KAYA WANDJOO NGALA NOONGARPEDIA – WELCOME TO OUR NOONGARPEDIA

Report on a research project.[1]

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I.   Background

Chapter 1: What is the Noongarpedia Project?

Kura koorliny: Introduction
'Kaya, nitja kwop noonook ngalang Noongar maya waanginy kaditjiny!'[2]

In 2006 Justice Murray Wilcox of the Federal Court of Australia found that native title continued to exist in Noongar[3] *boodjar* (country).[4] The decision demonstrated one of the world's most remarkable examples of cultural and physical resilience on the part of an Indigenous group. This is particularly so when one understands the onerous demands placed on claimant groups, to provide (i) detailed evidence of a distinct culture and set of practices at the time of 'sovereignty', (ii) the claim-group's continuity of language and knowledge, and (iii) demonstrated knowledge of and connection to ancestors at the time of 'sovereignty'. Kingsley Palmer, author of the Single Noongar Claim's Expert Anthropologist Report, concluded that the

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[2] *'It's good to have you reading our Noongar language!''*
[3] Throughout this work the term 'Noongar' is used. Noongar is a noun (meaning, roughly, 'human being') and refers to those people who have family, cultural and geographic affiliations with the South West region of Western Australia. Noongar is both singular and plural, although many contemporary Noongar use the plural signifier 'Noongars' or 'Noongar people'. Noongar is also spelt in many different ways: Nyungar, Noongah, Nyoongah, Noonga.
[4] See Bennell v State of Western Australia [2006] FCA 1243:
http://www.atns.net.au/agreement.asp?EntityID=252.

maintenance of Noongar knowledge, language and culture is monumental 'testimony to an enduring Indigenous tradition that continues to survive despite the odds' (Palmer, 2016: ix).

The following Report includes stories of present-day efforts to maintain this tradition of cultural resilience through novel, contemporary and globally networked means. It includes stories about a project that took as its dual aims (i) to carry out research concerned with bringing together old Noongar knowledge and new social media, and (ii) to make the social effort to build a digital platform that helps to make information about Noongar culture and ancient traditions available to the public, as well as to Noongar 'users' of that language and culture. In this way it is a story about research being used to support attempts at social and cultural development: research as social enterprise, and as 'creative citizenship' (Hargreaves and Hartley, 2016).

This introductory chapter sets the scene for a discussion in subsequent chapters of the various element of the 'Noongarpedia Project', as the research team calls it. The Project started from the premise that modern forms of media, which allow for user interaction, participation and 'DIY' or 'do it yourself' consumer co-creation, may offer a means to support knowledge maintenance for marginal and under-represented groups, who may by these means be able to make public elements of Noongar knowledge among and beyond Noongar people. In particular, because the project was about *knowledge* – and who gets to 'make' it – the idea was to test whether Wikipedia, as the world's largest encyclopaedia, which relies entirely on volunteer effort and 'crowd-sourced' knowledge, can offer a means to use Noongar people themselves as sources of knowledge as well as its destination.

For those interested in the rapid globalisation of internet affordances over the past decade or two, the big surprise was that, to date, no Australian Aboriginal language has launched its own language version of Wikipedia (although of course Indigenous knowledge is displayed in the English-language version, albeit randomly).

After all, as the news media themselves noted on Wikipedia's own 15th 'birthday' (January 14, 2016), 'In just 15 years, *Wikipedia has become arguably the largest collaborative effort in the history of mankind*.'[5] That's a big claim. Why is it that none of the original languages of this continent – over 100 surviving out of hundreds before European settlement[6] – shares this collaborative effort in its own voice?

Wikipedia's mission to make all the world's knowledge accessible to everyone 'in their own language' has proven harder to achieve than early optimism may have wished. There are many reasons – readily summarised as the legacy of colonialism, deprivation, political failures and the endless pressure of official control culture – why

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[5] Source: http://www.telegraph.co.uk/technology/wikipedia/12100516/How-Wikipedia-changed-the-world.html.
[6] Source: http://aiatsis.gov.au/explore/articles/indigenous-australian-languages.

Indigenous people in Australia and elsewhere have not prioritised the realisation of the dream of Wikipedia's co-founder Jimmy Wales.

Even so, the opportunity was there for the taking: could Noongar become the first Australian Aboriginal language to boast its own version of Wikipedia, entirely in the Noongar tongue? And could Wikipedia be used to build the cultural repertoires of young Noongar and others interested in learning about Noongar?

Here, our project has departed from a view of 'the media' as a top-down system, where *news* and *entertainment* predominate as communicative values. The taken-for-granted assumption inherited from the era of industrially-produced mass media is that media *production* occurs quite separately from media *consumption* and that communication is a one-way street. Our perspective draws from a larger, more encompassing view of communication domains derived from the dialogic nature of language itself and of 'participatory' social media: not news but *knowledge*; not entertainment (pop-culture) but *culture*; not production as a hard-to-enter professional industry that is remote from the domestic context of private consumption, but production (creativity) in association with consumption (use in context) as the work of *populations*, where *groups* make cultural knowledge using meaningful (Hartley and Potts, 2014).

After offering some general introductory remarks on the world of Noongar in this chapter, we provide the reader with a cultural induction to the project. It begins by taking you to Noongar boodjar (country), and then situating the work by having us nyinny ni 'sit down and listen' to consider the ontology and cultural traditions of Noongar. This introductory piece is designed to help us take a slightly different route to understanding *media citizenship* in the digital era: one that works through the activism of citizens themselves, using 'new media' affordances, in a 'bottom-up' process of knowledge-sharing and creation/building.

Nidja Noongar boodjar gnulla nyinniny – This is Noongar country we are sitting in

The term Noongar (man or people), as it is used today, describes those people of Indigenous Australian descent whose forebears occupied Noongar boodjar (Noongar land). According to Harben (n.d.: 19; see also Collard et al., 2004):

> *Noongar budjar (country or land) lies in the south-western corner of Western Australia. It extends eastward of Esperance (Wudjari) moving in an arc to the north-west close to the small wheat-belt town of Nyoongah (Njakinjaki), and west-north-west towards Coorow (Juat), and south of Geraldton across to the west coast of Western Australia. These are the general boundaries of the*

budjar or country where all Noongar moort have budjar or geographical land and moort or family regional affiliations.

The 'Noongar nation', as it is commonly called, is made of up to fourteen different language groups (which may be spelt in different ways): Amangu, Yued/Yuat, Whadjuk/Wajuk, Binjareb/Pinjarup, Wardandi, Balardong/Ballardong, Nyakinyaki, Wilman, Ganeang, Bibulmun/Piblemen, Mineng, Goreng and Wudjari and Njunga. Each of these dialect groups is responsible for different geographic areas with ecological distinctions and unique cultural nuances.[7]

Knowledge of Noongar boodjar has, from time immemorial, been passed on across the generations from *deman* (the old people) to koorlangka (children). It is well supported by other forms of documented evidence, recorded by non-Aboriginal people since their earliest times in the region, although Noongar might say of these accounts: nidja Noongar boodjar were wangkiny (this is Noongar land and stories) (Collard and Palmer, 1998: 14-15). To Noongar it is impossible to talk about *boodjar* (country) and *moort* (people and family) as separate entities. As Patricia Baines wrote:

> *To look at the land through Nyoongah eyes is to perceive personhood in all life forms. Old trees are parents and seedlings are children. Birds and animals, particularly when one of them behaves in an unusual manner or is distinguished in some way, may be a deceased ancestor. The land is seen as a huge body – most often it is recognized as the body of one's mother. To put a trench through the ground is to scarify the mother's back or dig into her guts.* (1998: 228)

Old Noongar taught that Noongar *boodjar* (country) began during the *nyitting* (cold time), when the world was flat, soft and featureless. During this time before people, ancestral spirits dwelt and wondered. As Noel Nannup puts it, they drifted in and out of their spirit forms, into the physical and material world (Nannup, 2003).

The *Wakarl* (rainbow serpent) was the first to move from pure spirit form and become 'real' (realised in material form). This allowed it to move across this unformed land fashioning hills and valleys, tunnelling under the ground and then up again. This is how rivers, lakes, swamps and wetlands came into being (Nannup, 2003). In this way Noongar say that the Wakarl created the waterways, acting as the keeper of all fresh water sources. 'Pop' Tom Bennell describes this 'old carpet snake' further:

> *The Waakal - that's a carpet snake and there is a dry carpet and a wet carpet snake. The old Waakal that lives in the water, they never let them touch them. Never let the children play with those. They reckon that is Noongar*

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[7] Source: South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (2016) *Connection to Country*: http://www.noongarculture.org.au/connection-to-country.

> *koorlongka warra wirrinitj warbaniny, the Waakal, you're not to play with that carpet snake, that is bad. ... Nitcha barlup Waakal marbukal nyininy - that means he is a harmless carpet snake. He lives in the bush throughout Noongar budjar. But the old water snakes; they never let them touch 'em. ... the real water snake oh, he is pretty, that carpet snake. ... the Noongar call him Waakal kierp wirrinitj. That means that carpet snake, he belongs to the water. You mustn't touch that snake; that's no good. If you kill that carpet snake noonook barminyiny that Waakal ngulla kierp uart, that means our water dries up – none. That is their history stories and very true too.*[8]

While it is the case that the landscape around many of the places where Wakarl nyinniny (Wakarl sits) has changed significantly since non-Aboriginal contact, for many Noongar it continues to be a place associated with the Wakarl. Whadjuk (Perth-area) Noongar Cedric Jacobs explains how these kinds of 'water sites' continue to be significant, spiritually and ecologically:

> *It is through the lake system. There is a water serpent down there below which is extremely important and the water on the surface is really the marks where the* Waugyl [Warkal] *wound his way through and came up after making the streams and the waterways. It's all part of the ecological system to purify the land and the family. Once it was surrounded by waterways and if they fill them up with rubbish then the land begins to die* (Laurie, 2003).

Baranginy kanya: coming into the work with respect

Modernist ideas of knowledge imagine it as openly available, universal and independent of politics, as well as of land and locality. But it is unhelpful to truncate or separate Noongar katitj (knowledge) from ethics, politics and country. Indeed, the use of Noongar katitj is closely tied to old and well-established Noongar cultural and epistemological frameworks and strong social obligations to follow and respect protocols carefully. Many of these protocols are shaped by old rules for living and conducting oneself.

For example, in *kura* (the past) if – for social, spiritual or economic reasons – a neighbouring Noongar group were to travel through to the Perth area, the onus was on them to check in with local people. At the same time, local *Noongar boordier* were responsible for the health and safety of visitors. Part of the obligations of *wam* (outsiders) included the expectation that they announce their arrival, bring enough *daadja* (meat), *merny* (food) and goods to exchange for the length of their travels. The expectation was that visitors would honour and respect *boodjar* (country) and *boordier* (bosses) by taking instruction on where safely to go, how not to offend the

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[8] Bennell, T. 1978. Oral Interview. Transcribed in 2002.

old people (those who have died), other *jennak* (spirits) or *Wakarl* (the old snake spirits), and not to move through country without proper introductions.

Failure to do so could have devastating consequences on the health and wellbeing of visitors and custodians. Thus, the 'cultural safety' of visitors was tied up with obligations on locals and visitors alike. Presenting on behalf of the Combined Noongar Native Title Claim, Kingsley Palmer explained it thus:

> *In Noongar thinking, an owner of country has the right to exclude or grant permission to non-owners to enter and use their land. But he or she also has a duty to share their land with others and a duty to ensure that no harm comes to visitors. The Aboriginal evidence amply demonstrates that Noongar people believe that unknown country is potentially dangerous, because Noongar land is possessed of spiritual potentialities which must either be avoided or knowledgably managed. Ignorance of country is therefore a matter of personal jeopardy. To venture into unknown country is to imperil both yourself and those who depend upon you. This means that, for the most part, Noongar people regard country that is not their own, and therefore which is unknown to them, as country to be avoided. Based upon Dr Palmer's research data and his own observations, he is of the view that Noongar people recognise a general duty to care for their own country. Looking after country typically requires a personal inspection to check for damage, perform maintenance, and ensure there is no unwelcome or unexpected development.*[9]

Another important aspect of looking after boodjar, respecting local katitj and speaking for country, is to make any representations that might be necessary to ensure that spiritually sensitive places or restricted knowledge are not harmed.

> *There is also a right and a duty to pass on knowledge about country and about Noongar ways so as to ensure the continuity of Noongar tradition over the generations. The passing on of knowledge of country is understood to be a duty of a landowner.* (K. Palmer)

Part of this process includes mechanisms to protect Noongar and others. For example, Daisy Bates records that custodial Noongar would scatter rushes or leaves from balgo (the grass tree) at a particular spot and say the following before moving past a Wakarl site:

> *Ngaija noono daranya gonin kalguttuk nganya mamma* (I your bed carry countryman me father). (cited in Vinnicombe, 1989: 17)

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[9] Bennell v the State of WA. Federal Court of Australia (Wilcox J) 19 September 2006 [2006] FCA 1243.

At some places, other protocols were followed. For example, game may have been killed or it may have been prohibited to cook food near a Wakarl pool (Vinnicombe 1989: 17). Before going to some places associated with the Wakarl, Noongar sing out:

> *Ngain-ya ye-ya koorliny* (I am coming now)
> *Nyal winjala nyinde* (Where are you?). (Vinnicombe, 1989)

Today Noongar custodian elders continue to observe these and other protocols to ensure that visitors and newcomers are given the appropriate welcome and permission to enter *boodjar* (country). The late Ken Colbung has spoken of the special rituals involving speaking to wardungs (crows) before approaching Wakarl sites (cited in Bloor, 1987). This is because, to Noongar responsible for the areas around Perth, the wardung is regarded as a keeper of country. According to Colbung:

> *... that's why you've got to ask the crows' (birds) permission to come. They've got to hear you and if they hear you, they know you're right! If you couldn't find them here, you couldn't do anything.*

Ken Colbung is also quoted as offering the following welcome to visitors to areas in and around Perth:

> *Baal quabelee wanjoo budjarrah winnaitch budjarrah, kata-tja- nyoon (we give and receive from you the very best welcome on this sacred earth and we will be at peace with each other).*[10]

Arguably these processes are equally important for those carrying out work using new digital platforms such as Wikipedia.

Noongar katitj wangk: a word on talking about Noongar and knowledge

Before moving onto a discussion about the project it is important to make several points in relation to the business of recording history, knowledge, language and cultural capital associated with people who have had to contend with cultural invasion.

The first point to make is that it is no longer reasonable for researchers and professionals interested in Indigenous knowledge to sustain the view that if they look hard enough at the public record, and consult widely enough, then it is possible to discover the definitive word on Indigenous knowledge. Despite the best endeavours of Noongar and non-Noongar knowledge brokers, it is difficult to know with confidence what went on prior to the 1820s (Palmer, 2016). The fact is that early accounts of Noongar life are often contradictory, selective and laden with the values and interests

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[10] *West Australian* newspaper (18/11/1988): 52.

of those recording events. Until recent times these accounts were almost exclusively recorded by non-Aboriginal government officials or those with an amateur interest in their relationships with Noongar.

Djanga (the outsiders) largely controlled the pens and thus record-keeping, in tandem with controlling access to land, and planning and legislating people's movements. The authors of many records were, by and large, people writing about culture, customs, activity and land use that they little understood. Not surprisingly, the available records on Noongar use of places, language and rules of living are strongly mediated and edited by non-Aboriginal writers, using non-Aboriginal narrative forms, ontological constructs and the English language.

Neville Green (1984: 50) well understood this when he observed of the recording of Noongar knowledge and language that:

> *Few of the reports are reliable, most are lacking, some are contradictory and all are by non-Aborigines. The European writers are often observing customs they did not understand and which were explained to them in a foreign language. Consequently, they tried to use their own cultural experiences and values to describe Aboriginal behaviour.*

It is also worth noting that European cartographic conventions, social-science research and systems of writing are not directly or easily transferrable into Noongar systems of naming, land use and knowledge systems. For example, European maps are usually set out in such a way as to imply that places can be separated from other places by clear boundaries, have fixed names over time, are universally understood and treated, have a principal set of land uses and can be understood in isolation. In contrast, Noongar use of boodjar is much more relational (Muecke, 1984: 166). Different persons will have a different relationship with a place, depending on their family connections, gender, age and knowledge.

Further, it is impossible to understand a place without reference to its relationship with other places. For example, one place may be partially understood as it features in a *Wakarl* song, a dance or a story. This could mean that this place is more deeply connected to other distant sites along the river by virtue of the story. For Noongar, any one place may be called by a number of different names and be used for different purposes at different times of the year. Kings Park (Perth) may be referred to as *Karrakatta* (hill of the crabs); Yongariny (place for catching kangaroo); *Gennungin Bo* (the place for looking a long way); and *Karlkarniny* (fire place). All of these names are equally correct – depending on the context and time of the year. So, for many Noongar, talking about the heritage of a place as if it exists in isolation is akin to talking about a person as if they exist in isolation from their *moort* (family) (D. Palmer et al., 2016).

Early accounts also should be treated with some scepticism because of what K. Palmer (2016: 10) calls the 'one-sidedness of relations between the settlers and the Aboriginal people'. He claims it is highly likely that the history of these relationships is laden with moments when Noongar would exercise considerable caution in acting as informants about Noongar knowledge matters. As a consequence, it is likely some of the early accounts are not particularly accurate. For example, Ethel Hassell suspected that many Noongar she knew would only tell her what they considered 'was good for you to know', what they thought you wished to hear or nothing at all about important elements of ritual life (1975: 157).

Many of the early accounts are also likely full of one-dimensional or simplistic ideas because of the limited capacity of those writing to speak and understand Noongar. This had two consequences. It is likely that Noongar had a limited capacity to articulate the complexity, nuanced and rich layers of their life in a language other than their own. It is also unlikely that many early writers had more than simple Noongar language comprehension. Jesse Hammond (1933), one of the early writers on Noongar matters, said: 'without some knowledge of their language' it would be 'impossible to get a true account of the aborigines'. According to K. Palmer (2016: 11), fluency in Noongar by the newcomers appears to have been extremely limited and varied from a few who claimed fluency to those who understood the odd word (Green, 1984). Palmer concludes that dexterity in Noongar would have been restricted by most who wrote about Noongar life and culture:

> *On the whole, my reading of the texts is that in exchanges between the settlers and the Aboriginal inhabitants the use of English was the norm, supplemented by the interpolation of some Noongar words* (2016: 11)

Finally, the training and capacity for systematic research possessed by many who recorded details of Noongar knowledge was minimal. Many had amateur interest, squeezed between other commitments as government officials, land developers and missionaries. There existed no agreed or formal methods, as much of the work was written prior to the formation of western disciplines such as anthropology, history and sociology. Living on the edge of the colonial frontier was also demanding, putting extra pressure on people's judgment. Indeed, some of those who wrote in the greatest detail have had their mental health and intellectual faculties questioned. For example, commenting on Daisy Bates (1985), Alfred Radcliffe-Brown, leading the emerging discipline of structural-functional anthropology, suggested a high degree of disorganisation. He took the view that the contents of Bates' mind were 'somewhat similar to the contents of a well-stored sewing basket, after half a dozen kittens had been playing there undisturbed for a few days' (Langham, 1981: 267).[11]

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[11] It is worth remembering the patriarchal and patronising culture of anthropology (among other disciplines) at the time; and also that Bates had publicly accused Radcliffe-Brown of plagiarising her work. Ian Langham finds that even on a 'charitable' interpretation, 'Radcliffe-Brown was guilty of impropriety' (1981: 267; see also Wikipedia: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Daisy_Bates_(Australia).

Naatj Wikipedia? – Why Wikipedia?

The project started with the aspiration to grow and share Noongar *knowledge* (not just the language). Noongar, the language, is counted as 'endangered' or 'threatened' (McConvell and Thieberger 2001: 59). *Ethnologue* recorded only 240 'first-language' speakers in 2006, and 8,000 who speak a mixture of English and Noongar.[12]

Meanwhile, the Noongar people are 'one of the largest Aboriginal cultural blocks in Australia', comprising around 30,000 people.[13] Most if not all of them know some Noongar words (e.g. places, flora and fauna), as do (Western) Australians at large.[14] Thus the Noongar 'knowledge network' is not coterminous with the language as used by fluent speakers, but much more extensive. This means that Noongar remains a language continually to be 'invented' by its users, including new ways of making sure that knowledge is passed from one generation to the next, using new media as well as traditional means. Like any language, Noongar faces the future, and Noongar people regard its further development as an important cultural issue.[15]

The team were also keen to test whether it is possible for a local and minority language to be supported in the fast and furious contemporary global digital environment. We sought to experiment with seeing if publicly accessible internet technologies could both support the production and circulation of Noongar cultural knowledge.

Drawing on its global popularity and success we chose Wikipedia as the most-accessed 'medium' for the project. Wikipedia is one of the Internet's five most-visited websites. Co-founder Jimmy Wales has made a celebrated statement of his ambition for it:

> *Wikipedia is first and foremost an effort to create and distribute a free encyclopedia of the highest possible quality to* every single person on the planet in their own language.[16]

Wikipedia is quite a big 'country'. It is the 4th most Googled site on the World Wide Web. It hosts a range of subsidiary software (eg. Wiktionary, Wikiversity) as well as 284 active Wikipedia versions in different languages. The grand total in all languages

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[12] Ethnologue: www.ethnologue.com/language/nys.
[13] SWALSC (South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council) (2013) 'Noongar'. Online: www.noongarculture.org.au/noongar/; and see indigenous.gov.au (2012).
[14] SWALSC (South West Aboriginal Land & Sea Council) (2013) 'Language'. Online: www.noongarculture.org.au/language/.
[15] See: AIATSIS: www.fatsilc.org.au/languages/reports/nils-report-2005.
[16] Jimmy Wales (2005) 'Wikipedia is an Encyclopedia': http://lists.wikimedia.org/pipermail/wikipedia-l/2005-March/020469.html.

is impressive by any standard: 43 million articles across 158 million pages, with over 2.3 billion edits and 65.65 million users:[17]

Articles	Total	Edits	Admins	Users	Active Users	Images
43,006,711	158,434,074	2,300,944,323	3,883	65,653,222	286,323	2,430,409

The total number of users compares favourably with some pretty populous nations. By population count, 'Wikipedia Users' amount to one of the world's largest 'countries', pipping the United Kingdom to the post at number 21 (the UK's population was 65,111,143m at June 2016).

Our project team was drawn to Wikipedia's democratic, bottom-up, non-commercial ethos and practices. We were also mindful that a considerable amount of Noongar knowledge is already present in the English-language version of Wikipedia, whether acknowledged or not.

Part of the attraction of Wikipedia is the central role played by volunteers, people offering their time to act as knowledge creators, producers and consumers. In this Web 2.0 platform, knowledge consumers become knowledge producers, enticed into action not by short-term individualism, market driven incentives or the capacity to control or directly benefit from knowledge. Rather, those Wikipedians who daily post, edit and comment on the platform (over 286,000 active agents in 2016), engage in their work as a form of civics, drawn into a cycle of obligation and benefit, into a rich and international social network of give-and-take.

Drawing as this does upon a global form of a 'gift economy' (Mauss, 2002), it reminded us of old practices associated with the *Noongar* knowledge economy. In contrast to modernist knowledge exchange, Noongar knowledge systems have long been grounded in a gift economy with people dependent on one another, producing conditions that see people obligated to reciprocating knowledge they have learned from others. In traditional Noongar life the knowledge exchange moves in complex directions, from one generation to another with no immediate assurance of anything in return (Hyde, 2007: 11).

These knowledge systems are reliant on the expression of care for children and young people. This work across the generations makes it possible for children and young people to be 'held' by their seniors. McCoy discusses similar processes in his book based on fieldwork in the Western Desert region, describing the importance of the *Kukatja* idea of *Kanyirninpa* (McCoy, 2008: 22). *Kanyirninpa* is made manifest in a number of interconnected ways. It includes nurturing young people and knowledge. It

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[17] Figures and Table at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_Wikipedias (December 2016). Populations at: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_countries_by_population_(United_Nations).

also involves older people taking responsibility for the knowledge and offering 'protection' for those they hold. This is expressed in relationships that involve forms of knowledge exchange, teaching and learning, where older people help young people 'grow up the right way'.

This business of 'holding' young people in knowledge, language and story creates social bonds and social obligations to reciprocate. In response, when they get older, young people are obliged to adopt the same practice and attitude towards their children. As Fred Myers says, this is because this style of passing on knowledge is 'rooted less in command than in responsibility, the relationship of "holding" not only defines the juniors, but it is the very basis of the status of seniors' (1991: 213).

In this way, Noongar knowledge exchange draws people into a mutual dependence upon those involved in the exchange, a formal give-and-take that forces people actively to participate in sharing, depending on one other and on the practices associated with knowledge. This way also forces us to respond to those around us with whom we become bound. The gift brings with it both a built-in check and creates the seeds of the practice of kindness.

Wariny nidja – Making this thing

The project set out to achieve a range of objectives, some practical, some civic. The recruitment of language-speakers to volunteer as editors, to create content, or simply to use the resulting pages, meant that the project involves producing knowledge archives as well as a community of what we call *'knowledge agents'*. In this way, we sought to draw upon ancient Noongar systems of knowledge production, by combining in one action both *recording* knowledge and *building* the capacity of knowledge brokers themselves. The project sought to mobilise young and old, Noongar and non-Noongar, urban and rural or remote, to stimulate broad participation in an ongoing community enterprise that is designed to uplift and extend the cultural status of one of Australia's biggest Aboriginal 'nations'.

From its inception, the project was confronted with the challenge of how to make the work sustainable. Project funds and scope only allow resources to be spread over only three years. This is not necessarily a problem for conventional research projects. However, given our dual goals of (i) undertaking research and (ii) building long-term and intergenerational knowledge transmission, it is desirable that the work continue beyond the life of the research project. One of the attractive qualities of Wikipedia is that it creates the conditions for ongoing participation, fuelled as it is by voluntary and civic involvement.

It was therefore important to adopt an approach that combines the act of research with development of a sustainable future for the project and people and, hence, also for Noongar knowledge. There is strong precedent in this regard, within ethnographic

action research,[18] participatory research, creative industries research (practice-as-research), community development, Indigenous studies, grounded theory and applied social research.

We hoped to achieve some theoretical goals too. How to contribute to new understandings of *cultural evolution* based on *uncertainty*, taking diversity and difference among incommensurable (mutually untranslatable) knowledge systems (e.g. English and Noongar) as a *source of innovation*, rather than holding on to a preferred cultural heritage that's stuck in the past, or a purist notion of either language? How does an ancient language, with its burden of traditional knowledge and know-how, adapt to the urban, electronically-equipped pop-culture that many young Noongar actually live in; and how does that modern, global, mediated culture adapt to – and 'hold' – the languages that has been treated so carelessly to date?

Another issue is how to develop a new concept and model of *'knowledge networks'* based on user-created systems? Wikipedia has an in-built tendency to *separate* languages from one another. An all-Noongar version is imaginable (as *nys.wikipedia*) but would be used by very few agents (at least until we grow the pool of active users!), while a hybrid version made up from Noongar, English and 'Australian English', which contains quite a few Noongarisms, would be more useful to the larger 'knowledge network' but is much harder to deploy on Wikipedia. Thus a real 'knowledge network' is scattered and disorganised on Wikipedia. English-language entries that use Noongar knowledge are randomly distributed across a global platform with 5 million articles across 41 million pages, making the category of Noongar knowledge highly fugitive for even motivated users. Meanwhile, Noongar itself is 'archived' as much in speech and story as in libraries and documents, as much in English as in the Noongar tongue (which many Noongar don't use), because Noongar words and meanings may be carried in an English-language idiom (as in this Report; or in stories families share), posing a further challenge to Wikipedia protocols. The often-encountered '*[citation needed]*' insert can't easily be sorted by sticking, on the one hand, to traditional official sources, or by saying, on the other hand, 'because my dad or Auntie says so!' These are problems that Noongar knowledge poses for Wikipedia, if that enterprise is to remain open to all languages and knowledge systems.

Initially the project team set out to move through a number of stages, combining background research with the development of a 'pedia site, initially recruiting several Noongar young people as Wikimedians (Wikimedia Editors) and testing out the functionality of various site designs. Considerable time was spent on research: to determine:

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[18] See for instance Jo Tacchi's work with UNESCO and others to produce a Handbook for Ethnographic Action Research: http://ear.findingavoice.org/; and http://portal.unesco.org/ci/en/files/13276/10672478597Ethnographic_Action_Research.pdf/Ethnographic%2BAction%2BResearch.pdf.

- To determine what knowledge resources and information exists about Noongar in the digital domain.
- To identify key stakeholders and develop relationships with Wikimedia Foundation.
- To identify key stakeholders and develop relationships with Noongar 'knowledge agents'.
- To understand, and train in the confident use of the Wikimedia and Wikipedia formats.
- To develop Wikimedians to create entries and to train others to deliver Noongarpedia workshops ('Wikibombs') throughout the south-west region of Western Australia.

Next came the development of a Noongarpedia site. The plan was to work with Noongar community members, Aboriginal and Islander education officers, Noongar language teachers and the Wikimedia organisation to develop a 'Noongarpedia site'.

Our initial aspiration was to have this site in only Noongar language (nys/Wikipedia), including not only its content but also its format, instructions and tabs (as the Māori site mi.wikipedia tries to do).[19] However, given the current state of Noongar language regeneration and the small numbers of speakers capable of communicating in full sentences it was decided that a bilingual page would be more inviting and less exclusive, encouraging a range of editors to contribute content.

This was followed by active promotion of the use of the site to a range of groups in a number of ways. These included:

- School incursions (Hilton Primary School, Mullaloo Primary School, Lockyer Primary School, St Hilda's School camp in Dwellingup, Seton College).
- Wikibombs held at and supported by the State Library of WA.
- Site visits on country and with organisations (Green Army Albany, NRM, UWA Camp Albany, On Country tour with Lindsay Dean (traditional owner of the Minang people).
- Tertiary student projects (Murdoch University and the University of Western Australia).

The plan here was openly to promote the site to a range of people of different ages, with multiple interests, operating in different contexts. Partly this was to test out where and with whom Noongarpedia might work best. The plan was also to encourage the site's growth and to maximise the take-up of interest. The desire was to be responsive to the interests of people and organisations, offering time and workshops where they were requested, in order to stimulate a growing 'knowledge

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[19] https://mi.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hau_K%C4%81inga.

network' of distributed 'knowledge agents' willing to volunteer time and energy as well as 'content'.

During this stage of the project it was also important to market the project through social media and news stories, to spread the word of the work being conducted. We found the news media in the press, radio and TV were all very interested in and sympathetic to the project. Some journalists and networks went the extra mile to get the story right. We gained informative coverage in *The Guardian, The West Australian*, ABC Today, ABC Regional Radio and the ABC *Awaye* show among others.

Of course, our ultimate aim involved coming to an answer to the central research question of the original project: Why is there no Noongar Wikipedia? – and what would be the benefits of and challenges to such a thing being developed and utilised.

Initially the team set out to collate and populate knowledge on the 'pedia by focussing on specific 'knowledge domains'. We chose six of these (broadly conceived) both to give ourselves reasonable scope without overwhelming the project and to reflect specific interests of the Chief Investigators who would be responsible for each domain. Thus, we settled on:

- **Country** – places, landscapes, flora, fauna; tribal groups and trading patterns;
- **Narrative** – stories from everyday life, including suburban domestic, urban industrial and regional traditions; literature and other art-forms;
- **Music** – including lyrics, traditional and modern;
- **Popular culture** – broadly defined, including 'Gen Next' and emergent knowledge;
- **Citizenship** – public knowledge and exchange, from 'welcome to country' to international first peoples' forums.[20]

The project sought to categorise **Noongar knowledge networks** across three categories:

- Knowledge *domains* (as above, i.e. country, story, music, pop culture, citizenship);
- Knowledge *sources* (written archives held by government or organisations; and oral sources held by families);
- Knowledge *agents* (people from the Noongar language community, e.g. in schools and associations).

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[20] Originally the project was designed for five CIs: Len Collard (country), Kim Scott (story), Clint Bracknell (music), Niall Lucy (popular culture) and John Hartley (citizenship). But Clint Bracknell's position was not funded, and Niall Lucy died before the project was fully under way. Thus, in the event, we have not expanded each of these 'knowledge domains' systematically.

We still think this is a useful typology, although each category can vary. For instance, although we listed five 'knowledge domains', which were intended to cover both traditional knowledge (country, story) and contemporary knowledge (music, pop culture, citizenship), we could just as easily have divided the domains up differently, into 'science', 'belief', 'sport', etc., or into Noongar-friendly categories, such as:

- **Noongar** (the people and language)
- **Moort** (family or group)
- **Boodjar** (country)
- **Katitjin** (knowledge)

The main thing was to devise a plan that recognised the importance of social *agents* and discoverable *sources* as well as content-heavy categories (*domains*). In practice, it has proven most important to develop knowledge *agents* as the key to the other two categories.

Balang koorliny wam – Going along with others

This project is a story about 'balang koorliny wam', of different groups (us and strangers) going along together.

During the first year an important relationship began to emerge between the team and key people from Wikimedia Australia. This has proven to be of enormous consequence, with representatives from the WA chapter – led by Wikimedia Australia President Gideon Digby (whose Wikipedia handle is Gnangarra)[21] – offering a critical supportive network, practical expertise on how to reconfigure plans, and innovative ways to confront challenges associated with the Wikipedia platform. Indeed, key people from Wikimedia have provided enormous support, including providing personnel to be present at Wikibombs, to train team members and young people in the use of Wikipedia, to co-teach the use of Noongarpedia to tertiary students, and to co-present at conferences and co-author some of the research reports.

This was of crucial help to the project as it confronted the tensions and challenges associated with trying to use new and emerging technologies to support a language and knowledge system that is as ancient as any in the world. The tensions were considerable and at times included how to deal with sensitivities that emerge when the language and knowledge held in families have been stripped from them over a period

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[21] Gideon Digby is a photographer from Perth and has been editing since 2005. He created the Quality image process on Commons in 2006 to recognise and improve the work of photographers providing images to Wikimedia projects. Additionally, Gideon has been running editing workshops in Western Australia since 2010, and been leading the development of WikiTown projects like Freopedia. Email: gnangarra@wikimedia.org.au (https://wikimedia.org.au/wiki/Committee), December 2016.

of generations. Wikimedia's ongoing and patient involvement with the project has helped the team to navigate our way through various protocols that should be considered as part of the Noongarpedia. During the first year, when our Wikmedia moort (family) sat with us during inteminable internal discussions and consultation with those using the Noongarpedia site, this was of particular importance.

Also vital was the relationship that emerged with the Storylines team at the State Library of Western Australia. Storylines is an online archive for the State Library's Aboriginal digitised heritage collection. It has assisted the library in the digital return of photos and other resources to Aboriginal families and communities. Storylines became a critical 'knowledge source' for those posting onto the Noongarpedia site, assisting people to carry out online research and providing content that has often been used as referencing material and links in people's posts. Additionally, Storylines facilitated the use of rooms at the State Library for monthly Wikibombs, providing training for those in attendance in accessing and using the Storyline archive.

Similarly, the South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council (SWALSC) offered important support. As the principal Native Title Representative Body and cultural organisation for Noongar, SWALSC provided access to their website and data base, carrying out an annotation of key sources and proving a key link to Noongar families and community groups.

Noongarpedia moort: who are the team

The Noongarpedia moort (family/team) has been led by three chief investigators and two research associates. A number of others have been involved in various roles.

Len Collard is an Australian Research Council, Chief Investigator with the School of Indigenous Studies at the University of Western Australia. Len has a background in literature and communications and research interests are in area of Aboriginal Studies, including Noongar interpretive histories and Noongar theoretical and practical research models. Len has conducted research funded by the Australian Research Council, the National Trust of Western Australia, the Western Australian Catholic Schools and the Swan River Trust and many other organisations. Professor Collard's research has allowed the broadening of the understanding of the many unique characteristics of Australia's Aboriginal people and has contributed enormously to improving the appreciation of Aboriginal culture and heritage of the Southwest of Australia. Len is also a Whadjuk Noongar elder and a respected Traditional Owner of the Perth Metropolitan area and surrounding lands, rivers, swamps ocean and its culture.

Kim Scott is a writer and Professor of Writing in the School of Media, Culture and Creative Arts of Curtin University. He is a member of The Centre for Culture and Technology (CCAT), leading its Indigenous Culture and Digital Technologies

research program. Scott's reputation as an Australian author of national and international prominence is a matter of public record. His interest and expertise in Noongar storytelling practices have resulted in his leadership of many community-based projects focused on the recovery and dissemination of Noongar narratives and narratology (e.g. www.wirlomin.com.au).

John Hartley is a leading international figure in media studies, cultural studies and creative industries (including new media), with a strong track record in large project management. His involvement stems from prior work on Indigenous media. This research enables an updated account of his earlier work on the Indigenous Public Sphere. Hartley played a key role in conceptualising the theoretical dimensions of this project, and in securing and conducting international collaborations with the global Wikipedia community.

Jennie Buchanan and Ingrid Cumming have since been employed to facilitate project management and research.

Jennie Buchanan is a non-Aboriginal yorga (woman) who grew up in and around Fremantle. She has many years of experience teaching in universities, including course in Australian Indigenous Studies, Sociology, Community Development and Youth Work. She has worked with a range of community-controlled organisations and has been a research associate on many projects concerned with the lives, languages and knowledge of Noongar.

Ingrid Cumming is Whadjuk Noongar yorga who grew up in and around Fremantle. She has moort (family) affiliations out through Brookton and the Eastern Wheatbelt and is a mother of two beautiful koorlungka (children). She has worked as an academic, teaching in a number of Aboriginal Education programmes and has learnt to speak Noongar from a young age. Ingrid has worked in many areas including national and local indigenous media (including film, radio and print), consultancy, marketing and communications, state health, the arts, anthropological research, training and education. She is a graduate of a Bachelor of Arts majoring in Australian Indigenous Studies at Murdoch University, and also from the Management and Academic Leadership Program.

Dave Palmer is an academic in Community Development in the School of Arts at Murdoch University. He has long been involved in work that assists in reviewing community-based projects with Indigenous groups in the Kimberley, Pilbara and Southwest of WA. He has assisted with the analysis and writing of the project.

Previous team members of the team included Clint Bracknell and Niall Lucy.
In the early stages of the project Clint took up an appointment at Sydney University.
Clint is a contemporary musician and ethnomusicologist and coordinates the Bachelor

of Music Studies (Contemporary Music Practice) at Sydney University. He has written about links between Aboriginal Australian song and languages, emerging technologies and Indigenous creative futures.

The late Niall Lucy brought his internationally recognised expertise in postmodern studies, with a focus on communication theory and contemporary culture to the projects. His ongoing legacy to the project will be his contribution to the development and elaboration of the project's theoretical frame along with his prior research on Australian contemporary and colonial issues and Indigenous issues.

Conclusion

What follows is a series of chapters that describe various elements of the Noongapedia Project. This work is not without its challenges. It seeks to make public knowledge and language that has a tender history over the past two hundred years. Many have been stripped of their access to Noongar. Much has been lost and many have had to endure the pain of this loss. Some Noongar knowledge lies 'sleeping', sitting in quiet places or gently covered over (Zukermann and Walsh, 2011).

However, despite the many attacks on its integrity, Noongar knowledge has remained tough. Predictions and claims that it would die-out have proven inaccurate. Today, Noongar, including many children who are learning to speak in the language of their great-grandparents, bear witness to the continuing vibrancy of Noongar knowledge.

The Noongarpedia project is trying to develop a platform to support the many attempts to rebuild the health of Noongar knowledge and language. It does this in a way that attempts to give 'everyone' (Noongar and non-Noongar) the opportunity to engage with Noongar people, culture and language, while respecting that some information is not for public exposure.

Yoowalkoorl noonook barongoolat dwankiny unna[22]

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[22] Come here, you bring ears heh!

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