

Hidden Frontiers: A new Look at Pearling on the Northwest Coast of Australia from the *Other* Side

Bart Pigram & Sarah Yu

The arrival of pearlers to the northwest coast of the Kimberley from the 1860s heralded one of Australia's last frontiers in settler-colonialism. In this paper, however, we argue that the stories and contact histories reveal another frontier that continues to exist between the worldviews and epistemologies of the coastal Aboriginal groups, who have been pearling for over 20,000 years, and the new settlers. It is an intellectual frontier in which the significance of things, and the relationships between people and their natural world continue to hold different values. The presenters will draw on their own family histories, research projects and experiences of to elucidate these hidden histories of the pearling story of the Kimberley.

From the late 20th century this hidden frontier is being exposed as the once world-renown pearling industry devolves and a growing movement of people (that includes indigenous native title holders, conservationists, heritage consultants and the current pearling community) seeks to protect the values and heritage of the northwest coast. In response to world-changing events such as climate change, resource exploitation, and land and sea degradation, the heritage industry is now embracing holistic concepts of heritage under the banner of Indigenous Cultural Landscapes that eliminate the false dichotomy between nature and culture. As we embrace these *Other* worldviews, we can begin to deconstruct the colonial pearling narrative to look more deeply at the range of transcultural relationships that have existed and continue to emerge, as a world heritage story.

Bio

Bart Pigram is a Yawuru man of the musical Pigram family and project officer at Nyamba Buru Yawuru. He has worked within the arts since 2001, composing many visual art pieces for media productions, such as 'Faces and Places' (Goolarri Media); 'Dark Whispers' (Spearpoint Productions). In 2014, Bart became Yawuru's first *emerging curator* working on 'Lustre: Pearling & Australia', with Sarah Yu and the WA Museum. In 2016, Bart set up his own indigenous tour company Narlijia Tours, with the aim of introducing his audiences to Yawuru understandings of the country in and around Roebuck Bay.

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Sarah Yu has lived in the West Kimberley for over 40 years, working as an anthropologist, curator and heritage consultant focusing on relationships between people and their connections to country. Sarah has most recently curated the successful 'Lustre: Pearling & Australia' exhibition at the WA Museum in Perth and produced the Award winning *Yawuru Cultural Management Plan* (2011, winner of the AILA National Medal 2012). Sarah works for *Nyamba Buru Yawuru* and is currently enrolled as a doctoral candidate within the research group "The Transcultural Heritage of Northwest Australia: Dynamics and Resistances" at Heidelberg University.

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