I

HOMELANDS

skin

My grandmother's skin was concealed when she was a small child. I am of my grandmother's skin. Her skin leads to my mother's skin, and my mother's skin to mine. My skin is olive and supple. Cuts do not heal quickly but dissolve slowly into raised scars devoid of pigment. The scars last. They show. But this is not the skin I am talking of. I was reunited with my skin when I returned to my grandmother's country, Miriwoong country. *Jalyirri* is my skin. It is how I am placed. It is my skin of reunion. My grandmother was placed by her skin, *Nangarri*, and then taken away to a place where her skin meant nothing more than colour.

A dissecting black border was ruled north–south through the Kimberley, slicing my grandmother's country in two. It cut its way along Empire-red maps dividing the northern frontier into federated Western Australia and the Northern Territory. White people had been in my grandmother's country less than twenty years when she was born. The Europeans saw these countries simply—pastured or rocky, fertile or infertile, inhabited, but from where they stood, under utilised. They saw only two seasons in the East Kimberley, Wet and Dry. The Dry is seen as hot and dusty. The Wet is even hotter, but the heat is broken by the rains. The Miriwoong identify four seasons: Rain, Cold, Windy and Hot. Come the Rain season the country sings into life in rich greens, reds and purples. There is plenty of food and it is Law-time; time to catch up with the mob and rejuvenate the land. The ground is always damp, and can become one vast glass-like flood plain when the afternoon rains thunder down.

Tracks are harder to follow come Rain time. In the Windy season it is cooler and there is no rain. Life swells around the larger water supplies where there's food and business. Tracks last a long time in the dry red earth and the nights are clear and fresh. But the ruling *guddia* saw the world only as wet or dry, black or white. Within a world of 'Empire' they marvelled at their clinical brilliance. They had reduced the world into discrete, simple particles of matter. But it is not so simple. My grandmother's skin had held the story of over two thousand generations of her people's life in their country and then the generations of others. She was born of the crossing of this vertical black line. It cut through her country and into her life.

My grandmother was broken down into 'authentic' parts, half white, half black, but never seen as wholly human. She was the product of the Colonial Frontier to be mapped, traced, labelled and categorised. They called her a 'half-caste'. They thought they had her pegged. But then they didn't know what to do with someone who didn't fit within their neat lines of demarcation so they decided to remove her from their picture. When they took her away they thought they were solving a problem. They thought they were setting the picture straight, clean of their own sins, free of imperfections. They did not see the hole they were tearing. They did not see they were taking someone's daughter, someone's grand-daughter, someone's sister, and someone's future mother. They studied my grandmother, but they did not see her and they did not see the chain of events they were setting in place. They did not think she would remember what had happened to her, or that others would share in this story. They did not think we would one day be leafing through the personal files they created about our grandmother, watching back, as her life was tracked and controlled across those pages for almost half a century. Cuts leave scars. Scars leave tracks. Tracks can be followed.

Lake Argyle stretches the walls of what was once the giant Ord River valley. Tourist brochures boast that it is the largest man-made lake in Australia, containing nine Sydney Harbours nestled neatly within paperbark-covered hills. It is classified as an inland sea, an unnatural version of the ancient sea that 'explorers' had coveted and mythologised as they searched in vain through an imagined landscape. In reality it is neither a lake nor a sea. A concrete and rock dam wall wedged in a gorge on the Ord River tenuously holds back this enormous body of water.

There is a small tourist village on Lake Argyle. Tourists bring their boats to the lake to fish, ski and sunbathe out on its vast blue surface. You can almost be guaranteed a good catch of freshwater fish on Lake Argyle and, if you're lucky, a rare barramundi that has escaped from the managed fish farm. It is a water playground for southerners escaping cold wet winters, and overseas visitors chasing an illusion of outback Australian life.

But submerged beneath the water's skin, the land remains. This is still my grandmother's country. Hundreds of feet below the surface where the light does not penetrate, the contours of the land, now liquid and dark, hold the story of my grandmother and our ancestors. Not far from an island that was once the tip of a mountain lie the remains of Argyle Station. The old station homestead has been shifted, brick by brick, and rebuilt above the waterline as a heritage site and tourist attraction. It is an instant, transplanted history commemorating the role of the cattlemen in developing the East Kimberley frontier. But this clean, well-tended site is not the house that my grandmother knew.

Before the flooding of the valley, a few bodies were selected for exhumation from the original homestead cemetery, part of the heritage re-creation to celebrate white tenacity in 'overcoming the odds'. But this handful of graves does not speak for the hundreds of blackfellas who died in these lands, whose remains are still held within the now drowned lands of the Miriwoong. Aboriginal accounts of resistance and conflict, of sites of renewal and law, and thousands of years of ancestral story, were left outside the homestead re-creation. These stories had always been left outside, away from sight, and beyond the comfort of the boundary fence in the minds of the whites who came to these lands.

Today, beneath the massive lake's surface the land lies transfixed, cold and silent. Like the hull of a giant sunken ocean liner, my grandmother's country lies trapped in time, holding the memories of thousands of lifetimes, and a moment of disaster when the waters flooded in. If you turn south at the ruins of the old homestead though, and search along the silty floor, you will pick up a trail. These are my grandmother's tracks leading silently out of her country. Although it is dark beneath the silent waters and the tracks are very old, look carefully and you will see them leading all the way back to a place called Wild Dog.

'Ballay Jalyirri, look out for that turn-off now. He be that-a-way a little bit somethere — turn!' Nangala shouts excitedly. I hit the brakes but the

Valiant just keeps on going, drifting past the Yardungle turn-off, weighed down by a car load of relatives all tooled up with handlines and donkey meat. I reverse back to the turn-off to howls of laughter at my terrible driving. It's hard to get my old station wagon, full of ten people, to stop on the gravel siding. We're going fishing. It is the build-up, coming into Rain time. We are passing down the road that was once the bush track that led my grandmother out of her country.

My partner Lauren is squeezed in the front seat between Nangala and myself, scrabbling with the bag of food to hand around for the journey out of Kununurra. She is listening and nodding good-naturedly as all the women tell her it's time she had some babies now. We have passed, some way back, the re-created Durack homestead where the tourists go. In the back seat Nangala is arguing with Namidge about the best place to stop to catch bait in one of the many side creeks before we head off to the Ord River for some real fishing.

Nangala and Namidge are too old now. They have earned their cataracts well and truly, but Nangala is boasting: 'Even I could drive this mutta-car better than you Jalyirri. I could drive a truck if I put my mind to it, true I could. I'm going to too. I'm going to get a license and drive a big bus and take everyone longa meeting in it, not a small mutta-car like this one. Anyone could drive a little mutta-car like this.'

When we have caught enough bait and piled into the car again, Nangala points me south and we head off to the dam wall. Here the waters of the Ord are stopped dead in their tracks. It is the beginning of the lake that we pass as we round the ridge, drive over the wall and come to the headwaters of what is left of the old river system.

All the way along the country, Nangala is singing, singing, singing. She is singing for the places that we pass, for the big hills and the little trees. She is singing the stories of places and people that overflow through her country, and the other women, Namidge, Nangarri, Nannagoo and Nambijin are singing with her, softly picking up where she leads them. When Nangala stops she will yell out the stories to us because Lauren and I can't speak language. She has to explain to that guddia girl and that 'yella-fella' boy who talks like a guddia what she has been singing about.

At the dam wall freshwater crocs swim against the thrashing waters as they make their way almost imperceptibly against the current, while all the handlines go in and we sit and wait for a bite. Nangala has made her way to her spot, carrying her frail skinny self on her cane, climbing over rocks to find the right position. Crippled from a fall from a tree as a child, Nangala moves awkwardly but swiftly. Her feet, too brittle to be covered by shoe leather, are enclosed in padded layers of bright white socks that stand out against the red soil and granite rock. She will get me to throw her line in for her — but it is never good enough. 'Jalyirri, he even throws like a guddia,' and I'm in for another round of laughs and shaking heads covered in bright scarves.

When I first returned to my grandmother's country, Nangala sat with me in the park in Kununurra and we swapped our stories and talked all afternoon before she decided that my place and my grandmother's place should be settled properly at Yardungle Springs. This is where most of the Elders were then — those who were not at Moongum, or the Reserve, or at Emu Springs, or just beginning the moves to the out-stations.

At Yardungle we sat and listened carefully as Nangala called out my granny's story. All the old men and women talked about it and thought about it, and the boss of Warringarri, who had given me a lift out, translated for me. English, my first language, is only a fourth or fifth language here. My grandmother was placed and it was decided. My skin was placed. Here in Miriwoong country, I am Jalyirri.

Nangala welcomed me back to the country, exhausted but happy. She had stated my case and helped sift through the many stories of children taken away from these lands in order to work out my place. It had been settled. Nangala is my mother, and my own mother, Betty, still thousands of miles south, is also Nangala. Our skins have been reclaimed. My grandmother's skin was Nangarri before she was stolen from her people and placed in a mission thousands of miles south. Our point of reunion is there, back beneath the waters of the lake that was once a river valley, from where my grandmother was taken as a child.

On that same day old Namidge, one of my aunties, sat me down and started teaching me language, making me touch my nose, my ears, my mouth, my hands, my eyes, and calling out the words as if I was just a little kid. Then there were rules to learn. Lauren was given the name of my straight, my rightful, marriage skin, Namirra. With inclusion comes responsibility, and Lauren has to know who she can sit with and who she can't, as do I. We get it all wrong to start off, sit with the wrong people, name people we're not supposed to, but that's okay, because it is a return, and Jalyirri is a southern city fella.

I might be a Nor'wester, but I have grown up in Sou'west country, Noongar country, the country my grandmother was taken to, and so I'm cut some slack.

I call myself a *marda-marda*. It is a Yindjibarndi term that strictly speaking means 'blood-blood'. It is a term that Nor'westers of mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal descent use to describe ourselves. In the south, where northern Aboriginal people such as my grandmother were taken and placed in institutions, terms such as marda-marda were used instead of derogatory words such as 'half-caste' and 'quarter-caste'. Thrown together and forced to learn English, a new language developed, mixing Kimberley Mulba and Yamatji lingo with that of a community of people, mostly women removed from their country, existing in Noongar country.

This place, my skin, has become my starting point, a place from which I am linked and claimed. Being my grandmother's beginning point also, there's an important symmetry, a reconnection to her belonging within country that was disrupted with her removal.

When the fishing was done and we were driving back to Kununurra with our catfish, Nangala pointed south over the lake we were ridging. 'That way Jalyirri, where that road used to slip in that big water there. That's the way, long-way south to that Wild Dog country, true, where they pinched your granny.' It's getting late, and we have to get back to town, and Moongum, and the Reserve, as I drop everyone off black-taxi style. The road is leading us away from Wild Dog, but in the rear-view mirror I can see that lake, that barrier that stands between my present and my grandmother's past. The physical track back to Wild Dog is hidden by the waters of the lake, but there are other ways to go back, guddia ways that I will use to lift my grandmother's story from between the lined pages that were created to document her separation.

Friday 29 June 1906. Wild Dog Police Station. Before they took her away my grandmother's name was Gypsy. She had been taken off a cattle station called Argyle. My grandmother's older half-brother's name was Toby. He had been brought into Wild Dog from the Ord River Cattle Station, which was further south. They waited together. Gypsy was recorded as being five years of age and Toby as being six. They could have been older. They could have been younger. Over the years their ages would fluctuate across the pages of the files that were created about them as figures of authority took wild guesses about their beginnings. For certain, they were too young to be away from their families. They were two small children being held over by the Kimberley police pending their removal. It was all matter-of-factly noted in the Police and Aborigines Department files. The lean sentences, tidy phrases and abbreviated words of bureaucracy were used to begin their story. A simplistic system was in place to decide their future. Although the sentences might be spare, reading these records is like deciphering a code. To be chained and dragged a hundred miles was described as being 'escorted'. To live in a camp with your family was deemed to be 'neglected'. To have fairer coloured skin than your mother meant 'suitable for removal'.

Wild Dog Police Station had a bad reputation. It was as rough and as isolated as it got in the East Kimberley. Smack up against the Northern Territory border; two mounted policemen, four black trackers, young black women, a few old men, a few old women and lots of 'orphaned 'half-caste' children'. Depending on the sort of copper you were, the Wild Dog run was easy money, or a guilty conscience. It was located about forty-three miles south of Argyle Cattle Station near Flying Fox Creek. The police set it up in 1897 as a supposed outpost of white law in the midst of the Killing Times, when open acts of murder and retribution by white authorities against traditional owners of the country were commonplace. In reality, Wild Dog Police Station wasn't there to protect Aboriginal people from being killed by whites, or to protect Aboriginal women from being kidnapped and run as drovers' boys or 'kombos' by itinerant bagmen and stock workers. Wild Dog was set up purely to stop 'the blacks' from killing cattle.

As I leaf through the documents of the archives, I can see the police station in my mind. Rusty corrugated iron flapping loosely in the hot dry wind. Old tins and powdery remains of cold camp fires blow about the station when the morning winds begin. Wild Dog Creek passed nearby; a bed of cracked mud, an invisible promise of water. Way over, up Flying Fox Creek, there was a mob of old people who lived off the scraps of Wild Dog police. Drovers came through here and took young Aboriginal women when they wanted to. Sometimes they brought them back on their way through. Sometimes the women just disappeared.

There was a group of Aboriginal prisoners at Wild Dog waiting with my grandmother and her brother — nine men and two women, chained at the neck. They had been arrested a week earlier at Bow River Station on charges of cattle killing. They were tied to the tree that grew not far from the bough shed, where the trackers lived with a large number of local women. Next to the bough shed was the wreck of a house where the police had their digs. Government-issue blankets shielded the station from the sun. Red, white and blue stripes with the King's crown stamped in the centre. They were supposed to be handed out to old and infirm Aboriginal people on relief at the station depot. But the old folks went without at Wild Dog.

It was the Big Dry of 1906. It had been the driest year in a long time. Water was scarce throughout the Kimberley. There was little traditional game that season due to the drought, so there had been an increase in the number of cattle killed for food by Aboriginal families trying to survive on their county. But the police blamed this increase in cattle killing on the newly arrived Resident Magistrate, James Maloney. Maloney had only been in the district six months and had already got the police and squatters offside. The previous Resident Magistrate, Dodwell Brown, wasn't shy to lock up Aboriginal 'cattle killers' for anything up to two or three years in Wyndham gaol. It didn't matter that the arresting officer was often also the prosecutor. It didn't matter that defendants had no one to defend them, or that the trackers, who were often used as interpreters, might not even speak the same language or, at least, had a vested interest in not crossing the police.

James Maloney made it clear to the police and the squatters that he wasn't going to put cattle killers away without direct proof, which meant cattle station owners coming in to give evidence, something they were loathe to do. The Resident Magistrate called the shots in a place like the East Kimberley. With Maloney on the bench the best the police could hope for was to get prisoners on three- to six-month sentences for the lesser charge of 'possession of beef'. The police didn't need proof for possession, just a few captured Aboriginal women dragged in as coerced witnesses. While in gaol Aboriginal prisoners did hard labour. Effectively, each escort could provide anywhere up to three years' free labour to the guddia.

After serving their time, prisoners would be released back into the country, but with traditional game being driven away by cattle, they would have to again kill cattle to survive. It was a vicious cycle that some police used to their advantage. The police might have complained about the lower sentences, but their arrest rates went through the roof, and along with higher arrest rates came higher ration rates for escorting prisoners to trial in Wyndham. Police received ration money of two and sixpence per day per prisoner. With an average escort of twelve prisoners over ten days, a policeman could earn an extra fifteen pounds each trip. Some policemen lied about the distances they travelled, spent extra days padding out an escort, and made good money out of reimbursement for rations that they rarely provided.

In 1906 the East Kimberley cattle stations carried vast herds, numbering in the thousands. That year the cattle industry shifted over nineteen thousand cows and twenty-two thousand sheep through the port of Wyndham alone. Mostly it was Aboriginal labourers who worked the cows for squatters in return for rations.

Cattle killing was not a threat to this market. Out of fifty-eight reported cases of cattle killing in police files for the East Kimberley in 1906, one hundred and seventy-nine Aboriginal men were brought to trial, of which one hundred and fifty-nine were 'summarily convicted' of the charge. There were a further fifty-eight convictions for the lesser charge of 'possession of beef'. Even allowing for ten times the number of reported cases of cattle killing, that would make maybe five hundred cows being killed out of tens of thousands. Cattle killing was the primary police concern in the district. There were eight police stations, twenty-six policemen and over thirty trackers employed to stop cattle spearing. They were funded by four different government departments, covering wages, rations, horses and equipment. That was expensive law enforcement. The economy of the cow ruled the land.

Wild Dog's police business ended at the Northern Territory border, along with its jurisdiction. The border was the guddia's way of containing themselves in a land they considered without edges. Of course, there were other boundaries that the whites were well aware of but chose to ignore. The guddia were well aware there were tribal boundaries of owned country and the police used this knowledge to their advantage. They preferred Aboriginal trackers from around Wave Hill, across the border in the Northern Territory, country far away from the country they would be employed to patrol. That way, if there was a skirmish, the police hoped these trackers from alien country would not try to protect the local Aboriginal population. It was the old method of divide and conquer.

It was an uneasy relationship of mutual benefit for some. The police made sure to keep their trackers in food, clothes and women, and although the trackers didn't have any real power in the system of policing, when a police party was out in remote country and the finding of water was critical, the coppers knew they couldn't survive without them. The trackers knew it too.

The Wild Dog run was an endless cycle of abuse, use, advantage and imprisonment. Trackers came and went as it suited them. When they had to return to their own homelands, or when they had had enough of the police controlling their lives, they headed across the border where the police would generally not follow. Just before my grandmother was taken, there had been some trouble just west of Wild Dog. While the police were off investigating, the trackers who had been left behind decided it was time to head home, back to Wave Hill country. But new trackers were readily acquired to replace the old ones. The revolving door of the border line crossings swung another turn. The Wild Dog trackers watching over my grandmother were new on the job. These were the men, along with the policeman, who were in charge of the run that would take my grandmother away.

We are sitting by the Ord River near Ivanhoe Crossing. The rains are getting closer. You can feel rain building. From the first light of day the hot air saps your strength, even before the sun has made its way over Kelly's Knob. Even while the town and the valley are still in the shadow of night, the grass in the build-up smells dry and sweet. It is cool under the trees with the river spilling past. Nangala has been telling us of the Killing Times, when bags of flour were poisoned and black men shot on the outskirts of stations. Nangala can remember the Killing Times because they had continued into the early years of her childhood. When Nangala was a little kid there was still trouble that was settled guddia way, by the gun, or by Aboriginal business and Law. As the guddia encroached on Miriwoong country, arresting men for cattle killing, chasing people off their traditional lands or stealing Aboriginal women, the delicate balances between country, culture and Law were damaged. It was a period of outright white domination and control, but also of shifting allegiances, of people forced to track food beyond their own country, causing tensions with other traditional owners, and of conditional brokerage and patronage of station bosses. Nangala tells stories about other people much older than herself, who are long gone now, because it is important to keep those stories alive. When Nangala tells killing stories it is as if they happened just yesterday.

My aunty, Namidge, was only a girl herself when the guddia came looking for her and her father. They had resisted going in with the guddia and had avoided the police, keeping in touch with relatives on stations while remaining out of sight. They hid in the ranges of the valley for months, until her father became sick with leprosy and died. After weeks of trying to care for herself, Namidge was found and brought in. She was young enough to be trained as a house girl for Newry Station, where she spent the rest of her working life.

Government enquiries into the removal of children use dates in their calculations of the numbers of Aboriginal kids taken away from their families. The dates coincide with the passing of legislation when this practice was proclaimed legal. However, these official dates are arbitrary and misleading. From the time the guddia first entered this country Aboriginal children were taken. To really understand what happened, and how it impacted on the lives of Aboriginal communities, you have to listen to stories that have been handed down.

I passed around my grandmother's photograph in the park in Kununurra, the one of her soon after she entered the Mission. In the photo she was a chubby little five-year-old. When she smiled her eyes were all squinty in the sunlight. She was short for her age, fair skinned, big hipped and skinny legged. She had a big birthmark on her left thigh, and a head that was too big for her body. She was a funny-looking little kid, and she was a long way from her home. I wasn't sure if it was permitted to show the photograph so widely, but Nangala said enough time had passed for cheeky spirits not to be a worry. The photo was of great interest and all the women had cooed and sighed, and laughed too, at the sight of my grandmother dressed up in mission clothes.

My grandmother and her brother Toby were some of the first children taken from the East Kimberley by government authorities, but not long after them the yearly toll started to rise. Many of the women sitting in the park had experienced the trauma of having their children taken away. Some of them were younger than my mother and had had their children taken from them as recently as the 1970s and 1980s, when they were sent as babies to Princess Margaret Hospital for treatment, and once there were adopted out without the women's consent. I think this is one of the reasons why they were so welcoming; it was not just about my grandmother, but about every child that was taken away. I could come back and be placed because missing children and their stories are not forgotten. One aunty told me she is still waiting for her son to come back. It is the same in the south, where too many older women waited their entire lives without ever being reunited with their children. This is our community history and an unresolved daily reality for many Aboriginal families.

Later that afternoon the women are off to a ceremony about fifty kilometres out of town. I offer to take them in my station wagon, but Nangala tells me politely, 'No Jalyirri, this is properly business now. You can't come with us longa Yardungle this time. You gotta stop in town. We see you tomorrow, ay? Maybe we go fishing at Ivanhoe Crossing.' And with long arms hauling big bodies into the back of a Toyota, everyone is gone in a cloud of red dust.

I am of here. But I was not born here. There are rules to abide by. There are stories the women are happy to share, and then there are other stories that are not on offer to me. It is all part of the legacy of the policy of removal.

Saturday 30 June 1906. Wild Dog Police Station. The beginning of my grandmother's escort. Mounted Police Constable Joseph Hill was in charge. Hill was a policeman of the ilk to wear his copper's uniform, replete with starched cotton underwear, in the middle of a heatwave. He wasn't good at milking the system for rations, but did his fair share of prisoner round-ups.

My grandmother remembered being taken from her mother by the police. How long she had been at Wild Dog Police Station though is unclear. There were many children kept there at different times, along with the old and infirm who were on rations. She could have been there a month. She could have been there a week. The stories that she told my own mother were not concerned with details and dates. She remembered being taken off Argyle Station and the trek out of her country. She remembered crocodiles and waterholes, rivers and dry red earth. She remembered the sound of her mother crying as her child was taken away. She remembered to have respect for people from the same country.

Constable Hill and the new Wild Dog trackers spent all morning on the day my grandmother's escort began getting the provisions and horses ready for the journey into Wyndham. At two o'clock on a clear blue afternoon, Hill roused up his trackers and they hit the road. It hadn't rained in months and the air was bone dry. It was the hottest part of the day. They moved slowly north out of Wild Dog and into country. Wild Dog Police Station was at the extreme edge of my grandmother's country, bordering Malngin country to the south. The people stuck at Wild Dog Station — an excuse for a border junction — were from all over; from Kidja, Djaru and Malngin country.

It was a typical escort party. There were two black trackers, Paddy and Dickey; nine male prisoners chained at the neck; two women witnesses, Walaumbal and Duiack; my grandmother, Gypsy, and her half-brother, Toby. They started out on the track for the port town of Wyndham, twelve days and one hundred and fifty miles to the north-west. The prisoners, witnesses and the two small children were on foot. The policeman and the trackers rode on horses with five fresh ones trailing spare.

At Sugar Springs the group broke for camp at dusk. The children had been on the road only one day, but the prisoners and witnesses had been on the road and chained at the neck for almost a week. A hunchback moon rose late in the north-west sky over the distant ranges. Later that first night, Constable Hill made a note in his journal: 'Further conveying to Wyndham, two orphans one half-caste girl five years of age and one abo native boy 6 years of age on arrival hand above named orphans to Dr. Maloney for transmission South.'

The details had obviously been worked out months before in telegrams exchanged north and south between the police, the Aborigines Department and the Anglican Church missionaries. The files detailing my grandmother's life were already growing. In neat phrases and minimally constructed sentences, public servants in Perth had begun the process of rewriting a version of my grandmother's story. In the documents they made there is no mention of her mother. No permission was needed because legislation had been passed granting full powers of 'guardianship' to a white man in Perth. There was no discussion, no dialogue, nor any questioning of their actions. The voices of the file makers are self-assured in their powerful ignorance. They do not listen, they only ever instruct.

Sunday 1 July 1906. Octayard. The second day into my grandmother's escort. Constable Hill steered the party further north. Breaking camp early they travelled sixteen miles following small ravines, descending deeper into the huge Ord River valley flood plain. They made camp at five o'clock at the Octayard. The Octayard was primarily a place for breaking horses, and races were held there every year. It was a hub of comings and goings between Argyle Station and Rosewood Station across the border to the east.

When escort parties stopped to camp for the night the prisoners remained chained. Female witnesses were chained by the ankles and fastened to a tree close to the camp. The policeman made his camp slightly away from the group and the trackers were left to guard the prisoners. The women were particularly vulnerable to sexual demands by the trackers, and if the copper knew what was going on, it was in his best interest to turn a blind eye. It was part of the reciprocal arrangement between trackers and their bosses. There are damning instances of such practices recorded in government archives, and it wasn't only the trackers who abused women on the long journey to Wyndham. There is recorded evidence attesting that the police were also often as not abusing Aboriginal women.

I wonder how, in the midst of such a camp, my grandmother and Toby fared. Were they too chained with the women witnesses? Were the children taken by the trackers to sleep near their camp? My grandmother had lived on a station and she was used to a certain way of life. Who made sure the children had sufficient food to eat and water to drink? The rationing of food was solely at the policeman's discretion. If a pecking order existed I'm sure the trackers came first and the women and children were a sorry last.

When PC Hill recorded my grandmother as an orphan he was mistaken. When she later told the story of her removal, my grandmother spoke of growing up on Argyle Station. She said M.P. Durack, who was the main boss, was her father. My grandmother never mentioned whether M.P. Durack was around when the policeman came to take her away; was more concerned about the loss of her mother.

Camped at the Octayard, my grandmother was back in her home country. She would have known this land well. She would have travelled over it when she was a baby. She would have been carried over it, heading out into country for months at a time with family when the wet season came and everyone went into country to rejuvenate the land. She was as close to Argyle Station as she would ever be again in her life, only I doubt she had any understanding of that then. For my grandmother, growing up in the East Kimberley, there was nothing else *but* her own country and it must have been an inconceivable thought, to be taken from your country.

Later that night Constable Hill left the escort party in the hands of his trackers and headed into Argyle Station to catch up with the manager, Ambrose Durack. Ambrose was considered a solid stockman, but also a ‘cunning old bugger’ by the Aboriginal stockmen working under him. He had their respect, but they liked to call him ‘old parrot nose’ behind his back.

The East Kimberley police had an uneasy relationship with squatters like the Duracks, which ranged from open hostility to resentful negotiation. The police resented the squatters, who treated them as de facto boundary riders, babysitting cattle in country that they were too busy making money to venture into. The squatters thought they were a cut above the coppers who they wrote off as simple wage earners.

Personal feelings ran high and a few police were shunned and refused food and comfort at stations, although others were welcomed enough to be invited to Christmas dinner. The Duracks had worked out a successful understanding with the Wild Dog police. Of all the runs in the area Argyle Station was the most central, and the most protected. It was dead centre of the richest country of the Ord valley, one million acres of the best-watered prime cattle country in the north. The Wild Dog police run was closest to Argyle Station, and included Lissadell, Carlton, Mentinee and Ivanhoe cattle stations, but these other stations never received the same attention as Argyle.

If you trace it on a map it was Durack country every step of the way into Wyndham. The Durack family leased the biggest and most successful stations in the East Kimberley and they recognised the benefit of controlling other aspects of the industry. Their leases made a quilted pattern over the land for the whole one hundred and fifty miles from the Northern Territory border to the Cambridge Gulf. The smaller station owners complained about the Durack monopoly over shipping and transport, and later their influence in government. If you needed to ship your beef to the south, you had to use Durack-owned transport, and if you wanted to sell a few cows, you had to use a Durack-owned company.

Michael Patrick (M.P.) Durack came from a family of cattlemen. After surveying the East Kimberley in 1885, the Durack boys trekked overland with cattle from their Queensland property to start up Argyle, their first venture in the region. Eventually they ruled over an empire of cattle stations equal to half the total size of their original homeland, Ireland. For a bunch of poor rural white boys originally from County Galway and

Clare, their clan had certainly come up in the world. They were young, rich, self-righteous, and they packed pistols. Nothing was going to stop them making good in the newly opened territory.

The East Kimberley was a good money-making proposition for cattlemen, and by 1906 the Duracks were well established and more than comfortable. Their father, Patsy Durack, had done the same in the west Queensland territories, and it was he who encouraged his sons, nephews and cousins to give it a go in the north-east of Western Australia. This isn't to say they didn't take risks, or put in a hard day's work; they had even buried a good number of their clan in the Kimberley earth by 1906. The Duracks were simply the best at working the system to their profit; they were well connected, and they knew how to court essential government support. With the comfort of political support, and a cheap pool of Aboriginal labour, it was close to a sure proposition. Moreover, the Duracks had worked out how to run the whole show on subsidised rations, without the need to part with their own cash — once again, the 'economy of the cow'.

The labour force that worked Argyle Station was predominantly Aboriginal people. Originally, around the time that my grandmother was born, there was a small nucleus of trusted Aboriginal workers from Queensland, but increasingly workers from the East Kimberley were brought in. The men did the fencing and worked with the cattle, and the women worked up at the house washing, tending the vegetable gardens or feeding the poultry and small livestock. These were the people my grandmother had lived with all her early life.

The Argyle homestead, made of stone and timber, grew out of a high bank on the Behn River. M.P. Durack had personally selected the site. Standing on the shaded front verandah, you could see Mount Misery rising in the distance. At the foot of the mount, a dry grassless plain encircled the perimeter of the station. Heavy Victorian furniture filled the bungalow's rooms, along with a piano for genteel entertainment. But aside from a few trimmings, the homestead was generally quite basic, made for utilitarian living. And it was isolated from distant neighbours.

Around the homestead, chicken-wire fencing attached to rough logs attempted to mark out some form of boundary against the vastness of the surrounding landscape. In windy weather rags and blankets blew from the 'blacks' camp', pinning bedraggled scraps of material to the skeleton wire fencing. A stark windmill pumped hot water into a raised water tank. The stockmen's quarters stood nearby; a smaller, rougher version of the main house. Stone, wood, corrugated iron, red earth, dry grass. The Boss and his family slept up at the homestead. Trusted offsiders sometimes slept on the all-round verandah to protect the white bosses. The main camps were a little way down from the house and occasional camps were further down on the river. Every bit of territory was claimed and marked, from the Boss's bed to the dry earth of the camps. Small borders of rocks marked out red dirt paths from red dirt country, enclosing a manageable space.

When M.P. Durack chose the site for the station he did not know that it stood in the centre of traditional Aboriginal trade routes that ran right through country and into Wyndham. It was an accident in his favour as it guaranteed him labour. Aboriginal people had traded pearl shell, weapons, songs and grinding stones, and shared Law along these routes for centuries, but in the first twenty years of occupation, these practices would be terribly disrupted.

With the aid of trusted black workers the Duracks 'acquired' Aboriginal boys, 'brought in' Aboriginal women and 'coaxed' local Aboriginal people to come 'inside' to serve the new pastoralist order. In return for work and ceasing to kill cattle for food, the Duracks provided rations, clothing and shelter. As more people came 'inside', more 'outside' people were being imprisoned for cattle killing, or were killed in reprisals. In this climate the Duracks' inside world offered more than food and shelter; the Durack's had become brokers of power under the mantle of the gun.

Although coming inside with the Duracks brought its benefits, the bonds of kin and skin were greater than any introduced system. Ceremony and Law continued to be maintained throughout the seasons, especially when the rains came, when insiders and outsiders would gather close to the station for business. There was greater flexibility between groups than the whites liked to admit, and M.P. Durack, hearing the comings and goings at night as he sat in his homestead, was described by his daughter and biographer as disdaining such liaisons.

Living on Argyle Station, my grandmother would have participated in these rhythms of station life, going *pinkeye* each Wet season when everyone headed bush for seasonal hunting and to carry out ceremonies and rituals. As well as participating in the cultural life of her own people, there were occasional entertainments at the homestead. The Duracks were Catholics and they liked to celebrate Christmas in a big way.

The children of the Aboriginal workers were included in some of the festivities and sports organised for the day.

The last Christmas my grandmother spent at Argyle was exceptionally hot: a forewarning of the dry year ahead. It was so hot that the annual races and games held for the Aboriginal kids on the station were postponed and everyone had a lazy day at the homestead. M.P. had gathered together the usual assortment of white workers and managers from his nearby stations, as well as friendly coppers and workers from the Aboriginal camp. The phonograph was dragged out and all the favourite tunes were spun.

In the afternoon M.P. handed out clothes to the station 'boys' (which could mean men as old as fifty). Later that night he sat alone in the hot and still homestead to record the day in his journal. The following day, Boxing Day, they played cricket and, before one of the guests headed back to Wyndham, stopped to take photographs of all the workers and men to mark the passing of another season.

If M.P. Durack acknowledged my grandmother as his daughter, she did not rate any special mention in his records; nor did he appear to oppose her being taken away. Of course, it was common at the time for white fathers to avoid responsibility for their children. Although government archives show a growing population of 'half-caste' children at this time in the East Kimberley, it was rare for white men to come forward and claim responsibility for the care and maintenance of their own children. It was as if they saw the children of their unions with Aboriginal women as not being connected to themselves.

In the short years she lived at Argyle, my grandmother witnessed the coming and going of many travellers and visitors to the station. She saw the Durack brothers as they made the rounds of their empire, and the excitement of anticipated visitors up from Perth. She saw the white drovers passing through on their way to and from Wyndham, and would also have seen the policemen and their trackers leading prisoners on the chain.

On that warm night while my grandmother was camped with Toby and the other prisoners, close to the Argyle Station, M.P. Durack wasn't home. He had left several months after Christmas for a grand world tour. Around the time the group reached Octayard he was on *The Empress of Ireland* sailing from Liverpool to Canada. Writing in his travel diary in his cabin at night, he marvelled at the pure luxury of first-class travel, and recorded his amazement at the sights he had seen.

Monday 2 July 1906. Stoney Bar. Police Constable Hill broke camp from the Octayard early and headed north along the main track into Wyndham. Passing through Stoney Bar, he took his party around the familiar Carr Boyd ranges to the west. The days were long and slow. My grandmother and her brother kept up with the women. Hill made regular notations in his journal each evening. 'Left Camp 7 am and travelled to Stoney Bar and Camped for Night at 6 pm. 15 miles.' He wasn't one to elaborate. Hill had travelled this road dozens of times. He knew the East Kimberley run well, though it wasn't by choice.

Constable Joseph Hill first joined the East Kimberley police in 1899. He was stationed in Wyndham for three years before he managed to win a transfer south to the quiet and relatively safe posting of the Newcastle District, just north-east of the city of Perth. He would have served his time out there if he hadn't gotten greedy for his boss's job. There was an incident where Hill faked a letter defaming his superior officer in an attempt to secure a promotion. The letter was not actually sent, but it was discovered and reported. The District Sergeant took a grim view of Hill's actions. '[Any] Constable who would take this means of injuring a comrade, and degrading the service is not worthy to wear the uniform.'

After an internal investigation Hill was found guilty of writing the letter, but they couldn't prove he was going to send it. Desperate to keep his job he pleaded his case. 'I have always been of good character ever since I have been in the Police Force and I have a wife and child to keep.' The Commissioner considered the charge against Hill a most serious one, 'and instant dismissal would result if the evidence was stronger.' It was only due to lack of evidence that the charges were dismissed. Hill, aware the matter wasn't over, struck a deal. He offered to apply for a transfer and promised that he would 'give no further trouble'. Within three weeks Constable Hill was back on the Wild Dog run; the most remote, isolated and dangerous beat in the East Kimberley.

Wednesday 4 July 1906. Cockatoo Springs. My grandmother had been on the road five days and had covered seventy-four miles barefoot. The moon waxed high above, almost full and steadily drifting west. They had climbed north out of the Ord River valley, through Stoney Bar, over Granite Creek, swung past the Newry Station turn-off to the Northern Territory border, and moved west around the ranges into Cockatoo Springs.

They stopped early, at five o'clock that afternoon, and watered the horses. My grandmother was moving further from home than she'd ever been before. The country was becoming unfamiliar. The children would stay close together. Cockatoo Springs was a common resting point for travellers, stockmen and police escort parties on the Wyndham route. It was an oasis of pandanus palms, shade and fresh water.

Jim Patterson, manager of Ord River Station, also stopped at Cockatoo for the night. He was on his way back to the station from Wyndham. Patterson had once managed Newry Station for the Duracks. Now he was the working partner with the Copley brothers who had purchased Ord River Station from a deceased estate. Patterson did all the sweat work and built the station up. He'd been done out of more than £6,500 in 1903 on a deal that went bad with the Duracks. Hill checked Patterson out. Patterson had no complaints. Having recently been taken off this man's station, young Toby would have known Patterson by sight.

Constable Hill would participate in many more removals of children and Patterson would witness increasing numbers of them being herded along the road into Wyndham for removal to the south.

The removal of my grandmother and her brother, and the removal of hundreds to come after them, came as a direct result of the 1905 Aborigines Act.

Up until the passing of the 1905 Act, the police turned a blind eye to the existence of Aboriginal children by white fathers living in the district. Children were being removed from one district to another, from one station to another, and from stations to ration depots, but the 1905 Act signalled the beginning of decades of carefully planned and institutionalised removals of children to southern missions, thousands of miles from their homelands. My grandmother didn't have any idea of the legislation or why she was being taken to Wyndham, but she would understand the realities of it soon enough.

The new 1905 Act not only gave the Aborigines Department the green light to remove Aboriginal children of mixed descent, but removal was at the core of its intention. Instead of controlling and curtailing the abusers, the Act controlled the abused. Its ratification through state parliament was a defining moment that would set the tone for race relations in Western Australia throughout the rest of the century. Almost one hundred years later the effects of the 1905 Act are still being felt in the

Aboriginal communities of Western Australia, and the intent behind its enactment is still being debated.

The 1905 Aborigines Act legislation resulted in part from the 1904 Roth Royal Commission. Named after Dr W.E. Roth, the former Chief Protector of Aborigines in Queensland who headed it, the Roth Royal Commission was created not only to respond to increasingly alarming reports of abuse of Aboriginal people in the north of Western Australia, but also to address the racist alarm of southern whites who feared the rising population of 'half-caste' Aboriginal people in the south-west of the state. However, the Commission was to focus its investigation on the north, and on the East Kimberley frontier in particular.

The Roth Royal Commission crystallised the already existing differences of opinion between the north and south in regard to the treatment of Aboriginal people. Whites in the south saw the north as being dominated by ruthless squatters whose stations were overrun with 'half-caste' children. Whites in the north saw the south as being peopled by a bunch of urbane city folk who had no idea of the realities of the frontier. In a sense, there were truths in both stereotypes. When Roth's report was released in 1905 these views were inflamed in the resultant controversy. The cries of the pastoralists and pearlers against Roth's scathing assessment of their treatment of Aboriginal people echoed through the press. Official witness evidence given to the Commission was attacked openly in the press and the moral character of witnesses was called into question. Roth himself was attacked by people in the south for not going far enough, and by people in the north for going too far. His methods of collecting evidence, of going into the field and interviewing witnesses, were disputed. He was accused of talking to the wrong people from both sides of the fence.

Witnesses Roth interviewed ranged from clergymen, magistrates and white stockmen to alleged bushrangers, as well as a number of policemen. Few Kimberley pastoralists were included. Everyone giving evidence had an angle. The police painted themselves as white as snow, while expressing grievances against pastoralists. Certain stockmen had a chance to even the score with both the police and the pastoralists, and resident magistrates expressed their dislike for certain police practices. Roth grilled police from the city of Perth, and from all over the North-west. Events in the south of the state hardly rated a mention.

However, of all the allegations of abuse of Aboriginal people levelled at pastoralists, pearlers, missionaries and police, the group most focused upon in Roth's investigation was clearly the Western Australian Police Force. As Roth's evidence mounted he began to smell something particularly bad in the East Kimberley district and decided to close in on it in his questioning. Much of what smelled seemed to come from the direction of Wild Dog Police Station. At the junction of the colonial border separating state and territory, it was a purported gateway to vice and immorality. Immorality was something Roth was particularly keen to uncover and stamp out.

Many records of the paternity of white fathers of Aboriginal children were collected by Roth as he interviewed police and pastoralists eager to inform on each other. In the end though, he decided that it wasn't in the best interests of the state, or of the many well-to-do families involved, to have these details released in the press, and this evidence was expunged from the final report.

The Roth Royal Commission established an integral link between police corruption, frontier abuse of Aboriginal people, the hidden hypocrisy of northern white society, and the increasing population of Aboriginal people of mixed descent. Commissioner Roth repeatedly asked witnesses about the presence of 'half-caste' children like my grandmother, and what they considered would be an appropriate way to deal with them. When asked if sending children to missions for education was a good solution, responses varied from 'Such treatment only ruins them', to 'They should be removed from the black's camps altogether.'

Many white people seemed schizophrenically caught between despising children of mixed race as 'inheriting the worst of both races,' to feeling a responsibility towards the imagined 'white blood' in their veins. There were, of course, examples of successful unions between Aboriginal women and men of other cultures, and there are instances in the archives of men wanting to act in their children's best interests who were undermined by the authorities. However, these cases are in the minority. In the East Kimberley at the turn of the century, Aboriginal women were being traded and abused by a steady stream of men who passed through the district.

If Aboriginal children of white fathers were living in deplorable conditions, and if some, as was reported, were involved in prostitution, it had nothing to do with fanciful notions of inferiority due to the calculated admixture of race. What it had everything to do with was the dominant European attitudes in regard to racial superiority, and a corresponding repugnance to the concept of mixed race.

At the core of the corruption revealed by Roth's Commission was the heightened vulnerability of Aboriginal women and children. Infuriatingly, the resulting legislation, with its aim of widespread removal of children, would do unprecedented damage to a society already under attack.

Friday 6 July 1906. Carlton Reach. Constable Hill, the two trackers, the prisoners, the witnesses, Toby and my grandmother made camp on the banks of the Ord River. A huge Kimberley full moon rose early, while the sun was still in the sky. By nightfall it was casting strong shadows. The sound of the river would be gentle and constant. Moonlight would glint over the surface ripples with the passage of water flowing west to Wyndham and then out into the sea.

They were one week and one hundred and four miles foot-march into an arduous journey. They camped away from the river to avoid the large saltwater crocodiles that inhabited the area and made all the cattle drovers windy with fear. Early the next morning they broke camp, crossing the Ord in the shallows. Pandanus and wild reeds covered the banks, obscuring any sign of crocodile nests. My grandmother told how she watched PC Hill shoot a bullock right by the river bank and then heave it into the water. He wanted a decoy in case any salties turned up looking for a feed. They crossed safely, making their way along the Ord on the west side, up towards Button's Gap. They camped at Sandy Beach before travelling on through Button's Gap, past the Mentinea Yard and out into the flat flood country. They broke away north from the Ord River as it wound its way towards the mangrove flats where it spilled out into the Cambridge Gulf. They passed through Pig Hole, Goose Hill, crossed the tidal flats, the Nine Mile, Six Mile, and finally camped at the Three Mile Well, just outside the township of Wyndham.

The Three Mile Hotel was a popular stop on the road in and out of Wyndham, a rough corrugated iron hotel with hewn-wood posts, rocks holding down roof tins, and plenty of places to tie a horse. In the Royal Commission several resident magistrates had expressed disdain for the Three Mile Hotel and what went on behind it. It was far enough from the main centre of Wyndham to be out of sight, but too close to stay out of mind.

Lines of chained prisoners were a common sight passing by the wayside house. Aboriginal women brought in as witnesses for trials would be released in Wyndham, often left to find their own way back to their country, sometimes hundreds of miles away. Many women in this predicament found themselves forced to camp around the Three Mile, waiting for a safe passage and vulnerable to whoever agreed to escort them home.

The children spent the last night of their escort unaware of what awaited them in the town of Wyndham.

The road to Wyndham is smooth and sticky in the midday heat of the build-up. In the distance huge thunder clouds hang over the landscape like giant floating jellyfish. The purple-blue masses of cloud rupture in places and whisper-like tentacles of rain evaporate in the sky before making it to the ground.

We drive across the mudflats, through the town and up to the hospital. When Nangala heard that my grandmother was taken from Argyle she said I must visit old Banggaiyerri. We walk through the lino corridors of the hospital and find the old man lying in a bed in a ward. He is wearing an old hat with his hospital-issue pyjamas.

Banggaiyerri is getting too old to be at home in his shack. He's busted his hip again and so has to sit in the hospital waiting for it to heal. He doesn't remember how it happened but recalls that for quite a few days his leg stuck out at a funny angle. He is looking forward to getting on his feet again so he can return to Frog Hollow. He was born on Argyle Station and worked as a stockman from the time he was able to lift a rope.

Banggaiyerri thinks he can place the story of my grandmother from a story he was told when he was only a snipe. He says he was born at the beginning of the century. He remembers when Hill was the copper at Wild Dog. He says there was only one 'half-caste' born at Argyle before him, a girl, and then there was a boy born after him. He reckons there weren't any more born on that station until his sister Daffodil was born in 1923. He says a house girl named Dinah was the mother of that first girl. He stops to think it over a bit longer, then he says, 'That one be your granny now. That girl was taken away.'

A nurse bursts into the ward and speaks over us as we are talking. I've brought the old man a bottle of cool drink and some chewing tobacco, and as I go to pull them from my bag he motions for me to wait until later. Our conversation is disrupted with the emptying of bottles and the administering of medication. Banggaiyerri slips a urine bottle under the blanket. He is easy with the medical treatment going on around him and he doesn't rush anything. When he's finished with the bottle he calls the nurse over to take it. While I'm watching all of this going on I'm thinking about how things have changed in Banggaiyerri's lifetime. Not only with the changes to the stations, but how the hospitals in the north used to be racially segregated. If I had lived through those times of tin and hessian-walled sheds and second-rate medical treatment, then I'd have those young nurses running around after me too.

After the nurse has gone Banggaiyerri gets back to business. He tells me that Dinah was a 'properly good-looking one', and she was brought into Argyle for one of the top stockmen, called Boxer. Dinah was described by M.P. Durack's daughter as a 'prize' for Boxer for having helped police track down some cattle spearers in 1900, and as becoming 'One of the much-loved universal mothers of the East Kimberley.' M.P.'s daughter, born fifteen years after my grandmother, described Dinah as childless but it is doubtful she would have known about a child removed well before she was born. Boxer, who was a Marban, did not stay with Dinah. She ended up living with Ulysses, another Durack faithful from the East Kimberley. They lived out their lives on Argyle. Dinah took care of other children after her own daughter was removed. She lived a long life in her own country, but died well before my return.

Banggaiyerri says he remembers Dinah's little girl and that she was a 'yella-fella'. He says she was 'bright coloured', just like himself. When I ask him who her father was he says with no hesitation, 'Old M.P. Durack was the father of that one.' He says Dinah's daughter was sent away all the way down to Fremantle. Then Dinah reared Banggaiyerri up like he was her own. He reckons she did that because she was missing her own kid. I ask him if the Duracks had any other children. He said he heard stories about different ones but he doesn't know for sure. I tell him that my grandmother always believed old M.P. was her father. Banggaiyerri says with a knowing grin, 'my word, he coulda been that kid's pop. That's what they all reckoned.'

Before we leave I ask the old man if I can take a photograph. He pulls himself up onto the pillows and looks directly into the camera. As I'm leaving we shake hands and I ask him to tell me his skin group. He smiles at me wryly and says he is Julima. This means, Miriwoong way, he is my son.

Tuesday 10 July 1906. Wyndham. The town of Wyndham swam at the junction of five big rivers. It was lined by not so much a bay as a muddy tidal delta. It flooded twice a day as a reminder that the moon ruled the oceans, and occasionally the town was washed away in storms that hit every Rain time.

The township was essentially a main street lined by tin houses and stores cobbled together along its length. Moving west from the inland route to the sea, the town of Wyndham was accessible only by crossing the tidal flats. The tiny main street separated the giant muddy delta of the bay to the west and the naked hill that rose up behind it to the east. From the back of the town a wooden jetty stretched out into the bay, forming a T-junction to nowhere — except when the state ships arrived to create a temporary lifeline and escape route. This back section of the town existed as either muddy mangroves or flooded embankments, depending on the time of day and the tide, and was where you could stumble upon saltwater crocodiles slinking in the murky waters like stray dogs.

PC Hill left camp late and arrived in town at around noon. He handed the Bow River prisoners and witnesses over to Corporal Goodridge, then sent the trackers back to the Three Mile to spell the horses and wait for him. Then he took my grandmother and Toby and handed them over to Resident Magistrate James Maloney. They had covered one hundred and forty-eight miles in eleven days. They were to be held at Wyndham until a passage could be arranged on one of the steamships heading south.

Nangala knew all about race relations in Western Australia. She was a young adult when the 1967 Referendum was passed and she became a 'citizen' of her own country — although voting would not become compulsory in the East Kimberley until well into the 1980s. She was there when her community started up a medical service against the wishes of the majority of the state, who preferred Aboriginal people to use mainstream services, even though it was widely understood that we were discouraged from doing so.

She was there when a big mob travelled all the way from Kununurra to Perth to march for Land Rights, when all the government people seemed to shout back 'No!' from every office tower she passed. In Kununurra, Nangala had seen the effect of the introduction of wages on stations in 1968, when most of the people had been dumped in town and the reserve was started up. She had lived in both Type One and Type Two government housing, tiny tin shacks with dirt floors that were hotter inside than out. She had seen the introduction of grog to the community as the Argyle Dam was constructed and large numbers of whites rolled into the crossing and began turning it into a town.

Down at the pub there are still two sections. There is the Saloon, where a strict dress code is used arbitrarily to keep Aboriginal people out. And around the side is what is called the Animal Bar, where the younger blackfellas get served. Inside, the Animal Bar is utilitarian, just a single pool table and locker-room style seating. From the straight line of the bar you can catch a glimpse of the Saloon, more salubriously decorated and air-conditioned against the humid tropical heat. Driving past the pub on a Saturday night, you need to be careful not to hit someone stumbling home.

In the early 1980s a diamond mine was established on a Dreaming site on a tributary of what is now Lake Argyle, but was then the Ord valley of my grandmother's country. It began a development boom in the area that is still resounding through the Kimberley today.

Having gone through a major slump in the latter half of the twentieth century, the northern regions of Western Australia are looking to boom again. While cattle is still one of the most influential industries in the region, the west is being crisscrossed by exploration teams in search of oil, diamonds, water—you name it. There is a sense of impending 'big' developments that echoes the century-old idea of the 'big' wilderness to the north. Aboriginal people have traditionally been marginalised from these developments. From having worked on cattle stations for tea and tobacco, to being rounded up and dumped on reserves once wages were expected to be paid, Aboriginal people still remain outside the main game of development in the East Kimberley.

The Kimberley does have huge potential, and Aboriginal people do want to engage in appropriate development for the future of the next generations, but the current hype smells a little too much like the old sell of developing the 'wilderness'.

It is a mixed message of open land for the taking with a minor back-beat of recognition of Native Title. Amidst the historical facts of exploitation and segregation, the newer visions of the future bump up against the resonance of older ideas. Future visions for these places can only include Aboriginal people if they include Aboriginal visions that reach to the future whilst recognising our ancient past. Amid positive stories of employment schemes, of new Aboriginal tourism developments and agreements with mining companies, the real task—of the real recognition of Aboriginal spiritual and cultural connections with these lands — is yet to be settled. For traditional owners this story is far from resolved. The Elders still speak for this place, sing for this place and dance for this place. Until this is really understood, places like Kununurra can still be described as frontier towns, 'the remote north'; it is how they are sold to the thousands of tourists that swell the region in the Dry. Until real negotiated outcomes result for the traditional owners though, it might as well be considered no different from when Nangala heard all those voices yelling 'No' from the office towers of the city of Perth.

Late one afternoon on my way to pick up Nangala and Namidge, I stopped for a young couple by the side of the road. The woman's foot was swollen and broken, and was causing her a lot of pain. I turned for the hospital, but on the way I almost came to blows with her husband. He didn't want her to go to hospital. We argued. When I stopped the car to sort it out, his wife asked me to leave it; she said it was culture, business, and that her husband was boss. She limped off to the park with him following.

I told Nangala about it when I picked her up. 'No,' Nangala said, waving irritably with her hand. 'That's not culture.'

Nangala works for culture. She speaks five languages and works to record language for the future generations of Miriwoong. 'Language, Jalyirri, that's culture now.' Nangala sings at all the ceremonies and organises people to help in identifying sites under the guidance of the Land Council so that mining companies don't harm sites, or can at least be made accountable for any damage they cause. 'Ceremony, Jalyirri, that's culture now.' Nangala is fighting to get back land for out-stations, and is involved in meetings about sharing out the royalties fairly from the diamond mine. 'Land, Jalyirri, that's culture now. And story. That's culture now. Mens beating womans that's not culture, that's grog, Jalyirri. That's rubbish culture.'

'Culture' has been described as the glue that holds the diverse peoples of the Kimberley together. But it is a glue that has had to weather policies of removal, enforced concentration on the outskirts of towns, the impact of grog and substance abuse, and increased migration of guddia as the potential development of natural resources is realised. There are stories of outright racism and conflict that inform the history and mark the present of this place, and stories of resistance and reconciliation that are equally remarkable.

When my grandmother was taken from her country, this part of the world was in flux. It is still in flux today.

Wednesday 11 July 1906. Wyndham Courthouse. The Bow River prisoners and witnesses faced the court. Resident Magistrate Maloney was presiding. It was a brisk walk for Hill and the white justice system. The women witnesses were compelled to give evidence against their own countrymen. The men answered 'yes' or 'no', depending on how good the translation was. There was no one to represent the defendants' case in court. They were all tried together as one. Three men received six months' hard labour. Three men received three months' hard labour. Three men received one months' hard labour. It was a lottery. Those who got one month were lucky. Those who got six months lucked-out.

Pop-up towns with flimsy constructions breed flimsy frontier politics. Money talked in a place like Wyndham. If there wasn't money in cows, they wouldn't have bothered to rebuild the town when one of the storms blew it away, or when one of the floods floated it away. As a township it hadn't been going that long when my grandmother was taken, but even then it looked old beyond its twenty years. A short-lived gold rush built this town in the 1890s, as it did many Western Australian towns, but there was still enough in cattle to keep the old hands at it, and new land was yet to open up near my grandmother's country.

The town's lifeline was the telegraph wire and the fortnightly cattle steamers from the south. Sometimes they came more often, or sometimes a boat coming in from Indonesia or Ceylon (Sri Lanka) made a stopover. Mostly these large boats avoided Wyndham, however, and stopped in at Broome, further west. The milk-run boats brought the mail, stores and passengers. These boats weren't stately, but they served their purpose. They would make their way into port at high tide and go belly deep on the muddy bottom when the tide pulled out. Tied to the jetty, they would remain stranded until unloaded of stores and reloaded with cattle, people and mail. They would sail on the high tide and escape south again.

Tuesday 17 July 1906. The SS *Bullarra.* My grandmother had never seen the sea before. It was a vast unknown plain.

The SS *Bullarra* arrived from the south, ending its long winding journey north in the Cambridge Gulf at the Wyndham jetty. Not one of the better class of ships, the *Bullarra*'s main function was as a cattle steamer and cargo vessel. It was 1,735 tons of rust-streaked metal plate and was about to be retired. The *Bullarra*'s passengers travelled in either Saloon or Steerage. The ship was unloaded in a flurry of activity. Cattle were herded through the town and onto the jetty from the Three Mile holding pens, to be sent south for the slaughter yards. Stopping at all ports along the way, the *Bullarra* would trail down the coast, dropping off and picking up supplies and passengers.

My grandmother and her brother were the only Aboriginal children travelling on the *Bullarra* for that voyage, entered on the shipping register as, 'Gipsy and Brofy, two Natives, Steerage'. They had reached the end of Hill's escort.

Five big rivers snaked their way across the land of the East Kimberley into the Cambridge Gulf. The Ord River flowed from my grandmother's country, spilling out into the murky waters surrounding the *Bullarra.* Crocodile tracks slithered across red mangrove mud, vanishing before the rising tide. The ship towered over the jetty.

As my grandmother walked onto the Wyndham jetty her tracks ended, slowly. Red-earth footprints lead a small way along the rough grey wooden planks, gradually fading, leaving no trace.

The jetty throbbed with the sound of the ship's steam engine. Vapour pumped through old pistons, hissing from the worn valves. Propellers churned, tearing the ship from its muddy berth. Ropes cast adrift, fell away. The *Bullarra* listed south. Pulling away from Wyndham port, my grandmother watched from the deck as her homeland slipped away. As the ship spilled out of the Cambridge Gulf, where the waters of the Ord River and the Timor Sea swirled in muddy currents, the mangroves, blue red hills, and the dot-like gum trees of the distant ridges slowly disappeared, leaving nothing but sea, sky and salt.

The Indian Ocean separated my grandmother from her homeland. In time her country would become flooded as easily as the Gulf waters flowed in from the sea at high tide and lifted the ship and carried it and my grandmother away. But, unlike the Gulf waters, the flooding of her country would not recede. This was no natural cycle. The moon would be unable to draw out the cycle of ebb and flow from the land to the sea. This cycle has been rendered impotent by a dam wall. The lapping waters of the flooding Ord River have smoothed into placid Lake Argyle. My grandmother's country would remain sealed.

Within days of my grandmother's departure, a fingernail was all that remained of the moon. As the ship moved south the nights became colder and darker. Eventually the moon disappeared, slipping below the ocean, leaving nothing but the night sky. My grandmother's life was now to follow another course, a course determined by others, based on non-existent fractions imagined within her blood, and new definitions of race that were marked upon her skin.

It's beautiful country, Miriwoong country. The deep red sands and the violent green of the trees and grasses are vivid in the Wet. That last time when Nangala was with us it rained a huge storm late in the night. Water poured out of the sky and onto the ground, filling up the rivers and the streams, washing into all the dry hot places, bringing life to the trapped and hidden parts of the land as we drove south-west out of Kununurra. Thousands of grasshoppers began their march along the creeks and roads before taking to the air, and frogs rose up out of the earth and sang. The out-door gaol of the police station in the centre of town was empty. The pub was closed. The roads were clear.

The rain has washed tracks clean from the land a thousand times since my grandmother's removal, but they have remained in other places — in the cycle of skin and memory, and in the people who were there to welcome a relative back.

My grandmother left this country as a child. It had become a dangerous home, but it was her home country, and I can see her in it — in the beauty, and in the violence; in the ranges that she travelled as she was taken from it, in the rivers she crossed with her brother as they made their way finally to the sea.

I have been to the stumps of the old Wyndham jetty where the two children last touched the earth of their country. At the back of the township, where the drain from the meatworks once fed the Gulf with streams of blood, drawing the crocodiles dangerously close to the bank, only the pylons of the old jetty remain. I jumped out, balancing on each one as I went, one bad judgement away from landing in the muddy, murky waters. This was the place of their leaving, but it was not their end.

Nangala told us that after so many children began to be taken, women sang songs to try and spirit the children back to their country. She sang that song for us on the Ord River, while kids ran around and surfed the diversion dam wall. The women who sang those songs sent their despair in their voices, flowing through the valley and out to sea.

But when my grandmother turned to face the mouths of the five big rivers, she had already been removed beyond the point of physical return. I wish she could have known that she would be remembered and missed from her country, and that the women had sung her return. When Nangala finished, she said very quietly, 'See Jalyirri, that's one good song that one — you came back.'