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"WHILE MY NAME IS REMEMBERED, I TEACH":
OODGEROO NOONUCCAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL STORYTELLING FOR CHILDREN

Introduction

Translating an Indigenous Australian text is inevitably a great cross-cultural challenge, even if the text is originally written in English. Oodgeroo Noonuccal's *Stradbroke Dreamtime,* a collection of 27 short stories for children, written in plain, easily accessible English, is no exception. In order to be prepared I participated in several cultural awareness trainings, talked to scholars, activists, consulted Indigenous lawyers, researchers and custodians, and read. I formulated a project and scrupulously described it on several pages, sent it to one of the *Stradbroke Dreamtime* copy-rights owners, Noonuccal's grand-daughter, Petrina Walker, and hoped for her approval or, at least, interest. Living on the Stradbroke Island, within Moreton Bay in the Australian state of Queensland, Petrina Walker turned out to be inaccessible. After my numerous phone calls, some unanswered and some with broken connection, she advised me to contact her father who was at that time "doing business" in Canberra. I felt both disappointed that she might have not shared my excitement about yet another translation of her grandmother's writing, and thrilled about this unexpected opportunity to meet Denis Walker. I was yet unaware that my project, though it had always revolved around one text, had already started to transform: from a relatively straightforward translation task with clear aims and a specified deadline, to a much more complex cultural encounter and cross-cultural relationship building with complex framework and unspecified time frame. I met Bejam Kunmunara Jarlow Nunukel Kabool, also known as Denis Walker, an Australian activist and the son of an Indigenous poet and activist Oodgeroo of the Noonuccal, born Kathleen Jean Mary Ruska and also known as Kath Walker, to discuss the project of translating his mother's stories for children from English into Polish. He seemed surprised, yet intrigued, though the sense of urgency in his voice could have been only my interpolation.

We met at the Tent Embassy, which still, since its establishment in 1972, provides space for campaigns for social justice and land rights of Indigenous peoples, and a home to many activists determined to stand for the political rights of Aboriginal Australians. Several bigger and smaller tents were pitched on the lawn in front of the Old Parliament and had this semi-permanent look about them, most likely provoked by my awareness of all these years of their presence there, rather than any actual signs of permanence. The big sign "Sovereignty" was stretched over the lawn, drawing attention to this permanent temporality, a sense of estrangement and struggle, but also self-determination and unity. A campfire was on, which, in the context of the total fire ban in the region at that time, seemed to imply privilege and ownership. People of different ethnicity and age started to gather around the fire for a storytelling session – the Frontier Wars Story Camp that runs each years throughout the week proceeding Anzac Day and educates about the wars of white settlement in Australia.

I entered the biggest tent, the residency of Elders. Inside several people were doing their own things, eating, reading, talking, undistracted by my presence. Bejam was waiting for me. He asked for a project description, but only glanced over it, being more interested in whether I had read Frantz Fanon and were aware of the Gweagle clan shields held in the collection of the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and

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Anthropology. He made sure I had not started any work on translation and suggested looking for money first "because you cannot do it properly without funds", he explained.

The meeting was brief. Bejam was rushed to join the Frontier Wars Story Camp, while a nice young man who introduced himself as an "administrative help", advised that they "need a few days" to think about my project. He gave me his contact details "in case Uncle Denis doesn't call," and also reassured me that they would still be around, "How long? Until we get what we want, several months maybe", he concluded.

Bejam did call and, indeed, texted me on numerous occasions, providing me with a kind of an overview of very many things he was dealing with at the time. We met a number of times. My friendly and welcoming hosts were well prepared for the second meeting and they invited others to join us: elders, activists, a journalist and all those whose opinion they held in high regard. We sat in a big circle and talked about many things: the situation of Indigenous peoples in Australia, racial discrimination, education, Stradbroke Island, songs and dance, about Poland and the European Union but not really much about the text which was the purpose of my visit. In a rather philological manner I was mulishly coming back to the text, while they were patiently returning to all other different threads of our discussion, as if implying that the text is least important in my meticulously planned project.

It was during our second meeting that I started to understand my awkward and dubious position I myself defined in the project description under the term "literary anthropology". Yet, Bejam's generosity with time and stories, openness and willingness to talk encouraged me to persist in what started to shape as an increasingly ambiguous and challenging venture. He wanted to develop what he called a general "module" for tribal people to use in the cases like mine, he wanted the project to be big and meaningful, and to bring change. He drafted several goals and requirements without which, in his view, the project could not run. These included "dancing, gestalt and sovereignty," and the funds without which we could not "do things properly" (Kabool 2016). Our consecutive meetings, though exceptionally interesting and enlightening, did not advance my project much. In my view then Bejam seemed distracted, as if looking for something different to bring into our conversation: we talked about Europe, wars, the Holocaust, social justice, drug addiction and the Bible, but not much about the text.

These were fascinating meetings, but the project stalled. I did not have funds to bring dancers from Stradbroke Island to Canberra, as Bejam requested, but also, and more importantly, I did not understand their role in my literary translation. Neither could I comprehend the link between this little project of Polish translation and the issue of sovereignty Bejam was so firmly focused on. I was confused. I was told I need to be patient and wait. And so I did.

Bejam passed away on 4 December 2017. My little project was never "officially" approved, although in some ways it was, I think, already underway since the very first meeting at the Tent Embassy. At Bejam's funeral his sons read their grandmother's poem dedicated to him, "Son of mine". This is what made me think about my translation differently, or rather wonder what such a cross-cultural translation project should or could be like. What are the ways of rendering and translating difference responsibly and with due sensitivity and sensibility? And what if these are children, in Australia and beyond, who are the active participants and recipients of such an endeavour? In the course of my research, questions like these multiplied, making me increasingly convinced that "an 'apt' response to Indigenous writing" (Freeman 2010) cannot be achieved by only learning the text and following protocols. It is necessary

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also to make connections, build relationships, learn other ways of being, both spiritual and practical, and often share your own experience in the process.

I start this article by introducing the poem "Son of mine", from the first collection of Kath Walker's verses, which provoked me to reflect on the abandoned translation project and approach *Stradbroke Dreamtime* from a different angle. A presentation of the poem from Walker's first collection might not seem relevant here, as one reader pointed out. However, I see the poem as an important departure point for engaging with Walker's later work differently than I had initially envisioned. It encouraged me to read *Stradbroke Dreamtime* in the context of Walker's pedagogical efforts and reflect on her idea of reconciliation as well as on our responsibility and ability to participate in cross-cultural communication. I introduce Walker as an activist and a poet – the two roles that provided a meaningful context to her later work focused predominantly on children. I move on to discuss Walker's engagement with children at Moongabla, Stradbroke Island, and her first prose book, *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972). I read Walker's work as intergenerational, inclusive and transformative, and reflect on her ultimate goal of sharing her stories to educate all the children. I propose to read the text as, in itself, a form of translation of difference – translation between generations and cultures, and an act of solidarity between generations *and* cultures. In the context of Indigenous Australia, the concept of solidarity is often associated with reconciliation.[1] I explore this nexus arguing that *Stradbroke Dreamtime* reflects Walker's strategy for reconciliation which includes empowering children through storytelling. Yet, I also acknowledge the challenges communication between cultures poses, particularly misinterpretations and misrepresentations resulting from insensitive editing and publishing.

I use the names "Kath Walker" to refer to the poet's early writing and activism, and "Oodgeroo Noonuccal" to speak of her later work after she moved back to Stradbroke Island and changed her name. I do not refrain from using a subjective "I", as I do not want to make any claims of objectivity. I want to emphasize that this is my personal and evolving understanding of Noonuccal's work, shaped by my developing knowledge of Indigenous cultures in Australia, meetings with Indigenous Australians, contemplating Bejam's mission and death, and the experience of bringing up my own cross-cultural children who are developing their own understanding of Australian culture and history, satisfying their own thirst for stories as well as the need for tolerance and empathy.

"Son of mine"

The poem "Son of mine", dedicated to Denis Walker (Bejam), appeared in the collection *We are Going* published in 1964 under the name Kath Walker. It was the first book of poems to be published by an Australian Aboriginal, as James Devaney explains in the Foreword to the volume. Denis was thirteen then, and Walker was concerned

[1] In Australia the concept of reconciliation refers to the process of and commitment to bring together Indigenous and non-Indigenous peoples in Australia by building positive relationships between them, challenging discrimination, overcoming divisions and inequalities and advocating constitutional and legislative reforms. The *Council for Aboriginal Reconciliation Act* 1991 officially commenced the process of reconciliation that since then has become an important theme of Australian political and public life. Pratt (2005) points out different ways reconciliation is defined and understood: as the recognition of Indigenous-specific rights, a greater sense of national unity, improvements in Indigenous social and economic wellbeing, or improved awareness of Indigenous history, culture and heritage (2005: 158).

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about the ongoing and new challenges young generation of Aboriginal Australians had to face. The speaker – the mother and an educator, is encouraging her son and other young Aboriginal Australians, and indeed all young Australians, to focus on reconciliation, which is the only way towards a better future with the "lives of black and white entwined". To do this, however, they must be aware of the difficult past and black history of Australia. And so the speaker informs the reader that she will *not* be talking "of heartbreak, of hatred blind. (…) of crimes that shame mankind, of brutal deeds and wrongs maligned, of rape and murder", making it clear that to be forgiven wrongs must be acknowledged first.

The poem's foremost goal is to serve as a salutary lesson, rather than evoke an aesthetic experience. Through conveying acts of atrocious racist behaviour, expressing sadness and anger, it evokes intense emotions, provokes and motivates into action. Yet, with its short verse, simple rhyme and rhythmic pattern, the poem can also be read as a lullaby, the expression of care, a universal language mothers use to communicate with their children, convey cultural knowledge and instruct. These are the poem's two characteristics, being a call for action and a gesture of care, that define Walker's work, which with time increasingly focused on children. When read at the funeral of Walker's son by his sons, the poem became a declaration of generational and tribal solidarity or, to use Knudsen's words, a symbol of "an ancient Aboriginal practice of storytelling: where one voice (story) ends another one takes over" (1994: 110). In the context of Walker's cross-cultural ambitions and strong determination to teach, this solidarity can perhaps be read also as a pronouncement of global social responsibility.

Often criticised for creating "bad verse (…) jingles, clichés" (qtd. Allen 2017), "verse [which] is not poetry in any true sense," with no "serious commitment to formal tightness" (Taylor 1967), and displaying "technical weakness" (Shoemaker 1994: 183), Walker has been more often associated with social protest and activism than literature. Hatherell sees Walker's poetry, with its traditional forms and simple rhyme schemes, as a somewhat awkward presence in Australian mainstream literature (2012: 5). In response to numerous dismissive reactions to her poetry, Mudrooroo coined the term "poetemics" to "separate social verses such as she wrote from the more 'serious' business of poetics" (Mudrooroo 1994: 58). Indeed, both writing and activism occupied Walker entirely: her poems inspired Aboriginal advancement movements, while her action for civil rights informed her writing. Many Indigenous and non-Indigenous writers and activists appreciated her simple verse and getting the message across to those who do not read poetry (Mudrooroo 1994: 60), and stressed her ability to avoid the danger of "thinking white" (Knudsen 1994: 111). Many white critics, on the other hand, saw Walker's work as not "Aboriginal" enough, or not "obviously Aboriginal" (Hodge 1994: 67; Shoemaker 1994: 182), or classified her poems under a vague but practical category of protest writing.

While there has been a lot of discussion focused on Walker's poetry, criticism and defence of her poetic style as well as "important political act[s]" (Knudsen 1994: 117), her role of an educationist – though always acknowledged and commended – has been as if secondary, subordinate to her political activism or even derivative of her poetry. Mudrooroo recalls that during his long friendship with Walker, she "never once described herself as a poet." Instead, she would often call herself an educationalist whose "job was to educate both white and black" (1994: 57). This clear and unpretentious message which has been, however, overshadowed by discussions of poetry and literariness, on the one hand, and activism and protest, on the other. Mudrooroo, for example, focuses on a broader polemic on values, accessibility and

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urgency of Walker's poetry.[2] James Devaney, in his Foreword to her first collection of poems – where he memorably called her "the poet of her people" to indicate her dedication to speak for those who lack awareness, courage or voice – concentrated on her place in and contribution to literature, and more significantly, "our national literature" (Walker 1964: 6). While Walker's place in Australian literature is unquestionable, and while "the breakthrough of an Aboriginal voice into print was in itself an outstanding achievement" (Knudsen 1994: 110), it is her storytelling for and engagement with children as a strategy for reconciliation that I find particularly interesting.

The poet of her people

Kath Walker started attending meetings of the Queensland Council for the Advancement of Aborigines and Torres Strait Islanders in 1958 and soon became very committed to fighting racial discrimination and oppressive legislations. When at the 1962 annual conference of the Federal Council for Aboriginal Advancement in Adelaide she read her "Aboriginal Charter of Rights", she wanted to speak with the voice that had not been heard before, that would unite the wider Australian community beyond racial, social and cultural divisions.

The year 1964, when Kath Walker wrote the poem "Son of mine", was the time of intense political activism in Australia. Protests were indeed held around the world, and Indigenous Australians were inspired and encouraged by American Black activists. Indigenous Australians as well as white liberals supporting the Aboriginal movement protested against the lasting oppressive legislation still regulating the lives of Indigenous people, the Protection Act regimes, church-run missions and government reserves. They protested against the White Australia policy, still held up by some to regulate ethnic composition of Australia, and the assimilation discourse which implied – as Peter Coleman summed up and Donald Horne repeated in his acclaimed book *The Lucky Country* (1964) – "absorption and that means extinction" (Coleman 1962: 8). In this context, Walker's work did not need any justification or rationalisation, nor did her readers need "to justify or explain how they were reading her" (Hodge 1994: 63). Walker's active political engagement embraced all possible ways in which she could advance Aboriginal civil and land rights: writing poems, speeches and letters, marching and teaching, embracing Aboriginals as her own people who needed both to grief and hope, and considering whites "as capable of shame and self-correction" (Hodge 1994: 75). She wanted to empower both "black and white" ("Son of mine").

Walker's political engagement, together with the efforts of many Aboriginal and white activists involved, led to the "citizenship" referendum held in 1967, which resulted in two amendments to the Australian constitution and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islanders being included in the national census and granted full civil rights. This was a tremendous success which facilitated and encouraged further work against racial discrimination: now Walker and other activists, as Duncan observes, "had a major educational program in front of them" (1994: 138). It included negotiating the ways of understanding and approaching Aboriginal advancement with parliamentarians and government officials, but also educating Aboriginal people of their own tasks and

[2] Mudrooroo, also known as Colin Johnson, Mudrooroo Narogin and Mudrooroo Nyoongah, is a prominent author and activist who significantly contributed to debate on the struggles of Indigenous peoples in Australia and on the role of literature within Australian race relations. However, his own identity and public identification as an Indigenous Australian was questioned, which caused public debate on Aboriginality and authenticity. Following this controversy, Mudrooroo withdrew from public life in Australia.

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responsibilities (see Duncan 135-8). Children gradually became the main target of Walker's efforts although it was clear from the first collection of poems she published that it is children that she believed would bring change.

In the 1970s, the prominent role of Walker as a writer with international reputation, vehement activist and a dedicated teacher was unquestionable. She travelled around the world, lectured for large crowds, was regularly interviewed for television and radio, and wrote. Her achievements were recognized in Australia with honorary doctorates from four universities, and her efforts commended by Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal people. She was not, however, pleased with how things were progressing, and perhaps unsure whether her approach to reconciliation is understood and shared. Neither was she happy with the attitude of some young Aboriginal Australians and the lack of a strong unified voice she was advocating for since the 1960s. Cochrane reports that Walker felt offended when considered too old to do her service for the Tribal Council (1994: 84) and devastated to see young Aborigines, including her son Denis, advocating violence as a solution to social inequality. In 1972 Denis Walker made his stance clear saying that "if you haven't got a gun, you have nothing. We're not going to get what we want by standing here and talking." (qtd. "Aborigines seeking black power" 1972). The same year, as if in response to her son, Walker published her first prose book of stories for children, *Stradbroke Dreamtime*. While it was the urgency of the moment and the clarity of the message that governed the poems such as "Son of mine", in *Stradbroke Dreamtime* she concentrated on continuity, developing intergenerational connections, inter-relatedness of past and present, cross-cultural links, and building rapport between the speaker and young readers.

Walker wrote *Stradbroke Dreamtime* after moving to her birthplace, Minjerribah (North Stradbroke Island) two years earlier. There, she focused predominantly on working with children – they became her "whole life now. Of course, the future is with them" (qtd. Hatherell 2012:4). She continued to be politically engaged, but mostly with, as Hatherell puts it, "the causes that defined the period", such as opposition to uranium mining (2012: 4). She was back to nature, devoted herself to painting, writing and children. In protest against the 1988 celebration of the bicentenary of the arrival of the British First Fleet at Sydney[3] Walker returned the MBE (Member of the Order of the British Empire) which she had been awarded in the 1970s for her service to community and which she now perceived as a disgrace. To make her statement stronger, she changed her name to a Noonuccal tribal name reflecting her ancestral connections as well as her mission of a storyteller and educator – Oodgeroo, meaning paperbark tree.

The educationalist

Although *The Australian* announced that she "has withdrawn from public life to her birthplace" (qtd. Cochrane 85), Oodgeroo Noonuccal's mission was far from being completed. She had yet another project she strived to realise and, in some ways, all her previous activities and engagements led to it – to develop a cultural and educational centre for children.

When asked by Margaret Read Lauer, an American scholar visiting Moongbala, why it was so important for her to work with children, Noonuccal answered: "because children are the ones who will create the change. (…) Children don't have racist

[3] Although the Hawke Government refused to fund events that might have been seen as inacceptable by the Indigenous community, celebration of what many considered an invasion did take place. A protest of more than 40,000 people was staged in Sydney and numerous demonstrations were held throughout Australia.

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attitudes unless they're taught by adults" (qtd. Cochrane 1994, 100-1). She kept reiterating this message at various occasions. In an interview with Bruce Dickson at the opening of the exhibition of her paintings she reiterated that "change will come with the young people anyway and I'm sick of talking to mentally constipated adults" (qtd. Dickson).

Noonuccal's enthusiasm and empathy for children was certainly nothing new; she expressed her concern for children in her first published collection of poems, particularly the poem dedicated to her son. Cochrane writes that Noonuccal's ambition was "to gain a better world for her sons, and also for her grandchildren", and so her dedication to fighting for civil rights, better health care and education was strongly and personally motivated. Yet, as her work shows, Noonuccal was apprehensive about all the children. Perhaps it reflects the Aboriginal world view and law she referred to, saying "think first of your tribe", even before *your* children (Noonuccal 1993), or her unshaken confidence that only broad, inclusive education and solidarity can bring a change for the better. Recalling her visit to one of the high schools in Sydney's western suburbs, Duncan observes that Kath Walker had "an empathy with students that was unique" and the ability to "tailor her remarks to suit the needs of her audience to make each student feel that the remarks were addressed to them alone" (1994: 139).

Noonuccal's educational strategy embraced both Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children and aimed to "broaden horizons for all people" (qtd. Dickson). She ends the first collection of verse with a "Song of Hope" for "children's children" and "the glad tomorrow" when no "colour shame us" (1964: 40). Cochrane further explains that Noonuccal's "concern for children was not sentimental", that she believed children "had potential as agents of change, provided they received the appropriate message from the adult world" (1994: 61). This message is captured in many Noonuccal's poems and stories in which she calls for mutual respect, understanding and adopting new approaches while still upholding "sacred myths", as she wrote in the poem "Integration – Yes!" from her second collection *The Dawn is at Hand* (1966).

To nurture this potential for change, Noonuccal aimed to purchase five acres of her family's land in Stradbroke Island which she called Moongalba (Sitting-Down Place) and build a permanent centre that would include museum, library, art gallery, open-air theatre and park (Hatherell, 2012: 4). Her claims were, however, contested and the request rejected, but she was allowed to lease the land on which she built a temporary shelter, a gunyah, which she later replaced with a caravan, and gradually erected sheds and temporary structures for activities with children.

While the buildings were constructed to provide space for educational activities such as painting, drawing, craft and theatre (Cochrane 1994: 91-93), Noonuccal's teaching was much broader and embraced, what she called, "Aboriginal way of life" (qtd. Dickson). She reflected that

> when the children come to Moongalba I teach them the same as I teach my own grandchildren. I teach them how to pick up shellfish and how to look for them. I teach them how to fish and to crab. I teach them what's good to eat in the bush and what isn't, and I teach them how to cook underground (qtd. Cochrane 93).

Yet, Noonuccal also presented her educationalist approach and philosophy from a different perspective. When asked what her work with children who visited the centre at Moongalba looked like, she replied "there is no point in trying to do things for young people … when young people come there they do it themselves. (…) I do nothing at Moongalba but welcome them in. They do their own thing there" (qtd. Dickson). Encouraging children to roam the island, like she did as a child, observe and discover

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nature like she did, or inspect artefacts she brought from her travels around the world, and learn *from* and *about* each other, she expressed trust and confidence in children's inquisitive, unbiased and fair-minded nature. Learning freely about the island and each other was a significant element of the whole educational experience at Moongalba, the lesson that could facilitate, as Noonuccal believed, the overcoming of the biggest barriers of all – "lack of communication, lack of tolerance, and lack of understanding" (qtd. Dickson). She was confident that such simple activities as interacting with each other and talking to one another could make Australia a truly multicultural society (*The First Born*). In fact, one of the first essential lessons at Moongalba was that the most important person on Stradbroke Island is "a fellow man" (qtd. Hatherell 2012).

Noonuccal's work in Moongalba, which I see as an act and a lesson of solidarity and a strategy for reconciliation, was focused on teaching black children about their rich cultural heritage, and white children about Aboriginal way of life and respect for nature. Teaching Indigenous children about their ancestry was essential for Noonuccal, as it is the lack of knowledge and the sense of identity that she saw as most hurtful; she recalled that "often it was the first time in their lives they heard and saw something of the rich culture of their heritage " (qtd. Cochrane 96). At the same time, she urged Aboriginal Australians to teach non-Aboriginal Australians of the Australia's rich heritage and horrific past, "so that they can be our allies" (qtd. Craven 123), ensuring that all children were treated with respect and were told the history they deserve to know.

Non-Aboriginal children were also welcomed at Moongalba; Cochrane sees Noonuccal's educational work as building "bridges between her people and the children of white invaders" (158). Still, it is important to emphasise that Noonuccal's approach to cross-cultural relations was more nuanced. She often acknowledged that many white Australians are committed to supporting social rights and justice for black Australians, and stressed that children do not have racist attitudes, but discover numerous similarities and connections between each other, if given an opportunity. In one of the interviews she argued that "it is this lack of a balanced view of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people that feeds an ill-informed understanding of Aboriginal Australia, which compels others to continue to want to 'do things to and for us' rather than with 'us'" (Gooda 2012). So it is not only building bridges that her work aimed to achieve but also changing the narrative on both Indigenous and non-Indigenous Australians.

Apart from what seem to have been leisurely cultural activities, Noonuccal devised ambitious and practical learning programs for her young visitors at Moongalba. One of such sophisticated educational programs aimed at Indigenous students, as Hatherell reports relying on a collection of Moongbala archive at the University of Queensland Library, featured "sessions on college, career search, black literature, study skills, pottery/macramé, and assertiveness training" (2012: 4). Noonuccal's educational project seemed promising. Children were coming to Moongalba from around Australia and from overseas, as school trips and with families, from poor suburbs of Sydney as well as elite private schools. Cochrane reports that between 1972 and 1977 more than eight thousand children visited Moongalba, and in 1993 the number of visitors increased to thirty thousand children (1994: 153). Noonuccal not only welcomed children at Moongbala, but also visited schools, helped to develop curricula for trainee teachers and design teachers' handbooks, engaged with tertiary students of Anthropology and Black Studies, writers, artist and educators (see Cochrane 1994: 93, 153).

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Noonuccal's teaching through her writing was ongoing. Her first collection of poems, *We are Going* (1964), was followed by two more volumes of poems: *The Dawn is at Hand* (1966) and *My People* (1970), sold in seven and eight thousand copies, respectively. Her collections of poems brought her fame in Australia and abroad, yet her work with children superseded her earlier poetic ambitions and short stories for children substituted her politicised poems and speeches. Following the 1967 referendum, books for children rethinking representation of Indigenous Australians started to appear, and Noonuccal's *Stradbroke Dreamtime* was among the first ones. It was followed by her other stories for children, such as *Father Sky and Mother Earth* (1981), *Australians Legends and Landscapes* (1990) or *Australia's Unwritten History* (1992).

The storyteller

Noonuccal wrote *Stradbroke Dreamtime* upon her return to her childhood home at Minjerribah, the North Stradbroke Island, which has been home for many years to the Noonuccal people. Brewster observes that this publication marks a second phase of Noonuccal's writing (1994: 92) during which she produced mainly prose and short stories for children. While Brewster discusses the traditional role of a storyteller particularly in the context of Noonuccal's "protest poems" and their "enunciative voice" (1994: 93), I would like to emphasise the importance of Noonuccal's storytelling in the context of her later prose and stories for children. They convey traditional values of storytelling such as passing on knowledge, providing guidance as well as entertainment and allowing space for one's own interpretations and thus participation.

As a spokeswoman and people's poet, Noonuccal created straightforward, often unadorned writing which she herself described as "sloganistic, civil rightish, plain and simple" (1975) as well as "somewhat angry and bitter" (1966: 4). Her stories for children, though also aimed at educating and inspiring, invite transformative experience on the part of the reader in a different way. Personal experiences, emotionally compelling descriptions of events and imagery, allow children to better remember the story and easier relate to one another and form relationships. In the process of this research I came closer to understanding Indigenous Australians' diverse relationship with the past, knowledge and, most distinctly, with land, and how this relationship sets "the tone for the relationship between people" (Graham qtd. Heiss 2003: 33). The stories are short and uncomplicated, capture attention with vivid details, and invite young readers to engage with the characters emotionally. The urgency and abruptness evident in the poems is replaced here with personal reflection on the past and a sense of continuity and belonging. While Brewster sees Noonuccal's storytelling as assuming "the form almost exclusively of a chronicles of legends" (97), I propose to approach her storytelling as active engagement with the past, a strategy disclosing contemporaneity of the past and its meaning for the present and future, and a means for developing cross-cultural communication.

The first part of the book, "Stories from Stradbroke", is autobiographical; it describes everyday life and memorable events from Noonuccal's childhood. The second part, "Stories from the Old and new Dreamtime", includes stories she knew from her childhood and those she created herself in the form of traditional tribal stories. Noonuccal prioritizes personal voice and reading of the past that serves the purpose of providing instruction, but also allows for subjectivity informed by the present. The speaking subject of the first part of the book, an Aboriginal child, captures innocence and joyfulness in her stories, but also recalls important lessons such as a punishment for killing a Kookaburra in an accident provoked by anger (Kill to Eat) or parental

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discipline that followed such an irresponsible behaviour (Shark). She recalls her emotions of shame and regret, and reluctant acceptance of punishment. She describes traditional community rules, for example, how to hunt and "gather enough crabs to feed the tribe, and no more" (Going Crabbing), and the memory of the taste of traditional Aboriginal food (Dugong Coming), but also presents her childish yet genuine objection to some of the practices. She recalls she disliked getting up at the dawn to look for mud-crabs with her father and siblings (Going Crabbing), or helping her siblings carry dead birds or bandicoots they had hunted (Family Council). This sincere objection fosters empathy, builds trust and shows the speaker to be a child other children could easily identify with.

Telling stories of not being a good hunter, but rather a day dreamer (Family Council), of getting seasick in spite of "[t]hree generations of sailors' blood in her veins", of not being able to understand the sea "as Dad did", or of being "weak and sentimental" in spite of her father's attempts to bring up children tough (Going Crabbing) is an open confession and an important expression of solidarity with those who think they do not understand or, worse, do not belong. It shows a diversity of practices and behaviours within a culture which is always fluid and transforming following both group and individual experiences. It also conjures the image of experiences that are potentially familiar to children of Western cultures, and provoke emotions that resonate with many. Noonuccal tells her stories often focusing on experiences many children could identify with, for example, of how at school she would be dreaming of the world outside (The Left-hander), or how she would cheat to resolve a difficult situation with teachers at school (Repeat Exercise). There are stories of little mishaps and silliness, comical moments many children would find amusing, such as walking off with a ladder leaving her father trapped in a water tank high above the ground (The Tank), or falling into the sea while trying to stay neat and tidy before the weekly picture show (Not Our Day).

The autobiographical part of the book includes narratives that disclose common experiences of Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal children, prevalent at that time, such as the punishment for being left-handed or leaving one's desk without permission (The Left-hander), and reprimands for being a bad writer (Repeat Exercise). Describing feelings such as shame, embarrassment or anger invokes the sense of commonality of experiences and solidarity against school injustice as a child could see it. Yet, the writer also provides an insight into the reality of being an Aboriginal child in Australia of the 1930s, when doctors would attend white people only (Mumma's Pet), when meagre white man's rations were hardly enough to survive (Kill to Eat), and when Aborigines had to help themselves by searching through "the white man's rubbish dumps" (Kill to Eat). Such personal accounts of hardship and discrimination are emotionally stimulating and invite emphatic response on which understanding of diverse ways of being and differing experiences can be developed.

Although in her recollections Noonuccal indicates that many things have changed, some for better and some for worse, there is no clear opposition between what is traditional and modern. Talking about "traditional" values and rules she does not conjure the image of old, lifeless and static culture, but refers to practices meaningful for modern and Western lives. Noonuccal introduces rich heritage in a light-hearted way, through ingenuous and comical stories like the one about the Noonuccal's totem – a carpet snake which her family kept as a pet, which was hated by her mother for eating their chickens, but stayed unthreatened as a blood brother of her father. Assuming a childlike perspective, the narrator expresses her connection with the totem animal, not

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as a spiritual emblem, but as an untired listener of the stories she used to tell while sitting in lavatory (Carpet Snake). The story about the pet snake, while amusing and childish, introduces the context of rich spiritual life, displays relationships and responsibilities within Aboriginal family, great respect for nature and unceasing amazement over it.

The connection to nature, expressed in continuous admiration or bewilderment, is the narrative thread running through all the *Stradbroke Dreamtime* stories. While the narrator boldly states that she hated early morning "crabbing", she adds "there is something unfailingly and breathtakingly beautiful about a sunrise – and this was especially true of a sunrise over Stradbroke Island" (Going Crabbing). This rapport with nature, which transgresses cultural differences and racial divisions, seems to be a clear and dominant message of Noonuccal's stories, implying not unchanging and sheltered life outside civilization, but a shared reality and responsibility.

Against the personal and family stories Noonuccal sets the second part of *Stradbroke Dreamtime*. These are tribal stories which she knew from her childhood and those which she created based on her knowledge of her people and the land. She called these stories "legends"**,** although other Australian writers and storytellers would rather call them "dreamtime stories" or myths. She explains elsewhere that although the word "Alcheringa" was translated by Europeans into English as "Dreamtime" – and so the stories are described as "Dreamtime stories" – she prefers to use the word legend (Noonuccal 1992). Perhaps it is the interplay of historical account and imagination that she found so engaging and useful about legends, or their common presence and connotations in various cultures. And so, allowing for a sense of uncertainty and symbolism, but also commonality and familiarity, Noonuccal reshapes the stories she tells, adapts them, emphasising the significance of these accounts with all due seriousness and genuine significance: they "record our past, teach us how to behave, how to read the land, how to reject evil and uphold good" (1992: 4).

Recalling the experience of visiting Stradbroke Island and listening to Noonuccal's stories, Attebery recounts that through reshaping, reconfiguring and repurposing traditional Noonuccal stories she made them a part of cross-cultural exchange (2014: 10). Attebery identifies this new purpose of the stories as entertaining and educating visitors "who might then spread the word that her people had neither vanished nor lost their way in the modern world" (2014: 10). Acknowledging Noonuccal's understanding of the past and myth as a source of resistance, pride and power, Attebery called her "a myth bearer" and a "negotiator between two worlds" (2014: 11, 10), which are, however, continuously evolving through interaction with one another.

Indeed, both Noonuccal's childhood stories and the legends seem to have a double function. On the one hand, they teach Indigenous children about their rich cultural heritage, instruct how to behave and how to interact with the environment they live in, make them feel proud, motivated and hopeful. Although the stories are rendered in autobiographical form and offer a personal account of the past, they convey "communal narratives" and "spiritual connections to land and kin" (Moreton-Robinson 2000), teach responsibilities that rest with young Australians towards the land and its people and thus nurture a sense of belonging and unity. On the other hand, these are the stories for all the children – descendants of colonizers, migrants and overseas visitors, who do not share the common past or heritage, but who might have – as Noonuccal saw it – the common future. Noonuccal's uncomplicated and straightforward standard English makes the stories accessible to all English-speaking children. Moreover, in the

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way she tells the stories she acknowledges the fact that the Indigenous world is often not known to European and Indigenous children alike, that European concepts defining reality are more familiar to all children and young adults growing in Australia of 1970s and 1980s.

Stradbroke Dreamtime highlights intergenerational links, connections between the ancestral and the everyday, it encourages positive self-concepts, the feeling of belonging and unity in the context of evolving and transforming culture, but it also employs analogy to bridge gaps between the familiar and unfamiliar, de-mythicizes the past and, perhaps, difference. Thus I read *Stradbroke Dreamtime* as the author's efforts to communicate her own Aboriginality to the world and contemporary Aboriginality as a living culture, an attempt to translate between cultures, and an act of solidarity with the view of reconciliation.

There are, however, serious and legitimate doubts about how to respond to the voice influenced by white editing and publishing practices. To be published in Australia in the 1970s, Aboriginal narratives had to be standardised, Anglicised or "gubbarised" (Langford Ginibi, gtd. Heiss 2003: 29) by editors to appeal to non-Indigenous readers. Noonuccal's *Stradbroke Dreamtime* – as we know from the studies which compared the published text with the manuscript (Jones 2004) – certainly was. Heiss explains that Aboriginal English or Aboriginalisation of the English language often "needs to be translated to aid understanding by non-Aboriginal audiences" (2003: 28). While not everybody agrees with the label "Aboriginal English" (see, for example, Kenny Laughton qtd. Heiss 2003: 29), it is a well-evidenced fact that it was impossible in the past to have Aboriginal text published in its original form without rewriting or "correcting" it, and sifting it "through white filters" (*Protocols…* 2007: 19). Such a process not only eradicates distinctive features of Aboriginal voices such as vocabulary, style, tone and discourse, but also distorts the message and deprives Indigenous writers of having control over their stories.

Jeniffer Jones, in her article "Deemed Unsuitable for Children: The Editing of Oodgeroo's Stradbroke Dreamtime" (2004) provides a disturbing commentary on how *Stradbroke Dreamtime* "was adjusted during editorial preparations to accommodate white notions of Aboriginality" (2004: 5). She argues that not only language of the original was significantly altered by reducing colloquial and local voices, swearing and dynamism, and promoting the "Queen's English" (2004: 9-13), but also that "stereotypes of Aboriginal primitivism subvert Oodgeroo's portrayal of contemporary Aboriginality" (2004: 5). As a result, the book failed, in her opinion, to present accurate Indigenous world-view. Jones insists that the author's work was depoliticized, the past mythicized and detached from the present, the representations of Aboriginality considered inappropriate were replaced, and sections criticising white racist behaviour removed (2004) together with "Aboriginal perspectives on land, spirituality and contemporary Aboriginal culture" (2009: 6). Additionally, as Jones reports, the editor made a decision to separate two genres originally mixed by Noonuccal: autobiography and legends, disturbing the expression of continuity intended in the manuscript. This first edition included black and white illustrations made "in style" by Denis Schapel to accompany each story.

Overall, in her meticulous study of the manuscript and the first publication Jones identified 1219 changes introduced by the editor.[4] In her opinion, the changes soften the

[4] In her later publication, Jones mentions 3700 changes to the manuscript of *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (2009).

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narrative by removing both the experiences of racism that would embarrass white reader and language that conveys perspectives, behaviours and relationships deemed unsuitable for children. Using the example of one of the autobiographical stories, Mumma's Pet, Jones explains that the manuscript is "much more realistic; it manages to hold spite, vengeance and experiences of discrimination in dynamic tension with the happy family situation also described" (2004: 13). The changes make the text more palatable for white readers and more suitable for children or infantilized and, as a result, the book's radical potential is lost. Categorised as children's literature, the book becomes more marketable "because of the large educational market" (Heiss 2003: 40).

The editor of the first edition (published with Angus and Robertson), Ker Wilson, recalls that Noonuccal "made some remarks about how her manuscripts had been changed, which is always sad for an editor because she did have the opportunity [to object] at the time" (qtd. Jones 2004: 6). Only seven years later the author publicly expressed her disappointment with the publication (Jones 2004: 5), perhaps to the surprise of many readers. Yet, given the power imbalance between white editors and Aboriginal writers at the time, it is not surprising that Noonuccal did not defend her position and did not insist on retaining the manuscript in its original form. Moreover, Jones argues that *Stradbroke Dreamtime* was written at a "personal low point in her [Noonuccal's] life, making her text uncharacteristically vulnerable to editorial amendment" (2009: 207). Over a decade after the publication of *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, during the first conference of Aboriginal writers held in Perth in 1983, Indigenous writers "demanded 'community control' over the means of production of their own writing" (Freeman 2010). Now, over four decades later, the Indigenous literature market is greatly transformed and cultural protocols developed,[5] but Indigenous Australian writers are still concerned about their ownership and control over their works. How *Stradbroke Dreamtime* might be different if it were published today can only be speculated.

Stradbroke Dreamtime was republished many times. As far as I know, the last edition was revised by Jones and published in 2006 by Vulgar Press. According to the edition details, it restores Noonuccal's text and "offers it to a new generation" (Stradbroke Dreamtime 2006, *Trove*). Unfortunately, the edition is unavailable.[6] Yet, its very existence potentially undermines the idea of translating the first edition Noonuccal was not happy with. A close comparison of the versions together with a careful examination of the manuscript seems to be the right way to resume the translation project. Yet, whether this would be the "apt" response, I cannot be certain; after all, Bejam never suggested consulting a different edition of his mother's work. What interests me is how differently readers with a limited cultural competence would interpret the *restored* text and how this difference would be rendered in a different language. In such a process of multiple translations, responding "aptly" to the text, that is, "as the ideal appropriate reader would" (Thomas McCormack qtd. Freeman 2010), presents a whole new challenge for a cross-cultural storytelling.

[5] For example, *Protocols for producing Indigenous Australian writing* (2007) or *Guidelines for the ethical publishing of Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander authors and research from those communities* (2015).

[6] *Trove*, an electronic platform launched by the National Library of Australia in 2008 to bring together content from various libraries and repositories, mentioned 24 editions of *Stradbroke Dreamtime*, including the one from 2006, yet does not identify any library in which this edition can be located.

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Conclusion

In the Forward to her second volume of poetry, *The Dawn is at Hand*, Noonuccal explained that she was well aware that her poetic success "was not due to any greatness" in her "simple verse, but to the fact that it was the work of an Aboriginal", a kind of "succès curiosité" (1966: 4). Yet, there must have been other reasons for unceasing interest in Noonuccal's work. In 2016 *Stradbroke Dreamtime* was selected one of the ten top children's book that "awake the imagination", as reported by the National Indigenous Television (Booth 2016). It was also the first book of Indigenous literature translated into a European language other than English (Haag 2009). Interestingly, this first translation was a translation into Polish published in 1977. While the text reads well, I am concerned that it might not be as close a representation of Noonuccal's voice as possible.[7] The title itself, *Senne widziadła* [Night Phantasms], implies a rather loose interpretation of the original. Forty years later I hoped to involve Indigenous people in the process of translation, recreation and retelling of Noonuccal's children stories yet again.

While my abandoned project saved the text from potential misinterpretation, misrepresentation, oversimplification, unintentional stereotyping and further editorial impact, it has also prevented Noonuccal's message from travelling, being read, enacted and shared. Maybe it would be the best outcome. After all, classified as "folklore" and reviewed by anthropologists (Jones 2001: 190), *Stradbroke Dreamtime* is considered to be "framed and impinged upon by neo-colonial attitudes" (Jones 2004: 8). Besides, once "tampered with by non-Aboriginal people" the writing, as McGuinness insists, "ceases to be Aboriginal" (McGuinness and Walker 1985: 44).[8] And while there is little control on publicly released works, particularly on the way they are received and embraced, "using knowledge as part of the general spread of ideas is a concept that often sits at odds with Indigenous notions of holding and disseminating knowledge" (*Protocols…* 2007). At the same time, interpretations of this protocol seem to vary. Commenting on his children's stories *Booyooburra: A Story of the Wakka Murri* (1993), Lionel Fogarty observes that "with a little bit of information or a little tiny bit of a story from back then, you can bring it into the reality of today", bring "truth to the children's minds" (qtd. Heiss 2003: 40). I believe these were also Noonuccal's hopes, intentions and efforts and they should not be neglected even if the full potential of the manuscript cannot be achieved. Reflecting on these challenges is one of the steps in a long process of learning, listening and building relationships I just commenced with my "abandoned" project.

Roberta Sykes recalls Noonuccal's words of encouragement to continue with the book Sykes was working on and not to refrain from mentioning Noonuccal's name after her death. Traditionally in Aboriginal culture referring to a deceased person by name is to be avoided as a mark of respect and to ensure that the spirit is not kept in this world (see, e.g., *Sad News, Sorry Business* 2015; McGrath and Phillips 2008). Noonuccal was not concerned about this culturally significant practice and made it clear saying:

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[7] I examine the existing Polish translation of *Stradbroke Dreamtime* in a separate article.

[8] It is debated what constitutes Aboriginal writing; "Apart from style and language Heiss mentions the message of the work as an "obvious identifier" of Aboriginal writing (2003: 38), while Alexis Wright – its drive to challenge "white concepts, values and ways of describing events, places [and] people." (2007: 81).

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When I die, I want people to shout my name. (…). All my life I've been teaching, teaching, and I'm going to keep right on teaching beyond the grave. (…) Help me to keep teaching. While my name is remembered, I teach. (qtd. Sykes 39-40).

Would she tell me the same? Intrigued by her approach and prompted by my unfinished project I chose to reflect on the work of Noonuccal as an activist and a poet, and, particularly, on her engagement with children, to better understand the aim of her storytelling as well as our ability to participate in cross-cultural communication, and respond "aptly" to the text. I read *Stradbroke Dreamtime,* as intergenerational, inclusive and transformative project, a translation in itself, and suggest that, although it might be considered to have failed to present a true Indigenous voice, it reflects Noonuccal's approach to reconciliation seen as an act of solidarity between generations and cultures and facilitated by storytelling. As such, it invites young readers to reach across cultural boundaries (cf. O'Conor 2006), to communicate, share and empathize, and promotes a sense of solidarity among the young readers. Seen this way, it should be disseminated, explored and translated allowing other young readers to feel empowered by its messages. While I share Noonuccal's hope that "Change will come with the young people anyway…" (qtd. Dickson), I also support her view that we should "keep right on teaching beyond the grave", in spite of complexities of meaning and cultural inferences we may encounter on our way in translating difference.

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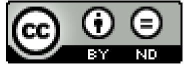

KATARZYNA KWAPISZ WILLIAMS

“WHILE MY NAME IS REMEMBERED, I TEACH”: OODGEROO NOONUCCAL AND CROSS-CULTURAL STORYTELLING FOR CHILDREN

Focusing on *Stradbroke Dreamtime* (1972), the first prose book of an Australian Indigenous poet, activist and educationalist, Oodgeroo Noonuccal (also known as Kath Walker), I reflect on questions which arise around cross-cultural communication and translation. Prompted by the unfinished project aimed at translating *Stradbroke Dreamtime* into Polish, I deliberate on challenges to respond appropriately to Australian Indigenous writing, particularly if it is influenced by white editing and publishing practices which often privilege Eurocentric views. Situating *Stradbroke Dreamtime* in the broader context of Noonuccal’s life, political activism and pedagogical efforts, I read her work as an intergenerational, inclusive and transformative project, and an act of solidarity between generations and cultures. In the context of Indigenous Australia, the concept of solidarity is often associated with reconciliation. I explore this nexus, arguing that *Stradbroke Dreamtime* reflects Walker’s strategy for reconciliation which includes empowering children through storytelling.