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‘The Old People had Brooms’: Yanyuwa Women, Material Culture and Resistance

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Abstract

This piece investigates the complex and multiple meanings associated with one piece of Australian Aboriginal material culture, a broom made by Yanyuwa woman Emalina Evans a-Wanajabi in the 1980s. Yanyuwa people constitute one nation of the myriad Aboriginal peoples of Australia, with Yanyuwa country being in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria, in the far north of Australia.

In this piece, we explore both the uses of and the meanings associated with brooms within Aboriginal and colonial contexts. Emalina a-Wanajabi’s broom stands as a testament to her response to the colonial imposition on Yanyuwa women during the assimilationist years of 1950s Australia. The broom highlights the false and essentialist rhetoric invented concerning Aboriginal identity in the eyes of the coloniser. Emalina’s experiences of welfare intervention in her early life may have contributed to her decision to manufacture this broom in her later years. Surveillance into Aboriginal home life and routine inspections conducted by welfare administrators played a role in Emalina’s formative years, as was the case for Aboriginal people in many regions of Australia. For Emalina welfare intervention resulted in the removal of two of her children during the period we call the “Stolen Generations”. Interventions into Aboriginal family life by colonial authorities, based in racialised discourses of cleanliness and domesticity, have played key roles in the colonisation of Australia and have had particular impact on Aboriginal women. Emalina’s broom therefore becomes a particularly powerful response to colonial discourses of cleanliness.

Material evidence of Aboriginal women’s resistance appears less often in studies of material culture and anthropology more generally. Exploring the meanings associated with the broom as a physical manifestation of resistance allows us to recognise a significant assertion of women’s cultural identity and essential position as holder of knowledge within the Yanyuwa community, as well as their role in resisting colonisation.

Keywords: Yanyuwa (Australian people); Women; Material culture; Resistance; Colonisation; Indigenous peoples

This piece investigates the complex and multiple meanings associated with one piece of Australian Aboriginal material culture, a broom, made by Yanyuwa woman Emalina Evans a-Wanajabi in the 1980s.Yanyuwa people constitute one nation of the myriad Indigenous peoples of Australia, with Yanyuwa country situated in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria in the far north (of the Northern Territory), Australia. In this piece, we consider both the uses of and the meanings associated with brooms within Aboriginal and colonial contexts.

This piece develops from Brigid Hill's honours thesis, in which she explored three objects of Yanyuwa material culture from The Yanyuwa Collection.[1] By considering Yanyuwa material culture within its Yanyuwa context, Hill utilised the knowledge of the objects held by the collector and caretaker of The Yanyuwa Collection, Associate Professor John Bradley, in turn highlighting the power of narrative to disseminate Yanyuwa cultural insights and epistemology. Hill was supervised by Rachel Standfield, a historian of Australian colonisation, and Standfield's collaboration on this paper reflects her interest in colonisation and the ways in which colonisation attempted to intervene in Aboriginal family life.

This piece is written with the relational ontology of Yanyuwa people in mind, and research is conducted with the knowledge and permission of Senior Yanyuwa individuals as discussed below. It is through co-author John Bradley that we come to know about his *ardiyardi* (mother's older sister) Emalina and the intention behind her making of the broom.

We bear witness to Emalina a-Wanajabi's making of the broom and the emergent themes evident within the narrative surrounding its creation. Through the relationship between the collector of the broom, John Bradley, and Emalina, we have a somewhat rare and privileged insight into understanding the narrative of this object of Yanyuwa material culture. The broom stands as a testament to Emalina's response to the colonial imposition on Yanyuwa women and families during the assimilationist years of 1950s Australia. Emalina, born in 1928, was a young woman during the period known to Yanyuwa as 'welfare times', from 1953 when the Northern Territory state government implemented its polices of assimilation. Emalina's experience of welfare intervention in her early life may have contributed to her decision to create this broom in her later years. The broom highlights the false and essentialist rhetoric invented concerning Aboriginal identity in the eyes of the coloniser, of which Australian anthropology, as a discipline, is implicated.[2] Critical to our discussion are notions of welfare and cleanliness, particularly during the mid-20th century when the threat of not conforming to white standards, or appearing 'dirty', implied negligence and could mean the removal of children.

Surveillance into Aboriginal home life and routine inspections conducted by welfare administrators played a role in Emalina's formative years, as was the case for Aboriginal people in many regions of Australia. Interventions into Aboriginal family life by colonial authorities, based in racialised discourse of cleanliness and domesticity, have played key roles in the colonisation of Australia and have had particular impact on Aboriginal women. We outline the broader colonial context by highlighting anthropology's influence on policy frameworks and

[1] Brigid Hill, *'Here is a memory of the country… good country, country rich in island wild honey': Three objects from the Yanyuwa Collection*, unpublished honours thesis, (Clayton: Monash Indigenous Studies Centre, Monash University, 2016).

[2] Gillian Cowlishaw, 'Studying Aborigines: Changing Cannons in Anthropology and History', in *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, edited by Bain Attwood and John Arnold, (Bundoora, Victoria: La Trobe University Press in association with the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 1992).

its aims for assimilating Aboriginal people into mainstream Australian society. In doing so, we discuss the theoretical background underpinning the contributing role anthropology as a social science played in informing the 'understandings' of Aboriginal people which provided the principal discourse for such administrative interventions to be implemented.[3] Furthermore, we discuss the methods by which such policies were applied and the implications interposition had on the lives of Aboriginal women and their families.

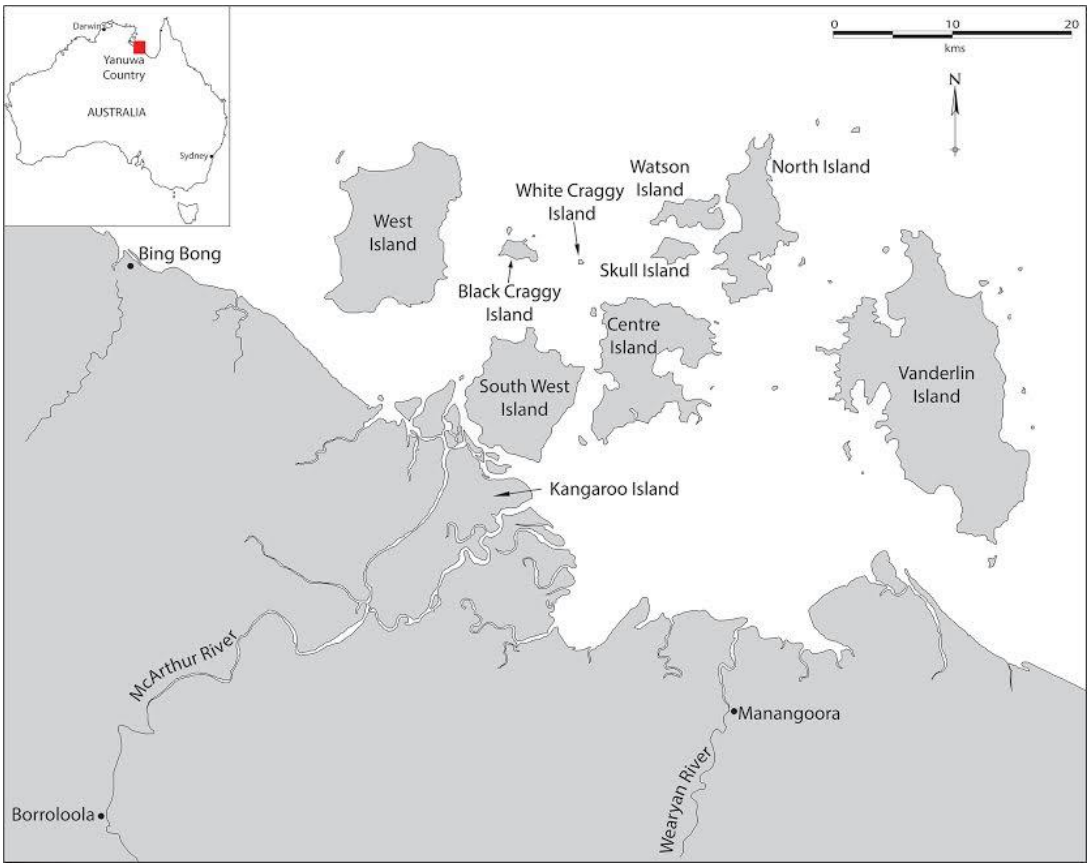
Emalina's broom therefore becomes a particularly powerful response to colonial discourses of cleanliness and Aboriginality. Material evidence of Aboriginal women's resistance appears less often in studies of material culture and anthropology more generally. Exploring the meanings associated with the broom as a physical manifestation of resistance allows us to recognise a significant assertion of women's cultural identity and essential position as holder of knowledge within the Yanyuwa community, as well as their role in resisting colonisation. Beyond the notions of cultural assertion, the broom and the intention of Emalina as its maker demonstrate the recuperative power and importance of storytelling and material-making in processes of decolonisation and as a way of restoring cultural wellbeing.[4]

Australia's Indigenous peoples have called the northern-most reaches of the continent home for upwards of 65,000 years.[5] Archaeological research is gradually catching up with Indigenous knowledges that tell us Indigenous peoples have lived in Australia for eons. Koch and Nordlinger state that at the time of British colonisation, Australia held between 700 and 800 language varieties, which collectively constituted over 250 distinct languages.[6] Yanyuwa is one of these distinct languages, and the language name, Yanyuwa, is also used to refer to the community of people who belong to this language group. In Australia, each Indigenous language group denotes an independent nation of people who belong to their own tract of homeland known as their 'country'. We are indebted to Yanyuwa families and to the literary expressions of Stanner and Rose for our understandings of what country means to Australian Indigenous people.[7] As Stanner suggests, the English language does not do justice to the widely shared Aboriginal sense of 'country':

> Our word 'home', as warm and suggestive though it be, does not match the Aboriginal word that may mean 'camp', 'heart', 'country', 'everlasting home', 'totem place', 'life source', 'spirit centre' and much else in one. Our word land is too spare and meagre. We can now scarcely use it except with economic overtones unless we happen to be poets… The Aboriginal would speak of earth and use it in a rich symbolic way to mean his 'shoulder' or his side'… a different tradition leaves us tongueless and earless towards this other world of meaning and significance.[8]

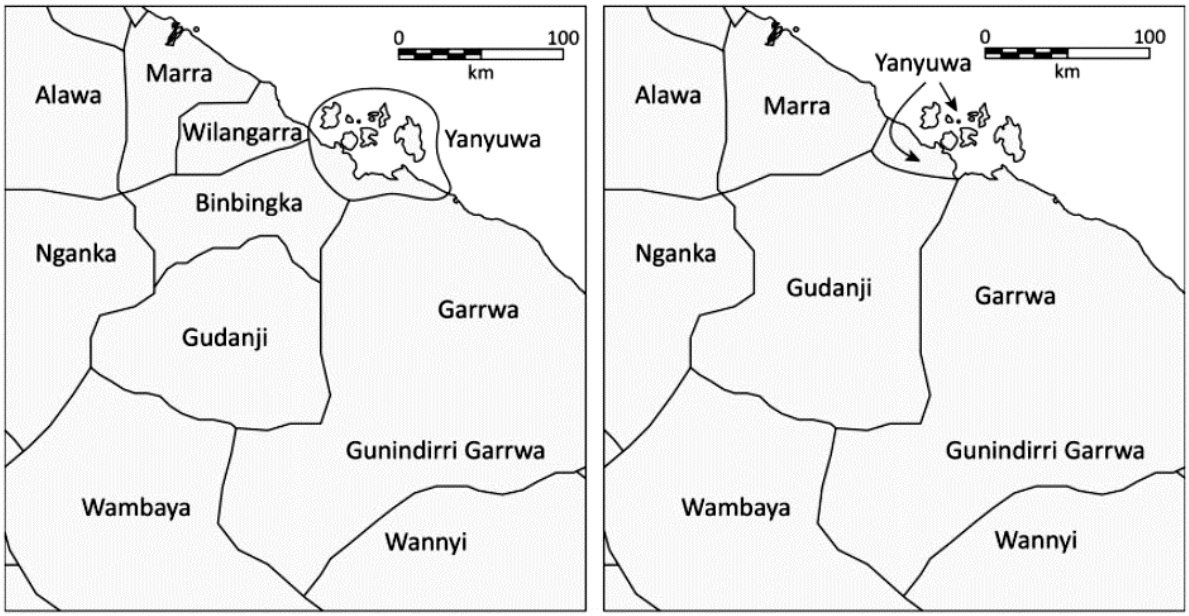
[3] Bain Attwood, 'Introduction' in *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, edited by Bain Attwood and John Arnold, (Bundoora, Victoria: La Trobe University Press in association with the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 1992).
[4] Jo-Ann Episkenew, *Taking back our spirits: Indigenous literature, public policy and healing*, (Toronto: University of Manitoba Press, 2009); Naomi Adelson and Michelle Olding, Narrating Aboriginality On-Line: Digital storytelling, identity and healing, *The Journal of Community Informatics*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (2013).
[5] Chris Clarkson et al., 'Human occupation of northern Australia by 65,000 years ago', *Nature* 547, (July 2017), 306-313, https://doi.org/10.1038/22968.
[6] Harold Koch and Rachel Nordlinger 2014, 'The languages of Australia in linguistic research: context and issues', in *The languages and linguistics of Australia: a comprehensive guide*, eds Harold Koch and Rachel Nordlinger, (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), p. 3-21.
[7] William EH Stanner, *White Man Got No Dreaming: Essays 1938-1973*, (Canberra: Australian National University Press, 1979), 230-31; Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Canberra: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996).
[8] Stanner, *White man got no Dreaming*, 230-231.

Yanyuwa country is comprised of the sea and land territory located in the southwest of the Gulf of Carpentaria, in the Northern Territory of Australia (Map 1). Yanyuwa territory encompasses the delta region of the MacArthur River, including the saltwater extents of both the McArthur and Wearyan rivers, and the Robinson river mouth and the Carrington and Davies Channels.[9] Today there are four main language groups in this region, namely the Yanyuwa, Marra, Garrwa and Gudanji (Map 2). Due to the destructive forces of colonisation, there are no living descendants of Wilangarra and Binbingka people. The Yanyuwa community and other neighbouring groups have moved in to care for those countries.[10]



Map 1: Yanyuwa land and sea country (Source: Liam Brady 2016)

[9] Liam Brady et al, 'Negotiating Yanyuwa rock art: relational and affectual experiences in the Southwest Gulf of Carpentaria, Northern Australia', *Current Anthropology* 57, no. 1, (2016).
[10] Liam Brady and John Bradley, Reconsidering regional rock art styles: Exploring cultural and relational understandings in northern Australia's Gulf country, *Journal of Social Archaeology* 14, no, 3 (2014), 365.



Map 2: Showing the language groups and boundaries in the southwestern region of the Gulf of Carpentaria (left: pre-1900, right: post-1900) (Source: Brady & Bradley 2014).

Yanyuwa are *li-Anthawirriyarra*, meaning 'those people whose spiritual and cultural origins are from the sea'.[11] Today the majority of Yanyuwa people reside in the township of Borroloola, which is approximately 1000km southeast of Darwin. Community life is predicated on a patrilineal clan system and comprises two unnamed moieties, clans and subsections that incorporate all phenomena existing in country.[12] The importance of kinship systems as a key feature of many Indigenous communities Australia-wide is well known and discussed in ethnographic literature.[13] Larrakia and Warumungu woman Christine Fejo-King states that kinship originates from the Dreaming and is both 'a network of social relationships and a form of governance'. She draws on the work of Karen Martin to explain that kinship is '…extensive and includes relationships and inter-relationships of all creation; from the celestial; to mother earth; to all inanimate formations or objects; to living creatures that fly, live on and within the earth, the waterways and seas; it includes Aboriginal Australians; and even the seasons'.[14]

For Yanyuwa people, as for many Indigenous communities, their world view is largely ordained through the network of kinship affiliations which they are born into.[15] Yanyuwa man Mussolini Harvey explained the interrelatedness of country, kin and Dreaming: 'The

[11] John J. Bradley, '*Li-anthawirriyarra*, people of the sea: Yanyuwa relations with their maritime environment', (PhD thesis, Northern Territory University, 1997), 12.
[12] John J. Bradley, Singing Saltwater Country: Journey to the Songlines of Carpentaria, (Crows Nest, NSW: Allen & Unwin, 2010).
[13] M. G. Bicchieri, *Hunters and Gatherers Today: a socioeconomic study of eleven such cultures in the twentieth century* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1972); Francoise Dussart, *The Politics of Ritual in an Aboriginal Settlement: Kinship, Gender and the Currency of Knowledge*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2000); Fred R. Myers, *Pintupi country, Pintupi self: sentiment, place, and politics among Western Desert Aborigines*, (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, and Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 1986); D. Rose, D. James, and C. Watson, *Indigenous kinship: with the natural world in New South Wales*, (Hurstville, NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, 2003).
[14] Christine, Fejo-King, 'Let's talk kinship: innovating Australian social work education, theory, research and practice through Aboriginal knowledge', (Christine Fejo-King Consulting, 2013), p. 69; Karen L. Martin, *Please knock before you enter: Aboriginal regulation of outsiders and the implications for researchers*, (Teneriffe, Queensland: Post Pressed, 2008).
[15] Amanda Kearney, *Before the old people and still today: an ethnoarchaeology of Yanyuwa places and narratives of engagement*, (North Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2009).

Dreamings are our ancestors, no matter if they are fish, birds, men, women, animals, wind or rain. It was these Dreamings that made our Law. All things in our country have Law, they have ceremony and song, and they have people who are related to them'.[16]

The broom belongs to The Yanyuwa Collection, an assemblage of over 150 objects of Yanyuwa material culture collected by Associate Professor John Bradley. Bradley's[17] relationship with the Yanyuwa community extends back to his arrival in Borroloola in January 1980 to work as a school teacher. His relationship to Yanyuwa individuals and families is an intimate one, as outlined by Kearney: 'his role in the community has ranged from school teacher, to anthropologist, to advisor on land claims and importantly, close friend and family to many Yanyuwa people'.[18]

In a letter to Hill and a fellow honours student, Vincent Dodd, senior Yanyuwa individuals offer insight into the close ties between Bradley and the community; the Elders note that Bradley has grown up with them and is held in high esteem.[19] The collection, like their relationship, has developed over nearly four decades and consists of various objects, many offering evidence of the lives of Yanyuwa as saltwater people, including those used for dugong and turtle hunting, and a dugout canoe. In many cases Bradley knew the makers or users and holds the knowledge surrounding the biography of each object. Many objects were gifted to Bradley, or his family, by members of the Yanyuwa community.

Hill's honours thesis falls within decolonial approaches whereby the community's consent and collaboration is a paramount prerequisite for conducting research.[20] The time constraints and ethics procedures in Hill's honours year meant she did not have direct access to the Yanyuwa community whose objects of material culture she studied. However, she undertook the project with the full knowledge and approval of the senior members of the community[21] and was fortunate to have access to the collection via its collector and *kunkunmanthawu* (caretaker), Bradley. Acting largely as 'narrator' and 'informant', Bradley kindly shared his knowledge about the objects via interviews and personal correspondence. It is from this somewhat privileged vantage point that we explore a portion of knowledge relating to The Yanyuwa Collection.

The following excerpt highlights the overarching aims of Hill's exploration of Yanyuwa material culture:

> The three Yanyuwa objects that form the focus of my thesis will be presented as case studies of the intricate and complex knowledge that objects of material culture have the ability to express. By utilising these objects as examples, I intend to illustrate how material culture, when collected in certain contexts, comes with a complex set of narratives about Yanyuwa cultural life, particularly in relation to the Old People.[22]

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[16] Yanyuwa People of Borroloola and John Bradley, *Yanyuwa country: the Yanyuwa people of Borroloola tell the history of their land*, (Richmond: Greenhouse Publications, 1988), xi.

[17] For the academic purposes of this paper, we refer to John Bradley simply as 'Bradley' but also because that is how Yanyuwa families refer to him.

[18] Kearney, *Before the old people and still today,* 151.

[19] See Hill '*Here's a memory of the country…*' 6, for the 'Letter From Borroloola'.

[20] Linda Tuhiwai Smith, *Decolonizing methodologies: research and Indigenous peoples*, (2nd edn, London: Zed Books, 2012).

[21] Hill '*Here's a memory of the country…*', 6.

[22] Hill, '*Here is a memory of the country…',* 2. The term 'Old People' is one used by Yanyuwa and other Indigenous people and refers to the respected Elders and ancestors who have passed on, see Bradley, *Singing Saltwater Country*; Clare Wood et al., 'The Stories We Need to Tell: Using Online Outsider-Witness Processes and Digital Storytelling in a Remote Australian Aboriginal Community', *The International Journal of Narrative theory and Community Work*, No.4, (2015), 52.

Placed within a framework of Yanyuwa relational ontology, objects like the broom were investigated using Kopytoff's concept of object biographies.[23] A Yanyuwa-inspired approach, only possible through an ongoing commitment to learning a Yanyuwa epistemology, enabled an unfolding of themes particularly relevant to Yanyuwa lived experience and knowledge. In demonstrating how Yanyuwa objects sit within a sphere of social process and relationality, we draw on the work of Julie Cruikshank, who states that objects are 'embedded in social life and are part of the cultural equipment used to think about and engage in reproducing or transforming complex human relationships'.[24] Cruikshank suggests that objects are illustrations of cultural narratives and stories, a vital notion informing our methodology that provides a key to our approach in exploring the ontological and colonial themes materialised by Emalina's broom.

In doing so, we offer an approach that considers the wellbeing of communities and the intricacies of cultural contexts and epistemologies. In line with the work of Jo-Ann Episkenew and others, we offer a platform for Emalina and Yanyuwa voices to be heard and speak back to the 'master narrative' of colonial discourse.[25] We reject the reductive nature of a functional approach underpinned by past processualist frameworks within Australian ethnography and anthropology. Instead we follow in the footsteps of Christopher Tilley, who within studies of material culture generates space for multiple voices to present knowledge about objects.[26] When broadened to emphasise cultural truths and contexts, material culture can be a conduit to cultural expression and objects may be understood as embodiments of culture rather than mere tools enabling everyday functionality and 'economic' activities. In this instance, the broom and the meaning attached to it embody a theme of cultural significance to its maker, Emalina. It is through the broom that we discuss the impact colonisation and its welfare policies had on Emalina's life, and the lives of many Aboriginal families in Australia, which we present in detail below. However, first it is necessary to provide the historical conditions by which academic and public discourse about Aboriginal Australians was constructed.

Popular anthropology and later archaeology informed mainstream Australian society and their perceptions about Aboriginal Australia.[27] This often homogenising and reductive representation informed not only public discourse but also the welfare policies that were implemented with purposes of assimilation and which sanctioned intervention into the lives of Aboriginal families and communities. In line with Foucauldian thought regarding the power relations tied to knowledge production and the work of Said, where the 'subject' of knowledge is often dichotomised from the 'self' as 'other' by western cannons, ethnography and anthropology have been implicated in the political policies which sought to redirect the course of Aboriginal lives.[28] In many parts of Australia, missionaries too played a role in informing anthropological scholarship and subsequent doctrines of protectionism and welfare.[29]

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[23] Igor Kopytoff, 'The cultural biography of objects: commoditization as process', in *The Social Life of Objects: Commodities in Cultural Perspective*, ed. A Appadurai, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986).
[24] Julie Cruikshank, *The social life of stories: narrative and knowledge in the Yukon Territory*, (Lincoln, Nebraska: University of Nebraska Press, 2000), 104.
[25] Episkenew, *Taking back our spirits;* Adelson and Olding, 'Narrating Aboriginality On-Line'; Daniel Justice, 'Literature, Healing, and the Transformational Imaginary: Thoughts on Jo-Ann Episkenew's Taking Back Our Spirits: Indigenous Literature, *Public Policy, and Healing'*, *Canadian Literature* 214, (Autumn 2012) 101-108, 202-203.
[26] Christopher Tilley, 'Metaphor, materiality and interpretation', in *The material culture reader*, ed. V. Buchli, (Oxford: Berg, 2002).
[27] Gillian Cowlishaw, 'Studying Aborigines'.
[28] Edward Said, *Orientalism: Western conceptions of the Orient, (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul,* 1978); Bain Attwood, 'Introduction' in *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*.
[29] Carl Strehlow, 'Carl Strehlow's Aranda and Loritja Tribes', *Journal of Friends of Lutheran Archives*, No. 17, (2007), pp. 80-84; James R B Love, *Kimberley people: stone age bushmen of today: life and adventure among a*

Early anthropology in Australia was dominated by non-Indigenous male ethnographers who due to training or cultural reasons largely overlooked the experiences and realities of the role of women within Indigenous societies and instead focused attention on men.[30] Elkin, poignantly pointed out that Aboriginal women were also subjugated beyond scholarship, within mainstream Australian society, under the widely held misconception that they '…were mere drudges, passing a life of monotony and being shamefully ill-treated by their husbands'.[31] Fortunately, the work of female anthropologists, like Phyllis Kaberry, sought to redress such imbalances and oversights on the part of their male colleagues.

> Until recently, aboriginal woman has occupied rather an obscure place in Australian anthropology; and in popular imagination, at least, she has too often been lost to view beneath the burdens imposed upon her by her menfolk….[32]

Ethnography and the study of material culture saw Australian anthropologists allocate Aboriginal men's and women's 'toolkits', thus defining the sexes and gender roles of Aboriginal people by their objects of material culture and the functions these 'tools' facilitated. Early ethnography and its colonial framework were inextricably implicated in the authoritative depiction of the 'other' and their 'primitive' way of life as evidenced by the objects selected by ethnographers for collection.[33] Classified in early Australian anthropology as simple technology, the Aboriginal woman's or man's domestic toolkit was comprised of two or three objects said to be essential for survival. For a woman, such a kit is archetypally said to contain a digging stick, a wood or bark container and a firestick, or, as Berndt describes it, a dilly bag, basket or wooden food-carrying container.[34] The explicitly pronounced simplicity of both women's and men's toolkits have often perpetuated the notion of primitiveness in Aboriginal Australia.[35] There is obvious peril in homogenising more than 250 diverse language and cultural groups under the singular terms 'Indigenous' or 'Aboriginal'. The result is the reduction of cultural diversity to singular or broad similarities that indicate the exploitation of similar 'simple' technologies. Furthermore, suggestions of this kind assume that such practices are not coeval with our own and are therefore relegated to 'prehistory'.[36]

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tribe of savages in North-Western Australia, (Blackie and Sons, London, 1936); Rachel Standfield, 'Thus have been preserved numerous interesting facts that would otherwise have been lost: Colonisation, protection and William Thomas's contribution to the Aborigines of Victoria', in *Settler Colonial Governance in Nineteenth-Century Victoria*, eds. L. Boucher and L. Russell, (Acton: ANU E Press, 2015) p. 47-62.

[30] Phyllis Kaberry, *Aboriginal woman, sacred and profane*, (London: Routledge, 2004, first published 1939); Bell, Diane, *Daughters of the Dreaming*, (North Melbourne: Spinifex Press, 3rd edn, 2002, first published 1983); Catherine Berndt, 'Digging sticks and spears, or the two-sex model', in F Gale (ed.), *Woman's Role in Aboriginal Society*, (Canberra: Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies, 3rd edn. 1978); Dussart, *The politics of ritual in an Aboriginal settlement.*

[31] Alfred P. Elkin, 'Introduction', in Kaberry, *Aboriginal woman, sacred and profane*, xxxii.

[32] Kaberry, *Aboriginal woman, sacred and profane*, xi.

[33] See, for example, L. T. Hobhouse, G. C. Wheeler, and M. Ginsberg, *The material culture and the social institutions of the simpler peoples: an essay in correlation*, (London and New York: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1915).

[34] D. John Mulvaney, and Johan Kamminga, *Prehistory of Australia*, (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 1999), 89; Berndt, 'Digging sticks and spears, or the two-sex model'.

[35] Hobhouse, Wheeler, and Ginsberg, *The material culture and the social institutions of the simpler peoples;* J. Flood, *The original Australians: story of the Aboriginal people*, (Crows Nest: Allen and Unwin, 2006); see L. Russell, L 2001, *Savage imaginings: historical and contemporary constructions of Australian Aboriginalities*, (Melbourne: Australian Scholarly Publishing, 2001) for a broader critique of museum depictions of Indigenous people and their material culture.

[36] Johannes Fabian, *Time and the other: how anthropology makes its object*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 1983); Philip Jones, 'The Boomerang's erratic flight: the mutability of ethnographic objects', in *Power, Knowledge and Aborigines*, edited by Bain Attwood and John Arnold, (Bundoora, Victoria: La Trobe University Press in association with the National Centre for Australian Studies, Monash University, 1992).

While Indigenous camp or 'bush' brooms predate colonisation, there is very little in the Australian ethnographic record concerning their usage or manufacture.[37] The apparent lacuna is eye-opening in itself and raises questions as to why brooms are underrepresented in the ethnographic record. Within 19th and 20th century 'salvage' approaches there was a desire to collect 'authentic' objects of material culture that demonstrated the 'primitive state' of Indigenous people prior to their contamination by 'civilisation'.[38] The critique of ethnography by James Clifford highlights crucial points regarding the 'salvage ethos' behind ethnography and its collecting practices:

> Collecting – at least in the West, where time is generally thought to be linear and irreversible – implies a rescue of phenomena from inevitable historical decay or loss. The collection contains what "deserves" to be kept, remembered or treasured. Artifacts and customs are saved out of time.[39]

Conversely, salvage, whether of knowledge or objects, where directed by Indigenous people can be a recuperative and aspirational strategy for moving towards decolonisation, particularly when the preservation and safeguarding of material culture, or social acts imperative to oral transmission of knowledge, such as storytelling, facilitate the creation of a counter-narrative to historical falsehoods.[40] Undeniably, the material salvaged during the late 19th and early 20th century ethnographic expeditions has contributed to contemporary revival of cultural knowledge and practice in some contexts. Both in Australia and internationally, the ethnographic record has provided exceedingly valuable historical documentation in which to support legal rights of Indigenous land reclamation and the re-instatement of Indigenous ownership or title to their homelands.[41] For the Yanyuwa community a recent re-engagement with ethnographic material, in this case photographs taken by Baldwin Spencer in 1901–1902, provide a case of cultural remembrance.[42] Importantly, the recent and ongoing reengagement with material objects, housed within public institutions that Indigenous groups are driving and enacting, is in accordance with their own revitalisation programs, including repatriation.[43] Furthermore, Indigenous engagement with historical and ongoing public discourses which often silenced their truths are taking various shapes, from literary and digital forms to material production of cultural equipment known to have been made and used by family members and ancestors.[44]

Brooms made by Aboriginal people do not feature as objects that warranted ethnographic collection. Similarly, the broom is an object that does not fit the criteria for European projections of what it means to be Aboriginal. Philip Jones suggests that 'certain

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[37] See Hill, *'Here is a memory of the country… good country, country rich in island wild honey'.*

[38] James Clifford, *The predicament of culture: twentieth-century ethnography, literature, and art*, (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1988); N. Peterson, L. Allen and L. Hamby, *The Makers and the Making of Indigenous Australian Museum Collections*, (Carlton: Melbourne University Publishing, 2008).

[39] Clifford, *The predicament of culture*, 231.

[40] Adelson and Olding, 'Narrating Aboriginality On-Line'.

[41] D. C. Newell, 'Renewing "that which was almost lost or forgotten": the implications of old ethnologies for present-day traditional ecological knowledge among Canada's Pacific Coast peoples', *The International Indigenous Policy Journal*, vol. 6, (2015).

[42] John Bradley et al., '"Why Can't They Put Their Names?": Colonial Photography, Repatriation and Social Memory', *History and Anthropology*, Vol. 25, No. 1, (2014).

[43] A. J. H. Henare, *Museums, anthropology and imperial exchange*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005).

[44] Vincent Dodd, '*One day they will come back home to us…' Yanyuwa marine hunting material culture, Mikhail Bakhtin's dialogism, and the impact of language endangerment and translation upon the power of material culture*, unpublished honours thesis, (Clayton: Monash Indigenous Studies Centre, Monash University, 2016). Justice 'Literature, Healing, and the Transformational Imaginary'; Hill, *'Here is a memory of the country…*'; Wood et al., 'The stories we need to tell'.

categories of objects attracted successively greater attention' as commodities among European markets.[45] Jones further implies that as standards of authenticity have transformed over time certain objects remain undesirable because they do not conform to non-Indigenous notions of Aboriginal 'tribal' or bush life. The broom falls within this category and according to Jones, may not be 'consumable' as a 'Dreaming' object representative of non-Indigenous ideals of 'traditional' Aboriginal cultural life.[46]

Additionally, brooms, while somewhat lacking in early ethnographic collections, have more recently been viewed by museums as objects of art.[47] While we acknowledge the difference between art and souvenirs, such objects are often transposable. Jones reiterates this point suggesting that souvenirs and objects of ethnography are as 'interchangeable as their collectors, both the tourist and ethnographer'.[48] Jones borrows from the work of Bennetta Jules-Rosette[49] who proposes that:

> …tourist art is both an object with market value and a symbolic unit, it is a medium through which diverse cultures come into contact with each other and are transmitted and preserved [disturbed and distorted?]. For the tourist, every object of interest constitutes a sign of cultural practices.[50]

While there are few brooms within Australian museums and ethnographic collections, both historic and contemporary records suggest they were and are available to collect.[51] Brooms are discussed in the context of early encounter and trade between Aboriginal communities and settlers, at least in colonial Victoria. Edward Curr wrote in 1839 that Aboriginal people (of the Kulin Nations) were making 'brooms for barter' in early Melbourne.[52] Bar singular exceptions,[53] the absence of brooms in the early Australian ethnographic record is remarkable, particularly when public discourse and colonial practices surrounding Aboriginality have been fixated on issues of cleanliness and order within domestic life. Public discourse of Aboriginal people and their 'unkempt' domestic spaces were deeply implicated in governmental policy designed to refashion people's living arrangements and intervene into family life on missions, reserves and through government 'protection' policies.

Further evidence of Australian Indigenous-made brooms and their domestic role are recorded by Indigenous communities. The role of brooms within Indigenous societies often comes from knowledgeable senior members. The Bardi Jaawi Elders of the Ardiyooloon community in the Kimberly region of Western Australia teach their primary-school-aged children how to manufacture bush brooms. It is explicitly stated that in the 'old days' before store-bought brooms were available, people made their own and are currently used to 'keep our camp clean and tidy'.[54]

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[45] Jones, 'The Boomerang's erratic flight', 63.
[46] Jones, 'The Boomerang's erratic flight', 63.
[47] See Hill, *'Here is a memory of the country…'* for an overview of the brooms in storage at Museum Victoria.
[48] Jones, 'The Boomerang's erratic flight', 71.
[49] Bennetta Jules-Rosette, *The Messages of Tourist Art: An African Semiotic System in Comparative Perspective,* (New York: Plenum Press, 1984), 3-4.
[50] Jones, 'The Boomerang's erratic flight', 71.
[51] See Hill, *'Here is a memory of the country…'.*
[52] Edward Curr, *Recollections of squatting in Victoria, then called the Port Phillip District (from 1841 to 1851)*, (2nd ed., Melbourne: Melbourne University Press, 1965), 11. See also Russell, L. 'Tickpen', 'Boro Boro': Aboriginal economic engagements in early Melbourne,' in *Settler colonial governance in nineteenth-century Victoria*, eds. L Boucher & L. Russell, (Acton: Australian National University Press, 2015).
[53] See Hill, 'Here is a memory of the country..', 48, for the 'besom' collected by Alfred Haddon in the Torres Strait.
[54] One Arm Point Remote School, *Our world: Bardi Jaawi: life at Ardiyooloon*, (Western Australia, 2010), 32.

The broom from the Yanyuwa Collection (Figure 1) was made by Emalina Evans a-Wanajabi in 1981 (Figure 2). The object itself is made from bundles of branches from a turkey bush, *rdalmantha* (*Calytrix exstipulata*) and tied up with spun bark from a wattle tree, *ma-kawurrka*, (*Acacia sp.*).

Figure 1: The broom from the Yanyuwa Collection, made by Emalina a-Wanajabi (Photo: Hill 2016).

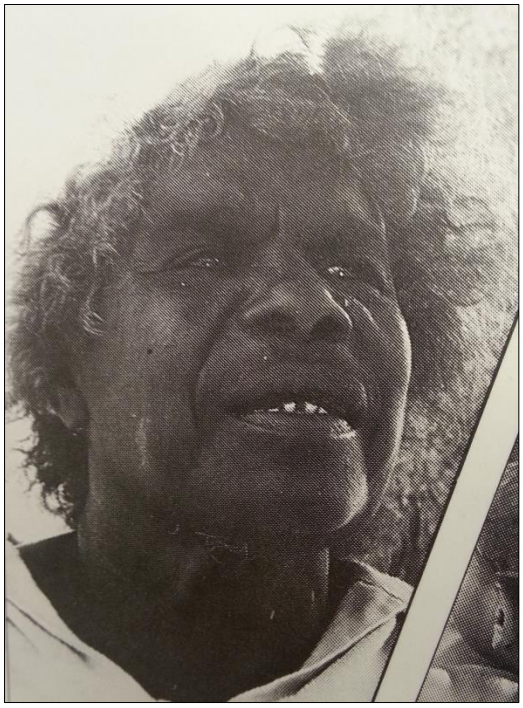

Figure 2: Emalina a-Wanajabi (1928-1989) (Photo: Yanyuwa People & Bradley 1988)

Emalina had personal reasons for making this broom, which she had hoped to sell to the buyers from Mimi Arts and Crafts, an Aboriginal art shop, in the Northern Territory town of Katherine. The broom, however, was not bought, as the buyers did not expect that it would sell on the tourist market. The following story is extracted from an interview between Bradley and Hill and explains how the broom came to be in the collection:

> Now the broom was actually made for an Aboriginal craft shop that used to be in Katherine… but they didn't buy it because they didn't think it would make any money. So, it just stood in the craft shop, in the craft store house, for about 3 years and then one day they were cleaning

> out and I was next to this old lady and she said, "Oh well you can take it", and that's how I got it.[55]

The narrative above occurred in 1984, by which time Bradley had spent four years in Borroloola teaching children in the local primary school and by which time Yanyuwa families had already taken care to begin educating Bradley into their culture. In the quotation above, the 'craft shop' actually refers to the adult education centre in Borroloola where people would gather to make objects for sale, and when the broom did not sell, it was put in the store room at the education centre.

Emalina made the broom in response to the colonial discourse that presumed Aboriginal people were unclean. Bradley, who calls Emalina *ardiyardi* (mother's big sister), states that Emalina told him that 'the Old People had brooms', and that Emalina 'wanted people to know that Aboriginal people are not dirty, that they keep things clean'.[56] To ensure living spaces were clean and tidy was not something foreign or introduced to Yanyuwa people by outsiders, as was often implied by welfare intervention (see discussion below). Rather, as Emalina emphatically recalled, her Old People had objects for which to ensure these tasks were undertaken, and she had the skill to recreate evidence of such, by way of the broom.

On learning her intent, it seems no coincidence that Emalina's anticipated audience, the visitors and customers of Mimi Arts and Crafts, would most likely be non-Indigenous tourists. It is poignant that it was through this avenue, perhaps the largest white audience most immediately accessible to her, that she desired to offer a counter-narrative based on her own lived experience and historical truth.

Interestingly, there is no Yanyuwa noun for the English word 'broom', but the verb *wurrbantharra*, meaning 'to sweep' (or 'to rake'), is the term used to refer to the object. The literature relating to the Yanyuwa context indicates that sweeping activity is undertaken at places of ceremonial performance and in association with the area encompassing a family's home, particularly the central hearth (especially before electricity became available) (Figure 3):[57]

> …every morning in the camp in Borroloola, even today to some extent, people sweep and rake around their homes… not so much around the central hearth because that's gone, but in the days when the central hearth was critical to people's cooking, living and sitting around every night and during the day, it was swept.[58]

[55] Interview with Bradley, in Hill, *'Here is a memory of the country…'*, 56-57.
[56] Emalina Evans a-Wanajabi, personal communication, 1984; Interview with Bradley, in Hill, *'Here is a memory of the country…'*, 57.
[57] Amanda Kearney, 'Place as material culture and restorative tool: Yanyuwa women's ceremony places in Northern Australia', in *Women and Objects 1750-1950: Gendered Material Studies*, eds. M. Daly Goggin and B. Fowkes Tobin, (Ashgate: Farnham, 2009); Bradley, *Singing Saltwater Country*, *23*.
[58] Interview with Bradley, in Hill, *'Here is a memory of the country…'* 52.

Figure 3: Photo showing the swept periphery of the home of Pharaoh Lhawulhawu at Malarndarri Camp, early 1960s (Photo: Pattemore Collection).

For Yanyuwa people the act of sweeping the ground creates *rlikarlika awara*, meaning 'a clean place'. It is the stem of the verb, *rlikarlika*, which holds the deeper meaning 'to make clean', not just in a physical sense but also in a spiritual sense. This spiritual or holistic sense refers to the general health or wellbeing of people and place. Therefore, the act of sweeping, even in the 'everyday' sense, as a daily 'chore', has depth of meaning. Today sweeping is an ongoing part of ceremonial preparation and clean up and continues to be an important element of campsite maintenance when people 'go bush'.[59]

Of note is the significance of the hearth as fundamental to the wellbeing of people. As with almost every human community, the importance of the hearth lies chiefly in its centrality to people's lives, in providing the means for cooking, warmth, comfort and a general place by which people gathered and spent time participating in communal life.[60] Within Australia several scholars discuss the sociality and meanings of the hearth within a variety of Indigenous contexts. Morris states that the campfire was the key to the 'domestic sphere', a place of communal cooking and eating and central to Dhan-Gadi's women's sense of identity. He also suggests that the campfire was one aspect of everyday life that was 'not usurped or displaced' by Europeans.[61] However, Bain Attwood (2000) suggests otherwise in relation to the conditions at a mission station in Victoria. At Ramahyuck, the Kurnai people of Gippsland were denied the use of outdoor hearths, as one of many deliberate attempts by those in authority to disrupt the familial networks essential to the wellbeing of communities.[62]

In a Yanyuwa context, the use of fire as central to the social and relational sphere is depicted in documentary films such as *Aeroplane Dance*.[63] In this film Bradley is seen sitting alongside Yanyuwa campfires and hearths, conversing with people that he is evidently familiar

[59] Kearney, 'Place as material culture and restorative tool'.
[60] See Mika Kajava, 'Hestia Hearth, Goddess, and Cult', *Harvard Studies in Classical Philology* 102, (2004), for an example of ancient Greek hearths.
[61] Barry Morris, *Domesticating Resistance: the Dhan-Gadi Aborigines and the Australian state*, (Oxford: Berg, 1989), 87.
[62] Bain Attwood, 'Space and time at Ramahyuck, Victoria, 1863–85', in *Settlement: a history of Australian Indigenous housing*, ed. P Read, (Canberra: Aboriginal Studies Press, 2000).
[63] Trevor Graham, (dir), *Ka-wayawayama aeroplane dance*, (1994).

with. In *Singing Saltwater Country*, Bradley recalls the vital characteristics of the hearth to Yanyuwa families in 1980:

> At both Top End and Rocky Creek camps, the hub of each home was the campfire in the front yard, around which everyone gathered in the morning and at night. These campfires not only provided warmth and were used for cooking; they were the central hearth around which meaning was transmitted and negotiated between generations. It was in the glow of the fire that the sense of being Yanyuwa was still being transmitted – through story, jokes, laughter, sometimes anger, mourning, and sometimes oratory and song.[64]

Hearths were an essential social platform by which intergenerational communication and storytelling could take place. Senior Law men and women used such spaces to maintain heritage and identity through the telling of 'Dreaming narratives or important episodes from the human past'.[65] The connection to ancestors and past loved ones is also inherent in the repeated use of the same hearths over time.[66]

For Yanyuwa the act of sweeping is a way of ensuring the health and wellbeing of people and all living kin by maintaining an active role in their relationship with country. Sweeping as an act of keeping places, particularly hearths and ceremony grounds, both physically and 'spiritually' clean, and therefore keeping country healthy is a much deeper understanding of what it means to keep something 'clean' than compared with western standards. A non-Indigenous understanding of cleanliness suggests ideas of hygiene and being free of physical contagion. Yet this Yanyuwa notion of cleanliness, inherently linked to wellbeing and a healthy country, has been overlooked by those in power who drove the processes of colonisation. The lack of recognition of Aboriginal notions of cleanliness were entrenched in strategies of colonisation, whereby violence was used as a mode of intervention into Aboriginal family life.

During 'welfare times' Northern Territory Aboriginal peoples were brought under the purview of state control, with Federal and Northern Territory Governments applying assimilation policy in the Northern Territory, and all Aboriginal people in the Northern Territory being made wards of the State.[67] As the Yanyuwa community explained as they introduced the concept of 'Welfare Times' in the 1981 documentary *Two Laws*, Thelma Douglas a-Walwalmara reads a passage: 'The year 1953 was the beginning of the Welfare Ordinance. Its aim was to direct and encourage the re-establishment of the Aborigines, that they would eventually be assimilated as an integral part of the Australian community'. And, Thelma then goes on to explain: 'Which means that they wanted us to be like white people'.[68] Heather Goodall outlines in an important article about gender and Australian assimilation policies that government interventions focused not only on attempts to bring women into work and increase skills to be utilised in working within the non-Indigenous economy, but also policies to control Aboriginal women's sexuality, and then policies to intervene in family life. These three aspects of Aboriginal women's lives under assimilation policies 'are all

[64] Bradley, *Singing Saltwater Country*, 23.
[65] Bradley, *Singing Saltwater Country*, 70.
[66] Franca Tamisari, '"Personal Acquaintance": Essential Individuality and the Possibilities of Encounters', in *Provoking Ideas: Critical Indigenous Studies*, eds. T. Lea, E. Kowal and G. Cowlishaw, (Darwin: Charles Darwin University Press, 2006), 29.
[67] Emalina's name is recorded as 'Emelina Wanijabi' of 'Group: Nimarama, Tribe: Yanyula' in the Register of Wards; Northern Territory of Australia, *Welfare Ordinance, 1953-1955*, 'Schedule Welfare Ordinance, Register of Wards', Government Gazette, (Sydney: Government Printer, 13 May 1957), 96.
[68] James Roy Macbean, 'Two Laws from Australia, One White, One Black: The Recent Past and the Challenging Future of Ethnographic Film (1983)', in *The Documentary Film Reader: History, Theory, Criticism*, ed. Jonathan Kahana, (Oxford University Press, 2016), 652-663.

inextricably entwined'.[69] A commonly told story by Emalina and other women is to laugh at and mimic Mrs Festing who would remind them every morning before sewing lessons 'we don't want any yellow babies', by which she was referring to mixed descent children with non-Indigenous fathers. Yanyuwa women therefore remember the way that work, mothering and sexuality were tangled together by the white women who had authority over their lives in 'welfare times'.

These attempts to control Aboriginal lives – their working lives, sexuality and mothering – were shaped by racialised readings of Aboriginal societies in Australia. Goodall writes that Aboriginal administrators, for her research on male welfare administrators in the Australian state of New South Wales, 'usually wrote and spoke about Aboriginal women in negative terms', with 'little awareness of the traditional strengths of women's economic and social roles in pre-invasion societies'.[70] Administrators and humanitarians combined this lack of 'awareness' with the assumptions they inherited from European frames of thinking about those groups of people racialised as 'others'. Intellectual systems that justified slavery and the economic exploitation of black bodies throughout the world were also applied to Australian Indigenous peoples, and stereotyping of black women's sexuality was of course central to the suite of racialised representation that 'othered' black people. Aboriginal men in these forms of representation were depicted as inherently violent and Aboriginal women as promiscuous. These intellectual frameworks then shaped colonial assumptions about Aboriginal family structures and mothering, with the result of these racialised assumptions being a number of interrelated administrative policies applied to Indigenous peoples, which had specifically gendered impacts.

Within the particular forms of colonial authority exercised over Aboriginal peoples in mid-20th century Australia, intervention into home life was especially strong. Francesca Bartlett's work speaks to what might be termed the 'colonisation of cleanliness' whereby government and humanitarian intervention into Aboriginal people's, and particularly Aboriginal women's, lives were buttressed by readings of what was clean and what was dirty. In the twentieth century, and particularly the mid-twentieth century when Emalina was a young woman, the colonisation of cleanliness became central to the way the government interfered with the lives of Aboriginal women, with massive and ongoing consequences for family life. Notions of what was clean and what was dirty, and the power invested in non-Indigenous authorities to judge 'standards' of cleanliness had serious implications. Cleanliness was a justification for the training of young Aboriginal women in a particular form of skills associated with 'domestic science', to be prepared for work in the homes of white women. Sold as 'employment' this was, Bartlett reminds us, actually indentured labour.[71] In other jurisdictions Aboriginal women were apprenticed into the homes of white women for periods of years being paid meagre wages compared to white domestic servants, with most Aboriginal women receiving little to none of this money as it was kept in "trust" by Aboriginal Protection Boards. Thus, Aboriginal women received an 'education in rituals of "cleanliness"' which was believed to 'extend their ability to keep their men in line and raise children and, of course, their suitability for respectable employment'. This 'education' was 'an extension of the cleaning duties performed at the mission, when girls were sent to farms, stations, homes and churches to "keep house" for white women'.[72] For Yanyuwa women, work involved highly organised and gendered tasks such as baking bread, laundering clothes and working as domestics for the

[69] Heather Goodall, '"Assimilation Begins in the Home": the State and Aboriginal Women's Work as Mothers in New South Wales, 1900s to 1960s', *Labour History*, 69, no. 1, (1995): 76.
[70] Goodall, "Assimilation Begins in the Home," 75-76.
[71] Francesca Bartlett, "Clean, White Girls: Assimilation and Women's work", *Hecate*, 25, no. 1 (1999): 12.
[72] Bartlett, "Clean, White Girls," 12.

welfare officers. Yanyuwa women were also gathered together for sewing classes and 'home maker classes' taught by the welfare officer's wife.[73] These were the same classes where they were lectured about their sexuality, lectures that carried threats about their mothering, discussed later.

As well as employment, however, such rituals of cleanliness were central to state intervention into the home life of Aboriginal people. A focus of assimilation policies was movement of people, whether it be centralisation from their country into European controlled settlement, or movement into European-style housing. Organising and controlling Aboriginal time and space has been a feature of non-Indigenous strategies of colonisation. The arrival of 'welfare times' for Yanyuwa meant relocation to Borroloola and a 'highly organised' life shaped by the welfare officer's control of time. 'A bell or siren denoted the pre-dawn start to the day. Aboriginal people paddled across the McArthur River from their camp… to the "white side" of the river'.[74] Following this movement and centralisation, welfare authorities, as part of their absolute power over Aboriginal people, kept women under surveillance as to how clean this space was. Mission or government welfare authorities had the power to judge an Aboriginal woman's home, meaning that 'neither the Aboriginal home nor any Aboriginal person was ever seen as "private"'.[75] Women with babies were expected to bring them across the river to be formula-fed, and rations were withheld 'if children were not kept clean'.[76] Yanyuwa women in *Two Laws* stated how cleanliness was used to control them: 'You make him clean, I give you dress, I give you food'.[77] *Two Laws* depicts a scene where the soft-spoken yet very insistent and firm Joy Irving, playing Mrs Tess Festing, judges cleanliness and furnishes women with soap, a towel and comb, sending them away to wash and scrub their bodies and hair to become 'clean' and 'tidy'. In this scene women were inspected, along with their babies and children. Again, the notion of cleanliness arises as a colonial category, a judgement exercised by colonial authorities against women to control family life and punish people by denying basic necessities that until very recently Yanyuwa men and women had provided for themselves, as they had been doing for thousands of years. Colonial authorities moved people into settlements to create systems of dependence and then used that dependence to control people's lives. This surveillance of domestic space and subjection to judgement about whether a home and its people were sufficiently clean was a feature of Aboriginal women's lives around the country.

The same authorities with the power to inspect an Aboriginal home also had the power to remove children. From the end of the nineteenth century to the end of the 1960s, policies of child removal were a feature of approaches to Aboriginal kin groups by the nation state. These child removals, now known as the 'Stolen Generations', were a systematic intervention into Indigenous family life, removing between one in ten to one in three Indigenous children from their families in the period between 1910 and the 1960s. Yanyuwa women were subject to the permanent removal of their children, and Emalina herself had two children removed. In a colonial discourse that equated 'cleanliness' with the welfare of children, judgements applied about the cleanliness of a home could be used to remove children from the family and their community of kinship networks. As the Australian national inquiry into the Stolen Generations described: 'the 1940s were the days of the "hygiene movement" when the focus was on

[73] Richard Baker, *Land is Life: From Bush to Town, The Story of the Yanyuwa People*, (St Leonards: Allen and Unwin, 1999), 96.
[74] Baker, *Land is Life*, 96.
[75] Bartlett, 'Clean, White Girls', 26.
[76] Baker, *Land is Life*, 98.
[77] Carolyn Strachan, Alessandro Cavadini; Borroloola Aboriginal Community, *Two Laws*, (Chicago: Facets Video, 2007).

"discipline and hygiene": whether you were clean, whether you had clean habits…'.[78] Colonial authorities combined their power over Aboriginal people with assumptions that Aboriginal people were dirty to remove children. As the magazine of the Aboriginal Protection Board in New South Wales, *Dawn*, put it:

> The provision of so many clean, modern homes on Aboriginal Stations throughout the State [of NSW], opens up a new worlds for the aboriginal woman of today. She can now enjoy the same amenities, the same comforts, and the same pleasures as her white sister. From the dirt floor of a bark gunyah to the polished linoleum of a modern hygienic cottage, is a big step for many aboriginal women to take, a frightening step, perhaps, but, with the patient and ever ready help of the Station Managers and Matrons, she will find it is not a difficult one at all. She will realise, that as the schools are educating her children to the cleaner and better ways of life, she must play her part by providing that home environment that is so necessary to the welfare of her children.[79]

Here, Aboriginal women are depicted as being 'helped' to be 'clean' and 'hygienic' by non-Indigenous women with authority over their lives. Aboriginal women were depicted as needing to learn how to have clean spaces, and needing to know how to care for their children, how to look after their 'welfare'. These pronouncements were not merely a matter of representation, however, but had profound implications. If a woman was judged not to have kept her domestic space to a standard of a 'clean, modern home', a standard never explicitly articulated and subject to the absolute power of welfare authorities, the consequence could be the permanent removal of her children. This, of course, had serious implications for Aboriginal family life. Fear of, and resistance to, removals could be actualised through a focus on cleanliness by Aboriginal women. Kathleen Jackson, a Wiradjuri woman from central New South Wales, has recently written an intimate portrayal of her own childhood where she reflects on the role of cleanliness in her own upbringing:

> I remember from a very early age my grandmother being pedantic about my appearance. I had to appear immaculate to go out in public. So much so that to this day people from my hometown tell me that they remember me as a little doll; not to mention that my Mum and I still have our 'home clothes' and our 'going out' clothes. My Nana told me that her mother was a thousand times worse – she had to sit everyday to have her hair curled into perfect ringlets, she had to use harsh soaps to ensure her hands and face were always clean. She was not allowed to get dirty. This obsession with cleanliness never made sense to me until I began learning about the Stolen Generations.[80]

In reflecting on this upbringing, Jackson makes the vital point that to be clean was, she believes, 'a form of everyday resistance' rather than any sign of submission.

> The horrifying reality is, under the Aboriginal Protection Act, children could be removed if 'welfare' officers felt the child was being neglected, this included poor hygiene. There was a general assumption that Aboriginal people were, by nature, dirty and unable to maintain suitable hygiene practices. As a result, one could resist the Aboriginal Protection Act by embodying the opposite of this stereotype.[81]

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[78] National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families, 'Chapter 11: The Effects', in *Bringing them Home: Report of the National Inquiry into the Separation of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander Children from Their Families*, (Sydney: Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 1997).

[79] Quoted in Bartlett, 'Clean, White Girls', 11-12.

[80] Kathleen Jackson 'Representation and Power: A Picture is Worth a Thousand Words – "Nulla-Nulla: Australia's White Hope, The Best Household Soap"', *Journal of Australian Indigenous Issues*, Vol 18, Issue 1, 2015-2016, pp. 62-67.

[81] Jackson, 'Representation and Power', 70-71.

As Jackson thus makes clear, the idea of cleanliness and its application to Indigenous people was simply an excuse to justify removal of children. The idea of whether a child was clean or dirty was combined with other explicitly racial assumptions about children of mixed Indigenous and non-Indigenous heritage. The Stolen Generations represent a contestation over the role of mixed-heritage children and their connection to either Indigenous or non-Indigenous society.

Richard Baker describes the ways that Yanyuwa people remember the connection between the removal of children and the power of welfare authorities. Those children with non-Indigenous fathers were targeted for removal from their Yanyuwa mothers, no matter that they were as Yanyuwa as anyone else, loved and cared for as all children were and are. Baker writes:

> The Yanyuwa did not consider these children to be any less Yanyuwa because of their lighter skin. Europeans, however, with their views predicated on racial concepts that saw Europeans as inherently superior, thought such children, with their European 'blood', were more likely to be receptive to the benefits of 'civilisation'. European fathers who did not acknowledge their children were saved embarrassment by this policy. However, in cases when the children were acknowledged, the policy represented an official expression of disapproval of European men openly living with Aboriginal women.[82]

The Yanyuwa women's voices collected by Baker stress the ways that welfare authorities betrayed Yanyuwa people by promising that children would only be away temporarily to go to school, knowing that Yanyuwa placed great emphasis on education:

> Eileen Yakibijna remembers children being taken away and the government official involved saying 'take him away, that's good and we will bring him back along you. Bring back along parents when they learn about school.' She notes, however, that 'they didn't bring [them] back, they been tell liar . . . They all [used to] cry, all the mothers for kid'.[83]

The removal of children was, and continues to be, felt intensely by the community, mothers who had children removed cut themselves in the same way as they would for "sorry business" akin to the mourning of a death. "This gives some idea of the sense of loss mothers felt and of how little hope they had of ever seeing their children again".[84] We can only imagine the sense of loss that must have been felt by Emalina, with two of her six children being removed by colonial authorities. Emalina, like many other Aboriginal women, went to great lengths to stop having children removed, taking measures such as disguising them to have darker skins, given that welfare authorities were most interested in removing lighter skinned children from families.[85]

Subjected to these experiences of assimilation throughout the mid-20th century, Yanyuwa families have complex ways of remembering their ability to exercise their agency in this period of strict government control. Richard Baker relates how Yanyuwa remember their agency in which they were moved to Dangana (on the Robinson River in Garrwa country) without consultation by welfare authorities in 1960 to make way for mining on their country.[86] This proved to be a short-lived relocation, and Yanyuwa remember their return to Borroloola being brought about by their own agency, stressing the fact that their opposition to the settlement led to it being abandoned, the end of the settlement a symbol of continuing Yanyuwa authority and independence. Likewise in *Two Laws*, Yanyuwa women coach the white woman

[82] Baker, *Land is Life*, 172-173.
[83] Baker, *Land is Life*, 173.
[84] Baker, *Land is Life*, 174.
[85] For another description of making children appear to have darker skins to protect them from removal from welfare authorities, see Confidential evidence 681, 'Chapter 2: National Overview', *Bringing them Home*.
[86] *Two Laws;* Baker, *Land is Life*, 100

who will play the welfare administrator as to how she should speak, 'the Aboriginal women remark, "Yes, that's just the way they would talk to us; and we would just stand there and look down at our feet, not daring to speak a word"'. But in the following scene of the movie, Yanyuwa women react differently, laughing, showing 'the distance they have come in asserting themselves' in the intervening period since welfare had such power over their lives.[87] Similarly Baker describes how Yanyuwa people spoke in the 1980s of their inability to speak back to this wielding of power by white welfare officers. The threat of Yanyuwa, and other Northern Territory Aboriginal peoples', assertion of their rights, was in fact used by welfare authorities in justifying the application of control by welfare authorities:

> the Welfare Branch Annual Report for 1953, in a section titled 'Control and Discipline', notes how Aboriginal people were beginning to stand up and fight Europeans who were mistreating them and that 'they are beginning to show signs of effrontery and undue confidence in themselves'. The report goes on to lay part of the blame for this on 'the so-called kind people, some of them on government settlements and missions, who teach the doctrine of equality of black and white races to the aborigines and who foster the performance of tribal ceremonies at the expense of working hours [and are] are a menace to the proper development of the aboriginal'.[88]

This quote speaks to the complexity of reading agency and resistance. In 'welfare times', any sign of Aboriginal resistance and articulation of rights was a signal to government of the need for more intervention, and hence a dangerous act. Within this context, Aboriginal people had little power to express any agency, to continue to live their own lives, to articulate any form of dissent or even to continue those acts which expressed culture, such as ceremony or language. When looking back, people were and are able to express their agency, their dissent and their solidarity at having survived such intervention as a community of people, still with culture intact. In this context Emalina's broom is an even more powerful symbol of resistance for people for who have been unable to express resistance, an object which speaks back to the colonial authorities which have attempted to, and had the power to, control Yanyuwa, intervening into lives, culture and families.

Emalina's broom stands as a testament to her response to the colonial imposition on Yanyuwa women and men during the assimilationist years of the 1950s. During these 'welfare times' the role of women in the Yanyuwa community shifted. Their roles as knowledge holders and cultural continuers were of necessity, heightened particularly during the period men and women were employed in the cattle industry on the Barkly Tableland.[89] While community members were away Yanyuwa women in Borroloola were the subject of colonial imposition and inspection based on rituals of cleanliness, which attempted to remake Aboriginal lives. The lack of brooms within museum collections speaks to the early missionary and anthropological emphasis on authentic and exotic objects of material culture, but also may reflect assumptions of dirtiness within Aboriginal living spaces, a racialised depiction that continues to shape perspectives of Aboriginal people.

Importantly Indigenous counter-narratives to the colonial discourse and colonial story are widespread although not always clearly visible in society. McNiven and Russell present a number of cases in which Indigenous people have engaged with or resisted colonial imposition in unseen ways.[90] The narrative of Fanny Balbuk and her *wanna* (digging stick) used as a

[87] Macbean, 'Two Laws from Australia', 660.
[88] Baker, *Land is Life*, 96.
[89] Baker, *Land is Life,* 102.
[90] Ian McNiven, and Lynette Russell, 2002, 'Ritual Response: place marking and the colonial frontier in Australia', in *Inscribed landscapes: Marking and Making Place*, eds B David & M Wilson (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002).

weapon of physical resistance against fences and houses is a pertinent demonstration of resistance against the colonial imposition on her country.[91] Fanny's refusal to be bound by fences, as cardinal boundary markers, and front doors, is an act of reclamation over Aboriginal (women's) space and power. Scott suggests that such is the 'subtle, surreptitious, and everyday character' of some acts of resistance to colonial authority that they did not often produce material evidence or leave lasting material residue.[92] The material presence of Emalina's broom is the epitome of resistance and cultural affirmation. Yanyuwa women's responses have gracefully, yet powerfully, countered the colonial discourse surmounted against them in their re-assertion of identity and collective wellbeing.

We have discussed how cleanliness means broader things to Yanyuwa people, particularly how sweeping is tied to understandings of holistic wellbeing. In this context, Emalina's broom is explicit as a statement of cleanliness and wellbeing and is a rejection of the master colonial narrative about Aboriginal people being dirty. The tourist and the ethnographer may not have perceived brooms as representing their ideals of Aboriginal culture and practices; in fact Aboriginal people in possession of brooms opposed mainstream constructed understandings of the 'bush-dwelling savage'. Therefore, rather than being seen as an inauthentic object of ethnography, we read Emalina's broom as an embodiment of Yanyuwa cultural continuity, as material resistance, as agency and as an example of women speaking back to their colonial oppressors in a public and visible way. Episkenew and others highlight the restorative qualities of counter-narratives in reinstating the dignity and competency of Indigenous identity and ways of knowing.[93] As Justice describes:

> Indigenous people are not simply passive victims of settler violence, but are instead active respondents to both the troubling and beautiful aspects of their world, respondents who draw on rich cultural, intellectual, spiritual, historical and aesthetic wellsprings… In telling their own stories, in asserting their own imaginative sovereignty and placing themselves, their communities and their worldviews at the centre of concern rather than the margins to which Indigenous subjectivities have so long been relegated…[94]

When broadened to emphasise cultural truths and contexts, material culture can be a conduit to cultural expression, and objects may be understood as embodiments of culture rather than mere tools enabling everyday functionality and economic activities. In this instance, the broom and the meaning attached to it embody a theme of cultural significance to its maker, Emalina. It is through the broom that we learn the impact colonisation and its welfare policies had on Emalina's life and the lives of many Aboriginal families in Australia. In exploring this object, we come to know about the affiliation between Emalina as a Yanyuwa woman and her familial ties to Bradley, who currently cares for the broom and its story. Moreover, through Emalina's materialisation of the cultural practices of her Old People in making the broom, she has provided a powerful counter-narrative to the false historical discourse surmounted against herself and her community.

[91] Stephen Muecke, *No Road (Bitumen all the Way)*, (Fremantle: Freemantle Arts Centre Press, 1997), quoted in Dennis Byrne, 'Nervous landscapes: race and space in Australia', *Journal of Social Archaeology* 2, No. 2, (2003).
[92] James Scott, *Weapons of the weak: everyday forms of peasant resistance*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985). See also Byrne, 'Nervous Landscapes'.
[93] Episkenew, *Taking back our spirits*; Adelson and Olding, 'Narrating Aboriginality online'; Justice, 'Literature, Healing, and the Transformational Imaginary'.
[94] Justice, 'Literature, Healing, and the Transformational Imaginary', 103.

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