11. One name for one Place – but it is not always so

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1. Introduction

Aboriginal placenames represent a very ancient layer of the vocabulary, just as placenames do in European traditions: extensive work has been done on European river names which are said according to some scholars, to form the most ancient layer of the vocabulary, preceding the arrival of the Indo-Europeans (Vennemann 1994). For a traditional Aboriginal person, as for older Europeans the world map was territorially very much smaller than it is for people now in the days of the 'global village'. It was, however, infinitely more detailed and meaningful. We will look at several aspects of Aboriginal placenames in the light of this:

- (i) Placenames may be old, but there is not an eternal one-to-one relationship between a place and its name: there are cases of duplicates in name, on the one hand, and dual naming on the other;
- (ii) Placenames may be old, but they are not immutable, and there are cases where one can see new placenames evolve; and
- (iii) Aboriginal Placenames have special significance in the chronology of the creation of the landscape.

2. More than one place with the same name

The fact that there is not a one-to-one relationship between a place and its name is clear from the many instances where there are two or more places with the same name.

For the eastern Lake Eyre Basin we have the remarkable list compiled by J.H. Reuther of over 3000 placenames with their explanations, and the associated map by Hillier (1904). This list, which comprises volume 7 of the Reuther MS (translated in *The Diari*, 1981), contains a surprising number of 'duplicates': two or sometimes even three places can share the same name. The explanations

and the comparison with the Hillier map make it clear that these duplicates refer to separate and different locations, often in different people's country. There is enough similarity between the languages involved to make this quite feasible, but sometimes there are reasons for doubt in the identifications. For instance there are three places in this list called by the name 'Daku-ngarra-ngarra',¹ which was said to refer to a heart-shaped sandhill. One of these is attributed by Reuther to a Wangkangurru Ancestor and is assigned to Wangkangurru country, but the word 'daku' sandhill is not known in Wangkangurru, where the word for 'sandhill' is *mudlu*. Even if in isolated instances the multiple locations with one name are doubtful, there is still plenty of evidence of this practice, and the same situation can be seen in those placenames that have survived into modern times. We will look at the reasons behind these duplications. The data on which this study is based are language recordings and fieldtrips undertaken since 1965 in the Lake Eyre Basin.

2.1. Copying a name

The use in Australia of European names like 'Newcastle' is usually due to nostalgia: a desire to name a township after an English township. This kind of translocation of a placename is extremely rare in Aboriginal topography, but it does occur. One striking example is the translocation of the Arrernte name *Antherrtye*. It is originally a common noun, defined as follows:

a large rocky hill or mountain, mountain range or chain of large hills
(Henderson and Dobson 1994).

People further south, in the Lake Eyre Basin, both Arabana and Diyari, interpreted this as a specific name for the Macdonnell Ranges, which to them were a mysterious, distant and very high mountain range, the home of several important Ancestors, including the Native Cat *Malpunga*, the hero of the Urumbula song cycle. Siebert in his correspondence with A.W. Howitt, compares the range spelt variously as 'Antiritcha', and 'Antirtja' to Mt Olympus, the Greek 'Mountain of the Gods'. He writes about one of the Two Men of mythology being sent

nach dem Götterberg Antirtja, dem Australischen Olymp.

'to the mountain of the Gods, Antirtja, the Australian Mt Olympus'.

(document 347, a letter sent from Bethesda-Killalpaninna, 28 August 1899, p. 2).

¹ We follow the convention of writing Aboriginal words from early documents within quotation marks, and words that are taken from modern transcriptions in italics.

In document 334 of the same collection Siebert calls ‘Antirtja’ ‘the holy mountain’, cf. also Howitt 1904: 785. The Macdonnell Ranges rise to over 1500 metres with Mt Zeil. Arabana people borrowed this name for a low but rocky range on the west side of Lake Eyre, under 200 metres high, admittedly rising from close to sea level. This range includes Mt Perrypollkot² (*Pirri-palkanha* ‘Splitting their claws’ from the Emu History), Mt Robinson (*Yaltya-Wati* ‘Frog-Path’, because the Ancestral Frogs clambered right up to the top in pursuit of their enemies), and Mt Toodlery (*Thurliri* ‘Rocky Tableland’). As is evident from the names, a number of important myths traverse this range and so Arabana people had their own *Anthritya*, sometimes pronounced *Nganthritya*, though not of Olympic proportions.

2.2. Names from common features

A name may be descriptive and refer to some obvious and commonplace attribute: this is one of the main reasons why two or more places can end up having the same name.

2.2.1. Bird names

This attribute may be the presence of particular creatures.

Finches love to congregate around water, and so it is not surprising to find sources of water called after them. On the western side of Lake Eyre in Arabana country there are two places simply called *Yatyapara-nha* ‘Finch’ (the final *-nha* is just an optional proper noun marker). One *Yatyapara-nha* is the Tarlton³ spring near the headwaters of Hope Creek, in the Mt Margaret Range, the other is Paisley Pond⁴ in the Paisley Creek, hence the name served also for the Paisley Creek (see Hercus and Potezny 1999: 165). These places once named *Yatyaparanha* are only some 50 km apart, but in a world where each place was so much more significant and transport was not mechanised this did not seem to lead to any confusion. Unfortunately in neither case has the name survived on modern maps.

Other birds too figure in more than one placename: there are for instance several *Paku-Paku* ‘Bellbird’ creeks, *Kukunka* ‘Brown Hawk’ creeks and places called ‘Eaglehawk’s nest’. There are also duplicate placenames involving other creatures, such as ‘Ant-water’ and ‘Mosquito creek’, but as the names of these creatures vary a lot between languages, multiple identical forms are not so common.

2 All the locations given here are in decimal degrees using the Geocentric Datum of Australia (GDA) 1994, Mt Perrypollkot is -27.7468 Latitude, 136.2160 Longitude.

3 -28.5384 Lat., 136.1154 Long.

4 -29.2928 Lat., 136.6928 Long.

2.2.2. Plant-names

Dikirri is the term for ‘swamp cane-grass’ in Yaluyandi (once spoken on the Diamantina near Goyder Lagoon) and neighbouring languages. This plant is particularly common in wet areas, and so it is not surprising to find a number of swampy waterholes called by that name: there are four in the Birdsville-Bedourie area. Three of these appear on modern maps: the vagaries of English spelling however are such that these duplicated placenames always seem to turn out to be written in different ways:

1. Dickeree⁵ waterhole on the Diamantina just south of Birdsville;
2. Dickerrie⁶ waterhole below Old Annandale on Eyre Creek;
3. Dickery⁷ waterhole near the Kalidawarry ruins, not far from the junction of the Mulligan with Eyre Creek;
4. *Dikirri* is also the original name of the waterhole where Old Alton Downs⁸ homestead was built in South Australia on an Eyre Creek channel near the Northern Territory border. This name does not appear on modern maps.

Kurla is a widespread name for ‘sandhill cane-crass’. The name *Kurlanha*, with the optional proper noun suffix *-nha*, is used for two separate locations. English spelling has made them look very different from one another:

1. Goolong Springs,⁹ near Marree;
2. Coolina¹⁰ waterhole, at the Macumba Bend.

The latter site has a mythological background as well as the simple descriptive one. It is on the track of the Ancestor *Intara* from Mt Arthur¹¹ to the Ilkildana waterhole¹² on the Alkaowra Channels. In one of the verses of this cycle, *Intara* travels at night to get home quickly with the precious pounding stone that he has taken. He gets disoriented, and so he collects some sandhill cane-grass from a dune near a waterhole to light a bright fire so that he can see. He sees his own track and sings ‘This is the way I have come just now!’ This waterhole, Coolina, was therefore named after the cane-grass.

Karingala is the name for a scented kind of water-mint in Arabana-Wangkangurru and Kuyani. There are several places named after it, one is a small watercourse,

5 -26.0350 Lat., 139.1945 Long.

6 -25.2800 Lat., 138.4100 Long.

7 -24.4454 Lat., 138.8888 Long.

8 -26.1219 Lat., 138.9412 Long.

9 -29.6563 Lat., 138.1479 Long.

10 -27.2807 Lat., 136.5279 Long.

11 -27.4928 Lat., 135.9742 Long.

12 -27.1946 Lat., 136.6125 Long.

location uncertain, near Nilpinna Spring¹³ in Arabana country. Another *Karingala* is a long way to the south on Finnis Springs Station. It is by the Screechowl Creek and is now called 'Woolshed Springs'. Yet another *Karingala* is the original name of Duck Waterhole¹⁴ not far from Duck Bore near the Woodmurra Creek, and it is shown on T.G.H. Strehlow's map (Strehlow 1971). A fourth and fifth are still found on modern maps: Curranullina¹⁵ Spring, now a bore, on Peake Creek and Karingallanna¹⁶ waterhole in Wangkangurru country on the lower Warburton.

Similarly there are at least two sites named after the 'Ruby Saltbush' *Kudnampira*, and several others saying 'full of *Eremophila* bushes' *Yarda-purrunha*, e.g. Yardaparinna Creek and Waterhole¹⁷ close to the Macumba homestead. It seems that duplicates of this kind are accidental and there is no other connection between the sites of identical name.

2.2.3. Names from the actions of Ancestors

In the stories of the Ancestors events are often repeated. The Two Men of Initiation introduce the use of knives in initiation: they arrive just in time and save youths from initiation by fire. This happens at Finnis Swamp¹⁸ near Lake Eyre South, and so this place was called *Wibma-Malkara* 'History-time Initiation'. There was another History-time Initiation at North Hawker Springs¹⁹ near Mt Margaret, so this place was also called *Wibma-Malkara*.

In the myth of the creation of Lake Eyre, the Ancestor *Wilkuta* tries to find a place to spread out the huge kangaroo skin, which ultimately forms the lake. He tries to spread it in a number of places and each time a tiny wren *yurilya* calls out shrilly telling him 'don't put it here, I need room for all my little children'. In memory of these events there are a number of sites called *Yurilya(nha)*:

1. Eurelyana Hill,²⁰ and the nearby Eurelyana Creek, which is a tributary to the Peake Creek.
2. Eurilyna Spring,²¹ south of Lake Cadibarrowirracanna.

13 -28.2097 Lat., 135.6901 Long.

14 -27.6398 Lat., 136.0735 Long.

15 -28.0857 Lat., 135.5509 Long.

16 -27.7609 Lat., 137.6383 Long.

17 -27.2090 Lat., 135.6986 Long.

18 -29.5921 Lat., 137.4111 Long.

19 -28.4192 Lat., 136.1930 Long. The Arabana name for this site, *Wibma-Malkara*, is noted in the current Gazetteer.

20 -28.3455 Lat., 135.2553 Long.

21 -28.9333 Lat., 135.4437 Long.

3. *Yurilya* was also the name of the Margaret Spring,²² just south of Francis Swamp, where the little wren again stopped the Lake from being spread out. The journey of *Wurru*, the name of the ancestral White-face Heron is reflected in the placename *Wurrunha*, which is an alternative name for Brinkley Springs²³ (see section 3.2) to the east of Mt Margaret, and also in the Woorana²⁴ waterhole. These names are obviously connected as they follow the myth over the landscape.

Names from the deeds of Ancestors however need not be connected: some may originate from separate minor stories, which may have been forgotten; one such is the name *Katilkanha*, which means ‘jaw’ in Arabana-Wangkangurru and neighbouring languages. This still survives in the name of a waterhole and the ruins of a station, ‘Cadelga’,²⁵ adjacent to a waterhole of the same name, in the far north-east of South Australia, near Haddon’s Corner. It was also the name of a waterhole in the location where Big Blyth Bore²⁶ is now near Mt Denison on Anna Creek. There is no obvious connection between the two.

Wabma-karda(ya)pu ‘Snake-head’ in Arabana features in several unconnected stories and there are sites with that name. It was the traditional name of Hamilton Hill,²⁷ near Coward Springs. This hill is now part of a reserve, which is called ‘Wabma Kadarbu Mound Springs Conservation Park’. There is another *Wabma-karda(ya)pu*, belonging to a different story on the lower Neales, close to Lake Eyre and that is written as ‘Warmakidyapoo Waterhole’²⁸ on modern maps, adjacent to a ‘Warmakidyapoo Hill’. Similarly there are several ‘Snake-skin’ waterholes. There are several ‘Fingernail’ and ‘Toe-nail’ places too, as well as ‘White smoke’ and ‘White ground’. These similarly named sites have no apparent connections with one another.

A particular site is usually seen as part of the landscape and part of stories, not as an isolated feature, and there is therefore much less chance of confusion than there would be if one viewed things from a European perspective. This duplication of names never seems to lead to confusion, somehow the names always occur amid sufficient background to be correctly identified. They are part of a web of stories.

A glance at modern maps makes it clear that the Aboriginal names are more varied than the European ones, this is to some extent because the European names are practically all in one language, English, but the Aboriginal names are in many different languages. The main feature however is that Aboriginal

22 -29.2175 Lat., 136.3418 Long. The Arabana name for this site, *Yurilya*, is noted in the current Gazetteer.

23 -28.5040 Lat., 136.3079 Long.

24 -27.6493 Lat., 136.6849 Long.

25 -26.0855 Lat., 140.4091 Long.

26 -28.0723 Lat., 136.0554 Long.

27 -29.4576 Lat., 136.8543 Long.

28 -28.1430 Lat., 136.7731 Long.

placenames are ‘lively’ through their connection with stories. They make the introduced names seem endlessly dull and repetitive: one need only think of the seemingly infinite number of names like Salt Creek and Welcome Springs and Creeks, and places called Dinnertime and Breakfast Time, Five Mile and any other number of miles. Yet these European names originally were meaningful in the context of life on particular stations. Just like the Aboriginal duplicate placenames they did not lead to confusion when used within their context: however, when stations were split up or boundaries changed or homesteads moved they lost their original significance, whereas the Aboriginal names were permanently relevant to the Aboriginal view of the landscape.

The Aboriginal placenames reflect Aboriginal views on life and are an integral part of storytelling. Telling stories in the traditional environment must have been somehow an ‘insider’ affair: the audience already knew something about it all. The storyteller might mention the main protagonists by name once or twice near the beginning, but normally did not bother with names later on – except for some asides to the audience like ‘cunning old fellow that Crane’. It is not the same with placenames – a recital can almost be a series of placenames – but there is still scope for that familiarity, and so instead of naming a creek the speaker might say ‘you know that box-creek coming down’ or instead of naming a swamp ‘you know that cane-grass swamp behind there’. This is probably why we have so many places called *Dikirri* and *Karingala*. With station life this practice continued into English, usually with loss of the original name: hence the numerous places called Box Creek, Wattle Creek, Gum Creek and Canegrass Swamp. There are 10 Canegrass Swamps in the South Australian Gazetteer alone, but that number is easily surpassed by the 25 Gum Creeks.

3. Dual naming

3.1. Naming in adjacent languages

Dual naming is much less common than the duplication of names. There are just a few places that have dual naming because they are at the boundary between two groups speaking different languages.

Sometimes the name from one language simply gets adapted to the sound-system of the second language: there is a difference of pronunciation, not a difference of name. This has happened with the Lower Southern Arrernte name *Utyerre* ‘Springs’, the traditional name for ‘Dalhousie Springs’, with the accent on the second syllable. The Arabana-Wangkangurru pronunciation is *Wityira*, with the stress accent on the first syllable, and this is the pronunciation that

is reflected in the name Witcherrie Mound²⁹ which survives on modern maps, and it has been re-established with the naming of the Witjira National Park. It was one name that had split in two according to the two different sound systems of two different languages. A parallel situation is found when an Arabana-Wangkangurru word is pronounced by Arrernte speakers. *Aruwolka* is a waterhole, not named on maps, but located by the Wangkangurru elder, Mick McLean in the vicinity of Coolina waterhole (see section 2.2.2) on the same northern outlier channel of the Macumba, in an area which was said to be shared by Arabana, Wangkangurru and Arrernte. He was telling an Arrernte story, and he consistently pronounced the name as *Arrwewelkente*, in the manner of an Arrernte speaker, not as *warru-(w)alkanta* ‘appearing white-coloured’ as he would have done had he been speaking Wangkangurru. This name is formed from Wangkangurru *warru* ‘white’, *-w-* is a glide consonant, *alka* means ‘colour’ and *-nta* is the present tense reflexive marker (Hercus and McCaul 2002: 44).

Nganta-ngantanha ‘Stopping’ was the name of the Gregory Creek, near Lake Eyre South. This is where the Willie Wagtail was stopped when he was trying to fly away stealing the fire, in the form of a fire-stick. The Kuyani name *Thinta-thinta* ‘willie wagtail’ for the nearby Tinta-dintana³⁰ Creek belongs to this story. Arabana people use their pronunciation of this name *Tyinti-tyintinha*.

Dual naming can involve actual translation. The best-known example is the name of the Macumba. During the west-east part of its course, below the present day Macumba Station, this river formed the boundary between Southern Arrernte to the north and Arabana to the south. The floodplain is a vast expanse of dark red gibber. In the ‘History Time’ *Maka-thakapa* ‘the Fire-striker’, who was nearly bald and had just one little strand of hair, was teased by some boys ‘you’ve got lice in that little strand of hair, ha ha!’. He lit a fire which raged along the river burning them and everybody who lived there as far as the *Maka-thadninha* ‘Fire-stopping’ Swamp, not marked on maps, just above Woorana³¹ waterhole.

The name Macumba belongs to this story and is derived from Arabana *Maka-wimpa* ‘fire track’. The Arrernte version of this name is *Uringka* ‘fire-track’ and the two terms were used by senior Arabana and Arrernte speakers respectively. Only the Arabana name has survived on modern maps.

3.2. Alternative names

Places may have two names, one being an alternative name, a kind of nickname. These nicknames tend to be ephemeral, and there are very few such alternative

29 -26.4382 Lat., 135.5268 Long.

30 -27.6493 Lat., 136.6849 Long.

31 -29.5071 Lat., 137.2709 Long.

names recorded. *Parra-parranha* ‘The very Long One’ is an example of a site that has an alternative name. It is a well in the Central Simpson Desert. *Parra-parranha* was so called because people had to dig a very long tunnel to get down to the water. The explorer Lindsay in his report wrote this name as ‘Burraburrina’. In the ‘History Time’ the Two Boys, followed by their mother travelled through there on their way to the east, bringing with them the use of feathers in ceremonies. They camped and were cooking two emus. The older boy went down the well to fill up his waterbag. The younger boy brought the emus back to life and they ran off making their loud grunting sound. Hearing this the boy down in the well got such a shock that the bag slipped from his hands. This is why the place also got the alternative name *Yunga-kurdalayangu* ‘his waterbag slipped down (out of his hands)’.

Another place with two Aboriginal names is Brinkley Spring (see section 2.3). It was called *Thurru-thurrunha*, ‘The Hard One’. It also came to be known as *Wurrunha* ‘Crane’, because the one box-tree standing there represented the Old Man Crane of mythology.

4. New placenames

Placenames are an old layer of the vocabulary, but as with any living system, a new name could be created, when for any reason a site came to be recognised as a distinct site. The way this could happen gives us some insight into the traditional formation of placenames.

4.1. *Ngunarndula*, ‘Lilies’ a descriptive name in the making

Thanks to the way in which Wangkangurru people cherished their traditions it is possible to see how the kind of descriptive naming seen in section 2.2.2 could have come about. In the early years of the 20th century a Wangkangurru man who had gone to the Killalpaninna Mission dreamt that a spirit showed him the landscape around Lake Eyre and gave him the songs which he called collectively the *Kudnarri* ‘floodplain’ songs, as some verses related to the floodplain of the Cooper. He taught the songs to younger people. The Wangkangurru and Diyari speaker Leslie Russell, *Wanga-pulanha* ‘Two Mornings’, and his cousin Jimmy *Wanga-mirri* ‘Many Mornings’ who worked with both L. Hercus and P. Austin learnt these songs from the old man and Leslie added to them. He ‘found’ a verse about a particularly large patch of beautiful *Crinum* lilies, *ngunarndula* growing on the eastern side of the Kopperamanna³² crossing. It is a distinctive site, easily

32 -28.6019 Lat., 138.7116 Long.

accessible: a track goes through there on the way to a bore, which is adjacent to the Swan Rocks *Kandri-mukunha* (Horne and Aiston 1924: 141), important in mythology. Some of these verses have been analysed by P. Austin (1978: 530). Because of that special verse this particular place in the floodplain came to be associated with Crinum lilies. People would speak about the site as if they were giving a placename: 'I'll show you *Ngunarndula*'. It had become recognised as 'The Lily Place'. Aboriginal people gradually all moved away from that area, and the name is sinking into oblivion, as is its association with the song, now, when the people who could sing it have died.

4.2. *Yuru-pula pantirda* 'Two Old Men had a fight', an action name in the making

In the 1860s or '70s a duel to the death took place between two Kuyani men. There had been a long-standing feud between the Kuyani people from around Mirrabuckinna, north of Lake Torrens, and those from the Gregory. The two protagonists belonged to the opposing factions and also had a grudge against each other. The event was so horrendous that it became legendary, and a Kuyani song was made about it. In the 1960s a few people still knew this song and everybody in the Lake Eyre South area seemed to know about the fight and commented on the futility of it all. The two men killed each other with boomerangs on the southern edge of the *Wimparanha* Whimberina Waterhole³³ south-west of Finnis Springs, and so this spot was known to the Arabana people who had come to live in the area by the Arabana name *Yuru-pula pantirda* 'Two Old Men had a fight'. There were said to be many broken boomerangs lying about – but we did not see any. This name was regarded as a placename, but as few Aboriginal people now live in the area on a permanent basis, memory of the name and its origin is fading.

5. Many associations, but one name

The network of myths that connects together the Lake Eyre Basin is so complex that naturally the paths of Ancestors cross one another. One place may have been visited by several Ancestors. This is all viewed chronologically: the comments made by traditional people about placenames imply that the Dreamtime or 'History Time', as it is often called in the Lake Eyre Basin, was not altogether timeless, but had its own inner sequence. It is viewed normally that an Ancestor created or found a place and at the same time named it. It was somehow a system of first-come, first-served: whoever came first to a place, found it as it was or

³³ -29.8812 Lat., 137.3880 Long.

created it, was the one to name it. Thus it is usually taken for granted that the Two Old Man Snakes created many springs on their journey down the western side of Lake Eyre. They were, however, not the only ones on the scene at that time: they coincided with the HFire Striker, who brought about the formation of the Macumba, the Fire-track (see section 3.1). They got burnt by the Fire and only just managed to escape, and that is how they came to name the Melon Spring,³⁴ *Palku-wakanha* 'Body-black', because they had been blackened by the Fire. They still saw that Fire when they have reached much further to the South:

They saw the fire which was burning (far way on the Macumba) as related in the Fire History), the smoke kept on billowing up, they both watched it, and they climbed up on the hill, the Yarrapolina Hill, to have a look at the country to the north. (And they said one to the other, speaking in Arabana): 'It's (still) burning over there, old man my friend!' They watched it in the distance. (L.A. Hercus, MS, p. 7).

There are many other examples of contemporaneity in the 'History Time'. Ancestors are apt to make rude observations about others they encounter, and this can be reflected in placenames: the name may reflect the activities of two or more Ancestors. The Emus camp on a high sandhill near Duff Creek.³⁵ They see the Ancestor *Thudnungkurla* 'The Erotic Old Man', the main character of another long History. He is camped by a claypan below. He bends down to pick up his bag, and they make an obscene anatomical observation about him. That is why that claypan has the absurd name *Manha-warirndanha*, which of course always had everybody laughing when they heard it, and people do not forget that claypan.

One of the most crowded places in the 'History Time' was Primrose Springs³⁶ called *Papu Ngalyuru* 'Green Egg'. The Emus, the Kangaroo whose skin forms Lake Eyre, and the Fish and Crane all travelled through there, visiting this high mound-spring. As its name implies, the Wangkangurru elder Mick McLean said, 'the Emus must have been there first, *ularaka* (Histories) could travel same place different times'. Although there may be different stories for a place, there is only one which first explains the name.

In the traditional culture of the Lake Eyre region placenames were much more significant, evocative and meaningful than what they are in modern times. They represented an ancient layer of the vocabulary, mostly reflecting the activities of Ancestors of the 'History Time'. The system was nevertheless flexible, as is shown by the duplication of placenames and double naming, and the way in which new placenames could be created.

34 -28.2647 Lat., 136.0778 Long.

35 -28.5347 Lat., 135.8333 Long.

36 -28.1464 Lat., 136.3824 Long. The Arabana name is noted in the Gazetteer.

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This text taken from *Indigenous and Minority Placenames: Australian and International Perspectives*, Edited by Ian D. Clark, Luise Hercus and Laura Kostanski, published 2014 by ANU Press, The Australian National University, Canberra, Australia.