addition “…No mattress or bed of straw is allowed to natives except in hospital, [and] there is always a strong offensive smell from the Native prisoners…”254 A Government review found some Aboriginal prisoners working in irons, which legislation disallowed and it was reported that “…the minute cells, where sometimes five slept, were damp. It was no surprise, said the Colonial Surgeon, they [prisoners] died in large numbers.”255

Influenza, accounted for the majority of the deaths recorded among the Aboriginal prisoners in the winter of 1883, with over 40% of prisoners succumbing to the deadly disease. At its peak period it reached ten daily256 whereby the sight of Aboriginal prisoners being wrapped in a grey blanket and being carried on a hand-barrow to their graves “…in the little circular cemetery, walled with cobblestones, among the Cyprus trees at the north end of the park, beyond the prison…”257 became a daily and common occurrence.

Watson wrote about the death of one of his favourite prisoners: “One morning during the prevalence of the epidemic (Mangrove) came into the reformatory yard, inflated his chest and striking it with his fist explained, ‘me strong fellow’…’me cant noitj! (die)’ – alas a week later we saw his body pass by on the hand-barrow on its way to the cemetery.”258 Elder Noel Nannup reiterates:

“And, when people died, they had a special trolley, it had two wheels – dunno’ if you’d call it a wheelbarrow – but the wheels were on each side and it had a flat plank and two handles, and the body was placed on there or if, in some instances, the bodies – they were then taken out. The prisoners had to dig the holes, wrap them

250 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 86.
251 Ibid: 84.
252 Ibid.
254 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 91.
255 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 84.
256 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 87.
257 Ibid: 84.
258 Ibid: 89.
in blankets and bury them... They always buried them sitting up, and facing the East, of the rising sun.”

Wilkes, supports Nannup’s statement, with his declaration that the Aboriginal custom was to “…dig the grave in an east-west direction so that when the body was placed in the grave, it was positioned in a slightly half-sitting position with the head facing east. This was done so that the spirit of the dead could see the dawn of the morning following the burial. If the spirit was placed in an angled sitting position, it would see the new dawn’s rays of lights, and so be transported by the light into the spirit world of the Dreamtime.”

Kelly, further explains that there would have been a diverse set of burial rituals on the island due to the multiple tribal groups sharing the one space and burial site:

“…that’s pretty hard to fathom, particularly when...burial rights and traditions across the state are very different from country to country and they differ – even in Noongar country – from place to place, up but there is one common thing [which] is that your body goes back to the country where you came from and you have got these senior people – these law men – these cultural people being buried – Noongar or otherwise being buried in this place...you know this Wadjemup...this place of spirits across the ocean...a long, long way from places where people should have been buried and they’re still there...”

With less than 100 natives alive, mainland inhabitants thought it was time conditions on Rottnest were examined. F.N. Broome was appointed Governor at the time of the first epidemic, and after attending the jail during this period he quickly ordered an official inquiry, which instigated the “first Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody in 1883”. The Commission of Inquiry included Comptroller of Prisons, Dr. Waylen, and surveyor, John Forrest, and after lengthy debate the Commission officially condemned no party, but it did propose that, “…the island prisoners be issued with extra coverings during cold nights and also warmer clothing during winter.”

Previously, the more fortunate prisoners had been supplied only with cotton shirts and, more strangely kilts, which were made from pieces of rugs and blankets, which had ropes attached to act as waist-belts.

Despite the archaic resources at his disposal and the tragic outbreak of disease and illness Jackson was seen as a more caring and astute man. In fact, in the seventeen years of Jackson’s administration only one case of wilful cruelty is recorded, when a prisoner working on a road near Government House was struck violently by a warder. After the prisoner complained Captain Jackson gave the warder the option of putting in his resignation or being recommended for dismissal. The warder resigned.

259 Nannup, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
261 Kelly, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
262 Truth may still be buried on popular island retreat, The Koori Mail, Wednesday, June 30, 1993: 3.
263 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia’s Tempestuous History. Volume 1: 41.
264 Ibid.
265 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 36.
A more harmonious occurrence, in 1872, highlighted that Wadjemup prison was not all ‘doom and gloom’ when a corroboree was given in honour of the famous novelists Anthony Trollope, who claimed that the celebration and corroboree “…was the best ever I saw.” In fact, following this corroboree, many more were routinely allowed, and performed by the prisoners, on the island in the subsequent years.

Under Governors Weld and Broome, conditions on Rottnest improved, including the utilization of teams of experienced white convict tradesmen who were dispatched to the island to improve accommodation. It should still be noted that most of the major works and buildings on the island (which are still standing and in operation), were built with the ‘blood, sweat and tears’ (literally) of Aboriginal prison labour – including the summer residence for Governors (now the newly revamped Quokka Arms Rottnest Island Hotel). In addition, and as significant, on the mainland Aboriginal prisoners assisted in the building of Perth’s Town Hall, the Fremantle Bridge, the Pensioners’ Barracks, Government House, and many other fine buildings, besides hundreds of kilometres of roads.

Great change was again to take place at Rottnest Island when, in 1883, another Commission of Inquiry into prison conditions rejected a proposal to close Wadjemup prison down, justifying its decision by claiming that it was “…their duty to teach Aboriginal people to respect the justice of white law.” The circumstances of Aboriginal prisoners did improve, however, with the appointment of W.H. Timperley as superintendent in 1884. He introduced new sanitary measures, including placing wash troughs in the prison yard, more rigid washing routines, spare clothing during wet periods, and most significantly having the pit toilets located well away from the living areas and having them constantly cleaned. Improvements to the food ration also took place with flour, meat, tea, sugar, vegetables and rice included in the prisoner’s newly revamped diet. However, Kwaymullina claims that despite these and other reforms that the prisoners witnessed they “…in no way counterbalanced the inhumane treatment that Aboriginal prisoners suffered and would continue to endure… Yet the only crime of Aboriginal prisoners was resisting invasion.”

Despite relative isolation of the island, and respectively little reporting on the heinous conditions that the prisoners had to endure, occasionally newspapers would ‘get wind’ of the dreadful conditions on the island and condemn the prison establishment. These newspaper stories were not only confined to metropolitan Perth but were reported as far away as the dusty eastern goldfields of Coolgardie and Kalgoorlie. For instance, an article in the Golden Age pointed out that “…the prisons inspector last visited the island seven years ago and then only to hand a man (over for imprisonment)…[H]ere is material for a threepenny shocker [thriller] in which truth might prove very much stronger than even shocker fiction.” Austen describes Wadjemup as a “…living tomb…in which the native owners of the soil had been buried many years.”

266 A celebration of song-lines and ancient rituals via dance, music and costume. Known as kobori, kakarook, doodjarak, warangka or midaar in Noongar
267 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 37.
268 The Barracks’ Arch from the front is the only remaining remnant of this building on St George’s Terrace Perth, with Parliament House in the background and the sunken Mitchell Freeway in between.
269 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia’s Tempestuous History. Volume 1: 43.
270 Kwaymullina, "Wadjemup: Holiday Paradise or Prison Hell-Hole": 112.
272 Kwaymullina, "Wadjemup: Holiday Paradise or Prison Hell-Hole": 112.
273 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 118.
274 Ibid.
Wadjuk Elder Cedric Jacobs continues the narrative of the Noongar connection to the island, in both a cosmological, spiritual, physical, and colonial sense as a result of the penal occupation and deaths on the island – he also describes Wadjemup’s eternal connection to other Aboriginal tribes and peoples across the state:

“...the records also show that the greater percentage of the people who were imprisoned in Rottnest Island are Nyungar people from my country. The greater percentage so...Wadjemup has special significance to we who are Nyungar people...as it does to all people right across the state...and it has an effect of uniting us...”

Nannup reinforces the concept of Wadjemup as a keystone of travesty and dispossession, and a hub for the colonial expansion from Noongar country (including the core Swan River Colony), into the ‘frontier’ regions of the Goldfields, Gascoyne, Murchison, Pilbra and finally the Kimberley pastoral plains:

“When we look at the burial ground, and we start to think about how it was used, we find that the very beginnings of the island as a prison – eighteen thirty-eight onward – the first prisoners taken over there were from the South West, as Nyoongars. Then you begin to find a clear layer of settlement that moved out from there, and there’s three waves; those early years were all Nyoongar people. We then find places like the Mid-West, the Murchison, the Gascoyne, to a lesser extent, some parts of the Goldfields. And then of course there’s the final layer – and that is the 1880s onwards: The Kimberley...”

3.6.2 Prisoners Sent to Rottnest Island From All Over WA

All for the Land
(Part I – cont.)

Thus to the cruel, brutal island
we are banished
To that warra place where
none of our clan has ever returned
In body maybe, In spirit –
Never!

Across the sea to the place of the Dead
Wadjemup! Where the South Wind kills
Quick! Tell the warriors! Flee to the hills and resist...
Resist, until death, for there is no future for us
Our land is trussed
like we are trussed
in these shackles and chains
that burn and break our flesh
Forcing us the Desert People, to the sea

Graeme Dixon

275 Jacobs, Cedric "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground Project."
276 Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
277 Dixon, Holocaust Revisited: killing time: 5.
After the conquering of the Noongar in the Southwest, the 1840s and 1850s were years of vast change in Western Australia. The expansive coastal region, from Geraldton to Albany, became less mysterious as stock routes and passable roads were opened up and, as a direct result, pastoral stations established. As the expansion took place in these regions more water sources were discovered and thus pastoral areas expanded, along with newly discovered deposits of minerals and precious stones. Hence “...the more adventurous stopped clinging to the borders of the Swan and Canning rivers…” and ventured East, North and beyond their comfort zones. The Western Australian Frontier was born, and tragically, as a direct result more Aboriginal peoples came from the Northern regions to be imprisoned at Rottnest.

Green & Moon note, in Far From Home, that very few prisoners on the island after 1860 were from the metropolitan area, and Green reiterated this when being interviewed: 279

“...the second period, which began with the arrival of Governor Kennedy and who reopened the prison in 1855, the prisoners would have been brought from different parts of the colony. Keep in mind that in 1846 new pastoral laws allowed the pastoralists to venture far beyond the line of supervised settlement and take up large blocks of land, further and further away from Perth. Aborigines arrested in these areas for stock killing would have been chained by police, brought to the nearest port of call, Geraldton, or as the pastoralism and the pearling extended to the north from the Pilbara to the Kimberley, Gascoyne and with the gold rush and the eastern development from distances far to the east, some three hundred kilometres on the chain, to a place like Carnarvon where they would be held for up to a month waiting for the coastal ship to arrive, taken on board, usually in the hold under pretty horrific conditions, and then arriving in Fremantle, sometimes in the clothes that they were or naked as they were arrested in the warmer northern climate. And arrived and held at the Roundhouse Fremantle. In this second period there was a doctor that examined and deemed them fit to make the sea voyage to Rottnest Island.” 280

Within the plains and townships of the expanding pastoralists regions of the north-west, whenever a ‘crime’ was committed the West Australian police would round up a number of Aborigines without warning, chain them together and take them to the nearest police station or lockup regardless of whether they were connected to the ‘crime’ or not. Sometimes the Police Officers bringing these prisoners into town for trial, or as witnesses, would use giant hollow boab trees as overnight lock-ups. 281 This scenario was commonplace in the Kimberley, with many Kimberley Aboriginal men (who were often lore-men of great standing and with an abundance of cultural knowledge and prestige) would own up to crimes that they had not even committed for fear of being beaten, or worse murdered. 282

278 Nairn and Pash, Western Australia’s Tempestuous History. Volume 1: 27.
280 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
281 Nicholson, Australia Locked Up: 23.
282 Elder, Blood on the Wattle: Massacres and Maltreatment of Aboriginal Australians since 1788: 229.
This is supported by Haynes, Barrett, Brennan & Brennan in *W.A. Aborigines 1622 – 1972*, who report that, “To secure a conviction the accused are accordingly made to plead guilty – at the muzzle of the rifle, if need be.” Further, it was not uncommon for the authorities to put the pressure of blame on the innocent and/or the young. On the 11th of November 1904, in the Wyndam Gaol, a child of about 14 years named Boodungarry, undergoing a sentence of two years hard labour for alleged cattle killing, speaks in pidgin and claims:

“I was caught by...[policemen]. Some others, named Manulla and Goominyah, were with me and other men. We were caught at the camp at Mt Barrett. I had been working for a white man, but left and went into the bush. [Policeman] asked me if I killed cattle. I said ‘No’. [Policemen] then talked together, and they said they would shoot me. [Policeman] put a cartridge in his rifle, pointed it at me, and said he would burn me at a rock. It frightened me, and then I said I did kill a bullock. The first time I said I did not kill any cattle, but this time I was frightened when he said he would shoot, and I said I did kill cattle. He took me and some other ‘blackfellows’, who were also frightened. They all said they had killed a bullock because they were frightened. The policemen put handcuffs on our legs and hands. Two of us were chained by the legs. They then caught some more ‘blackfellows’ – a big mob – and some ‘gins’, and took us away. [Policeman] got a ‘gin’ and took her into a gully. I have seen Policemen...’marry’ plenty of ‘gins’. We were taken (in chains) to Hall’s Creek. At the Court House I said nothing, because [Policeman] told me not to talk. [Other Policeman] hammered plenty of ‘blackfellows’ with nulla-nulla. I do not know why he ‘wommered’ [beat] them, but he frightened me and I did not talk in the courthouse.”

Green notes that the main crime, or more technically correct, the main charge that Aborigines were convicted of in the north-west was cattle and sheep stealing or killing. Like the crucial reduction in numbers of wild game in the south, which affected the Noongar, the tribal groups of the north also had their traditional food sources disrupted and moved on by the farming practices of the pastoralists. These trumped up charges were also used as a tool to remove Aborigines from their traditional lands for long periods of time:

“The frontier crime was usually in the category of cattle killing or sheep killing, and this also reflected the frontier. But sheep was the predominant stock and you walk around and you see a group of strange animals there, and you’re feeling hungry, you kill them. And some of the settlers had flocks of twenty to thirty thousand with

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283 Haynes and History Association of Western Australia., *W.A. Aborigines, 1622-1972*: 28-29.

284 ‘Pidgin’, is a simplified language that develops as a means of communication between two or more groups that do not have a language in common. [Source: http://www.thefreedictionary.com/pidgin]

285 In traditional terms a hunting stick or club, mainly used by the male, in the terms of the police – more likely a police baton.


287 Note: the relative importance of the convictions for killing cattle can be seen by noting that, of the 194 Aborigines who were convicted in 1901-02, 111 were found guilty of killing cattle and that in 1902-3, 61 of the total of 128 convictions were for killing cattle. Ibid.
one shepherd to look after them, or it might have been an Aboriginal shepherd. If you only wanted a limited number of people and a group of 20 or 30 Aborigines arrive, the easiest way to get rid of them is to complain that they are killing your stock, they are arrested, convicted by the JP, who is usually the local pastoralist, or if the law dictated by two JP’s, and usually they are both pastoralists, and if they consider the crime or their powers of sentencing for one year are insufficient, then they will have them taken down to the coast where the resident magistrate will have powers to convict them to three years.” 288

Another scandalous action that was regular in the Northwest was Aboriginal women being made to turn informants against men from their own tribal groups, and in some instances against their own husbands. Adding to this damaging act was the incidences whereby northern Aborigines were admitting guilt to a crime that they may have committed some time ago; sometimes crimes for which an individual had already been punished:

“I think, and have seen it, that a man will plead guilty now for killing a beast some time ago: the native cannot separate two charges on two beasts, and will plead guilty to every subsequent charge of killing a bullock, no matter how often he will be charged with it.” 289

Many of the pastoralists did not care about the traditional lands of the North-west Aborigine, or their eternal claim as traditional custodians of the land. Alfred Wernam Canning was a Western Australian government surveyor, who is best known for surveying in 1906 and 1907 a stock route for bringing cattle 1500 km overland from the Kimberley district to the Goldfields. In 1906 he wrote:

“I look forward to the time when all of this country will be stocked, though at present the natives are plentiful, and as has been proved higher up the Sturt where stock are running, they are a constant annoyance to the squatter, not only killing his cattle in fairly large numbers, but by running them about, making them very wild and hard to manage. Certainly the police are on the alert, and a good number of them have been sent to gaol when caught, but it does not seem to act as a deterrent, the natives who have been in gaol apparently having a contempt for those who have not…” 290

Another scribe had a more barbaric and inhumane method to deal with this apparent ‘Native problem’. Frank Wittenoom, at the time the largest employer of Aborigines in the North-west suggested:

“…that all police be withdrawn, and that the settlers be allowed to deal with the natives in their own way: he thinks that if half-a-

288 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
dozen of the worst ringleaders were shot it would ‘soon put an end to the whole affair’…” 291

This type of uncivilised and merciless discourse was not uncommon in the State at the time. In fact, some whites argued that the British justice approach should be abandoned entirely and that:

“…it would be a good time for the WA Government to shut its eyes for, say, three months and let the settlers up here have a little time to teach the ‘nigger’ the difference between thine and mine…It would only have to be done once and, once done, could be easily forgotten about.” 292

This heartless and repellent letter, from the fast expanding Kalgoorlie region (due to gold and farming prospects), reflects the hatred and racism towards the Aboriginal population, at the time:

“I have been in daily contact with the natives of Western Australia…I can safely say (and I know the whole country from the Gulf right around) I have never met such low class of humanity [sic] in my experience than I have seen…These people have a semblance of human form, but outside of that they are animals of the lowest type, and have only the animal instincts of thieving and eating. They want no consideration, and the sooner they are wiped off the face of Western Australia the better. If the Government would send out shooting parties to destroy all who are left at the very earliest moment, West Australia would go ahead much quicker.” 293

The Aboriginal tribal groups from the north of the State had suffered not only from the expanding pastoral industry, but also from the influx of prospectors as the result of the discovery of gold in 1881. Adding to this was the already existing, but now rapidly advancing, pearling industry 294 (mainly in Broome). These gold and pearling discoveries brought a greater Police presence to the region than before and as a result Aboriginal incarceration increased dramatically. With this a Geraldton reporter suggested that a jail – similar to Rottnest Island – should be set up on one of the north-western islands. Lockups existed in the North-west, and were incorrectly termed prisons, when in fact these overcrowded holding cells sometimes held as many fifty or sixty prisoners. They were designed to hold twenty prisoners. In the hot weather conditions, common to the North-west, “…the stench had passers-by complaining.” 295

291 R. Fairbairn, a resident Magistrate, investigating the Aborigines stealing large numbers of sheep and cattle in the expanding pastoral industry; 5th August 1882 in: Ibid: 25.
293 A letter sent to the Kalgoorlie Miner by ‘I No Em’ and published on the 17th December 1897. Haynes and History Association of Western Australia., W.A. Aborigines, 1622-1972: 41.
294 Pearling in Western Australia existed well before European settlement. Coastal dwelling Aborigines had collected and traded pearl shell as well as trepang and tortoise with fishermen from Sulawesi for possibly hundreds of years. After settlement the Aborigines were used as slave labour in the emerging commercial industry.
295 Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 86.
Like the reign of terror that predominated in the settlement of the Swan River Colony, and subsequent extinguishment of Noongar resistance, the expanding ‘frontier’ of the north, which included the pastoral, mining and pearling industries, also included annihilation of the Aboriginal tribes who did not adhere to the new ways of the European. This death by parties of police and colonists continued in the Kimberley into the early twentieth century and the utilization of Rottnest Island prison as a tool of dispossession affected the northern tribes like it did their southern counterparts. Such exploits left the colonists “…embroiled in a welter of denials and cover-ups of atrocities and abusive treatments of Aborigines,”296 and no more true was the adage from historian Neville Green regarding the actions of the colonists: “…they came, they saw, they took…” 297

Within both houses of parliament the all-powerful pastoral lobby used its control to protect their own economic interests by “…passing unprecedented discriminatory legislation to ensure a stable Aboriginal work force and to stop cattle killing and other Aboriginal ‘depredations’.” 298 Not seen in the general population since the 1870s these newly revamped legislative measures included the reintroduction of whipping of Aboriginal’ men and “…extraordinary gaol terms of up to five years for breach of employment contracts compared to three months under the Master and Servants Act, which now excluded Aboriginal workers.” 299

Predominately the pastoralists were able to use their parliamentary and police influence to manifest an environment of Aboriginal slavery. A concerned ex-citizen of the Colony, Walter Malcomson, writing a letter to the Editor of The Times London newspaper claims: “…the Western Australian Government passed pages of Acts and clauses to rob them [Aborigines] of all liberty, and to bind this low type of people to work without payment…”300, Malcomson added, “The Western Australian squatter is altogether inferior to those of other States in Australia, the others pay white men to do their work, the Westralian only employs slaves…” 301

The Reverend J.B. Gribble commenced missionary duties near Carnarvon in 1885 on behalf of the Church of England. Upon voicing his opposition to the treatment and exploitation of the local Aboriginal population, he was forced to leave. Before he did so, he published his findings, which were printed under the heading; Dark Deeds in a Sunny Land or Black and White in North-West Australia:

…the wife of a certain settler told me her husband said ‘he could keep his natives as long as he liked’. That is just the fact of the matter – they are kept as long as their owners like…But yet another reason for my defining the native labor system as a species of slavery is the sad fact of the assignment of native women and the girls to white men, the great majority of whom are single. This, to my mind, is the most sad association of the whole native labor

297 Ibid.
298 Ibid.
299 Ibid.
300 Walter Malcomson (Belfast) writing to the Editor of The Times, London, 2nd May 1904, p.5. Cited in Haynes and History Association of Western Australia., W.A. Aborigines, 1622-1972: 43-44.
301 Walter Malcomson (Belfast) writing to the Editor of The Times, London, 2nd May 1904, p.5 Cited in Ibid: 44.
question. Most admitting that they had them (native women and girls) for ‘immoral purposes’.  

Often violence was to accompany this slave and master mind-set. The *Sunday Times* newspaper in Perth, mentioned the case of a squatter, who had annexed the wife of a local Aboriginal in the North-west. Upon requesting his wife be allowed to come back with him, “…this 'justice of peace' fired both barrels of a shot gun into the native’s legs and left him to crawl away and die as he liked…” This letter, and many others, led to a Royal Commission which reported in December 1904 and the findings instigated the *Aborigines Protection Act 1905*, and effectively laid the foundation for Aboriginal administration in Western Australia until 1963.

With this increase in settler violence, legislative control and police presence in the West Australian Frontier, it is therefore hardly surprising that Aboriginal imprisonment rates soared from the 1880s to levels far higher than in any other colony in the continent. Most of those northern Aborigines arrested and incarcerated between 1841 and 1907 were gaoled in Australia’s only Aboriginal gaol: Rottnest Island. The island is described by Haebich as a “…hellhole of death by disease, execution, abuse and over crowding – an Australian ‘gulag’ with hundreds of unmarked graves as testimony to the brutality there.” She correctly points out that, in addition to the thousands of Aboriginal prisoners sent to Rottnest, “…Hundreds of others were crowded into local prisons in the northern towns of Derby, Wyndham and Roebourne.”

Just as the South-west Noongar had suffered and witnessed their tribal lands alienated by the colony and settler, the North-west Aborigine would be subject to the same level of disadvantage by the effects of the ‘frontier’ and the pastoralists. Hammond argues that, “The North West has been badly neglected by a long succession of Governments from the natives’ standpoint. Large leaseholds have been granted for stock runs, no provision being made for the real owners of the land. They were deprived of their living and hunting-grounds, and forced to mix with other tribes, which was contrary to their principles and added still more to their misery. The white men could take all their meat, food and water, as well as their land but the natives could not say one word in their own defence.”

Another controversy was to present itself as a result of the Rottnest Island prison establishment. Due to the remote locations and considerable distances that Aboriginal prisoners were being arrested at, and transported from, the authorities found it necessary to chain all native prisoners and pay a Constable to oversee the capture and transfer. The journey to the place of trial took many days, longer in the wet season, and often the prisoners were not adequately fed. Rations could not be sufficiently transported as the number of prisoners to be captured could never accurately be predicted, plus the Constable would invariably never give up his own rations. Hence the prisoners often relied on what wild game could be procured; and often it was not much. This system

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303 Walter Malcomson of Belfast’s letter to the Editor on page five of *The Times*, London, 2nd May 1904, Malcomson quotes and comments on a report in the *Sunday Times* - Cited in Haynes and History Association of Western Australia,, *W.A. Aborigines, 1622-1972*: 44.

304 Ibid: 43.


306 Ibid.

was rife to abuse and misappropriation, as the Constable was given a ration of 2 shillings per head per day, and often would arrest “…every native he sees…putting them on a chain and thereby earning a big cheque on the way to the Gaol…” 308

The advent of the steam ship – or ‘steamers’ as they were more commonly known – was of great benefit to the white population, particularly in making access to the North-west more convenient and logistic. So whilst these ‘steamers’ assisted the majority of the population they were, “…a disastrous blow to the black population of that part of the country.” 309 In simple terms all that these industrial advancements brought was the quickening of the dispossession of the North-west Aborigine as the ease of transport to the North-West allowed settlers and pastoralists to take “…up the country and driving the natives off.” 310 Dreadfully, as easy as it was to transport settlers and farmers north on the ‘steamers’, it was now just as easy to transport Aboriginal prisoners south to Rottnest Island.

Occasionally, but rarely, settlers or authorities would complain publicly about the cruelty with which Aboriginal prisoners were transported from the north to trial in Perth, or alternatively, trial in the north and imprisonment on Rottnest Island. A newspaper received a report from ‘Humanitas’ regarding two Aborigines convicted at Roebourne and sent to Rottnest prison. According to ‘Humanitas’, “These unfortunate wretches were placed in irons – one having a chain fastened round his neck to which the other was handcuffed, and were so kept for the twenty-five days the voyage lasted from Cossack to Fremantle . . . I appeal to the colonists at large to know if such barbarity is to be tolerated.” 311

Another factor that needs to be considered for the North-west Aborigine was the diversity of their cultures and language groups. Say for a journey of 800 kilometres, from Perth to the Murchison, a traveller would come into contact with quite a different kind of Aboriginal in as far as customs, ceremonies and language are concerned. They had similar features and skin colour and in general the methods of living were alike, but they were unable to converse with each other and had different names for everything. 312

This would cause major problems when men (lore-men) from different parts of the Kimberley, then the Pilbra and moving south through the Gascoyne and Goldfields into the Noongar country were mixed in with each other; both within the chain gangs, then the holding cells, the steam ships, the Round House and then the trip across the sea to Rottnest. Tammar talks about her grandfather and the in-fighting that would occur because of the breach of traditional law and diversity of the Aborigines incarcerated:

“From what I know of he did his time and then went home. But it was a bad time because he was with Aboriginal men from all over the state and there were a lot of differences amongst them, a lot of squabbles I suppose…” 313

309 Hammond, Western Pioneers: The Battle Well Fought: 34.
310 Ibid.
311 Austen, A Cry in the Wind : Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 83-84.
312 Hammond, Western Pioneers: The Battle Well Fought: 114.
313 Tammar, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
Thankfully, of the hundreds of deaths recorded on the island, there were no recorded deaths as a result of in-fighting or violence between the prisoners. Green explains that there existed three main causes of death on Rottnest Island:

(i) Introduced disease, (ii) Accidents and (iii) Executions.

“Working back backwards on that, there were five executions, a couple from the Southwest, a couple from the Pilbara and several from the Kimberley. Most, they were all prisoners sentenced to death for the murder of a white man. And the executions were conducted on the island, mainly as an example to the prisoners of how British justice works. If you kill a white man, then this is what happens...

...And on these occasions all the Aborigines were assembled to witness the executions...”  

In their text *Far From Home*, Green and Moon, state that there were five Aboriginal prisoners executed over the history of the Rottnest Island Prison establishment. They provide a different location for the executions. All were by hanging, on the island itself, evidently in the exercise yard of the Quod or in the vicinity of the Prison grounds. The five Aboriginal prisoners executed were: Tampin (1879 for murder) Wangabiddie (1883 for murder), Guerilla (1883 for murder – same day as Wangabiddie), Nannacrow (1883 for murder) & Carlabangunburra (Cuibergerana) (1888 for murder). All were executed for murder of a white settler, except for Carlabangunburra, who murdered a Chinese resident.

Rottnest Island was deemed desirable, mainly for deterrent purposes, to carry out executions of Aboriginal prisoners within the State. On one such occasion Superintendent Jackson, who oversaw four of the five executions of Aboriginal Prisoners on Rottnest, was given instructions to delay the release of 10 prisoners ready for release so that “…they could take back to the Gascoyne the news of the execution…” and “…thus see the punishment that awaits those who break the white mans law…” in the hope that “…the news of the punishment they suffered will be spread far and wide among their own and other native tribes, so that Aborigines living in the far-distant parts of the Colony may learn that the shedding of man’s blood will surely followed by the equally violent death of the murderer.” Swan River Elder Albert Corunna and Wadjuk Elder Cedric Jacobs discussed this in their interview:

“…you read stories of where the people were...sentenced to be hung and they (the authorities) would stop the release of any prisoners from the island...even though they should have been hung in Fremantle here, they took them over there and hung them and they stopped the release of any Aboriginal prisoners who were due for release until this hanging, they had to witness this hanging.

314 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
315 AKA Wangabiddy, Wanjibidd or Wangerbiddy.
316 AKA Guerilla, Gourhilla, Gerilah or Kearali.
the trauma these people had to suffer to see one of their country men or see an Aboriginal person hung, they had to witness that and then they were released, so there is no doubt that they not only wanted to show fear, they wanted to traumatising them in every way they could...” 321

“... So already you have put yourself in the role of these men and it has to be one of the most traumatic experiences that these men had endured. I mean even then they would have been ready to have just ended their life.” 322

One can only imagine the emotion of fear, confusion and anxiety that went through the minds of these perplexed Aboriginal prisoners as they were readied to be executed. How could we ever know the feelings that these five executed prisoners, so far from their homelands, would have felt as they placed their feet for the first time onto the strange land, which was to be their final resting place? The Inquirer Newspaper from the 26th of June 1883 reported, in detail, the execution of Wangerbiddy and Guerhilla:

On Monday June 18 the natives, who had been convicted of the murders of Redfern and Cornish, suffered the last penalty of the law at Rottnest. At about two o’clock in the afternoon all the native prisoners on the Island were mustered in the large yard, at one end stood the scaffold. The men were ranged around the yard with their backs to the walls, the warders standing at intervals in front of them armed with revolvers, while the scaffold was guarded by...the constables. Shortly after two o’clock the officials proceeded to the condemned cell in which Wangabiddy was confined, and upon entering it they found he was busily occupied in finishing his dinner. The wretched man was pinioned by the hangman and led to the scaffold; but the executioner experienced some little difficulty in properly adjusting the noose round the man’s neck, a proceeding to which Wangabiddy seemed to most decidedly object. At half past two o’clock all was ready, the fatal sign was given, the lever was pulled, and the prisoner’s soul was launched into eternity, apparently without the infliction of the slightest pain, as death seemed quite instantaneous. 323

Watson, a young boy at the time, witnessed the execution first-hand, and thus described the execution in a more personal and descriptive manner: “...in full view...the native prisoners were drawn up in two lines...a pin could have been heard to fall as the condemned man was led from his cell by the warder in charge...Wangibiddy was launched into eternity! The death like silence of the prison yard was broken by startled ejaculations of terror from the awe stricken natives, and two of them overcome by shock fell fainting to the ground...the execution cast a gloom over the island for several days...” 324

The Inquirer Newspaper continues with its report of the execution of the second prisoner, Guerrilla:

323 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup:84.
324 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 53-54.
After the expiration of half an hour the Sheriff and the other
official proceeded to Guerrilla’s cell, and found him on the floor
apparently dozing. This man appeared to have felt all the horror of
approaching death more acutely than his fellow convict had done,
as he refused to eat any dinner at all, and seemed to be in a very
depressed state of mind. However, he ascended the scaffold
steadily and submitted to the fearfull preparations very quietly.
Death in his case was almost instantaneous, convulsive twitching
of the lower limbs being the only motion perceptible after the belts
had been withdrawn. Two of the native prisoners assisted to lay
the bodies in the rough coffins, which had been provided for the
purpose; and at the inquest, which was held afterwards, the jury
returned in each case a verdict of ‘Death in accordance with the
law’. 325

Green, continues his narrative regarding the principal causes of death of Aboriginal
prisoners on the island. Along with executions the other cause of death on the island
was as a result of accident:

“...there were several accidents on the Island. Several men
drowned at The Basin, and two of their friends dived in to try and
rescue them and they too were drowned.” 326

This tragedy occurred during the time of superintendent Colonel Angelo, who unwisely
allowed some Aboriginal prisoners, who had come from the vicinity of Cue and had
never seen, let alone been in the ocean, to swim at the Basin. Not surprisingly, these
prisoners found themselves in difficulties and four of them drowned, despite the best
efforts to rescue them.

Green says that the third main cause of death was disease:

“...And then the major cause of course was disease, and in 1883
was the major year for disease, 1897 was another peak year for
deaths by disease, and minor years in the sixties through introduced
disease. In the early years it was things like Whooping Cough, in
the 1860s, in the 1890s it was Influenza was the carrier, but in the
1880s it was a combination of measles, which came to the colony in
about 1880, and influenza. The poor conditions, the wet conditions,
the close contact with one another spread measles and influenza
throughout that group, and in that year I estimate that at least 79
people died in the cells in a matter of about four months. So it was
a bad year on Rottnest Island.” 327

Life for the Aboriginal prisoners was, in most respects, and for the most part, a ‘living
hell’. But fortunately within this narrative there was some respite from their atrocious
conditions in the instances when prisoners could roam free on the island every Saturday
or Sunday. They remained at liberty to swim, hunt, forage and create. Most prisoners
took the opportunity to hunt quokkas, birds and snakes for much needed protein, and

325 Moran, Rottnest : Ghosts of Wadjemup: 84-85.
326 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
327 Ibid.
many (particularly from the Kimberley) used pieces of glass and quartz to make spearheads. According to Watson, the prisoners “…received half a stick of twist tobacco as a reward for each reptile [deadly dugite snakes] captured…and the natives are unafraid and are very clever in the manner in which they detect and capture them.”

Getting off the island alive and successfully returning back to homelands and family was another celebration related to the island. In 1890, a group of Noongar released from Rottnest jubilantly and exuberantly returned to their traditional lands at Jerramungup and passing through their custodial country they “…collected about a hundred men, women and children for a grand carnival, or corroboree…[whereby] they feasted and danced all night.”

Regrettably the task of returning back to the remote northern regions of the Pilbra, and especially the Kimberley, was a much harder and riskier venture. On many occasions the released prisoner was left at various northern ports or rail depots with no rations, or idea of where they were. This journey back to their traditional homelands would be navigated through hostile territories, without a common language and identifiable navigation markers. Numerous prisoners were killed on their attempt to return home or re-arrested for needing to procure food. Some even found it necessary to stay in Noongar country and marry into a family thousands of miles from their traditional lands and people. The trek was also made more dangerous as a result of the ‘Frontier war’.

3.6.3 The Frontier War and Imprisonment on Rottnest Island

In the Kimberley region the ‘frontier war’ lasted longer than anywhere else on the Australian continent. Beginning in the 1880s and continuing until, at least, the 1930s the ‘Frontier war’ closely resembled Noongar resistance to colonisation in the Swan River Colony (and surrounding regions) in the 1840s and 1850s. This hardcore resistance in the northern regions led to one Englishman, writing home, declaring that, “The Australian ‘natives’…had committed far greater atrocities on the British than even the Zulus had, and the British had ‘fearful respect’ for them.”

Another evident parallelism was that one of the key figures in this Kimberley resistance – Jandamurra (better known to Europeans as ‘Pigeon’) – was both “…feared and respected” and, much like Yagan & Calyute, led the “…last great campaign of what some called the ‘Hundred Years War’.” Noted for his exceptional skill with traditional weapons and his ability to learn the language of the settler, he became renowned as a cunning warrior and began harassing pastoralists, killing sheep and utilising the mountains of his homeland to hide. A police warrant was issued for his arrest. Upon his arrest he served time in Derby gaol where he was permitted to train horses and was soon allowed free movement in the town. Upon his release he returned to work with a station owner, who treated him cruelly. Once again escaping into the mountain region he was captured and charged with absconding from bonded service.

328 Watson, Rottnest: Its Tragedy and Its Glory: 89.
331 Grassby and Hill, Six Australian Battlefields: the black resistance to invasion and the white struggle against colonial oppression: 65.
333 Ibid.
Rather than face another gaol sentence he became a ‘black tracker’ and formed a tight relationship with a man from a southern tribe called Captain. Despite a longstanding policy of not using Aboriginal trackers against their own people, Jandamarra was employed to capture his own mob – men he knew and was even blood-related to. Following tribal law Jandamarra released the captured men from his own tribe (including close associate and elder Ellemarra) and shot dead the Constable in charge whilst he slept, “The rebellion had begun…” 334

After a prolonged period of freedom, Jandamarra and his party – including Captain – were attacked by police and forced on the run. Captain was captured and sent to Rottnest Island and Ellemara was hanged in Derby. Captain was one of the most famous of Rottnest prisoners. He had already served time at Rottnest for murder, in 1891. As was common with other Rottnest prisoners he was paroled out to a police station far from his country and family – to Derby – where he met Jandamarra. Now at Rottnest for the second time, he was sentenced to 10 years, arriving on the Island in the month of August 1896 (prisoner number 155) with the orders ‘never to be released to the Kimberley.’ 335 According to Green, Captain’s “…term of imprisonment was shorter than anyone could predict.” 336 He, like many of his contemporaries, succumbed to influenza and he died in 1898. Remarkably Captain would only outlive Jandammara by one year. Jandamarra, after avoiding police capture for near 3 years, was shot dead on April 1st 1897. In that time he had become a Kimberley folk hero for evermore.

For a lot of Jandamarra’s people normal life still meant wandering the sweeping plains and hills. To be imprisoned in a stockade or tiny cell “…was beyond sufferance…” 337 And like their countrymen on Rottnest Island, some 2000 kilometres away, they yearned to be with their own, within their land, surrounded by the spirits of their ancestors. For anything else was simply death. A lot of the Pilbra and Kimberley Aborigines “…were unclear why they were prisoners, other than it was part of the resistance against the invader…” 338 and the colonisers could not understand why Aboriginal captives “…weakened so quickly even where food and clothing were adequate.” 339

Even hardline police officers in the ‘Frontier’ who had witnessed Aboriginal heroes and warriors defy time and time again their forces and the authorities in their own country wrote of the devastation that the Island of Rottnest was to cause such men:

…heroes of their earth who resisted the invader and claimed their own land and their own women, and speared the invader’s sheep as thy had speared their own game for centuries, were old and broken at Rottnest within a year. Few of them saw their own country again. Like shackled beasts they died’. 340

This view is also shared by Noongar Elder Noel Nannup, who expresses the importance of ‘connection to country’ and the displacement that an Aboriginal person feels once he (or she) is in a foreign landscape due to forceful removal:

336 Ibid.
337 Austen, A Cry in the Wind : Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 134.
338 Ibid.
339 Ibid.
“And once again it goes back to that living hell, where they’re off their country and spiritually they’re weakened. Even though they’ve got the trails that lead back to their countries from here, they feel weakened...” 341

Like Heelia, recognized as one of the first Aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest Island, and Captain, renowned as its most famous prisoner, or Tampin, who regrettably has the title of the first Noongar executed on the island, Lumbia is acknowledged as being one of the last Aboriginal prisoners to serve time on the island. He too would have felt the dislocation of his spirit and ‘Being’ as a result of being incarcerated on Rottnest, especially given the long and arduous journey that he would have had to endure from the top of the Kimberley to the cold south region. Kimberley woman Rosemary Walley (married into a Noongar family) was told stories about Lumbia from her mother who witnessed Lumbia’s trial and him being chained ready to depart for Rottnest:

“I would say for Lumbia342 to have been transported...he came down by boat, that would have been really scary and he would have had thoughts of ‘will he ever see his people again...?’ and then in that isolation that they were just totally surrounded by sea, I think, psychologically that would have played on his mind, because as far as his eyes could see - just would be water - and no solid ground, no land...that he identified with...So I think, psychologically it would have had a big effect on him. Yeah and quite often if you left country then there was little chance that you’d be seen again. So in actual fact it was a miracle that he survived the ten years at Rottenest and made it back to his home in the north...” 343

Green, reinforces Walley’s recollection by explaining the psychological effect on remote Aborigines and Lumbia’s connection to disturbing Kimberley colonized history:

“Aboriginal prisoners from remote areas who would suffer if they were locked into a prison cell where they went to the Island, one famous one was Lumbia, who in 1926 killed a settler up in the East Kimberley and triggered what has become known as the Forrest River massacre. 344

Police and armed forces carried out many clandestine raids and murders of Aboriginal groups throughout the state. Some of these raids were recorded and/or reported by the authorities or settlers (they were always remembered by the survivors and passed down through the generations by oral means) – including the Pinjarra Massacre, the Forrest River Massacre, the ‘Battle’ of Perth and the execution of Midgigooroo – and they were colonial tools to dissuade and banish any thought or action of Aboriginal resistance. Next, the concept of prisons, were utilized as a key element of colonial control and many prisons in the colony’s North were “…used almost exclusively for Aboriginal

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341 Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
342 Prisoner number 13083 – originally from Wyndham and recognized as one of the last Aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest. In the words of Green he ‘symbolized the final years of the Kimberley frontier, the last region of W.A. to be settled by Europeans.’ Lumbia was recognized as the impetus for the infamous ‘Forrest River Massacre’.
344 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
prisoners." Rottnest was the only designed prison for Aboriginal prisoners in the country and “Aboriginal people today are still subjected to disproportionately high rates of incarceration, in large part stemming from this colonial legacy.” Further, imprisonment served to sever ties of Aboriginal people with their families and communities and disconnect many from their heritage, their land and their homes, “…leaving them dispossessed and in a seemingly unbreakable cycle of crime and incarceration.”

One of the most adversely affected by the colonial law, order, incarceration and prison systems were the tribal lore men who preserved the cultural stories, protocols, initiations and law of their respective family or clan. There is no doubt that these senior men and elders were targeted by the police and authorities and were a crucial element in shattering the strength of the Aborigine and their vital harmony with their land, culture and their spiritual ancestors and lore. Once these men were arrested and deported to Rottnest the rest of the clan and tribal groups suffered immeasurably. According to Green their lives and their futures “…became marred by a pervading sense of hopelessness…”

Those who were left behind had to readjust thousands of years of protocol and practice. Lifestyles needed to radically change, almost overnight, and one of the most affected by the men being sent to Rottnest or other prison establishments in the north were the women of the tribe. They were also mostly forgotten in the story of Rottnest, within the historical annuals, and certainly in the thinking of the settler and authorities. But the descendents of these women undoubtedly have never forgotten the trials and tribulations that they had to endure to continue their (and their children’s) way of life:

“…like I said a lot of the women were left by themselves and had to fend for themselves, so…once again it was an extremely painful time for them (the women) and if they did have children at home…babies at home they had to look after them as well with no man…they couldn’t travel, very painful time…”

3.6.4 Final Prison Phase and Transition to ‘Holiday Island’

Alarmingly, by 1901 the Aboriginal population in the Southwest was believed to be reduced to only “…about 1419, of whom some eighty-five were ‘full-bloods’, the remainder being ‘half-castes’."

Regardless of the accuracy of these numbers there was no doubting that colonization, and all that it had brought to the colony and then the frontier – settlement, conquest, farming, mining, disease, incarceration, violence, murder, rape, alcohol, Rottnest, etc – indicated a “…considerable drop even from the conservative estimate of 6000 in the area immediately preceding conquest.”

346 Ibid.
348 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 118.
349 Tammar, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
351 Ibid.
In 1901 Western Australia became a State as part of the nations’ Federation. The Federation brought no change to the status of the Aborigines. They simply remained “…non-citizens of the new Commonwealth.” 352 Almost immediately one of its first parliamentary debates focused on the ‘Aboriginal problem’, and from this debate parliamentary legislation was passed which led to the state’s Aborigines Act 1905, whereby “…Aboriginal people became wards of state.” 353

Transportation of Aboriginal prisoners to Rottnest Island ceased in 1903, however prisoners continued their sentences on the Island until the 1920s.

“...they (Aboriginal prisoners) looked after the Island in terms of making sure the roads were kept up, the pathways were maintained, the firewood was there for the tourists, in the off season, the winter season they painted the buildings out and prepared them for the new run of tourists. One of the Aboriginals, Frank Nannup, conducted the horse and cart that took the tourists around to the tourist spots of the Island 354, they would cross over the causeway to the old salt works built by the Aborigines and the salt works maintained by the Aborigines. So the aspects of the Island had been built by the Aborigines became part of the tourist scene, and in fact every nineteenth century building on that Island, that forms part of that number one heritage site had Aboriginal labour, making it the major site in Australia for display of Aboriginal labour at work…” 355

During its near one-hundred year existence the establishment had changed from Governor Hutt’s vision of a training institution to a prison with “…a record of death, horror and despair unequalled by any other Aboriginal prison in the Australian colonies.” 356 A reason given for the phasing out of the prison on Rottnest was that other regional prisons were being built in areas closer to where the (mainly Aboriginal) prisoners lived or worked:

“Also, regional prisons were being established at Albany, at Roebourne, Derby and Wyndham, and they were being engaged at works there, so there’s less need for a prison on Rottnest Island. Some parliamentarians saw it as a good place to sell off and have retirement cottages and holiday cottages on the island, but fortunately the government saw otherwise and decided it would be retained for the public, and converted it into a recreation facility on the Island. So, in 1902 the Rottnest Island prison as such ceased, most of the prisoners who were already on the Island were sent back to the home community prisons Roebourne or to Broome or to Wyndham. It then became for a short period of time, from 1902-1931, an annex of Fremantle prison…” 357

354 Ironically his descendent (Dr Noel Nannup) would do the very same thing with modern tourists in the next century.
355 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
356 Green, Broken Spears: Aborigines and Europeans in the southwest of Australia: 171.
357 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
At the turn of the 20th Century the overall structure and principles of Rottnest had taken a dramatic ‘about-face’. Instead of being a topic to avoid, many parliamentarians and affluent settlers now confided that nothing would be “…more attractive than owning a summer place on the island.” 358 It was not long before settlers, of all persuasions and status, appealed to the Surveyor General’s office to issue grants on Rottnest Island. Writing to the West Australian In 1907 Somerville wrote in their defence: “…in a democratic community it will not be seriously contended that the man who has only means sufficient to erect a humble camp in which to spend a summer holiday has as much right to a block if he desires it, as the plutocrat who would erect a mansion.” 359 He was against completely privatizing the island – especially to the wealthy and influential – as this he said would, “…establish a little oasis where our local silvertails can retire, secure in the knowledge that they are safe from intrusion by the common herd.” 360

The period leading up to the First World War heralded a new era for Rottnest Island. With the threat of war growing more real each day, the island’s location as a forward defence position soon eclipsed its value as a potential holiday island. In 1914 Rottnest became, for a brief time, an interment camp for prisoners-of-war, those Europeans that had migrated from nations which were now enemies with approximately 1,700 German and Austrian people being interned. 361

However, the attitude of the prisoner-of-war internees was in complete contrast to the view-point held by most of the native detainees. One of the 1,700 prisoner-of-war internees wrote that the island to him was “…extraordinary in loveliness.” And that his first walk over the causeway between two small lakes filled him with joy and made him “…forget the war and the horrible bitterness it had stirred in people’s hearts.” 362

In 1917, some ten years after Somervill’s impassioned lobbying on behalf of the people, there was an upsurge of political pressure which led to Rottnest Island being declared an A-Class Reserve. Thus no portion of the island could be leased or sold (except by legislation), and strict regulations were introduced in an attempt to protect the island’s flora and fauna. On the island there would be complete bans on shooting, horses and dogs and it was made clear that misconduct and indecent behaviour would not be tolerated on the island at any time. 363 After much discussion, Rottnest was opened to the public as a holiday destination in 1917. Since 1864 it had been mainly used as a prison and also housed a Governor’s residence, but now it would be accessible to the general population.

The year 1918 was notable for the last Aboriginal prisoner death on the island 364 and not long after the dividing walls of the Quod prison cells were removed, making two cells into a room. According to Wiltshire, “…all [buildings] benefited from repairs and a fresh coat of paint.” 365 And during the 1920s camping sites were set up in Thomson Bay and Bathurst Point. More private huts were set up along a dirt track in Salmon Bay, opposite Green Island. 366

358 Wiltshire, Gone to Rottnest: 36.
360 Ibid: 41.
361 Ibid: 46.
362 Ibid: 47.
365 Ibid.
All of this revamp and newly constructed infrastructure gave the island a profile as a ‘holiday island’. By the 1930s weekenders moved about the island and its settlement with cheerful abandon. Wiltshire describes how this new influx of sun-seekers stamped the island as “…everyone’s favourite ‘getaway’.” 367

Setting the scene for future debate about development and lease holdings on the island in 1932 Parliament debated a bill, which allowed granting of leases for building sites on the island for periods of up to twenty-one years. 368 The West Australian received a letter from Dr Somerville, who again arguing for the ‘common man’, wrote: “…this unique and beautiful island – the whole of it – should be preserved as a public playground for the people for ever, and that no man, however influential or wealthy, should be allowed a right to exclude others from any portion of it.” 369

The proposal to grant leases was withdrawn, and according to Wiltshire, “…Western Australians gave a collective sigh of relief.” 370 This debate would not go away though, and as explained in a next chapter, the issue of Aboriginal memorial and protection would also be added to the matter of island development and resort tourism. But for that period of time and up to the current timeframe Rottnest seemed once again assured of remaining “…a public playground for the people”. 371

Wadjemup, more commonly known as Rottnest Island, from 1838 until 1931, for nearly a hundred gruesome years, was a prison for more than 3,600 Aboriginal men (and boys) between the ages of 8 and probably 80, they were chained by the neck and feet and brought to Rottnest from places all over the state; the Southwest, the Goldfields, Murchison, Gascoyne, and Pilbra regions all the way to the top of the remote Kimberley they came in the “…wake of colonial ‘expansion’.” 372 Now an Island for tourists Rottnest, which attracts around 500,000 visitors annually, is a holiday playground for Perth families and national and international tourists alike. The Island and its authority continue to mis-represent the truth, and deny “…the enormity of what actually went on during those days of incarceration.” 373

3.7 Post-Prison Period (1930s to Present)

Well before the declaration of the second world war the Army began building Kingstown Barracks at the eastern end of Rottnest including a narrow-gauge railway which ferried building materials from the jetty to the building site where the barracks administration block, hospital, officer’s mess, canteen, cottages for Non Commissioned Officers (NCOs), workshops and store was established. 374 When war was finally declared the once Aboriginal prison establishment, and the now holiday island, was transformed into a ‘fortress’ with a 9.3 inch gun installation built to take advantage of the sweeping ocean views. Rottnest is one of only three locations worldwide with such a gun installation still intact - the others being Gilbralter and Robben Island, South

367 Ibid: 43.
368 Ibid.
369 Wiltshire, Gone to Rottnest: 43.
370 Ibid.
371 Ibid.
372 Millroy, Jill in Mia et al., Gnyung Waart Kooling Kulark: released, going home: 2.
373 Millroy in Ibid.
374 Millroy in Ibid.: 49.
Africa.  

It became the first line of defence and in 1940 the island was closed to the public and declared a prohibited place under national security regulations. Wiltshire wrote that, “Fortunately the guns of Rottnest were never fired in anger and have now become a tourist attraction.”

After the war the island returned to its function as a public space and island of recreation. After several decades it was this ‘playground’ mentality that dominated the island and its visitors’ psyche. Long forgotten (but not by the Aboriginal community) were the cries of anguish from Aboriginal prisoners, the sound of ghostly silence as the executed lay suspended in time immortal from the hangman’s rope, or the echoes of tapping sticks and tribal chants from the many corroborees on the island. No these were all reserved to the silent history books, lost to the passages of time, etched from the memories of those that had been buried in unmarked graves or returned broken men to their tribal lands. Regardless that the prison itself, and most of the key infrastructure on the island, was built by Aboriginal prisoners, this island some 18 kilometres off the coast of Fremantle was now but a place of idle relaxation, of sun-baking by its crystal clear ocean water. But to the Aboriginal collective memory (and some well meaning historians) it was an ‘Alcatraz of Western Australia’; an Island off the state that was not easily accessible by most people...an island where Aboriginal people were left to die.

Government House was later turned into accommodation for holiday-makers and in 1953 became known as the Rottnest Hotel, commonly known by the public as The ‘Quokka Arms’. The former boys reformatory became a hostel.

The former gaol – known to the Aboriginal prisoners as the Quod – was the place where hundreds of Aboriginal men (and some boys) took their last phlegm ridden painful breaths, the place where Aboriginal prisoners were forced to huddle together in the freezing cold of the winter and lay in drenched sweat in the heat of the summer. The place where once proud Aboriginal warriors and lore-men vomited, pissed and shat – lying in their own urine and excrement – before being transported to their final resting place in the prison establishment’s hospital, which often doubled as a Morgue. Inconceivably, this place of horror was converted into visitor accommodation. The thought of this area being annexed and welcoming visitors only three decades since the illness plagued winter of 1883, whereby more than 60 Aboriginal men became gravely ill in their cells and ultimately ended in unmarked graves, beggars belief.

“So, in 1931 that phase of the Island ceased. And the Quod became part of the tourist centre, the cells were re-shaped and re-designed so that a cell that might have accommodated four people was broadened to accommodate more and little motel units now, and the Lodge which was boys reformatory, built in 1879, is attached to it. So, the two prisons, one for boys, bad boys, and the other for Aborigines, now formed the major holiday place on the Island.”

Refurbishments of the old Quod meant that these rooms become self contained units in which tourists pay hundreds of dollars to stay and sleep. Milroy asks “Where else in the world can you holiday in an Aboriginal prison cell for over four hundred dollars a night,

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375 Wiltshire, Gone to Rottnest: 52.
376 Ibid: 49.
378 Ibid.
379 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
next to where 5 executions took place and hundreds of Aboriginal men are buried?” The answer is, more than likely, nowhere. Very few societies in the world would contemplate turning a prison, in which an estimated 287 people died in miserable conditions thousands of kilometres from their traditional homelands and families, for tourist accommodation. Green poignantly comments that, “It is comparable to transforming (the) Auschwitz concentration camp into holiday cottages.” According to Green, and a view shared by most commonly decent people, tourists staying in these former cells – these former ‘death traps’ – as well as the general public, should be made aware of the Rottnest Island Resort’s horrific past. Hence Rottnest remains an unfathomable place of guilt and shame, compounded by its superficial and impossible desire to be the State’s ‘premier tourist destination’. Unbelievably, this lie and deception, is shared by the Tourism Council (the ‘voice’ of tourism in Western Australia), who congratulated Rottnest Island on its 2012 Australian Tourism Award. One can only shake his or her head in bewilderment and assume that despite Rottnest containing, within the main settlement, an Aboriginal cemetery (virtually unmarked) and seventeen Aboriginal heritage sites (again virtually ignored) none of this was mentioned or a criteria for the award. I have no doubt that the future awaits an appropriate island monument and memorial that recognises the gruesome hardships that these Aboriginal captives, who looked towards the mainland from Wadjemup and wept, had to endure and experience.

Many Aboriginal people ARE aware and respectful of the Wadjemup legacy and have attempted, over the years, to counter the thoughtless idea of Wadjemup simply as a holiday paradise. In an attempt to reveal its Aboriginal history many have given a countering interpretation of the island’s past:

\[
\text{I look across at Rottnest in the far off haze} \\
\text{where my people breathed their last sigh for home} \\
\text{the mainland to them the distant blue} \\
\text{What did they do but stand within the paths of cloven hooves} \\
\text{Their only crime to fight for what was rightly theirs} \\
\text{To them the island was a place of souls} \\
\text{departed down through eons of time} \\
\text{but by a savage twist of fate} \\
\text{No flight of soul for them} \\
\text{But chained they waited for their lot’s conclusion} \\
\text{to be forever part of the island of the dead}
\]

Jack Davis

This forgetting of Wadjemup’s Aboriginal shameful past is not a new phenomena. It can be traced back to 1937 when the treatment meted out to black prisoners on Rottnest Island was explained by a scribe as: ‘Such horrors are best forgotten and Australia is wiser and kinder today. It is a good thing that stones do not speak.’

\[380\] Calculated from the number of deaths between 1864, when the quod was first occupied and 1906, (less the numbers by drowning) in: Green and Moon, Far From Home : Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931: 83.

\[381\] Ibid.

\[382\] Ibid.


\[385\] Austen, A Cry in the Wind: Conflict in Western Australia, 1829-1929: 212.
As we move into a new century the question needs to be posed: Is Australia wiser and kinder? Are we, as a nation, following a full apology to the Aboriginal peoples from the Prime Minister in 2008, a more understanding and empathetic society? Indeed, in regards to the many forgotten massacres, incidents of removal of children, treatment of peoples like at Rottnest, it is a pity the stones and the trees, and the spirits, cannot speak. As Austin so eloquently declares: “If the horrors are forgotten, the next generation may think they never happened – there will remain little more than the cry in the wind…” 386

But this will never happen, because despite the best efforts of the Western Australian Government, along with its Rottnest Island Authority and commercial interest groups on the island, the island has Aboriginal men buried within its soil; the island’s heartbeat is shared by the spirit of these tribal men from around the State. Rottnest may have ceased officially to be a prison in the 1920s, but Aborigines had been sent there, with one short gap, since 1838. And colonial prison records showed that at least 364 Aborigines died there. In addition to this written evidence, a Curtin University ground-radar survey in 1993 indicated that hundreds of people were confirmed buried in the settlement area on the island. 387 The Aboriginal history of the island is indefensible, and in all probability, more considerable than what was first thought:

“Looking at what happened to all these people who died from various causes, particularly those from disease, usually they were transferred...to the hospital to spend their last weeks in the hospital built in about 1884, it still exists on the Island, hidden behind other buildings, but it is there. And from there they were taken to the grave, where they were buried, and I estimate that about 379 men are buried on the Island, that’s about ten percent of the total admissions to the Island, and are buried in unmarked graves...many of them, the majority of the deaths on that island, the majority of the graves are of Noongar men...and there may be a third grave on the Island that I have never been able to find...I suspect that there are actually three cemeteries on the Island. The white cemetery that has headstones and is very well known to tourists, then there was a prison that may have been down behind the jail, toward the lakes, because there are reports of pigs rooting out the remains of Aboriginal prisoners, there was a garden area there so it may well have been that the stock was held there, but in a report in about 1886 the superintendent reported that the new cemetery had been built for the Aborigines but to that point no one was in it, now I believe that prison he refers to is the one that is marked out, and set out as a heritage site of the greatest number of Aboriginals that died in custody of any prison in Australia are buried there.” 388

We will probably never know the exact number of Aboriginal deaths at Wadjemup prison. Green claims that the total deaths numbered up to about 400 men. But most Aboriginal people regard this to be conservative and have their own interpretation of the number of Aboriginal men that are buried beneath its soil. Green and Moon, via their text Far From Home, have done an exceptional job constructing a list of Aboriginal Prisoners that never made it off the island alive but even Green himself admits that the

386 Ibid.
387 Ibid: 151.
388 Dr Green, "Interviewed by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
figure is derived from existing, but incomplete archival records, and the number is still debatable and therefore inconclusive. Jacobs said in her interview:

“I don’t feel that only 400 odd men are buried on Rottnest Island, I feel that it would be more like probably 3½ thousand men because we know that possibly only 150, if that, Aboriginal prisoners at the end of the Quod life, managed to make it off the Island. So you have to ask questions, where are they…?” 389

Holocaust Revisited

History’s lies are now outlined
in brief sentences on your signs
“Once an Aboriginal Prison
where influenza took its toll”
Now tourists sleep fitfully
in those cold, damp cells
Where once the dispossessed
suffered in this colonial hell.

Did it make you wonder how
humans could treat others so brutally
Making your kind stew like devils
in the flaming pits of hell’s fury
whilst they cooled in the southern breeze
that chilled you and yours to the bone
Never having felt the icy sea blow
such a long long way from
the eternal warmth of your desert home.

Did you dream for your loved ones
left so far away in your sacred lands
Where the sky, stars, trees and horizons
were so different than this godless place
Did you remember the day they took
you and your warrior brothers
away from the place of your ancestors
where you roamed eternal with each other

The sacredness of those special places
where the old men
sang your history eternal
And the women danced
what could not be spoken
and how each taught
all parts of infinite law.

389 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
Huddled on the freezing earth
of the quod
mouthing the words of secret songs
trying to keep alive a piece of yourself
a piece that they could
never convince you was wrong
Even when they made you witness
the brutal strangulation of a warrior
they could make you cry icy tears
But not take away
your promise to one day

Return to this place of death and bloodshed
across the waters from your homeland
And let the spirits fly free to return
to the sacred places of their ancestors
And to one day, at last, truly find peace

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390 Dixon, Holocaust Revisited : killing time: 78.
3.8 Conclusions

As in this exegesis, the film (within *Act II*) informs the audience of the ‘need’ for a Prison on Rottnest Island due to the massive increase in Aboriginal incarceration throughout the State. Further, both the exegesis and film segment focus on the ongoing clash of Laws; British Law vs Aboriginal Customary Law. Within the film up to a dozen re-enactment scenes complement the narrative provided by the ‘talking heads’ (or interview narrators if you like) and provide a stark visual and sonic reminder of the major stages of the Rottnest Prison Establishment; from transport, arrival, (escape), Holding Cell (as seen below – the actual location), labour, Quod incarceration and conditions, disease, to death. One of the liberties taken by me, as both writer and director, within the film was showing the several beatings of various prisoners throughout the Superintendent Vincent period [explained in minute detail in the exegesis], but due to time and edit restrictions I found it necessary to present these in the film as an amalgam in a single scene. Hence a single [unnamed] prisoner is seen having hair from his beard being ripped off by Vincent using blacksmith tongs, then being beaten to the ground with a set of metal keys, and finally being kicked brutally by Vincent whilst on the ground. The sequence of events may be condensed and presented within one (edited) scene but the shock and brutality still remains intact. Actually I would argue that though considerable pages within the exegesis are spent acknowledging Vincent’s brutal and barabaric supervision, and the heinous conditions that the prisoners were privy to, the dramatic re-enactments (complemented with dialogue, action and/or non-diegetic soundscape) drive the message and barbarity home as, if not more, effectively for an audience.

In the cinema style reflects a way of seeing: it embodies the filmmaker’s relationship to objects and actions. But, as a way of *showing*, it also involves his relationship with the spectator. The film’s point of view is contained within each of these relationships.

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Chapter 4: Reconciliation, Museums and Monuments

4.1 Introduction

This chapter leads us to the third stage of our narrative; the Postcolonial’ or ‘Postmodern’, in which repatriation of the Ancestors, and their History and Memory is reconstructed. Thus what was “Possessed, then dispossessed is now viewed and expressed as repossession.” This current ‘post-modern’ third-phase is where the ‘true’ accounts and alternative narratives of Australian (Aboriginal) history can be (re)written without fear of reprisal or mockery. So post-Apology the narrative has now shifted to rightful memorial, remembrance and conciliatory healing.

4.2 Alternative Histories, Cultural Awareness and Reconciliation

“We are what we do together.”
Gerald Postema

For Gerald Postema, the past has a ‘moral presence’, the past is the very substance of our individual memory, and we need memory to make sense of our place in the world. Furthermore, ‘the hopes, aims, projects and values we hold as a community’ are a product of our collective memory: ‘We are what we do together’. This poignant statement by Postema powerfully relates the importance that memory – and thus memorial – has for the public conscience. This highlights the importance of a significant and symbolic memorial site on Rottnest Island.

Our national memory, and certainly our local memory (for people living in Perth, Fremantle, York and the Swan River) is intertwined with a culture of violence and dispossession. Not just from a ‘native’ experience but one also related to the convicts and the settlers attempting to find a ‘new world’ in which to (co)exist. In fact, while it is argued that the nation needs to progressively move forward, it is also counter-argued that this cannot occur until the past, and its horrific treatment of the first nation people, is addressed and deconstructed more directly, and with Indigenous people central to the discussion and debate. As expressed by Birch “Colonial history is increasingly being contested through wide-ranging Indigenous-produced media and textual production”.

A contemplative memorial space can only exist on Rottnest through collaboration and dialogue between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people, and through negotiation and trust between key Aboriginal organizations (state-wide), Government, Authority and the public. This is reinforced by Birch who writes that “…before dialogue for the future can be accomplished, Indigenous people who lie in the ground and the past they inhabit need to be recognised and commemorated so that the burden carried by elders…can be lifted.

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1 Postema, Gerald. On the moral presence of our past, 1991: 1176
3 Created or done to honor a person who has died or to remind people of an event in which many people died serving to preserve remembrance; also commemorative of or relating to memory. Something that keeps remembrance alive as monument or something (as a speech or ceremony) that commemorates. [Source: http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/memorial]
This can only be done when white Australia takes vigilant responsibility for its own past.\textsuperscript{5} Deborah Bird Rose further supports this when, within Birch’s text, she asks for ‘a moral engagement between the past and the present’ that acknowledges colonial violence and ‘acknowledges the moral burden of that knowledge’.\textsuperscript{6} Rose and Birch’s argument stems from the notion that the non-Indigenous community must take ownership of, and responsibility for, this violent colonial past.

In his essay on the construction of memory, Marc Auge informs us that ‘the duty of memory is the duty of descendants, and that it has two aspects: remembrance and vigilance,’\textsuperscript{7} Auge’s idea is the very essence of Aboriginal history and recollection. Traditionally, (and in contemporary times) stories of the past were endorsed and passed down orally through the generations by the Elders. Hence, when Elders speak of \textit{Wadjemup} they do so in a manner that is both remorseful and forceful. An example is the forceful tone that the former Rottnest Island Deaths Group Aboriginal Corporation Chairperson Albert Corunna takes when he writes:

\begin{quote}
Rottnest Island is a Death Island of Aboriginal People being sentenced there, many to die through sickness, coldness, hunger, harsh work, beatings, neglect and most of all, being away from their Family Structure on the Mainland. The Spirit People are still there, the Sufferers of Rottnest Island. The whole of the Quod where they were imprisoned, suffered and many died has to be handed back to their relations, the Aboriginal Elders Statewide through the Traditional Owners and Protectors and Keepers.\textsuperscript{8}
\end{quote}

In many ways Rottnest Island is a perfect case-study for the debate and misinterpretation that history has manifested within our nation. It is well over twenty years since the evidence of Aboriginal skeletal remains of former prisoners became a public issue and open for debate. Larissa Behrendt (2008) in the foreword to Curthoys, Genovese and Reilly (ix) questions “What history means, how we interpret it, and the role it plays in shaping our national identity have been central and controversial debates during the past decade. The ‘history wars’ or ‘cultural wars’ have been hardest fought over the telling of Aboriginal history.”\textsuperscript{9} The history of Rottnest Island spoken by an Aboriginal Elder is in striking contrast to the narrative usually given by a non-Aboriginal spokesperson.

Glen Kelly, of the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, whom are currently in negotiation with the State Government for a billion dollar Native Title deal, disagrees with critics such as the former Prime Minister John Howard, who declared the phenomenon of seeking an alternative to Australian colonial history with an Indigenous perspective as the ‘black arm band’ view of history. Kelly counters that he’d ‘…often have discussions with people about this and my rejoinder would always be ‘…better that than a white blindfold’…”\textsuperscript{10}

\begin{flushright}\textsuperscript{5} Ibid: 114. 
\textsuperscript{6} Ibid: 115. 
\textsuperscript{7} Auge in Ibid: 107. 
\textsuperscript{8} Corunna, Albert. \textit{Why the Quod on Wajemup/Rottnest Island is important to Aboriginal People of Western Australia}, Rottnest Island Deaths Group Aboriginal Corporation Press Statement, {date & page unknown}. 
\textsuperscript{10} Ibid. \end{flushright}
Kelly, like most of the key Aboriginal stakeholders and writers, disagrees with the neo-conservative view of history within contemporary Australia. That view is based on hidden, buried and suppressed narratives. Birch succinctly explains: “…privileged remembrances of and the contest over the colonial past are inextricably linked, in both a psychological and material sense.” 11

Anthony Kronman, in Curthoys, Genovese & Reilly, “…rationalises that our obligation to keep faith with the past is culturally based: culture is a cumulative construct, building on what has come before; we must keep faith with the past to ensure the continued accumulation and preservation of our culture; and to preserve our culture, we must respect the past ‘for its own sake’.” 12

Agreeing with the writers above, I argue it is both apparent and imperative that in order for the nation to move towards an honest appraisal of itself in any diligent and purposeful manner, its past must first be acknowledged, interpreted, debated and expanded. This is happening, as seen by the texts produced by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal writers, filmmakers and artists; however, this work needs to be expanded.

As noted previously, Wadjemup is a very suitable site for some of this work to be done. This requires (re)adjustment and (re)negotiation of the previous interpretation of the history of the Swan River Colony and the wider State. Currently Rottnest Island is best described as ‘…a holiday playground for Perth families and tourists alike’. This continues to mis-represent the truth and the enormity of what actually went on during those days of incarceration. 13 As Milroy asks:

Where else in the world can you holiday in an Aboriginal prison cell for over four hundred dollars a night, next to where 5 executions took place and hundreds of Aboriginal men are buried? It remains a guilty place, a confusing or enigmatic place to be, compounded by its shallow and impossible desire to be the State’s ‘premier tourist destination’. 14

The lack of questioning the morality of using the island as a playground without acknowledging its past is confusing and insulting for many in the Aboriginal community. Questions need to be asked and answered, exposing the hidden history of places, such as Rottnest Island, or the site of the Pinjarra & Forrest River massacres, the execution of Noongar leader Midgeriggodgoo, and the killing of his son and Noongar resistance fighter Yagan. The burial of this truth is best summarised by Henry Reynolds, who proclaims in his powerful and thought-provoking text Why Weren’t we Told?:

I am asked these questions by many people, over many years, in all parts of Australia…Why didn’t we know? Why were we never told? …Why do so many people ask the same questions of themselves, of their education, their heritage, of the whole of Australian society? 15

11 Birch, ”"The Invisible Fire": Sovereignty, History and Responsibility,": 108.
13 Millroy in Mia et al., Gnyung Waart Kooling Kulark: released, going home: 2.
14 Millroy in Ibid.
15 Reynolds, Henry. Why Weren't We Told?: a personal search for the truth about our history, 1991: 1.
According to Healy it is ‘…not just that a ‘distortion in the history of Australia’ [that] has to be corrected’ but that a ‘new history is required, a new history that not only tells different stories about Indigenous people but also tells different stories about non-Indigenous people…’16 This will help readdress the common misinformation that the public is exposed to. Healy usefully asks ‘What kinds of remembering and forgetting might enable us to live with these artefacts of colonial culture, both to tell different and enabling stories and to mourn?’ 17 Glen Kelly explains that the reason history in Australia is largely misinformation is “…people don’t like looking at the bad bits…which is the truthful bits…” 18

‘Cultural memory’ is a key to the survival of Indigenous peoples. It is one of the key arguments made by the SWALSC in the Single Noongar Claim for Native Title throughout the Perth Metropolitan area and the South West of Western Australia in the Federal Court of Australia. Cultural memory is the ageless tradition of Aboriginal (Noongar) oral history being shared with other Aboriginal (Noongar) persons; either from an Elder to another Elder and/or a selected privileged ‘story holder’ to preserve Aboriginal (Noongar) language, tradition, protocol and custom.

Hence Aboriginal participation in educating the public (by means of ‘Cultural Memory’) is paramount. Whether that (manifests) via multi-media, public address (or re-address), school and university lectures, public protests, academic transcript, board and committee participation and/or industry consultation the methodology is not the essence of the argument; the fact that it is allowed a mainstream forum is the real issue.

A famous African saying is that “When an Elder leaves us, a whole library burns down.” So how do Aboriginal stakeholders (including Elders) re-address this misinformation of history? How do the Aboriginal collective conserve, strengthen and promote neglected history and instigate change so that stories like Wadjemup and the Quod and the Burial Site are not removed from the sites of public consciousness?

4.3 Museums and Monuments

4.3.1 Role and Design of Museums and Monuments

“History isn’t was. History is. No matter how much we wipe our feet at the front door, we track history through the house. Leaving its muddy footprints all over the carpet.”

Phillip Adams 19

Museums and cultural centres will play an integral role in the re-positioning of Aboriginal history and the re-emergence of Aboriginal cultural autonomy in public spaces, now and in the future. Traditional museums and their manifesto relate to such issues as representation (or more correctly in this era of ‘cultural wars’, re-representation), repatriation and new forms of cultural negotiation and collaboration. This challenge and rebuttal to Colonialism is integral to help re-balance the notion that ‘History is written by the victors’ 20 and to recognize that ‘…Indigenous peoples have

17 Healy, Forgetting Aborigines: 28.
18 Kelly, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground Project."
survived despite centuries, and in some instances millennia, of colonialism, imperialism and cultural genocide.’ 21 It is important to note that Australian museums are now often involving Aboriginal people in curating of exhibits, however, more work needs to be done. Kelly talks about the need to re-position the memory of the Quod and the burial site on Wadjemup in the public space:

“Wadjimup is a beautiful example of cultural memory and we’ve said this a lot to the people of the state and I have actually used this line – If we can remember Wadjimup being connected to the mainland six thousand bloody years ago…we can remember our culture and our places from a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago. You know that’s a tiny, tiny short piece of time and if we can remember something…you know before Jesus Christ was even thought of…if we can remember something that existed thousands of years prior to agriculture being…happened upon…in what’s known now as the middle East…then we can remember stuff that happened a hundred or a hundred and fifty years ago…it’s a simple as that.” 22

Hence the right of the Noongar community and the wider Western Australian Aboriginal community to manage their own cultural heritage and facilitate self-determination, becomes the essential foundation for reconciliation. This approach begins with “…questions of displacement, dispossession and colonization as an integral part of the history of Indigenous people…” 23 and concludes with “…the positive side of cultural adaptation, resilience and survival…” 24 being presented and memorialised to the wider community within the public space. Thus museums (and, in the modern context, interpretative centres) help fill the void of information and re-address the predominate, colonial historical narrative. Deborah Eldridge (now known by her traditional Noongar name Tjalaminu Mia) at a global symposium on curatorship contended at that symposium that:

The absence of this history gives only half an account of what really took place, and only half the historical story is being told. There needs to be a positive mood to correct the injustice and the disservice not only to Aboriginal people but to the wider community as well. The history over the past two hundred years is European history written by European historians. It was a history that was forced on us as that particular time, but now it has to be accountable or the conspiracy of silence is strengthened. 25

Further support stems from Cummins who writes that, “It is within this context that museums, as centres of excellence for cultural education, have an important role in raising the cross-cultural awareness of the wider society. In the realization of such an

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23 Ibid: 85-86.
24 Ibid.
objective, it is a fundamental premise that the museum industry itself becomes reflective and frameworks for consciousness-raising…”\textsuperscript{26}

Museums are central to the transformation of public memory and historical consciousness, and thus being conduits to the reshaping of the landscape of heritage in Australia. Thus these memorial institutions have moved from a paradigm embedded in colonial discourse to one more in line with a post-colonial renegotiated concept and ideal. According to Healy, Australian museums have become the quintessential “…modern sites of memory…”\textsuperscript{27} and they are “…remembering for us”.\textsuperscript{28}

However, Aboriginal people do not necessarily agree that this museum-based reconciliation will necessarily be effective without deep involvement of Aboriginal people themselves. This seems to be the underlying apprehension of the Rottnest Island Death Group (RIDG) who wrote a public statement summarizing their ambitions regarding the remembrance and memorial of the Island:

The Rottnest Island Authority recognised the custodianship of the Rottnest Island Deaths Group and had negotiated with this Body, promising to enable the Rottnest Island Deaths Group to set up a culturally appropriate Museum of Remembrance at the Quod when the Dallhold lease was gone.

We are the Grassroots Custodians and Protectors of the Sacredness of the Quod and the Burial Grounds and the whole of the Island that impounded our Ancestors.

The Bones of our Human Ancestors are the Foundation Stone of the Quod and the whole of Wajemup (sic).

The mortar that they used to build the Quod was the Blood of our Ancestors to go on the stones that our Ancestors were forced to carve out of the Island itself to impound them.

\textit{“Their Blood is still on the Walls. Their Spirits are still in the Cells.”}

\textit{(David Mowaljarli RIP, 1990)}

All of the Suffering and the Dying of these Aboriginal Men were and still are the Foundation Stone of the Quod and the whole of Wajemup, the Island of Rottnest which belongs to the Aboriginal People who were taken there in chains and died there.\textsuperscript{29}

It is evident from the tone of the above extract that the RIDG are not trusting of the new manifesto being generated by (post)modern contemporary memorial institutes and museums. Following negotiation with the Rottnest Island Authority, their intent is to take control of the Quod area and burial site and exclusively manage and interpret the site based on their cultural and spiritual morals and ideology.

\textsuperscript{26} Galla, "Public Lecture – Indigenous Peoples, Museums and Frameworks for Effective Change in Curatorship.",: 86.

\textsuperscript{27} Healy, Forgetting Aborigines: 133.

\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.

\textsuperscript{29} Public Statement from members of Rottnest Island Deaths Group in support of R.I.D.G. and our ancestors at Wajemup (4\textsuperscript{th} March 2009)
Providing a somewhat conflicting viewpoint, Gidja (Kimberley) leader and Chairman of the Kimberley Stolen Generation Aboriginal Corporation, Mark Bin Barker, is recorded as saying that “This island (Rottnest) is a jigsaw of Aboriginal people in WA, this island has a history that belongs to all Australians, particularly in WA…I’m not here to make anyone feel guilty, but this history belongs to us all – black and white.”

There are three models of interaction in project development between museums and indigenous peoples and/or communities:

- The first model is defined by consultation as participation. The project is initiated by the researcher or specialist, usually a museum anthropologist, and the role of the community’s participation is limited to that of an informant. [i.e. a common ONE-WAY process model where community is disempowered]
- The second model articulates participation as a strategic partnership. The project is initiated either by the indigenous community specialist or the external anthropologists. [i.e. a TWO WAY, mutually empowering model, where community members are co-workers in project development and outcomes, via ongoing and shared decision making in a spirit of partnership and collaboration]
- The third model is characterized by indigenous community cultural action. The project is initiated by community cultural specialists, such as Elders and other keepers of culture, and activists working for community cultural development. Indigenous people control the cultural project and its development. [i.e. this model provides a voice for cultural leadership, cultural reclamation and produces community cultural self-esteem within a post-colonial setting]

The RIDG wish to pursue this third model with respect to the Quod and the Aboriginal burial site. However this could be part of an overall jointly managed approach for the whole island in terms of the second model.

4.3.2 Robben Island Case Study

“Very few places in the world have such an exceptional history of human suffering, the fight for freedom of mind and body, and of subsequent triumph.” [Robben Island Museum]

UNESCO declared Robben Island a world heritage site in 1999. Prior to that it was given South African National Monument status in 1996, affirmed a National Museum in 1996 and an associated institution of the Department of Arts, Culture, Science and Technology in 1997. In 2006 it was confirmed as a National Heritage Site. There are few (heritage) sites that can be compared to Robben Island but one that does resemble this island, in cosmological, spiritual, physical locality (from its nearest mainland), colonial history, and utilization is Rottnest Island/Wadjemup. The two islands share very similar geographical and physical attributes. Rottnest lies approximately 18kms west from mainland Fremantle whilst Robben Island is situated some 9km offshore from Cape Town. Rottnest is 11 kilometres long and less than 5 kilometres wide with a terrestrial area measuring 1859 hectares and Robben Island is over 3 kilometres in length and about 2 kilometers wide covering an area of 518 hectares.

Like Rottnest, this small island was also a prison – in fact, it became a maximum security prison during the apartheid regime. At that time, Robben Island held over three thousands prisoners in very harsh conditions. Its most famous prisoner was Nelson Mandela, who remained on Robben Island for twenty years. However, after Mandela was released from Victor Verster prison in 1990, at the end of the Apartheid era, the prison facilities were put to another use. According to the Robben Island Museum Comparative Analysis, Rottnest Island “…is another island that Robben Island can be compared to.” This is also shared by Professor Peter Limb, who in his article “Of Deeds Most Foul, And Vile”: A Short Comparative History of Robben and Rottnest Penal Islands writes that, “The history of penal stations in the two nations…suggest interesting comparisons.” Like Wadjemup, Robben Island was originally part of the mainland but after the last ice age the sea level rose and created a channel between the island and the mainland. It received its Dutch name (‘the place of seals’) when the Dutch decreed it a secure site of imprisonment (1657-1793). Again, after initial Dutch influence, Robben Island, paralleling Rottnest was to come under British occupation (1795-1802 & 1806-1910) and Indigenous chiefs who resisted the British were declared “…a hindrance to European civilization…” and silenced via imprisonment on Robben Island in an

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33 United Nations Educational, Scientific & Cultural Organization created in 1945 in order to respond to nation’s belief that Peace must be established on the basis of humanity’s moral and intellectual solidarity and to be responsible for building intercultural understanding: through protection of heritage and support for cultural diversity. UNESCO created the idea of World Heritage to protect sites of outstanding universal value. See more at: [http://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco#sthash.TUvWqR6s.dpuf](http://en.unesco.org/about-us/introducing-unesco#sthash.TUvWqR6s.dpuf)


37 On March 31st 1982 Mandela was transferred from Robben Island to Pollsmoor Prison in Cape Town. [Source: https://www.nelsonmandela.org/content/page/biography]


39 Ibid.


attempt to “...break their spirit of resistance.”\textsuperscript{42} Hence, as a symbol of inhumanity and oppression both islands share the common trait that both were institutional islands “...which practiced the systematic repression of the mind and body through hard labour, the denial of basic human rights, long-term confinement, and non-reparation of the dead.”\textsuperscript{43} The prisoners of both islands “...suffered from a poor diet and lacked warmth due to inadequate clothing and drafty (damp) cells.”\textsuperscript{44} During the World War Two period both islands were used to imprison POWs and sustain a defense battery. From 1961 to 1994 Robben Island became an Apartheid Prison ‘housing’ some of South Africa’s most famous political prisoners, including Nelson Mandela.\textsuperscript{45} However, despite these shared multiple aspects of histories, and that both islands are recognized as spaces of memory, Robben Island is a World Heritage Site and Rottnest is not. It is merely a Class A Reserve\textsuperscript{46} (since 1917) and has some sites listed under the WA Heritage Act.\textsuperscript{47} The Rottnest Island Management Plan 2003-2008 under Section 5.3.2 Aboriginal Heritage Values\textsuperscript{48} lists five key Aboriginal heritage values on the Island and the National Trusts of Australia (WA) formally recognized Rottnest Island as ‘a place of National Heritage Significance by classifying it as an historic Island in 1993.’\textsuperscript{49} World Heritage listing awaits.

There are currently 830 heritage sites, both cultural and natural, that have been granted World Heritage Status, as a result of being judged as having “outstanding universal values.”\textsuperscript{50} Interestingly of those 830 sites, 82 are island-based. All sites are considered heritage sites for purpose of humanity protection\textsuperscript{51} and some as places of former imprisonment and/or internment; one of their main purposes is to remind humankind “not to forget the atrocities and cruelty that have been meted out to others and to ensure that it does not happen again.”\textsuperscript{52} Another universal context is that these

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{42} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{44} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{45} “In the winter of 1964, Nelson Mandela arrived on Robben Island where he would spend 18 of his 27 prison years. Confined to a small cell, the floor his bed, a bucket for a toilet, he was forced to do hard labor in a quarry. He was allowed one visitor a year for 30 minutes. He could write and receive one letter every six months. But Robben Island became the crucible which transformed him. Mandela eventually...assumed leadership over his jailed comrades and became the master of his own prison. He emerged from it the mature leader who would fight and win the great political battles that would create a new democratic South Africa.”
\item [The Prisoner: http://www.pbs.org/wgbh/pages/frontline/shows/mandela/prison/]
\item \textsuperscript{46} A Class 'A' Reserve is the most highly protected class of crown land, where public consultation and acts of parliament are required to initiate changes. Class 'A' Reserves are created for a single, specific purpose -- generally (but not necessarily) related to environmental protection. The most common uses for a Class 'A' Reserve are as a national park, nature reserve, or conservation park. Such reserves (like Rottnest Island) are havens for wildlife and indigenous flora.
\item [Source: http://everything2.com/title/Class+%2527A%2527+Reserve]
\item \textsuperscript{47} There are 17 sites on Rottnest Island listed under the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972-1980
\item \textsuperscript{51} (Robben Island, Auschwitz, Dachau, Ellis Island, Devil Island etc)
\end{itemize}
sites also ‘symbolize freedom or pursuit of freedom’. There are only a few World Heritage Sites that memorialize heritage with negative experiences, for example, Auschwitz, the Island of Goree’, and Robben Island. They are listed on the World Heritage List to remind humanity of the tragedies that occurred and to prevent the recurrence of such incidents. Many of the sites are places of pilgrimage, reflection and remembrance. Further, they have become places of education, research and tourism, with some attracting thousands of visitors every year – notably Robben Island receives more than 1,500 tourists (both international & local) a day – indicating their strengths as epicenters for reconciliation with those who have served such cruelties upon them. Robben Island has now become an icon that embraces and symbolizes “…the spirit of forgiveness and reconciliation; more or less representing the hearts and minds of South African politics,” and retrospectively a place of trauma, a place of healing, and more so “…a memorial and learning centre symbolizing the political struggle for freedom and justice.”

Rottnest Island, like Robben Island, contains “…intrinsic historic interest…” mostly for its incarceration history, and the by-products of its labour. Turnbridge suggests that, “Rottnest and its heritage tourism opportunities are broadly comparable to indigenous penal islands elsewhere in the formerly colonial world.” He further argues that, Rottnest, more than any other Island site affected by colonization, “…has a particularly extensive and unsettling affinity…” with Robben Island, in regard to its parallel heritages and potential for tourism exploitation. So one must (again) ask the question: “Why isn’t Rottnest Island classed as a World Heritage listed site and privy to the same status and recognition as Robben Island?”

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53 Ibid.
54 Ibid.
56 Ibid.
57 Ibid.
59 Ibid.
60 Ibid.
World Heritage significance is based around cultural significance because of the social, historical, symbolic, experiential, sensory and recreational values that are associated with the prospected site. Its significance is derived from historical use that has included the exercising of political power, social control and resistance. Robben Island has acquired a universal symbolism because of the people and events associated with it. It has also assumed symbolic significance in terms of human suffering and transformation.\(^6^1\) Its value is summarized as follows:

(i) Historical value
The historical and associative value of Robben Island is reflected in both the tangible and intangible heritage, which arise out of events and historical or cultural phases that have had a significant role in human occupation and evolution of the site. The intangible significance is held in memories; the physical or tangible fabric of a site, in its buildings, burial places and landscape as well as in places of significance within the landscape that presently do not show any physical evidence. Hence the strongest associative Historical value is that which is linked to banishment and imprisonment.\(^6^2\)

(ii) Social value (symbolic, spiritual, sacred value)
Social values are essential reference points or symbols for communities' identities. Hence Robben Island has acquired a universal symbolism in terms of human oppression, resistance and transformation. It is also associated with values of the restoration of human dignity and pilgrimage and is a place of sacred & spiritual worth. Hundreds of marked and unmarked graves bear testimony to those people who died on Robben Island. A number of political prisoners died during their incarceration and, in some cases, their remains were never returned to their relatives. This heightens the symbolic value as a site of loss and trauma.\(^6^3\)

(iii) Educational value
Described as the ‘university of life’, Robben Island became a crucible, in which strategies for a future society based on tolerance, respect and non-racialism were nurtured and implemented. Its educational value is also seen as an epicenter for debate, lifelong learning and the fight for justice and education, is key to Robben Island’s role as a heritage site and its human rights discourse.\(^6^4\)

(iv) Environmental value
Other than the human impact that the island has been privy to, including construction of buildings and the introduction of alien plants and animals, the isolation of Robben Island from the mainland, has ensured its place as a haven of bird species and created an opportunity for numerous species of fauna to evolve separately. The Island has therefore remained an important place of environmental significance both in flora and fauna.\(^6^5\)

(v) Place value
Robben Island’s setting has enabled colonial authorities to dictate its use as a place of banishment and exile. The place physically embodies and collectively bears testimony


\(^{6^2}\) Ibid.

\(^{6^3}\) Ibid.

\(^{6^4}\) Ibid.

\(^{6^5}\) Ibid.

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to the Island’s layered symbolism, for instance its architecture is a physical embodiment of its layered history, and its layered re-use of buildings and the island demonstrates a **landscape of extraction and insertion**. The evolution of the human footprint on the Island reflects various periods of occupation and use, which is reflected by the Island’s numerous and varied **sites of prison labour and infrastructure** (i.e., quarries, stores, buildings etc).

Furthermore, the various precincts, landscapes, and individual buildings of different historical periods contribute towards its significance. It is the interaction between these elements that make the island:

- A sacred place
- A place of melancholy and austerity
- A place of continuity and discontinuity
- An imposed rather than a spontaneous landscape
- A dramatic island location
- A place of commemoration and learning and hope.

The Robben Island cultural Centre could be a useful model for development of a similar facility on Rottnest Island. Of course, each history, cultural environment and site is different, so it is not suggested that the Robben Island centre be merely replicated. Careful design and implementation of a suitable facility would be needed.

I argue it is now time to consider using the Quod at Rottnest Island as a special heritage centre, which records its use as an Aboriginal prison. Maybe it is also time for the original buildings at Rottnest – built by Aboriginal labour under the cruel and sadistic supervision of Superintendent Henry Vincent – to be rightfully considered as very special parts of the heritage of Western Australia [ney the WORLD]. Indeed, with good consultative planning – and financial support from the State and Federal Governments and various other supportive industries and organizations – the Quod could well become a major interpretive centre, not only for Western Australia, but perhaps for Australia. Such a centre could be a significant focus for many people who visit the Island. Until

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66 Ibid.
68 Ibid.
When dealing with traumatic events, situations and/or relationships that have caused us pain, distress or suffering most of us yearn for reconciliation, for catharsis, and for closure, it is one of the core elements that make us human. Through reconciliation, and memorial (either via museum, monument or event) and the related processes of restorative and/or transitional understanding and justice, parties to the dispute explore and overcome the pain brought on during the conflict and find ways to build trust and live cooperatively with each other. This also applies to Wadjemup. Metaphorically treating the Island as a living, breathing and functioning entity that is seeking a sense of healing, reconciliation and resolution to its past has driven me as a filmmaker to utilize the documentary form to bring about a sentiment of reconciliation at the most basic level. However it cannot be forced on people. They have to decide whether to forgive and reconcile with their one-time adversaries, and more so from a film production perspective, whether they want to engage in the film’s message and theme, and then whether they want to do anything about it…

Nichols describes documentaries as filmic tools that, “….reveal events or human experiences in corners of societies that were hidden from the public eye, whether deliberately or not.” 72 Further, according to Wells and Nelmes, the documentary as a

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70 Ibid.


filmic text usually informs audiences of “…a particular point of view, and seeks to address a particular social issue which is related to and potentially affects the audience.”

This, plus the notion that documentary, “…interacts with and contributes to other cultural institutions and resources, and operates as a relay of social knowledge” drives me as a modern Aboriginal storyteller (and cultural archivist) to help better explain the Aboriginal view-point, explore issues that affect the community and add to the Australian Aboriginal post-colonial debate. *Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground* is my tool to present the story, remind historically, cultivate the discussion and open up the forum for dialogue. There is no doubt that documentary production is one of the most important means of creating “…a considered national record that extends beyond the reportage of news and current affairs. Good documentary programs interpret and contextualize, challenge and inform, inspire and entertain. They further understanding and provoke dialogue.”

It is my hope and aspiration that this documentary will also, like other well received documentaries, promote social change and equality and leave a legacy.

“True reconciliation does not consist of merely forgetting the past.”

Nelson Mandela

4.5 Reconciliation Progress and Proposals for *Wadjamup* Aboriginal Cemetry Site

*Holocaust Island*

Nestled in the Indian Ocean
Like a jewel in her crown
The worshippers of Babel come
To relax and turn to brown
To recuperate from woe and toil
And leave their problems far behind
To practice ancient rituals
The habits of their kind

But what they refuse to realise
Is that in this little Isle
Are skeletons in their cupboards
Of deeds most foul and vile
Far beneath this Island’s surface
In many an unmarked place
Lie the remnants of forgotten ones
*Kia*’, members of my race...

Graeme Dixon

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75 Ibid: 237.
76 Intolerance, Social Justice and Reconciliation in Film by Francis G. Lu, M.D., and Br. David Steindl-Rast: [Source: http://www.gratefulness.org/readings/social_just_film.htm]
77 *Kia* is a Noongar affirmation – meaning yes, acknowledgement or hello.
Europeans via the colonization process exerted a profound impact on Wadjemup by establishing a prison there for Aboriginal men. In the approximate 100 years that it was used as a place of incarceration and dispossession, the island, a part of the sacred Noongar ‘dreaming’, became a place to be feared, a place of brutality, violence and death.

“On Rottnest there was only one phase, you died, you were buried and you were left in an unmarked grave. And there it [the Aboriginal burial ground] remained...tent land grew over it, a World War One intern camp went over it and it wasn’t until about 1972 when a trench was being dug from the mainland to, I believe a golf course for a sewage pipe, that the workers uncovered what we now know is the Aboriginal cemetery.” 79

Rottnest Island is a short ferry journey from the port of Fremantle, and attracts around a half-million visitors annually. It has become a holiday playground for Perth families and tourists alike. Today authorities, including the State Government and Tourism WA continue to mis-represent the truth (and thus mis-inform the public), about what Aboriginal people endured there during incarceration.

Prominent members of the Aboriginal (especially Noongar) community have constantly questioned the motivations of the RIA and the State Government (and to a degree the general public) when it comes to the matter of Rottnest Island and its treatement (or lack thereof) of the memory of Aboriginal prisoners and the use of the (former) Quod as a resort establishment. Kelly also asks the question; “...how could you sleep in a room with that history...where people were brutalised and died...” 80 Former Rottnest Island Board Member, Karen Jacobs, says it makes her “...feel sick to tell you the truth.” 81 Although she does add that most guests are ignorant to the fact as there (currently) is no educational signage contained in the rooms, but regardless she comments that the rooms still contain “…DNA in the floor and in the walls of those buildings...there’s blood, there’s urine, there’s all sorts of things...” remain from the past. Jacobs deduces that, “…if you actually educated them and let them know, you’re sleeping in a holding cell, where men not only died, I think they would move out of those pretty quick smart.” 82

Dr Neville Green takes this point further: “…And to realize that people were actually living in the cells, and not realizing they were living in a cell where Aboriginal people may have died. It’s like converting Auschwitz into a holiday camp.” 83 Allardyce shares this view, and questions visitors who stay in the former jail asking, “…would you like to stay at Auschwitz [or] Changi prison...?” 84

79 Dr Green “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
80 Kelly “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
81 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground Project."
82 Ibid.
83 All over the world, Auschwitz has become a symbol of terror, genocide, and the Holocaust. At first, the Germans held Polish political prisoners in the camp. From the spring of 1942 Auschwitz became the largest site for the murder of Jews brought there under the Nazi plan for their extermination. More than 1,100,000 men, women, and children lost their lives in the camp. [Source: http://en.auschwitz.org]
84 Dr Green, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground Project."
85 The name Changi is synonymous with the suffering of Australian prisoners of the Japanese during the Second World War. Changi was a Japanese prisoner-of-war camp. [Source: http://www.awm.gov.au/encyclopedia/pow/changi/]
86 Allardyce, Paul “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project"
Wadjemup remains a place of guilt. It is a contradiction in terms. Sinclair-Jones calls it “An Island in Denial.” Once where cells reeked of shivering Aboriginal prisoners now happy couples honeymoon and frolic in well kept spacious rooms; where “An Aboriginal murderer once kicked on a gallows where sweet-scented girls in bikinis now sit drying their hair in the sun.”

Academic Dr Lily Hibberd, research expert in the area of Benevolent Asylum, who investigates institutional confinement hypothesising that state care and incarceration are inseparable, argues that tourism and recreation at former prison makes the ‘dark’ histories of these tourist precincts border on fiction. She says it constitutes “…simply another radical forgetting…” Hibberd claims that Wadjemup “...is a space of amnesia right now and it’s very powerfully potentially a place of coming to understanding not only the history but the significance of its space of that site as the largest Aboriginal deaths in custody site in Australia but also the fact that right now it is this space of total forgetting and the way in which people are behaving on that island.”

This understanding of people’s behaviour on the island mirrors the concern of this exegesis and its title; Wadjemup: Rottnest as Black Prison and White Playground. Hibberd informs readers that the playground as metaphor and the literal physical location of a playground, have been utilised in other parts of the world in the past to conceal places of trauma, suffering and death. She explains:

“The playground for me has another resonance which was some sites that I was looking at in Paris where there were the deliberate construction of playgrounds on traumatic sites...two of the largest prisons in Paris at the time...still operative until the 1970s...they were torn down and rebuilt...to create a space of recognition and a remembrance by placing a children’s playground on the site with signage...on one of the prison gates that were still standing, [saying that] on this site 1000 women and children were massacred...”

Bringing the matter closer to home, Hibberd further comments that Rottnest is a sublime example of western politics and government policy, which converts space that has experienced trauma, cruelty and oppression into enacting a campaign of forgetting and creating a space of amnesia “...through tourism...” Serene images of healthy young women and men on the beach, intertwined with happy families and tranquil turquoise waters attract tourists to ‘paradise’ and “...because it’s a space of total amnesia ... people can do what ever they like and take no responsibility...”

Local artist, Tania Ferrier, spent all of her family holidays at Wadjemup as a child, staying in the hostel (as the Quod was called then). Upon discovering the true history of the place as an adult, she produced an exhibition entitled The Quod Project at Heathcote Museum. It incorporated diverse artistic interpretations about the Quod (including a ‘mock’ 3m x 2m Quod cell) and its current operation as the Rottnest Island Lodge. Ferrier says that her main motivation was the shock she felt and the attempt at

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90 Hibberd, Lily “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
91 Ibid.
92 Ibid.
93 Ibid.
understanding “…how tragic this site is and how inappropriate it is that they [Rottnest Island Authority in conjunction with the Rottnest Island Resort consortium] use it as a tourist resort.”  

Milroy supports Hibberd’s notion with her comment that, “Such histories are extremely rich in interpreting the inseparable social and built fabrics of these special Western Australian places.” Her colleague Grant Revell on the Gnyung Waart Kooling Kulark (‘Released – going home’) project, part of the bigger Human Terrain project, produced multi-disciplinary art creations related to Wadjemup via the collaborative efforts of students (who asked rhetorically “…how can a whole nation’s history…be silenced in such a deliberated manner and basically turned into a place of amusement? A holiday-maker’s escape.”) Teachers, artists, Elders and custodians, declared that the project, “…quickly became a journey of feeling that acknowledged the chasm between Western Australian cultures. We learnt that how one deals with this deep subjective gap really defines one’s Western Australian identity.”

Fortunately due to projects such as Hibberd’s, Ferrier’s, Millroy’s and Revell’s, the desperate nature of Wadjemup and its paradoxical existence, Black Prison – White Playground, the public are being notified and/or reminded of the site’s importance and its significant heritage for Aboriginal people and the community as a whole. I ask, will Wadjemup continue to remain a confused landscape, or will this public recognition help create an environment of empathy, understanding and ultimately action? According to Ferrier, the public admiration for ‘their island’ far outweighs their care of its Aboriginal entity and history:

“I feel that it is time to actually say that there is still collusion at Rottnest with trying to hide the history, because they do not want to affect the ‘brand’ of the Lodge (Quod) as a tourist resort…I have comments made to me by very wealthy, well educated Perth people who say “it’s not going to change because it’s the only island nearby”, more or less saying that if we had another island nearby maybe we would acknowledge the Rottnest history but because it’s our only holiday island we’re not going to acknowledge its history.”

The (former) Chair of the Rottnest Island Authority rejects this notion. He argues the Quod holds no secrets and it would be “….really hard to keep secrets because some of the rooms, … have still got the bars there so it’s very obviously a past prison…” O’Meara’s own (former) board member Karen Jacobs contradicts his view-point, claiming there is a lack of acknowledgement, not only because of sans-signage, but because the rooms now resemble nothing like their former self with “…carpet on the floor and they have been repainted and they have nice furniture in them and they now have been extended out the back and there is a lovely big window for them to look out at.” O’Meara continues to defend the situation by maintaining that, “….not being involved in the management of the lodge or its marketing I’m not sure whether it’s highlighted or not highlighted; but I would say I would be very surprised if there is a

94 Ferrier, Tania “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”  
95 Millroy, Jill & Revell, Grant. Gnyung Waart Kooling Kulark (Released: Going Home), 2003: 2  
97 Ibid: 5.  
98 Ferrier “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”  
99 O’Meara, Laurie “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”  
100 Jacobs, Karen “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
conspiracy about it but I think the authority itself, we make no secret about the Quod and its history. I don’t, and when I have been challenged about how it might effect the commercial operation of the lodge...so be it.” 101

This is not the consensus shared by a majority of the Aboriginal community who counter claim “…I don’t think those people [who occupy the former cells at the Rottnest lodge] know the history, to be wanting to actually sleep in them rooms. That’s not been taught enough, you know, not only in Australia but also around the world...it is frustrating for me because a lot of people don’t know...about the history there...” 102 Ashworth & Hartmann in a collection of essays entitled, Horror and Human Tragedy Revisited: The Management of Sites of Atrocities for Tourism contend that “…tourists are attracted to the sites and memorials of atrocity, which have thus become tourism attractions whether this was the intention of those establishing and managing such memorials or not.” 103

Revell also concludes that its colonial history – including its misconstrued name (‘Rat’s Nest) – is open for “…extraordinary mis-interpretation and that its blood stained past still...haunts and denies a community’s ability to come forward and speak or appreciate the truth of this significant cultural landscape.” 104 The contradictory and romantic rhetoric of an ‘island-paradise’ shrouds a more realistic and profoundly horrific place that, “For most suburban Perthites, their guilty island retreat reassures a displaced identity; a curious exchange from one beached experience to another. It remains a distant segregated mindscape; a place of suffering subconsciously or consciously, seemingly because we don’t really want to know it. Rottnest Island ‘Tourist Paradise’ continues to lie above the deeper ‘Rottnest Island Native Prison Establishment’.” 105

Most West Australians have their own Rottnest memories, and these have contributed to the iconic status the island enjoys today and one of the most common phrases regarding the island:

“Hands off Rottnest!”

This is simply because many Western Australians share collective childhood and ‘rite-of-passage’ memories of escaping across the water to the nearby island. Like most islands, Rottnest provides a heightened sense of freedom from familiar patterns of life, traffic, and paternal scrutiny. And this extraordinary phenomenon is not restricted to the general public but is a conscientious afterthought from the Rottnest Island Authority, who both recognize and acknowledge the terrible history of the Island that they manage and control, via the Western Australian State Government, yet are indecisive and evasive in beginning the next phase of the islands history; Aboriginal memorial:

“I’m conscious of the fact that right from the early days of 1838 when it was set up as a jail that there was a number of young men and young boys who were imprisoned on the island over that quite a long period of time and I think It was number of up to 4000 and something like 10% of that number are actually deceased on the

101 O’Meara “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
102 Walley, Rosemary “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
104 Millroy & Revell, Gnyung Waart Kooling Kulark (Released: Going Home), 2003: 5.
105 Ibid.
island. So my take is that it is very important that those ancestors of today's Aboriginal people are duly recognised...”  

Renowned writer Henry Reynolds estimates that up to 2,500 settlers were killed by Aborigines post-settlement, and as many as 20,000 Aborigines were slain as a result of direct conflict or contact. Many also died from illnesses related directly to settlement. Reynolds uses these figures to argue that if those 20,000 Aboriginal people killed before federation “…had been white our histories would be heavy with their story, a forest of monuments would celebrate their sacrifice [as] they fell defending their homelands, their sacred sites, their way of life.”

It is apparent that NOT doing anything about the unmarked graves of the some 400 Aboriginal prisoners on Wadjemup, is a blight on the main parties involved [State Government, Federal Government, Rottnest Island Authority, etc] and continues the 200 plus years of denial by all political parties in the state regarding colonization and settlement and the 150 plus years of Aboriginal incarceration and its cultural legacy:

“Once there [Rottnest Island/Wadjemup] these men suffered inhumane and degrading treatment, most never again returning home...their bones and spirit still incarcerated on the island. A major issue that permeates from this legacy and which both has an historical and contemporary post traditional history – is incarceration.”

Tjalaminu Mia, one of the first Aboriginal women to work in the Western Australian prison system, effecting expresses that this denial of Rottnest as a place of inhumane Aboriginal incarceration has manifested itself culturally and spiritually in the current situation, with 6.7% of Aboriginal men in the State making up the incarceration rate. She maintains that both the introduction of common law practices and the general denial regarding Aboriginal incarceration in hindsight has, “…been the most fundamental and dominant factor in the fragmentation of a culture and its people, and has brought with it a wide range of issues that have been inherited from generation to generation and which have affected not only Aboriginal people but the community as a whole...”

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106 O’Meara “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
107 Reynolds, Henry. The Other Side of the Frontier: Aboriginal Resistance to the European Invasion of Australia, 1982: 200-1
108 Tjalaminu Mia “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
109 In 2008 Aboriginal people represent only 2.3% of the total population, yet over 28% of Australia’s prison population are Aboriginal. In Western Australia the Aboriginal imprisonment rate was 6.7% - nearly three times the Aboriginal total population.
110 Tjalaminu Mia “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
Tjalaminu’s argument has validity and is further reinforced by the fact that it has been (at the time of writing) over four decades since the bones of Wadjemup Aboriginal Prisoners were first uncovered. On the 13th of June in 1970 the Weekend News reported, under the headline “Convict bones found on Rottnest”, that:

“Human bones uncovered on Rottnest Island could be the remains of 19th century Aboriginal convicts. They were turned up by earth moving equipment working at the edge of the island camping ground – about 500 yards from the hostel, the former penal settlement.”

A resident of the island gave further background to the story by claiming that in 1962 a gravesite was erroneously exposed and the further the workers dug down and around the more skeletal remains were discovered. He said the remains “…had been buried in a sitting position in rows of trenches about 60cm apart. The first thing we did was notify the police and the museum, and we were told to cover them over again.”

Tragically the discovery brought not only inquisitive sightseers, but souvenir hunters as well. “We tried to keep the kids away, but the adults were worse. Some even picked up skulls and ran away with them”. Both the authorities and police were informed immediately and it was reported that, “…the authorities want to avoid attracting the public to the site of the uncovering.” In typical fashion the Island Board “…did not want to comment.”

The newspaper report also informed readers that it had only been three years since the Referendum of 1967. Hence the then local Aboriginal community and respective leaders had little of the political and social power that contemporary Aboriginal people and figureheads are privy to: “The Aboriginal community made no protest and had to be

112 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 172.
113 Ibid: 173.
114 Ibid.
116 Ibid.
117 In 1967, after ten years of campaigning, a referendum was held to change the Australian Constitution. The referendum saw more than 90% of eligible Australians vote YES to count Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Australians in the national census of the population and to give the Commonwealth Government power to make specific laws for Indigenous people. [Source: http://www.reconciliation.org.au/home/resources/school-resources/1967-referendum]
satisfied with the assurance of respectful reburial.”

It is still debatable as to whether this in fact occurred and what importance the remains of these Aboriginal prisoners has on the Rottnest Island Authority and State Government when it comes to the running of the island and its (#1) iconic status for Western Australian tourism. Wadjuk Elder, Cedric Jacobs, summarises this on-going travesty and neglect by expressing that:

“...it [Wadjemup] certainly draws a stark contrast between what the Island was established for in its early days and the...concept of what the Island stands for today. It seems that today it’s all about tourism - we can see it on our television you know, come to Rottnest Island it’s a place for leisure and play.”

Jacobs, with other Elders, leaders and warriors, reflected on the plight of his direct ancestors, claiming that the island is “…still a place of torture....” For him this is due to its unrecognized inhabitants contained in unmarked graves, and most significantly the little importance given to the thousands of Aboriginal men who were incarcerated on the island and were denied a fair go. According to Jacobs, the right to a fair go “...needs to be re-captivated because it belongs to all Australians.”

Jacobs plea for his people to be given a fair go in this day and age speaks volumes:

“We have in our culture tremendous qualities...we are the soul bearers of the land...and until the soul of the land is brought into focus in the nation, then we will simply be a nation of...economic worth, which the western world has brought to Australia, at the expense of losing the greater qualities...”

Jacobs brings this national plight back to a local level when he argues that the poor treatment of Aboriginal ‘citizens’ around the country also applies to Wadjemup. He suggests Wadjemup is a metaphoric and allegorical representation of Aboriginal and White relations in Australia, when viewing the Island from a spiritual, cultural, political, economic, social and historical context.

“It also applies to Wadjemup, yes absolutely. It is sad, the sadness of Wadjemup comes through, and it only comes through when we hear the story of why it was created and...we begin to empathize and live the life in our spirit and in our soul of the people who were brought away from their home country around the state. Incarcerated...and imprisoned in penal prison colonies...and they (have) purposely tried to breed out the soul, and spirit and culture from my people from within us and from within the land.”

Kevin Gilbert famously proclaimed in 1977 that, “…Aboriginal Australia underwent a rape of the soul so profound that the blight continues in the minds of most blacks today.”

Swan River Elder and former Rottnest Island Aboriginal Deaths Group (former) Chairman, Albert Corunna reminds us of the importance of this statement, and what

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118 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 172.
119 Jacobs, Cedric “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
120 Ibid.
121 Ibid.
122 Ibid.
123 Ibid.
Wadjemup represents, when he tells the community that the remains resting on the Island are not only a matter for the Aboriginal community yesterday but to the whole state of Western Australia TODAY as “...they [Aboriginal prisoner remains] are from all around the state...” 125 and hence represent ALL citizens of the State. In a collective sense Aboriginal identity is central, not marginal, to Australian life. Jacobs reinforces this notion with his comment that:

“Wadjemup is so important because, our heroes and our warriors and our leaders were stolen from being able to exercise their right as leaders of the clan, the politicians and the head-ship, the eldership of the people, was taken away, and was taken to Rottnest Island or Wadjemup.” 126

Nannup takes this notion one step further. He suggests if the public accepted Wadjemup’s dark prison history in conjunction with the (‘true’) dark history of the nation, then Wadjemup, “…could be a place like Robben Island127, like Alcatraz128, like some of the islands off the Greek coast where people do go there and they realize what happened and they see those things...” 129

“[Wadjemup] ...is so important to Aboriginal people because it is a point, that can either destroy us as a race, or it is a point in our history – in our past – which can propel (us) into becoming greater as a people. And, it’s the hard times that brings out the best in people...and so I appeal to my people and all people everywhere who have been incarcerated and treated unjustly, turn those weak points that could destroy you, and is unfortunately destroying many people, turn them into your power points to propel yourself into greatness and achieve greater things for your very self, your family, your people and your nation.” 130

From the first instance of the burial grounds on Rottnest being exposed in the early 1970s until 1987 they remained relatively forgotten, buried by bureaucratic red-tape, political undermining and powerless Aboriginal influence. But in 1987 the Rottnest Island Board decided to erect a memorial plaque on the grave-site of Aboriginal prisoners buried on Rottnest. This public relations exercise by the board had one profound effect; it brought to the surface the inane treatment of this matter for nearly two decades. The irony of the situation was that by the late 1980s, and with the impending Bi-Centenary celebration of Australia’s colonial settlement (invasion?), Aboriginal groups and leaders had become more powerful, media savvy, and politically minded. Hence when the Rottnest Island Board, in a publicity exercise, advised the media of their gesture it “…fuelled resentments held by the Aboriginal people and

125 Corruna “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
126 Jacobs, Cedric “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
127 From the 17th to the 20th centuries, Robben Island served as a place of banishment, isolation and imprisonment. Today it is a World Heritage Site and museum, a poignant reminder to the newly democratic South Africa of the price paid for freedom. [Source: http://www.robben-island.org.za]
128 From the mid 1930s until the mid 1960s, Alcatraz was America’s premier maximum-security prison, the final stop for the nation’s most incorrigible inmates. Today, Alcatraz is a place of contradictions, with a grim past and an enduring future as one of San Francisco’s most prominent landmarks and tourist attractions. [Source: http://www.alcatrazhistory.com/mainpg.htm]
129 Nannup “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
130 Jacobs, Cedric “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
provided further impetus for protest and confrontation.”  

This was the exact moment that local Aboriginal leaders raised the issue of spiritual connection, cultural belonging and historical genocide. According to Moran in Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup, Rottnest presented a prime example of the sad history of not only the Island, but the dispossession caused by settlement across the state, frontier and country. It was “…a story that could be used to communicate the wrongs done to their people.”

“…so I think we’re dealing with different histories it doesn’t make it any more or less horrific that you have this holiday island, this you know an athenaeum of tourism occurring without any recognition of what is actually the largest…Aboriginal deaths in custody site in the country…which has to be addressed which is a shame a total Australian shame…”

Prominent Noongar leader and Elder Ken Colbung is quoted as claiming Wadjemup as “…a place of Aboriginal dreamtime long before it became a prison.” As a voice of conciliation he implored the “…people of Western Australia to learn the truth of Rottnest…” Aboriginal leader, Robert Bropho, warned the public that, “Aboriginals would lay claim to Rottnest Island as a sacred site if they were not satisfied with the Rottnest Island Board’s response to their demands.” So on the 10th March 1988 approximately two hundred Aboriginal Elders, leaders, custodians, activists, and supporters, from all over the state (hence comprised of many different tribal/language groups) gathered on the jetty of Rottnest to express to the media and authorities their disdain for the way the unmarked graves matter was playing out. According to Moran the Aboriginal collective “…marched in colourful procession to the gravesite…with banners and Aboriginal flags held high.” Upon reaching the sacred site of the gravesite a meeting was held at the site and “…with ceremony gave respect to their dead.” Most of the group were descendants of those buried on the Island and most were making their first visit to the Island.

“…it’s for both of us, it’s for Wadjella and Noongar to respect and remember that there are two sides to Wadjimup/Rottnest island- not just the tourism side…”

The then Minister for Tourism – Pam Beggs – met with the collective and thus began the first demands from the Aboriginal community, in regards to the protection, conservation and memorial of the Aboriginal dead. The Minister was informed that a fence needed to be erected around the unmarked burial site, cottages in the vicinity needed to be removed, a statue (with plaque) erected under the supervision of an Aboriginal representative. The Minister indicated that a “…memorial was appropriate but in regard to the houses, road and fence, she would seek further advice.” This political speak angered the collective as they believed that they, “…represented all

131 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 172.
133 Hibberd “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
134 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 173.
135 Ibid.
136 Ibid.
137 Ibid: 176.
138 Ibid.
139 Jacobs, Cedric “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
140 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 177.
Aboriginals in Western Australia and there was no need for [Mrs Beggs] to see other groups.”  

This gathering, and the respective dialogue that was opened up, both within the collective and with external parties, reinforced the spiritual connection that the Aboriginal community had with the Island, and significantly with each other. Mark Bin Baker, a descendent of three tribes, the dominant tribe Gidga but also Gooniandi and Jarlu of the Kimberley region, who also married into the Noongar community, describes this as:

“...the spiritual connection with Kimberly, Wadjimup and Wadjuk is that for ever now we are connected and not only the Kimberly ...but Wongi country and Yamatji country, Noongar country and Pilbra country...we’re connected...the island itself is the heartbeat of our state.”

So much so that it is common legend amongst the Noongar community and other relevant tribal groups that “...Kimberley men had put their souls into the Quokkas...” and that, as an Aboriginal person, if you look into a Quokkas eyes (and the Crows) on the Island you will “...feel that connection to the old people [deceased Aboriginal prisoners]...and their presence...it’s our old people’s spirit grabbing hold of you and saying ‘you’re part of us...thank you for coming...we stuck here...we can’t go back...”

When in 1989, the Western Australian newspaper headlined that the Bond owned Rottnest Island Lodge was to receive a $6.5 million renovation, it raised the ire of the state Aboriginal collective. The article went on to report that Dallhold Investments, a personal family company of Alan Bond, would oversee the revamp and improvements:

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Ibid.

The Kimberley is a region of approximately 420,000 square kilometres (262,500 square miles), bordering the Indian Ocean in the northwest corner of Australia. Covering over 25 Aboriginal tribal zones, the Kimberley is very complex both culturally and linguistically. These differences within the Kimberley are in stark contrast to other regions in Australia.

Yamatji means Aboriginal ‘man’ in the Murchison and Gascoyne. Yamatji Country is in the Mid West region of Western Australia and stretches from Carnarvon in the north to Meekatharra in the east, to Jurien in the south. The Yamaji area covers nearly one fifth of Western Australia and includes coastal, regional and remote areas.

Marlpa is used by some Traditional Owners to denote the Aboriginal people of the Pilbara. Under the Regional Development Commissions Act Pilbara is situated south of the Kimberley, and is made up of the local government areas of Ashburton, East Pilbara, Port Hedland and Roebourne. In 2006, it was estimated that 15% of the population of the Pilbara was of Indigenous background, approximately 6,000 people.

Bin Barker, “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”

Abraham, “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”

Noongar legend states that the crow or Waardong carries the soul of the deceased into the after-life. On Wadjemup the waardong have the soul of Noongar Aboriginal prisoners in them. In Richard Wilke’s novel Bulmurn his main character Bulmurn prowess as a Moharn Boylla Gudjuk (magic spirit man) is to change into a Waardong (and using this he escapes Wadjemup as a prisoner).

Bin Barker “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”

A British-born Australian businessman noted for his high-profile business dealings. He became a public hero in his adopted country after his Australia II syndicate won the 1983 America’s Cup, which
The extensions would include 30 additional units, the removal of every existing odd unit to make way for the ensuites, extra staff quarters, a new swimming pool in the quadrangle area and further landscaping. Approval was sought, and respectively given by the State Government, for the works to begin, including excavation of the grounds for the new pool in the middle of the lodge’s grounds. In addition, the Rottnest Island Management Board also extended the original lease of the lodge and their dwellings from 20 to 35 years, ending in 2018, where upon it will legally revert back to the State Government under the auspices of the Rottnest Island Authority. Bankwest took over the 30-year lease in 1991 after the collapse of Alan Bond's private company, Dallhold Investments. The current lease runs until 2018, but Bankwest intends to rid itself of the asset before the lease expires and seek another entity to take over the operating lease of the historic Rottnest Lodge – the former Quod.

According to a West Australian newspaper report a bank spokesman is quoted as saying: "As part of our long-term strategy to transfer the Rottnest Lodge to an organisation with the specialised skills needed to properly manage it, we can confirm we are in discussions with a preferred entity." More controversy was to beset the renovations when during extensive earthworks a variety of Aboriginal artefacts (later clarified as being from the Kimberley region) were discovered. It was established that these artefacts could well have been part of the burial ceremony and process. Upon being informed Aboriginal representatives and activists Robert Bropho and Len Culbong immediately went to the island to demand a stop-work action.

According to Moran, *The West Australian* newspaper on page 3, contained a photograph of Robert Bropho and Len Culbong with the Aboriginal flag raised over the excavation of the proposed swimming pool. Elder Bropho is recorded as saying that, “This is very serious. The State Government’s only aim is the holy dollar, which it puts before any other concerns.” Poignantly *Yorta Yorta* Elder, Henry Atkinson, when discussing skeletal remains of his descendants asks, “…what value can you put on your ancestors? There is no dollar value and no words that can really describe the value of our ancestors.” The report outlined further that both Bropho and Culbong claimed the area and the Lodge itself on behalf of the Aboriginal people as a sacred site. The paper reported that “Work on the Rottnest Island Lodge resort was stopped late yesterday after Aborigines claimed Rottnest Island and the lodge resort – where at least 15 of their ancestors were publicly hanged – as a major sacred site. After Federal intervention late...
yesterday the State Government agreed to halt work until anthropological and archaeological studies were completed”. 158

“The pool incident was as simple as this without any planning what so ever the Bond Corporation...just did what they wanted... there was no plans submitted. They dug, they excavated round the centre of the Quod - the old jail - and we ended up in the Supreme Court, I was able to produce evidence...and we successfully won the fact that this was a place of ceremony and extreme significance to the Aboriginal community and the Bond Corporation were ordered to place the earth back and adorn the property...basically I dragged the Lawrence Government kicking and screaming into tent land with this ground probing radar...” 159

Allardyce’s above account of the incident is validated by historical transcript which highlights that the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs Dr Lawrence stopped work on the lodge site due to “…concern among the community”. 160 According to reports the Minister for Planning Mrs Pam Beggs also agreed with the actions of the Aboriginal Affairs minister.

Further to ceasing all excavation, extensions and revamps to the lodge the protest group also wanted “Federal Aboriginal Minister Gerry Hand to intervene and declare the site [sacred] until there was proper consultation between the Aboriginal people and the State Government.” 161 The main argument was that from previous excavations when bodies were dug up when sewerage pipes were laid, many of the bodies were only a metre from the surface, and some in a sitting position, the potential for more bodies to be uncovered in the area of the lodge and particularly the pool were magnified.

According to locals that Allardyce consulted with on the island, there “…was an immediate cover up. Some universities actually tried to find the graveyard because it had been lost forever because they were unmarked graves but there was a massive cover up at the time [because] as you can appreciate it was right next to the resort...” 162

Dr Carmen Lawrence163, who from 1990 became the Nation’s first woman Premier, was the State Minister for Aboriginal Affairs during the time of the Dallhold Investments resort situation at Rottnest. When being interviewed for this project and film production Dr Lawrence denied there ever being a ‘cover up’:

158 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 177-178. [Ibid.]
159 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
161 Ibid.
162 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
163 Entered State Politics in 1986 and in February 1988 she was appointed Minister for Education and a year later received the additional portfolio of Aboriginal Affairs. When Premier Dowding was deposed in February 1990 Dr Lawrence became Australia's first woman premier and also held additional portfolios including Treasurer, Minister for Public Sector Management, Women's Interests, Family, Aboriginal Affairs and Multicultural and Ethnic Affairs. Her government was defeated at the election in February 1993 and she then served as Leader of the Opposition for one year before resigning and, in March 1994, entered Federal Politics – serving on both the Government and Opposition benches until 2002.
[Source: http://john.curtin.edu.au/lawrence/biography.html]
“I’m a bit puzzled by that because as I say we were really trying to get to the bottom of it, you know we employed commissioned work to not only do the ground probing radar, but I saw some of those results and I thought it would be surprising if the results were somehow manipulated or covered up, I’m not quite sure who is supposed to have done that... it may be the more significant issue is that nothing was done, rather than the information wasn’t available... if it was covered up it was covered up from me too because there was certainly no conspiracy on the part of government to hide this... Knowledge is power after all and if that knowledge was available we wanted to have it. It wasn’t going to help any anyone to pretend that it wasn’t a problem.”  

Allardyce explains that, once the ground probing radar was authorised, work began to establish any indication of disturbances within the soil contained within the area of the lodge and its proximity. This was achieved with the use of a probe sample taken from the nearby European cemetery, which contained 13 gravesites of settlers deceased on the island. Once work began it was quickly established that multiple disturbances were evident in an area next to the lodge dwellings, which was where campers frequently paid to pitch their own tents. Halidays explains that, “…when we went into tent land of course the ground probing radar was complimentary on both sides and the ground probing radar doesn’t show skeletons but it does show disturbed ground consistent with a grave…”

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164 Lawrence, Carmen Dr. “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”  
165 The first deceased drowned 19th December 1853 – the last died 13th January 1899.  
166 Allardyce “interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”  
167 Randolph (et tel) Rottnest Island Aboriginal Prisoners Cemetery, [year unknown]: 401.
Better known as ‘Tent Land’ this name was to become synonymous with the burial site at Rottnest and play a major part in turning the tide in favour of the respective Aboriginal groups campaigning for sacred rights on the island.

“Tent land is where we [Rottnest Island Authority] would let people have [camping] sites for $16 a week, or whatever it might be, to bring over their own tents and set up holiday tents on that land...and that had been going and developing for a long time but when we found with the probing the land that there was disturbed land, soil underneath which could well be graves we said ‘right draw a line – we can’t have those in conflict with each other.’”

The site’s location was in an area about 50-70 metres in diameter and adjacent to the T-junction of the road to the Golf Club and the road on the Garden Lake side of the Lodge. It was disclosed further that bodies of Aboriginal prisoners had been disturbed previously by accident when foundations were laid for a fence between the old prison quad and infirmary. Allardyce continues that “...at that point in time I had recorded just over 300 deaths myself and realising that you can’t fit 300 graves into a 70 metre area whether it’s circular or triangular or rectangular, I knew that there must be more grave yards somewhere on Rottnest...”

So debate about a further grave site location was raised at the time and according to Timperley in 1885 there were indications that a new cemetery was constructed “…further away from the prison.” In 1990 Allardyce was able to locate Jack O’Donoghue, son of a prison warder, and Don Watson, Edward Watson’s son who reaffirmed the evidence that Watson gave in his publication: *Rottnest its tragedy and its glory*.

O’Donoghue prepared an affidavit and stated that the cemetery he recollected was “…about one hundred yards square and was situated in the north-eastern corner of the area now known...as ‘Tentland’. Its eastern border was about thirty yards west of the...”

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168 O’Meara “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for *Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground* project”
169 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for *Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground* project”
170 Timperley in Randolph (et tel) *Rottnest Island Aboriginal Prisoners Cemetery*, {year unknown}: 399.
road…and the centre of the [this] cemetery as being two hundred yards to the north-north-west of the aboriginal hospital.” 171

Allardyce recollects that during one of the ground probing sessions he felt a strange sensation and could not figure out why as his survey work and coordinates did not match up at the time with where he was located. “I’m in tent land, I’m walking down towards the northern end of tent land and it was like walking into a cool room or blast cool room, I will never forget the sensation…” 172 About six weeks after Allardyce identified this spot as his ‘ground zero’ he was informed that it was the epicentre of “…the largest burial area we have come on tent land to date…” 173 Allardyce is still unsure how he discovered the key disturbance section of the burial area but after having discussed this phenomena with Elders from all over the state he has been informed that, “…they believe yes their ancestors did communicate with me. For a person who never believed in spirits…I’ve certainly changed my mind in respect to that matter.” 174

Elder Noel Nannup recalls the struggle of identifying the tent land burial site and the hurdles that the community had to go through to achieve the desired outcome, plus the significance of Paul Allardyce’s crusade to get to the truth of the matter. “…They tried to hide it. But, one man, there was no way he could hide it – he felt some sort of spirit and…he found out as much as he could as quickly as he could, and then, he brought that information, and he shared it with the Aboriginal people.” 175

Allardyce reasons that, “…Wadjimup/Rottnest belongs to both Noongar and Wadjella, we don’t have a lot of history and we should vigorously defend the integrity of our history and that’s the way I have always worked, my knowledge has always been freely available to anybody who wished to use it.” 176

The Aboriginal cause now had the necessary scientific facts, administrative documents and legislative authorisation as a power base to stop any further work on the lodge and adjoining sites. This caused unforeseen loss of revenue to Bond Corporation and untold embarrassment to the State Government and Rottnest Authority. Aboriginal demands included total disclosure of the burial site, future plans related to the site to be publically declared and appropriate acknowledgement and protection of the ancestors remains or “…losses would continue to accrue.” 177 The battle lines had now certainly been set.

Allardyce reflects on this time and explains that, “The attitude of the Rottnest Island Authority from...1989 was pure confrontation...particularly to myself. They thought I was interfering and there was no assistance at all from both the Rottnest Island Authority and, in those days, the Department of Aboriginal Affairs…” 178 He believes that the authorities needed to cover up the situation because it affected one of WA’s biggest entrepreneurs (Alan Bond) and his corporation. Extraordinarily, Allardyce also claims that a casino was intended for the island (on the resort site) and that the Aboriginal resistance was “…interfering with progress.” 179 The State Government was correspondingly aware of these further plans and according to Allardyce there was

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171 Randolph et al, Rottnest Island Aborigional Prisoners Cemetery. {year unknown}: 399.
172 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
173 Ibid.
174 Ibid.
175 Nannup “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
176 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
177 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 177-179.
178 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
179 Ibid.
definitely a concerted attempt to cover the situation up and discredit him and that he knew of “...government officials who worked in these departments, they were not allowed to communicate with me and quite often they would ring me at night tell me what was going, what the latest going on.” 180 It was a stand off between the authorities and Aboriginal people, who were clearly not going to accept anything but a full public disclosure, “Yes...it was a conspiracy between...both departments, the overwhelming weight of evidence and primary evidence which I presented was overwhelming [that] there was obviously graves in tent land...and the Aboriginal people made it very clear that they were not going to go away until the sanctity of their ancestors’ graves had been uncovered and I had exactly the same attitude, I had guaranteed people from about the state that I would not rest until we found their ancestors’ graves.” 181

According to the former Chair of the RIA, every effort was made to bring about a working relationship with the Aboriginal concerns, including a clear buffer zone around and near the burial site. “So that was [a] very positive indication and...answer to...the Deaths in Custody Group to see that we really are going about it in a pretty strong fashion...when we took the line to move the camping ground, and that was not taken lightly as you appreciate because we had all the physical infrastructure there, the change rooms and toilets and everything were on that site but...we just moved it [tent land]...so that was the big action in terms...to settle on the boundary and the buffer area around that burial ground.” 182 Dr Lawrence also supports O’Meara, and claims further that “…there was considerable discussion about what we needed to do in order to establish, for instance, the boundaries of the burial sites. I think all of us wanted to ensure that there was proper recognition but there was no agreement about what sites were affected and as I say, precious little knowledge really about what had happened...” 183 Dr Lawrence also adds that due to political pressures (both Government and Aboriginal) and bureaucratic procedures: “I don’t think we [authorities and parties involved] moved fast enough and there were some other people involved and the Aboriginal group who had a bit of an axe to grind with government so it wasn’t always easy to make the discussions prosper, they tended to go around in circles a bit.” 184

Elder Cedric Jacobs not only shares his antipathy for unsuspecting campers sleeping on top of his ancestors unmarked graves but also the resentment he feels for the authorities who allowed the campers in the burial site in the first place:

“It made me feel very bad, I felt very bad in my spirit, I felt bad for them as well...for the fact that they...were camping on the graves, but for the ignorance by the administrators to properly identity the grave, the grave sites, or the bounds of the cemetery...fortunately the tent land has been moved...” 185

It was apparent that the Rottnest Island Board and the respective authorities had previously known about the burial site and the history of the island, as a statement released by them at the time stated,

180 Ibid.
181 Ibid.
182 O’Meara “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
183 Lawrence, Dr. “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
184 Ibid.
185 Jacobs, Cedric “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
“...some 364 Aboriginals had died in the Rottnest Prison...[and that]...through a process of reconciliation it is hoped that due recognition can be given to the Aboriginal past of Rottnest through protection of the cemetery site, the development of an interpretive centre and the opportunity for wider community to participate in education programmes which will enhance their understanding of this era in Western Australia’s history.” 186

O’Meara validates that himself, his board and the Rottnest Island Authority were, and are, aware of the tragic circumstance of the island and when questioned responded that,

“...the history of the Quod...was constructed back in Vincent’s time and it’s got a dark history. I am aware of the statistics...and the number that died there, the number that are in the burial ground in unmarked graves. I am aware of the burial ground being the largest unmarked grave in the southern hemisphere and the Rottnest Island Authority is aware of its responsibilities in doing something about that...we [Rottnest Island Authority] know the history of the Quod, I know the history of the Quod. I have personally strong feelings about that and I have personally been concerned about it being used for holiday accommodation and I have expressed those views previously.” 187

Allardyce when given the response of the RIA reacted immediately and with vehemency,

“I see...Rottnest [as a] piecemeal from the Government departments, they don’t really want to know and up front they will smile nicely and say ‘oh yes we are proud of our Aboriginal heritage’ but have a walk around [the Island] and there is one little plaque that denotes it as being an Aboriginal grave yard and that’s it. I think that says it all....” 188

O’Meara further clarifies the actions of the Authority and declares the situation then was very different (it is not clear if he intends this to mean politically, socially or culturally), but now things have improved “...very different from what it was 10 years ago, the...cabins have been removed...it’s [burial site] fenced off and it has been cleaned up quite well so although there is no memorial activity of the ancestors at this time, the actual site itself is not in a bad state...” 189 It should be noted that the burial site is not fenced in a strict sense. During special events, like School leavers week, a temporary security fence is put up, but normally it is nominally ‘fenced’ by some limestone boulders – showing that the area has a designated boundary – but not withholding access to the site to the general public and wildlife. Noongar Aurora Abraham expresses dismay about the current state, and lack of memorial, of the burial site:

“Very, very sad cause’ there is still no recognition. I mean you go to any gravesite anywhere, there [are] tombstones, even a cross, to

186 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 181.
187 O’Meara “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
188 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
189 O’Meara “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
The political landscape had changed by 1994 with a change of State of Government but the issue of Aboriginal prisoner skeletal remains had yet to be formally resolved by both the island and state authorities. From the initial report in 1970, over two decades had passed without a resolution. On the morning of the 4th June 1994 readers were confronted with the headline: “Aborigines want Rottnest – Aborigines want control of Rottnest and an official Aboriginal cemetery established.” Several demands were made at this time to the State Government, that the Noongar community (via elected Elder representatives) should be installed as ‘custodians of the island’ and that the Quod area should be set aside as a ‘meeting and camping place’ for Aboriginal use.

These proposals were among a number presented on behalf of the Rottnest Island Deaths Group to the Premier Richard Court at a formal meeting held on the island to conduct a traditional funeral ceremony for an unknown Aboriginal prisoner buried on the island. According to Moran the ceremony at the Aboriginal burial site was to “bury the bones and release the spirit of the unknown prisoner who was accidently dug up…” Moran recalled the ceremony in his book Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup; as a mark of respect, young Aboriginal men from communities throughout the State held flags and marched behind the elders, most of who were wailing in language and who carried the bones from the jetty to the cemetery in a wooden bowl known as a coollamon. The bones were wrapped in paperbark and decorated with cockatoo feathers and before being buried, a traditional digging stick was used to prepare the grave. Moran explains that the burial was “…part of a three day Rottnest Wadjemup ceremonial meeting organised by the group.”

This historical event did not go unnoticed by the spectators. Glen Kelly, who would later hold the position of Chief Executive of the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, was one such witness to this monumental meeting and gathering:

“I was present at the big gathering that happened...in 1994 when a whole lot of people all over the state came, (and) went over to Rotto...look it was extraordinary, there must have been two or three hundred people there...a huge number of elders, senior elders...law men and women...who had travelled from...the Kimberley, the Western Desert, the Pilbra, the Goldfields, Noongar Country, all over the state, to come together to seek to try and heal this place.”

The 1994 meeting was pivotal for many reasons, not least it bore witness to the State Premier – the Honourable Richard Court – addressing the meeting and declaring that,

Abraham “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”

In 1993 Richard Court led the Liberal Party in a resounding defeat of the Labor Government

[Source: http://www.wa.liberal.org.au/party/history]

Ibid.

Also known to Noongarr as a mirlkoorn – and also as a Yandi

Known to Noongar as bibool or yowarl

Known to Noongar as karak

Known to Noongar as a waan or waana

Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 183.

Kelly “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
“Rottnest was the biggest Aboriginal deaths in custody site in Western Australia.” 200 For the first time in the continuing debate a senior member of the government had affirmed what most of the Aboriginal community knew, and not only that but it was made public and to the throng of media that attended the historic meeting. The Premier continued his speech by declaring that, “The Quod was a visible reminder of the mistakes of the past but the unmarked graves and Aboriginal cemetery had been largely forgotten.” 201 The massive gathering of senior Aboriginal Elders and leaders and their family members, some who had travelled thousands of kilometres, were overwhelmed by the words spoken by the state’s leader. The gathering and the importance and status of the attendees also overawed Kelly:

“It was extraordinary and that is what struck me the most, I remember looking around at all of these people and it just really struck me as a really powerful gathering...[that] I don’t think that I will ever in my life time again see a gathering of such senior people in one place...” 202

The Premier thanked the organisers, Aboriginal participants, and spectators and concluded with the stirring statement that, despite a lack of recognition in the past of the island’s sombre history, “Now however, this appalling history has been acknowledged thanks largely to the efforts of Aboriginal people in their sincere respect for their ancestors who came here against their will and remained here forever.” 203

Many of the people present were convinced that “The Court Government...were a little bit more conciliatory...” 204 but several months later some also were taken aback by (and consequently rejected) the State Government’s suggestion of placing an interpretative centre in the middle of the burial site and surround it with limestone walls, paths and buildings. Many senior Aboriginal leaders were aghast at this, with one of their spokespersons declaring that, “it’s just abhorrent [as] these men [Aboriginal prisoners] died in limestone buildings, they died cutting limestone blocks, the thought of putting any sort of building on top of any cemetery [was] just totally out of the question so this department all they were looking at is a way that they could make a dollar out of it basically and we put paid to that very smartly.” 205

In hindsight the meeting of the Aboriginal collective at Rottnest in 1994 was historic for several reasons. Firstly a senior politician addressed the issue up-front, the media filtered the message of the Aboriginal collective back to the mainland and across the nation, some form of healing was begun with the ceremony conducted for the unknown Aboriginal prisoner’s remains. As a direct result of the momentous meeting it was agreed by relevant senior Aboriginal Elders, and then sanctioned by the State Government, that a committee should be convened to protect and monitor the burial site and unmarked graves contained within. Thus the Rottnest Island Deaths Group of Western Australia (RIDGWA) was formally conceived and is recognised under common seal as the Rottnest Island Deaths Group Aboriginal Corporation. Claims by the group that, “....there probably wouldn’t be an Aboriginal person in this state who doesn’t have some ancestor buried under the ground in a unmarked grave at Wadjimup”

200 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 183.
201 Ibid.
202 Kelly “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
203 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 183.
204 Kelly “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
205 Ibid.
would not be too far from the truth and strengthens further the importance of the island to the Aboriginal community. (Former) Chairperson Albert Corunna surmises both his and the group’s position and purpose:

“…the Rottnest Island Deaths Group was given in a state meeting in 1994 when we went over there and camped on Rottenest Island... and that (the) authority was given to us that we were the people to look after the graves, even though the graves...belonged to people all over Western Australia and they [authority and/or State Government?] recognised that we were the traditional owners - the Swan River people - and we would be the ones to look after it [the graves]...as they [Aboriginal prisoners] perished there and suffered there....”

The concept of Aboriginal spirituality was also a cornerstone of the governance and decision making process of the newly formed Deaths Group with a clear mandate being that full consultation needed to be implemented when it came to decisions about the burial site. In fact the Group determined that where possible decisions of this magnitude would need to be “…on the island because the spirits are still there, this is our belief the spirits are still there and...we would like to answer all these questions in front of those spirits and so they would have some...degree of influence... [as] they give us some guidance...”

Former Rottnest Island Authority member Karen Jacobs, daughter of a Senior Noongar Elder, and descendent of Aboriginal prisoners explains that politically the Group, having been approved by the Minister, “…brought the right level of attention to the Island. It sort of forced the questions to be asked about the cultural history of the Island; what’s going on, on the Island, and where does it go in the future?”

These poignant issues were now being debated in the wider public domain and the campaign to recognise, preserve and protect the burial site began to gain momentum. The Deaths Group and its supporters started to pressure both the State Government and Rottnest Island Board to conform to their requests. However, despite a flurry of media exposure and (some) public sympathy the matter was not deemed important enough on the political and social landscape and combined with a lack of financial resource and political clout, the issue was quickly neglected. In the words of Moran, “Poor people have little power to influence, as influence is mostly gained through the power of money.”

Noongar Aurora Abraham, who worked on the island and from those experiences captured her spiritual dreams of the island through her paintings, underlines the above notion and the current status of Wadjemup as a ‘holiday camp’:

“Now being a holiday camp people pay hundreds of dollars to sleep in them rooms [the Rottnest Island Resort] that were [formerly] known as cells. It’s sort of, you know hard to understand but I mean that’s the way of life, money is more important than people’s feelings.”

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206 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
207 Corunna “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
208 Ibid.
209 Jacobs, Karen “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
210 Moran, Rottnest: Ghosts of Wadjemup: 177.
211 Abraham “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
Another major outcome that eventuated from the 1994 gathering was the beginning of dialogue and debate as to what should happen with the Quod. Some felt that the Quod should be locked up. Many objected to this and felt that, “…if the building is locked up it will die…” so another viewpoint and compromise was put forward – for the Quod to be “…turned into a living memorial, a memorial of remembrance.” Allardyce states that:

“In a perfect world I’d like to see the initial thoughts and requests of the conference of Elders from about the state be realised. Commercially…the jail [that is] the Quod could become a marvellous museum, a living memorial of remembrance and there wouldn’t be a need to try and hide and cover up the truth then. The commercial reality is that it [a memorial] can be achieved…now or after 2018…where both Wadjella and Noongar benefit…[regarding] our joint history - our collective history.”

Other Elders agree with Allardyce, but from a slightly different viewpoint. Elder Robert Bropho, at the time, was recorded as saying that an interpretative centre where the Quod was positioned was the ‘right idea’ but that it was purely “…the Aboriginal people [who] are the ones to tell the people what’s going on, showing them, telling them. Aboriginal history.” Bropho recognises the commercial potential of the Quod area, and pre-empts thoughts of eco-tourism and a cultural draw-card for the island. “That in itself would bring in a lot more tourists over there. It would double the amount of what the Rottnest Island Authority is doing now, just hand[ing] out pamphlets and tourist information. It would draw the people in.”

Another Elder, Noel Nannup, agrees with this notion but also believes fervently that “…there should not be any volunteers on that island. The people telling the story of that place should be us [Aboriginals] because we’re the only ones with the sensitivity to articulate what that place is all about.” Allardyce sees a more reconciliatory solution and pleads for the sensibility that the island and its key sacred Aboriginal sites are, “…for both of us, its for Wadjella and Noongar to respect and remember that there are two sides to Wadjimup/Rottnest island – not just the tourism side…”

From the 1994 meeting, the Aboriginal population of Western Australia were right to think that progress was being made regarding the burial site and the Quod. The Premier had declared support for the project, plans had apparently been drawn up by a Sydney based consultant (according to Moran a proposal of a sight and sound museum at considerable costs was formulated), work had been carried out to remove cottages away from the ‘buffer zone’ of the burial site, and negotiations continued with the Liberal Government. But all of this was to amount to nought when the Liberal Government was defeated in 2003 and talks to re-begin with the newly appointed Labour State government would need to be carried out. Moran explains that many of the points

212 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
213 Ibid.
214 Ibid.
215 Ibid.
216 Nannup “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
217 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
218 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
discussed and negotiated during that time period are, “...still today left unattended to.”

So, unbearably, the situation on Wadjemup remains at a stalemate. There have been proposals put forward by the Rottnest Island Deaths Group [see below], which were published by PAPER TALK under the guidance of member Graham Merritt, who invited the general public to view the Two future options (with diagram) or present their own ideas.

![Diagram 1: THE FUTURE – OPTION 1](image1)

The Site is designed to facilitate public access along carefully designed pathway that moves between known graves. Inlaid along the pathway are memorial stones, having the name of the prisoners that died, inscribed on them. At the centre of the Site is a Memorial Sculpture. Access to the site is via the Interpretative Centre.

![Diagram 2: THE FUTURE – OPTION 2](image2)

Axonometric view of Site, Memorial Sculpture and Interpretive Centre. This option prevents public access, the memorial being viewed from the area near the Interpretative Centre.

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Nothing has come to fruition regarding these two ‘Future Options’ and the Rottnest Island Deaths Group has been relegated to the background of the debate – an almost voiceless organisation – with little influence and political power. Former RIA Board Member Karen Jacobs asks the question;

“...Does that (group) still have a role to play? Big question mark! I personally don’t think it does. The (Rottnest Island) Deaths Group purely had a mandate...to have a say on what occurred within the burial ground parameters. On a personal level and being a board member, I don’t only take into account what has happened within the Quod and the burial ground parameters, I take on board what occurred right across the whole Island when it comes to its cultural history, both pre-settlement and during settlement and the set up of the Quod prison and also...how Aboriginal people are engaged today with what goes on, on the Island. The Deaths Group to me, because of that mandate, are stuck in a time zone and I believe that it’s the (group’s) title on its own that really does restrict them according to that letter that the minister allocated at the time onto what their role and what their level of responsibility [was]...”

This is also the view shared by the Rottnest Island Authority, represented by Laurie O’Meara, who explains that previous to his term as Chair a dialogue did exist, but that since his appointment no correspondence has been forthcoming between the two parties.

“In the past...there was quite a deal of consultation...[however] I have not personally had consultation with the Rottnest Island Deaths Group...Things have changed a lot since that group was set up...and we don’t really want to be side-tracked into problems with Aboriginal politics...” The Chief Executive of the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, gives further background to the matter of Aboriginal politics and the urgency of the Rottnest Island Authority and State Government to avoid such matters:

“...it’s probably mainly because there is a lot of very strongly competing groups in Perth who are each vying for legitimacy and some sort of exclusivity over the matters that happen in and around Perth and Wadjimup. Our opinion is that they are all legit but they can’t be exclusive because they all have a connection to country, something to say and they all have to be heard and listened to. So the (Rottnest Island) Authority finds it pretty difficult to work with these politics...”

These types of ideologies from the Authority will not change in the foreseeable future with their Senior representative declaring that Rottnest by legislative definition is, “...a holiday island and so whilst...we must recognise the past we can’t live in it, we’re [we’ve?] got to recognise it for what it was and then move forward...I think we achieve that by giving full recognition to places like the Quod and the burial ground...and I feel that the time is more right now than it’s ever been...”

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221 Jacobs, Karen “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
222 O’Meara “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
223 Kelly “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
224 O’Meara “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
Through all the rhetoric the simple fact remains that the Aboriginal population of Western Australia continues to wait for the building of an Aboriginal Memorial on the Island; whether on the current unmarked burial site, the former Quod, which is now the Rottnest Island Lodge (Resort) or both:

“I know from personal experience [Rottnest Island] is an embarrassment to a lot of the Rottnest Island Authority people. Rottnest has been an embarrassing island to the Government since 1838 and nothing’s really changed in respect to Aboriginality...maybe someday somebody will have the wisdom to do it.” 225

One of the recent considerations for the island of Wadjemup has centred around the matter of Native Title, particularly given that the Single Noongar claim enveloped the metropolitan area and separately the south-west region of Western Australia. The peak body that is responsible for this Native Title claim – the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council [SWALSC] – noted that they do receive ‘correspondence by the Authority’ related to the Island and any relevant Native Title matters but generally “...relations to the Noongar and the broader W.A. Aboriginal sensitivities – around the prison, the burials, and those sorts of things...hasn’t particularly involved [SWALSC]...” 226

Further the recent Noongar Native Title ruling over the metropolitan area did not include the Island of Wadjemup as it was deemed that local Noongar have not had a physical connection to the island (for several thousand years) and could not therefore have maintained laws and customs and cultural activities on the island whilst it was separated from the mainland and before it became a prison.

“There’s been lots of Native Title Claims which have gone over the top of Rottnest...[and] while it was recognised by the judge that there is a special spiritual connection to Wadjemup for Noongars and that it was recognised that Wadjemup was a significant place for Noongar people, culture and spirit...(it) didn’t extend to mean that there was a Native Title on Wadjemup because Native Title relies also on ongoing physical connection and the argument was well ‘yes it’s important culturally and important spiritually and it’s all recognised but because people haven’t been physically there for five or six thousand years there cannot be a native title’. So that was an unfortunate side of what was otherwise a really magnificent win.” 227

Regardless of this Wadjemup will always have a spiritual connection to the Noongar community and their northern ‘cousins’. Kelly states:

‘Native Title ruling or not, it’s (Wadjemup) Noongar country, it’s got Noongar spirit and an attachment to it and you don’t need any sort of Native Title ruling to tell you one way or the other, but by the same time there’s all of these people from around the state who are buried there, so the Noongar mob who were there saying ‘look this is our country but we know that we can’t do things here without your

225 Allardyce “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
226 Kelly “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
227 Ibid.
involvement’ and the other mob were saying ‘these are our people buried here but we know that we can’t do anything here without your involvement because it’s your country’...” 228

Bin-Barker says that Wadjemup is “…the very essence of our unity as an oneness because we are all connected to that one sacred place. It’s the sacred common ground...for all of us.” 229 Swan River Elder Corunna expresses his connection to the island with this statement: “My relationship...well my spiritual relationship...to the Island I think we regard it as our traditional country even though the white man say we were cut off by water but...we know that is the land of our Ancestors under the water there so that water becomes our waters of our country as I say...” 230

Though recognising spiritual connection to the island has always been problematic to the Aboriginal community the physical connection to Rottnest Island is frankly incontestable. Many of the physical buildings and landmarks on the island were built with the “…long, hard days of labour...” 231 of the Aboriginal prisoners, some of whom are now in the unmarked gravesite on the island. Some of these buildings include the former Salt Store (built in 1868), which is now modernised as a key gallery and exhibition space, the original old mill and hay store (built in 1857), which is now the Rottnest Island Museum. Further the Sea Wall, the holding cell on the foreshore, Vincent’s Hut, the Quokka Arms Hotel (formerly the Governor’s residence), the limestone causeway that dissects the two main salt lakes, and the iconic Rottnest lighthouse (later replaced by the Wadjemup lighthouse), which was designed and supervised by Mr Henry Trigg 232. Elder Cedric Jacobs implores that the general public consider that these key buildings and iconic symbols of the island were constructed “…with the blood of Aboriginal men…” 233 lending weight to the argument that, “…[though] it’s a very sad history in the life of the nation...it’s...[a] story that needs to be told so that Aboriginal people can see, can know their history, and the wider Australians [can] know their history as well...they will know clearly that Rottnest, or Wadjemup, was a prison.” 234

Hibberd enunciates that if nothing was to happen on Wadjemup and the memory of the Aboriginal prisoners who served time, and perished on the island, were to be forgotten, and fade away in to the annals of history then this would equate to a momentous form of denial and that by its mere existence “...we are living in it and in denying it, [and] not addressing it causes trauma...” 235 This trauma is felt predominately by the Aboriginal community, particularly the local Noongar community, for whom Wadjemup lies in close proximity. In fact it is very rare to see an Aboriginal person or groups of people on the island, other than for official business or ceremonial gatherings (for instance in 1988 and 1994). Why is this? What factors make this happen...and

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what can be done to heal this harm and trauma that the Indigenous population traditionally associate with Wadjemup? Jacobs expresses regretfully that the island is being “…portrayed as the most pleasurable place to go for a holiday by the wider community and the white people [are] the only ones who go over there…[to] use it as their playground.” 

“You know Wadjimup requires a level of sophistication that we haven’t yet come to…it will show the world I think ways in which we understand horrific human behaviour but also the potential power of healing and memory…and turning around a way of seeing ourselves…[it] could be an international example of the appropriate handling of historical memory and recuperation and of traumatic sites...of healing...but also one that understands itself and can move on and start to begin the healing process…” 

Sally Morgan’s Welcome To Rottnest

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236 Jacobs, Cedric “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
237 Hibberd “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
238 Morgan’s art depicts the tourists of Rottnest enjoying its spoils whilst just below their feet the deceased Aboriginal prisoners lay in abundant unmarked graves.
[Source: http://wadjemup.blogspot.com.au]
4.6 Conclusions – Towards Healing and Reconciliation on Wadjemup

4.6.1 Intergenerational Trauma and the Need for Healing

“We have a horrendous history in Australia. About what happened to us as Aboriginal people. And guess what? You’re never going to know, unless we tell you...”

Wadjemup is a metaphor for the nation. Until recently, official Australian history has attempted to cover up the abuse and repression towards Aboriginal people post the invasion in 1788. For me, NO place has attempted to cover it up as much as Rottnest Island. NO other place in the nation has dealt with its Aboriginal and Colonial history as badly as the State, and its respective authorities, has dealt with ‘Rotto’, from my perspective. However, it could be the epi-center of understanding colonial history, of respecting cultural knowledge, of manifesting healing and millennium conciliation. The colonial atrocities are in the walls of the former Quod, below the soil of the burial site, in the buildings that still stand, while culture and healing are evident in the mystical sunsets that set over the Noongar ‘heaven’ known as Kurranup. It is intact. It is both physical and spiritual, tangible and intangible. Rottnest’s history should be a major focus in Australian history. It should be taught in every classroom across the state, nay nation. This history should be preserved, nurtured and documented thus allowing us – the collective nation – to learn, to reconcile, and to heal.

“After all it’s Australia’s true history, I was always taught history belongs to everybody and through a celebration we could do some sort of healing...”

But in reality the Island has lost its traditional name in non-Aboriginal society. It struggles to hold onto its spiritual core, its cosmological stories relegated to the few who know them, the plight of hundreds of Aboriginal men are relegated to the soil that these men now lie in, some feet under the land. The Island’s history also mirrors the ‘ethnic cleansing’ that occurred in the 18th century, and some would argue, still today. Today Wadjemup represents the complacency of society, an island of ignorance, a playground, a holiday resort and a place to ‘escape’ (ask yourself what are they trying to ‘escape’ from?), and have vacations ‘away from societal pressures.’

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1 Noel Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
2 Ibid.
Reflections from Rosemary Walley, a Kimberley woman, who resides in Noongar country, and whose mother recalled meeting and talking with Lumbia [pictured left], the last Aboriginal prisoner to serve time on the island and then return to Oomoogari in the far North, elaborates on the feeling that most Aboriginal people of the state have towards Rottnest and its historical symbolism:

“I think it [Rottnest] encapsulates the history past and present...its almost a forgetfulness of that history in today’s context where history has been covered up and it’s been turned into something that it’s not, a place of fun, activity, holidays...”

Walley continues to question whether the general population would, in fact, want to holiday on the island if they were aware of the whole truth of the island – that is if this “…really important part of the story of Perth and Western Australia…” was finally uncovered without political spin-doctoring, tourist gloss-over and/or marketing make-over. She comments that it would likely deter from complete ‘holiday merriment and relaxation’ as continuing to do so, once the complete truth and realization of the situation and island’s history was known, would be like, “...dancing on the graves of our people...” Though as I argue later creating a respectful memorial could remedy this.

The South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council has an interesting perspective when dealing with the island, which involves a focus on the heritage value of Wadjemup. As part of their dialogue with the State Government they explain that Wadjemup “…tells a story not only about our [Noongar] people and our land but this tells a story about you and about the history of the development and the settlement and the invasion of this colony and this state and it’s not one you can ignore.” Continuing, Kelly pleads for action, “Heritage is suppose to be about telling a story, so lets tell the story...”

Dr Lawrence also hopes that Wadjemup is ‘prioritized’ in regards to heritage, and the Government bodies [Local, State & Federal] formally recognising this aspect, as they have (up to now) failed, “…to properly recognise Indigenous heritage, and I don’t just mean their rock art, which is very important, but also the lives lived, the stories told, the stories untold and I think in this case what we’ve got to say is ‘Heritage is what we choose to remember, what we choose to pass on’. And this is an area where we can’t afford forgetting, so it’s a very important symbolic gesture, but also a healing gesture, to recognise, in a very public way, what happened at Rottnest...”

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3 Walley “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project”
4 Kelly "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
5 Ibid.
6 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
8 Lawrence, Dr. "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
Walley also argues that if the State Government gave any credence to the past events on the island, this would, “...add more meaning to our cultural history...” regardless of whether it was deemed to be unpleasant, horrific or damaging. Neglect of this history, and a propensity to ‘do nothing’, as the State Government is currently doing, serves only to nurture intergenerational trauma. The island “reflect[s] some of the problems that our next generations have encountered because of some of those atrocities that have happened in the past, because it does effect from generation to generation if it hasn’t been dealt with.” The Chief Executive of the Aboriginal Legal Service (Perth) further contends that one of the major issues affecting the Aboriginal community, resulting in high incarceration rates, health problems and higher than average mortality rates is, “…post-colonial stress disorder that impacts on so many Aboriginal people and their families.”

Professor Craig McGarty, an expert in social psychology including the area of trauma and social change, defines intergenerational trauma as a “…reflection that events in the past play out over time...” particularly where evidence of genocide, mass killings, multiple executions, and/or slayings have occurred which is then likely to cause “...trauma to be borne across generations...” and unless they are addressed, acknowledged and (attempted to be) resolved, the underlying traumatic issue and matter “…can go on for a long period of time...” Broderick and Traverso support McGarty and further define traumatic memory as “…a wound... marked by violence, conflict and suffering...[and] a painful mark of the past that haunts and overwhelms the present…” Recognition of intergenerational trauma is a critical element to the healing process of Indigenous people, “…for the past holds much pain with not only the ancestors being taken by force and brutal means but also the tearing apart of the fabric of our lives.”

Retrospectively therefore a spiritual connection with ancestors must be provided and skeletal remains, or in the case of Wadjemup, unmarked graves and unidentified remains, “…need to be given ceremony which will ease the pain of the Indigenous community and restore some self-respect and pride as their ancestral spirits are united.”

Accordingly, McGarty argues, a resolution can be formulated with the “…agreement and the involvement of both the perpetrators and the people harmed by those past events...” working together to bring to light the true accounts of the event, the

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9 Walley, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
10 When trauma is ignored and there is no support for dealing with its effects, trauma can be passed from one generation to the next. [Source: http://www.mhfa.com.au/documents/guidelines/8307_AMHFA_Trauma_guidelines_email.pdf]
11 Ibid.
13 McGarty, Craig "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
14 Ibid.
15 Ibid.
18 Ibid.
19 McGarty, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”

damage it has effected and then a third space where dialogue, negotiation and conciliation can be fostered. This is also appropriate when the transgressors or victims are deceased. Past harm can be resolved and can be addressed by actions taken in the present day, which will, according to McGarty, “...benefit both the descendants and people in the present day from the perpetrating group, but also the group that has been transgressed against, the group that has been harmed.” By creating an awareness with the next generation(s), the historical narratives that are passed down – particularly of a traditionally oral nature – help the contemporary population to better understand and contextualize the events and circumstances that led to the trauma. Walley agrees with this theory, recalling the times she has taken her daughters to Rottnest:

“...they don’t like going there because they can feel a sense of unhappiness there, they can feel depression and for them it’s not a nice place to be...[but] I think if it was opened more as a place that you come and you show your respects and a place of remembrance, then for them it would be more meaningful because it’s putting to rest something that hasn’t been laid to rest...”

McGarty explained that the feeling that the island gave him when he visited there several years back shocked him. He recalls, “...it is eerie to know of that level of harm, that level of death, that...level of human suffering that occurred at that place.” For Aboriginal people, Wadjemup, in effect, went from a special place of both cultural and spiritual significance to a colonized institution for incarceration, desecrating its place in the Aboriginal world, becoming a beacon, a physical symbol of the repressive legislative actions and policies of the settlers. This effectively cemented within the minds of Aboriginal people that they had ‘no voice – no power’. Tajalaminu Mia argues that this symbol of institutionalization then carried through to a paradigm or a legacy of ‘rite of passage’ through which “…the younger generations followed the older generations and [as] the older generations ended up in those institutions...as a natural course of action younger people ended up in Fremantle, Roebourne, Derby, Broome, Geraldton, Kalgoorlie or Albany prisons. Prisons thus connected family members; fathers, uncles, brothers or cousins.”

Further Tjamalinu argues that one of the major reasons for the high rate of Aboriginal incarceration in the state and the almost acceptance of it by both the Aboriginal perpetrators within the community and the Government itself, is that “…it all stems back from historically the incarceration of our men and young boys over there at Wadjemup.” Nannup agrees with this theory and adds that Wadjemup, “…was the beginning of a process where it was ok to arrest Aboriginal people, to put them in prison and not necessarily need any serious charges, and it’s something that has just continued on today [as] they’re still arresting Aboriginal people [for minor offences].”

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20 The ‘third space’ or ‘third cultural space’ draws on the rich Aboriginal & Islander histories, perspectives, ways of knowing, being and doing balanced symbiotically alongside Western ways of knowing, being and doing. The ‘middle ground’ is the ‘third cultural space,’ which represents a new way of working, thinking, interrelating, and significantly collaborating. [Source: http://deta.qld.gov.au/indigenous/pdfs/eatsips_2011.pdf]

21 McGarty, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."

22 Walley, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."

23 McGarty, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."

24 Tajalaminu Mia, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."

25 Ibid.

26 Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
Bin Barker, in regard to Wadjemup, urges that the situation needs immediate addressing, as a starting point for tackling the wider issues affecting the modern Aboriginal community. He says “…we have a responsibility as a state and a responsibility as a community of West Australians to also acknowledge its traditional name, its history and its attempt at probably ethnic cleansing our community in terms of the social disorder that was imposed on our people and at the expense of our people.”

The Wadjemup prison system, over its near 100 years of operation of Aboriginal incarceration, promoted the break-down of Aboriginal kinships, family structures and tribal protocols by removing (temporarily and in some tragic instances, permanently) the role models, decision makers, those leaders and Elders who gave (and made) direction. According to Aboriginal custom and structure a family (community) group was only as big as what the leaders could maintain order and leadership over. Remove that leadership and guidance and that group will attach itself to another (family/relation) group. Take away those leaders and you have a situation whereupon the group is almost unmanageable, as they have no cultural leadership, protection, guidance and stability. Tragically, what occurred was that a generation for the first time had no true cultural role models in their lives, and often women had to take over the role as sole-parents. This means cultural protocols and practices are often demolished and have to be ‘rebuilt’ or ‘re-discovered’. This history, and all its atrocities, doesn’t just belong to (and affect directly) the Aboriginal community of the state or nation. It “…belongs to the nation, good or bad, right or wrong. The challenge is whether or not we are able to embrace the truth as a nation.”

The nation’s historical neglect, or ‘amnesia’, is a result of Australia still being in the process “…of coming to understand itself…” including the role and responsibility of European settlers in traumatic history against its Aboriginal population. Hibberd argues that the time is right to move “…beyond that trauma for the future recognition of issues of human rights and healing and reparation…” particularly at Wadjemup. McGarty explains that resistance to trauma processes, reconciliation and places of acknowledging harm is common as “People often feel that if they acknowledge harm...in [the] past, that they are accepting personal responsibility...[and] people debate...whether it’s possible to accept that responsibility...” but to keep fostering this denial and continuing to recognize the previous (past) failures and accept the past harm “…doesn’t make it go away. It just leaves it unresolved...”

Wadjemup prisoner descendant, Tammar is saddened by the many people she encounters who say that, “…’what happened in the past should stay in the past’. But I have always said ‘well we can’t move on until we acknowledge the past and that’s the way it has to be...’” Tammar continues that she is aware of people being “…sick and tired of hearing about Aboriginal matters...”. However she adds that it is one of the first steps of education and knowledge sharing and by letting the youth, authorities and wider public know what happened, it promotes respect and recognition of the (past)

27 BinBarker, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
28 Ibid.
29 Ibid.
30 Hibberd, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
31 Ibid.
32 CMcGarty, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
33 Ibid.
34 Tammar, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
35 Ibid.
situation and fosters the process of reconciliation with “...people respecting each individual regardless of race.” 35

“Recognition. That’s all it is, I mean, you know from being little we were taught respect. Respect is a big way of life for the Noongar community and if you can’t give respect to your ancestors who are buried over there or acknowledgement, how is any healing going to be done? So I guess, recognition and respect would need to happen for the healing process [to begin]...” 36

McGarty acknowledges Wadjemup is not only “…a place where there is a lot of unresolved harm,” 37 there also exists “ignorance about the harm.” 38 The harmed parties (or descendants) have been denied an environment and platform to express their concerns and hence haven’t worked through any of the outstanding issues. Until such time that this is worked through, “…that healing that is necessary of that relation to that place...” 39 will not occur.

There are therefore “…not many Indigenous people...who would want to go over to the Island, it’s not a place to go...” 40 The Island itself is a place (and reminder) of “…pain, suffering...because of its past history of what happened there to our people...” 41 Mark Bin Barker expresses that when he travels to Wadjemup, he goes “…with a broken heart.” It is “…like going to visit your grandfather’s grave, you know you are getting close to the cemetery and there is an angst about this is [as] the final resting place...the moment you step off that ferry you are on sacred ground...the moment you step off that pier [and] you see the wall and the buildings you cry in your heart...” 42 When Cedric Jacobs returns to the final resting place of some of his ancestors and countrymen he hears “…the spirit of the people crying, and when I look in some of the buildings and I go home at night I can not get to sleep in fear of a door slamming behind me in one of the cells...” 43

Tania Ferrier recalls “…never seeing Aboriginal people over there when I was growing up but I hadn’t really known why...and it wasn’t until 1997 that I became aware of the graveyard over there...and it was a big shock, I was already 48 years of age and all my holiday beautiful memories of this island...were just shattered in one go...” 44 For other non-Indigenous peoples the memories of ‘Rotto’ have now also been influenced by the ‘reality’ of the islands psyche and historical ‘baggage’.

Even though the island is a place of trauma, harm, amnesia, and cultural neglect, Wadjemup is also seen as a beacon of hope and resilience and a perpetual cross-road that, “…can either destroy us as a race, or it is a point in our history, in our past, which can propel [us] into becoming greater as a people...” 45 When will this healing begin? When will the acknowledgement of this harm and trauma reverberate and ‘wake’ the

35 Ibid.
36 Abraham, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
37 McGarty, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
38 Ibid.
39 Ibid.
40 Abraham, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
41 Walley, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
42 Bin Barker, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
43 Jacobs, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
44 Ferrier, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
45 Ibid.
rest of the State and nation up enough to begin the (re)conciliation process and the memorial development? Perhaps it will come once parliament officially (re)recognizes that it is Australia’s largest Aboriginal Deaths in Custody site and the largest unmarked burial ground in the nation? Perhaps it will begin when the island is finally recognized and decreed a national, or better yet world heritage site. Once that occurs then the authorities may allow or at least encourage (with more intent and ambition perhaps?) those local, national and international tourists to learn about the true cosmological, spiritual, colonized, legislative, political, social, economic, historical and cultural nature of the island; including its rightful and culturally appropriate name: Wadjemup! Then – and only then – can the TRUE healing of the island and communities begin…

“…that’s why I say…I don’t think the place (Wadjemup) is healed yet...look at what happens at Rottnest, people go and ‘run amok’ and ‘schoolies’ and people go there for holidays and all of that sort of stuff and people use it as a playground but underneath that you know it’s paved in blood, and to me, it’s just all wrong and that’s why I can’t go there, people can’t see what we think is the reality of the place and it needs to be healed properly.”

Wadjemup, and its physical outlook, has changed in the past couple of decades – the hotel has been revamped, the cottages that line the bays have either been newly built or renovated, and the former asbestos riddled cottages in the town site have been thankfully razed and replaced by finely rendered abodes. The general store (though its prices have continued to rise at a faster rate than the CPI) now stocks finely selected wines, fruit, cheeses and other delicate produce. If you want a fine meal, there is always the Dome Café or the more up-market (Aristos Waterfront) restaurant; a far cry from the days of the Rottnest bakery pies (as delicious as they are…) or soggy fish and chips. But the one thing that has not changed is that Aboriginal people still do not inhabit and visit the island in any significant numbers (unless on business and/or for cultural purposes).

So why don’t Aboriginal people visit and stay overnight on the island? As explained previously, there are spiritual reasons and belief systems at play which still has validity today. Neville Collard reminds us that, “...Wadjemup...was a bad spirit place, a place where, if you visit there, or if you travel there, or if you stay there...for a long time the evil spirits (warra wirnitj) will get into you and you die (noitj)...”

Tania Ferrier, like most Western Australians – including the Aboriginal community – and this writer – think that the island should still remain a place of recreation, (eco)tourism and relaxation (creation of holiday memories if you like) but that the Aboriginality of the island should not be mutually exclusive; in fact it should have a symbiotic relationship:

“I still think that it should be a holiday place but it’s that understanding of the profound history that makes it even so much more special to go there because you go there knowing that there’s this deep, deep affection for Aboriginal people for how profound the

46 School Leavers (hence ‘Schoolies’) who after final exams venture in their thousands to iconic spots in the south-west – including Rottnest – for what is termed an annual ‘right of passage’ involving alcohol, partying and the opposite sex. [Source: http://wadjemup.blogspot.com.au]
place is, how sacred it is to them and if we can go there with that knowledge we go there experiencing something sacred that we might not normally have.” 49

For Tania, Wadjemup is an important historical landmark and that others should “...go there realizing how spiritually important it is to Aboriginal people and so therefore it also becomes spiritually important to us as well...” 50 Conceivably as more of the “...history is outed more and more...we [will] see more Aboriginal people going there to pay their respects and we get to share the island as a powerful part of our history...” 51 This would transform the island from a ‘place of amnesia’ to a more responsive and constructive ‘social space’. Such a process would “...address progressively colonial dispossession and its legacy.” 52 Areas that are burial sites, religious sites and acknowledged as being of cultural importance can become sites of “restitution because of their distinctiveness...[and] a path through the political, moral, and legal morass...[reviving] the dignity of the wronged group [and acting] almost [as a] magical quality of an apology.” 53

The healing and reconciliation paradigm acts as a symbol of ‘peacemaking’ in areas that have needed to recover from repression, violence and human rights violations, and is “...a ‘balancing of truth, justice, forgiveness and mercy...and not a confrontation where one must win out over the other.” 54 According to Hibberd, Wadjemup as playground may very well be “…instrumental to both remembrance and to forgetting,” 55 and hence the impetus of the healing process.

There is no doubt that the Rottnest Island Authority, and thus the State Government see the island as a commercial enterprise set up predominately as a tourist destination for holiday makers. That is a given; but what these authorities and the public also need to recognise, is that the Island was once also (prior to the Quod, prior to the burial site, prior to the prison, prior to colonization, indeed prior to the last ice-age) a place of celebration, a place of spiritual healing and cleansing – a sacred site of ceremony – that is literally cultural tourism itself. According to (Karen) Jacobs the “…ideals of tourism are all about celebration, relaxation...so relaxation comes down to dealing with all sorts of healing...so a place of celebration and ceremony and that’s what the Island to me needs to revert back to.” 56 The island contains the spiritual and physical remains of Aboriginal warriors, leaders, lore-men and Elders from around the State – which can never be ignored or forgotten – and which, “…Aboriginal people need to embrace it, we need to actually draw power from it, we don’t need to treat it as if it’s a place that you don’t dare go near, cause these men, if they were here today they would want us to be empowered by their death and to take on their call into the future...” 57

49 Ferrier, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.
53 Ibid.
54 Hibberd, Benevolent Asylum, 2011: 95.
55 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
56 Ibid.
4.6.2 Healing Suggestions for Wadjemup Island

“I couldn’t really say what would be needed to actually heal the place [Wadjemup] with so many people buried there, but obviously it needs something pretty extraordinary...” 58

The following TWELVE topics of discussion constitute a comprehensive approach to facilitating suggestions for future activities for the healing of Wadjemup:

(i) CEREMONY & CULTURAL PROTOCOL

Death and ceremony are closely related in the Aboriginal world. Ceremony emphasized the close link between the living and the spirit-world. Gibbs explains that in Aboriginal tradition, “Death was the end of the physical life only, for a dead person’s spirit was then released from the body…and it would make its way to a home in the sky…or to a spirit-centre such as a waterhole [and] in some groups it was believed the spirit was carried across the sea to a land of the dead.” 59 This passing into the spirit-world was accompanied by a ceremony – often utilizing fire – to assist the dead spirit to move on and the living to be cleansed of any bad spirit (warra wirn in Noongar). It is conceivable that ceremonies of this type did not occur for the Aboriginal prisoners buried at Wadjemup. Therefore to begin the healing process and appease the dead and cleanse the living, “…a ceremony would need to be conducted...there needs to be a whole lot of cleansing to take place on the Island, the Aboriginal people need to take leadership on that. Unfortunately we can’t do a thing until we’re given permission would you believe!” 60

A smoking ceremony, utilizing fire, and smoke from the fire created by burning eucalyptus branches (in Noongar culture), is the most common way to conduct a ceremony that is attempting to cleanse and heal. Fire is one of the great indispensible quantities of Aboriginal existence and is the major element to dispel evil spirits. Hallam, citing George Fletcher Moore, notes that “...brushwood was burnt in the grave, and the ashes brushed out, thus to drive away evil spirits.” 61 Host and Owen observe that traditionally graves were fired and ash brushed out before the bodies were placed in them, but that now to dispel evil spirits, “Smoke is now the dispelling or protective agent, but like ash it is a residual of fire and plays a similar ritualistic role.” 62 Millet, in “It’s Still In My Heart, This Is My Country”: The Single Noongar Claim History, 2009, wrote about the importance of fire in Aboriginal culture not only for warmth and cooking but also “…for its ritual significance.” 63 Nannup believes that Wadjemup, first and foremost in regards to healing, needs a smoking ceremony, “…a cleansing that would coincide with the easterly winds so that the good spirit would be left with us...[and] the bad spirit would be taken...way out beyond.” 64

58 Kelly, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
60 Jacobs, Cedric "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
64 Known to Nyungar as Kurannup (the ‘heavenly home’ – a land of plenty)
Nannup believes that once this smoking ceremony is conducted, a place could be assigned, “...where people could sit, talk to one another, particularly Aboriginal people, but not excluding non-Aboriginal people because there’ll be those carrying a lot of guilt...”  

Another Noongar Elder notions further, that once the smoking ceremony is complete, that a Corroboree should also be initiated, but “...not a sad corroboree, but a happy corroborees so that them spirits can see that Noongars do care about who’s buried there...we should have a ceremony that includes other Aboriginal men to come down and dance there...and then we can all go there - even the ‘whitefella’s’, invite the wadjella’s, invite the brydia’s, invite people who want to be a part of it...” 

Collard calls this special event the ‘corroboree of reconciliation’ and says it should occur as a special event on the island ‘every year’. Regrettably many Elders believe that this type of special ceremony will not occur as, “The way things are going there at the moment, there’s been a downgrading of Aboriginal focus, of importance. So, something drastic...would need to happen before we can heal the land, or heal Wadjemup, and lift the curse of the people.”

Another key aspect to the healing process is recognition of Aboriginal culture, and this is (fortunately) being displayed on the island with a ‘Welcome to Country’ protocol being implemented at significant events on the island, obviously via an endorsement of the Rottnest Island Authority. Karen Jacobs recalls “...[Noongar] Welcome to Country (ceremonies) being used regularly. Not only did we have Aboriginal Elders being invited onto the Island to welcome visitors to the Island or at the start of each significant event or a function...we made sure that welcome to the country were an obligation at the beginning of the agenda for all those [RIA] meetings.”

Similar to the momentous gatherings of the Aboriginal communities in 1988 and 1994, and to a smaller degree the gathering for the launch of the Rottnest Island Authority (RIA) Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) in 2009, it has also been suggested that a regular formal ceremony and gathering on the island could be provided by the State for all of the relevant and respective Aboriginal authorities and prisoner descendents. One such suggestion is that, “...representatives from all the tribes over Western Australia...could bring something from their country and spread it on the island...” thus embedding the healing process of the state and affirming the consultation process with the traditional custodians.

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65 Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
66 A ceremonial meeting of Australian Aborigines. The word was coined by European settlers – it is better known as koberi, kaggaroo or middar.
67 Noongar terminology for a non-Aboriginal person – a ‘whitefella’.
68 In the Noongar language it means leaders or can also be used to describe politicians and heads-of-state.
69 Collard, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
70 Jacobs, Cedric "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
71 A ceremony performed by Aboriginal & Islanders (usually Elders or Traditional Custodians) to welcome officially (usually in the local traditional dialect) visitors to their traditional lands. It can take many forms including speech, singing, performance, dancing and/or smoking ceremony. [Source: http://www.reconciliation.org.au/getfile?id=1055&file=Welcome+to+and+Acknowledgement+of+Country+Q%26A.pdf]
72 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
73 Corunna, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
(ii) GOVERNANCE – ROTTNEST ISLAND AUTHORITY (RIA) BOARD

“It is only when effective governance is in place that communities and regions will have a solid foundation for making sound decisions about their overall goals and objectives…what things they want to retain, protect or change, the kind of development they want to promote or reject, and what actions they need to take to achieve those goals.”

The above statement from Professor Dodson, informs the reader that for true change to occur (across the nation) and for Aboriginality to assume a new and distinctive role in public culture, governance and decision making, a shift away from just telling the historical narrative is required towards enacting the heritage paradigm with a considered representation on boards, formalized committees and state approved working parties. O’Meara explains that the Rottnest Island Authority “...is the group of six who are appointed by [the State] government to administer the island in a commercial manner...we need to generate income from the island to cover the cost of its maintenance. That’s our task.”

But what O’Meara fails to address is that in the time of the Rottnest Island Authority (and previously the Rottnest Island Board) only once has an Indigenous Australian been appointed to the board – Karen Jacobs – and it is she who argues that the RIA board “…must have an Aboriginal person sitting on that board, every year after and purely for cultural reasons. They have an obligation to have an Aboriginal person still maintain a position on the board, whether they see it as being a significant role or not...[the island] has a cultural heritage, a very significant cultural heritage and that needs to be maintained and questioned.”

But regrettably (former) RIA Chair Laurie O’Meara disagrees, “…because the interests are broader than that, if the person has a (board) contribution to make and they are an Indigenous person then so be it. I think there is a bit of a danger with that word – tokenism – if you start putting an Aboriginal person on the board because they are an Aboriginal person, because I don’t think that is a gain to the board or to the Aboriginal interests.”

Senior Elder Cedric Jacobs (Karen Jacob’s father), views this as a cultural travesty and demands that there shouldn’t be (just) an appointed Aboriginal board member but rather “…there needs to be an Aboriginal board comprising of Aboriginal people. With a proper...office over there, and [a] community centre, where people can come down from all over the state to visit their relation’s graves. There is no provision for this style of thing, and [until so] we will never get any reconciliation.”

The Rottnest Island Authority (RIA) Reconciliation Action Plan (RAP) includes many key objectives and goals advantageous to the Aboriginal community but stops short of encouraging any such board or mandatory Aboriginal inclusion on its existing board. O’Meara supports this (non) aspect of the RAP by reasoning that, “...one of the initiatives of the reconciling plan was to appoint an Aboriginal reference group which were made up of...

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75 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
76 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
77 O’Meara "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
78 Jacobs, Cedric "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
Aboriginal people in its entirety…” and that the expression of interest to formulate this working party had been “…put out in the normal channels…” The outcome of this is not known at the time of writing.

The RIA have recently begun inviting Elders and custodians, from around the state, onto the island on a regular basis to promote their “…right and…role to have a say and…have an opinion on what should occur and how things should be done on the Island…” Additionally, a full-time Aboriginal Project Officer working under the RIA banner, and specifically responsible for dealing with outcomes of the RIA RAP and encouraging Aboriginal activity on the island, has been the employed. An on-going concern regarding this position has been the constant turn-over of Aboriginal people working in the position [3-4 times in the past decade according to Jacobs-Smith] which “…causes its own change in dynamics,” and agendas to change from one recruitment to the next. The role, according to Jacobs-Smith, needs somebody who is dynamic but is also aware that they are also bound to the governance of the Authority as “…an employee of the State Government…[making] it a very difficult role for them to play then, [as] there is always an opinion and an assumption by any Government department on how an Indigenous unit should operate and the outcomes they should be achieving” A cultural versus administrative conflict perhaps?

Karen Jacobs argues that as the peak Noongar body, the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council should also broker the matter of governance on the island. They “…have a role…as a broker, to make sure that issues are being dealt with and are being discussed on behalf of the traditional owners.”

As explained previously, though Wadjemup is not recognized from a Native Title perspective, it does currently have 17 registered Indigenous heritage sites. These include the Transit Cell, the Burial Site, the Quod, and the Old Hospital (Morgue). The site types are classed as man-made structure, Art, Burial, Ceremonial or History. Regardless, matters concerning Wadjemup do cause conflict for between the cultural organization SWALSC and any department like the Department of Indigenous Affairs (DIA) or the Indigenous Land Corporation. SWALSC needs to broadcast their opinions and/or broker the information on behalf of the Aboriginal community, as the Government agencies and organizations do not want to interfere in the role and influence of the RIA.

Hence the major recommendation by (Karen) Jacobs is for either SWALSC [and/or DIA] to utilize the information that has been gathered and archived over the years and

79 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
80 Ibid.
81 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
82 Ibid.
83 Ibid.
84 Ibid.
85 Ensure all developments affecting Aboriginal Heritage Places are undertaken in accordance with the requirements of the Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972. Any development proposed on a place that is listed on the Department of Indigenous Affairs’ Register of Aboriginal Sites has strict requirements and restrictions. [Source: http://www.rotnestisland.com/docs/default-document-library/cultural_heritage_places_and_precincts.pdf?Status=Master]
have the (whole) island “…registered on two levels, not only with the heritage council but also through the DIA and the registrar of sites." 87 This, in effect, would force the State Government (and thus its representative, the Rottnest Island Authority) to engage and factor in Aboriginal governance above and beyond what it has declared in its RAP. I propose that this step goes further and that SWALSC, DIA, other Land Councils (being represented and endorsed by traditional custodians and relevant Elder groups) and the RIADG lobby for the Island to be WORLD HERITAGE LISTED. Currently the government’s focus is commercial and tourist factors and the Aboriginal heritage of the island stands as a political matter that is ‘too hard to answer or address’ on most occasions. World Heritage listing would force the government’s hand, including with regard to governance and Aboriginal involvement in the Island’s management and decision making.

(iii) ROTTNEST ISLAND AUTHORITY RECONCILIATION ACTION PLAN

At the time of writing, the Rottnest Island Authority had produced TWO Reconciliation Action Plans. The inaugural plan was formally launched at Rottnest Island on Wednesday 25th February 200888 by the State Minister for Tourism Hon Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA and the Minister for Hon Indigenous Affairs, Dr Kim Hames MLA. The most recent in June 2013 was launched at a ceremony hosted by Wadjuk Elder Richard Walley who commented at the launch that “…reconciliation was not just about making good statements on paper; it was the follow-up that counted.” 89 Interestingly the 2008-2011 plan identifies the ‘irony’ of the island as once a unique place in the annals of Western Australian history but that the Aboriginal prison period has now given the island a “…special status as a point of reference for every Western Australian person of Aboriginal descent alive today.” 90 Former RIA Chair Laurie O’Meara comments that a ‘working party deals with most of the contents, objectives and timelines of the plan,’ but gave no indication of who constitutes the working party or how many of the inaugural plan’s objectives had been specifically reached or nearly realized, other than observing that “Most of the initiatives that were listed in that original plan have in some form been addressed, so it will be revamped and a new plan or a revised plan will be put in place to succeed it…” 91 At least this much we do know. Essentially the RIA RAP is attempting to encourage Aboriginal people to become actively involved in events related to the island – particularly in projects, events and schemes on the island – whether they be cultural or community projects, employment initiatives, business opportunities in a commercial or an (eco)tourism sense. Karen Jacobs notes that, “…any reconciliation plan is really a statement of commitment by the company or organization that has intent to encourage and promote Aboriginal activity within their operations.” 92 Continuing she remarks that it is her hope that the authority will continue to hold the reconciliation plan in “…high regard and still maintain activities to achieve objectives from the…plan…” and the authority and those significant entities connected with the island will “…eventually get to a position in history where they don’t have to have reconciliation action plans - that it’s just part of

91 O’Meara, “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
the objectives for the business of the Island and that it is a natural process and thought that ‘of course we are going to have an Aboriginal business set up here’...‘of course we are going to have Aboriginal employment opportunities and of course we are going to do this’...that [it] will be part and parcel...for the future...”  

According to O’Meara one of the most important initiatives of the plan is to have all RIA staff, and volunteers take part in cross cultural training (over 10 sessions) where Aboriginal culture, history and awareness is taught, “So that they have an understanding when they are dealing with tourists and Aboriginal people as to their culture.”  

Karen Jacobs adds that the RIA board members also went through some sessions of cultural training with the Aboriginal economic manager at the time “…which brought the Board to a whole new level of understanding about the Aboriginal cultural history of the Island and that changed opinions quite dramatically...”

But not all individuals are in favour of the plans or appreciate its objectives. Nannup, who currently has a court case pending against the RIA for the closure of his Cultural Bus Tour on the island [more about this in section (v) Noongar Tourism], passionately claims that “…the reconciliation action plan to me, it’s an absolute joke, it may as well have been written on toilet paper or tissue paper, because when you have a reconciliation action plan and it says that people have to do cross cultural awareness workshops…and they, on mass, don’t attend, that’s where it becomes a joke...”

Though obviously supportive of the plan, O’Meara does have one minor caveat regarding the underlying sub-text of the plan, that “In general the broader view of the reconciliation plan...is that whilst recognising the ills of the past we...wanted to use that as a base to look forward to better times ahead for all of us...”

(iv) EDUCATION & AWARENESS

Cross cultural awareness training should not be limited to RIA staff and Island volunteers says Elder Albert Corunna, but rather anybody staying in the former Quod – now Rottnest Lodge – should have pre-booking conditions in place for potential guests “…to go through some cultural awareness of what’s happened over there...” and in the Quod area particularly. Corunna holds this as a personal opinion, and in my personal opinion, the chances of this occurring, are as remote as the island being swept under sea by a tsunami, but he does raise a good point about the passion that the island evokes and the extreme ideas that may need to be considered and debated before common ground and a conciliatory position is reached.

One of the key considerations for educating the public and increasing the awareness of the island from an Aboriginal perspective is that the education process and exposure to the island’s Aboriginal history should begin, not just on the island itself, but firstly (and predominately perhaps) on the mainland. “It probably begins before the ferry terminal…I know there are people with great expertise who can get that story told and understood and make sure it is shared in a way that’s intuitive.”  

Kelly’s initiative

93 Ibid.  
94 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”  
95 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”  
96 Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”  
97 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”  
98 Corunna “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”  
99 Kelly, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
has merit and it makes sense that a level of awareness should begin upon the purchasing of ferry tickets. Perhaps the Rottnest Island Authority produced brochure entitled: *Wadjemup: Message Stick,* explaining succinctly and with poignant photographs the Aboriginal history and perspective of the Island could be attached to or given out with every ticket purchased. In addition, perhaps there could be distinct [Aboriginal] signage at the ferry port where visitors disembark. Kelly however would like it to go further, “…having a sign is all well and good but it’s not very intuitive...having a plaque’s all well and good but it doesn’t really cut it.”

Perhaps upon embarking on the ferry, during the trip over, which takes approximately 25 minutes to 90 minutes depending on place of embarkation and weather conditions, can also be an appropriate time and place to educate the passengers, not just about the island itself and its beauty, sites and amenities, but also the Noongar cosmological, spiritual and prison connection. Visitors to Robben Island leave from the aptly named *Nelson Mandela Gateway,* which serves as the orientation centre for visitors to the island, and more importantly contextualizes visitors to Robben Island’s place within the South African and international anti-apartheid struggle. This would also work for Rottnest and should be a major consideration for the total Island experience; Pre-journey, Island experience, Post-experience. This would encapsulate a more balanced and rounded experience.

At least the RIA also feels that education of Aboriginal perspectives of the Island could be presented whilst on the ferries [note that the RIA do not control the ferries which are operated under different company banners and regulations]:

“We’ve been trying to get the ferries (to) take the [local] news off on the way over on their monitors [TV screens] and have something about Rottnest…and I believe tapes are being made to talk about Rottnest. Now there is no reason why those tapes shouldn’t contain or wouldn’t contain matters of education and interest to people in regard to Aboriginal matters…but I would think that there is no reason why the Rottnest/Wadjimup connection can’t be shown in some pictorial form at the point of embarkation…”

O’Meara also explains that educating the public is not just a function for the now, but consideration needs to be given to the future inhabitants of the island, who may one day return with children of their own. School groups travel in huge numbers each year and stay at the Kingstown Barracks, and are educated on various issues related to the island; including a curriculum based around the Aboriginal point-of-view. “Something like 20,000 students pass through those dormitory areas of Kingstown each year, coming over in organised groups.”

Regrettably, as much as this program has great merit, it should not act as a substitute for direct Aboriginal contact for visitors as the now-defunct Aboriginal Bus Tour once did. O’Meara comments, “We have got very strong input into that curriculum of Aboriginal issues, and this is even more so since the tour that we had set up previously has ceased, we see now a way to get that information to the visitors of Rottnest for tomorrow, is to get it into that curriculum for all those

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100 Ibid.
102 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the *Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground* project."
103 In 1934 a permanent Army Barracks at Kingstown was constructed (containing living accommodation for officers and rank and file personnel plus attached nurses brigade – particularly during the war period) and then after the war for training purposes until it was officially closed in 1984. It is now used as an environmental education centre and accommodation for school camps and visits. This use continues today. [Source: http://www.rottnestisland.com/about/rottnest-history/military-history]
104 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the *Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground* project."
students who come across to Kingstown..."  105 This could be viewed as perhaps a desperate attempt to gloss over the regrettable and consequential matter of the Aboriginal bus tour failing.

(v) NOONGAR TOURISM

There exists bad blood between Noongar Elder Noel Nannup and the Rottnest Island Authority. Where once Nannup operated an Aboriginal Bus Tour with full support of the RIA, travelling to the island (almost) every day, regardless of potential patrons and weather conditions, they are now both locked in a court battle about the stoppage of the bus tour. This ‘bad blood’ has not only spilled over into the legal system of Western Australia but also into the local (and national) media with Nannup declaring that Rottnest was cursed and that the Island would suffer “endless misfortune”. 106 Nannup, with unidentified Noongar Elders, also acknowledged that already “…the iconic holiday destination has been plagued by accidents and controversy since the curse was invoked last year [and that] the island was ‘spiritually doomed’ because the bus tour was a key plank of the island’s reconciliation plan, aimed at cleansing its dark history.” 107

So why did the once pride and joy of the RIA, in regard to their cultural promotions and RAP marketing motif [see photo below] fail?

(Former) Board member Karen Jacobs argued that the ‘Authority did what they could’ to assist (within restrictions) with the development of Aboriginal tourism on the island. She also reiterated that Nannup, as the tour operator, was dedicated and put in “…130% there every day, seven days a week…whether they had bookings for tours or not, they were on the Island...” 108 but that due to a poor (or mis-timed) marketing campaign “…when it came to targeting, or accessing that target group of people that should have been on those tours...” 109 it failed. O’Mara supports his RIA colleague explaining that the RIA tried ‘a number of things’ namely encouraging the ferry company, Rottnest Island Express, to sell tickets to the Aboriginal Tour with general ferry tickets. However “…after its period of time and the actual cost of running it as against the number of guests that were taking advantage of it was such that it was not going to continue…[which] was sad, [as] we leased the coach…and had it set up and painted up

105 Ibid.
107 Ibid.
108 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
109 Ibid.
with Aboriginal motifs...but the actual tour itself did not work [out] financially viably. ”

Nannup has a slightly different slant to the narrative of the failed bus initiative. Nannup reflects back that the telling of the Aboriginal history, both spiritually and physically, had to be “...delicately balanced...” and that the best way to do that was to share the story which had happened recently and then build on that so that people would begin to have a base upon which they “...could understand Aboriginal people, Aboriginal thinking, Aboriginal view of the world.” From that he claimed that “...then and only then, have you got an opportunity to be able to really take on board with some clarity what that island’s all about...” Hence, it was decided, that a bus tour could be conducted whereby interested visitors could be taken away from the settlement and slowly build the story as you travelled around the island and then approach the Quod and burial site upon return, “...and give them some quiet time [and] allow the spirit to come to them.” Nannup remarked that as the person became more aware of the special place and its spiritual importance to Aboriginal people then they could take “...this journey of understanding. [And] those people that have an empathy have to be catered for, those people that don’t necessarily give a damn, there also has to be some way of being able to cater for them... I was trying to determine the best way to articulate all of that and to me the best way was on a bus tour and that’s why I went for it as vigorously as I did.”

Karen Jacobs understands the cultural strength that Nannup possesses and his spiritual vision, but she also knew the sad reality that an operation of that type “…probably won’t be successful overnight. It will need time and it will need...a huge amount of support funding and ongoing guidance.” So the chances of the tour being sustainable from the get-go was remote and according to Jacobs-Smith for it to overcome its initial hurdles “…the most successful Aboriginal tour operations have been done in partnership with either local government, state government, federal government or corporate organisations.” This obviously did not occur with the Wadjemup Tour project and Nannup is far more scathing of the environment that he feels he had to cope with:

“And the sad reality was that no one else, particularly those that had been working on the island was willing to entertain that... then you have some bus drivers that are worried about their jobs and some of them may have had racist streaks, which they hid behind...not to underestimate the volunteers as well, because when you go to a place and it says there is [sic] tours today, these ones you pay for...[and] these ones are free, which one are you going to go on? And this is how it was and when you add all that up we were doomed from the very first tour, there was no way it was going to be a success...”

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110 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
111 Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
112 Ibid.
113 Ibid.
114 Ibid.
115 Ibid.
116 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
117 Ibid.
118 Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
O’Meara does not contest Nannup’s version of events other than maintaining that the bus tour “...specializing in Aboriginal interest did not succeed after a year of operation”, and the remaining bus tours that do exist on the island [the Bay Seeker is given as the example] “...have a strong Aboriginal influence and the speaking that the tour guides use...so we have replaced [it] and put it into the general tour...” Nannup is aggrieved by this statement and concludes that that type of reasoning is both insulting and in poor taste and the existing tours “...takes people and tells them a little bit of the Aboriginal history without a lot of sensitivity...” The bus that Nannup utilized with its striking and distinctive Aboriginal murals and motifs currently sits mostly idle in a holding yard, occasionally being used for general transport.

(vi) EVENTS & PROGRAMS

In 2011 the Rottnest Island Authority put $20,000 towards an annual grant for interested Aboriginal groups to convey to the authority (via a formal application), “...what sort of programs they would like to have us make a financial contribution towards that would bring Aboriginal people to the island...” In addition to this, the authority also decided that to promote the island to the Aboriginal community, and relay a sense of welcoming and hospitality, that “...the Rottnest Island Deaths Group, any time they wish to come to the island, their cost of getting there and accommodation is covered by the authority...” This author is aware that during the early life of the Rottnest Island Deaths Group that a cottage was set aside for the exclusive use of the group, for when official business on the island needed to be conducted. This is no longer the case.

Probably the most important calendar event that the authority stages to highlight its reconciliation commitment and application towards Aboriginal inclusiveness is its Wadjemup AFL Football Cup. Every year the Gerard Neesham Academy brings Aboriginal boys from all over the state to play a lightning carnival over a weekend of Australian Rules Football. This event is also opened with a formal Noongar Elder Welcome to Country and the victorious team is awarded medallions and a prestigious cup. The authority proudly boasts that “…the Wadjemup football [cup] is a good example of trying to demystify and to move away some of that...[bad history]...” and that “…it’s the biggest grouping of Aboriginal boys on the island since the prison was closed and some of those boys come from as far as Alice Springs and have never seen the ocean before...so it’s a day of great celebration and a very great event and it gets

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119 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
According to Parliamentary documentation The Rottnest Island Authority entered into a contractual agreement with Indigenous Tours WA for the provision of a guided Indigenous bus tour on Rottnest Island for a period of 12 months from 1 January 2009 to 31 December 2009. Two 12-month extension options were exercised at the absolute discretion of the RIA. In the 12-month period, there was a loss to the RIA of $124,000. The RIA offered a three-month extension to Indigenous Tours WA at either a fixed rate of $4000 a month or revenue from sales, whichever was the greater. Indigenous Tours WA required the remaining bus tours that do exist on the island [the Bay Seeker is given as the example] “...have a strong Aboriginal influence and the speaking that the tour guides use...so we have replaced [it] and put it into the general tour...” Nannup is aggrieved by this statement and concludes that that type of reasoning is both insulting and in poor taste and the existing tours “...takes people and tells them a little bit of the Aboriginal history without a lot of sensitivity...” The bus that Nannup utilized with its striking and distinctive Aboriginal murals and motifs currently sits mostly idle in a holding yard, occasionally being used for general transport.

120 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."

121 Nannup, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."

122 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."

123 Ibid.

124 The Clontarf Football Academy was established on-site at the Clontarf Aboriginal College site in January 2000. Former footballer and coach Gerard Neesham developed the concept for the Academy, which combined studies with AFL training and positive role models mentoring. [Source: http://www.isx.org.au/news/media/Clontarf.html]
bigger every year...” The (former) Indigenous Project Officer on the Island, Reg Yarran, further explains that “…the Wadjimup Cup... is actually part of the reconciliation [plan/program] that we’ve got and it’s achieving reconciliation for the Authority [and]...to me its a real celebration and reverts back to the celebration of youth on the Island. That to me is a wonderful event that I want to see duplicated through a number of other festivals and opportunities that the Island can operate.”  

On a smaller scale, but still championed by the Authority, is its regular NAIDOC golf tournament which sees Indigenous golfers taking part in 18 holes on the Rottnest golf course and vying for a cup and boasting rights for the year. Another regular event that showcases Aboriginal culture and active participation is having a Noongar Welcome to Country at the beginning of the ANZAC Dawn Service on the island, including a didgeridoo player sharing the stage with the bugle player. This author had the pleasure of attending this moving event and I was honoured to be part of this service with distinguished Aboriginal veterans who were treated as VIPs by the Authority. There is also a shelter on the Island explaining the six Noongar seasons.

(vii) NOONGAR IDENTITY & RENAMING

Understanding others makes possible a better knowledge of oneself: any form of identity is complex, for individuals are defined in relation to other people - both individually and collectively - and the various groups to which they owe allegiance, in a constantly shifting pattern.

UNESCO, Learning : The Treasure Within, 1996

To counter racism there is no one ‘golden rule’ or ‘silver bullet’, but perhaps understanding and valuing cultural diversity are key factors. Individuals deserve the right to feel free to explore the uniqueness of their culture and identity whilst attempting to recognize and understand the cultural diversity that exists in the world around them. Limiting the expression of unique perspectives on life and the transmission of knowledge from generation to generation does one thing only; it limits, and in some cases denies, cultural expression. An individual's sense of identity is grounded in their cultural identity. Once it is realized by society that there are many Australian identities, then and only then, can we begin the true pathway to a racism-free community. The Island also has several senses of identity, but not all of them are being given a chance to be expressed and revered.

125 O'Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
126 Yarran, Reg "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
127 NAIDOC stands for National Aborigines and Islanders Day Observance Committee. Its origins can be traced to the emergence of Aboriginal groups in the 1920s which sought to increase awareness in the wider community of the status and treatment of Indigenous Australians.

[Source: http://www.naidoc.org.au]

128 ANZAC stands for Australian and New Zealand Army Corps and on the 25th April each year a service to commemorate war service under the ANZAC banner is conducted. It marks the anniversary of the first major military action fought by Australian and New Zealand forces during the First World War.


129 An interactive display investigating the Noongar 6 seasons in comparison with the European seasons.


130 Racism Noway: The Importance of Culture, Language & Identity


Supporting the above statement, Kelly said that the island “...has to have a Noongar identity...the trip needs to have a Noongar identity attached to it...the design of things on the island, the architecture...needs to have Noongar cultural sensibilities bought into it...the personality of the place needs to reflect Noongar culture and people, because telling the story about these things isn’t just about reading a sign, it’s about being immersed in something...” 132

Cultures themselves are not static or differing but develop and change as peoples’ belief systems and ways of life change with influences, including mass media and popular culture, to create new identities. For Wadjemup the history of the island needs to manifest and the true story of the island’s culture should be told. Kelly agrees and comments that signs and “…plaques and all that sort of stuff is great but it is too static and it doesn’t give enough understanding. You need people to soak it in and that happens by being surrounded by things that you might not notice on first glance but (they) say something about the place and the story.” 133 Kelly says it’s not just about discussing Noongar space and Aboriginal history. Most importantly the public must know its (true) name: “Last year there was a story in the Sunday Times which was about the renaming of Rottnest to Wadjimup, which I think is a pretty good idea to be honest with you because an island being called ‘rats nest’ is not too glamorous is it?” 134

Mark Bin Baker respects Kelly’s viewpoint and cannot understand opposition to renaming the island and giving it the Aboriginal name: “I mean hello it had an Aboriginal name before European people came to this country...” 135

(viii) SIGNAGE

The above viewpoint regarding the signage on the island is an interesting notion that needs some further thought. Elder Cedric Jacobs understands the importance of suitable and knowledgeable signage – particularly when it is of a cultural and linguistic nature – and the signage is attempting to conserve a cultural identity that is surrounded (one could say swamped) by the more commonly saturated English derived media and correspondence. “Yes, there needs to be signage, Aboriginal signage... I was inspired when I went over to Wales...everything was in the Welsh language, everything. [If] That’s happened over there, it can happen here...they (the Welsh) knew they could not all lose their identities...” 136

There have been three main signs placed at the entrance to the burial site. Two of these signs have been sighted by the author (the third was highlighted in a document entitled: Rottnest Island Aboriginal Prisoners Cemetery: Delineation of extent using ground penetrating radar, which contained a picture of the first temporary sign and fence at the burial site). The first sign (see next page) – painted in the Aboriginal colours Red, Black & Yellow – and made from wood kept the message simple:

132 Kelly, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 Bin Baker, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
136 Jacobs, Cedric "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
This (wooden) sign has since been pulled down, and now according to authority workers is stored ‘somewhere on the island’.

The second, and most recent sign (above), is of a more modern design and material (steel) and contains much more information. It is set out in 3 distinct parts. In section One it explains that the site behind the sign is sacred to Aboriginal people and the reasons for that sacredness. Section Two indicates a narrative related to the burial ground – with particular focus on the initiative of the Rottnest Island Reconciliation Plan relating to the Burial Ground. Part Three of the new sign outlines the Draft Concept Plan of the future burial ground memorial [see section 4.5 previous].
“The signage came together because there was a section 18\textsuperscript{137} on the burial ground. To replace new interpretation to the burial ground and have a concept plan we wanted to show that the reconciliation is there [on the island] and the second part is that I wanted to feel that there are other things besides just looking at a sign, that there are people there and that...there are leaders there, there are brothers and there are uncles, there are all parts of people there...” \textsuperscript{138}

Some people are still critical of the signage (on the island), and complain that because of how and where the (current) sign is positioned “...you have to walk up to the sign to see what it says. And you can walk past ten paces away and not know what it is.” \textsuperscript{139} There was never any risk of the old sign failing to make its presence felt – it’s rich and vibrant colouring, plus distinct and simple text, could be seen from afar.

Green also argues that, “...there are other ways to present it [signage on the island]...” \textsuperscript{140} and that signage is also missing at key places like the Basin, the first stop for many visitors arriving at the island, and “...there should also be a sign there that shows that this was the site where four Aboriginal men died, two drowned and two drowned trying to save their friends from drowning. So signs should be showing places of great [cultural] significance.” \textsuperscript{141} Green continues, “There should be a sign on Thompson’s Bay - that the rescue of men from a shipwreck...involved Aboriginal prison labour in this rescue. So there was a part they played other than being prisoners that should be acknowledged.” \textsuperscript{142}

Tania Ferrier supports the current sign at the burial site, but adds that “...they’ve got a good sign at the Aboriginal grave site, it’s a powerful sign with Noongar words on it, it hits you hard when you stand in front of it. That sign needs to be down on the jetty as well, it needs to be at the grave yard and at the jetty so that people when they arrive on the island they have this sense of ‘oh my gosh there is Aboriginal history here’...” \textsuperscript{143} Further she suggests that once the visitors are informed of the Aboriginal history and the burial site significance “...they can take that walk if they want to pay their respects...” \textsuperscript{144} but, like Green, she thinks that currently “...the sign [at the burial site] is so remotely placed...so many people don’t come across it when they’re there...” \textsuperscript{145}

\begin{itemize}
\item[\textsuperscript{137}] Under the \textit{Aboriginal Heritage Act 1972-1980} [and its various Sections] this Act makes it an offence to alter an Aboriginal site in any way without written permission from the Minister for Aboriginal Affairs. [Source: http://www.rottnestisland.com/about/rottnest-history/aboriginal-history]
\item[\textsuperscript{138}] Yarran, “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the \textit{Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground} project.”
\item[\textsuperscript{139}] Green, Dr. “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the \textit{Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground} project.”
\item[\textsuperscript{140}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{141}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{142}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{143}] Ferrier, “Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the \textit{Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground} project.”
\item[\textsuperscript{144}] Ibid.
\item[\textsuperscript{145}] Ibid.
\end{itemize}
Even (former) RIA Chair Laurie O’Meara says the signage was somewhat inadequate in the past and that to celebrate 100 years of tourism on the island (in 2011) most of the signage was “...redone and replaced...” with particular focus on the main jetty so that when people arrive on the island a series of panels not only showing people what the island has to offer (sites, attractions, amenities etc) but also at “…the bottom of each of those panels is a very strong representation of the Aboriginal interests in [on] the island, so that all those tourists arriving on the island have no doubt as to the background of the Aboriginal interest in [on] the island back over the last century or so.” O’Meara sees this as a “…very good start...” and that the RIA is also “…looking at a speaking type signage that will tell the story to people.” Additionally O’Meara advises that a walk trail, approximately 42 kilometres in distance, is being created around the island and that “…along that trail will be interpretive signage put up and there is no reason for me to think that that won’t contain matters of Aboriginal interest...” In fact, this Coastal Walk Trail was first proposed as a project in 2008 and came with a proviso that “It is hoped that through the Coastal Walk Trail, the visitor will experience an attitudinal shift towards an understanding of the cross-cultural values of the land.” The proposal is for three distinct trail systems; one will pass through the centre of the island; another circumnavigates the island and the third weaves in and out of the islands hills and lakes. The key Aboriginal members of the trail project team envisaged that the “interpretation will be balanced between the story of contemporary Aboriginal spiritual connection to the land and the prison history of the Settlement.”

(ix) BURIAL SITE SUGGESTIONS

A grave is a memory. It represents our traditions, the values we inherit and pass on, the sense of continuity and above all the sense of belonging. It is hugely important that the grave for an individual not only be a final resting place but that it reflects and respects the life that was lived. To some, a distinct gravesite and/or headstone may not be important, but to others it is an essential point of reference. Why have so many cultures made such an effort in maintaining burial sites? For the very reason that it is our cultural heritage that we pay homage to. According to Gibbs “The ancestral beings themselves did not die but lived on in different forms. Nor in Aboriginal belief did the spirits of later Aborigines die - death is merely a physical end, so that a person’s spirit survives. The past is thus linked vitally to the present and is very real.” This leads to the interminable question of what should happen at the burial site on Rottnest? With up to 400 bodies of Aboriginal prisoners resting eternally in unmarked graves – some according to tribal law incorrectly buried, that is, some buried with unknown countrysmen from different family groups and country. However they all share a common fate: they are nameless, they are unmarked and they are predominately forgotten. The opinions regarding this scenario are many and varied:

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146 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
147 Ibid.
148 Ibid.
149 Ibid.
150 Ibid.
151 [Source: http://aila.org.au/projects/wa/rottnest/]
152 Ibid.
"...I would argue very strongly that the whole prison area, needs to be walled off, there needs to be a wall put around it, a certain height and a certain thickness, then it would give the place its rightful...importance as a sacred place, as an important place. It’s not to be walked over, the graves not to be walked over, bikes not to be ridden over it, it’s to be sanctified, set apart...as a sacred place, in the life of the nation.” 154

This passionate plea by Noongar Elder Cedric Jacobs highlights not only the ardor felt by people connected to the burial site and the island but also the differences in opinions held by different family members, language groups, and the general public. Cedric’s daughter Karen Jacobs, though respecting the Rottnest Island Deaths Group original ethos, contradicts her father by proclaiming that, “...you don’t want to cordon off that whole area so nobody gets to embrace who those men were and the position they held in their community...This is one of...the issues that I had with the [Rottnest Island] Deaths Group, that they were all about glorifying the death of these men – they have to be remembered...” 155

What should happen to the Wadjemup burial site? What type of memorial and design needs to be instigated to best remember the dead, and give access to the ancestors and public to pay their respects?

The Rottnest Island Authority have now publically declared, via the updated sign at the burial site and their Reconciliation Action Plan, that it is their “…intent to work collaboratively to bring about healing and spiritual cleansing for the Island.” 156 Specifically the 2008-2011 Action Plan addresses the burial site by listing it as Action Item 2.1 In consultation with Aboriginal People, establish the Aboriginal Burial Ground as a place of remembrance that is culturally accepted by Indigenous groups with ancestors buried there. 157 The responsibility for this task rests with the RIA CEO (currently Paolo Amaranti) and for the purpose of this action plan was given a timeline of June 2013 with a desired outcome being reliant on the project being externally funded and commenced within a five-year period. 158 The updated 2012-2015 Action Plan highlights that the island’s prison history (and the resulting burial site) “…places it in a unique position of shared significance...[and] has a unique role to play in bringing about reconciliation with Aboriginal people, and particularly Western Australian Aboriginal communities.” 159 Significantly the plan addresses and recognizes the “…cultural significance and sad history that Wadjemup holds for Aboriginal people and therefore its position of responsibility to ensure the island is both appropriately managed and contributes towards economic and cultural opportunities for Aboriginal people in Western Australia.” 160 A more true statement of importance and validation I have not seen.  Action Item 2.1 of the 2012-2015 plan now has an addendum to it – “to the extent that resources allow,” 161 which gives the RIA an ‘out’ if resources are not

154 Jacobs, Cedric "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
155 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
158 Ibid.
159 Ibid.
160 Ibid.
realistically available. The timeline for the revamp and ‘restoration’ of the burial site has been modified to June 2015 and the desired outcome reads: “Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground is externally funded and Stage 2 completed.” Best not to hold our breath…for we too may thereby end up in the same predicament as those lying four-foot under the soil at the burial site…

The following is a synopsis of the WADJEMUP BURIAL GROUND: Concept Plan displayed on the (updated) sign at the entrance of the burial site:

(a) SCULPTURAL SENTINELS
   o Sentinels to provide a threshold between the pedestrian areas and known extent of gravesites.
   o 400 sculptures to be commissioned from selected Aboriginal artists designing for their tribal group.
   o Sentinels to face East towards the mainland – detail at base may point to the direction of Country.
   o Base detail may contain stabilized earth collected from the part of the Country where the sculpture originates.

(b) REFLECTION SPACES
   o Seating areas adjacent to the gravesite allowing for quiet reflection.
   o Food/medicinal plants pertinent to representative tribal groups to be planted within quokka proof enclosure.
   o Seating layout and form to be determined in consultation with Aboriginal Groups.

(c) VIEWING TERRACE
   o Seating and shelter overlooking Garden Lake and towards Wadjemup Hill.

(d) ENTRANCE LOOKOUT & SHELTER
   o Interpretation entry structure accessible from Quod and Kitson Streets to provide shade and shelter.
   o Rammed earth walling to be incorporated using earth collected from the various parts of Country.
   o Structure to act as the main gateway to the site having prominence within the heritage precinct and being adjacent to the Quod.
   o Interpretive elements to be incorporated within the entry shelter.
   o Major interpretive elements to be located in Quod.
   o A flagpole & light to be installed at entrance.

(v) GENERAL
   o “Kissing” gate type elements across pathways to discourage bike use.
   o Bike racks to all entrances to site.
   o Continuous line of stone edging to gravesite using small limestone rocks from the island, denoting known extent of burial site.
   o Use of roof water collection from Quod and entry shelter for plant establishment.
   o Winnit Club Camp to be relocated.
   o Interpretation of Winnit Club campsite & memorial tree to be provided.
   o Tuart trees to be selectively pruned to remove dead wood. Exotic trees with no relevance to Aboriginal groups to be removed from site.
   o Recommended upgrade of heritage precinct to the south-east of the burial ground.

162 Ibid.
o Recommended upgrade to the European Cemetery. Planting of Melaleuca and Callitris around perimeter of site.

“For many years this Burial Ground was unacknowledged and was used for other purposes including a recreational camping ground. When the physical repair is complete; the leaders who are buried at this site, their people and their homelands will be represented. The Draft Concept Plan outlines the elements from around Western Australia have requested to be integrated to the final plan. Discussions with representative Aboriginal Groups have been undertaken and are continuing.

Please observe the sanctity of this area.

So the (previous) synopsis from the updated Burial Site Sign reflects strongly that a great deal of thought and planning has gone into the proposal future treatment of this long neglected site, but until funds are secured and contracts signed off it still remains written (and verbal) rhetoric.

(x) MEMORIAL WALL

Dr Neville Green, with the assistance of Susan Moon, spent considerable time collating the names of 3,676 Aboriginal prisoners (some of whom had several visits to the prison establishment). Utilising several research tools, including the Rottnest Island committal book (the official register of Aboriginal men arriving at Rottnest Island), Rottnest Island annual reports, records of the Colonial Secretary’s Office and police files, they were able to cross-reference back to the main entries (including aliases and variation of spellings) and compile the list present in the publication Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931. Dr Green suggested to the Rottnest Island Authority that this list of names could be used on a Memorial Wall on the island, perhaps at the burial site or Quod area. When this author again presented this idea to the RIA via the (former) Chair it was noted that he personally had not considered that idea and it was his “…understanding that this memorial was probably better done without names being attached to it.” Though O’Meara doesn’t specifically give a reason why utilising names to be not acceptable I can concur that due to cultural sensitivities (particularly from tribal groups in the northern region) the mentioning of the names of deceased persons is frowned upon and taboo. Death of an Aboriginal leader is/was a complex issue. It was often believed that there was another form of the dead person’s spirit, called the ‘trickster spirit’, who sought to remain near the body and

163 Rottnest Island Burial Site sign by the Rottnest Island Authority.
164 O'Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project.”
cause mischievous trouble.\textsuperscript{165} Thus the living, not wanting to disturb or arouse this spirit would avoid “...the use of the dead person’s name...for a long time, possibly forever.”\textsuperscript{166} Physical and visible reminders of the death were allowed (such as a mound, a cremation site, specific rock formations, a tree-platform, or grave-posts — sometimes grandly decorated) and accepted but mentioning of the deceased name was not common.

Though a memorial wall with prisoner’s names may not be the best solution, a memorial wall could be erected that lists all of the language groups that were affected by the Rottnest Prison establishment, with some quotes in traditional language explaining the effect that colonization had on the tribal groups throughout the state. This could include details of key events (massacres, resistance battles, legislation etc) that occurred in these various regions during the 1838-1931 period that the Island operated as an Aboriginal Prison (or Prison Annex).

\textbf{(xi) THE QUOD}

The burial site is not the only aspect of Rottnest Island that needs addressing regarding an Aboriginal facet. The Quod is the other main structure on the Island that needs immediate attention. The Quod, as explained previously, was the major site of Aboriginal imprisonment since 1864 when, under the supervision of Henry Vincent, it housed the prisoners in appalling cramped dank cells. It is not known how many men exactly died in these cells, but out of the noted 364\textsuperscript{167} deaths, it is not inconceivable to assume that most of these deaths occurred in these cells themselves. As explained in detail previously, the former Quod is now the Rottnest Lodge defined as the ‘premier accommodation on Rottnest Island,’\textsuperscript{168} where for between $310 for a 6 berth room or $210 for a double room\textsuperscript{169} a visitor has the “perfect setting for an island escape.”\textsuperscript{170} Other than a morose sign, located considerable distance outside of the Lodge fascia, there is no mention whatsoever of the Aboriginal history of this building.\textsuperscript{171} When visiting the Lodge’s web-site there IS mention of its ‘rich history’ in that “…it was once the summer residence of the Governor of Western Australia [and] The rooms have the original thick walls keeping them cool in summer and warm in winter and are rich in history.”\textsuperscript{172} After further searching I came across an apt and resoundingly poignant blog from a disgruntled patron: “Was a very dissapionting (sic) stay at the "Lodge"! Should really be called the "Cell" I have never been to prision (sic) but would imagine this would be very close. The room had leaks (as it was raining constantly (sic)) and had no ventelation (sic), cramped dark and depressing.”\textsuperscript{173} Perhaps if this patron was informed before-hand that it WAS a prison, WAS a place of harm and trauma, that it WAS an abode where, in the rain, it became dank and inhospitable and hence this inextricably led to the deaths of many men, this patron may not have considered staying there in the first place!

\textsuperscript{166} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{167} According to: Green & Moon, \textit{Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931}.
\textsuperscript{168} Rottnest Lodge is rich in history too – built in 1864, it was once the summer residence of the Governor of Western Australia. Quod Rooms: The rooms have the original thick walls keeping them cool in summer and warm in winter and are rich in history. [Source: \url{http://rottnestlodge.com.au}]
\textsuperscript{169} [Source: \url{http://rottnestlodge.com.au/the-accommodation/}]
\textsuperscript{170} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{171} No mention in any paraphernalia given or displayed by the Lodge, nor any in advertisements, websites or within the rooms themselves.
\textsuperscript{172} [Source: \url{http://rottnestlodge.com.au/the-accommodation/}]
\textsuperscript{173} [Source: \url{http://www.tripadvisor.com.au/Hotel_Review-g488366-d456772-Reviews-Rottnest_Lodge-Rottnest_Island_Cockburn_Greater_Perth_Western_Australia.html}]
What should be done to rectify this situation? Many Aboriginal people, thankfully supported by a majority of the non-Indigenous community, believe that the Quod needs to IMMEDIATELY be annexed and transformed into a cultural centre; a hub or focal point of reconciliation. Tammar summarises this concept:

“...it would be good if they could use the Quod...and make it into some sort of cultural centre, museum, a healing place where people who had connections can come back there and reconnect and tell their kids stories and if there was recognition of some sort for all of those prisoners that were there, name plaques so that people can heal...” 174

Karen Jacobs puts a more bureaucratic spin on the current situation, highlighting the frustration she felt as an Authority member who was restricted in venting her displeasure against the Lodge in any formal manner. “Wearing two hats, it’s always difficult especially as an Aboriginal person...in the Rottnest Island Authority sense, the Island now has a commercial purpose set up as a tourism destination for holidaymakers,” 175 But when questioned as to her personal view-point regarding people naively staying in rooms that once held Aboriginal prisoners she emotionally declares, “It makes me feel sick to tell you the truth. Unfortunately while I was on the Authority you don’t have the right to go up and interfere with the holidaymaker’s aspirations of what their stay is all about.” 176 Administratively and legislatively the only option available to the Aboriginal community currently is to continue lobbying to “....try and make sure that the quad is handed back to Aboriginals as quickly as possible, then we can actually take it off the commercial lease for the Lodge and if I had my way, well probably the Lodge wouldn’t be used either but very quickly remove the Quad and the burial ground from any connection to the lease of the Lodge.” 177

Thankfully the opinion of the Rottnest Island Authority is one of support for the separation of the Quod from the Lodge “...at the earliest practical day.” 178 O’Meara does give a practical approach in his answer and, as frustrating as it is, logistically (realistically) explains that, “...there is no point in us saying...we will separate it tomorrow and let it just lie there in disrepair when we haven’t got a plan or a budget for its use, but soon as we can practically arrange that it is our policy to so do.” 179

In the WestBusiness section of The West Australian newspaper on July 20th, 2011, the headline Future of island’s historic lodge founders on rocky receivership, was the first report in some time, that, had directly addressed the Bankwest lease of the Lodge/Quod. “Bankwest boss Jon Sutton has voiced his frustrations at a failed bid to hand control of the Rottnest Lodge “back to WA”, claiming interest in the historic venue from community groups has ‘faded away.’” 180 Classed as one of WA’s longest receiverships, Bankwest took over the 30-year operating lease in 1991 from the collapsed private company of Alan Bond, Dahlhold Investments. Throughout the 1990s several would-be

174 Tammar, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
175 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
176 Ibid.
177 Ibid.
178 O'Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
179 Ibid.
buyers reportedly withdrew their offers in “the face of strong protests over the use of the Quad.” In 2018 the lease of the building will revert to the RIA. Despite the Lodge generating annual turnover of $4 million, which generates about $400,000 profit, since 2008 Sutton has had a gnawing feeling that “…Given the history of the place, the cultural significance, [he] always thought it should go back to the community.” As a side note, the National Trust promised to perform upgrades and “…restore the lodge to a place that better reflects its historical and cultural significance,” but, according to them, walked away because of a lack of support from the RIA. In response O’Meara claimed that his board had not received any “official proposal about the National Trust taking on the lease.” The final word on the matter is given by both the Bank and the National Trust who agree, “that simply waiting until the lease expires in 2018 to hand back to the island’s authority is not a satisfactory outcome.”

On the weekend of the 19th & 20th November 2011, it was reported in The West Australian that the RIA were attempting to separate the Quod section of the Lodge from being used for accommodation purposes, with a view of the “RIA taking control of the adjoining Quod.” At the end of the same month it was again reported in The West Australian that the Karma Royal Group, owned by John Spence, was understood to have been close to obtaining the lease to the Lodge from Bankwest. This was officially announced on December 1st 2011 when the Rottnest Lodge was relaunched under the new brand of ‘lifestyle’ resorts within John Spence’s Karma Royal Group. Spence was quoted as saying that he “…hoped to strike a deal with the RIA that would see the Quod annexed from the lodge and handed back to community interests in exchange for the right to build a group of luxury units elsewhere on the grounds,” this was hoped “…to appease traditional owners.” Then with the headline: History Horror – Rotto to close Aboriginal jail holiday units, the final word of the matter was given by Spence who remarked that “Like many others [he] too…felt uncomfortable about having prison cells as tourist accommodation,” and that the Quod, “….should never have been part of the hotel [and that] It should be protected as a memorial.” The Editor of The West Australian whole-heartedly agreed with Spence and stated conclusively:

*It was an unfortunate anomaly that the Quod, the site of such misery for the State’s indigenous people, should end up being put to such an inappropriate use. And it is only right that Aboriginal*
people should have a strong say in how the Quod is now to be used.

Envisioning the day that the Quod is appropriately annexed\[195\] the Rottnest Island Deaths Group contends passionately that they “...don’t want that ever [to] be pulled down ‘cause that would have to be a symbol of the torture that they put our people through...” \[196\] Karen Jacobs agrees with Corunna that the decision about the Quod needs to be left “...up to Aboriginal people of the state because they have a voice and they do have a role and a responsibility to say what do we do with this prison now because it did hold their ancestors.” \[197\] She asks ‘how’ the Quod should be presented back to the Aboriginal State community and queries:

“Do we actually want the State Government to continually benefit from any outcome that we determine for the Quod? I actually want that discussion to be had with all Aboriginal people across the state not just Wadiuk people, so I think everybody has a responsibility for that one.” \[198\]

So what should happen [in 2018] once (if?) the Quod is handed back to the Aboriginal community? The consensus is that it should be converted and transformed into a world recognized and unique cultural museum and interpretive centre. Dr Neville Green, who has spent a considerable portion of his life dedicated to researching Aboriginal history, put several ideas to Authority officials ‘some years ago’ on what would make an excellent museum on the island:

- Similar to the Washington DC Smithsonian, Green suggests that the “...shifting panels [that] depict the different native American groups across America...” \[199\] could be applied to the Aboriginal tribal and language groups of the State: “...and in a similar way you could have an activated museum [that] could reflect the home countries of where these men came from, so you are on the Island, you are seeing what they have left and you are seeing where they came from.” \[200\]

- Further, Green suggests that like the Holocaust Museum in Washington DC, the Quod museum could have a construct whereby visitors “...receive a [numbered] card and that card has a number on it and you follow through the museum and then at a point towards the end...you key that card in and it tells you...a name of the person.” \[201\] Green adds you may have travelled around as Mollydobbin \[202\] or

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195 RIA chairman Laurie O’Meara is quoted in January of 2012 that “Negotiations are under way to separate the Quod from Rottnest Lodge [and he] expected an agreement to be reached within months.” [Acott, Kent. Rotto to close Aboriginal jail holiday units, The Weekend West, January 14-15\[th\] 2012: 21.]
196 Corunna "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
197 Jacobs, Karen "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
198 Ibid.
199 Green, Dr. "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
200 Ibid.
201 Ibid.
202 AKA Mollydoben – this man is well documented in colonial records – particularly for his tracking skills, which led to the rescue of a missing European child. Charged in 1838 for stealing flour & sugar and sentenced to 7 years on Rottnest – serving nearly 4 years in captivity. [Green & Moon, Far From Home : Aboriginal prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931: 230-231]
Lumbia, and you retrospectively “…find out whether you died there of measles in 1839…or you may find that you died two weeks after you entered the prison, or that you left and you went on to greater things…”

- Green also suggested that there could be a memorial wall, similar in design and concept to the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial Wall at Washington DC or the U.N. War Memorial at Busan Korea, “…where a wall has the names of every person that were killed in those conflicts. But the Rottnest one could have 3000 bricks, each one depicting a person who was on that Island, with a different colour brick depicting a person who died.” Green further points out that an honour book could also exist which lists all of the prisoners including details of their language groups, cultural status, crime, term, occupation and if applicable illness and/or death. He reminds that “…modern technology could have all this, [via] electronic displays and you could search through electronically…”

- Green’s last suggestion was that the key lodges and abodes on the Island could be “…named after Aboriginal prisoners…” and that significant streets could also be re-named after significant Aboriginal people. In the West Australian on January 24th 2012 Michael Sinclair-Jones declared that, “Former Rottnest Island jailer Henry Vincent was a sadistic killer who starved, tortured and cruelly abused hundreds of Aboriginal prisoners under his control. Yet his name is venerated on the island’s main waterfront thoroughfare, tourist heritage trail and sports club trophy in the Governor’s Bar. It’s like naming a freeway or footy competition after a genocidal mass murderer.” He makes a good point and leads to the question of ‘why can’t we have Aboriginal prisoner or Noongar dialect named buildings and streets?’

But regrettfully none of Green’s suggestions were taken seriously, including that it is “…very much up to the Aboriginal community, and when I say community it’s the whole community…” as Rottnest has the makings of becoming a world renowned heritage site.

Elder Noel Nannup takes the argument a step further and suggests that visitors who do visit such a museum and interpretive site need to hear the tragic history and stories about the people who died there from Aboriginal storytellers. Consideration needs to be given to these visitors not leaving the museum/interpretive centre sad and forlorn, but rather there is:

“…a place where they can sit and think about it, and meditate. Take on board the heartache and the misery, but also then go into a building where there might be…a rainbow room…I defy anybody, who sees a rainbow, and doesn’t smile. They go in there with the negativity, then turn and circle and then they come out, and as they go round, they start to go out, looking at positives…”

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203 One of the last Aboriginal prisoners on Rottnest he symbolized the final years of the Kimberley frontier – sentenced to death for killing a pastoralist he was instead commuted to life imprisonment (on Rottnest) [Green & Moon, Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931: 212-213]

204 Green, Dr. "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."

205 Ibid.

206 Ibid.

207 Ibid.


209 Nannup "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
The RIA also shares this philosophy and observes that physically the current location and layout of the Quod (and thus Lodge) works well because “...the main entrance to the Quod is not through the Lodge, it’s out facing the common so if you have got that separated and you have got that set up as an Aboriginal interpretation centre...then you have got a main entrance into the Quod and then you have got the side entrance that opens out onto the burial ground so the integrity of all that works very well...”

(xii) SITE OF RECONCILIATION

There is no doubt that Wadjemup is an island of distinctiveness and is unique. In the words of the Auditor General in 2003, Rottnest is a rare jewel, “an icon of Western Australia.” The Auditor General, when writing about the need to turn the island around as a commercial entity, wrote that, “Achieving this turnaround will require the collective engagement of Parliament, the RIA and the community. Rottnest is, after all, a unique resource for everyone.” One can also apply this notion to the need for a joint cooperation to finalize the Aboriginal recognition, healing, memorial and reconciliation on the island. Just as Wadjemup lies unassuming in the merging waters of two oceans – the cool waters of the Great Southern Ocean and the warmer Indian Ocean; the Island also sits between and within the Aboriginal space and the Colonized space. So this Island is a perfect epicenter for the third space that needs to be negotiated and established as the framework for the Reconciliation paradigm, a now familiar concept within Australia, which aims to encourage co-operation and improve relations between Aboriginal and Islander Australians and the wider community. Reconciliation is a critical element in the process to eliminate racism and promote cultural distinctiveness. Thus the understanding of how history and post-colonial trauma has shaped our relationship with each other, and retrospectively the development of respect for each other’s cultures, are key components of the Reconciliation process.

The peak body of the Noongar nation, the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, claims that Wadjemup could be THE hub of reconciliation, “…considering that it’s got a really amazing reach and significance across the state...being a site or an ‘epicentre’ – let’s call it - for proper reconciliation.” SWALSC’s stance remains that the story or narrative is not just about Aboriginal discourse but ALSO “…in a lot of ways it’s about white people coming to terms with their side of the story...” This is also a significant concept and model for Robben Island which has, in the words of South African Minister Z Pallo Jordan, transformed from “…a place of isolation, hardship, degradation and human atrocities to a place representing resistance, resilience and the triumph of the human spirit over hardship and that enshrines values of nation building, human rights and national reconciliation.”

Professor Craig McGarty defines reconciliation as “…a process that takes at least two sides...at least two parties...[and] a recognition that harm was done. There has to be acknowledgement of harm and there has to be a response by the people that harm was

210 O’Meara, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
211 Auditor General for Western Australia. Turning the Tide: The Business Sustainability of the Rottnest Island Authority, Office, 2003 [page unknown]
212 Ibid: 4
213 Kelly, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
214 Ibid.
done. ” Some may argue that the Rottnest Island Authority’s Reconciliation Action Plan has achieved this. There is no denying that it is a major step in the right direction, but it is written rhetoric and nothing more. The Aboriginal community, and many of the general population want to see legislative and physical action – the Quod and Burial Site discussed in State Parliament, a retraction of the 2018 Rottnest Lodge lease and finally, an interpretive/memorial on the Burial Site and a Museum/Place of Healing within the Quod grounds and buildings.

“Well it starts with the people who are the authorities who are now controlling, representing [the] Western Australian Government – [the] Rottnest Island Authority. It starts with those people asking advice and guidance of the traditional custodians, the people who are the representatives of the Indigenous Australians who were harmed and the descendants of those people, asking them for the best way to proceed. It starts with that acknowledgement that there is something unresolved and that there is something that needs to be done. But it’s a step, it’s the first step and with a response there will be a process, and a process will lead to resolution. But you can’t get anywhere on the road to reconciliation without taking steps.”

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216 McGarty, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
217 Ibid.
218 Ibid.
Chapter 5: Research Conclusions

5.1 Introduction

This thesis provides a deep historical analysis of Wadjemup from a post-colonial perspective. It uses theories and examples of intergenerational trauma, memorial and reconciliation. In discussing these issues in depth it emphasizes the ideas and words of key Noongar Elders (and other significant Aboriginal representatives) but also includes those of historians, politicians and administrators. A case study of Robben Island is used to point to a possible future approach of using Wadjemup as a key centre for [Australian] reconcialition.

‘Life is lived forward but understood backward’. ¹

This is an apt thought for Wadjemup. At the time of the Aboriginal Prison on the Island, there was a clear mandate by the authorities to break the resistance to colonization, both in the Swan River Colony and then the State frontier. However, what was not known was that this action would have repercussions that affect the State Aboriginal population generations later. When the deceased Aboriginal prisoners were buried in unmarked graves in the area near the Quod, it was not known, but is now, that centuries later we would still be discussing and debating their fate, and arguing as to the best method and form for paying respect to their memory. In 1972, George Seddon wrote that, “The conversion from prison settlement to holiday village has been extraordinarily successful. The prison has become a hostel, Government House is now the Quokka Arms…the old buildings have both charm and historic interest, and should have been preserved in any case, but they have been preserved in the best possible way, by finding a new use for them.” ² In hindsight, we know that Seddon’s statement is both ill informed and insulting.

Some twenty years later, the Aboriginal Affairs Planning Authority (AAPA) budgeted $400,000 towards the construction of a commemorative centre and memorial on Rottnest Island, to be located near the Aboriginal burial site. Then, later that year (28th October) in 1992, representatives of the Aboriginal Sites Department outlined the commemorative proposal to the key stakeholders involved in leading Indigenous affairs within the state, including the now defunct Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Commission (ATSIC). It was envisaged that the project would require $800,000 for the core structure of the building and annual costs of $200,000 for staffing and maintenance.³ Green noted that a designated interpretative centre at the burial site and a “…restored Quod could become the most significant Aboriginal museum in Australia.” ⁴ Sadly, this vision has not come to fruition and the rhetoric; bargaining and negotiation about the two key sites still remain in limbo.

It has been well over 40 years since skeletal remains were first dug up on the Island and over 20 years since the above proposal was forwarded to key stakeholders. At the time, according to Green, the Perth Noongar Regional Council was “not willing to undertake

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¹ Quote from 19th century philosopher Soren Kierkergaard [Source: http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/s/soren_kierkegaard.html]
³ Green & Moon, Far From Home: Aboriginal Prisoners of Rottnest Island 1838-1931: 72
⁴ Ibid.
any action on Rottnest that would further divide the Noongar and other Aboriginal Communities throughout Western Australia on this sensitive issue.”

Recently, when being interviewed for this project and the film Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground, Noongar Elder Neville Collard remarked that Wadjemup could be “…a very important step into Noongars reconciliating [sic] amongst themselves…” This, of course, will not eventuate until something of significance is constructed and transforms the Island. For Collard, “…when that happens the ferry should be full of everyone - black and white people to go over there and have a day of celebration where you can sit down and break the links and the chains that have bound us there for 178 years…”. I suggest this is another pipe dream in a long list of ‘pipe-dreams’ for the Noongar/Aboriginal community.

Unfortunately the reality is that many of the key stakeholders in this time and place do not see eye to eye, and lack of trust and negotiation (within the 3rd space) has led to nothing but resentment, misguided viewpoints and empty talk. The PUBLIC STATEMENT [4th March 2009] issued by the MEMBERS OF THE ROTTNEST ISLAND DEATHS GROUP IN SUPPORT OF RIDG AND OUR ANCESTORS AT WAJEMUP for a meeting at Edith Cowan University, Mt Lawley, hosted by Professor Craig McGarty (and ‘all whom it may concern’) when this project was first conceived and the seeds of the film Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground were planted, is an example of this mistrust. Here is an excerpt from the statement:

“We are the authorised Custodians delegated by the Statewide Ceremonial Meeting of Elders who gathered to show respect to our Dead Ancestors and to put one of our Ancestor’s Remains to rest in June, 1994, after his remains were dug up by RIA. This was one of our Ancestors who died and was buried on Wadjemup/Rottnest Island.

It was a coming together of all concerned Aboriginal Elders and People from Communities scattered throughout the whole of Western Australia. RIDG organised the Ceremonial Meeting of Elders and Aboriginal People in June 1994 on Rottnest Island bringing Statewide Elders to Rottnest Island.

We are still that Body of People – the Rottnest Island Death Group (Aboriginal Corporation) authorised by that Meeting to look after and protect the Place of our Ancestors’ Remains and the Place of their Suffering.

The white-run Rottnest Island Authority that is in place now consulted with us at the time and took our advice, and committed themselves to working with us, and never suggested they would turn away from RIDG. They acknowledged they have no right whatsoever to employ other Aboriginal people to override the Rottnest Island Deaths Group’s authorisation by the Statewide

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5 Ibid.
6 Collard, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
7 Ibid.
8 Original Statement in Appendices.
Meeting of Elders in 1994 which asked us, RIDG to be the authorised Custodians and Protectors.

Through the passing of time since the Ceremonial Meeting, The Rottnest Island Authority has been overridden by other Aboriginal groups. People like Cedric Jacobs was at the Statewide Meeting and he knows what was said at that meeting which authorised the Rottnest Island Deaths Group (AC) to represent the interest of the Elders statewide concerning Rottnest. Also present was the Premier, Richard Court.

The Aboriginal Legal Service was also aware of what was said at that Statewide Meeting.

The Rottnest Island Authority has been playing to [sic] many games against Aboriginal People and trying to divide us.

The Rottnest Island Authority recognised the custodianship of the Rottnest Island Deaths Group and had negotiated with this Body, promising to enable the Rottnest Island Deaths Group to set up a culturally appropriate Museum of Remembrance at the Quod when the Dallhold lease was gone.

We are the Grassroots Custodians and Protectors of the Sacredness of the Quod and the Burial Grounds and the whole of the Island that impounded our Ancestors.

We call on Laurie O’Meara, the godfather of this huge plan to modernise the island and make it a playground for the rich white people, and we call on Noel Nannup, Cedric Jacobs and Marilyn Morgan and all those who support them, to back off. There is no ‘whale dreaming’ or ‘butterfly dreaming’ out there.

We ask again of Cedric Jacobs to stop saying he is the only custodian of Rottnest Island. He must stop putting himself over and above those Senior Elders from all over the State. Human lives and human suffering cannot be used for profit in our Culture. There are to be no profits made in running tourists buses to bring in dollars and cents.

We, the Nyungah Elders, spearheaded the first moves to bring in Elders from all over the State in 1990 and 1994 to protect Rottnest Island on behalf of all Aboriginal People whose Ancestors were impounded and killed to see that justice was done on behalf of all Aboriginal People in Western Australia whose Ancestors are still laying dead at Rottnest Island.”

The above, right or wrong, indicates the delicacy of the situation in regards to Wadjemup and the amount of passion it creates within the Aboriginal community. It

9 PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM MEMBERS OF ROTTNEST ISLAND DEATHS GROUP IN SUPPORT OF RIDG AND OUR ANCESTORS AT WAJEMUP 4March, 2009, For Meeting at Edith Cowan University, Mt Lawley.
has the same amount of power to divide and fragment the community as it does to unite, heal and empower. Regardless of Noongar, Aboriginal, and Authority politics and agendas, this project is of local, State and National importance. This matter and its ramifications cannot, and should not, be ‘owned’ by one group. It is a matter for ALL parties to share, debate and decide. Decision time has arrived. For me, the major significance of this research project and film is its potential to contribute to the dialogue and hence potentially fulfill the wishes and hopes of the Aboriginal (Noongar focused) community to ensure a more accurate representation of the history of European-Aboriginal relations in the history of the State, including the Swan River Colony and Wadjemup. A Noongar perspective, if you will, from Wadjemup to Walyalup and Wadjuk Boodjah and Beyond.

Thus to create harmony we have to allow the pathway or the passageway for people to learn the truth and be exposed to the ‘other’ narrative. Bin Baker says "...the truth doesn’t belong to Aboriginal people, it belongs to our nation, it belongs to every man and woman in this state of Western Australia to know the truth about Rottnest Island…”

Dr Ian Crawford suggests, “…that all parties involved in Rottnest have something to gain from resolution of differences: at the end of the process we could hope to see an Aboriginal cultural centre of some sort which could tell with sensitivity the Aboriginal history of the Island, and that would be significant addition to the facilities available to visitors to the Island. Apart from the small display in the museum, at present remarkably little is said about Aborigines on the Island.”

Australia’s history can be understood as a three-fold transition: a pre-colonial past, involving the ‘Dreaming’, Aboriginal Creation, Cultural Law/lore and Protocol and Tribal Rituals; the colonial past, often referred to as Settlement, Colonization and the Frontier Period; and the third stage classed as ‘Postcolonial’ or ‘Postmodern’, in which Repatriation (of Ancestors, History and Culture) and Native Title are the cornerstones. Symbolically one could argue that Australia was “possessed, dispossessed, [and is now] repossessed.” This is the period – the third-phase – where true accounts of (Aboriginal) history can be (re)written without fear of reprisals or mockery. This is a period, when the multi-cultural aspect of our national society and ‘post-Apology’, can promote the true history of our past, and the recognition of Aboriginal struggle and colonial resistance. The scars of the past do appear to be slowly healing and the spirit of reconciliation supports the movement forward to celebrate understanding and recognition. There is no better time than now for our State Government to be open and honest about what happened at Wadjemup and foster a climate for the sharing of the truth, of black and white history; to everyone. This ‘post-modern’ period has seen a “…quickening of interest in Aboriginal culture…[and] this national heritage should be protected ‘for all Australians’.” It is now time to utilize and position Wadjemup as a national focus for healing and reconciliation.

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10 Bin Baker, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
13 Ibid.
Local artist Kate McMillan agrees saying, “The motif of the island as a place where forgetting can occur has long been part of European iconography…” However now as we embody the post-colonial phase of our nation, the dynamic has transformed from forgetting, veiling and concealing to a sense of truthfulness, revealing, and collaboration.

Collard conveys that Wadjemup “...could be one of the key healing places within the metropolitan area, including the site where Midgegooroo was executed and Yagan’s Park where Yagan’s full body is now laid to rest...” Efforts are currently being made to have the body of Midgegooroo, the father of Yagan and the ONLY person to be formally executed by firing squad in Australia’s history, identified and protected/memorialized at the Deanery in Central Perth and in 2010 a formal sacred Noongar ceremony was conducted to join the kaart (head) of Yagan with his (long buried) body. A State Public Yagan Memorial Park (Stage One) was opened at Swan Valley. As Collard expressed, an interpretative centre and museum at the burial site and Quod at Wadjemup could be the final ‘trilogy’ of sites in the Perth (Wadjuk) area that completes the pathway to healing and reconciliation. Perhaps the other significant massacre sites, in the north, the Forrest River Massacre and in the south the Pinjarra Massacre could also be sanctified links to the State’s places of trauma and harm, but ultimately on the other hand, sites of remembrance, recognition, reconciliation and healing.

So when will this happen? I personally remain optimistic – BUT “HOW LONG IS A PIECE OF STRING?” This idiom, usually offered in rhetorical response to a question that has no sensible answer, is the only response I can currently give – both written and filmic. In 1992, a Koori Mail article reported “The Government still was trying to decide, in co-operation with Aboriginal groups, how the site could be commemorated…” In the 1995 Rottnest Island Review appropriately entitled: Achieving the Balance, 153 recommendations were made regarding the future of the Island – Chapter 14 – focused on Aboriginal Interests and Recommendation 145 expressed that the establishment of an interpretative centre or related programs, “…would add considerably to the historic and cultural presentation of the Island to those visitors keen to have a comprehensive understanding of the Island’s place in Western Australia’s history and ensure a closer involvement of Aboriginal people in that process.” It concluded with the consoling notion “…however it is understood that there has been no commitment to that proposal at this stage.” The Auditor General of Western Australia declared in 2003 that the business sustainability of Rottnest Island was determined by the appropriate Cultural Heritage being protected and nurtured on the Island – namely the Aboriginal prison and hospital (former morgue) – which need conservation to the amount of $3,800,000. Hence authoritative recognition and monetary designation HAS BEEN publicly declared; but still NO action!

16 Collard, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
17 1925 – recognized as the last WA massacre of Aboriginal people – fronted by Lubia – recognized as the last of the Rottnest Island Aboriginal prisoners.
18 Discussed earlier in detail.
21 Ibid.
Further, in the Rottnest Island Authority Reconciliation Action Plan 2008-2011, Action Item 2.1 expressed the need for, “In consultation with Aboriginal people, establish the Aboriginal Burial Ground as a place of remembrance that is culturally accepted by Indigenous groups with ancestors buried there.” The desired outcome of this project was for it to be externally funded and commenced within a five-year period, with a completion date of JUNE 2013. Obviously this was not satisfied (or even remotely satisfied) and the updated RIA plan of 2012-2015 extended the time-line out to JUNE 2015 with a desired outcome that the Wadjemup Aboriginal Burial Ground is externally funded and Stage 2 completed, “...to the extent that resources allow...”

Given that the State Government recently pledged $50,000 and the Federal Government $450,000 for a memorial park in Bali (to commemorate the 88 Australian victims killed in the ‘Bali Bombings’ of 2005) there shouldn’t be an issue with the government’s pledging monies to commorative and memorialize the near 400 Aboriginal prisoners buried on Wadjemup The Rottnest Island Authority (via the State Government) recently spent millions of dollars on revamping Rottnest; including $500,000 to upgrade the Bickley Battery at Kingstown, $310,000 on a remediation project at Henrietta Rocks, $830,000 on the central kitchen and toilet block at the campground, $1.4 million refurbishing the Rottnest Island golf course, thousands on the re-painting of the two 9.2-inch guns on Oliver Hill, hundreds of thousands of dollars refurbishing 30 ‘premium view’ units in Geordie and Longreach Bays, and expanding the visitors centre to house Rottnest Volunteer Guides and an expanded coffee shop. So despite MILLIONS being spent on the Island it seems not ONE CENT was spent or pledged towards the burial site and/or Quod project. Perhaps it is time for another physical protest on the Island, similar to the one in 2001, when a group of Aboriginal protestors carrying multiple Aboriginal flags and dressed in the same motif marched from the main jetty to the Quod and demanded that action begin; sadly this also came to nought. The waiting continues and the ‘string’ has been ‘stretched’ further again. How long is this piece of string exactly…and why is this matter embedded in complexity?

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23 Rottnest Island Authority Reconciliation Action Plan 2008-2011
26 Gareth Parker, Funding boost for Bali peace memorial, The West Australian, [date & page unknown].
27 Though ‘Rotto’ is amusingly labelled ‘overseas’ by locals – it is and always has been part of the Australian landscape – no disrespect to the Bali plight but the State and Federal Government owe it to the Aboriginal population and wider population to start comprehensive memorialisation within the nation landscape before focusing on overseas sites (Gallipoli and the Somme Region in France not withstanding).
5.2 Closing Remarks

The Greek philosophers Leucippus and Democritus suggested that however complicated the world might seem to human eyes, it was fundamentally simple…and that with strategy, process, commitment and dedication anything could be achieved. Lennon & McCartney sung in 1967:

“And though the holes were rather small,…they had to count them all.
Now they know how many holes it takes to fill the Albert Hall.”

What does this have to do with Wadjemup? Well philosophically – like the Albert Hall, in the Beatles song *A Day in the Life* – we may not be able to count all the holes (graves) that it takes to fill the burial site at Wadjemup, but we do know that there are holes (graves), we know that harm and trauma occurred there, we know that the Quod still stands there (as a resort) and we know that money, commitment (from the Government, Authority, Aboriginal Community and the Public) and time are needed to begin the process.

Western Australia is currently in one of the most economically productive phases in its colonial history due to the mining boom (ironic considering that traditional country provides most of this wealth) and recently it was announced by the State Government that the former Perth Waterfront would be the “…centrepiece of a bold plan to revitalise central Perth,” at a cost of $2.6 Billion, and named Elizabeth Quay, in honour of Her Majesty (does anybody else see the irony in this…?).

Another significant event is to be played out on the political front. The State Government will soon sign a landmark deal, believed to be $1.3 Billion, with the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council, which will include State Parliament recognizing Noongar people as Traditional Owners (I prefer the word Custodian) of their lands in a Recognition Bill entitled *Koorah, Nitjah, Boordahwan* (The Past, Present and Future), the first of its kind in Australia. Hence monies from this landmark deal could be utilized to fund (or co-fund) the 2nd phase of the Burial site – which would then create a ‘domino effect’ and place due pressure on the RIA and State Government to begin procedures and conceptual plans on annexing the Quod and providing a monetary scheme to transforming the Quod into the Museum and Interpretative Site that it should be.

It is foreseen that this *Koorah, Nitjah, Boordahwan* arrangement will help lift outcomes in Aboriginal health, education, and governance, producing a “…new generation of Noongar leaders to drive further change within the community.”

Though, like Wadjemup and other significant issues affecting the community, the matter

http://www.egs.edu/library/democritus/


[Source: http://www.lyricsfreak.com/b/beatles/a+day+in+the+life_10026556.html/]

Metropolitan Redevelopment Authority, Government of Western Australia,

[Source: http://www.mra.wa.gov.au/Projects/Elizabeth-Quay/About-the-Project/]


Ibid.
has divided Noongar peoples, and like Wadjemup, the Premier claims that, “Nothing happens overnight…” and this outcome and resolution, will take time.

Noongar time is a concept that can be foreign to many non-Aboriginal people, but it is a concept that many still live by (including, where possible, this author). It is, in a simplistic description, a way of life whereby time is not considered an important element but what is important is that the task is done, and that it is done well; the amount of time it takes is irrelevant. So perhaps I shouldn’t ask HOW LONG IS A PIECE OF STRING? but HOW LONG DO WE HAVE TO LOOK AT THE PIECE OF STRING?, and that (hopefully) the reformation of the burial site and the Quod will happen in Noongar time. Not in a hurry – but it will happen. Perhaps the concept and basis for Noongar time can be taken into account. Ask a Noongar person how long they have been here and they will more than often tell you ‘from the beginning of time…since the Waugal first dominated the earth and the sky during the Nyitting, when it created the fresh waterways such as the bilya/beelier (river), pinjar (swamps, lakes) and ngamar (waterhole) and battled the Yondock (crocodile spirit) out in the Darbal Narr, and created the Island Wadjemup’. Noongar spirituality lies in the belief of a cultural landscape and the connection between the human and spiritual realms. Everything in our vast landscape has meaning and purpose. So have Noongar faith that the spirits will eventually be put to rest on Wadjemup and that in the meantime wherever you go allow the spirit of Wadjemup to enrich your soul (and lives) and be empowered to protect the memory and spirit of the sacred ancestors that lie beneath its soil.

“...we [Aboriginal people] are still here today and we are just as strong, if not ever stronger, and we gain our strength from that sad history of the island...and I think the title of this documentary [Research Project] is very appropriate to remind people that you can’t dance on the history of our people and you can’t dance on justice and on the grave of justice, history and the truth...”

A Holiday Mourning

As I view the opulence of five star accommodation
A half naked bimbo posing stretches in satisfaction
Overfed tourists bloated are still finishing breakfast
When I think of the past they make me feel nauseous

As I walk to my room
I heard the crow cry
A haunting memory reminded of an historical lie denied
And no matter how many coats of paint they apply over the fading façade under, the skeletons still lie

34 Ibid.
35 Bin Barker, "Interview by Glen Stasiuk for the Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground project."
I’ve come to mourn
and remember my kind
to spill salty tears
for those left behind
But all around
holiday makers mock me
They show no respect
for this part of black history

I leave, feeling grim
so empty and wasted
This holiday playground
full of evil disenchantment
But why do they play
and dance on old graves
Don’t they hear the spirits howling
in the trees and the waves

Some say ‘let it lie’
they know not what they do
But ignorance my friend
is not worth defending
A price must be paid
for the pain and suffering
those that don’t R.I.P.
But alas decay, beneath their feet!

Graeme Dixon

The Roundhouse by Christopher Pease, 2007 ©

36 Dixon, Holocaust Revisited – killing time: 80.
Chapter 6: About The Film

6.1 Introduction

Storytelling is an integral part of life for Indigenous Australians. Gathered around the campfire in the evening, Elders, matriarchs, leaders and children would bed down for the night and stories were shared and passed down from one generation to the next. These stories were often based on the land and surrounding environments and they encompassed and embraced totemic belief systems, experiences derived from the seasons, stories of the hunt, and mythical stories from the beginning of time.

In modern times, in addition to continuing oral traditions, other methods of storytelling have arisen from the ashes of the fire: filmmaking and multi-media production. In the past, stories were verbally passed from one family member to the next, or these ‘yarns’ could be presented on a ‘message stick’ – now the modern form is the DVD or the Internet via multi-media platforms.

The true role of the storyteller is to teach; teaching the cultural values, passing on knowledge and belief systems within the stories and archiving or preserving the stories for future generations. Indigenous films and productions – from Indigenous perspectives – are finally revealing intimate details of Indigenous histories, country, culture and knowledge. In the twentieth century the dominant white population actively discouraged Indigenous storytelling and many important tales and stories were lost. Now the Aboriginal community (and individuals) is attempting to invigorate their cultural identity and vitality via modern means and without others negatively appropriating or exploiting the stories that carry it. Finally, language and culture are being respected, spoken, archived and being culturally protected through Indigenous productions, acknowledgment of Native Title and traditional custodians of country. Until the late 1970s, Indigenous Australians, via the mainstream media, namely film, television, radio and print media, were represented through the eyes of white Australia and the dominant colonial gaze. Aboriginal communities and individuals had very little (if any) influence on the outputs and productions and as a result the wider audiences of this media were subject to Aboriginal stereotype and cliché. In fact the only time an Aboriginal person would be seen by the mainstream audience in a positive light was if they were chasing a football around the major ovals of the day, boxing for a world title or hitting a tennis ball on the world-circuit. Fortunately this mostly negative mainstream representation was challenged and confronted by Essie Coffey’s (1979) feature documentary My Survival as an Aboriginal [applauded as one of the first feature films to be made under the direction of an Australian Aboriginal person].

In a sense this self-produced media is creating and manifesting a living Indigenous modernity. Sentiments expressed by Sally Riley, the former Director of the Indigenous Unit of the Australian Film Commission, who writes that Indigenous filmmakers “…have original and interesting stories to tell with a fresh vision that offers different perspectives from those experienced by most Australians, and for that matter, most people worldwide.” 1 These stories and depictions are often told and represented in a matter that is ruthless, fresh, truthful and honest – and allows audiences to view the Indigenous perspective and experience with the same honesty and vigour. Riley substantiates this statement by emphasizing that, “Indigenous filmmakers as a group

1 Riley, Sally in Gallasch, K (Ed.). Dreaming in Motion: Celebrating Australia’s Indigenous Filmmakers, 2007: 3.
have an uncanny knack for representing their stories with a truthfulness on screen that resonates with many different audiences.”  

This ‘truthful’ notion is essentially derived and manifested from the essence of a ‘lived experience’. Indigenous filmmakers more commonly portray their ideals and points of view, not through reading and theorizing, but through first-hand experience and first order knowledge(s).

Professor Marica Langton states that constructs of Aboriginality will continue to be remade over and over and non-Indigenous people will continue to want to make images and create narratives of Indigenous individuals and communities. The key now is to recognize the strength and distinctiveness that Indigenous filmmakers have within this industry and the role they play in negotiating and/or collaborating with non-Indigenous parties within this new paradigm.

Janke describes the importance of these Indigenous stories steeped in variety and background as experiences that shape Indigenous cultures and are of heritage significance to current and future generations of Indigenous people:

Indigenous people’s heritage is a living heritage and includes objects, knowledge, stories and images based on that heritage, created today or in the future. For Indigenous people, the stories of their ancestors are their heritage, and so are the stories that recount Indigenous experience over the years of colonization.

6.2 Concept Description and Development Process

Documentary filmmakers can be a peculiar bunch of people, driven by an amazing drive to tell a specific story and impart a message. It’s a hard slog to make a documentary film, both physically and emotionally…but there are numerous rewards that make it worthwhile. Firstly, as documentarians, we get to completely immerse ourselves in fascinating, hitherto unknown, subject areas. Secondly, we have the opportunity to effect change, or make some kind of difference.

The above statement from Glynne could not have summarized my attitude towards my craft, and the documenting of this subject matter, any better if I had expressed it myself. According to Glynne a recent survey conducted by the Documentary Filmmakers’ Group showed that over 80 per cent of documentary filmmakers made films in order to “make a difference”, be that on a global, national, community or individual level. I would like to take this claim further by commenting that I consider myself, as an Aboriginal filmmaker, to be a storyteller and an archivist, a storyteller of Aboriginal narratives and a conservationist of Aboriginal culture, history, language and issues. Being primarily a documentary filmmaker allows me also to learn (more) about the subject matter – and within that subject matter – the people, cultural aspects, and

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2 Ibid.
5 Ibid.
conceptual elements, so that I can share this newfound knowledge (or perspective) with an audience. Most significantly I learn about myself, and as my film repertoire grows, so does my appreciation and knowledge of my Aboriginality and my cultural heritage. Every film that I have been involved in has changed me a little and given me a better insight into who I am. As an Elder once said to me:

“Everybody gets older, not everybody gets Elder.”

I love to tell a story – and educate and emotionally move an audience – particularly about subject matters that have not been described from a particular point of view – an Aboriginal (Noongar) point-of-view. So I essentially like to tackle Aboriginal issues, topics and narratives – Wadjemup is a perfect example of this. My subject matters and topics are traditionally based on issues that have affected others but wherever possible I attempt to ‘method’ direct and empathetically deal with the subject matter and ‘characters’ as if I was directly affected – as if I was one of the characters – at all times I attempt to ‘go inside’ and use my Aboriginality as a powerful source of motivation, thought and action. The key to any of my film productions (and film productions in general) is ‘Ni Djinniny, Kadidjinny Wangkiny’ – ‘Listen Look, Learn and Talk’.

My hope is that this film will open people’s eyes about the truly disturbing history of this present-day holiday island and reveal its dark past. I envisage that the film (and its ‘by-products’) will lead to debate and (open) dialogue. For me it has taken too long to arrive at the point where truthful Aboriginal stories and acknowledgement of Aboriginal cultural mores has become ‘respected, acknowledged and accepted’. We need to now continue this tradition and outcome.

6.3 Treatment and Script Description

John Grierson is often cited as the father of documentary filmmaking and the founder of the Documentary Film Movement in the 1920s. He defined documentary as “…the creative treatment of actuality…”⁶, a definition which has stood the test of time. Grierson’s academic training was as a philosopher, and he was quoted as saying that documentary form and mode “…allows us to…have a window on virtually every aspect of life on this planet…”⁷ When formulating the thematic design and structure of Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground I was buoyed by Grierson’s perceptions and conceptualized that the film was going to be a ‘window’ into the Island’s Noongar cosmology (its birth if you will), European contact, colonization and Aboriginal prison period (childhood to adolescence and its ‘growing pains’) and then finally Post-colonization/modernism (adulthood and current status).

The major issue of film construct – particularly of a subject nature and matter of this size – is that the film’s story time is bound by the constraints of the production’s screen time. Basically I am attempting to take an Island that has an almost infinite cultural time-line, an extensive and intense colonial history and a modern psyche and I am attempting to squeeze all of this narrative, drama, history, and impression into a broadcast-hour. Thus will the film work and is that going to be reality?

⁷ Ibid: 23.
To do this I needed to investigate the following filmic variables:

- **1st Hurdle - Narrative**

‘Am I telling a story? Is there a journey here?’ Regardless of whether the form is documentary, fiction film, novel or a play, they only work when there is some kind of journey that we follow. And perhaps the most important question (that) I needed to continually pose was ‘is there an interesting narrative within the film?’

Hence according to Sheila Curran Bernard:

A story is a narrative, or telling, of an event or series of events crafted in a way to interest the audience…At its most basic, a story has a beginning, middle and end. It has compelling characters, rising tension, and conflict that reaches some sort of resolution. It engages the audience on an emotional and intellectual level, motivating viewers to want to know what happens next…

- **2nd Hurdle – Characterization**

‘Documentaries often fall into two camps – either subject driven or character driven…’

*Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground* endeavors to combine both facets. Characterization is the usual film mechanism in which to drive the narrative forward and provide the necessary emotion that invites audiences “…to identify with characters and to be emotionally involved with the events shown.” Hence, I created the generic character [played by film student & actor Curtis Taylor] who acts as the amalgam of the key characteristics and circumstance of the Aboriginal prisoners incarcerated on the Island; chained, transported, dispossessed, brutally treated, confused, sickened, witness to beatings and hangings, and finally death. This I hope, combined with the knowledge and ‘investment’ provided by the ‘talking heads’, places the audience into an emotional (and somewhat empathetic) ‘head-space’.

- **3rd Hurdle – Research**

An integral component of the documentary process, particularly when it involves such an enigmatic and spiritual subject such as *Wadjemup/Rottnest Island is research and location reconnaissance*. This component is best summarized by Glynne who writes that, “Research is an ongoing process and…may involve vast amounts of time…and may continue throughout the entire production…” Getting to know the subject matter is integral to the documentary production methodology, and for this project I needed to get a better understanding of both the Island and all of its convoluted aspects.

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8 Ibid: 27.
Glynne suggests:

…the starting point for research is to try and get to know the subject area as well as possible. It’s the beginning of a journey that will take you from the general to the specific…although no one expects you to be a world expert in an instant, you do need to be the next best thing: as well informed as you can be.  

Hence, as part of the documentary treatment and drama-script procedure, and encompassing the 3-Act structure I constructed Act One to introduce the Island (as a character and central thematic device), the overall arc of the film’s narrative, and the first elementary ‘talking heads’ (or characters if you like). It comprises some dramatic re-enactment and several montages to complement the interviewees. Act Two encompasses the core of the dramatic re-enactments. These are presented in such a way that the key narrators’ (the ‘talking heads’) discussions are reinforced and strengthened by segments of constructed drama – involving our key dramatic character – being led through the major components of the life of a Rottnest Island prisoner: (i) transportation in chains (ii) incarceration within the cells (iii) hunting and gathering on the Island (iii) deterioration of health within the cells (iv) labor on the island (v) witnessing execution (hanging) (vi) exposure to brutal treatment (vii) further exposure to disease (both self and accompanying prisoners) and (viii) loneliness, illness and death. Act Three predominately focuses on the post-prison phase of the Island and its ‘transformation’ to ‘holiday-island’, with reference to the exposure of the burial site and bureaucratic influences. The final act consigns to expose the issue of trauma, healing, reconciliation and action (or ambiguously non-action) in regards to the Island and its current status. It is for these reasons that I wanted to avoid reflexivity – I wanted a structured filmic style in both the interview [stable frame, focus on the ‘talking heads’ gaze and their spoken word, and juxtaposing this static framing with classic film production techniques, style and mise en scene contained within the drama re-enactment. Note that this utilization of classic structured film style within the re-enactments also complements the structured nature of the interview sequences.] I agree with Yuwa who writes that, “…reflexive sequences can mislead, as their use in so-called ‘mockumentary’ demonstrates.” In effect I am attempting to critically engage audiences in the concurrent happenings (or non-happenings if truth be known) on the Island in a context of (Aboriginal) historical significance; hence I am attempting to create a form in which audiences are involved in the critical discussion via orthodoxy stylistics and interview processes that characterize as much as they do inform, educate or narrate.

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12 Glynne, Documentaries: …and how to make them, 2012: 33.
13 Reflexivity within the documentary mode is recognised when the filmmaker acknowledges their presence in front of the camera and provides a narrative to the documentary. The reflexive style of documentary is usually associated with experimental documentaries, where the viewer is just as interested about how the film is constructed as they are the actual content. Source: http://www.slideshare.net/cheffernan/reflexive-documentaries
14 Mockumentary (also known as mock documentary) is a genre of film and television in which fictitious events are presented in documentary format; These productions are often used to analyze or comment on current events and issues by using a fictitious setting, or to parody the documentary form itself. They may be either comedic or dramatic in form, although comedic mockumentaries are more common. A dramatic mockumentary should not be confused with docudrama, a genre in which documentary and dramatic techniques are combined to depict real events. Source: http://www.princeton.edu/~achaney/tmve/wiki100k/docs/Mockumentary.html
6.4 Interviews, Filming (Drama) and Editing

“Everyone wants something that’s never been seen before. It’s just difficult”


When constructing the final edit of the documentary film we are under no illusion that as good as we feel the film may be, audiences will still find voice to critique (and criticize) the film. This is the countenance of our artistic hubris as filmmakers. Though what I hope I have achieved via the integration of interviews, constructed drama footage, archive and the editing tools available, is as authentic a representation and portrayal of Wadjemup and the plight of the Aboriginal prisoners as possible.

I am also aware (though audiences may not realize) that film, and particularly documentary, is constructed by means of conscious manipulation. Frederick Wiseman believes that “Everything about a movie is manipulation…If you like it, it’s an interpretation. If you don’t like it, it’s a lie.” 17 I would never call any of my films (and films in general) a lie, but it is true that, generally speaking, documentary as a film form is predominately constructed in the edit suite and that documentaries can not be completely objective (unbiased) to the situation or topic they are documenting, as one way or another, they are edited through someone’s eyes and their own contexts. It is for this reason that documentaries aim to capture the accepted idea of the truth and therefore, often conventions used within fiction films, such as structure, mise-en-scene, cause and effect, character arc, story arc, editing techniques, sound-scape (to name a few) can either complement or interrupt the audience’s reaction and interpretation of the film text. According to renowned film writers Bordwell and Thompson, “Staging events

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17 Allioff, Maurice, Camera Eye: Peter Wintonick’s Cinema Verite’: Defining the Moment. Source: http://www.northernstars.ca/directorsmz/wintonick_peter_article.html
for the camera…need not make the film fictional or fake.” 18 Despite many documentaries having ‘staged’ footage, this does not make them any less factual. This describes the creative treatment of actuality that real life may be creatively tampered with in order to best portray facts (and ‘reality’).

6.5 Proposed Role of Film/Exegesis & Key Contributions to Knowledge

“The majority of white Australians never actually engage with an Indigenous person, so…storytelling is a very powerful form of sharing.”

Maryrose Casey 19

Michael Leigh (cited in Langton) writing in reference to celebrating a century of Australian cinema, estimated that a staggering 6,000 films had been made about Aborigines from 1893 to 1993. 20 It is in this modern context and paradigm that Indigenous filmmakers (in collaboration with non-Indigenous filmmakers and the filmmaking fraternity) attempt and promote the ‘pulling of the two worlds together – the Aboriginal and the (dominant) white world’ – to begin the navigation of the ‘third space’ – the area where ‘black and white’ collide. This is when the issues of the right of representation and of self-determination are linked and intimately bound up in each other. The shift from being unrecognized and invisible within this land – such as never having held native title rights by Australian law and/or being recognized as part of the constitution – to the recognition that such rights (should) and do exist, is a major shift in the political spectrum of this nation. Issues surrounding the right to self-representation, that is the representation of one’s own people, identity and culture are crucial elements of self-determination. To move from ‘being represented’ to ‘representing yourself’, your people, your own world-view, is a major shift in approach and not an easy ask in a country where representations of Aboriginality are so negatively and naively entrenched and often have not been negotiated with Indigenous peoples. That is why it is essential that self-representation be a key focus for Aboriginal filmmakers and that dogmatic ideals of what it should, or must be represented, be allowed to cross the many diverse representations of Aboriginality that exist in this land.

Professor Langton expresses that film productions will continue to be made about Aboriginal people, communities, matters and issues, but rather than ‘hide our head in the sand’ it would be (and is) better that (we) Aboriginal filmmakers take back some of the control of productions, and these forms of storytelling, and negotiate a collaborative ‘third space’ in which to work, produce and capture these unique stories and narratives:

It is clearly unrealistic for Aboriginal people to expect that others will stop portraying us in photographs, films, on television, in newspapers, in literature and so on. Increasingly, non Aboriginal people want to make personal rehabilitative statements about the Aboriginal ‘problem’ and to consume and re-consume the ‘primitive’…Rather than demanding an impossibility, it would be more useful to identify those points where it is possible to control the means of production and to make our own self-representations. 21

20 Langton, Marcia. “…Well I heard it on the radio, and I saw it on the television…” 2003.
21 Ibid.
Further to this acceptance, Langton related that to expect complete disengagement by non-Aboriginal people from such dialogue would be erroneous. In part this relates to the fact that such engagement is necessary for non-Indigenous Australians to engage with their pasts, and for Indigenous Australians to realize that constructions of Aboriginality have been mitigated within the colonial processes that have consumed our nation. Move from ‘being’ represented to ‘representing’ yourself, your people, your community and your own world-view. This equals a sense of manifestation towards self-determination and the re-representation of image or narrative. This has been the basis of my film and academic work for well over a decade and is a strong (cultural) thread of both the documentary production and exegesis.

*The media do not simply reflect or mediate reality. Rather, they utilize certain conventions and codes, both aesthetic and technical, to re-represent things to us.*

### 6.6 Key Limitations

As with any project of this scope, significance and cultural importance, the major factor that frustrated me and placed undue stresses upon the project was time and space. Though gaining access to information, from secondary and archival sources, provided many challenges, and securing the necessary interviewees (and thus the appropriate primary representatives of the diverse stake-holders connected to the Island) proved difficult to a certain degree, it was the constraints of time firstly, that presented the major hurdle, and then secondly creating and/or discovering the appropriate space in which to engage with the (subject) matter and appropriate interviewees. Appropriateness – from a cultural protocol(s) perspective – was also an issue that placed stress upon the project. Amongst the Noongar community (principally because of colonization, family or clan migration, Native Title and white bureaucracy) there exists a schism between who the appropriate Traditional Custodians (and hence spokespersons) are from a Cultural and Organizational viewpoint. Simply, there are many Noongar individuals and family groups who proclaim that they are the most suitable to represent an area, matter or practice (particularly when money or celebrity is involved) but very often other individuals or family groups and/or [Aboriginal] organizations will disagree and argue that this is not the (cultural) truth. Navigating this cultural ‘minefield’ is a nightmare in this period of post-colonial modernity.

### 6.7 Possible Future Research on Topic

Finding closure (and reporting on it) would certainly be the next phase of this project. That is, upon analyzing and reviewing the outcomes of both the film and written dissertation in their current contexts, there will invariably be an opportunity (and arguably a need) to concentrate on particular aspects of the project; post-feedback from interviewees and key stakeholders, public and Government responses, descendents resolution, post-traumatic studies as a result of the film and/or written material(s), memorial and monument outcomes (if any), and finally closure – if, as hoped, the (i) the Quod is annexed and transformed into a museum, (ii) the Burial Site is altered to a space of distinctive memorial and healing, (iii) the Island is registered as a National or World Heritage listed site.

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6.8 Closing Remarks and Final Conclusion(s)

O great creator of being
Grant us one more hour to
Perform our art
& perfect our lives…

James Douglas Morrison 23

Some regard documentary as a second-class form and the ‘poor relation’ of the narrative drama and feature film. The documentary mode can (still) be explained as fictions with plots, characters, situations and events like any other film. A documentary, like any other film form, introduces characters, creates conflicts and dilemmas; builds a heightened tension, and concludes with resolution and closure. In fact, according to Grant, “The extent to which a [genre] film achieves narrative closure is an important factor in reading its political implications.” 24 This is also true of Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground, whose political, social and cultural message is presented to the audience as a source of negotiation, not just information and design. Further, Spence and Navarro describe documentaries as a “negotiation between filmmaker and reality.” 25

Finally, what needs to be taken into consideration, is that as a documentary filmmaker and practitioner, it is all very well for me to state that I am allowing the audience to make up its own mind, but in truth, within the documentary mode [or genre] there is, I believe, no such thing as objectivity. The moment you choose a particular subject, the moment you position your camera, the instance you make a cut in the edit process or choose a particular type of music for the film’s score – all are subjective decisions which affect the audience’s feeling for and against the subject of the film.

This demonstrates how documentary is “…a creative treatment of actuality, selecting details from life and exploiting (exploring) it as a filmic art form”. 26 George Lucas, through his character Obi Wan Kenobi, explained to audiences that, “…many of the truths we cling to depend greatly upon our own point of view.” 27 Spence and Navarro explore this central characteristic of documentary as the debate between choosing what aspects to include and what to leave out. These decisions of ‘actuality’ are justified, in some respects, on what elements must be emphasized, and what must be downplayed – that is to ‘assert some truths and to ignore others’. Spence and Navarro declare that, “…‘Actuality’ is infinite and can never be wholly represented.” 28 Though I agree with Spence and Navarro, I am particularly drawn to Ellis’ definition of ‘actuality’ and the confinement and configuration that filmmakers within the documentary paradigm find themselves. I believe their perspective incorporates more of my own filmmaking ideals and the intention of Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground:

The purpose or approach of the makers of most documentary films is to record and interpret the actuality in front of the camera or

24 Grant, B. Film Genre: From Iconography to Ideology, 2007: 16.
27 Return of the Jedi (1983) 20th Century Fox; Dir: Richard Marquand, 134mins, [DVD].
I attempted within *Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground* to present a truth: a truth about the Island’s Aboriginality, the Aboriginal Prison establishment and the Island’s post-modern status. It is envisaged that from both the written and filmic form of this research project via the investigation of the history and cultural context of *Wadjemup/Rottnest Island* and its collective cultural memory and attached trauma - will lead directly to some action [or re-action] from the audience and/or readership, which will effectively promote and strengthen the [collective] reconciliation processes *needed* to better facilitate a sense of Aboriginal recognition, healing and memorial on the Island…

‘...Ngulluk Wangkiny Koora, Yeye, Boorda’
*We Speak of Yesterday, Today & Tomorrow.*

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[Source: http://www.wadjemup.blogspot.com/]


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7.2 Appendices

7.2.1 Film Production question:

**Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground**

I interviewed 20 participants for this research and film project (2011 & 2012) – choosing a cross section of Aboriginal spokespersons & Elders, Industry representatives, Academic experts & historians, ex-Prisoners, former Politicians, a ‘whistleblower’ and Rottnest associates. The questions and research materials directed at the various participants differed depending on their knowledge base, expertise and backgrounds – but ONE common factor or QUESTION was posed to ALL interviewed participants: “What does it mean to you when I say the title of this film and the research project is – Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground...?”

The eclectic participants answers and view-points are transcribed below...

“So what does it mean to you...when I say that the title of this film and the research project is – Wadjemup: Black Prison -White Playground?”

**NEVILLE COLLARD:**

Very true but I believe that under (a) reconciliation program implemented now that those issues of it (Rottnest Island) being a ‘playground’ on and over the Indigenous sites - the burial grounds - is changing under the reconciliation program of Rottnest...they have changed that and I know that...area is being fenced off and I know that recently I had a phone call from the Noongars out there who had concerns...Albert Corruna and them (Rottnest Island Aboriginal Deaths Group) and they were wanting to go over there and have a meeting and I know its been arranged for them to go over there (Rottnest) to discuss what they believe the fence has been knocked down...so culturally they’re right and they should raise the issue...secondly under the reconciliation plan and integration into society I believe that the Wadjella’s are now understanding the significance of that sight (Rottnest and the burial site) and it will be isolated so that the Wadjella’s can still continue to have a ‘playground’ but not at the benefit of the Aboriginal people who died there in the past...

**Noongar Elder & (Former) Indigenous Advisor to the Western Australian State Minister**

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1325 This question was NOT asked this way to all participants VERBATIM – as such I have included the question that I directed at the interviewees from each session.

1326 The RIA’s Reconciliation Action Plan 2008-2011 was formally launched jointly by the Minister for Tourism, Hon Dr Elizabeth Constable MLA, and the Minister for Indigenous Affairs, Hon Dr Kim Hames MLA, at Wadjemup on Wednesday 25th February 2009.
“This is a standard question for everyone that I have interviewed... when I give you the title of this film and the abstract of the project; Wadjimup: Black Prison - White Playground...what does that say to you?”

CARMEN LAWRENCE:
Well, it’s a very confronting combination of ideas, but its one that I think captures the reality of Rottnest and its why frankly I’ve got to the point now having better understood, perhaps more recently than in the past, what happened at Rottnest, and having observed how little recognition is made of that in the material that’s available on Rottnest, in the protection of the burial site for instance, I’ve made a decision - I will not go to Rottnest until that is rectified and perhaps...never. I cannot reconcile those two ideas you’ve captured in the title.

WA State Premier [1990-1993]

“This film project is called Wadjimup: Black Prison - White Playground. What does that mean to you?”

ALBERT CORUNNA
Well it shouldn’t be a ‘playground’ for them (non-Indigenous community) and especially not where the grave area is, and we (Rottnest Island Aboriginal Deaths Group) want that respected and I understand now that they have pulled a fence down and people are walking over the graves...and the Quad – we don’t want that (fence) ever (to) be pulled down cause’ that would have to be a symbol of the torture that they put our people through. They (Aboriginal Prisoners) were locked in those cells - they were punished in that place in the centre of the Quad building there and some of them were executed there, there was...you read stories of where the people were...Aboriginal people were sentenced to be hung and they would stop the release of any prisoners from the island – they wanted to – even though they should have been hung in Fremantle here, they took them over there (Rottnest Island) and hung them and they stopped the release of any Aboriginal prisoners who were due for release until this hanging, they had to witness this hanging, the trauma these people had to suffer to see one of their country men or see an Aboriginal person hung, they had to witness that and then they were released, so there is no doubt that they (Colony administration and law enforcement) not only wanted to show fear, they wanted to traumatise them in every way they could...

Former Rottnest Island Aboriginal Deaths Group Chair & Swan River Elder/Traditional Custodian
“(Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground)...what would you like to see now in regard to the Island and it’s Aboriginal prisoner history and its current status as an Island resort and holiday destination?”

DR. NEVILLE GREEN

I think it can be both. Some of the ideas that I put to one official who some years ago I said that the Rottnest Quod would make an excellent museum, similar I have seen in Washington D.C., the Smithsonian where...shifting panels depict the different Native American groups across America and in a similar way you could have an activated museum, China has brilliant museums of this nature, both the holocaust museum for the (Nanking) Massacre and the Mao Tse-Tung in its hometown. They do exist, in Australia we have got very few, but that prison could reflect the home countries of where these men came from, so you are on the Island, you are seeing what they have left and you are seeing where they came from. I suggested something like it could be like the Holocaust Museum in Washington D.C. where people (who) entered that they receive a card and that card has a number on it and you follow through the museum and then at a point towards the end...you key that card in and it tells you just got a name of the person. So you travel and you may travel around as Mollydobbin, or you may travel around as Loomba and at the end you key that in and you find out who you are, you find out whether you died there of measles in 1839, you might find out your history...like 'Captain'...that you took part in the great 'Pigeon' affair in the Kimberley in the 1890s or you may find that you died two weeks after you entered the prison, or that you left and you went on to greater things. But that (idea/recommendation) never took off, that was suggested to the museum, but that never took off. I suggested that the Lodges could be

1327 The Smithsonian Institution established in 1846 for ‘the increase and diffusion of knowledge’, is a group of museums and research centers administered by the United States government. Termed ‘the nation's attic’ for its eclectic holdings of 137 million items, the nucleus of nineteen museums, nine research centers, and a zoo—many of them historical or architectural landmarks—is the largest such complex in the world. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Smithsonian_Institution]

1328 The Nanking Massacre or Nanjing Massacre, also known as the Rape of Nanking, was a mass murder and war rape that occurred during the six-week period following the Japanese capture of the city of Nanking (Nanjing), the former capital of the Republic of China, on December 13, 1937 during the Second Sino-Japanese War.

1329 Mao Zedong (also transliterated as Mao Tse-tung) commonly referred to as Chairman Mao (December 26, 1893 – September 9, 1976), was a Chinese communist revolutionary, and political theorist. The founding father of the People's Republic of China from its establishment in 1949, he governed the country as Chairman of the Communist Party of China until his death. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mao_Zedong]

1330 The United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) is the United States' official memorial to the Holocaust. Adjacent to the National Mall in Washington, D.C., the USHMM provides for the documentation, study, and interpretation of Holocaust history. It is dedicated to helping leaders and citizens of the world confront hatred, prevent genocide, promote human dignity, and strengthen democracy. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/United_States_Holocaust_Memorial_Museum]

1331 AKA Moleyobden – Was attached to the mounted police in 1834 and sentenced in 1838 for breaking and entering and stealing flower, sugar and other items – sentenced to SEVEN years transportation – to first Garden Island and then Rottest – one of the first escapees when he and 5 other prisoners stole Thomson’s boat – recaptured and served out his sentence – became a police assistant. [Green, N. & Moon, S. (1997) Far From Home, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, p230]

1332 Lumba – Prison number 13083 – one of the last Aboriginal Prisoners on Rottnest and symbolized the final years of the Kimberley frontier, the last region of WA to be settled by Europeans. Infamously linked to the Forrest River Mission massacre in July of 1926. Charged with spearing and murdering Frederick Hay. ‘Released’ in 1936. [Green, N. & Moon, S. (1997) Far From Home, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, pp212-213]

1333 AKA Cooigair – Convicted of murder and sentenced to life at Rottnest in 1891. Became famously linked with the outlaw Jandumurra (or 'Pigeon') in the Kimberley upon his release and was imprisoned again at Rotnest for murder of Constable Richardson. He died in July 1897 of influenza. [Green, N. & Moon, S. (1997) Far From Home, University of Western Australia Press, Nedlands, pp131-132]

1334 Formerly the Aboriginal Prison – generally referred to as ‘the Quod’ – a quadrangular shaped building constructed in 1863-64 by Aboriginal prison labour. Today it is known as ‘the Lodge' and utilized for tourist accommodation. The second addition came to ‘the Lodge’ in 1880, Palm Court - utilised as a boys reformatory school till 1901.
named after Aboriginal prisoners, I don’t think that ever took on, or streets named after Aboriginal people. I think that there could be a memorial like a wall, again I think of the Vietnam War or the U.N. War Memorial at [Busan in Korea\textsuperscript{1335}] where a wall has the names of every person that were killed in those conflicts. But the Rottnest one could have 3000 bricks, each one depicting a person who was on that Island, with a different colour brick depicting a person who died. There could be an honour book there of all the prisoners, and as in some cemeteries, a different page of honour, or even some war cemeteries a different page of honour is displayed. Modern technology could have all this, electronic displays and you could search through electronically, so there’s much that could be done but already there are moves to make Rottnest a world heritage site. It has the makings of a great site, it has the prison, it has the cemetery, which the Aboriginal community is looking after very carefully, there are tours there. It is made known to the tourists the significance of that graveyard and it’s part in West Australian history, but I think there is probably a little bit more that could be done to make this side of Western Australia’s colonial history better known to the public. And as a European Australian I can suggest these, but it is very much up to the Aboriginal community, and when I say community it’s the whole community, people from all over, people from all over Western Australia went to that prison, and it is their descendants and the people representing those localities that I think should have a very strong say in determining the future of the Aboriginal aspects of the Island.

Historian and Author of *Broken Spears & Far From Home*

\textsuperscript{1335}The cemetery, comprising over 35 acres (14.39 hectares) was established by the United Nations Command on 8th January 1951 when interments were begun and remains were transferred from six other cemeteries. The Korean government granted the land to the United Nations without charge, in perpetuity, as a permanent tribute to all those who gave up their lives in resisting aggression in Korea and in upholding the cause of peace and freedom from 1950-53. [http://www.findagrave.com/cgi-bin/fg.cgi?page=cr&CRid=1971979]
“My film is called Wadjemup: Black Prison - White Playground. What does that mean to you?”

CHRIS DIXON

Yeah the ‘white playground’ is sad to look at it now and to remember what it was a few hundred years, or say 100 years ago, it doesn’t really ring true as a holiday island, when there is so much bad stuff that happened in the past to ‘blackfellas’.

LINDSAY DIXON

It’s a lot of trauma and real bad dealings to our tribal people. They didn’t deserve any of that. They were castrated off their land. To come from the desert and be put on an island surrounded by water - to be chained and castrated - it’s horrific to even think what they went through. The abuse and the horrendous judgment and the disgrace of what the white man done to the people of this land - the traditional people of this land.

CHRIS DIXON (Con’t.)

It’s a sad thing that happened and all those lives that were just taken away…its pretty bad shit how they - the British - came across and just took the land that way. Incarcerated the people of the land with chains and battens…it’s an utter disgrace to our people and that’s what my brother (award winning Aboriginal poet Graeme Dixon1336) wrote about…he wrote the truth…it should open a lot of eyes...

LINDSAY DIXON (Con’t.)

If the people of today knew what was going on back then, knew roughly, they would think twice about going over there (Rottnest) for a holiday, if they knew the shit that happened out there, I don’t think many of them know, not that they’re ignorant, its just they don’t know...

CHRIS DIXON (final word)

I don’t think they tell it because it’s (Rottnest Island) a money...they’re (Rottnest Island Authority & State Government) making money out of tourism, and they’re not even showing the truth (of) what happened out there...you know they should acknowledge the past...until what he is doing now (points at me – the director) this might open a few eyes up...

Noongar brothers & Inmates of Fremantle Prison (in 1970s & 80s)

“So what does it mean when I say to you the title of this film - Wadjemup: Black Prison - White Playground?”

NOEL NANNUP (interview I)
Um, you’ve got it in one. Because that’s exactly what it is. And when you talk about prison, and you see the numbers of people that were taken over there between 1838 and 1931 - when it was reported to have closed...research showed me that it (the Rottnest Prison) closed in 1905, and that’s when it (Rottnest) started to become the white man’s ‘playground’.

And quite quickly everything was forgotten about - the prison glossed over – and, it was locked away. And suddenly there’s this magnificent little island, sitting out there off of Perth, far enough away for people to be able to take out their luxury cruisers, and...anchor around and...enjoy this magnificent place in a Mediterranean climate. And...the Aboriginal side of it was just slowly, quietly...forgotten. Until...Alan Bond decided he wants to spend some of his money...and he thought that, because he’d won the America’s Cup,that was his licence to do virtually as he pleased. And some of his men that were working for him at the time on a company called Dalhold Holdings, actually dug up some skeletal remains...

...And when they did that, they tried to hide it. But, one man, there was no way he could hide it – he felt some sort of spirit and some movement - and he said...he found out as much as he could as quickly as he could, and then, he brought that information, and he shared it with Aboriginal people. And I was fortunate enough to be one of those people, and I had a thirst for knowledge for the island at the time...

...And that’s still growing. It’s a beautiful place. Even though over that period of time, when it was used as a prison, in excess of three thousand seven hundred Aboriginal men were taken there, between those years I mentioned...

...And of those...it’s believed that three hundred and sixty-four of them died and were buried over there.

So it has a lot of significance from that aspect, but not just that aspect – there are other features that connect Aboriginal people to the island...

Noongar Elder and former Rottnest Island Authority Indigenous Tour Operator.
“Noel what does it mean to you when I say the title of this film or research project is - Wadjemup: Black Prison – White Playground?”

NOEL NANNUP (interview II)
Yeah that’s about right - that fits it. You think about it in a modern context for prison, sure I automatically think ‘black man’s hell’ – ‘white mans paradise’, because it just must have been a hell of a place to be in for those people (Aboriginal prisoners), you know it must have been really, really dreadful...and when they get there and they meet a man like Vincent (the 2nd Rottnest island Prison Superintendent) and they read his personality and they look at him and they go “oh my goodness, he’s a bad one this one,” and they knew they were in serious trouble, because he was driven by an ego. Not only that he had this...had this ‘Warrah’ (bad) spirit in him, really bad and they would have been so devastated, because between them and the mainland there was all this water...full of sharks, completely foreign for them to swim those distances. That’s what makes me think it must have been like hell. So when you put it that way as a prison, the connotations that go with a prison for me are...It’s hell, and I don’t know if I can explain it any other way. But as a white man’s paradise well yeah there’s no doubt there, the glitz and the glamour, the sense of ownership of it, where they exclude everybody and most of the people that work there or have anything to do with (the) place come from a background of all the western suburbs of the city, you know postcodes of 6000 to 6015 perhaps. That’s the type of thing that we look at and we see happening over there with the way they manage the island and also including in that the volunteers, I believe there should not be any volunteers on that island. The people telling the story of that place should be us (Aboriginal people) because we’re the only ones with the sensitivity to articulate what that place is all about. But as I say, that I know through this movie, DVD, whatever you want to call it, people will be informed a little bit more about the tragic history of that beautiful little island as it is now...

Second interview with Noongar Edler and former Rottnest Island Authority Indigenous Tour Operator.
“So what does it mean to you when I say to you that the title of this film and the research project is – Wadjemup: Black Prison - White Playground?”

CEDRIC JACOBS

Well it certainly draws a stark contrast between what the Island was established for in its early days and the contrasts made with the Island...the concept of what the Island stands for today. It seems that today it’s all about tourism and we can see it on our television you know, ‘come to Rottnest Island it’s a place for leisure and play’. Where once it was a place of torture, and it still is a place of torture would you believe...? Ah if you were to experience some of the experiences our people practically went through, in bygone days, such as being incarcerated into a cell with a number of other people, a very small cell, with concrete floors and concrete walls which are very cold, and we can almost hear our people, and especially those from the Kimberley and up the warmer weather, missing their country, missing their spirit, being bereft and becoming bankrupt of the greater values that belonging, of Australian life, which belongs to Aboriginal people and which really needs to be re-captivated because it belongs to all Australians. We have in our culture tremendous qualities, which would bring to Australia and identify more clearly to the Australian people, Australia’s very soul. And the soul of the nation rests with the soul of the Aboriginal people. We are the soul bearers of the land, of the environment, natural resources and all that there is that goes with that, and until the soul of the land is brought into focus in the nation, then we will simply be a nation of economic worth, which the western world has brought to Australia, at the expense of losing the greater qualities, and we have not...we have not as Aboriginal people had an opportunity yet to bring into focus the soul, spirit and the culture as we understand it and we want it to be told and understood. It takes us to a different level of management of our nation, we would take it from being a nation that rips up everything and destroys and utilizes everything, to taking it to a nation that is a sustainable nation, yet we are able to take advantage of the natural resources. But this management style needs to be brought into focus by Aboriginal people. This is where we are sensitive to the spirituality of the land, and the spirituality of the people, and that contrasts with the spirituality that the western community has brought to Australia, which allows for pursuing things, which we blatantly know, is wrong and should not be done. Yeah, those things, a lot of those things, we call them Kanya (shameful) to a degree, or Wearnitch (sick or not good). They should never be, never be happening. Um, so there you go, we need to re-focus...be sensitive to the qualities of life and all living, to respect the Creator and all of creation and administer our nations resources, all of its resources, including people, from a spiritual perspective, and this is where the western world...where the western world does not do the best for the wider community.

Wadjuk Noongar Elder and Traditional Custodian
“My final question; this film is entitled Wadjimup: Black Prison - White Playground, what does that title mean to you?”

KAREN JACOBS (AKA JACOBS-SMITH)

That’s purely what it means today and what it has meant for probably the last 180 years. Where are we now...? (the years) 2000, well probably going back 190 years that purely is what it has been even at the time of the prison, it was still being used by Governors and parliamentarians through the late 1880s through to the 1830s, 40s and 50s as a holiday destination. They would bring their families over watch their kids play in the water while there were Aboriginal prisoners being held in the Quad, but then also building the sea-wall and building other structures for them to enjoy their holidays in. The way I can put it in perspective is that this year or next year is the celebration of 100 years of tourism on the Island\textsuperscript{1338}, I purposely asked the Authority (Rottnest Island Authority) not to include any Aboriginal events into that. It was not a celebration for Aboriginal people. If anything, it would cause a huge amount of contention amongst the Aboriginal community if they were asked to be involved in any celebration events marking the 100 years of Tourism for the Island. It was still very much a prison, our Aboriginal leaders, still died, there was no acknowledgement to them and we didn’t want it (the prison) during that time.

Former Rottnest Island Authority board member and Wadjuk Noongar Yorga (woman)

\textsuperscript{1338} A schedule of events and festivities - including special deals, family days and celebratory activities - was planned across 2011 as Rottnest Island celebrated 100 years of tourism. Western Australian Tourism Minister Liz Constable formally announced the celebrations saying that they ‘will provide a great opportunity to reflect on how tourism on Rottnest had changed over the years, stating for more than 100 years, Rottnest has been a favourite destination of local and international tourists alike as recreational use began to gain momentum in the early 1900s with ferries carrying day-trippers to the island from 1902. A scheme for transforming the island from a penal settlement to a recreation and holiday island was drawn up in 1907 before the island’s tourist officer, officially appointed by the management of the Western Australian Department of Immigration, Tourism and General Information, began operating in 1911. [http://www.ausleisure.com.au/default.asp?PageID=2&Display=True&ReleaseID=3301]
“So (resulting from) your personal connections to your grandfather, therefore you’ve got a spiritual and an ancestral connection (to Rottnest Island), so when I give you the title of my film - Wadjemup: Black Prison - White Playground, what does this mean to you?”

CHARMAINE ‘TAMMAR’ WALLEY
The ‘black prison’…that is saddening, that’s kind of a sad thing for me. ‘White playground’ that’s kind of...yeah...I take that more of an insult that they’d (tourists etc) use that (Rottnest Island) as a playground, and yet to us, because so many of our people were there, and some died there, a lot (of Aboriginal people) have been scared because of that, their lives have never been the same because of that. ‘White playground’ is totally disrespectful. That’s what that means to me.

Direct descendent (grand-daughter) of Rottnest prisoner Emanuel Jackamarra & Yuat Noongar

“...I have asked this question to everybody, what does it mean to you when I say the title of the film- Wadjimup: Black Prison - White Playground?”

ROSEMARY WALLEY (nee Johnson)
I think it encapsulates the history past and present because of what actually took place on Rottnest Island with our people being imprisoned on the Island and the atrocities that actually happened there and its almost a forgetfulness of that history in today’s context where history has been covered up and it’s been turned into something that it’s not, a place of fun, activity, holidays, where as realistically it’s to me, it’s like dancing on the graves of our people without that knowledge. So I am sure if people become aware of its history, I would doubt if they would still want to go there and be a part of that holiday merriment and relaxation if they knew of the history.

Kimberley descendent of the Bunaba & Djaru peoples
“So this film title is Wadjimup: Black Prison – White Playground, what does it mean to you when I say that title?”

MARK BIN-BARKER
I think it sums up really the complacency of society...the ignorance and the lack of respect in that we regard Rottnest Island generally, as a community as a whole, as a playground, a holiday resort and a place to escape and have vacations and stuff and that’s fine, but I think that we have a responsibility as a State and a responsibility as a community of West Australians to also acknowledge its traditional name, its history and its attempt at probably ethnic cleansing our community in terms of the social disorder that was imposed on our people and at the expense of our people. It didn’t work because we are still here today and we are just as strong, if not ever stronger, and we gain our strength from that sad history of the island and I guess as an Aboriginal person and as a West Australian you feel a bit of disrespect towards yourself as an Aboriginal when our society, as a whole, don’t respect what’s happened to you and no doubt I, and most Aboriginal people in Western Australia, if not all, have decedents on Rottnest Island (buried in the gravesite) and so you have a cultural responsibility to talk up for them, to remember them and ‘lest we forget’ that this is what happened and I think the title of this documentary is very, very, appropriate to remind people that you can’t dance on the history of our people and your can’t dance on justice and on the grave of justice, history and the truth and that is what we are doing, hopefully somewhere in time we will come to terms with it as a Nation and as a State and we don’t have to do what we do anymore and it sits there on record and we can rest, but in the mean time we are the ‘modern warriors’ who have inherited this spirit from those men and people like that because men have, because of that engineering, that removing Aboriginal men from their tribes, from their country, from their communities, from their...people, they have also disempowered men and men are only now just starting to regain...of course a lot of our men had turned to alcohol and drugs and dispossession - all sorts of stuff that kept us suppressed - but it’s this generation or the ‘new generation’ that’s now through education and through strength and through spiritual enlightenment is becoming strong and we inherit that because we have to do it - because no one else is going to do it.

Kimberly descendant of the Gidga, Goonian and Jarlu tribes.
“My film project, and I have asked this question to all the interviewee’s, Wadjella and Noongar and Woms from other country...Wadjimup: Black Prison – White Playground - What does that title mean to you?”

AURORA ABRAHAM
That states it all. A few words. You know, a simple few words. Says it all. That’s it, a lot of our ancestors suffered on that Island. You know, they used to see campfires from back over the city. You ask any Aboriginal person - Indigenous person - family is the most important thing and I mean when they were taken from their family there was basically nothing left to live for other than maybe seeing their family again. To get tourists to come with their families as a holiday spot to enjoy the place well it’s a bit, it’s very, it’s a bit hard to...recognize...they have photos of holidays, their stories of how much fun they had, well them (Aboriginal) prisoners didn’t have fun, it wasn’t a holiday camp for them. They were locked away in their cells (at) 4 o’clock in the afternoon. The only day they got free was a Sunday to go out camping or hunting and yeah, that title says it all...

Descendent of Rottnest Island Aboriginal prisoner and former Rottnest Island heritage consultant

“This is what I ask everybody during the course of the interviews. When I give you the title of my film, and certainly the abstract of the project, Wadjemup: Black Prison-White Playground, what does that say to you?”

DR CRAIG McGARTY
Well it says something about the past...and it says something about the present and the contradiction between those two things suggests that there is going to be some resolution, you can’t have something that was treated in that way, that very negative and very bleak way and something that is treated in this positive recreational way - there is an inconsistency between those two things and that’s an inconsistency to me that needs to be resolved, and it needs to be resolved in some way that makes more people happy...that resolves and works more positively for people here...

Professor of Social Science Psychology & Director of the Social Research Institute – specializing in Trauma, Healing & Reconciliation studies

1339 Noongar for non-Indigenous person
1340 Noongar for Aboriginal persons outside of Noongar tribal boundaries (or ‘strangers’)
“So Tania what does it mean to you when I say the title of this film and research project is - Wadjemup: Black Prison - White Playground?”

TANIA FERRIER

Wadjemup I know is the Noongar word for Rottnest Island...I probably only got to know that in the last five year...prior to that I wasn’t aware of the word Wadjemup. ‘White playground’ that is the only way I know Rottnest, or the only way up until recently that I have known Rottnest. I didn’t know of any other history apart from the fact that the military were over there during World War II and even for them (Servicemen) it was a bit of a playground at that time. And there were internees in World War II from Italian and German background (who) were incarcerated there. Yes so all my knowledge of the ‘white playground’ (were) from all my family photographs. My mother and her sisters - sun bathing beauties on the island - and when you go there now its sort of quite tragic there because really it’s a ‘white playground’ - there is no other ambience to the place - its become so sterile really, and so unacknowledging of all the stories that could be brought out about Rottnest. And of course the black jail is something I’ve come to know now I totally know about it as being the black jail and when I walk past any of the buildings now it’s a deeply profound experience to touch the walls and to know they were made by Aboriginal prisoners. And to go over to the mini golf course on the island, which was the quarry where all the Aboriginal men labored, sawing the limestone to create all those buildings and to think that here is this mini golf course in there now with no acknowledgement of how profound the history is...to know that is the quarry. The lighthouse itself was rebuilt again at a later stage but the first lighthouse; there were many deaths of Aboriginal men who were having to slave making that place. The roads as well...deaths out along making the roads as well from the extreme heat that they endured at the time. I mean everywhere I go on the island I’m quite conscience having read these that there is this deep and profound history everywhere you walk and particularly as you go past the grave site now I feel it’s a incredibly powerful experience to know that.

Artist and Rottnest Island Aboriginal Prison campaigner
“I have asked this (question) to pretty much everyone that I have interviewed - Noongar, Indigenous, non-Indigenous and so I am going to ask you the same (question) - My film is titled Wadjimup: Black Prison- White Playground - What does that title or term mean to you?”

LAURIE O’MEARA
I believe that it recognises the dark side of Rottnest - the prison, the treatment of the prisoners and those that are deceased, those ancestors on the island and then you go forward to the ‘playground’ - it is, even by legislation, a holiday island and so whilst, as they said at the launch of the Rottnest Island Reconciliation Plan, whilst they said we must recognise the past, we can’t live in it, we’ve got to recognise it for what it was and then move forward using that as a basis for moving forward. That I think is the link between the past and the future and I think we achieve that by giving full recognition to places like the Quad and the burial ground, I think that link will always work there and I feel that the time is more right now than it’s ever been. Something you said to me recently was that we are getting more recognition of Indigenous matters, Aboriginal matters, from younger people than we are from older people and I think that’s a great thing because I think the old ones are sort of locked in, old people like me are locked in to those ideas from the past but it is the young ones coming up and that educational program that we have at Kingstown (part of the island settlement) is terribly important, if those young people can really understand Aboriginal culture and what’s occurred on Rottnest and at their age then they carry it through and I think we have a good future ahead. I think things in the future will be different from what they have been in the past and I’m not talking big past I’m talking 20 years ago, I think the attitude is changing and I think Rottnest has got a big part to play in that...

Former Rottnest Island Authority (RIA) Chair
“...So the notion of ‘Holocaust Island’, ‘Devils Island’ and obviously the ‘Island of Spirits’ is an apt description...my film is titled Wadjimup: Black Prison- White Playground - What does that title or term mean to you?”

PAUL ALLARDYCE

When you research it (Rottnest Island) as much as I have done, my only comment is that I’m personally terribly embarrassed that my ancestors would treat people this way. As I say it started off...Wadjimup was started basically in the humane sense, but it all went terribly wrong, particularly the way the buildings were built there, the Quad and the way that (Henry) Vincent (Rottnest Island Prison Superintendent) particularly treated and his son (William) treated the prisoners it was nothing short of disgusting. The harshest jailer in Australia’s history - I will reiterate that - and the conditions were sub human...I will put it to you this way with the knowledge that I have got there is no way that I would spend a night that in that (the former Quad – the current Rottnest Island Resort) building. The thought of staying there it worries me this is another reason why I think that the Aboriginality of this island is pushed to one side. The conference in the mid 90s I tried to get a practical resolve and I looked at it in Wadjela eyes, I looked at it as best I could in Nyungar eyes and the Elders from about the State they decided that basically they wanted the place - the Quad - locked up. I said if the building is locked up it will die, my compromise was that the Resort, as we call it, the Quad was turned into a living memorial, a memorial of remembrance...a memorial that described Wadjimup from an expression that I have heard a lot of Elders use; ‘When the earth was soft to the present time’ and that way the building would be maintained, the commercial reality would be you would have to build other accommodation units, I chose Garden Lake, which is right adjacent to that (current Resort location)...to facilitate the loss of the few rooms...in the Quad, extra land to be given and the Resort would go on and the museum would go on as a living memorial to the Aboriginal people who died there.

Former Rottnest Island Volunteer, ‘Whistleblower’ & Private Detective
“What does the title of my film - this project mean to you – Wadjimup; Black Prison - White Playground?”

LILY HIBBERD

Yeah, I think for me Wadjimup is a really powerful site...partly because right now it is a space of amnesia and when there is a total eradication of a history or an attempt to quash it, what you in fact have is a very powerful site in which once memory is recuperated and there is an act, who ever it might be, who rescued it away from those that are controlling those sort of spaces to make a total recognition. So Stradbroke (Island), its similarities to Wadjimup, or as everyone calls it Rottnest, which is a kind of forgetting and renaming, is a very significant opportunity to understand a practice of forgetting and the 'black prison - white playground’ is in Australia a very particular behaviour, which for me I think that there was actually a strategy, a deliberate strategy, to 'white out’ the...what could not be addressed...which is horrific history. The playground for me has another resonance which was some sites that I was looking at in Paris where there were the deliberate construction of playgrounds on traumatic sites and whether this was a conscious or unconscious...sort of strategy that...was deliberate or thought-out I don’t know, but certainly there were two or three sites I looked at in Paris that I think...even if I never find any evidence to say that there was some conscious in enactment going on there become a very significant way of thinking about what might happen in the future on Wadjimup...which is my argument...when there is a recognition of this traumatic history and a time beyond that trauma for the future recognition of issues of human rights and healing and reparation which on a national scale Australia is still in a process of coming to understand itself. In Paris what I saw were practically two sites - one which was there were two prisons in a place called...the Parc de la Roquette1341 ...where there were a prison for women and children as well as a major male prison - these were two of the largest prisons in Paris at the time up until they were still operative until the 1970s...they were torn down and rebuilt but on the same site and after that time it was decided - who knows by whom - to create a space of recognition and a remembrance by placing a children’s playground on the site with signage...on one of the prison gates that were still standing...and there is a sign (that) says on this site 1000 women and children were massacred and the date...and it says that the playground was built here for that reason. So it’s very clear as to why its there and what it’s doing... ...In Australia...spaces of horror of a certain theatrical enactment which is the other thing that happens...(the) ghost tour...I think needs to be reconsidered and really, really addressed because at the moment if you, say go to Port Arthur1342 (Tasmania)

1341 La Petite Roquette was a prison for minors from 14 to 20 years, then a women's prison in 1935 - Instead of the Petite Roquette , demolished in 1975 , there is now a square made in 1977 and residents around the park come to relax with an additional two playgrounds located – one for teens and behind a playground for children. [http://fr.wikipedia.org/wiki/Square_de_la_Roquette]

1342 Port Arthur is a small town and former convict settlement on the Tasman Peninsula, in Tasmania,
you can get a ghost tour but no one will talk about the massacre and the convict history is just one history, what about genocide of Aboriginal people?, what about the other people we can’t remember who have been locked up in these places and this all pertains to Stradbroke and to Wadjimup, to Fremantle Prison where there is imaginary right now of it only being a white prison and these are kinds of forgetting that unless they are...brought to the surface...now especially at this time when they have just been listed and protected in a way that the differing history’s - the kind of unbearable unwanted history’s - are also brought to account.

Academic & Writer on Benevolent Asylum and Memorial & Healing (Formerly Monash University)

“So what does it mean to you Aunty, when I say to you the title of this film, research project, is Wadjemup: Black Prison - White Playground?”

TJALAMINU MIA
...Well I think it’s very apt, the title is apt but sadley so, that it’s still apt at this present time...2011 and I shared with you nearly 50 years (ago) that I found myself at Wadjemup, when you talk about you know it ‘s been the 'playground’ for the rich and famous (and) the wealthy for many, many years, but even the common 'Mr Joe Blogs’ out there in the white community it’s always been classed as a get away, a place to go and unwind, get on the booze, have a great time, just soak up the sun on the golden sand beaches near the crystal blue water. And I was a part of that myself, and my cousin Lynette were a part of that, we didn’t know any better. We used to...go out on their boat...and we would anchor it...just off shore from Wadjemup and have a grand time over there, I mean in those days you could light a fire on the beach, you could party on the beach and of course we didn’t go to tent city, we had chalets, but still I always felt that apprehension. I didn’t understand what it was about, but about the system and it being a white privileged 'playground', yes well I was a part of that and so was my cousin Lynette. But as time’s gone on we understand, we’ve had the opportunity to understand that no...it’s not a ‘white playground’. But we actually got caught up in that system, we didn’t understand the hidden history, but physically and spiritually (we) were quickly alerted to...something

Australia. Port Arthur is one of Australia’s most significant heritage areas and an open air museum and best represents the example of a large-scale convict transportation and the colonial expansion of European powers through the presence and labour of convicts. In 1996 it was the scene of the worst mass murder event in post-colonial Australian history. Port Arthur is officially Tasmania's top tourist attraction. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Port_Arthur,_Tasmania]

North Stradbroke Island is an Australian island in the state of Queensland, 30 km southeast of the capital Brisbane. The island is only accessible by vehicular or passenger ferries and is the area’s major tourist destination in the holiday season. The island has also been the site of various European settlements, including a military/stores depot and convict outstation (1827-1831), a Catholic mission (1843-1846), quarantine station (1850-1864) and benevolent asylum (1866-1946). [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/North_Stradbroke_Island] & [http://www.stradbrokemuseum.com.au/trail/#]

Fremantle Prison is a former Australian prison located in Fremantle, Western Australia. The prison was one of 11 former convict sites in Australia inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2010 as the Australian Convict Sites. The prison was built by convict labour in the 1850s, and transferred to the colonial government in 1886 for use as a gaol for locally-sentenced prisoners. It closed as a prison in 1991 and reopened as a historic site. It is now a public museum, managed by the Government of Western Australia.
else that wasn’t quite right...she (her cousin) never went back but I went back 30 years later and I understood then, so yeah it’s an apt title. And it’s sad to say - it is still in place.

Former Research Fellow at the School of Indigenous Studies – UWA and current Managing Director Sister Kate’s Home Kids Healing Corporation at Communicare

“What does it mean to you when I say the title of this film is Wadjimup: Black Prison – White Playground?”

GLEN KELLY
I think that’s quite appropriate. I think that’s absolutely appropriate. ...I think my view of the way that we work in WA and Australia is that history, the bad bits people don’t like looking at, the bad bits which is the truthful bits - and you remember the ‘cultural wars’ when the Prime Minister (John Howard) would say things like the "black arm band view of history" - and I’d often have discussions with people about this, and my rejoinder would always be "better that than a white blindfold"... So the idea of calling the documentary what you are calling it is actually quite truthful because that is what (it) is...it (Rottnest Island) was used...deliberately...as a place to isolate important and powerful people from their communities so as to try and push aside people and culture. It was (an) important part of the colonial enterprise and it was quite deliberate in my view that people were put there in an attempt to really have a bad effect on people’s culture, and...the operation of the societies - the Noongar societies - and all the other societies so that’s why I say the place...I don’t think the place is healed yet...look at what happens at Rottnest, people go and 'run a muck' and schoolies and people go there for holidays and all of that sort of stuff and people use it as a 'playground’ but underneath that you know it’s paved in blood and to me it’s just all wrong and that’s why I can’t go there, people can’t see what we think is the reality of the place and it needs to be healed properly.

Chief Executive Officer of the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council (SWALSC)

1345 The history wars (or 'cultural wars') in Australia are an ongoing public debate over the interpretation of the history of the British colonisation of Australia and development of contemporary Australian society - particularly with regard to the impact on Aboriginal Australians and Torres Strait Islanders. The History Wars also relates to broader themes concerning national identity, as well as methodological questions concerning the historian and the craft of researching and writing history, including issues such as the value and reliability of written records (of the authorities and settlers) and the oral tradition (of the Indigenous Australians), along with the political or similar ideological biases of those who interpret them. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_wars]

1346 The phrase began to be used by some commentators to describe historians viewed as writing excessively critical Australian history 'while wearing a black armband' of 'mourning and grieving, or shame - Prime Minister John Howard infamously proclaimed that 'The 'black armband' view of our history reflects a belief that most Australian history since 1788 has been little more than a disgraceful story of imperialism, exploitation, racism, sexism and other forms of discrimination. [...] I believe that the balance sheet of our history is one of heroic achievement and that we have achieved much more as a nation of which we can be proud than of which we should be ashamed...’ [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/History_wars]

1347 ‘Schoolies’ or ‘schoolies week’ (also known as leavers' or leavers' week in Western Australia) refers to the Australian tradition of high-school graduates having week-long holidays following the end of their final exams in late November and early December. The media have represented the event as a period of lawlessness, loutish behaviour and unruliness due to binge drinking, and sexual promiscuity and as a result In efforts to reduce such acts, the week-long event on Rottnest in Western Australia has, as of 2006, been reduced to three days. [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Schoolies_week]
This edited narrative sequence was not utilized for either the current ‘rough cut’ of the film production (parts of it were used however) or final draft of the exegesis. It is however an excellent compressed piece of dialogue and edit from the key speakers [‘talking heads’ or interviewees] that creates a narrative which explains succinctly the arrests of Aboriginal prisoners across the state, their respective transportation in chains to Fremantle Round House, then being shipped across the ocean to the temporary holding cell on Rottnest Island, before being marched up to the Quod and the heinous conditions that these prisoners were privy to during their incarceration:

“These Aboriginal men, if you take over the time of the prison which was nearly 100 years, you’ve got Aboriginal men from right across the state. If they weren’t killed in battle protecting their families and their home country, then they were put in chains, sent to regional prisons and this is always a thing that I bring up, that regional prisons around the state were only built to house Aboriginal prisoners; they weren’t built to house convicts. Once those prisons were full those prisoners were then put onto long boats or even marched out across the state to Fremantle prison\textsuperscript{1348}...First stop, Fremantle. They’d have been sick as dogs as they came down in the boats – never been on the ocean before – these were desert men. These were lore-men. These men, you know their personal space was absolutely devastated, and invaded, and they were at wit’s end. Because they were told, they mustn’t kill, they mustn’t steal, they mustn’t tell lies. And yet all those things were done to them\textsuperscript{1349}...Well first many of them came down on the boats from the north, and they were put off at Fremantle, they went on to the roundhouse prison\textsuperscript{1350}...Unloaded at Fremantle, taken to what they call the Roundhouse which was the first building completed. Why was it built? It was built as a prison. So why did they build a prison? You know and I know why...[they built that for the Aboriginal people. Who they said didn’t exist, legally. Terra Nullius – the Land of No-one\textsuperscript{1351}...They’re all western, western misdemeanors I suppose, certainly nothing for, which related to the Aboriginal peoples’ sense of community and lifestyle, and lore and culture, it was all foreign\textsuperscript{1352}...They have never done that before, they have never (followed) orders from a white person, whereas they had this huge amount of respect for white people, right from the beginning thinking that they were descendents that had passed on and had come back in spirit form to protect us. What a let down. So to get a direction from a person who they were completely confused about - being a non indigenous person - that were supposed to protect them, telling them in a completely different language that they had no idea and
understanding about, sat next to Aboriginal leaders, from another language group, who they would normally, in every day, would have killed, or there (would) had been a major battle between different language groups, made you sit next to that person and pick up a piece of wood and row through a rough sea...Today we can hop on a ferry and go over there in twenty-five minutes. On a good day...I’m telling you about a boat trip that took nine hours. The prisoners were sick out on the sea but they still had to row themselves. And they were still chained together. It’s easy for me to say...Can you imagine? Can you really imagine? What that must have been like? Horrendous. And it defies...thinking...Well you can imagine (to) for a lot of people, for a lot of those fellows, it would have been the first time they had seen the ocean, let alone been on a boat, it’s hard to, I don’t know, it’s just hard to imagine how people would have felt, because even if you think in the Noongar context and you’ve got people who looked at the island just about every day of there lives, but had a particular story attached to it in terms of the travel of spirits and it being a spirit place...it would have probably been a bit terrifying to get wacked on a boat and dragged over to Rottnest...There was no clothing provided for prisoners in those early years, so what they wore when they were arrested is what they wore on Rottnest Island. For the Nyungars, and most of the prisoners of this early period were Nyungars, from the south-west of Western Australia, they would, if it was winter they would have been wearing a kangaroo skin cloak or Booka, if it was summer they would have been naked or perhaps wearing a pubic cover, a hair belt around their waist, and when it became winter they were naked. So, it was quite a harsh condition. This changed about 1846 when clothing was provided. So their conditions on the mainland was very brief: arrest, Roundhouse prison and across to the Island...They were all working once they arrived, they went over on the little boats, and the jetty that is still there, they were marched onto the jetty and into a holding shed I suppose...which is still there, it is a green building on the ground of the beach level. And they were all packed into the holding cell...together, no toilets, no wash-rooms and only this tiny little window in the door of the cell which still exists today. Then made to march in a straight line up a set of stairs to the prison, but also being stopped on the way so that the Superintendent at the time, could select out a certain number of prisoners that he would use for his own purposes...But they were not to complain, they were to work regardless of whether they were sick or not, whether they were ill and had any problems with their
hands...They had to work with the salt, gathering salt from...the salt lake, and...that became quite a thriving business. They also worked (hearing?) limestone out of the...lime walls over there, lime hills...they had to work to build...the place\textsuperscript{1359}...The first prison – which was burnt down in about eighteen forty-seven, was the place that they went to until that burnt down...then they had to build themselves a new prison. They called it the Quad...They were then taken in, they were put into cells – those cells were just so tiny – and once they were put in those cells, they were locked in, and, in the earlier years those cells did not have ventilation. So in the hotter months, it must have been absolutely dreadful. In the winter months – exactly the same - because of the freezing cold\textsuperscript{1360}...and then to be put inside a prison that they were forced to build, this is another dynamic as well, Aboriginal people never really built straight walls with stone, so to be forced to build a sea wall and a prison and then houses, that again were foreign construction to them, and then to take direction from a white person that they still couldn’t understand it puts you into a whole new paradigm as to what those men were going through\textsuperscript{1361}...to me that’s hell. That can only be described as hell. It really is tragic...I’m trying to describe what it feels like. But there’s another sense - smell, what must it have smelt like? And then of course there’s the feel, what did it really feel like? And that takes you into the depths, into the darkness of real despair, a real sense of hopelessness...how can one person, or one group of people do that to another group of people? Think that they’re nothing more than people who should be treated like that\textsuperscript{1362}...So it doesn’t surprise me that very few of the men actually left the Island, I would not be surprised if most of them passed on within the first few years of their incarceration\textsuperscript{1363}...the aches and the pains from just sleeping on the floor, with a thin blanket. But what about when you’ve got a cold, when you’re suffering, when you’re ill and your chest burns whenever you cough. There’s just nowhere to spit, nowhere to relieve yourself when to go to the toilet, now we’re starting to get into that picture of what I was talking about...a living hell\textsuperscript{1364}...a cold dark place, it breaks your heart, it breaks your spirit and a lot of people didn’t go back - a lot of people perished - a lot of people came to the mainland and never went back home they married into Noongar people, a lot of them probably tried to go back home but didn’t know how to go back home\textsuperscript{1365}... And then of course dying in there and being taken out of there and being buried, and then there’s an island over there that tourists go and stay in the same rooms where [13 to 17] people
[maybe] died, it’s hard to believe, and yet they’re not told, it’s really tragic. So yeah I don’t know if I could paint a more grimmer picture of it. It’s pretty sad... It’s a very sad history in the life of the nation, but it’s very ah...needful story that needs to be told so that Aboriginal people can see, can know their history, and the wider Australians know their history as well. Ah, they will know clearly that Rottnest, or Wadjemup, was a prison. Rottnest is being portrayed as the most pleasurable place to go for a holiday by the wider community and the white people there, the only ones who go over there, for, to become up and use it as their playground...
We are the authorised Custodians delegated by the Statewide Ceremonial Meeting of Elders who gathered to show respect to our Dead Ancestors and to put one of our Ancestor’s Remains to rest in June, 1994, after his remains were dug up by RIA. This was one of our Ancestors who died and was buried on Wadjemup/Rottnest Island.

It was a coming together of all concerned Aboriginal Elders and People from Communities scattered throughout the whole of Western Australia. RIDG organised the Ceremonial Meeting of Elders and Aboriginal People in June 1994 on Rottnest Island bringing Statewide Elders to Rottnest Island.

We are still that Body of People – the Rottnest Island Death Group (Aboriginal Corporation) authorised by that Meeting to look after and protect the Place of our Ancestors’ Remains and the Place of their Suffering.

The white-run Rottnest Island Authority that is in place now consulted with us at the time and took our advice, and committed themselves to working with us, and never suggested they would turn away from RIDG. They acknowledged they have no right whatsoever to employ other Aboriginal people to override the Rottnest Island Deaths Group’s authorisation by the Statewide Meeting of Elders in 1994 which asked us, RIDG to be the authorised Custodians and Protectors.

Through the passing of time since the Ceremonial Meeting, The Rottnest Island Authority has been overridden by other Aboriginal groups. People like Cedric Jacobs was at the Statewide Meeting and he knows what was said at that meeting which authorised the Rottnest Island Deaths Group (AC) to represent the interest of the Elders statewide concerning Rottnest. Also present was the Premier, Richard Court.

The Aboriginal Legal Service was also aware of what was said at that Statewide Meeting.

The Rottnest Island Authority has been playing to many games against Aboriginal People and trying to divide us.

The Rottnest Island Authority recognised the custodianship of the Rottnest Island Deaths Group and had negotiated with this Body, promising to enable the Rottnest Island Deaths Group to set up a culturally appropriate Museum of Remembrance at the Quod when the Dalhhold lease was gone.

We are the Grassroots Custodians and Protectors of the Sacredness of the Quod and the Burial Grounds and the whole of the Island that impounded our Ancestors.

The Bones of our Human Ancestors are the Foundation Stone of the Quod and the whole of Wajemup.

The mortar that they used to build the Quod was the Blood of our Ancestors to go on the stones that our Ancestors were forced to carve out of the Island itself to impound them.
Their Blood is still on the Walls. Their Spirits are still in the Cells.
(David Mowaljarli RIP, 1990)

All of the Suffering and the Dying of these Aboriginal Men were and still are the Foundation Stone of the Quod and the whole of Wajemup, the Island of Rottnest which belongs to the Aboriginal People who were taken there in chains and died there.

We call on Laurie O’Meara, the godfather of this huge plan to modernise the island and make it a playground for the rich white people, and we call on Noel Nannup, Cedric Jacobs and Marilyn Morgan and all those who support them, to back off. There is no ‘whale dreaming’ or ‘butterfly dreaming’ out there.

The only Dreaming and Sacredness there is the Dead People. It is surrounded by the Two Man Dreaming known by Elders, that links up to Warburton Ranges and Uluru (Ayres Rock) and the Mcdonnell Ranges. The Island itself is linked up to the Mainand. We have proof of that.

We ask again of Cedric Jacobs to stop saying he is the only custodian of Rottnest Island. He must stop putting himself over and above those Senior Elders from all over the State.

Human lives and human suffering cannot be used for profit in our Culture. There are to be no profits made in running tourists buses to bring in dollars and cents.

We, the Nyungah Elders, spearheaded the first moves to bring in Elders from all over the State in 1990 and 1994 to protect Rottnest Island on behalf of all Aboriginal People whose Ancestors were impounded and killed to see that justice was done on behalf of all Aboriginal People in Western Australia whose Ancestors are still laying dead at Rottnest Island.”

1368 (Complete) PUBLIC STATEMENT FROM MEMBERS OF ROTTNEST ISLAND DEATHS GROUP IN SUPPORT OF RIDG AND OUR ANCESTORS AT WAJEMUP 4March, 2009, For Meeting at Edith Cowan University, Mt Lawley.
AURORA ABRAHAM #
A Noongar artist who has painted many depictions of her ‘Dreaming’ visions of Wadjemup, Aurora has also worked on the Island as a Rottnest Island heritage consultant. As a descendent of an Aboriginal prisoner she relayed several stories related to her grandfather, which presented oral testimony handed-down via her family history.

PAUL ALLARDYCE #
Invaluable source who was present, and/or involved in the saga of the uncovering of skeletal remains of Aboriginal prisoners in the 1980s. Also witness to the legal and cultural happenings related to the uncovering of these bones during this period – including interaction with the State Government, the Rottnest Island Authority, Rottnest Island Aboriginal Deaths Group and the Bond Corporation. A former Private Detective, he was more than willing to have his testimony and eyewitness accounts recalled for the research project – particularly the documentary production.

MARK BIN-BARKER #
Involved in the 1988 documentary *In the Name of the Crow*, which documented the harsh treatment of Aboriginal Prisoners on the Island and the neglect of the Aboriginal prisoner burial site [formerly ‘Tent Land’]. He was also involved in lobbying for the commemoration of Aboriginal Prisoners on the Island through his work at AbMusic and as a musician and performer. A Kimberley descendent of the Gidga, Goonian and Jarlu peoples, and married into the Noongar community.

NEVILLE COLLARD #
Noongar Elder, and descendant of the Wadjuk & Ballardong Noongar. A former Principal Policy Officer and Advisor to the Western Australian State Minister for Indigenous Affairs and Department of the Premier and Cabinet, he is currently managing his own business *Yelakitj Moort* which conducts cross-cultural training, Aboriginal tours and consultancy work throughout the metropolitan and Brookton areas.

ALBERT CORUNNA #
Noongar Elder and direct descendent of the Swan River people. A former President of the Rottnest Island Aboriginal Deaths Group (RIDG) Corporation and still involved in the advocacy of Aboriginal and Noongar people in the Metropolitan area – including Wadjemup Island.

CHRIS DIXON & LINDSAY DIXON
Younger brothers of award winning poet Graeme ‘Bindarri’ Dixon [deceased] who in 1989 published his first collection of poetry, *Holocaust Island* (1990) which won the David Unaipon Award. In 2003 he published *Holocaust Revisited: killing time*, written whilst in jail and portrays the plight of incarceration at Wadjemup and the effect of colonization - some of these poems are featured in this exegesis. Both Chris and Lindsay spent (sometimes with Graeme) time in Boys Homes, Reformatories and then maximum incarceration in Fremantle Prison. This is documented in the short-documentary “Razor Wire” produced in 2011 by BlackRussian Productions: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FdSYJpU3LCY

TANIA FERRIER #
Independent Fine Art Professional, Artist, Set Designer and Rottnest Island Aboriginal Prison campaigner and lobbyist. Tania incorporated all of these elements for her critically applauded work: *The Quod Project*, which presented an exhibition of multidisciplinary art [including the ‘mock’ Quod Cell installation seen within the exegesis and film production] depicting Rottnest Island as a place of imprisonment and trauma. Tania followed this up with photographer James

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1369 Listed via the Surname (BOLDED)
Kerr and Aboriginal filmmaker Glen Stasiuk for the *Humaninside* project at the Fremantle Prison Gallery describing incarceration within Wadjemup and Fremantle Gaol.

DR. NEVILLE GREEN #

LILY HIBBERD
Academic (formerly from Monash University), artist and writer, Lily has focused her studies and publications in the area of solitary confinement, detention centres, asylums and places of Tourism at former prison/asylum establishments which act as sites of ‘radical forgetting’. In 2011 she published *Benevolent Asylum: An Eclipse of Historical Fiction*, as part of the Fremantle Arts Centre exhibition weaving a number of visual and textual strands.

CEDRIC JACOBS #
*Wadjuk* Noongar Elder and Traditional Custodian of the metropolitan area – including Wadjemup. Conducted official Noongar Welcomes and Greetings on the Island and currently lobbying for the recognition of the execution and burial of Midgegooroo at the Deanery site Perth.

KAREN JACOBS (AKA JACOBS-SMITH) #
*Wadjuk* Noongar Yorga (woman), Traditional Custodian and former Rottnest Island Authority board member – the only Indigenous person to be elected and sit on the RIA board.

GLEN KELLY #
Chief Executive Officer of the South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council (SWALSC), principal negotiator with the State Government regarding the Noongar Native Title Claim and participant at the Rottnest Island Aboriginal State Meeting 1994.

(PROF) CARMEN LAWRENCE #
State Labor Minister for Aboriginal Affairs during the period that skeletal remains of Aboriginal Prisoners were uncovered. Western Australian Premier from 1990-1993 and served as a Professorial Fellow in the Institute of Advanced Studies at the University of Western Australia once her Federal political career ended. Currently holds a position as Winthrop Professor in the School of Psychology at UWA and is also currently the Chair of the Australian Heritage Council.

DR CRAIG MCGARTY #
A social psychologist whose main work is on intergroup relations especially social identity, collective action, group-based emotions and stereotype formation. Worked for 16 years at ANU where he was Head of the School of Psychology before becoming Director of the Centre for Social and Community Research and then Director for the Social Research Institute at Murdoch University.

DR NOEL NANNUP #
Noongar [and Injabarndi] Elder and Traditional Custodian and former Rottnest Island Authority Indigenous Tour Operator. Is renowned as one of Australia's first Aboriginal park rangers and was employed as a senior Aboriginal Heritage Officer for the Aboriginal Tourism, Education and Training Unit in the Department of Conservation and Land Management (CALM). Currently an Adjunct appointment at Kurongkurl Katitjin Edith Cowan University.

LAURIE O’MEARA #
Former Rottnest Island Authority Chair [2004-2012] and Deputy Chair of Tourism Western Australia. In 2000 was awarded a Century Medal for services to tourism and in the 2007 Queen’s Birthday Honours was made a Member of the Order of Australia.
TJALAMINU MIA
Noongar woman and former Research Fellow at the School of Indigenous Studies – University of Western Australia - and current Managing Director of Sister Kate’s Home Kids Healing Corporation [Communicare]. Recognised as one of the first Aboriginal woman to work in maximum security prisons in the State.

CHARMAINE ‘TAMMAR’ WALLEY
Direct descendent (grand-daughter) of Rottnest Island prisoner Emanuel Jackamarra & Yuat Noongar.

ROSEMARY WALLEY (NEE JOHNSON) #
Kimberley descendent of the Bunuba and Djaru peoples, and custodian of oral testimony of the last Aboriginal prisoner released from Rottnest Island – Lumbia – from the Oombulgurri region in the Kimberley, via her mother’s oral testimony and regional history.

REG YARRAN
Senior Project Officer for the Rottnest Island Authority [2009-2012]. Responsible for advice to RIA on matters related to Aboriginal heritage, culture and reconciliation, including information for Ministerial correspondence and management of the RIA Reconciliation Action Plan.

# Designates that INTERVIEWEE also appears in the documentary production; 
EXT. BUSH – DAY

A convoy of people are barely visible, moving slowly through a heat wave in the bush horizon.

Three Aboriginal prisoners are being escorted by a mounted prison guard, GUARD HASTINGS (40) and a mounted policeman CONSTABLE SMITH (35)

The prisoners, ALBERT, JACK and ELDER, are chained together by the neck. They struggle to walk in sync.

CONSTABLE SMITH
Keep moving you black bastards!

Guard Hastings leads the gang, towing the length of chain that bounds the prisoners together.

He pulls harshly on the chain causing the prisoners to trip over like dominoes.

Guard Hastings and Smith laugh together.

Albert (22), the prisoner at the front of the chain gang, lifts his face from the dirt, his lips are dry and cracked from dehydration.

Guard Hastings gets off his horse and pulls a pistol from his waist belt and approaches Albert.

Constable Smith draws his rifle in anticipation.

Guard Hastings raises his pistol.

GUARD HASTINGS
Get up...

Albert puts his hands up to protect himself.

GUARD HASTINGS (CONT'D) I said get up!

The chain gang gets up and prepares to march on with heads bowed.

Guard Hastings mounts his horse and pulls the chain.

GUARD HASTINGS (CONT'D)
Move!
EXT. BEACH - DAY

Three Aboriginal prisoners are chained together and led to a whaleboat by Guard Hastings.

Albert crouches down in the sand and picks up a handful of sand.

He stares at it for a brief moment, knowing that it will be the last time that he will return to his homeland.

Albert lets the sand slip through his fingers.

Guard Hastings jabs Albert in the ribs with the baton.

GUARD HASTINGS
C'mon get in the boat... All of you... We have along trip ahead of us.

EXT. BOAT - DAY

Two PILOT OFFICERS row the boat on the open sea.

Guard Hastings and is sitting at the rear of boat watching over the prisoners.

Albert and the two other Aboriginal prisoners sit uneasily as waves lap over the side of the vessel.

ALBERT
White man is no good. He will kill us.

ELDER
Waardarn Yug-gynne. Ngung Minditj Wyng-nee! (The sea is angry. I am very sick and frightened!)

As the whaleboat bobs up and down violently on the ocean Elder lurches over the side of the boat to vomit.

He panics and falls over the side of the boat pulling Albert and Jack, who are chained to him at the neck, overboard.

GUARD HASTINGS
Pull those men up NOW!

Two PILOT OFFICERS pull the prisoners back up from the chain. Albert re-appears from below the surface and climbs back into the boat.
Jack comes up semi-conscious and is pulled back over. Elder comes to the surface of the water with a jolt. His eyes have rolled back into his head and is dead. The other prisoners start to wail in despair and fright.

GUARD HASTINGS (CONT'D)
That one's had it. Get the rest of this rabble to keep quiet - keep the boat moving towards the Isle.

EXT. ROTTNEST ISLAND SALTLAKE - DAY

Two Aboriginal PRISONERS are busy bagging salt from the salt lake.

Another prisoner is attending to a limestone track.

A COOK (40) rings a bell and the prisoners begin to muster for lunch.

GUARD HASTINGS
Front and centre. Get in line.

The prisoners go past the COOK with a basic tin, cup in their hands into which a weak gruel of cabbage and hatley oats is sloshed into the apparatus.

GUARD HASTINGS (CONT'D)
Keep it moving... This is your square for the day so make sure you finish it.

EXT. ROTTNEST ISLAND BEACH - NIGHT

Three Aboriginal Prisoners are dragging a boat down the shoreline. They are whispering in language,

They jump into the boat.

One of the prisoners stumbles and falls. He gets up and gets into the boat.

They begin to row out to sea.
INT. PRISON CELL - AFTERNOON

Up to six Aboriginal PRISONERS are crammed into a limestone prison cell. All have a sickness of some kind. Several are moaning and in obvious pain and discomfort.

PRISONER I
Help me I am sick (in Noongar language) I do not want to die!

PRISONER II
This is warra (bad) This is warra! (bad)

PRISON OFFICER
Quiet in there! Stop your moaning...the Doctor will be here to tend to you tomorrow...or the next day...whenever he get's to the Island.

DISSOLVE TO:

EXT. PRISON CELL - NEXT MORNING

Two PRISON OFFICERS enter the cell. Moaning from the PRISONERS inside the cell continues but is less intense.

PRISON OFFICER II
Oh my lord! By God this is the worst stench I have ever smelt!

PRISON OFFICER
Hush up and do your duties...get the bodies on the barrow.

The Officers bring TWO dead bodies out of the cell. Officer II hunches over and vomits. Officer I locks the cell behind him.

PRISON OFFICER (CONT'D)
(Grunts) You will get used to how these dead savages smell...and there will be plenty more as winter sets in.

Officer II shakes his head in horror.

PRISON OFFICER (CONT'D)
Let's get these two in the ground.

- END SCENE -
EXT. ROTTNEST ISLAND SHORELINE - DUSK

A NOONGAR MAN sits cross-legged on the shoreline of the Island facing East across the Coburn Sound. He recognizes campfires of his family and relations and begins to sing in Noongar to his long-lost loved ones.

NOONGAR
Ngung wayliny moortung boodjah.
Ngung wayliny moortung boodjah.
Ngung wayliny karla mia-karla mia.
Ngung wayling karla mia...

The NOONGAR begins to break down and cry as he rocks back and forth. The waves gently crash in synch with his sobbing.

- END SCENE -

EXT. ROTTNEST ISLAND BUSH - AFTERNOON

In the background an ABORIGINAL PRISONER is shaving some glass for the tip of a spear. In the foreground several PRISONERS unaccompanied by GUARDS hunt for quokka and snake freely within the Island bushland (heavy tree-line and brush). They chatter and sing in traditional language. One spots a quokka and the chase begins...

- END SCENE -

EXT. ROTTNEST ISLAND SALTWORKS & LIMESTONEWORKS - DAY

ABORIGINAL PRISONERS are busy packing salt into hessian bags as they cultivate the salt under the watchful eye of PRISON GUARDS. Other PRISONERS are busy chipping away limestone to be used as building blocks for the Island's amenities. A COOK rings a bell and the prisoners begin to muster for lunch.

OFFICER 2
Front and centre. Get in line.

The prisoners go past the COOK with a basic tin cup in their hands into which a weak gruel of cabbage and barley is sloshed into the apparatus.

OFFICER 2 (CONT'D)
Keep it moving...this is your square for the day so make sure you finish it.

FADE OUT.

- END SCENE -
EXT. ROTTNEST ISLAND QUOD – AFTERNOON

A group of ABORIGINAL PRISONERS are lined up in formation outside of the QUOD Prison Cells. It is a blistering hot day and the prisoners are facing the harsh light of the sun. They have been standing for over an hour and some near exhaustion as the WARDEN VINCENT approaches with the sun to his back. The PRISONERS squint to see the barbaric man in front of them.

WARDEN VINCENT
So you natives want to disobey my order?!

VINCENT walks over to a prisoner and begins to pull at his beard. The Prisoner – in obvious pain – begins to cry. Vincent stops pulling the prisoner's beard and in his hand he has a clump of the distraught prisoner's beard hair.

WARDEN VINCENT (CONT'D)
Hold your tongue, damn you! I'll soon stop that wretched noise!

VINCENT removes a heavy set of keys from his coat pocket and strikes the prisoner with two savage blows – one to the forehead and one across the bridge of his face. The prisoner falls to the ground and cries out in pain.

DEHAN (PRISONER)
Don't kill me please! (in language)

VINCENT proceeds to kick the prisoner twice to his abdomen with horrific force and purpose.

WARDEN VINCENT
Try and speak now you vile nigger!

DEHAN crumples up on the ground and lays silent. VINCENT signals to TWO GUARDS with a nod of his head to take the prisoner away. The guards proceed to drag the limp body of DEHAN to the nearby cell. VINCENT approaches another prisoner. The prisoners are stony face with fear. Vincent points to the prisoner and then pokes him forcefully in the chest. The prisoner falls back slightly and then recovers himself.

WARDEN VINCENT (CONT'D)
You! You decrepit savage...abscond from your work will you?!

VINCENT grabs at the right ear of the prisoner and yanks at it with such force that part of the ear rips clean off. The prisoner yelps with pain and fear and grabs at the side of his head. Blood begins to flow from the wound. Vincent, holding a small part of the flesh, turns away from the stunned and frightened prisoners.
WARDEN VINCENT (CONT'D)
Get these animals out to work.
Take him to the infirmary.

TWO guards round the prisoners up out from the barracks.
ONE guard escorts the injured prisoner in the opposite
direction towards the hospital. Vincent throws the piece
of flesh on the ground. The camera closes in on the flesh
on the ground.

FADE OUT.

- END SCENE -

INT. PRISON CELL - ROTTNEST ISLAND (19TH CENTURY) - DAY

Two Aboriginal prisoners ALBERT (Nargalu) aged 17, and HARRY
(Babbalabung) (40), lay dormant on cell floor. Albert has a
fever and a cold sweat and is coughing due to his illness.
Harry lays motionless.

ALBERT
(whispers) Warra...warra

Albert attempts to sit up but his body slumps back down. He
is in obvious discomfort and delusional. Harry moves ever so
slightly but pays Albert no attention.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
(whispers and then more pronounced)
Warra...warra wirn...warrra wirn!

Albert, with heavy breathing, is now certain that he is going
to die and begins to look up to the roof of the cell. A
bright light appears from the heavens and he raises his hand
to the light.

ALBERT (CONT'D)
Ngung... maamanyura yoongie!
(God...help 'mel)

Albert slumps back down as the light fades. His spirit
leaves his body and his spirit begins to perform the WAARDONG
(Crow) dance. His spirit is attempting to break out/away but
due to NOONGAR lahe is not allowed to find peace in death.
His spirit returns to his dead motionless body.

- END SCENE -
EXT. KIMBERLEY - DAY

A group of Aboriginal prisoners are chained at the neck as they are escorted across the dry hot red dirt of the Kimberley outback.

OFFICER
Keep moving you savages...move!

The Officer - who is holding the last length of chain that bounds the prisoners - tugs harshly on the last prisoner's neck chain.

PRISONER
Meedah! Meedah!
(No Don't! No Don't!)

OFFICER 2
Is that necessary? They are already chained like animals...

OFFICER
...these wild animals are chained to prevent escape...they are nothing but savages - the lot of them!

The Officer pulls at the chain again. The prisoners with heads bowed low continue their forlorn walk.

- END SCENE -
EXT. BEACH - PRISONER TRANSFER TO ROTTNEST - DAY

Three to four prisoners are chained as they are lead to the whaleboat that will transport them on their nine-hour voyage to the Island. As the PRISON OFFICERS lead the group one of the men crouches down in the sand and picks up a handful of sand. He stares at it for a brief moment - knowing that it will be the last time that he feels the comfort of his homeland.

CUT TO:

EXT. OCEAN - PRISONER TRANSFER TO ROTTNEST - DAY

We see TWO oarsmen rowing a whale boat on the open sea. THREE to FOUR Aboriginal PRISONERS sit uneasily as waves lap over the side of the vessel.

PRISONER I
Ku-bod-inah Yug-gynne. Janark
Yug-gynne. noonookin nyung nooitj
(The island is no good. Whiteman is no good. He will kill me)

PRISONER II
Waardarn Yug-gynne. Ngung
Minditj Wyng-nee! (The sea is angry. I am very sick and frightened!)

As the whaleboat bobs up and down violently on the ocean PRISONER II lurches over the side of the boat to vomit. He panics and falls over the side of the boat. AS he goes into the ocean sea two other prisoners chained to him at the neck also go overboard.

CAPTAIN
Pull those men up NOW!
Get them natives back into this boat!

Two PRISON OFFICERS (crew-men) pull the PRISONERS back up from the chain. The first re-appears from below the surface and climbs back into the boat. The second prisoner comes up unconscious and is pulled back over. The third - and last - prisoner (PRISONER I) comes to the surface of the water with a jolt. His eyes have rolled back into his head and are completely white - he is dead. The other prisoners start to wail in despair and fright.

CAPTAIN (CONT'D)
That one's had it. Get the rest of this rabble to keep quiet - keep the boat moving towards the Isle.

- END SCENE -