

The following article includes the text of a presentation given at the Australian Museums and Galleries Association National Conference in Alice Springs in May 2019. Aunty Evelyn Parkin and Elisabeth Gondwe explain the practical tasks of telling an inclusive history, one in which the stories of First Nations' people are not subordinated below colonial ones. It is a history which says there was (and still is) conflict; but also says that First Nations' peoples are still making history some of which is shared with non-Aboriginal people.

The presentation is about the practical steps of one small local museum, the North Stradbroke Island Museum on Minjerribah.

Walking Together: Incorporating Aboriginal and European perspectives into small museum processes and practices.

Aunty Evelyn Parkin and Elisabeth Gondwe

North Stradbroke Island Museum on Minjerribah

**At the Centre. Australian Museums and Galleries Association National Conference.
13-17 May 2019 Mparntwe, Northern Territory.**



The authors feel that what they are trying to do has lessons for other museums and for all places and groups who are offering stories of past, present and future to their localities and communities. In particular, we hope to encourage and support openness about the past, present and future.

The text keeps the style of the verbal presentation rather than the more usual academic format of a journal. We feel this gives a better expression of the issues and more fully conveys our way of telling and talking about history.

A note on location

The histories we are telling are of Minjerribah/North Stradbroke Island. The buildings of the museum are at Goompi/Dunwich on Minjerribah. The island is the second largest sand island in the world (after K'gari/Fraser Island) and forms part of the eastern barrier of Moreton Bay the enclosed waterways which stretches from the Gold Coast through the Brisbane City area to the Sunshine Coast in South East Queensland.

“Quandamooka” is a word from the Jandai language used to describe Moreton Bay and the islands within it. The Quandamooka People are the people of the lands and waters of Moreton Bay including the two Stradbroke Islands (only separated in 1896) and Moorgumpin/Moreton Island. Colonial occupation

occurred in the 1820s and was followed by armed conflicts, resistance and clearances. However, Quandamooka people maintain continuous occupation on the Island and currently are around a quarter of the permanent Island population of 2120 persons. There are 329 Aboriginal and Torres Island people (38%) of the 860 population of Goompi.

Quandamooka Peoples' native title rights and interests over the land and waters on and surrounding Minjerribah and some islands in Moreton Bay were recognised in 2011. Those over Moorgumpin and the mainland littoral are in the legal process. This is the largest body of native title lands and waters close to any metropolitan area in Australia. Quandamooka Yoolooburrabee Aboriginal Corporation (QYAC), the prescribed body corporate, is the largest by membership of any in the country.

Minjerribah is also a prime site for colonial history and heritage. The convict causeway at Goompi is the oldest place on the Queensland Heritage Register. Around 23,000 inmates were placed in the the Dunwich Benevolent Asylum from 1864 to 1946. It was the state institution for the indigent and poor of the entire colony/state of Queensland. There was also a lazaret at Goopi which was later moved to nearby Peel Island. All of these set up complex relationships between Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. For example, the Asylum relied on Aboriginal workers who through industrial and political actions were able to get paid at award rates - equal to non-Aboriginal workers - in 1944. This was well before equal pay was achieved anywhere else in Australia.

The museum has become increasingly aware that it needs to explicitly tell three histories - 25,000 years of First Nations' people; occupation and colonisation and the shared experiences of 200 years. The presentation of Aunty Evelyn Parkin and Elisabeth Gondwe is a record of tentative efforts to walk together. In part, the story is put forward to ask others to say how it could be done better.

Aunty Evelyn Parkin

We acknowledge the Traditional Owners and Custodians of Alice Springs. We acknowledge the Elders of the past, present and the future. We bring the spirit of my Ancestors in harmony and peace.

Yura. Hello. I am a Quandamooka woman from Minjerribah/Stradbroke Island. I am on the Museum Committee and I volunteer there giving cultural history talks to all groups from adults to children. This is my daughter Stephanie. I would like to introduce Elisabeth Gondwe who is the Musarian at the North Stradbroke Island Museum on Minjerribah. We share with you today our *Walking Together* program.

Elisabeth Gondwe

In Queensland the majority of museums are of the 'brave pioneer' variety where colonial narratives are reproduced. If you have been to one, there is little value in going to another. They are filled with the same objects and similar Eurocentric story about discovery and colonisation, mainly with an agricultural focus. Two exceptions are the Cherbourg Ration Shed Museum and the Yugambah Museum. Museums reflect the volunteers that founded and control them and white Australian stories of the past. The dominant colonial narrative does not allow for other public stories. There is a national crisis in the museums sector. Our *Walking Together* program is our way of addressing this lack of inclusion in our museum.

The Museums biggest challenge is how we go about facilitating First Nation representation, including First Nation ontology and sovereignty, to move beyond a settler colonial national story. We try and explore the lack of visibility of First Nations history and culture.

Aunty Evelyn Parkin.

The true Australian story began thousands and thousands of years ago. It is a wonderful story that needs to be told of an Ancient people and Mother Earth living in spiritual harmony. It is a history of a very rich culture of Lore and Order, structure, purpose and identity.



For instance, look at this **picture**, I am reminded that my Quandamooka Country is known as Yulu-Burri-Ba, the people of the sand and sea. We have many stories about the spirit of the salt water and fresh water and one amazing true story is about a mermaid known as Warrajamba. The story of Warrajamba has been handed down from one generation to another. Warrajamba is true and a real being. We have names for every animal. Yungan was for dugong and Warrajamba had her own name and is living in our Bay.

Elisabeth Gondwe

Our museum is the North Stradbroke Island Museum on Minjerribah. It is on Quandamooka country - occupied for time immemorial and colonised for under 200 years. It is a volunteer-based not-for-profit organisation. It started in 1987 and employs two part-time professional staff. There is a board of 8 people, representing all three townships, and different social networks.

As part of trying to express and share different knowledges, the Museum has adopted the use of dual naming. As a first step, in 2017 our name was changed from the *North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum* to the *North Stradbroke Island Museum on Minjerribah*. Going forward, all Museum exhibitions, publications and activities will adopt dual naming.

As noted by Canadian writer Caitlain Gordon-Walker, city (smaller) museums are better placed to engage with the complexities of intercultural interactions as they occur on a local and level rather than reproducing established national mythologies¹. It is the local stories that break the ground for a new crop of historical paradigms and the creation of new norms. This can happen because smaller museums are not controlled and funded by the State but are only constrained by the understanding of the individuals within. This has been an issue at the NSIMM with some committee members over the past decades strongly rejecting non colonial stories of the past on Minjerribah. People feel their lived experience very strongly and are unsettled when an alternative narrative that is not their lived experience is shared. It threatens the status quo. We need to unsettle to allow space for new stories of the past and not just those of the dominant group in our colonial state. There is a tendency to only tell the story of those who came from the ships, not those from the shore.

Colonial history dominates the Museum's story-telling on the walls.

But it is not enough to just change our displays that visitors look at. We recognised the need to embed First Nation ontology and ways of doing things in our processes. The Museum has instigated a process we call *Walking Together*. This is a deliberate, active process, where the Board dedicates time at each meeting to

¹Gordon Walker Caitlin "Beyond Inclusion: Canadian and Indigenous Sovereignties in Mainstream Museums *BC Studies*; Vancouver Iss. 199, (Autumn 2018):129 p.13

reflect carefully on our aspiration to properly document and display the shared journey of living together on Minjerribah. *Waking Together* includes governance and inclusion, meeting procedure and collection management.

Aunty Evelyn Parkin

Governance and Inclusion

The museum has always had Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal community members on the management committee. Non-Aboriginal people have been more numerous. Several Aunties have made lasting contributions to our museum through their involvement as volunteers and on our management committee.

Aunty Eileen O'Loughlin

Aunty Estelle Bertossi

Aunty Rose Borey

Petrina Walker

We honour these ladies for their contribution.

A result of this was the book *Moongalba (Myora) Sitting Down Place* that was compiled and written by Bernice Fischer with assistance from Auntie Rose Borey and Aunty Estelle Bertossi. It was published by the museum in 1997.

At present we have two Quandamooka people on our management committee: Aunty Evelyn Parkin and Karen Rylance. Having Quandamooka people in Governance and decision making of the museum is vital for embedding processes.

Aunty Evelyn Parkin

Meeting Procedure.

In recognition of the importance of keeping *Walking Together* as an ongoing process, it has been put as the first item of business on the agenda for our management committee meetings. Aunty Evelyn Parkin who is a Quandamooka Elder and committee member delivers the report and informs the committee of what has been happening during the last month and what is happening in the future. Staff and volunteers also add to the report *Walking Together*.

Elisabeth Gondwe

Collection Management

Most museums in invaded colonial countries are based on Western Materialism. Museums collect, own and control objects. Most museums only collect what they can own and control.

This is the story of the deposit of the *Oodgeroo of the Tribe Noonuccal Custodian of the Land Minjerribah Collection* at the NSIMM. Kath Walker, / Oodgeroo Noonuccal's son Denis Walker and his oldest daughter Petrina Walker approached the museum to see if we could assist with preserving Oodgeroo's collection. This is a collection of National significance² and it was housed at Moongalba on Minjerribah North Stradbroke Island in a tin shed. A portion of Oodgeroo's papers had been lodged with the University of Queensland Fryer Library prior to Oodgeroo's passing. The bulk of the collection was retained by the family and included all of the handwritten first drafts of poetry, artworks, and correspondence.

"What is the point of a museum that cannot help preserve a collection of national significance and that excludes segments of the community due to rigid culturally subjective rules?" After a lot of talking with the Walker family and the Museum committee and with help of indigenous intellectual property lawyer Terri

²Blake Thom 2010 *North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum Assessment of Significance* Funded by Community Heritage Grant Department of the Environment, Water, Heritage and the Arts.

Janke, the museum negotiated the Oodgeroo of the Tribe Noonuccal Custodian of the Land Minjerribah Management Deed.³

This was an attempt to be more relevant and representative of the community, and to be a model for other Aboriginal families to use the Museum as a safe-keeping place.

Part of the significance of the Oodgeroo Collection – and of great importance to the family - was that it remained on the island and in the community where Oodgeroo lived and belonged to. It is as Caitlin Gordon Walker describes in the Canadian context, it is 'ownership of culture being asserted within ancestral territories.'⁴ The right to own and represent one's own culture does not bring with it an obligation to represent that culture for the benefit of anyone else.

As part of this process, at the request of Dennis Walker, the Museum Committee and volunteers undertook a Cultural Heritage Education Workshop. Many of the committee expected a description of life and customs before colonisation. This is the main way that Aboriginal people have been presented to Australians. Instead the workshop focused on Aboriginal Law and Sovereignty and examined various pieces of British and Australian legislation. It was all about sovereignty and the wish for Australian society to come under Aboriginal structures. It is clear and evidenced what Dennis presented; it is not evidenced what the participants did or not understand.

It was actually a special ceremony.

In more recent years we have reviewed our collection management policies to address Quandamooka community expectations and intellectual property considerations. We have drafted a Cultural Protocol document which is a broad statement of underlying guiding principles. It is not intended to be minutely prescriptive. The principles are based on values and expectations of the community.

Database Language and Display Captions and Text

We have a collection database that has been compiled over the past 32 years mainly by volunteers. The language in the descriptive fields is often ill informed, culturally nuanced and Eurocentric. Our file names for digitized images are problematic also with volunteers digitizing the images and applying Eurocentric metadata and file names. When items are misnamed, they become unsearchable and invisible in our collection.

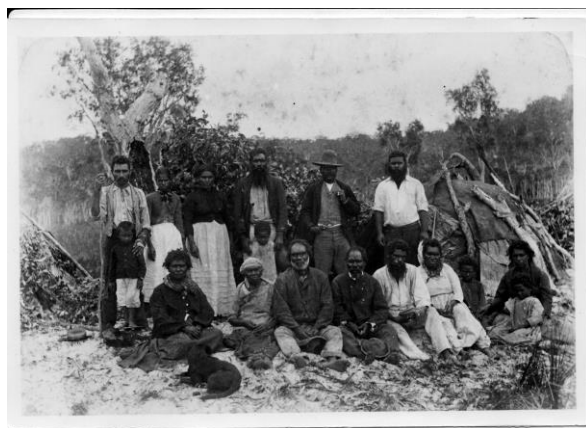
The captions and text on the walls flow on from the information that is in our database. We have started getting photographs and taking them to elders and Island organisations to try and put all the names of the people in the images.

Aunty Evelyn Parkin .

This is a **photo** of Great Grandfather Dick Martin, Great Granny Nuningha and the little boy is my Grandfather Alfred Martin.

³*The Oodgeroo of the Tribe Noonuccal Custodian of the Land Minjerribah Collection Management Deed Between the North Stradbroke Island Historical Museum and the Walker Family.* March 2012 Prepared by Terri Janke and Company.

⁴Gordon Walker Caitlin "Beyond Inclusion: Canadian and Indigenous Sovereignties in Mainstream Museums *BC Studies*; Vancouver Iss. 199, (Autumn 2018):129. pg



A common practice throughout Australian museums are photographs on walls of Aboriginal people without names, whilst you will see non-Aboriginal people with names and descriptions attached to the photos. It is a sad thing to see and we have begun a process of talking with our Elders to correct this. At our museum, a collection of photographs and stories are held and only with the permission of the families can they be accessed. We believe this helps people to contribute their stories and photographs to the Museum, knowing that they will be looked after and only accessed with their permission. Something that I and my family have experienced as Aboriginal people is photographs of our old people that are in the public domain being used without the permission of the families of those in the photos. Family members feel physically sick over the lack of protocol and the spirit is affected.

Aunty Evelyn Parkin

Contemporary Collecting

Our program of contemporary collecting is often driven by requests from groups in our community. These projects result in Quandamooka and non Quandamooka perspectives being included into our collection. An example is the One Mile Project, with members of the One Mile Aboriginal Community 1942 to current coming together for a morning tea and to talk about their stories of One Mile. We hope for a collaborative book about One Mile as well.

Elisabeth Gondwe

Museum Displays

This is our greatest challenge at the moment. Our displays are relatively unchanged since they were made 32 years ago by the original committee. Many of those people have now passed or are no longer active in the museum. We have an opportunity to change some of the stories that are on our walls and present a less Eurocentric rendition of history. As Aunty Evelyn eloquently explains. "There are two perspectives. Those who came from the ships and those that were here on the shore."



In 2018 we made a map of Minjerribah with original ancient names over landscape. This is in our foyer as you walk in. Our map is part of this wider process of cracking the Eurocentric laminate that covers our local area. Once it had been done, others follow suit. It becomes accepted. For example, the new Strad Ferries sign. Our map was an attempt at decolonisation which is an aesthetic strategy to question settler colonialism. Through our map we reveal the shocking to many fact that there are pre-colonial names! We try to use heritage, ie original place names to unpack the complexities of the colonial state.

The inclusion of Quandamooka knowledge requires an open dialogue about history within the local communities. It is an ongoing process which will never be finished. We do not want our forward going relationships to reproduce existing inequalities.

In Canada they have treaties with first nations and so are further along the road of addressing colonialism in their museums than we are in Australia. The crux of the argument that Caitlin Gordon-Walker and First Nation thinkers from Canada are making is: When indigenous people assert their right to self-determination by challenging the existing state of Indigenous / colonial settler relations, and it is directed to a non-indigenous audience within the authoritative space of a museum, it becomes legitimized as the new norm. This establishes a new standard or conversation to enact further shifts in mainstream understanding.

Learning from this, the way forward for our Museum. In the authoritative space of our museum we will create new stories and norms for Australian society.