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THE VIEW FROM BELOW: A SELECTED HISTORY OF CONTACT EXPERIENCES, PATJARR, GIBSON DESERT, WESTERN AUSTRALIA

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Abstract

In the Gibson Desert of Western Australia, the first physical encounters between Aboriginal and European Australians were often with military, mineral exploration or surveying personnel who came to that remote country by helicopter. This paper discusses stories of cross-cultural contact in the period 1957–1975, which continue to be publicly recalled; they include accounts that vary from hiding in great fear, nervous contact and goods exchange, to assertive action to drive these intruders away. Particular attention is given to the narratives of one man: Fred Kumpari Ward, Tjungarrayi, speaker of several desert languages and senior Law man for the country in which these contact encounters occurred. Fred Ward was also the senior Applicant of a native title compensation application that was discontinued in 2015. For over 20 years the political and legal processes engaged to provide secure title to their lands have proven, to the desert people, to be as alien and as difficult to comprehend as their first contacts with ‘white men’ less than 60 years ago.
Introduction

This paper responds to the challenge presented by Mike Smith in his monograph centred on the people of the Cleland Hills to ‘bring Aboriginal people as individuals into historical focus, redressing the anonymity that frontier histories usually confer on Aboriginal people’ (Smith 2005:2). It utilises filmic and audio archival materials created with those directly involved to tease out and personalise frontier histories from a numerically small, culturally strong, population associated with Patjarr, a sacred and extremely important desert site complex and now a small residential community, in far eastern Western Australia (WA). Those telling their stories are referred to as Story Owners and wherever possible individual names are specified.

The Indigenous experiences documented in this paper come from many years spent as an anthropologist working with residents of what is now known as Patjarr (or Karilywarra) Community, nestled beside the Clutterbuck Hills, some 240 km north of Warburton in the Gibson Desert (Figure 1). Much of my work was collaborative and I wish to acknowledge at the outset the contributions and many conversations had with my colleagues since 1988: anthropological, David Brooks, Dianna Newham and Chris Perry; historical, Mark Chambers and Tom Gara; multi-media arts, Albie Viegas and Gary Proctor from the Warburton Arts Project; film, Adrian Holmes; and three thinkers that cannot be pigeonholed by profession, Damian McLean, Nicolas Rothwell and John von Sturmer. Over the years a small group of my Ngaanyatjarra peers have increasingly driven the recording and research: Daisy Ward, Lizzie Giles/Ellis, Richard Ward (deceased) and his brother Ian Ward (deceased).

As an anthropologist, I have never been satisfied with note-taking, realising the abundant limitations in my own understanding and filtering of experiences as they occur. As the years progressed, records of my time with the people of Patjarr changed. The recordings that began with simple note-taking and sound files, progressed to the audio-visual, from mini digital video cassettes to utilising small professional film crews. Visual arts became integral to a non-literate, non-English speaking peoples’ communication and representation of themselves to mainstream Australia (Turner 2003). This paper presents Patjarr peoples’ stories to a new audience primarily by means of
acrylic paint on canvas and transcripts of film recordings with permission from the speakers and Story Owners.

Figure 1 Patjarr Community in relation to other Indigenous communities and vehicle access routes in the tri-State border area, 2018. Reproduced and modified with permission from the NPY Women’s Council.

The resourcing and accumulation of the set of archival materials referred to in this paper has primarily been driven by the requirement of matching specific people to a defined area of country, the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve, for the purpose of gaining recognition of traditional ownership and customary rights under European laws, both State and Federal. Since 2000, this has not always been undertaken in an organised, directed and coherent manner. Rather, the archives exist by dint of
funding opportunities and political circumstances. However, for the people of Patjarr the archival materials are an immensely detailed and often cross-referenced repository of their life experiences, recorded on-country, recorded in their own language, in the presence of family and friends.

In 2002, a substantial number of acrylic artworks on canvas, owned by the Warburton Arts Project\(^1\), were taken to Mina Mina claypan, north of Patjarr. During a three-day camp, the artists showed their artwork to their extended families and other community members present. As artists revealed their own paintings one by one, songs associated with the specific *Tjukurrpa* depicted (Dreaming tracks and song cycles), were sung by the men and women present. This three-day event was filmed for Warburton Arts by Brites, Perry and Janicki. A senior woman, Pulpurru Davies (pers. comm. 2002), described this event as ‘when every painting had its song’. Her words greatly influenced my preference for audio-visual recordings over standard anthropological note-taking traditions. Six months later at a second event, assisted by the then Ngaanyatjarra Council Native Title Unit, a State government minister, the Hon. Judy Edwards and her staff witnessed declarations of ownership and deeply rooted cultural connections to country through the revelation of Dreaming paintings and their associated ceremonial songs. This second event, also held at Mina Mina, was recorded by Ngaanya\(\)tjarra Media.

Since 2009 an ethnographic, culturally responsive, film making team has developed and Indigenous team members have become integral to this process: Norma Giles and Fred Ward have assumed senior status in matters relating to cultural guidance; Lizzie Ellis and Daisy Ward have become regular interpreters; and Daisy Ward has performed in an interviewing role. In addition, Bruce Smith and Richard Ward (deceased) have acted as facilitators and interpreters. Industry professionals, cinematographer, Jason Thomas, and director, Adrian Holmes, have become well known to the people of Patjarr. In 2012, Owen Hughes, a professional sound recordist, joined the team in

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\(^1\) The Warburton Arts Project began in 1989 as a way of Ngaanyatjarra people retaining control of the articulation of their culture in art form. From 1990 the Arts Project has bought community paintings, and artworks in other mediums, and now holds them in the Warburton Collection, the largest archive of Aboriginal art owned by the people themselves in Australia (Biddle 2013:19).
relation to those films funded under the Indigenous Community Stories (ICS) grant system operating in WA. \(^2\) ICS proved to be a way of recording a range of cultural data: songs, dances, group story telling, personal story telling, genealogical details, land usage, inter and intra group dynamics, free from any legal constraints associated with native title. Central Desert Native Title Service (CDNTS) has provided considerable financial assistance in filming trips, most of which have been ‘piggybacked’ onto the more legally driven progression of a native title Compensation Application (see Part 3 of this paper).

The film materials contain several detailed stories of how individuals and families saw their first white skinned humans. What is most noticeable is the proportion of stories that involve sightings of low flying planes, accompanied by helicopters and often supported by land based vehicles. All adults of Patjarr Community aged over 60 years were brought out of their desert home to Warburton, Wiluna or Papunya by Native Patrol Officers at least once. ‘Contact’ refers to the experiential interface between people from different cultures who encounter each other for the first time. ‘Contact’ and ‘first contact’ are terms that have been applied to the people of Patjarr in what, from a review of the literature, appears to be a particularly Australian-British context, exemplified by the film Contact (2009) based on a book by Davenport, Johnson and Yuwali (2005). For the Indigenous people of Central Australia there are many still living who have experienced contact in their own lifetimes. In the words of Teddy Biljabu:

> Many Martu people, like Yuwali and me, were born in the desert. Our lives changed because white people came into our land within our lifetime. Each Martu family has extraordinary stories of what happened when white fellas first came into our country.

(Davenport et al. 2005:back cover)

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\(^2\) ICS was a joint initiative of the Film and Television Institute of WA and ScreenWest, operating between 2008–2016. Its purpose was to record on film stories from Indigenous individuals and communities in WA in a format that could be archived with AIATSIS and remain accessible well into the future, ‘100 Stories for 100 Years’ (ScreenWest 2017).
In the experience of those working in the desert country of WA we can extend Biljabu’s words and widen the application of contact to include each Pitjantjatjara, Ngaanyatjarra, Pintupi and Ngaatjatjarra family who share similar stories and experiences (Brooks 2004, 2012; Brooks and Kral 2007; Brooks and Plant 2016; Ellis 2016; Plant and Viegas 2002; Ward 2018). In the regional Ngaanyatjarra context, in which Patjarr Community is placed, contact is used as a concept to assist non-Indigenous people understand the continuing relevance of desert Indigenous culture to contemporary life (Brooks 2011a, 2011b; Brooks and Jorgenson 2015; Kral 2012, 2014; Thompson 1998; Thorley 2016). My research confirms that for those concerned, and their families, contact is integral to the present. Contact encounters are not events that occurred in a distant, historical past.

In February 2011, I had the privilege of recording a Ngaanyatjarra elder, Mr Fred Ward, at my home in Perth. During the week of filming, with Jason Thomas on camera, Fred spoke of his life growing to maturity in the Gibson Desert of WA prior to living in residential communities at Papunya and Kintore in the Northern Territory (NT) and Kiwirrkurra, Patjarr and Warburton in WA. His oral accounts give us a fascinating glimpse into the dual forces of isolation and contact. Fred Ward’s Story was recorded in the presence of his wife, Lalla West, and his younger cousin-sister Daisy Tjuparntari Ward. In part, Fred was speaking directly to Daisy, educating her in her family’s history, for he had grown up with her father and mother before Daisy’s birth. That they took place at my home was not co-incidental. Daisy and I have worked professionally according to the Malpararra model for many years (NPYWC 1998). We are classificatory sisters and so much more. Daisy offered a translation into English at the time of recording (Turner 2011). The raw film materials provide an intimate and detailed recount of a time and lifestyle little affected by outside influences.

This paper is presented in three parts. In Part One, Yarnangu [Aboriginal] stories of contact encounters by air are presented in their own voice, undated by year. The stories highlight both the limited road access to this part of WA and the permeability of the contact frontier as experienced by the people of Patjarr who came in and out of Warburton as circumstances dictated. In Part Two, these encounters are placed in a wider
socio-geographic and historical context. Questions of ‘where?’ and ‘when?’ that the reader may have are, in part, addressed. Direct contact experiences are contextualised with other phenomena occurring simultaneously. The first vehicular inroads into the desert occurred as desert peoples’ views of the skies were also changing. Planes and their vapour trails were increasingly seen in the desert skies. The first satellites were visible in the night skies, travelling quickly through the spaces between stars and planets so well known to the people of Patjarr. Part Three places these stories in a modern political context taking them from interesting cross-cultural anecdotes to strong irrefutable justification of entitlement to recognition of the Story Owners’ status as traditional owners of country. Personalised contact stories from the recent past are juxtaposed with a legal judgement that precluded the granting of full native title rights. The paper concludes with a discussion of the ongoing and inexplicable nature of contact for those directly and actively involved in the cross-cultural frontier.

Part One

Fred’s Stories
In 2009, whilst filming Tatitjarra’s Story as part of an Indigenous Community Stories grant, Fred Kumpari Ward told a story about contact with a helicopter, standing beside a bush track pointing to country where the story took place. This eight-and-a-half minute recording is in his own language. At the end of the shot the renowned interpreter, Lizzie Giles, spoke to camera:

This is—Fred’s talking—my brother Fred is talking about the spot—this is the spot where he looked across over there to where he’s pointing and he saw the first white men and they were—there was a plane and a helicopter here and there were some of his families were here and he was by himself when he came with his bundles of spears and it was at this spot where he first met the white man—a white man for the first time and that man was Mr McDougall and he was the one who was coming out into country and getting people—talking people into going back—going into missions where the government had set up missions like Warburton and right here he was telling about how his family saw him and had a cry and after here he went
back to Patjarr and there he saw lot of—there was a large number of white people there who were talking people into going to missions—government set up missions to live and it was at that place where Mr Lawson told him said ‘where do you want to go—do you want to go to Jigalong or Wiluna or Warburton?’ and he didn’t say anything he just nodded his head and he talked about his family—what they were doing here prior to going to Patjarr and his mother—his mother caught up with him before he went to Patjarr just after being here and how she wore this huge dress that was billowing out behind her and um yeah that’s it and he went with—he went to Warburton from Patjarr they got him into a vehicle but they couldn’t get all his dogs in ‘cos they were too wild.

(2009 Disc 1, Tatitjarra’s Story)

This was not Fred Ward’s first encounter with white men or helicopters, rather it was the first time that he had been spoken to by a ‘white man’. A fuller story was forthcoming in 2011, filmed entirely in Mantjiltjarra language. His cousin sister Daisy Ward provided a running translation or summary in English. Earlier in his life, whilst still a boy, Fred, with many others, walked towards Warburton Mission:

When we could see smokes we would walk towards them to find other people. We walked to the Makarn Rockhole and Kumpul along the Gunbarrel Highway. At this time, we were walking towards Warburton. During these travels, we saw many men going in with gifts of kangaroos, wallabies and spears. As we approached Warburton, we could see white men were there. We picked up rations, nanny goat, sheep and kangaroo; and then went back to the bush. We wanted to kill dingo to trade. During this time, it was raining, we were naked without clothes, soaking wet. We ate kangaroo and drank the water at Kurnapuru, Warupuyu, Parntaltjarra and Pilyki, the claypan. We bumped into men during these travels, and the men joined us. The children travelled with their ngunytju [mothers] towards Mitika northeast of Warburton—where the cutline road was made a few years later from Giles Weather Station to Warburton, it joined up Wanarn and Mitika Homelands with Warburton. At this time, I was with Inkimata...who was my other ngunytju, and also my grandmothers, Kiwinyi and Taturli, from near Warakurna. We had bumped into Business [travelling Law ceremony] so men joined in too and we went into Warburton. We did not stay long. I learnt a song in Ngaanyatjarra language, a different language way of talking to me. I was given a pair of trousers. I didn’t know how to wear them and put the zip at the back. I was given a grey government thick blanket and I remember Captain West and his wife saying to the men with me ‘You can take him back to Patjarr, but return

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him here later’. Captain West knew a lot about the mission and worked with the missionaries. I don’t remember seeing Captain West after this. I was just a boy when the families were heading back from the Warburton Ranges to the bush. I could see smoke and climbed up and called out thinking it was my mother. Old Mrs Lawson, Daisy’s mother, skin-way mother, was coming from the east and met us. She said ‘Come on child sing me a song’. I sang in Ngaanyatjarra and she was amazed. When I came back to Warburton when I was a man she told me about this. My ngunytju [mother] was still travelling so I continued on with the other women.

(2011 Disc 3, Fred Ward’s Story)

After visiting Warburton and receiving a blanket and trousers the young Fred returned north with the larger group to what is now known as the Alfred and Marie Ranges. It was to be several years, as a teenager, before his first encounter with a helicopter:

We were coming back to Patjarr way. On the lakey country we saw it. Alo! They saw something coming. Alright now! They got up to have a look. Maybe someone had done a spell. Old Jimmy Ward shouted ‘Pakala’ [go away]. The ladies and children hid under the bushes and the men pointed their maparn [magic] to that thing. They put the maparn into the helicopter. Power things really. We could hear the maparn hitting the helicopter. The maparn was going off like fireworks. There were two white drivers [pilots]. All my people thought they were devils. Everyone was really scared. Then the helicopter went over the horizon. It was flying towards the Rawlinson Ranges. Must be that it fell over because of all that maparn. It was our very first plane [aircraft]. We all looked after each other and knew that it was a lucky escape from the white devils. We all had to stay together and stay away so the adults began nominating places that we should go, directions for travel to stay safe. We knew we shouldn’t separate or the white mamu [devil] might eat us.

(2011 Disc 3, Fred Ward’s Story)

Many months followed and the seasons changed. Older men could read the bird signs that a party of warriors were coming. Very early one morning Fred’s group took off towards Patjarr, in the Clutterbuck Hills where there were good hiding spots and water. Throughout his narrative Fred speaks of encounters with warrmarla (revenge warriors, avengers) and of being trained to be a warrmarla himself. In his second encounter with a
helicopter, he was travelling with an older man, Mr Campbell, tracking an unidentifiable bird from the imprints in the sand when:

We could hear this whistle from the top of the hill. We looked around. It was early morning. There was the sound of rock being hit. We heard it clearly then we saw the rotor and the helicopter was going up. 'Wait, wait, wait' we called. We would spear it if it came back. So, we went to Kurlkapitjarra. We went walking through the pila [spinifex plain] trying to get the helicopter but it flew off and we returned to where we had eaten the kangaroo meat. We stayed at Tjuntju for three nights and then we went back and there was that same track, the chopper had gone to another rockhole, Wayul way [a very sacred place].

(2011 Disc 4, Fred Ward's Story)

We had many surprises at this time. We were living our own way without whitefellas. I was a scrub boy and was learning Law for many years.

(2009 Disc 2, Tatitjarra's Story)

Fred spent several years going through different aspects of men's Law. During this time, he had his third crucial encounter with a helicopter:

After I went through the Law we went to Talala hunting around. It was raining, there were rabbits. Then we went to Pukurti. We slept near the creek bed because there was lots of water. I speared a kangaroo and then I could hear a weird whistling noise. Then I saw a helicopter on the other side and I saw a white man. I said I would stand there and told Mr Campbell to go around the other side to spear it because Mr Campbell was a left hander and might miss the white man. I was crawling on the ground and got to Mr Campbell, I told him to come closer and talk to the two whitefellas. They had binoculars and could see us and they had walkie-talkies. I had a spear and wanted to spear them right there. I got my spears, but the rotor going, going, around, around and the chopper took off. I tried to spear the helicopter. I got angry with kamarru [uncle], Mr Campbell, because he hid himself from the white men. I wanted to kill the two white men and burn the chopper! I was laughing at the way the chopper was running away. The whitefella was running to the chopper to run away and was gone. Mr Campbell was hiding in the branches. The chopper was in the air circling, they were looking for us. Those white men saw our smoke; they landed where we had burnt the grass. I asked him, 'Why are you getting sorry for the whitefellas? They are not your father!'. Mr Campbell was so frightened of the chopper, but I was so angry.

(2011 Discs 4 and 5, Fred Ward's Story)
Where does the first story fit into the narrative of Fred’s life? In preparing his Witness Statement for a Federal Court hearing in 2014 Fred confirmed again the information he had given three years earlier in Perth but this time in a more constructed narrative form (Ward 2014):

We were south of the Clutterbuck Hills. Everyone was together, Tjakamarra and his family were there and Napula Morgan she was there. We saw the helicopter. One whitefella could understand Luritja language from Alice Springs so I talked Luritja to him. He asked that we sit and he would come back with transport and we would get oranges and apples and tinned meat. Maramurtu [Walter MacDougall3] used the radio and then they flew back to Giles [Weather Station]. Daisy’s father had speared a white fella and was soon going to be taken to jail. He asked that I be brought to him. He said: ‘Go back and get my son [Fred Ward] or I will spear you all’. My mother came to look for me and tell me these things. She had walked a long way to get me and she was angry that I was not getting a good feed from the Ward families. She told me that whitefellas had come and left tinned meat. We were found by the patrol officers at Tika Tika. Maramurtu gave me a lift through Karilywarra to Warburton. Mr Lawson spotted me, and recognised me from being at Warburton as a little child. He cried out: ‘I was looking for you’. I didn’t say anything; I just shook my head slowly. Maramurtu sat next to me and he said: ‘I can take you to Jigalong, Papunya, where do you want to go?’. I said I wanted to go to Warburton. Fred’s departure from his homelands this time was far from easy: I was a really wild and an angry bushman. I was not happy. I wanted to spear the whitefellas, not live with them. But my families said the whitefellas would feed us. I put my ngupanu [dingo] on the truck but the people were scared of the dog and jumped off. So, I left my dog behind at Patjarr. Tjaapuyu was a good hunting ngupanu. I wasn’t happy about leaving my ngupanu there.

(Based on 2011 Disc 5, Fred Ward’s Story)

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3 Walter MacDougall was appointed a Native Patrol Officer by the Commonwealth Department of Supply in 1948, to safeguard the interests of Aboriginal people during the Woomera rocket tests (Gara 2017:366). He was called Marapika, mara-pika (hand-sick) at Yalata because he’d lost a couple of fingers in a rifle accident (Gara pers. comm. 2018). His name, Maramurtu, in northern desert languages refers to the same hand damage, mara-murtu (hand-short).
**Others Tell Their stories**

In January 2011, Daisy Ward and I, with Jason Thomas on camera, travelled to the Goldfields town of Wiluna in WA to record potential witnesses for an upcoming Federal Court native title case situated in the Gibson Desert (see Part Three). The Wiluna film trip occurred one month before Fred Ward was filmed in Perth. Napula Morgan spoke in Mantjiltjarra of seeing her first plane near Patjarr and her first white man at Kumpukurra on the west side of the Clutterbuck Hills when a helicopter landed and a white man gave food to her and two other girls. Her future husband went in a car, associated with the helicopter, back to Warburton with a Ngaanyatjarra man from Warburton, Andrew Lawson\(^4\), but shortly after walked back to the desert to take her as his wife. Her story cross references the first story told by Fred:

> We was scared that time when we were small. Don't know what's going on.  
> (2011 Disc 3, *Wiluna Film Trip*)

Cyril Maddog Morgan, deceased, told his own story in Mantjiltjarra in Wiluna in January 2011. It was Daisy’s father, Mulyamaru Ward, who he credited as travelling with MacDougall, the Native Patrol Officer, when the latter brought Cyril out of the desert and into Wiluna. Cyril, Fred and Daisy shared the same grandmother, Waparra, buried at Taltiwarra, in the northern Gibson Desert. Waparra had the three children: Fred’s father, Daisy’s father and Cyril’s mother. Cyril spoke of seeing helicopters and not knowing what they were. It was not until he was brought in to Wiluna that he understood helicopters were made by white men (2011 Disc 1, *Wiluna Film Trip*).

In 2002, canvasses from the Warburton Arts Collection were laid on the ground at Mina Mina claypan north of Patjarr. Artists took turns to speak to their paintings. The event was recorded on mini DV tapes, some of which appear to have been

\(^4\) The same Mr Lawson referred to by Fred Ward. In 2001 Andrew Lawson (deceased) was awarded an OAM for ‘service to the Aboriginal communities of the Western Desert’. He was a longstanding Chairman of the Ngaanyatjarra Council until his death.
lost. Pulpurru Davies explained and sang Songlines for many paintings, including a specific painting reproduced here, see Figure 2. I recorded Pulpurru’s words in a notebook, translated by her daughter Dorothy Ward:

White fellas bought helicopters. They came with a whistling noise and surprised us by landing. We was quietly digging for goanna. It was winter and they were all underground [hibernating]. When we heard that whistling, we dropped everything, wanna [digging stick], wirra [wooden bowl] and all. We hid. We was in the tali [sand hill country]. Bye and bye we saw them lift straight up, go sideways and fly away. We went over the tali to where they landed and looked at the tjina [imprints in the sand]. The whirly wind had taken the sand and flattened the plants. Those men must be wearing boots, there were no toes. No worries today. I get in plane and fly to Kalgoorlie [much public laughter]. In those days we don’t know what to call satellites or the big planes [jets]. Things was just moving in the sky [my emphasis].

It is Dadina Georgina Brown that provides the most recent contact experience with helicopters. This was in 1974 before the death of her elder sister in the desert. Whilst her parents were familiar with helicopters from their own experience in Wiluna, the children, born in the desert, were not. Dadina was frightened. The pilot landed on a flat claypan and on the second visit in 1975 gave her father a machete (Hercock and Brown 2009:16, 82).

…and when my mum and dad went hunting and my sister and me we used to follow them. My sister would always walk off and I’d always follow my sister so she could learn me and when we see a aeroplane coming we’d just grab—she’d grab my hand and we run when we see the tree or anything in front of us, we’d just go in and sit there ’til the noise stopped and she grabbed me and run to our parents.

(2011 Disc 10, Wiluna Stories)

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5 Pulpurru Davies was a foundation artist with the Warburton Arts Project. Many of her artworks are considered masterpieces of the Warburton Collection. Previously known as Katapi she featured extensively as an adult in several of the short ethnographic films directed by Ian Dunlop (People of the Australian Western Desert [1964–1968]), some of which were re-edited into the feature film Desert People (1968).
Part Two

*Gibson Desert, 1950s and 1960s*

The Story Owners of Part One came from a small and tightly related group that remained in the heartlands of the Gibson Desert when those on the desert fringes had already moved west to the towns of Laverton and Wiluna. From the west, vehicle access had been established from Laverton to Warburton Mission in 1934, but this road was well south of the Gibson Desert and terminated at the Mission. The first vehicle access into the Gibson Desert resulted from the creation of a road and facility network in WA, surveyed and constructed under the leadership of Len Beadell as part of a joint British and Australian government plan, formed at the end of World War II. Blue Streak missiles and rockets were launched from Woomera in South Australia (SA) and tracked from Anna Plains, on the coast near Broome in WA. It was envisaged that the rockets would follow a single trajectory known as the ‘centreline-of-fire’ (Bayly
2010:20; Davenport et al. 2005:3) (see Figure 3). Warburton and Jigalong Missions were the only European outposts of permanent settlement between Broome on the north-west coast of WA and Woomera in SA.

Figure 3 Australia, 1964, showing the rocket firing line, Giles Weather Station and Prohibited Areas in relation to Patjarr and the Central Aboriginal Reserves. Reproduced from Davenport et al. (2005:xiv). Original drawn by Brenda Thornley.
Warburton Mission, the most remote of the outposts, itself lay inside the western boundary of statutorily dedicated Aboriginal Reserve Land.\(^6\) Giles Meteorological/Weather Station was built in 1956 to provide information on atmospheric conditions relevant to the testing of nuclear weapons at Maralinga in SA (Bayley 2010:36; Doussett 2002). In 1958, Beadell completed the surveying and grading of what he called the Gunbarrel Highway, the first access road to connect Warburton Mission to Giles Weather Station to the north-east and beyond to the NT and SA. This single road also opened up access from Warburton to the mining and pastoral town of Wiluna to the west.

The construction of the Giles Meteorological Station with its airstrip and communication facilities enabled the first detailed aerial surveys of the eastern Gibson Desert. In 1957, John Veevers was employed by the Bureau of Mineral Resources in Canberra to command two crews; the first, ground proofing airphoto mosaics previously produced from low flying Air Force surveys flown in a series of east-west transects from a base at Noonkanbah Station to the north, and the second taking rock and fossil samples as indicators of potential oil deposits in the Canning Basin, a geological formation extending beneath the Gibson Desert (Government of Western Australia 2014). One party was based at Well 40 on the Canning Stock Route, another east of what is now Kiwirrkurra Community. During an interview recorded with me in Sydney, a reflective Veevers made several points pertinent to understanding what the Aboriginal people had seen and experienced north of Patjarr (Veevers 2002). For the times, the scale of the work was huge. The Department of Supply arranged for a truck and two Land Rovers to be shipped from Perth to Derby and then driven south. The Air Force flew a DC3 plane from Alice Springs to allow Army

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\(^6\) In 1920 the Western Australian government declared a large area of land adjacent to the Northern Territory and South Australian borders as ‘Land Reserved for the Use and Benefit of Aboriginal People’. In 1921 the South Australian government reserved land in the north-west of the State and the Commonwealth reserved land in the south-west of the Northern Territory for the same purpose. These three ‘reserves’ formed what became known as the Central Australian Aboriginal Reserves (Kral 2012:85 and 110). In 1988 responsibility for the majority of the Western Australian reserve lands was transferred from the Aboriginal Lands Trust to the Ngaanyatjarra Land Council under a 99-year lease.
dispatchers to parachute-land fuel drums for helicopter use. The ANA British military helicopter was flown from Melbourne to Alice Springs to Giles where it was serviced before heading to the survey area. It had wheels which could easily bog and:

...didn't have a crank. Our way of working was to come down on an outcrop, I'd have a look at it and Siggs Waterlander [the geophysicist] would take his gravity meter away from the rotor blades, motor still going of course, and measure the barometer for the elevation, which is important to the gravity meter and then use the gravity meter and then we would come back and carry on to the next point. At occasional places, like, a decent outcrop, I would want more than five minutes or so there. I would be allowed to get one shut down [motor switched off] on the day and that was very exciting, because if the battery had failed, and to that effect we carried a spare battery at any rate in case the power ran down, they cranked it out and they were always working very heavily on John [speaking of himself] not to stop [laughs] and take samples, because if it ran out...this thing [helicopter] was costing us one hundred pounds an hour, which is a fortune.
(Veevers 2002:tape 1, side 1)

Drums of fuel were also placed in slings beneath the helicopter. The helicopter was used by the surveyor who would venture out to land before dusk to make an astrofix:

They were the night blokes who would go out from wherever we were...these various corners [of the maps] and shoot the stars and come in the next day. They didn't want to fly at night, of course, and return that way.
(Veevers 2002:tape 1, side 1)

Their actual interactions with Aboriginal Australians were rare. At the base camp at Well 40:

...they had been into our camp and this was rather pathetic, they hadn't taken anything, things were left lying around, breakfast or whatever, but they had made the most crudest cover up of their tracks that I had ever seen [laughs] for people who were meant to be good at that, or at detecting tracks. It was very
obvious that. A very poor cover up. On another occasion coming into Well 40 we actually flushed people out, because we were naughty aggressive people in a way. If we thought there was someone there we would hover over them and no doubt scare the daylights out of them, I am afraid. I think we actually sighted somebody, but it was the night party, Casper’s the surveyor, that made the first real contacts. They saw these folk and they actually came out of the woodwork as it were, became visible out from Well 40 when they landed and that must have been the occasion when they took the woman with a spear wound in her thigh and a boy of ten or twelve years who had severe osteomyelitis. His ankle was a mess. So they were taken no doubt in their first contact with a helicopter to Well 48 and from there they went on to Balgo Hills. [The boy was the artist Helicopter Tjungarrayi, a close relative of Fred Ward (Haskin 2018)]. They must have been becoming quite familiar with us because I can remember Siggs Waterlander, the geophysicist, would have offered these chaps some food in the form of an opened can of beans or something like that. It was quaint to us, I remember it now vividly, because instead of taking a bit and passing it round [laughs] he hung on to it. They were dressed this way, in a laplap, or whatever it is. I don’t know if that was our rag or his. I suppose it was ours. (Veevers 2002:tape 1, side 1)

In 1961, the Western Command Field Survey Unit of the Army was surveying land to the west and south-west of Patjarr. The historian Mark Chambers (pers. comm. 2014), researching this event, ascertained their work involved a helicopter, pilot and support crew and ground support in two Land Rovers. There appears to have been no direct contact with local people.

By 1963, four Beadell vehicle access ‘roads’ had been graded in what could be termed an encircling manner around a huge portion of the Gibson Desert, that contained deep in its interior, the well-watered, in desert terms, Clutterbuck Hills and Patjarr waterhole (see Figure 4). Almost immediately the Commonwealth Government deployed Native Patrol Officers to the area, men employed through the Weapons Research Establishment at Woomera to establish contact with Indigenous persons living in the desert. The new roads, few as they were, provided access into the desert hitherto only available by

7 Veevers laughed at his own naivety when I suggested that the Aboriginal people may have assumed that he, like them, could track individuals and were therefore obscuring the likelihood that he could identify individuals from their footprints.
helicopter or camel. The Patrol Officers reported sighting people as they passed through the desert to the north of Warburton. Aware of the weapon-testing timetable, these Patrol Officers suggested and assisted the relocation of any groups they encountered that could be in physical danger from rockets that malfunctioned in flight and crashed to earth. Patrol Officers Robert Macaulay (1964), William Neech (1965), Walter MacDougall (1965), Bob Verburgt (1966 and 1968) and Glen Cornish (1967) wrote detailed reports of the Indigenous groups they encountered (Sackett 2014). These were the first archival records of the people of Patjarr. In most cases, individuals remain unnamed, identified by their relationships to each other, their approximated age and classificatory skin name according to desert sub-section customary rules.

Figure 4 Weapons Research Establishment road network. Modified from Bayly (2010).
In 1965 the first commercial oil exploration was undertaken by the exploration consortium Alliance Petroleum and Union Oil and it appears that the Native Patrol Officers utilised the resources of oil exploration staff on the ground. The permit system for access to Warburton tied in with the Patrol Officers also reporting to the Western Australian Department of Native Welfare (Keller 1965). This accords with Indigenous recall.

Several individuals quoted in this paper were filmed in 1965 and 1968 in an internationally acclaimed series of short, ethnographic films made by Ian Dunlop for Film Australia, People of the Western Desert. Anthropologist Robert Tonkinson, assisted on some shoots, providing detailed anthropological observations that became incorporated into Dunlop’s own notes and subsequent film narrations (Dunlop 1965, 1966a, 1966b, 1974, 2003). In the mid-1960s, ethno-archaeologist Richard Gould and his wife, Betsy, observed and recorded the daily lives of people living at Patjarr waterhole and other locations in the Gibson Desert (1967, 1968a, 1966b, 1969, 1970). Dunlop, Tonkinson and the Goulds clearly name and identify individuals. This familiarity was reciprocated with two children being named Ian after Ian Dunlop and Richard Gould respectively.

Pulpurru Davies, artist of the helicopter painting, features as a mature woman in the Dunlop films (Parts 1 and 2) at Patjarr in 1965 where she is called Katapi. She is filmed with her husband Tjakamarra, and surviving co-wives: Marnupa and Tjungupi, and their children including Ngampukutju/Ian Ward quoted below. Napula Morgan, cited in Part One, is also with the family. Dunlop notes the family had been met by the Patrol Officer, MacDougall, in 1964 and after the filming MacDougall met them again, north of Patjarr in 1965. In October 1965, a patrol took the family into Warburton. A few weeks later Pulpurru/Katapi’s husband Tjakamarra died (Dunlop 1966a:8). Four years later, the Goulds camped at Patjarr where they observed Katapi/Pulpurru with her second husband and four of her children from the first marriage including the late Tana (Richard Ward who guided the initial ICS film project Tatitjarra’s Story) and young son Ian Ward (Gould 1969).

In the late 1960s, the juxtaposition between international developments in space exploration and the lives of these desert dwellers could not have been larger: several
countries were launching satellites; American and Russian astronauts had walked in space, a vehicle landed on the moon, and the first human had walked on the lunar surface (Glover 2005). Of those he observed at Pulykara, Gould (1970:1) mused: ‘In an era marked by moonshots and urban blight, wars and dissent, ten Australian Aborigines peaceably subsist as hunters and gatherers with time to spare’.

Where does Fred Ward (and his detailed helicopter stories) fit in? Both Gould and Dunlop documented and filmed Fred’s stepfather Mitapuyi/Tjiltjit/Jimmy Ward and his mother Yiniparni/Ngurpaya and co-wives and younger children but by the mid-1960s Fred was a man leading his own independent desert life, seldom mixing with families. It is likely that he encountered Maramurtu/MacDougall in 1965. Napula Morgan and Dalpo/Mr Cawley Campbell were filmed at Patantja Claypan to the northwest of Patjarr, and at Kunapurul, north of Warburton (Dunlop 1966b:Parts 11–19). This is the same Mr Campbell in Fred’s story who refused to spear the white fella, choosing instead to hide. Napula had been given as a child to her deceased mother’s sister, Katapi/Pulpurru. As such she was filmed firstly with her family as a teenager and then a few years later as a young mother.

Dadina Brown’s first sighting of white men in 1975 has been well documented by both herself (Hercock and Brown 2009) and those in the expeditionary crew who brought her family into Wiluna (Peasley 2006, 2015). She is also the subject of a film made in 1997, The Last of the Nomads.

The late Ian Ward brought together the changes his family had experienced in a recorded interview with me in 2003:

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8 Mr I. Ward died 27 January 2008 whilst in protective custody. His death was the subject of a documentary Who Killed Mr Ward? by reporter Liz Jackson for Four Corners, ABC.
We was living with the rockhole and we were happy, everybody getting kuka [meat], and then whitefella came and they want to drop the bomb, bomb, want to drop the bomb in one certain place. All the yarrangu pirni [Aboriginal people] had to shift ngurra [country]...We came in through the testing of the rocket. It was gathered to us to the Mission. The whitefella took all the people into the Mission...Government time, the Mission was closing down, just a little bit of missionary there. Community got big. From there Hunt Oil was looking, searching for oil. At that time we had no power, no authority, no protection. They came yiwarra [tracks, roads], cutline, through all the sites and ngurra. Lately they had a satellite that could take photos of all the rocks, the colour, the place, the soil below, underneath so they could find rocks. They looked at all the richness of underground beneath the surface—different colour, soil, purli pirni [all the rocks]. Then they came in.

(I. Ward 2003)

Warburton Community is located 560 km northeast of Laverton and 900 km northeast of the closest regional centre, Kalgoorlie. It is 1050 km southwest of Alice Springs. When they did arrive at Warburton, the Gibson Desert people experienced a world quite unlike that experienced by the majority of their Indigenous contemporaries elsewhere in Australia (Brooks and Plant 2016; Plant and Viegas 2002). At Warburton Mission they became incorporated into a larger Indigenous world in a more persistent manner than hitherto experienced, joining together with families who themselves had experienced contact at most 30 years earlier with the establishment of the Mission in 1934. There were no other concentrations or communities of Indigenous people other than at Warburton for hundreds of kilometres. The creation of the tri-state Central Australian Reserves had, to a great extent, insulated and protected the lifestyle and traditions of the desert inhabitants from external Australian incursions and influences (Tindale 1940–41:71–81). A lone mission and the Weapons Research Establishment era had done little to change this isolation.

Warburton as a residential community had its own unique profile in the late 1960s. Brooks asserts that in the Ngaanyatjarra region:
...the overall impact of settler society has been relatively light. The people were not moved away from their country, the mission era was relatively benign and through the decades up to the 1960s, most of the population was able to adjust to the new circumstances at their own pace. (Brooks 2011b:208; see also Kral 2014:172–174).

In the ensuing years, this small group of closely related families became incorporated with other desert groups based at Warburton, the Ngaanyatjarra on whose traditional country Warburton was situated, the Pintupi, Ngaatjarra, Nyuntunatjarra and Pitjantjatjara. They became part of what is glossed as the Ngaanyatjarra Peoples\(^9\), inhabitants of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands\(^10\), members of the Ngaanyatjarra Council\(^11\), serviced by a range of Ngaanyatjarra Council operated transport, health and education services, residents of small residential communities within the Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku\(^12\).

However, their co-existence with other desert groups at Warburton was and still is uneasy. They are referred to as ‘northerners’ in a pejorative way (Turner 1993). In the words of Daisy Tjuparntari Ward:

> Kids at Warburton used to say to us *kayilinykutu* [go back to the north]...They called us “lizard eaters”...I used to recognise that my father’s Mantjiltjarra *wangka* [language] was different to what they spoke in Warburton when I was growing up...Sometimes at Warburton it was hard and if people got jealous for us *kayili* [north] mob, kids would give us cheek and say ‘go back to Tika Tika’. I heard about Tika Tika and I thought, where is Tika Tika? (Ward 2014)

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\(^9\) This term was initially used sporadically (McLean 1994; Thompson 1998) and then more extensively throughout the native title period in multiple volumes supporting the native title application brought by *The Peoples of the Ngaanyatjarra Lands, WAG 6004 of 2004* (Brooks 2004).

\(^10\) A specific area of ‘A Class Reserve Land’ leased to the Ngaanyatjarra Council for a period of 99 years by the Western Australian government in 1998.

\(^11\) The Ngaanyatjarra Council is the principal governance organisation in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands.

\(^12\) The Shire of Ngaanyatjarraku was established in 1993.
This uneasiness translated into a deep desire to return to their traditional lands and create a settlement at Patjarr. By the early 1980s this movement to return northward was under way (Turner 1993). Inter-related family groups camped out and by their own labours cut a single road by hand from Mipultjarra, a significant site on the Gunbarrel Highway to Patjarr. Over time the residential settlement grew from a few makeshift camps into a small functioning incorporated community under the auspices of the Ngaanyatjarra Council. As late as the early 1990s the twin forces of isolation and lack of vehicle access meant few visitors came to Patjarr, including government employees responsible for the A Class nature reserve on which Patjarr people had unwittingly sunk their water bores and built their airstrip. This was to change with the introduction of native title legislation in Australia.

Part Three

The Native Title Era

For those seeking to address issues of native title, ‘first contact’ in the 1960s is interpreted as recent contact in the settled history of Australia and as such is a clear means of establishing customary practice and cultural continuity from a period that predated British Australian influence to the present. Native title work in the desert regions of WA began in the late 1990s. Its influence has now been felt for nearly twenty years13.

Patjarr people enthusiastically embraced native title research. The methodological challenge was how to enable people who speak their own languages and have either limited or no English to best represent themselves in the Western legal system. One way was for them to speak to, sing and celebrate their culture by reference to the artworks held in the Warburton Collection and for these actions and events to be recorded visually and in film forms for the perusal of all parties (Turner 2005).

The majority of desert native title claims have been resolved by mediation, undertaken by members and staff of the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT) (Central Desert Native

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13 The Martu, Kiwirrkurra and Spinifex native title claims were registered in 1998 with the National Native Title Tribunal (NNTT).
and more recently Registrars and staff of the Federal Court through case management. The State of WA has been party to all these mediations which when finalised are termed Consent Determinations (see s. 87 of the *Native Title Act 1993* [Cth]). The Indigenous claimants are not required to give evidence in person. Published, archival materials and research undertaken by the applicants’ experts is brought together in a Connection Report to confirm the threshold issue of whether the Indigenous applicants have a case for proving strong links and continuity to the country (Neate 2002:4). However, this process which avoids the costs and intrusiveness of Court proceedings was unavailable to the people of the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve.

The State formally vested a significant portion of the Gibson Desert as a Class A Nature Reserve on 22 April 1977. With this vesting native title rights and interests over the land were fully extinguished at law. On every side of the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve (GDNR) the Federal Court had determined legally the existence of the strongest form of native title, exclusive possession. The State of WA had agreed by consent determinations. In 2005, the Chief Justice of the Federal Court pronounced that the effected lands would have been included in the Ngaanyatjarra Lands Determination of full native title but for the creation of the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve in 1977.

The establishment of the GDNR after the introduction of the *Racial Discrimination Act 1975* (Cth), created a legal liability for the State to compensate the Mantjiltjarra People of the GDNR for the extinguishment of their native title rights under the *Native Title Act 1993* (Cth). This liability was recognised in 2005 by the State signing a Memorandum of Understanding with the

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14 The NNTT was established as an impartial, independent body (Neate 2002:7). Mediation occurs under s 86A(1) of the *Native Title Act 1993*.

15 At the minimum, expert anthropological research will be undertaken, however some claims also include research reports by linguists, archaeologists and historians.

16 Reserved under section 29(1) of the *Land Act 1933* and vested in the WA Wildlife Authority (superseded by the Department of Biodiversity, Conservation and Attractions).
People of the GDNR (Fred Ward, Ian Ward, Daisy Ward and Jacky Giles were signatories) for joint management pending the creation of relevant legislation. Whilst begun with good intentions, the Indigenous Conservation Title Bill was not realised. The People of the GDNR had tried the political process and indeed got very close to success with both Houses of Parliament passing the Indigenous Conservation Title Bill, despite the opposition of the Liberal Party. On the eve of a state election technical drafting issues meant further work was required before the Bill could be proclaimed. The ensuing landslide victory to the Barnett Liberal Government, which had opposed the Bill in principle, meant the ICT Bill was now dead. The attempt to gain a new form of Indigenous title with a leaseback to the State conservation authority was discontinued. The last resort available to the traditional owners was legal compensation action under the Native Title Act.

Thus, the people began a Compensation application, Fred Ward & Ors on behalf of the Traditional Owners of the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve vs State of Western Australia [WAD86/2012]. Representatives of the State and the Federal Court met face to face for the first time with traditional owners on country in August 2014. For two weeks individuals were put to proof at a Federal Court hearing, at Mina Mina north of Patjarr. People gave evidence in the variety of ways open to them under the strict rules of Court proceedings. In one session, they sang the ceremonial songs associated with the acrylic canvasses painted throughout the 1990s, known as the Masterpieces of the Warburton Arts Collection, and told of the cultural information encoded in the art-glass panels and bowls of contemporary artistic practice. Reference was made to the Tingarri art-glass panels made by the Senior Applicant, Fred Ward, now installed into the walls of Parliament House in Perth. Finally, artworks some 25 years old, fulfilled a role that in the words of Jennifer Biddle ‘has taken the Australian consciousness twenty years to grasp: that Aboriginal art is history, archive, proper’ (Biddle 2013:19).

17 In 1993 a large kiln was installed at Warburton and artists began creating artworks in slumped glass for the architectural and domestic markets. Several art-glass panels remain in the Warburton Collection.
To the people, the connectedness between themselves and their aspirations to be recognised by the State as the rightful owners and decision-makers for the land now called the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve were tangible and obvious. Court staff assisted by transcription officers, barristers and solicitors for the Aboriginal Applicants, the State and the Commonwealth witnessed the presentation of Aboriginal evidence (Tasker 2014). Sacred places and stories were shared, ceremonies witnessed, special sessions convened for men and women elders to give separate sacred gender specific evidence according to customary traditions. All evidence was open to cross-examination. Each morning, Court and legal practitioners would alight from planes at the Patjarr airstrip. Each evening, planes would depart with these workers for their accommodation at Warburton Roadhouse. Site visits were undertaken by helicopter.

In August 2015, the people were told by their solicitor that the Judge, Barker J, had ruled that the grant of historical petroleum exploration licences early last century extinguished the native title right to ‘exclude’ others from the Gibson Desert Nature Reserve. This decision largely undermined the basis on which the compensation claim was brought, the consequential quantum of compensation that could be obtained and therefore the leverage which it was hoped would persuade the State to offer title to the land and monies for joint management (Tasker 2015). The Applicants produced their own press release:
This week a group of culturally strong Aboriginal men and women met with staff from the Central Desert Native Title Service to discuss in detail their options in Australia's test case on native title compensation. There was stunned silence from the attendees at the small remote residential community beside the Clutterbuck Hills in the Gibson Desert of Western Australia. How could it be that an oil exploration licence issued in the 1920s and never worked upon could take away a major part of their native title rights? This was before their first contact with Europeans in the 1960s, before Len Beadell graded his famous desert access roads in the 1950s, before even Warburton Mission was established in the 1930s. No strangers had been in this country yet the existence of a paper license had taken away their rights at law. (Turner 2015)

If the oil licenses were known to exist why were they not raised in the surrounding native title applications and determinations?

In the words of claimant Daisy Ward (pers. comm. 2015): ‘this is the actions of mean-spirited people who won’t share with us bush people, who won’t pay compensation for taking our rights away without asking’. The senior Applicant Fred Ward (pers. comm. 2015) broke his silence as the decision was made to withdraw from legal action, rather than proceed in such reduced circumstances. His sentiment, spoken in his own language:

...we can not trust these whitefellas, this white law [the Native Title Act] is not for us. No-one can tell us that we do not control the knowledge for this country, the sacred power that lies within.

Political process and the Native Title Act had failed these culturally strong desert elders, members of the last traditionally intact Indigenous society to stay on their lands before contact with the Western world.
Conclusions

Sixty years ago the desert inhabitants of what is now known as the Gibson Desert wondered about the new forms of twinkling, moving lights in the night sky and the vapour trails high in the daytime skies. It was another ten and in some cases 20 years before they met the white skinned occupants. In subsequent decades, they have themselves become accustomed to helicopters and aircraft, using them for site surveys, aerial burning and feral animal control (Figure 5). Many have benefitted from medical evacuations through the Royal Flying Doctor Service. Some artists have travelled nationally and internationally. Yet despite these contemporary experiences they remain individuals who are defined by contact and continue to be at the experiential interface between peoples of different cultures.

Figure 5 Ben Brown Jnr and Jeffrey Stewart, both of whom directly experienced contact, on fire patrols west of the GDNR. May 2012. Photo: A. Wall. Reproduced with permission of DBCA, Kalgoorlie Office, and with the men’s consent.
My research confirms that for those concerned and their families, contact is integral to the present. Contact encounters are not events that occurred in a distant, historical past. Rather, contact is a concept that assists non-Indigenous people to understand the continuing relevance of desert Indigenous culture to contemporary life (Brooks 2011a, 2011b; Brooks and Jorgenson 2015; Kral 2012, 2014; Thompson 1998; Thorley 2016).

This paper responds to the challenge presented by Mike Smith in his monograph centred on the people of the Cleland Hills to ‘bring Aboriginal people as individuals into historical focus, redressing the anonymity that frontier histories usually confer on Aboriginal people’ (Smith 2005:2). The limitations of vehicle access and relatively recent date for road construction has meant the people of Patjarr in the Clutterbuck Hills have experienced contact very differently to those described by Smith for the Cleland Hills less than 300 km to the east as the crow flies but some 1100 kms by road. The people of Patjarr are named, their voices heard, albeit in translations, their family relationships established as they speak to us of their contact experiences through film, oral recordings, paintings and art-glass. The artworks in the Warburton Collection are indeed their ‘history, archive, proper’ (Biddle 2013:19). These archival materials are an immensely detailed and often cross-referenced repository of their life experiences, recorded on-country, recorded in their own language, in the presence of family and friends.

The stories demonstrate their Story Owners long standing cultural strength and fortitude, juxtaposed with the emergence of cadastral borders, the ignorance of dominant Australian cultural paradigms and the incomprehensibility of Western law. In a letter to Justice Barker dated 23 August 2015 Daisy Ward wrote:
We grew up observing things not having them talked about all the time and there were strict punishments if you did wrong...When you came out to the lands, Judge, you were welcomed and people shared these stories with you, shared how scared they were when they saw whitefellas and their things, when they were given strange food, was it poison? They hid their children away from the big devil. But my people went even further for you. They told you and showed you the rock-holes, how they got water, showed you many things...We gave our sharing and gifts to you on the country so that the Court people would not feel like strangers, but then in Perth what happened? This news makes it seem like we are all still strangers...For me growing up I thought there were no other white people, because there were only black people living on the lands, until I learnt from school: about the man going to the moon; James Cook; the early explorers, all that I was learning at school. That’s when I realised there were cities and other countries...I am a strong culture woman I showed you and protected you from danger and going crazy. The spirits were with us, they were on the ground when we were preparing for you, the wind showed itself. I knew the spirits were with me. You put your trust in me to protect you. And I did. But who protects me from a piece of paper in the 1920s?

The Court staff and State and Commonwealth barristers had flown daily in and out of Patjarr daily. Site visits were done by helicopter. The irony was not lost on the people.

They just fly in and out. They don’t know how to stay and live on country. Just fly in and out. Like they always done.
(Daisy Tjuparntari Ward pers. comm. 2018)

Attempts to secure title to their lands have been circuitous for the Story Owners represented in this paper and the questioning of their bona fides as circular and maddening to the people of Patjarr as the whirling blades of the helicopters with which they first experienced contact.
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