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Amanda Kearney, University of Adelaide, South Australia

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Author Information: **Amanda Kearney, University of Adelaide, South Australia**

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Violence in Place: Reading Violence through Kincentric Ecology

Amanda Kearney, University of Adelaide, South Australia@

This article explores violence in place, with the intent to more broadly configure the notion of violence within sociological and anthropological discourse. So too it strives to expand the field of inquiry into the effects of human-induced violence on the place world, as made up of homelands, villages, communities, and ancestral realms. Throughout the discussion links are drawn between three particular forms of violence and their harmful effects on place: the physical destruction of place, the de-signification and social disordering of place identity and character, and elemental decay as ecological decline and toxicity in place. I argue that particular epistemic habits and dispositions allow for such violence to be carried out, in the pursuit of power, authority, land, and resources. Furthermore, other epistemic habits and dispositions, namely those provided for by Indigenous epistemologies, might present pathways out from unmitigated violence and towards practices of refrain and axiological return. I propose that this is achievable through a return to kincentricity, as expressed through human responsibility over rights, and recognition of place agency and sentiency as expressed through local empiricism.

Keywords: violence, place, kincentric ecology, Indigenous knowledge, human responsibility, plurality

> I come from this country. My spiritual essence is from here. This country is the point of my origin. I am crying, tears are falling, they have cut you deeply, so far down, they have flattened you, wiped you out completely (Roddy Harvey Bayuma-Birribalanja in Bradley 1997, 95).[1]

This article explores violence in place. It does so with the intent to expand the field of inquiry into the effects of human-induced violence on the place world, as made up of homelands, villages, communities, and ancestral realms. This invokes primary concern for the impact of violent human acts, which precipitate the physical destruction of place, erasure of place distinctiveness, and which instate toxicity along with ecological decline in places of cultural importance. The epigraph with which this article begins sets the scene for a discussion of human responses to violence in place. This testimony, shared by Roddy Harvey Bayuma-Birribalanja, an Indigenous woman from the Yanyuwa language group in northern Australia, distinguishes the place world as containing sentient co-presences and ancestral agents. Roddy's

@ **Amanda Kearney:** Amanda.kearney@adelaide.edu.au

[1] This statement records Roddy Harvey Bayuma-Birribalanja's response to the effects of mining activity on her Indigenous homelands. Roddy's "'*ardirri*" or spirit child came from Bing Bong

testimony conveys a strong sense that place has suffered at the hands of human agents. That human life suffers as a result of these harms and struggles under the weight of violence in place is the underlying contention of this discussion.

The primary aim here is to better understand the effects of violence through a model of kincentricity, a methodology inspired by Indigenous epistemologies of place (see Salmón 2000). Kincentricity is a view of "humans and nature as part of an extended ecological family that shares ancestry and origins" (Salmón 2000; Senos et al. 2006, 397). Kin includes all elements of an ecosystem and kincentricity is a form of total interconnectedness to "all that is relatable" (Senos et al. 2006, 397). This form of kinship entails familial responsibility to the world around and establishes relational terms of engagement across all species and environments. It compels the awareness that other agents (in this instance, place) and co-presences possess and demand rights through their inherent character and order. The pervasive effects of violence in place are vividly cast when the very nature of place in human life is explained through a framework of hyper-relativism, mutual agency, and sentiency (see Kearney 2017; Muir, Rose and Sullivan 2010). Engaging place on such terms mitigates a view of place as simply a "backdrop" to human life (Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003). It is kincentricity and relationality that bring place into a nested arrangement with human and nonhuman life.

Place is conceived of here as a spatial, physical, and ecological point, but also that which is existentially available to us through the mind's eye, meaning it may also be intangible, as is the case for ancestral realms and memoryscapes. It is the latter which distinguishes many Indigenous people's interactions with place, in a post-contact and settler colonial context. A defining feature of place in this instance is its alienation from the everyday geography of Indigenous peoples. So too memoryscapes loom large in the lives of diasporic communities, in that a memoryscape may be a place that no longer exists in real time, or in the reachable world of physical presence, but may be one of memory, of the past. It is described as a "complex and vibrant plane upon which memories emerge, are contested, transform, encounter other memories, mutate and multiply" (Phillips and Reyes 2011, 14), and a portal through which groups remember.

Broad by nature, these distinctions establish place as definitive, and bounded, yet also unbounded and everywhere (see key contributions in place studies, including Casey 1997; Low and Lawrence-Zúñiga 2003; Malpas 1999; Massey 2005; and Relph 1976, 1981). This view accepts, in full, Indigenous epistemologies and ontologies, which uphold place as a sentient co-presence and agent (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson 2000; see also Cajete 2000; Deloria 1994; Kahn 2011; Rose 1996; West 2005, 2006; Yunupingu 1997). Witnessing violence in place prompts reflection on how place as an agent receives and responds to harm.

Indigenous epistemologies, and the kincentricity that underscores networks of relating and the practice of establishing and recognising kinship with all human, nonhuman, and wider ecological elements, provide the relational pathways that this research follows in seeking to understand what happens to the world around us, when violence enacted against cultural or ethnic others takes place as its stage; transmuting someone's home into the object of ambivalence. Throughout the last eighteen years of ethnographic fieldwork with Indigenous families in northern Australia I have observed kincentricity in practice. Whilst I write here of the Indigenous epistemologies that support this, and the ontology that enacts it, upon reflection I have found that my own view of the world has become heavily influenced by kincentricity. I must credit my Indigenous teachers with enriching my view of the land and sea and all the elements they contain. I do not question that place is sentient, and thus has rights and intentions.

The greater effects of violence on the place world are tracked through the principles of deep relating (kincentricity) and nested ecology. A nested ecology is one in which interrelations between realms are defining. These realms include the personal ecology, social ecology, and environmental ecology (Wimberley 2009). It invokes also a nested "spiritual ecology" (Wimberley 2009, 7). A spiritual ecology is the ordered system of ancestors, spiritualism, and divinity that distinguish human interactions with their world (Wimberley 2009, 7). It is held that changes in one of these ecologies, for example harms

done to the environmental ecology by way of aerial bombing, or the killing of wildlife in times of armed conflict, will be felt throughout the entire context of life, as evidenced by personal struggles of human survival. Such is the emphasis on nesting that each realm is contained by and in the other (Wimberley 2009, 7). This nesting reveals the relational depth of people's connections with place and likewise the substantial role of place in shaping human life. It is with this in mind that I propose a need to closely examine the nature of violence in place, its targets, and the intentions behind it.

1. Violence in place

There is a pervasive effect to violence, so too violence requires a context and a target. It has a point of impact, yet also an absorbing effect which sees the influences of such violence go beyond that which has been the initial recipient of harm. Whilst directed, violence often casts ripples beyond an initial point of harm to spread its effects outward, thus impacting on the context in which the recipient exists. The sociological and anthropological literature engages violence as a historically situated practice, and part of everyday life, in that it structures individual and collective lives, and can be, at the same time concrete and visible, and also a subtle transformative event with an ideological signature (Riches 1986, 8; Schröder and Schmidt 2001, 1–24). It is the distinguishing features of being historically situated, part of everyday life, and embedded in acts of power, that so closely resonate with experiences of violence in a settler colonial setting such as Australia.

The effects of violence are measured by the prevalence of emotional anguish, physical suffering, erasure, and destruction (Robben and Nordstrom 1995). Such events can be engaged in a moment or enduringly encountered by an individual, a family, a place, and community of nonhuman species or entire ecosystem. This is the experiential nature of violence and its resulting trauma (Alexander et al. 2004; Eyerman, Alexander and Breese 2011). The greater effects of violence are understood through the principles of interrelation and interconnection of distinct, irreducible, and interrelated components; people, place, and place elements.

Violence, as it is presented here, is a multi-layered and culturally prescribed event. In the context of this discussion it is treated as an action simultaneously directed at people and the places they value or depend upon. This is a form of violence expressed most aggressively in contested spaces and sites of inter-ethnic tension. The specific acts of violence to which I refer throughout this discussion include place destruction and ruination, place de-signification and social disorder, and place toxicity and elemental decay (Kearney 2017; Stoler 2013). Violence is a dimension of people's existence, not something external to society and culture that "happens" to people. In the context of this research it is treated as a socially and culturally constructed manifestation of a deconstructive dimension of human existence. As Robben and Nordstrom (1995, 5) reflect, even the most horrific acts of aggression do not stand as isolated exemplars of a "thing" called violence but cast ripples that reconfigure lives in the most dramatic of ways, affecting constructs of identity in the present, the hopes and potentialities of the future, and even the renditions of the past. Violence is at once an action, an emotion, a process, a response, a state, or a drive. Attempts to reduce violence to some essential core or concept are counterproductive because this essentialises a dimension of human existence and leads to presenting cultural manifestations of violence as if they were natural and universal (Robben and Nordstrom 1995). For many researchers of violence, intentionality is a defining quality of violence, yet as early as 1969, Johan Galtung raised the possibility of unintentionality also playing a role in violence. In what remains a seminal study in violence, Galtung (1969, 169) launched an encompassing reading of violence, by exploring the potential and actuality of harm. He proposed that where actual harm is avoidable, yet not mitigated against, then violence is present (Galtung 1969, 169).

Galtung scopes six important dimensions of violence, then offering a typology of violence. The dimensions of violence are the physical and psychological forms it may take, negative and positive approaches to influence as acts of violence, violence as needing context; an object that is hurt, and a subject who acts. Intention and unintentional are also canvassed as dimensions of violence, suggesting a spectrum of motivation,

that is also accounted for in Galtung's levels of violence as ranging from manifest to latent (Galtung 1969, 169–73). It is Galtung's distinction of intention and unintentional as dual features of violence that are key to this very study of violence in place. Intentionality is taken as not only the intent behind an action that is likely to result in harm but encapsulates also the intent that fuels a failure to care, that is a wilful disregard of something or someone as being worthwhile and thus deserving of the integrity that comes from freedom from violence (Galtung 1969, 169). This aligns with Galtung's (1969, 169) point of avoiding actuality, or rather allowing an action and thus also its outcome. As such, intent remains a defining feature of this working definition of violence, but intent is accounted for not only in the immediate action of doing harm, but also in the preceding action of failing to safeguard against harm or seeing the potential for harm as having little or no consequence. Here I treat this as a form of unresponsive reflexivity. Unresponsive reflexivity stops at the self and denies an expanding reflexive awareness to include other beings and dispositions of consequence and importance. In sum, it manifests as unwillingness to imagine the lived experience of violence, it is a lack of commitment to witnessing such events and lingering encounters, and sadly, a denial of violence and its harmful effects altogether.

Violent encounters in place often cross-sect the three above-mentioned primary categories of place harm (destruction, de-signification, and decay), yet I do not suggest they can be easily explained by way of these categories alone. For example, nuclear testing has both a physically destructive effect on place, but also instates invisible forms of toxicity and decay, which often bring with them sickness and social depression and uncertainty among local populations. Toxicity is defined outcome, derived of action which introduces harmful elements into a context. It is an interruption in the relational dynamics that allow systems to prosper, survive, or maintain integrity in particular structural and functional properties. Whether seen or unseen, toxicity disorders place, rupturing its position within a cultural geography, by inducing conflicting imaginings and realities of place (Nixon 2011; Peeples 2011). Thus the effects of some violent actions are multiple.

2. Diagnoses of Violence and Place Harm

2.1 Place Destruction

The most immediate and familiar form of violence in place is that of physical destruction. This is squarely focused on the physicality of place, and brings about harm through acts such as annihilation, bombing, large-scale resource projects, and site desecration. The register of destruction contains a complicated ledger of lesser and greater physical impacts, yet, the effects remain the same; destructions and de-significations of place, when occurring in contexts of contested space and inter-ethnic tension, are often delivered with the intent to harm place in order to remove existing persons and their cultural imprint. As precursors to complete destruction, neglect and indifference towards place serve another equally harmful purpose in the wounding enterprise, feeding the decay and dereliction of sacred sites, and places of worship; for example, reverting places of worship to storehouses for animal fodder reinscribes meaning through disavowal of place order and value, whilst declaring certain identities either invisible or undesirable. Hewitt (1983, 257–58) writes of this kind of violence as intending "the disorganization of enemy space".

Destruction involves a whole sequence of violent acts, which can bring about the end of place existence. Agents of harm may attempt to call upon rhetoric of "space purification", "inevitability", or "progress" in efforts to justify this form of violence in place (Sibley 1988), yet contest will often remain as to the means and force employed in such efforts. So too there are often lingering effects to such violence, which transmit across generations as social memory, if not post-traumatic stress disorders (Barton 1969; Connerton 2011; Fullilove 2004; Stoler 2013). Destruction is closely tied to de-signification as another form of violence in place. Both are conspiring themes for those agents that seek to wound place, one bringing about physical chaos (along a spectrum from minimal impact to a final death point) in place, the other a denial of this impending chaos or any existing merit and order, which becomes silenced through an overlaying of new meaning or stymying of existing meaning. Removing any explicit reference to place, "destruction" and "de-signification" have menacing etymologies frequently used to reference acts of

violence and dismissal. These meanings take on decisive qualities of threat when the object of attention is place.

2.2 De-signification and the Social Disordering of Place

Agents that de-signify place meaning strive towards removal and/or denial of place order. This is achieved either by physically altering the character of place or by denying and erasing the cultural imprints which reside in place, such as place names, ancestral narratives, and social histories. By removing the cultural traces of people from the landscape, incoming agents attempt to undercut and weaken any ongoing claims to territory or ancestral connection (Falah 1996, 257). Relationships of affinity are challenged as places are harmed and imprinted with new identities as enforced by violent others. The social disordering of place may be achieved without physical acts of violence. The frontier upon which this particular form of violence and its wounding effects march is an ideological one. While not necessarily divorced from attempts at physical destruction, disorder achieves chaos in the hearts and minds of those who identify with and often cling to place as a presence of importance. So too it causes the substantive rearrangement of place character.

Colonial intrusions across Indigenous territories have often relied on such violence. Illustrative of this is the doctrine of "terra nullius", which underscored the British invasion of Australia and expansion of the colony post 1788. In staking a claim over Australia the British relied upon the "doctrine of discovery", meaning that a colonial power which first "discovers" a land has a right to possession (Behrendt 2012, 82). Terra nullius translates to a land "vacant or without a government" (Behrendt 2012, 82). Colonial invasion demanded the erasure of Indigenous sovereignty as a deliberate step towards remaking and resignifying place as a British settler colony. Determined a land "vacant or without governance", the ancestral homelands of Indigenous Australians, at the time distinguished as the territories of over five hundred distinct language groups, were plunged into disarray by the incoming and invasive colonial agents. Generations later, Indigenous Australians are still coming to terms with this, and attempting to heal from the lingering effects of this denial. That both people and place were ruptured and harmed by way of this de-signification and remaking is evident in the protracted and ongoing legal battles for land restitution (Ritter 1996; Sharp 1996).

Ethnic cleansing enacts another extreme form of both physical and social disorder for people and place. It is the systematic and forced removal of people from place by a powerful other, often another ethnic group, with the intent to make place ethnically homogenous or specific (Shaw 2007). This is high-level de-signification, where the removal of place's socio-sedimentary layers (these being the rich layers of cultural practice and habit that define place and people's actions within place) requires expulsion of the actual persons that stand to substantiate place through knowledge and a temporal and spatial awareness. Where people might ask routinely of their cultural universe, who are we? And where are we? (Downing 1996, 36), in the aftermath of ethnic cleansing, place is also faced with the unsettling effect of absence, both ecologically (as subsistence and environmental interactions cease) and cosmologically or emotionally. The latter referring to the responsiveness of ancestral beings and spectral presences that may reside in place. That they experience the loss of human presences cannot be dismissed and is engaged within many cultural contexts as a direct reflection of the agency that is held by non-human and intangible presences in the world.

Bakshi (2012, 479) writes of a "visceral sense of discomfort" in place, which often becomes "embedded in disputed places or territories central to ethnonational conflicts". That these experiences of upheaval and conflict in place might remain etched into the very character of place, and that campaigns of social erasure and forgetting might repeatedly fail, is evidenced widely across time and contested spaces. It might be, as Bakshi (2012, 493) contends, "whatever is held inside has the potential to leak out". In which case, the socio-sedimentary layers of place identity and the specificity of the people and place nexus reveal themselves in complicated and disturbing ways, when faced with violence. This is the revelation of substance and meaning in place, which may refer to the vivid display of ecological decline, as with species deaths and rotting carcasses or with the smell of toxic elements or the silence that comes with the absence of human

and non-human presences in place. These forms of violence are best described as "a political project that lays waste to certain peoples, relations, and things that accumulate in specific places" (Stoler 2013, 11). Ruination and the physical or social ruins left behind reflect the "protracted quality of decimation in people's lives". They are a lingering testimony to harmful exposures and the enduring damage which can hold on to place and its people (Stoler 2013, 11).

2.3 Elemental Decay and Toxicity in Place

New exposures and enduring damage as forms of violence are increasingly and dramatically encountered through ecological death, toxicity, and place decay. These forms of violence and the axiological retreat characteristic of those who enact them can generate substantial psychological unrest and fear for those who depend upon place. Axiology is treated here as the perception of worth and sense of value as it is generated within any cultural context. It relates to what people come to value and how they determine worth as culturally prescribed, thus there are distinctions to be found in the way that people perceive and prioritise aspects of life. As such, axiological retreat invokes principles of disregard and moral disengagement, at a level so profoundly normalised that the question of care passes into oblivion.

Elemental decay, whether the loss of floral and faunal life, the introduction of feral species (which triggers decay by way of invasive species that compromise the integrity of existing orders and the capacity for indigenous species to survive), or pollution and contamination, brings about monumental shifts in place identity and order. People for whom place matters, as home, as ancestrally potent spirit world, often struggle to decipher the meaning of such events and also to survive and hold on in place as such harms unfold (Davis 2005; Erikson 1976, 1994, 2011; Goodall 1994). Elemental decay and toxicity involve the delivery of harm to place's constitutive parts, as a strategy to erode the foundations of and relational setting for human life or heedless consequence derived from a lack of care for both people and place. Elemental erasure refers to the loss of life, inclusive of nonhuman elements: the flora, fauna, and all those dynamically interacting organisms and the communities they form that constitute living presences in place (Kearney 2017). The killing of nonhuman life in place and the decline of ecosystems in the midst or aftermath of conflict may trigger destructions and social disorder. The elemental changes that come from poisoning, toxicity, and contamination, occur if place is stripped of its inherent value and importance. Industrial development, the construction of major infrastructure projects such as dams and highways, and even nuclear testing are actions that reveal the extent to which others may determine that place integrity (as a structural and functional capacity for self-restoration) simply does not matter or has worth only in relation to its "developmental" capacity and neoliberal "value".

Toxicity is now a major weapon in the enacting of violence in place. Contaminating and insidious silent toxins "scare human beings in new and special ways, … [and] … elicit an uncanny fear in us" (Erikson 1994, 144). As a result of toxicity, place loses its orderly character, there is no narrative structure to a toxifying event or slow poisoning. Toxic disasters "… violate all the rules of plot" generating epistemological confusion and ontological uncertainty (Erikson 1994, 147). As Peeples (2011, 373) reflects: "Imaging toxicity is no simple task as many pollutants are invisible and sites of contamination are concealed, especially for those of privilege." Through this hidden dimension, and its concealed effect, toxicity is a means of achieving violence against place that is often severely punishing for its human residents. When questions arise as to the physical safety of residing in one's home territory, or as health concerns are raised over long held practices of subsisting off marine and terrestrial resources, then the kinship between people and place has undergone a substantive shift, one which is likely to induce a range of cultural traumas and wounds.

As these preliminary diagnoses of place harm reveal, violence in place operates as physical action, but also expresses itself as a form of axiological retreat (failure to care). In a vast number of these cases it is the powerful who act upon marginal or undesirable human groups (often culturally and ethnically prescribed). Understanding the costs exacted when place is annihilated, de-signified, or toxified through human action involves witnessing the epistemologies and ontologies which distinguish place as a co-presence, and committing to plurality in research.

3. An Ethnographic Account of Place Harm

In an effort to know violence in place more closely, and to anchor down an assessment of this violence, the discussion now turns to an ethnographic account of place harm. In particular the journey is taken to Yanyuwa country in the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria (see Figure 1). I draw on a total of eighteen years of ethnography with Yanyuwa families, and the other Indigenous residents of Borroloola in the Northern Territory. In this time, I have participated in everyday life in Borroloola, moved extensively across Yanyuwa country with elders, middle and younger generations and interviewed Yanyuwa of all ages on themes directly related to their country[2]. These themes have ranged from the emotional geography that accompanies engagements with homelands, land claim experiences, and experiences of cultural wounding and healing and cross-generational expressions of being Yanyuwa. Many of the elders interviewed have had direct experience with the process of forced removal from their homelands by colonial incursions and certainly carry social memories of frontier violence from earlier periods. Younger generations tend to learn about their country whilst based in the township of Borroloola. Learning in town is accompanied by infrequent and shorter visits to the islands and coastal regions of the Gulf of Carpentaria. Although young people encounter knowledge differently, they are still seeking to establish their own relationships to country through a gradual process of becoming engaged with it and all it contains.

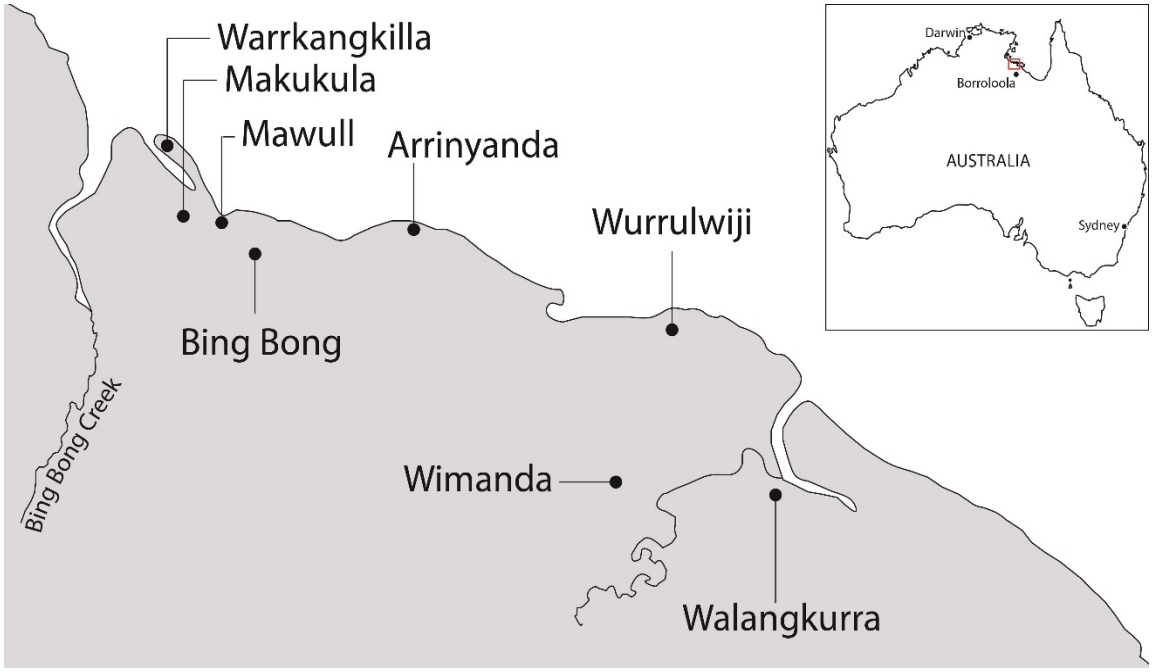
Throughout my time of collaborating with Yanyuwa I have worked closely also with John Bradley, an anthropologist who began working in the Gulf of Carpentaria in 1981, a long-term advocate for the community's programs of cultural recording and maintenance. I draw in part on his extensive ethnographic recordings of people's responses to massive changes in and around the southwest Gulf of Carpentaria, beginning in the 1980s, and amplifying in the 1990s. These insights are engaged, alongside more recent ethnographic accounts of place decline. There is a quality of richness to the ethnographic accounts of the 1980s and 1990s that is not found in more recent articulations of place harm within the Yanyuwa community. This is in part a reflection of the complicated dependencies that have emerged in relation to mining activity within the region. Today, some people are far less willing to decry the mining activity that is impacting on their place world. By way of illustration, one long-term Indigenous resident of Borroloola who is married to a prominent Yanyuwa elder, explains: "It's complicated, because us people here in Borroloola need that mine, it helps us out when family is sick, when we have to go see them in hospital or bury them. The mine gives us jobs, and we can't be cheeky about that. Some people, those young ones, they get upset, but what are we going to do?" Then in response, a family member sitting alongside us, rebutts, "it's just all shame, big shame you know, that place Bing Bong used to be all for our families, for camping and the old people, full of Law, but bit by bit they been kill 'im" (personal communication with author, unpublished fieldnotes, 2015). This paper is the distillation of thoughts derived from and observations made throughout my time in Borroloola and collaborating with Yanyuwa families. It also reflects the long game of place violence, as articulated by Yanyuwa, since the 1980s, as they negotiate and seek a future of good health on their lands and waters.

"Country" is a holistic term used by many Indigenous Australians to refer to their homelands as made up of land, sea, bodies of water, kin, and resources. The effects of cultural wounding in and around Yanyuwa country convey disregard for Indigenous Australians and their ancestral homelands. Their experiences of settler colonialism are distinguished by episodes of forced child removal, loss of homelands and sovereignty, and a litany of hardships that have come with the structural violence that is poverty and political marginalisation (Kearney 2014; Wolfe 1999, 2006).

By way of a case study, attention is given here to Bing Bong, a composite of places along the coastal margins which make up the north-western reaches of Yanyuwa country (see Figure 1). Yanyuwa refer to these as Warrkangkila, Makukula, Mawuli, Arrinyanda, Wimanda, and Wurrulwiji.

[2] For a broader contextualization of cross generational experiences within the Yanyuwa community and discussions of social change within the community, see Kearney (2016, 2018) as well as Kearney and Kowalewski (2017).

Figure 1: Yanyuwa homelands, northern Australia.



Map created by Fiona Brady using www.openstreetmap.org.

These places are the ancestral embodiment of the Black Nosed Python and the Winter Rain Dreaming, meaning they present as landmarks and landscape features which are the physical expression of these ancestral beings and their movements across country (Yanyuwa Families, Bradley and Cameron 2003, 279). This part of Yanyuwa country is alive with the presence and effects of these agents.

Several generations have fought hard against the violence that has come to this part of Yanyuwa country (Baker 1999; Bradley 2011; Kearney 2014, 2017a, 2017b; Roberts 2005, 2009). Their sustained resistance has been part of an exhausting fight against formidable opponents, for whom the motivation has been a colonial desire to rid the country of its rightful Indigenous owners and kin, and then later, through the pastoral and mining industries, heavily modify and exhaust the country of its resources. Yanyuwa and the region's neighbouring Indigenous groups, including Garrwa and Gudanji, have embarked upon widespread demonstrations and legal appeals in recent decades, aimed at halting the destruction of their homelands. They continue to resist the ongoing violence of the mining industry and other threats of resource extraction that threaten their homelands. On these matters, Yanyuwa man David Harvey reports his concern: "Our generation and our grandfathers been fighting for this country to keep it together, now they've come and destroyed this country" (in Bardon 2014). Others cry for country, lamenting that "Bing Bong is proper dead now, that place, they finally been kill 'im" (Roddy Harvey Bayuma-Birribalanja, personal communication with author, unpublished fieldnotes, 2015).

The timeline of violence since the arrival of British colonial presences in and around Bing Bong is roughly as follows. In 1788 the British begin colonising Australia, moving northward and southward from the landing point of Botany Bay in New South Wales. Localising the colonising encounter, it is by the mid to late 1800s that the Wilangarra, a language group within the region, are decimated through settler violence, murder and massacre (Roberts 2005, 66; 2009). Wilangarra were a neighboring language group who shared interests in lands and waters to the west of Bing Bong. By the 1880s the northern Australian pastoral boom begins with an emphasis on leasing vast tracts of lands to settlers (Roberts 2009). This leads to the establishment of a White settler township in Borroloola, and

mineral prospecting throughout the region by 1902. Throughout the 1930s and into the 1960s, Yanyuwa are gradually removed from their homelands, a process which led to dependencies on the township of Borroloola, where food rations were available and a degree of security from rogue settler violence could be found (Baker 1999).

The expansion of pastoralism outward from the township of Borroloola sees a pastoral lease granted over the Bing Bong area in 1964. Bing Bong Pastoral station is sold to Mount Isa Mine in 1976 and the extraction of lead and zinc deposits begin. Entering the distinctive recent era of mining activity in the Gulf region it is in 1995 that a large port facility is built at Bing Bong, to support the mining operations and the transfer of ore concentrate to ships. After more than a decade, mining operations expand from underground to open cut methods, and the port facility is in turn also expanded (2009). The company is meanwhile sold to Xstrata and later merges into Glencore. It is in 2011 that another mining company, Western Desert Resources (WDR), signs an agreement with Glencore to utilise the Bing Bong port facility, building a large-scale open-air conveyer belt to transport iron ore concentrate, dredging the coastal margins, and clearing vegetation (see Figures 2 and 3). WDR is later held responsible in 2014 for widespread pollution at Bing Bong port facility; iron ore concentrate is recorded in high levels across the entire area of water and land (Brown 2014). The company is held to have not adhered to world standards in environmental protection and goes into receivership by 2015. No remediation has since been attempted at the operating site (Brown and McCarthy 2014).

The establishment of a major port facility at Bing Bong in 1995, and the ensuing transport of mineral ore concentrate into the area have ushered in a period of dramatic change in place. The effects of place harm include the physical destruction of place, whereby large portions of the coastal margins have been dredged and destroyed. Old campsites have been lost and hunting is now prevented by declarations of "no access", "no trespassing" and fence lines. Species of animals which are indigenous to the area, and which are held to be ancestral beings and direct kin for Yanyuwa, can no longer be found in significant (or any) numbers. According to Yanyuwa accounts the kangaroos have gone, along with blue tongue lizards and goannas. The waterways are held to be absent of crabs, while sickness and declining numbers are reported among the region's sea turtle and dugong populations. The latter two are marine mammals of great importance within the Yanyuwa epistemology, ontology, and axiology: They are ancestral beings of the highest order, in accordance with a Yanyuwa identity as *li-Anthawirriyarra*, that is, saltwater people.

Figure 2: Bing Bong before Western Desert Resources landscape modification

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Figure 3: Bing Bong after Western Desert Resources landscape modification

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The sickness and decline reported among these species is directly linked to the increase of other invasive and disconnected presences, namely non-Indigenous mining personnel, foreign land use practices, and introduced pest species including buffalo, feral cats, cane toads, and pigs. In 1994, at the commencement of construction for the Bing Bong port facility, Yanyuwa leader Mussolini Harvey reflected on the disturbance the mining port facility brought to the old people and the spirit children of these places. According to Yanyuwa epistemology, *ardirri* are the spirit children that inhabit the land and sea. They are placed into the earth by ancestral beings. The spirit child is born into the body of a living person, where it is held to reside deep within the bones of an individual, these being the least corruptible parts of a person (Bradley with Yanyuwa Families 2016, 399, 408). By residing in the bones, this spirit child, a constitutive part of place, ensures the absolute mutual constitution of people and place (Kearney 2017, 29).

> Lots of people saw them, especially at night. They were many small spirit children darting across the road, coming from both sides, then the following night four old spirits were seen bowed over, hands behind their backs and dressed in bushel bags [hessian sackcloth]. The spirits were looking for new homes, they can hide under logs, make themselves small, they will find a new home … but makes me think … how many of the poor buggars died from all that work … makes me really really sorry (Mussolini Harvey, personal communication with author, unpublished fieldnotes, 1994).

Some years later, another community leader, Roddy Harvey Bayuma-Birribalanja, whose spirit child originates from Wurrulwiji, exclaimed, upon visiting Bing Bong: "Ah dear me! This is all too much I am telling you! They have cut you! They have emptied you! My stomach burns with shame for you! I come from this country, my spiritual essence is from here, this country is the point of my origin. I am crying, tears are falling, they have cut you deeply, so far down, they have flattened you, wiped you out completely!" (Bradley 1997, 95).

The wounding that has occurred in this place, and also among people, expresses a breach of Yanyuwa Law. Yanyuwa Law is the expression given to the overarching body of ancestral knowledge that gives meaning to all aspects of the Yanyuwa world. In October 2015, elder Dinah Norman a-Marrngawi reflected on events in and around Bing Bong, "*kanu-wingka nganinya nguthundiya walkurriji Makakula. Wayi ki-awarala?* – We used to go this way northwards to camp at Makukula, I wonder how that country is now?" (personal communication with author, unpublished fieldnotes, 2015). Whilst this may appear to be a simple remark on less frequent patterns of visitation to the Bing Bong area, there is profundity in Dinah asking this question. Dinah's comments echo her concern for these places, at a time when Bing Bong has been on her mind a lot. This conversation came through talk of its decline and through the death of her sister, a senior woman whose *ardirri* (spirit child) came from this area. She is negotiating her responsibility for Makukula and its surrounds, entering into a dialogue with the old people. The "old people" is a term used by Yanyuwa to reference the ancestral presences that remain in country. The question is rhetorical in many respects, yet instates a relationship to place and the ancestors, as an act of caring, as an empathic moment of reflection. Nobody offered an answer to her question, understanding that it is not one to be answered. It is not unlike the Yanyuwa understanding of "management", a principle that has gained attention in an era of expanding natural resource management within the region, in that it echoes an inherent Indigenous epistemology contained in caring for country (see Baker et al. 2001; Bradley 2001). Dinah is aware that Makukula has been deeply wounded. She is cognisant of what has caused this and searches through the epistemological structures provided for by Yanyuwa Law to assess the implications of this.

There is a resounding tension between the ethos of the mining operations and that of Yanyuwa Law. Whilst some young and mid-generation Indigenous residents of Borroloola work for the mine, and the community receives certain facilities from mining royalties (include a dialysis unit, swimming pool, and funeral funds to bury deceased kin) and certainly Yanyuwa have benefitted from the construction of a sealed and maintained highway to the port facility, the costs, as loss of land, rights, water access, and species decline weigh heavily upon the community. Indigenous people throughout the region have expressed anxieties over contamination from the mining activity for decades, yet not all have necessarily called for the mine's closure and end to operations. There is deep complexity in how these operations are negotiated by Indigenous groups in Australia, and Kirsch (2007, 314) has noted elsewhere, in

the context of BHP Billiton mining operations in the Ok Tedi River and the Fly River regions of the Western Province of Papua New Guinea, that people grapple with having to choose "between environmental degradation and monetary compensation". When economically and politically marginalised, Indigenous decision-making operates across difficult terrain. The crisis of neoliberalism, modernity, and coloniality is multifaceted in these cases. Not only do these operations deny a sovereign Indigenous right, and any inherent human kinship with place, they also obliterate the right for any other creatures to have kinship with place.

4. Indigenous Epistemologies, Plurality and Reflexive Responsibility

As an ethnographer I have listened to accounts of violence in place, which have led to cultural wounding, as told by Indigenous Australians. Many times, I have struggled to understand the magnitude of these experiences, yet when told to me "in place", at the site of the experience, or when left to walk amid the remains of place, I have come closer to appreciating the extent of violence and its emotional toll. Understanding the magnitude of loss and harm has also been assisted by recognising that there are diverse epistemic spaces in which place is configured.

Highlighting a similar commitment to plurality in research, Hokari (2011) explores the possibility of writing "dangerous histories", that is histories that are "beyond the limits" of disciplinary tradition. This principle is expanded and engaged here in relation to social and cultural engagements with place and the greater effects of violence. The danger he references is not one which calls for cautious refrain, nor is it a limit from which the discipline and its practitioners might be encouraged to retreat. Rather it is about a practice to which researchers might be drawn in the process of unsettling dominant epistemologies, and "sitting in the gap" that has been generated by the West in its failure to understand other culturally prescribed ways of knowing.

Hokari (2011) suggests that rather than incorporate plurality into a singular conceptual framework, we engage it in the very practice of learning to know something and understand something. This means changing the very way we see, look at, and hear accounts of social life, and in this instance, place and the ways in which it might be harmed. The discreteness of Indigenous knowledge is traced to the specifics of its emplacement, yet Indigenous authors acknowledge themes that assert an overarching theoretical distinction (see Battiste and Youngblood Henderson 2000). Ideas and philosophies generated by Indigenous knowledges, across a broad range of contexts promote the view that human relationships with place are about active engagement and kinship. There is recognition of relationality in the life world, emphasising the principle that we (humans) are nested within a relational sphere that is populated by a vast number of co-presences, each with the capacity for agency and sentiency. So too these bodies of knowledge are distinguished by the following: knowledge of and belief in unseen powers and/or ancestral beings, knowledge of place agency and sentiency, knowledge that all things contained in the world and ecosystem are dependent on one another, and knowledge that kinship reinforces the bond between people, place, and all other elements (Battiste and Youngblood Henderson 2000, 42–43).

The realisation that place is a sentient co-presence, operating alongside and in association with human life, brings forth a greater capacity to understand what might happen when it becomes the target of violence, racism, and disordering events. This research proposes an axiological return to care for the place world. This return is distinguished as a form of critical intimacy in which "relations" between elements are recognised and valued. As an extension of this relational integrity, an axiological return to place brings human life into a more profound relationship with place – one that recognises the inherent value of place. This is an action not unlike the assertion of kinship, which ensures responsibility and mutuality. This research proposes three avenues, each of which is drawn from an Indigenous kincentric ecological approach: firstly, a return to human responsibility over human rights, second, recognition of relational dynamics as affected by uncertainty and rapid change, and third, respect for local empiricism and place order.

Where disorder and the unsettling conditions of place harm take hold, human life is drawn into a relational encounter where response and non-response might appear to be options. Responsive reflexivity, not unlike kincentricity, involves reflexive

self-awareness, and acknowledging reflexivity beyond the self. Intimate forms of witnessing as seen in the Yanyuwa context embroil human life in the consequences and effects of place harm. People come to feel and embody the harm, whilst seeking frameworks to address it. So too they are axiologically drawn to care and thus express anger, or sadness at what has occurred. Intimate forms of witnessing have at their core a sense of responsibility. Responsibility throws open the limits of obligation, care, culpability, and investment in something greater than human life (see Rose 2008, 2011, 2013).

Emphasizing responsibility enhances relational awareness and recognition as to the life worlds in which humans exist. Kincentric ecology extends beyond human life, thus enlarging our perceptual selves and the capacity to see other agents and presences of consequence. In the case of responsive reflexivity, responsiveness is receptiveness to the acknowledgement of harm and sensitivity to its causation. This might be expressed as an empathic response or drive to remediate and mitigate against further harm, through action or ideological position. This is expressed by Indigenous groups through, for example, the fight for land rights and their resistance, along with non-Indigenous supporters, to extractive industries across much-valued homelands. Human responsibility is distinct from a sense of human rights, which locates human well-being as primary. One way of shrinking the gap, within which axiological crises and failures to care find their hold, is to balance the concern for human rights with that of human responsibility or radically replace the former with the latter as a new framework for configuring rights, accountability, and action. According to Barilan (2012, 263), "responsibility is not a purely agent centered concept", rather it is "the art of the possible, sincerely harnessed in the benefit of care". Accenting human responsibility over human rights is not to deemphasize the experience of disproportionate human suffering, nor dispute claims to cultural wounding and associated trauma. Instead, it is to locate the effects of such wounding and its lasting effects within a wider context of relations, and in doing so, highlight the relationship between human suffering and other localized suffering.

As relational dynamics in place break down or struggle under the weight of uncertainty and rapid change brought on by the greater effects of violence, then testimonies of disorder and loss begin to emerge from place. What these testimonies might look like and how they might sound has been explored here through a brief ethnographic account of place harm. Testimonies take the narrative form of trauma claims, etched in a language that may evade human translation where kincentric orientations are muted. Yet the disorder that is expressed as absence, silence, species decline, melancholia, spectral traces, human sickness, and toxicity speaks loudly of interruption in the relational dynamics that allow systems to prosper or maintain integrity in particular structural and functional properties.

The wounded place offers its testimony across all spaces and times. These narratives are known to exist, they are pre-linguistic and non-verbal iterations that communicate through mediums that often require culturally attuned awareness to be heard, seen, felt, and understood. Scientific narrations of the world's physical decline, as biological, atmospheric, and geological shifts are familiar, as are Indigenous accounts of ancestral suffering and the death of sentient beings in place, and the layperson's accounts of sadness, and overwhelming feelings of awfulness in place. How we come to listen and apprehend the testimonies of violence and wounding that are given in and by place depends on the cultural apparatus to which humans avail themselves. According to a kincentric principle, reached by way of plurality in research, humans are co-presences and necessary witnesses to place. Beyond this, and because of this, we are compelled, through responsibility, to consider how rapid change and uncertainty, as it might compromise integrity and survival, impact upon the place world.

Human life is not immune to the effects of rapid change and uncertainty in the place world, being both the agent of harm and the co-recipient of the hardships and suffering these experiences bring about. At best this research has sought pathways that might assist in an axiological return, as a practice that brings human life into a more profound relationship with place. This is traced through the principles of kincentric ecology. As Hogan (2000, 122) writes, we can begin by looking upon place with a deep knowing that human life is contained in place or is itself a part of place. It is born of local empiricism and is subject to place order. Denying this has not served human life well, yet there are those cultures that remain closer to

this ontology and seek to keep open the pathways of reverence that strive to safeguard place, to ensure its health and well-being and listen carefully when it communicates its ills. Indigenous epistemologies offer sophisticated models for an axiological return.

5. Conclusion

This article set out to explore some of the ways in which violence "takes place". In order to do so it has taken the epistemological lead offered by kincentric ecology and plurality in ways of knowing the place world. In particular, it is drawn to Indigenous knowledge and Indigenous pedagogies of place. Throughout the discussion links are drawn between three possible forms of violence and their harmful effects, including the physical destruction of place, the de-signification and social disordering of place identity and character, and elemental decay as ecological decline and toxicity in place. Particular epistemic habits and dispositions allow for such violence to be carried out, in the relentless pursuit of power, authority, land, and resources. These are offset and challenged by other epistemic habits and dispositions, namely those provided for by Indigenous epistemologies, which present pathways out from unmitigated violence and towards practices of refrain and axiological return. In turn, I argue that this is achievable through a return to human responsibility over rights, and recognition of place agency and sentiency as expressed through local empiricism. What is revealed through a diagnosis of violence in place is that human life suffers as a result of these harms and struggles under the weight of place violence. This is because violence has a pervasive effect, and through the relational dynamics that see human life as nested in place, harms done to one part of the nested ecology send shock waves through another.

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