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Norman B. Tindale’s Research Legacy and the Cultural Heritage of Indigenous Australians

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CARTOGRAPHIC ETHNOGENESIS: TINDALE’S INVENTION OF THE JADIRA TRIBE IN THE PILBARA REGION OF WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

While most critiques of Tindale’s work focus on his uncompromising belief in the tribe as a coherent social unit with relatively precise and defended boundaries, this paper instead explores a lapse in his scientific rigour through a close examination of one exceptional example. In his 1974 magnum opus on Aboriginal tribes he introduced the Jadira tribe of the Pilbara region of Western Australia. Intensive anthropological research into this area, precipitated by native title claims, has now revealed how little evidence there was for Tindale’s rather bold move. The fragmentary evidence is carefully sifted for any clues to the reasons for such boldness. The example of the Jadira suggests a paradox in Tindale’s empiricism. On the one hand, he was a methodical collector of facts. But faced with conflicting information about boundaries from previous researchers he did not in this case, and probably others, systematically justify where he placed his own proposed boundaries. Such a lapse justifies some wariness about the use of Tindale’s tribal map in native title and his deployment as a ‘phantom expert’. 
**Introduction: Norman B. Tindale as Phantom Expert in the Native Title Era**

In *Law’s Anthropology* I reported the strange phenomenon of the appearance of phantom expert witnesses in native title hearings (Burke 2011: 240–1; also see Sutton 2006). This occurred when legal counsel and judges began interpreting and deploying arguments about the work of early anthropologists by direct reference to their writings, but without any regard to the reception and later revision of their work in the discipline of anthropology. In some extreme cases, the judges deployed their own understanding of the works involved to counterbalance or even overrule the expert evidence of the living anthropologist in the case before them. Hence the term ‘phantom expert’. This deployment of dead experts inevitably precipitated a struggle between the living expert anthropologist and judge over who is best placed to properly interpret the archive of anthropological literature. Tindale has not been the only phantom expert—others include Elkin, Berndt, Stanner and Strehlow. But it seemed to me that Tindale presents the most difficult case because of the wide gap that has opened up between the increasingly critical reception of his work within anthropology and the increasingly positive public perception of his legacy. Of course, ideas like 'public perception' are difficult to verify but I thought I could see the traces of such a perception in the native title case in which Tindale’s publications were first deployed against an anthropologist taking a contrary view in the role of expert witness: the De Rose Hill native title claim.\(^1\) In the hearing of that claim some legal counsel and the judge displayed an easy familiarity and protectiveness towards Tindale. I had heard that counsel used his nickname ‘Tinny’ in their out-of-court discussions about his work and in the transcript of the hearing there is an extraordinary intervention by the judge questioning the expert anthropologist's right to reinterpret Tindale because, unlike Tindale, the expert had not been there doing fieldwork in 1953 (Burke 2011:229).

Accordingly, I see this paper as a small contribution towards a more realistic public appreciation of Tindale’s work. I realise that such a purpose faces many obstacles, the most

\(^1\) For a full account of that case see Burke (2011:209–241).
obvious being the irrelevance of academic critique to public discourse and to the revising of the views of those treasured few anthropologists (Stanner comes to mind) who have become national treasures. Tindale never had the media profile of Stanner, but what he did have was the simplicity of the idea of the tribe that reinforced common sense lay understandings of Aboriginal territorial organisation as if in a mutually reinforcing pact between the heroic, expeditionary researcher and the public. To be clear, however, this paper is not about the reception in anthropology of Tindale’s ideas about the tribe and tribal boundaries. That topic, including the latter day appearance of tribe-like ‘language groups’ in the land rights and native title eras, has already been adequately dealt with (see Donaldson 1984; Douglas 1971; Keen 2004:134–5; Merlan 1981; Miller 1971; Peterson 1976; Rumsey 1989, 1993; Sutton 1991, 2003). Indeed, Francesca Merlan (1981:136) was probably correct in characterising Peterson’s 1976 edited collection as an inquest upon the notion of tribe in Australianist anthropology.

Instead, what I wish to focus on is a lacuna (or is it a giant blind spot) in his scientific methodology: his failure to openly and methodically justify where he put his tribal boundaries in the face of conflicting evidence. That is why I have, for the purposes of this paper, bracketed the critique of Tindale’s assertion of the ubiquity of the precisely bounded tribe in Aboriginal Australia to focus on one case in which the absence of explanation masks a serious error of judgement. This bracketing is feasible in relation to the west Pilbara only because it is likely that the boundaries described there were relatively stable and continuous areas of direct association between a language variety and a large tract of land in a similar way described by Merlan (1981:141–145) for the western Roper River area of the Northern Territory. Such a bracketing would not have been feasible in Western Desert areas where many named language varieties do not refer to discrete tracts of land (Berndt 1959; Miller 1971), nor in some regions of Cape York where traditional estates were not confined to one continuous block (Merlan 1981:136–139; Sutton 1978; 2003:70–73). In those areas a direct confrontation with Tindale’s basic assumptions about the tribe would have been necessary.
The Mysterious Origins of the Jadira Tribe

Since 2007 I have been engaged by the native title representative body for the region (representing the Aboriginal claimants) to undertake anthropological research on the Kurrarama Martuthunira Combined Native Title Claim (the K&M claim) in the west Pilbara region of Western Australia. The claim takes in the western part of the Hamersley Range and continues westward towards the coast following the Fortescue and Robe Rivers. As part of my review of the ethno-historical record I encountered Tindale’s work on tribal boundaries in both its 1940 and 1974 iterations (Tindale 1940, 1974). To my surprise there appeared in his 1974 work a new tribe, his ‘Jadira’, complete with its own entry in his catalogue of tribes (Tindale 1974:242):

Jadira
Loc.: Middle waters of Cane and Robe rivers from south of Mount Minnie north to the Fortescue River; they did not go east of the western scarp of the higher plateau of the Hamersley Range. In post-European times some moved east to Ashburton Downs Station and others to the mouth of the Fortescue River and were absorbed into the Madudunera. They once used to have access to the sea between the Cane and Robe rivers through Noala territory. They did not circumcise.
Coord: 116°5´E x 21°55´S.
Area: 3,600 sq. m. (9,400 sq. km).
Alt.: Kawarindjari (means "belonging to the west," ie., Westerners [name given by Ngaluma], Kawarandjari, Kawarandari, Kawarindjara, Kauarind’arri, Kauarndhari, Garindjari [sic].

The relevant part of the map is shown in Figure 1.

Note: In more recent orthography used by Dench (1995) in his book Martuthunira: A Language of the Pilbara Region of Western Australia Tindale’s ‘Jadira’ is rendered ‘Yartira’. Tindale (1974:1–2) was using his adaptation of the International Phonetic Alphabet.
The ‘Jadira’ tribe as it appeared on the 1974 map took up approximately one third of the K&M claim area right in the middle of the claim and was therefore something about which I had to develop an opinion as an anthropologist.
To understand the novelty and the mystery of the late appearance of the 'Jadira' tribe it is necessary to present some of the earlier ethno-history. The sheep stations of the western Pilbara were famously some of the sites of Radcliffe-Brown's earliest fieldwork in Australia in 1911. Two publications arising from that fieldwork indicated that the claim area had been the country of two tribal groups: the Martuthunira and a western sub-group of the Yindjibarndi, known as the Kurrama. He was unsure whether the Kurrama were a separate tribe or a sub-tribal unit of the Yindjibarndi. In his first publication the map shown in Figure 2 appears locating the Martuthunira on the western part of the Fortescue River near the coast and, presumably because of his uncertainty about it, Kurrama does not appear on the map.

The Martuthunira are one of the three tribes described in some detail in his next journal article ‘Three Tribes of Western Australia’ (Brown 1913). It contains a written description of the Martuthunira tribal area:

The Mardudhunera tribe occupies the coast of Western Australia from a point somewhere between the Cane and Robe Rivers as far as the Maitland River… the country of the tribe lies on the coast, at the north west end of the Hamersley Range.
(Brown 1913:175–6)

It also contains the sketch map showing the approximate tribal boundaries and the location of various local groups (see Figure 3).
Figure 2 Radcliffe-Brown's (1912) tribal map of Western Australia. Courtesy of the Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain and Ireland.
There is a discrepancy between Radcliffe-Brown's written description and the sketch map that need not detain us here. The written description places the Martuthunira boundary with the 'Noala' tribe between the Cane and Robe Rivers whereas the sketch map places it further to the north-east between the Robe and Fortescue Rivers. Because of consistency with other reliable material, I ultimately concluded that the written description was to be preferred.
Among Radcliffe-Brown’s papers in the University of Sydney archives was other evidence of the extent of Radcliffe-Brown’s research on the Martuthunira. There are genealogies for eight of the nine clans named in the published paper and other fragments of Martuthunira genealogies as well as another sketch map which provides a little more detail than the one that was published. That map asserts the association of clan nine with a place called ‘Chalyianu’ on the upper Robe River. During my native title claim research I confirmed the existence of a large permanent pool on the middle Robe River also known to contemporary claimants by the cognate name Jalyarn. The permanent pool had also been one of the watering points on a historic stock route into the Pilbara and is known as Robe Pool. The significance of this location is that it is in the middle of the tribal territory that Tindale attributed to his ‘Jadira’ in his 1974 publication. Tindale had been willing to accept an expansive Martuthunira tribal territory in his 1940 tribal map as indicated in Figure 4. However, the 1940 map was not based upon Tindale’s own fieldwork but on the literature available at the time and to which he refers (Tindale 1940:208). His Martuthunira boundary bears closest resemblance to Radcliffe-Brown’s (1913) Martuthunira boundary.

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4 Radcliffe-Brown’s Martuthunira fieldnotes and genealogies are to be found in The Personal Archives of Professor A. P. Elkin (P. 130), Series 6: Research Materials Relating to Aboriginal Tribes in Western Australia, Item No 43, Box No. 243. University of Sydney Archives.
The question then is: what happened between 1940 and 1974 to change Tindale’s mind? Two obvious contenders are: 1) Tindale's own fieldwork in the region in 1953 and 1966; and 2) His relationship with the linguist Brandenstein, who first introduced the name 'Jardira'. On closer inspection, however, the mystery continues to deepen. The rather surprising thing about Tindale's diary of his 1953 expedition and the other unpublished material from the expedition (genealogies, key to tribes and informants, word lists and 'social framework' details) is that there is not one mention of a 'Jadira' language or tribe (Tindale 1953). On the contrary, his research confirmed the existence of the tribes described by Radcliffe-Brown (1913) and in the same relative locations to one another. One telling piece of evidence is a sketch map (not shown) commenced by one of Tindale's Yindjibarndi informants on 27 June 1953 at Roebourne and amended by Tindale following discussions with other informants.
between 28 and 30 June 1953 (Tindale 1953:573–649). It was designed principally to show the extent of Yindjibarndi country, but it also shows neighbouring tribes including Kurrama, Martuthunira and Thalanyji but no ‘Jadira’. The other telling thing about Tindale’s (1953:645) diary account is that he could not find any Martuthunira person to talk to since the usual Martuthunira resident at the Aboriginal camp near Roebourne was away at the time of his fieldwork. Accordingly, he was unable to contradict Radcliffe-Brown’s estimation of the extent of Martuthunira country from his own Martuthunira informants.

Tindale did not return to Roebourne during his 1966 expedition, but he did go to Onslow, Carnarvon, Geraldton and Port Hedland. He travelled via Perth where he met Brandenstein. The meeting seems to have been amicable. Brandenstein gave Tindale a copy of his language map of the Ashburton River region and a list of potential Aboriginal informants. In describing one of the informants, Mick Fazeldean, we find the first reference to ‘Jadira’ in Tindale’s diary. It appears to be information from Brandenstein:

Mick Fazeldean's language is Marduδunera, a people who have mixed with the 'Jadira and [indecipherable] them. The other name for Jadira is Kawarindjeri which means "Westerners". They speak a dialect close to Noala. The Jadira [indecipherable, penetrated?] to the sea between the Robe and Cane Rivers.
(Tindale 1966:57)

Tindale (1966) did not find Mick Fazeldean or any other informant for the ‘Jadira’ tribe although he had occasion to mention it again in the diary when summarising the information he had gathered from various Aboriginal people at Onslow on one very busy day (30 March 1966). It appears that none of his informants asserted ‘Jadira’ as a tribe, but in a note relating to the description of the territory of the ‘Talandji’ referring to Red Hill he states ‘the last named [indecipherable, part?] is Jadira + Naola territory’. Although it is somewhat unclear, the note

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5 The sketch map is not in the diary but on a separate piece of paper with the caption ‘Territory of Indjibandi Tribe. Map drawn by Indjibandi men at Roebourne after discussion in their camp 27 June 1953. At subsequent discussions with [indecipherable] 28–30 June all boundaries were confirmed except that E boundary placed E of Wittenoom about 20–30 miles further E of first line. Bailgu did not come W of Saltbush plain’.
appears to be overruling his informants of the day by reference to some other source of information, presumably Brandenstein’s. There appears to be no other reference to ‘Jadira’ in Tindale’s 1966 diary.

Returning to the references in Tindale’s 1974 catalogue entry for the ‘Jadira’ tribe, this leaves Bates (1914), Brandenstein’s (1965) MS and an AIAS Report from 1966. Bates (1914) in her article ‘Social organisation of some Western Australian tribes’ does mention ‘Kau’arndhäri’ as a West Pilbara tribe along with the ‘Kariyarra’, Ngarluma and Martuthunira (Bates 1914:392). But the location and extent of the ‘Kau’arndhäri’ tribe is not specified and it does not appear on her 1907 tribal map. A relative position may be inferred if we assume a broadly east-west sequence in her list of tribes (‘Karriara, Ngaluma, Mardatunera and Kau’arndhäri’) and her sentence: ‘These tribes occupy the coast between Port Hedland and a point somewhere west of Roebourne’. Bates does not proffer an alternative name like ‘Jadira’ or indeed any alternative name for the ‘Kau’arndhäri’ (Bates 1914). That brings us to the two Brandenstein references. Unfortunately neither of these documents are included in the bibliography of Tindale’s (1974) book. The reference to Brandenstein’s (1966) report to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies is probably his ‘Interim report 3 on field [sic] NW-WA 15.8 .65-15.9 .65’ (Brandenstein 1966). It contains a single reference to ‘Jadira (Kuarind’ari)’ as the language of a song (‘Kunangu Song’) he recorded sung by Willie Cooper, one of his main Martuthunira informants.

It also seems likely that the 1965 Brandenstein manuscript was material that was eventually published in 1967 as *The Language Situation in the Pilbara -- Past and Present* since it appears to link ‘Jadira’ and ‘Kua'arndhari’ (his ‘Kuarind'arri’) (Brandenstein 1967). If this is so, it represents another problem for Tindale’s adoption of ‘Jadira’ because the published paper is inconsistent not only internally but also with one of Brandenstein’s later publications.

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6 Map of Western Australia geographical distribution of tribes, MAP Daisy Bates Special Collection/6 (Rare Map Room) (800324) National Library of Australia.
Brandenstein states in the 1967 paper:

Jardira is a collective name for the Kauarindjarri, the 'Westerners' and the Kurama, the 'Highlanders', because they both live 'on the (one) side', as seen from the Marduthunira.
(Brandenstein 1967:3)

Brandenstein attempted a representation of this idea on a map attached to the article shown in Figure 5.

![Figure 5](image_url)

**Figure 5** Brandenstein's (1967) map of language areas. Courtesy of Pacific Linguistics, Australian National University.
It should be noted that there is an inconsistency between the written description of 'Jardira' and its graphical representation. The written description presents 'Jardira' not as a language name that might be used for self-identity but as an overarching name for the combination of two language groups as seen from a Martuthunira perspective: Kurrama plus Kauarindjarri. Whereas the map suggests that the 'Jardira/Kauarindjarri' grouping is separate from the Kurrama group. The map also indicates the inherent improbability of the Kurrama coming under a Martuthunira term for 'Westerners' because they were so clearly to the south-east of the Martuthunira.

Adding to this confusion is a reference to 'Jardira' in his *Narratives from the North-West of Western Australia in the Ngarluma and Jinjiparndi Languages* (Brandenstein 1970). He states:

> The Kauarindjari are the "Westerners", a general term for the western neighbours of the Marduthunira. The K. proper live between Cane and Robe Rivers. Their language is called either Jardira or Nuala.
> (Brandenstein 1970:85, footnote 4)

This last sentence contradicts his earlier publication in which 'Nuala' was considered a separate language.

Leaving these complications to one side for the moment, it was imperative that I tried to ascertain Brandenstein's evidence for such a language variety. Upon examining all of Brandenstein's reports to the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies and his field diaries, there appears to be only three references to Kauarindjarri or Jardira. Two are references to the name ‘Kauarindjarri’ as a language variety or grouping in other stories. One story was told by an informant, Peter Jackson, about a site near Karratha where three hills represent different groups, one of which was ‘Kauarindjari’ (Brandenstein 1968:3). The other is a story told by a Yindjibarndi informant about different forms of initiation. The story ends with a cryptic addendum "The Marduthunira did not “tie” [initiation by ligature] and the Kauarindjari did not “tie”, because they would not know' (Brandenstein 1970:85). This reference is cryptic because there is a great deal of evidence that the Martuthunira along with other coastal groups in the region did engage in initiation by ligature rather than circumcision. The only sample of the
'Jardira' language appears to be the song sung by Willie Cooper. The words 'Jardira (Kauarindjarri)' do appear in the index to the fifth volume of his diary (22.7.65–20.9.65) but it is a fleeting reference and probably refers to Willie Cooper's song. There appear to be no other speakers and no other details of the language recorded by Brandenstein for the entire period of his linguistic research in the Pilbara region that was carried out over four to six months each year between 1964 and 1968 inclusive (Thieberger 2008:325).

Thus when Tindale came to finalise his 1974 tribal map and catalogue of tribes the situation seems to have been as follows. Daisy Bates had briefly mentioned a 'Kau'arndhari' tribe on the coast probably west of the Martuthunira. Based on one song from one informant, whose own language was Martuthunira, Brandenstein asserted a traditional language variety called 'Jardira' or alternatively that 'Jardira' was a collective Martuthunira term for 'Westerners' that included the Kuararindjarri among others. Despite some confusion about what Brandenstein intended by the word 'Jardira', and despite the supposed tribal name having left only the merest ghostly trace in the ethno-historical record of the region compared to other tribal names, and despite all the contrary evidence from Radcliffe-Brown, Tindale decided to promote the 'Jadira' to an equivalent size and status as the surrounding tribes. Also contrary to the meagre evidence for Kuararindjarri being a coastal language variety or group Tindale (1974) placed his 'Jadira' tribe inland replacing the eastern half of Martuthunira territory as designated by Radcliffe-Brown (1913).

Why did he do it? I have only been able to discover one possible clue to this mystery but it seems so preposterous and gratuitous I initially ignored it. In his catalogue entry on the Martuthunira tribe Tindale cryptically states:

Brown [i.e. Radcliffe-Brown] (1913) gave them a tribal area of 3500 square miles (9100 sq. km) which seems to be an overestimation.

Could it be that one of the reasons Tindale promoted his 'Jadira' to tribal status against all the evidence, including his own, was that he thought the original designation of Martuthunira territory was simply too big?
Tindale (1974:31) did go so far as to suggest an ideal number of persons per tribe (450) and a fairly direct relationship between the annual rainfall in a particular region and the size of the tribal territory. But it is also apparent from another section of the book, Chapter 8 (Large Tribes and Small), that he did countenance tribes greater than the average size (Tindale 1974:110–11). Tindale (1974:112) did identify coastal tribes as typically being more compact in area, because of the constantly renewed marine food supplies that many coastal locations afforded. He also acknowledged variation among coastal tribes where access to the sea was difficult or where the tribe concerned did not possess the requisite fishing skills (Tindale 1974). These atypical conditions did not apply to the Martuthunira. Accordingly, it is consistent with this line of thought that the Martuthunira area should have been relatively compact. Tindale (1974) completes this chapter in his book without any reference to the Martuthunira. So even though it would make sense within the framework of his generalisations about tribes, we are still left wondering about his reasons for the shrinking of Martuthunira territory.

I have also considered other possible motives and influences. Why was Tindale so willing to embrace and subsequently transform Brandenstein's information? Why was Tindale so ready to abandon Radcliffe-Brown's view obtained from informants who were so much closer to the pre-contact era? It is only conjecture on my part, but I imagine that Tindale would have been quite impressed by Brandenstein. At the time of their meeting in Perth in 1966 Brandenstein was engaged by the Australian Institute of Aboriginal Studies to research Aboriginal languages in the north-west of Western Australia thus granting some institutional legitimacy upon his work. He had also spent much more time in the Pilbara region than Tindale was planning to. Brandenstein was later to fall out with the Institute when Dixon took control of its Language Research Committee and the assessment of Brandenstein's legacy among contemporary linguists is mixed (Thieberger 2008, 2015). Thieberger (2008, 2015) points to his idiosyncratic spelling system, his speculative search for evidence of Portuguese contact in coastal Pilbara languages and his anachronistic search for a proto-language that diffused around the world. On the
other hand, he praises Brandenstein for his then innovative recording of Aboriginal languages (including the publication of a vinyl record of the spoken language with one of his published works) and notes that despite the difficulties it is possible with some effort for contemporary linguists to convert his notation to contemporary orthography. In 1966, however, at the height of Brandenstein’s Pilbara project, this latter-day assessment of Brandenstein’s reputation for eccentric, non-mainstream approaches would not have tainted Tindale’s assessment of him. Even if such academic marginalisation was apparent in 1966, it may only have bound Tindale closer to Brandenstein as a fellow outsider: Tindale as an outsider to anthropology because he had no formal qualifications in anthropology and Brandenstein an outsider to academic linguistics because of his antiquated theoretical perspectives.

With regard to Radcliffe-Brown, there seems to be overwhelming respect expressed by Tindale over the whole of his oeuvre.7 This makes his dismissal of Radcliffe-Brown’s Martuthunira boundaries all the more puzzling. The fact that Tindale never refers to Radcliffe-Brown’s unpublished field notes of his 1911 fieldwork in the Pilbara suggest that Tindale was not aware of the extent of Radcliffe-Brown’s fieldwork. This is particularly pertinent to the Nhuwala (Tindale and Radcliffe-Brown’s ‘Noala’) because, although Radcliffe-Brown never published anything on Nhuwala, it is clear from his fieldnotes that he had made extensive enquiries of the remaining Nhuwala and had made sketch maps of their territory and compiled numerous genealogies.8 Had Tindale known of this material one wonders whether he would have felt so free in his 1974 tribal map to radically expand Nhuwala territory at the expense of Martuthunira territory. This possibility in no way justifies his overriding of Radcliffe-Brown’s Martuthunira boundaries because the relative depth of Radcliffe-Brown’s Martuthunira fieldwork, especially compared to Tindale’s own failure to find

7 One qualification to this general statement is Tindale’s (1974:xii) rebuke of Radcliffe-Brown for sometimes not acknowledging and referencing R.H. Mathews as a source for some of his own publications.
8 Radcliffe-Brown’s Martuthunira fieldnotes and genealogies are to be found in The Personal Archives of Professor A. P. Elkin (P. 130), Series 6: Research Materials Relating to Aboriginal Tribes in Western Australia, Item No 43, Box No. 243. University of Sydney Archives.
any Martuthunira informants, was evident from the published material. It should be apparent, though, that all this speculation is necessitated by the sheer absence of a meaningful explanation from Tindale about how and why he constructed a 'Jadira' tribe and its boundaries from the materials available to him. Instead, we have the formula adopted for his entire catalogue of tribes: description of the location, latitude and longitude, area in square kilometres and square miles, alternative names and references. Such headings project a degree of scientific certitude that is totally unjustified in the case of the 'Jadira'. Instead, it suggests a kind of hubris. In Tindale's defence it might be argued that it would have been practically impossible to include a full explanation of his chosen boundaries for every tribe given the already lengthy nature of the encyclopaedic work. Moreover, it could be argued (a little more successfully) that his minimal compliance with scholarly standards in supplying the list of references for each tribe has enabled my critique to be made. But I think this argument underplays Tindale's own pretensions to scientific rigour. This is particularly apparent in Chapter 2 of Aboriginal Tribes of Australia which opens with him exposing the previous blunders in the naming of tribes and the promise that this work would finally winnow out only the true tribal names from the numerous previous errors (Tindale 1974:38–49). Evidence of such winnowing in relation to the 'Jadira' tribe is starkly absent.

Post-1974 Research in the Region

More recent research has not been kind to Tindale's (1974) adventurism (or was it just carelessness) with the 'Jadira' tribe proposal. For present purposes, the most significant research was conducted by the linguist Alan Dench in the 1980s and early 1990s into the Martuthunira language. It resulted in a major publication Martuthunira: A Language of the Pilbara Region of Western Australia (Dench 1995). Dench, now the Professor of Linguistics at the University of Western Australia, had in 1980, while working on other languages in the region, been approached by a remarkable Aboriginal man, Algy Patterson, to record the Martuthunira language. Because Algy Patterson's father had been a white man and he was born in 1913 during the era of the removal of part-Aboriginal children, his Aboriginal
relations hid him in the bush away from the authorities and consequently he spent much of his early childhood with his Kurrama and Martuthunira maternal grandparents (Dench 1995:21–2). This unusual upbringing (he did not learn any English until he was 15 years old) meant that he had prolonged exposure to traditional languages, traditional modes of living and the traditional sacra of the country. One of the mysteries of the history of research in the region is why such a renowned man did not come to the attention of Brandenstein who had actively been looking for Martuthunira informants. In any event, it is evident that Dench had an extraordinarily productive relationship with Algy Patterson over many years culminating in the publication of the definitive text on the Martuthunira language. Among other things, Algy Patterson asserted the extent of Martuthunira country in almost identical terms to Radcliffe-Brown (1913). Dench produced a helpful map comparing various accounts of Martuthunira territory (see Figure 6).
Figure 6 Dench's (1995) Martuthunira tribal boundary.⁹ Courtesy of Pacific Linguistics, Australian National University.

⁹ There is a minor error on this map. Dench's (1995) 'Tindale (1974)' should be 'Tindale (1940)'.
Dench (1995) also analysed Brandenstein's (1967) 'Jardira' and 'Kauarindjarri'. He states:

While *yarti* does occur as a word for 'side' in Pilbara languages (Panyjima, for example), it does not occur in Martuthunira. Jardira (*Yartira* in the present orthography) is most likely a local group term for people living on the Cane River (*Yartil*). The word given here [by Brandenstein] for 'West', *kauari*, does not occur in Martuthunira, nor does the suffix -*ndjarri*.

(Dench 1995:3)

Thus Dench's conclusion is that in relation to 'Jardira' Brandenstein probably confused the name of the local residence group with a language group name.

The continuing mining boom of the 1970s precipitated unprecedented levels of mining and exploration activity within the area attributed by Tindale to the 'Jadira'. The area included the mining town of Pannawonica and nearby major iron ore mines in the vicinity of the middle Robe River. Heritage clearance surveys for the expansion of the mines and other infrastructure projects resulted in the first fine-grained information about Aboriginal traditions relating to the 'Jadira' area. Two significant reports relied on Algy Patterson as the principal informant (O'Connor and Quartermaine 1989; Palmer 1980). Algy Patterson consistently identified the area as having been Martuthunira and, among other things, he provided the Martuthunira names for key sacred sites in the region, for example, Pannawonica Hill (*Parlapuuni*), which had wide currency even among those who did not claim to be Martuthunira. The only heritage report that specifically addresses Tindale's 'Jadira' comes to the same conclusion that I have: that the middle Robe River had been Martuthunira not 'Jadira' (O'Connor and Quartermaine 1989).

My own belated native title research in the area since 2007 confirms the aforementioned view. I did not find anyone who recognised 'Jadira' or 'Kauarindjarri' as names of language varieties associated with large tracts of land in the same sense as all the surrounding names on Tindale's 1974 map: Nhuwala, Martuthunira, Ngarluma, Yindjibarndi, Kurrama, Pinikura and

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10 Algy Patterson is not mentioned by name in Kingsley Palmer's report but I have since confirmed with the author that Algy Patterson was his principal informant.
Thalanyji. All of these names where known in the region. Even though I encountered no one who claimed to be Nhuwala, the word Nhuwala as the name of a language variety associated with a large tract of land had survived. My research also indicates an overlap between Brandenstein's (1967) minimal estimation of Martuthunira territory and the view of one of his Martuthunira informants, Willie Cooper, whose descendants lodged a native title claim of similar dimensions.

Conclusions

I suspect anthropologists working on native title claims have always had mixed feelings about Tindale's 1974 tribal map. Well before the native title era and on the threshold of the land rights era it proclaimed at a broad rhetorical level the complete prior ownership of the Australian continent by Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander peoples. The map seems to have had only marginal relevance to the successful pursuit of land rights claims in the Northern Territory, presumably because the concerns of that legislation were confined to identifying the contemporary traditional owners. The continuity requirements of native title, however, brought Tindale’s map back into the spotlight as a seemingly authoritative statement of the pre-contact era. Anthropologists working on native title claims have learned not to take any of its authoritative claims at face value. They have had the advantage of the academic debate within anthropology about Tindale’s dogged pursuit of his view of the Aboriginal tribe and the sceptical consensus that emerged in anthropology about his project. In the native title era there has also been more locally-focused contextualisation and testing of Tindale's boundaries in the research for particular native title claims. The professional scepticism about Tindale’s tribal names and boundaries is sometimes not shared by Aboriginal claimants some of whom use Tindale’s map as a starting point for their own research. Occasionally such claimants expose their lack of continuity by adopting a mispronunciation of their own tribal name, not realising that Tindale was using an orthography quite different from standard written English. The continuing problem of the phantom experts in native title hearings, as mentioned in my introductory comments, means that the message about the need for healthy scepticism about Tindale's tribal names and
boundaries has yet to be assimilated by some legal counsel and judges. This paper has been a deliberate attempt to sharpen the point of such a message by choosing a particularly egregious example that I hope will penetrate some of the mystique surrounding Tindale.

The focus on one example raises the question of how widespread such errors of judgement are in the 1974 map. It would be interesting to hear from other regional specialists about this. For the areas in which I have conducted some detailed research (Broome, De Rose Hill Station in the north of South Australia, the 'Koamu' near Cunnamulla in southern Queensland, the 'Jinibara' just north of Brisbane and Warlpiri of the Tanami Desert) there was nothing having the same character of the 'Jardira' case of Tindale overriding early reliable research on a very dubious basis. There was, however, in many cases the problem of a lack of explanation of how Tindale chose between the various options available to him from the ethno-historical record. It seems to me that this is the main flaw in the scientific pretensions of the 1974 book and map. It means that, despite the map's identification of uncertain boundaries by the use of broken line, many of the unbroken lines, which in the scheme of the map represent a degree of certainty, are best interpreted as his unexplained theories about boundaries. This is something that anthropologists have long since accepted. It is time for the broader public to be let into this secret.

To be clear, this paper is not intended to be dismissive of the value of much of the information collected by Tindale. His prodigious energy and the methodical approach to the collection of information that was readily available (the photographs, the biographical details of individuals, the genealogies, kinship terminology, the word lists, the recording of language names) and his careful approach to maintaining his records will be of benefit to continuing generations of Aboriginal people and researchers. Indeed, even the book and map I am criticising have proven in my own native title research to be a useful starting point for further research.
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