



# **REFLECTIVE PIECE: EXPLORING PEOPLE, COUNTRY, AND ENVIRONMENT.**

Research Proposal for The Faculty of Communication  
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# **Discuss Personal Understanding within complex and interconnected relationships towards Peoples, Country, and Environment with linkage to First Nation and Western Worldview.**

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In this reflective piece, I find myself profoundly moved by the rich and intricately nuanced nature of the relationship between People and Country within First Nations culture. This transformative journey through the depths of Indigenous wisdom and knowledge has reshaped my worldview and deepened my perception of how people engage in the act of Caring for Country, and our individual and collective responsibilities towards it.

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The concept of Country, as expressed by Karen Martin and Booran Mirraboopa, is that “Entities of waterways, Animals, Plants, Climate, Skies, and Spirits” are “One Entity” which “should not be raised above another, as these live in close relationships with one another. So, People are no more or less important than the other Entities” (2003, p.207), this resonates deeply with me, as it goes beyond the conventional Western understanding of “Land and People” (2003, p.207). Thus, encompassing a holistic interconnectedness that incorporates land and spirit. Henceforward, the rejection of the hierarchical thinking, which emphasises the equal importance of all entities and the intimate relationships that exist among them. People are not elevated above other elements; they are an integral part of this intricate web. This worldview highlights the principles of respect and balance within First Nation societies, reflecting a commitment to the harmonious coexistence of all entities.

Additionally, Munya Andrews furthers this idea of Country as a strong sense of connection and belonging, akin to family, which adds a layer of emotional depth to this understanding, she coins it as “country gives us a strong sense of connection and belonging. Because as we walk, we are following in the footsteps of our ancestors that created country... country is not just the land or sea or sky, country is family you feel sorry for country, you long for country” (Evolve Communities, 2021). The connection to Country is not merely physical; it is a spiritual and emotional bond that transcends time and space. Deborah Bird Rose's opinion emphasises this deep emotional connection to Country, with expressions such as speech, worry, grief, longing, and care (1992 p.106). Country, in essence, is a living entity that provides nourishment to the mind, body, and spirit. This view challenges conventional Western views of the land as a resource to be exploited, highlighting the profound reverence and care that should be extended to Country (Rose, 1992; Rose, 1996, p.6-9; Milroy and Revell, 2013, p.2).

Larissa Behrendt's classification of Country is deemed “central to Aboriginal existence” (1995, p.55-56), standing as “spiritual” rather than a “proprietary” connection (Behrendt, 1995, p.55), this booms greatly within me, as this spiritual connection underscores the enduring bond between land and people, a bond that transcends mere ownership. Bill Gammage's categorisation is that “Country as heart, mind, and soul” (2012, p.142), which reinforces the spiritual significance of land. It is not something to be owned but something to be revered and cared for. Frederick Bronwyn's conception of Country as a “place of origin in spiritual, cultural, and literal terms” (2013, p.3), underlines the cultural significance embedded within the land.

The interplay between the physical and spiritual aspects of Country, as described by Bill Gammage, is a revelation. Country is not just a geographical entity; it is a spiritual and practical connection to the land. The balance between maintaining the world and caring for the land, as symbolised by songlines and universal connections, highlights the holistic essence of Country. It challenges the notion of separation between spirituality and geography, emphasising their interconnectedness (2012, p.139).

The adoption of a relational ontology within First Nations viewpoints, as described by Shawn Wilson, focuses the dynamic and interconnected essence of all living entities and elements (Wilson, 2008, p.74). Knowledge is inherently relational, transcending individualistic understanding. This relational knowledge extends to the cosmos, animals, plants, and the earth itself, underlining the unified systems of knowledge within the First Nation contextual framework (Country et al, 2015). This perspective challenges standard Western epistemologies, emphasising relationships over isolated entities (Martin and Mirraboopa, 2003, p.207).

The concept of Caring for Country, as practised by First Nation societies, has shown an insightful lesson within stewardship and reciprocity (Poelina et al, 2019, p.8). So, the idea that taking care of the Country leads to the land taking care of you resonates deeply. It underscores the mutual exchange between humans and their environment (Graham, 1999; Weir et al, 2011, p.1- 4). Neglecting the land results in its deterioration, and in turn, individuals and communities suffer. This principle reinforces the importance of responsible stewardship and custodianship of the land (2012, p.184).

With these principles in mind, I have created a visual representation of my connection to Dharawal (Wollongong) Country, as depicted in my collage. It serves as a compelling embodiment of my journey on this land. It's crucial to acknowledge that I am not a First Nations individual, and my presence here stresses the necessity of acknowledging and respecting the custodians of this land. The centrality of my presence in the collage symbolises my lineage, reflections, acquired knowledge, and understanding of connection to place (Kennedy et al 2010; Kennedy and Hoynes, 2010, p.29).

The footprint and handprint embedded in this piece signify my connection to Country, it shows the responsibility of knowing, being and doing (Kwaymullina, 2017; Welch, 1988). The depiction of Country, the pristine forest "*Madjura*" land of Dharawal (Dharawal Words, n.d.), is a prominent feature within this collage (Carboni, 2023). It is manifested through the representation of Minnamurra (Budderoo) (NSW National Parks and Wildlife Service, n.d.). The Earth "*Bamal*," takes centre stage, with the circle of the Minnamurra rainforest serving as a visual link to the heart of Country, "*Nguru*" (Dharawal Words, n.d.). This portrayal symbolises my journey into the heart of our Country (Evolve Communities, 2021; Gammage, 2012, p.142, p.139; Kennedy et al 2010; Kennedy and Hoynes, 2010, p.29).

The cosmic realm is depicted by the "*Mindjigari*" sky, and the "*Garru*" clouds, which symbolise the deep cosmological principles of First Nation societies (Dharawal Words, n.d.; Evolve Communities, 2021). The forest, or bush "*Madjuru*", represents the connection to Mother Earth and the land. The grass "*Bamburr*", signifies the paths and passages I have traversed in my quest to understand and respect this place (Martin and Mirraboopa 2003, p.207; Dharawal Words, n.d.; Carboni, 2023). Water "*Badu*", is of utmost importance, as it is a vital source of sustenance and economy for the Dharawal people, they were hunters and gathers, but most importantly fishermen "*Mahni*" (Dharawal Words, n.d.). Thus, symbolising the rich ecosystem and economy that sustained these people for generations (Kennedy et al 2010; Kennedy and Hoynes, 2010, p.29; Gammage, 2012).

The presence of stone and rocks, "*Gurabung*" and mountains "*Bubara*," within my photographs, highlights the geographical features that define Dharawal Country (Dharawal Words, n.d.). These natural formations hold the deep-rooted songlines and pathways that have been an integral part of Dharawal culture (Kennedy et al 2010). Being a coastal area with profound kinship ties to the inland regions, Dharawal's geographical diversity is evident (2012, p.139; Bronwyn 2013, p.3; Kennedy et al 2010; Carboni, 2023).

Incorporating photographs of animals such as the Eastern Water Dragon, known as "*Waruga*," the Eastern Grey Kangaroo, referred to as "*Buru*," and the Koala, known as "*Garilwa*," within my collage adds another layer of depth

to connection with Country (Dharawal Words, n.d.; Carboni, 2023). These creatures are not merely totems; they carry great cultural significance in Country, as the link to the Dreaming “*Nanga Mai*, with songlines of “Gurangaty, Goon na ghun and Wondangar, and Birth of butterflies” (Coomaditchie, n.d.), symbolising the interconnectedness of Kin with place. The picture of myself feeding the “*Buru*” within this collage serves as a powerful visual representation, highlighting the love and care that epitomises our fundamental belief that “*we are kin with the land, and the land is us*” (Yunupingu, 1988). This gesture underscores kinship and the reciprocity between the Dharawal People and the animals inhabiting this Country “*Nguru*” (Dharawal Words, n.d.). This understanding highlights the ever-evolving and situated nature of our link with Country, revealing the reverence and care that First Nation individuals have for the land across various ecological contexts, (Rose, 1992, p.106; Rose, 1996, p.6-9; Wilson, 2008, p.74; Dharawal Words, n.d.).

The use of native flora, including trees “*Gundhu*,” wood “*Barmagan*,” and various native flowers such as honeysuckle “*Wattung-Urree*” also known as “*Courridjah*” and Waratah “*Warradjah*” or known more commonly in my region of the Illawarra as “*Woolly Butt*,” further enhances the sense of place and connection within my collage (Dharawal Words, n.d; Clarke, 1986; Lill and Dennis, 1985; Carboni, 2023). These plants are not just decorative; the wattle “*Wadananguli*,” Black Salty Wattle (Illawarra) “*Myimbarr*,” brush Cherry “*Galang Arra*,” Lilly Pilly “*Tджерail*,” Blue Gum “*Couranga*,” and Blue Gum (Yarrah), “*Tjellat*” which surrounds the collage, embody the intricate mapping of the land and the relationship to it (Dharawal Words, n.d.; Battaglia and Bruce 2017, Clarke, 1986; Lill and Dennis, 1985; Searle, 1997; Lim and Lim, 2012). These native plants serve as living symbols of the intimate relationship with Dharawal Country, reflecting its natural beauty and ecological diversity. They also carry within them the generational knowledge passed down through First Nation culture, serving as a living testament to the wisdom and understanding of the ancestors, who have cared for and cultivated this land for countless generations (Kennedy et al 2010; Kennedy and Hoynes, 2010, p.29; Evolve Communities, 2021; Behrendt, 1995, p.55-56; Gammage, 2012, p.142).

To emphasise the deep significance of these elements, I have incorporated the “*Warradjah*,” “*Couranga*,” and “*Wattung-Urree*” within my hand (Dharawal Words, n.d.; Carboni, 2023). As I gaze upon these flowers, it's not merely an observation of my surroundings; rather, it signifies the deep relationship forged through understanding and learning within this unit of study. Behind me, a book adorned with sprouting flowers represents the holistic and deeply rooted knowledge derived from First Nation perspectives (Carboni, 2023). Within this religion, knowledge is not acquired through reading; it is attained through physical experiences and a link to Country. That is why, for this piece, I ventured into the heart of Country, walked upon its sacred grounds, and touched the essence of place. It is not something to be simply observed; it is a knowledge that is physically lived and experienced (Gammage, 2012, p.142; Kennedy et al 2010; Kennedy and Hoynes, 2010, p.29).

The colour palette I've utilised within the collage includes hues of blues, greens, greys, and browns. These colours serve as a reflection of the natural beauty and ecological diversity of Dharawal “*Nguru*” Country (Dharawal Words, n.d.). Beyond their visual appeal, these hues are deeply imbued with cultural and spiritual significance, representing the intricate linkage between the land and sea of Dharawal (Carboni, 2023). In turn, my collage seeks to convey the understanding of “*Nguru*” Country. This has given me a new worldview of all “*Bamal*” earth (Dharawal Words, n.d.), as Country is an entity of its own, it has history, spirituality, and love “*Ngambumaya*” (Dharawal Words, n.d.). The continuous journey of comprehending Country is an endless path to traverse, where I am eternally engaged in learning, and Country continuously imparts its wisdom (Kennedy et al 2010; Kennedy and Hoynes, 2010, p.29).

In conclusion, this reflective journey has strongly impacted my understanding of the relationship between People and Country. It has expanded my worldview to involve the holistic interconnectedness of all elements within Country, transcending conventional Western paradigms. The lessons learned emphasised the importance of stewardship,

reciprocity, and responsibility in Caring for Country, not as a resource to exploit, but as a living entity to cherish and protect. This journey has reshaped my perception of the world and instilled a deep sense of respect and reverence for the land and its custodians (Carboni, 2023).

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