

SHARED LIVES

A COLLABORATIVE PARTNERSHIP IN ABORIGINAL AUSTRALIA

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This paper ruminates on the collaborative partnership that we have developed with the Barunga, Wugularr, Manyallaluk and Werenbun communities in the Northern Territory, Australia, over the last two decades. We use “Barunga” as a shortened term to refer to all of these communities, as we are usually based at Barunga. We have structured the paper around points of change to give a cumulative sense of how our collaborations have developed over time.

The communities that we work in are located in a remote area of northern Australia (Figure 1). The populations of these communities are overwhelmingly Aboriginal, and range from 35 people at Werenbun (Rachael Willika personal communication 2012) to 511 at Wugularr (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012). The only non-Aboriginal people living in these communities are teachers, nurses and administrators, met almost invariably in formal situations. The first language in the region is Kriol, a creole that emerged during the contact period of the early to mid twentieth century (Smith 2004). Many community people are not fluent in English and are shy or reticent in their interactions with non-Aboriginal people. The economic status of communities is very low, with under-employment or unemployment of around 50 percent and subsequently low incomes (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012), low levels of car ownership, infant mortality rates that are 1.8 to 3.8 times as high as those for non-Indigenous children and life expectancies that are 10–12 years shorter than those of non-Indigenous Australians (Australian Indigenous HealthInfoNet 2012; Council of Australian Governments 2011).

Starting Point: First Evening

We went to Barunga in 1990 to conduct Smith's (1996) doctoral research on the social and material variables of an Aboriginal artistic system. The first evening we agreed to drive a group of eight people forty kilometers to the neighboring

community of Beswick. We agreed to do this partly because we wanted interaction with local people, and partly because we feared that no one would want to talk to us, that we would not be able to collect rich ethnographic data. The decision to drive people to Beswick was a mistake. It was the equivalent of putting a flashing neon light over our caravan, with the sign “taxi” or “free taxi,” and for many months we were given “humbug” at all hours of the day and night by people who wanted us to drive them somewhere, sometimes hundreds of kilometers away.

This dilemma did not dissipate until we were accepted into the extended family of senior lawman, Peter Manaburu and his wife, Lily Willika. Then, at Peter's suggestion we sent people to get permission from him, since he was “boss” for our car. We found ourselves under the auspices of a senior lawman, and the problem was resolved.

Point of Change: From Researchers and ‘Informants’ to Family

We started with a clear focus on Smith's doctoral research on Aboriginal art (Smith 1996). Though he is an anthropologist now, Jackson started his academic foray as an English major accompanying Smith on her field trips, where he thought he could just stay in the background. Wrong! Smith would ask the old men questions and they would sit facing Jackson and give him the answers as though Smith wasn't present. So we learned that there was no right to knowledge and that the transition of knowledge was determined by gender. Moreover, it seemed that our Aboriginal teachers saw Jackson's casual or reluctant attitude to research as an attribute and so he was taught much without having to question people. The best teaching occurred when people were in the bush, which acted as a mnemonic that made questions unnecessary.

Gary Jackson's main teacher was Peter Manaburu. Over the years these two became best friends. Manaburu lived with

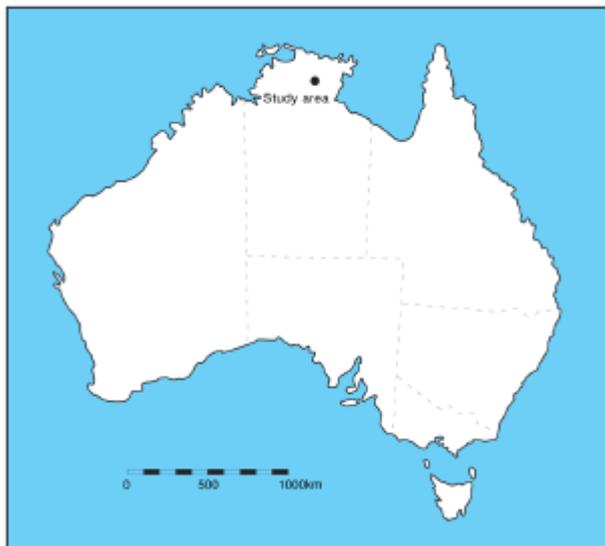


Figure 1. Location of Study Area.

Smith and Jackson whenever they were in the community and he stayed in their home away from the community for close to a year at a time. One difficulty of this situation is that you end up with middle class researchers talking with upper class Aboriginal teachers, so there is a class bias in the data. Also, the responsibilities of family means a lot of extra effort, as with any family: "Could you drive me to visit family in hospital tonight?" where the hospital is a 160 kms round trip. Or, "We have to take sticks and bash up that other family tomorrow because they went to the police about your nephew injuring one of their family." These costs and benefits come together as part of the package of collaboration.

Peter recently walked away. That is, he was called to join familiar spirits in the countryside and disappeared. No footprints are ever found as these "clever men" walk above the ground and the local police called Jackson to fly up to help in the search. Jackson spent two weeks searching the local bush in vain. Initially, he was very keen to find Manaburu but after a while he wondered what he would do if he did discover him in a cave. Manaburu was doing what was right and had told family members of a spirit wife, son, and daughter who lived in a cave and were presumably helping him on this adventure. Jackson is now pleased he did not have to decide what to do. Manaburu has never been found.

Point of Change: Jimmy Becomes Lamjerroc

When conducting Smith's doctoral research we worked closely with the senior traditional owner, Phyllis Wiyinjerroc. Towards the end of a year of living in the community, after one interview she pointed to our 18-month-old son and said "What's his name?" We gave his name, Jim, but she said "No, his Aboriginal name." We gave his "skin" name, as part

of the kinship system, Gela. She said "No, his Aboriginal name" ... and when we continued to look blank she said "His name is Lamjerroc, the same as my father."

At the time we were pleased, but we had no real idea of the honor we had been awarded. For the rest of her life, Phyllis demonstrated her acceptance of us to family, community, and strangers by reminding people that she had named our son after her father. She also told Lamjerroc that when he grew up he had to look after her people. He is the only person alive with that name. Looking back with the hindsight of twenty years, we understand that the naming of our son was a way of tying us to the community with gossamer threads that transcend generations.

Point of Change: From One-way Research to Two-way Education

We started off conducting research into Aboriginal culture and society. Informed by the interests of the community, however, this developed into a philosophy of two-way education, in which knowledge is exchanged equally between members of two cultural groups: Aboriginal people teach about their culture and heritage at the same time that they learn about non-Aboriginal culture and heritage, and about the practices of non-Aboriginal communities.

We have conducted many field schools on Jawoyn lands, giving students an opportunity to undertake archaeological work while experiencing our style of working with Aboriginal communities. The field schools include national and international scholars, and students in these field schools have had an opportunity to learn from people such as Martin Wobst, Bob Paynter, Heather Burke, Sven Ouzman, George Nicholas, Jane Balme, Ines Domingo, Didac Roman, Paul Faulstich, Graeme Ward, Cristina Lanteri, Alejandro Haber, Carol Ellick, and Joe Watkins. Many of these scholars developed their own relationships with members of the community. Community people travelling to other parts of Australia and to South Africa, France, the UK, and the USA have cemented these national and international relationships.

A number of our Honors students have conducted their own research in the region, most recently Ralph (2012) and Slizankiewicz (2012). Some of our students have gone on to become strong community researchers themselves, and all have developed their own styles of collaborating with Aboriginal people, for the particular situations in which they find themselves.

Point of Change: Manyallaluk Comes to Adelaide

In January 2011 Rachael Willika, the daughter of Lily Willika, phoned us and told us that she was coming to live with us, and that she would be bringing two of her children and a



Figure 2. Peter Manaburu and Gary Jackson, Barunga, 2005.

grandson. She was living in Manyallaluk, a community of 105 people (Australian Bureau of Statistics 2012), and wanted to come “south” to get a better education for her children. We turned one living room of our house into a bedroom for Rachael and the children. In the middle of the year, another grandchild joined her, so there were four children. In early 2012, two more children joined her and Rachael moved into a house of her own, a short distance from our house. We see each other on a day-to-day basis.

Rachael’s actions are exceptional. Normally, community people do not attempt to live beyond the safe perimeters of family. The transition to living in a non-Aboriginal culture without the immediate support of family is challenging and most community people assume that defeat is inevitable. Rachael has demonstrated that it is possible to live away from the community, and to prosper in this situation. Over the last 18 months the children have learnt to speak English well, and they now go to school every day (Figure 2). During this period, Rachael obtained her driver’s licence, passed the Finders University Foundation Course, and became the first Jawoyn person to enroll in a university course.

Rachael’s experience of living in “mununga” (European) society is a mirror to our own fieldwork with her mother and stepfather. As Lily and Peter helped us to understand the cultural practices of their society, so we have helped Rachael to understand the cultural practices of our society. The achievement of which we are most proud is that we were able to help Rachael and the children succeed in their forays into a non-Aboriginal world.

Innovations emerge from collaboration. Our proximity to Rachael allowed the three of us to develop new learning together. By pooling our respective knowledge we were able to identify barriers and enablers to Aboriginal people achieving success in a range of contexts—school, university, dealing with government—and to develop strategies that could be used to support Aboriginal success.

A practical outcome of this collaborative partnership is the development and trialling of a new method of training for Aboriginal communities in remote and regional areas, in which skills are transferred from one family member to another. This approach means that skills gap training is delivered with minimal embarrassment, and that it is cultural and linguistically literate and embedded in lifetime relationships. The critical innovation of this project is recognizing that Aboriginal people who have skills are uniquely placed to transfer their skills to other Aboriginal people—they have cultural and language literacy, know the limitations of family members, and have lifetime relationships of trust.

The benefits of a family-based approach to training are twofold: teaching increases the confidence of those who teach at the same time that it imparts knowledge and skills to those who seek them. If successful, this project will form a first step in a very substantial contribution to the Australian Government priority of Closing the Gap of Indigenous disadvantage (Australian Indigenous Health *InfoNet* 2012; Council of Australian Governments 2011), by establishing the basis of a new approach to training, education and employment in remote and regional communities. It could constitute a genuine breakthrough in Indigenous training, education, and employment. This program would not have been envisioned if Rachael had not moved to Adelaide.

Discussion

Things have changed since our first evening at Barunga. Our ideas about research have changed, we have changed, and the people we work with have changed.

What have we learned over the last 20 years? We have learned that it is important for a researcher to become part of a family in the community, and that this brings responsibilities and occasional difficulties as well as benefits. We found that we could not work with people without becoming engaged in their struggles, and using our skills for their purposes. We have learned that what you write has an impact at a community level, and that having a long-term commitment to a group and being patient will provide the best quality research results. We have learned that change is possible, that it is undertaken in small steps, and that small differences are large differences when compared to the nothing that would have happened otherwise. In this process, we have become a living archive for the history of the community, and our home and office a repository of historical and cultural knowledge, photos and articles.

Our collaborative partnerships with people at Barunga started with a clear focus on Smith’s doctoral research into Aboriginal art, but developed into something much richer, with the capacity to make a difference to the lives of the people with whom we work, and to deepen our own lives in unex-



Figure 3. From Left: Kayla Willika, Rachael Willika, Claire Smith, Samuel Willika, Jessalina Rockman, Marlene Lee, Jasmine Willika, Adam McCale, Cristina Lanteri, Gary Jackson, Adelaide, 2012.

pected ways. Our journey is documented in the products from our research and teaching, which range from books (Smith 2004), scholarly papers (Jackson and Smith 2005), and theses (Ralph 2012; Slizankiewicz 2012; Smith 1996) to opinion pieces in national media (Smith and Jackson 2008a), community publications and reports (Smith et al 1995; Jackson and Smith 2002), and submissions to government (Smith and Jackson 2008b).

We started off doing research about Aboriginal culture but ended up doing research for Aboriginal people. In the process, we changed from going to Barunga to do research to doing research so we could go to Barunga. Our situation today is one in which our personal futures and those of people in the community are entwined. Our collaborations are such that it is impossible to imagine separate lives, lives that not do intersect and enrich each other's.

Acknowledgments. This paper emerges from our collaborations with many, many people, and we thank them all. The photos produced here are published with the permission of the people who are in them and, in the case of Peter Manabaru, with permission from Rachael Willika and Peter's son Cedric Manabaru.

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CALL FOR AWARDS NOMINATIONS

The Society for American Archaeology calls for nominations for its awards to be presented at the 2013 Annual Meeting in Hawaii. SAA's awards are presented for important contributions in many areas of archaeology. If you wish to nominate someone for one of the awards, please send a letter of nomination to the contact person for the award. The letter of nomination should describe in detail the contributions of the nominee. In some cases, a curriculum vita of the nominee or copies of the nominee's work also are required. Please check the descriptions, requirements, and deadlines for nomination for individual awards. Award winners will receive a certificate. An award citation will be read by the SAA president during the annual business meeting, and an announcement will be published in *The SAA Archaeological Record*.

Book Award

Award Description: The Society for American Archaeology annually awards two prizes to honor recently published books. One prize is for a book that has had, or is expected to have, a major impact on the direction and character of archaeological research. The other prize is for a book that is written for the general public and presents the results of archaeological research to a broader audience. The Book Award committee solicits your nominations for these prizes, which will be awarded at the 2013 Annual Meeting of the SAA. Books published in 2010 or more recently are eligible.

Who Is Eligible to Submit Nominations or Apply for the Award: The Book Award committee solicits nominations for these prizes. Books published in 2010 or more recently are eligible. In the Scholarly Book Award category, the first author must be a member of the SAA, and all members receive the award. In the Popular Book Award category, all authors may be members or non-members of the SAA and all authors receive the award.

Nomination/Submission Materials Required: One copy of the nominated book must be sent to each member of the committee.

Nomination/Submission Deadline: December 2, 2012

Committee Contact Information: Nominators must arrange to have one copy of the nominated book(s) sent to each of the five members of the committee listed below. For further information, please contact Committee Chair Lisa LeCount.

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Crabtree Award

Award Description: The SAA presents the Crabtree Award annually to an outstanding avocational archaeologist in remembrance of the singular contributions of Don Crabtree. Nominees should have made significant contributions to advance understandings of local, regional, or national archaeology through excavation, research, publication, site or collections preservation, collaboration with the professional community, and/or public outreach.

Who Is Eligible to Submit Nominations or Apply for the Award: Anyone may submit a nomination. The committee does not accept self-nominations. Awardees may be members or non-members of the SAA.

Nomination/Submission Materials Required: Nominators should submit a current curriculum vita, a letter of nomina-