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Introduction: Strings of Connectedness in Ian Keen's Scholarship

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On a brisk early winter day in late 1994, I was on my way from my home in Fredericton, New Brunswick, to Halifax, Nova Scotia, about a five-hour drive away, to meet Ian Keen. I had just been accepted into the PhD program at The Australian National University, and Ian was to be my supervisor. As luck would have it, he was visiting his late brother's family in Halifax, and I decided to take the opportunity to make an overnight trip to meet him as I prepared for what was to become the most important decade, professionally, in my life. I had spent much of that northern hemisphere autumn reading and re-reading *Knowledge and Secrecy in an Aboriginal Religion*, which had just been published and which I had ordered through my local bookstore. This was a powerfully liminal period for me, personally and professionally. I had completed my honours degree earlier in the year, and was to leave for Australia the following February. Those crisp autumn days were spent immersing myself in the Arnhem Land ethnographic literature and daydreaming about fieldwork. *Knowledge and Secrecy* loomed large in that period—for me, it represented an imaginary future. For Ian, as I came to learn, it represented the midpoint of a very distinguished career.

Ian welcomed me into his sister-in-law's home and we spoke for a couple of hours about scholarship on the Yolngu in general and my own upcoming PhD research in particular. Outwardly, Ian was not at all as I had imagined him from reading his work. Small of stature, soft-spoken, with a grey beard and

bright, glinting eyes, he had a scholarly and jovial demeanour that suggested to me a career spent pondering rather abstract and complex religious and social systems. He was very kind and encouraging, especially given that, I now realise, I actually knew very little about the Yolngu and must have seemed every inch the fresh-faced 22-year-old that I was. I left our meeting with a sense of elation at the prospect of starting a new chapter of my life.

It is appropriate that I first met Ian in the Maritimes, as my home region of Canada is known. After nearly a decade in Australia, spent living either in Canberra or in Arnhem Land, I returned home to take up my current position, coming full circle. In my ongoing research and writing, his ideas remain profoundly influential in how I have come to understand Yolngu music and society, even as I contemplate those issues from the other side of the world. In a less obvious way, the lessons that I learned from Ian also influence my 'other' research on music and cultural identity in Atlantic Canada, which include research sites a short walk away from the house in Halifax where we first met. And, of course, all of my work on this volume of essays in Ian's honour has been done in the same city where I first encountered Ian's work, daydreaming, on those crisp autumn days more than 20 years ago.

Editing the present volume of essays has provided me with the opportunity to re-examine all of Ian's scholarly work in a new light. Rather than making use of selected ideas for particular purposes of my own, as I had done previously, I have been able to take a more holistic and synthetic perspective on more than 40 years' worth of writing. Several themes have emerged for me during this process. One is the quite remarkable breadth of Ian's interests and expertise over this period. His earliest work focused predominantly on matters pertaining to kinship, social organisation, and religious practice (and the interconnections between these), topics that have retained their importance in much of his more recent writing. His research on Aboriginal land rights elsewhere in the Northern Territory augmented the insights based on his Milingimbi fieldwork, evident in increased attention in his publications to matters of property and connections to country. His edited volume *Being Black* (1988a) was a landmark publication on Aboriginal cultures in 'settled' Australian society. During my closest association with Ian, from the mid-1990s until the early 2000s, he was publishing very stimulating, challenging, and theoretically engaged work re-evaluating the principles of Yolngu sociality. He then moved into a very productive period involving the comparative study of Aboriginal economy and society, and most recently has returned to a series of sophisticated studies of Aboriginal kinship.

Along the way, he has also published on songs, symbolism, dreams, art, and even classical music. This impressive range of scholarly interests is a clear demonstration of a stimulated and stimulating mind at work.

Another theme that has emerged in my re-examination of Ian's work is a willingness to critically appraise the scholarly work of his colleagues and contemporaries, and to develop and defend ideas that are unconventional or controversial. This critical engagement with the work of others is the lifeblood of our academic institutions, as it requires us all to re-evaluate our positions and sharpen our scholarly tools in the spirit of debate and discussion. My first taste of this came during my attendance at many anthropology seminars at ANU, where Ian could always be relied on for an astute observation or probing question in his appreciation of the work of his colleagues. Given his quiet good nature and gentle humour, these interventions were always understood to be cases of constructive criticism in the best sense of the term. His published reviews of the work of his colleagues could be reasonably critical (1986, 1993), but always demonstrated a considered and serious engagement with the work under consideration. In his own work he followed a strain of Australianist anthropology developed by Les Hiatt in challenging established orthodoxies and proposing alternative interpretations that were rigorously researched and strongly argued, but also intellectually risky (1994, 1995, 1997, 2000). As Ian's student during this period, I was inspired and encouraged to resist standard interpretations of Yolngu social life and to explore alternate ways of understanding and framing my own ethnographic data. Ian's comparative work (2003, 2004, 2006) and his return (2013a) to the study of kinship (although he never really left it) are the latest iterations of an independent attitude toward his scholarly work, finding value in topics and approaches that have fallen out of favour.

A third theme running through Ian's work is his impressive erudition. This is perhaps best illustrated in his writing on kinship, that old chestnut of Australian Aboriginal studies that has generated an enormous amount of ethnographic data and a bewildering variety of interpretations, some firmly grounded in that data, and some speculative. This is a segment of the scholarly literature that is not only complex, but requires a mastery of theories going back to the very earliest days of Australian anthropology. Ian's writing on kinship (both among the Yolngu and more broadly across Australia) moves confidently across this sometimes perplexing terrain, generating insights that are then used to shed light on his own research. The same holds true for his writing on Aboriginal religion, or his use of theory on metaphor to re-examine Yolngu sociality, or his quite extensive research on Howitt's anthropological work in Gippsland, or his very ambitious comparative study of seven different Aboriginal societies

as they existed at ‘the threshold of colonisation’ (Keen 2004): in each case, Ian demonstrates a great depth of understanding based on his close reading of a wide range of the scholarly literature.

Ian has been a very productive scholar: 7 books, 14 encyclopedia entries, more than 25 articles in academic journals, and more than 30 book chapters over a 38-year span—and the number is still rising, with more than 20 of those publications appearing in the last 10 years alone. This is a rich oeuvre which rewards regular re-examination.

Ian’s path to his prominent position in Australian anthropology has not been a conventional one. Born on 21 November 1938 in the semi-rural community of Finchley, on the northern outskirts of London, Ian was the younger of John and Susanah Keen’s two sons. John Keen ran a grocery store before joining the signal corps of the Royal Air Force during the war, and the family lived in London during the Blitz. After the war, Susanah taught at a school and John was a commercial traveller, later doing a theological course, becoming ordained into the Anglican Church, and directing a parish in Suffolk. Ian left high school before taking his advanced-level exams, opting instead to attend art school where he studied stained glass and lithography. Drawn to the practical, craft aspect of stained glass art, Ian worked as a stained glass artist in Norwich for a couple of years, doing mostly restoration work, but eventually realised that he did not want a career in the field.

By the mid-1960s Ian was in London, doing a variety of jobs at different times: barman, petrol pump attendant, working for a sculptor, and teaching art part-time, including at the Ruskin School of Drawing at Oxford University. By the late 1960s he had decided to do a university course, but he first had to take night classes in history and English in order to complete his advanced-level exams. In 1970 he began his studies at University College London, where he became interested in anthropology and took courses from Mary Douglas, among others. Completing his honours degree in three years, he considered various options for postgraduate study, including universities in the U.S., and enrolled at the London School of Economics. A more generous offer from The Australian National University, however, brought him and his family to Canberra in early 1974. By September of that year, they were in Milingimbi in northeast Arnhem Land.

Ian’s fieldwork among the Yolngu consisted of two main periods: a 14-month stint based at Milingimbi; and a further 10 months based at Nanggalala on the mainland. After a slow start, he was taken on by the local *Liyagawumirr* men and spent much of his time working on their ritual life, which led to significant

amount of time spent on Howard Island, as the *Liyagawumirr* had connections to the Wobulkarra traditional owners there. He worked a great deal with Bāriya, Banhdharrawuy, Buwa'nandu, and Durrng, as well as with Gupapuyngu men, including Djāwa. Living conditions were challenging for the young family, as they inhabited a rather rudimentary former contractor's camp consisting of a tin shed with no glass on the windows. This situation improved on his second trip based at Nanggalala, where they had a small caravan. On this trip, Ian was primarily attached to the *Liyagalawumirr* elder Paddy Dhathangu and attended numerous ceremonies in his company, including a Djungguwan, a Gunapipi, and a Mandayala. Near the end of this second field trip he was invited back to Milingimbi to attend a Ngārra ceremony being organised by Bāriya, the analysis of which featured prominently in both his PhD dissertation and *Knowledge and Secrecy*. This lengthy and intensive exposure to Yolngu religious life provided the basis for his doctoral dissertation, as well as a score of publications to the present day.

Bugs was snoring—loudly—on the floor beside me. Ming was asleep on my lap, drooling copiously. The former was Ian and Libby's elderly dog, the latter their cat, and I was house-sitting for them in their cosy house in O'Connor with my future wife, Peta. Ian and Libby were very generous with opening their house to us on numerous occasions, allowing us to escape the rather close confines of our residential college. Their house always seemed to me to be a quiet place of contemplation, located on a leafy lot with a beautiful native garden and two laying bantam hens out the back. I invariably brought with me my own research materials in the hope of an especially productive weekend of thesis-writing, but a bottle of wine left for us on the dining room table and the possibility of pet time usually meant that my time there was a combination of work and play.

I clearly recall spending a couple of long afternoons there, midway through my writing-up phase, working away on an analysis of some of my song texts. A developing argument on the centrality of place names and other place references in Dhalwangu songs required a time-consuming, word-for-word analysis of an entire five-hour performance, a task that seems retrospectively to have been facilitated greatly by the lack of distractions offered by our occasional O'Connor getaways.

Ian and Libby not only opened their home for house-sitting when they were away, but they also were gracious hosts. I first visited with them the day after I arrived in Canberra from Canada, still jet-lagged, for lunch outside in the garden. I first met Ad Borsboom, Nigel Lendon, and other Arnhem Land scholars

at dinners at their house. This hospitality later extended to a townhouse they owned on the south coast at Moruya Head, which they again allowed us to use from time to time. I proposed to my wife there.

You can say in private that yours is the true story, for your father told it to you, and those other people have it all mixed up, but there is a convention to leave these differences unsaid. This convention, and the ambiguity of Yolngu song language, allows Yolngu groups to perform together, each retaining its own identity and holding to its own truths. (Keen 1977: 49)

In 1977, before his PhD dissertation was completed, some of the principal themes running through much of Ian Keen's work were already apparent. His article 'Ambiguity in Yolngu Religious Language' (1977) was published in the inaugural issue of the journal *Canberra Anthropology* (now *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology*). In it he examined the role of deliberate ambiguity in Yolngu song texts in the constitution of an 'economy of knowledge'¹ (1977: 33). In contrasting the songs of the Yolngu Maḏayin ceremony with those of the Gunapipi ceremony, Keen was able to demonstrate that the former were structured in terms of different levels of access to knowledge, from the public and exoteric to the restricted and esoteric, with the inherent polysemy of the song texts functioning as the key ingredient in this differential interpretability based on relative age and gender (ibid.: 43). Interpretations of the Gunapipi song texts, by contrast, were radically different from one another because they were not based in everyday language, allowing different groups to participate together because the differences are not commented upon publicly (ibid.: 46). Both forms of song are based in ambiguity, but the Maḏayin songs allow for the development of a true 'economy of knowledge' because they allow for such a wide range of levels of access to meaning, which relates in turn to the structure of group identities (ibid.: 49).

These formulations about the economy of Yolngu religious knowledge and its relationship to Yolngu social structures became a recurring theme in Keen's scholarly work over the next two decades, and is one of his most valuable contributions to Australian Aboriginal studies. His doctoral dissertation, 'One Ceremony, One Song' (Keen 1978), explored these themes in depth, drawing upon a substantial amount of ethnographic data acquired during his very successful fieldwork in Milngimbi and surrounding communities. His analysis of kinship and marriage uncovered important patterns regarding bestowal and marriage from the standpoint of the individual, but also indicated the role of

1 An 'economy of knowledge' refers to a system of control over knowledge, especially in a form whereby older Yolngu men retained control over valuable resources (namely wives) by controlling access to religious knowledge (Keen 1978).

sociocentric 'clan' structures in maintaining and reinforcing the system. His diagram depicting 'Marriages over three generations between clans in the Woollen River area' (Keen 1978: 130) shows a dense web of interconnections between 35 groups that quite literally boggles the mind; it is a testament to his analytical powers that he is able to reduce this complexity to a coherent set of principles that underlie it. Similarly, his chapter on the Ngärra ceremony is a definitive account, documenting an iteration of the ceremony over an incredible 33 days with a level of detail that enabled a compelling analysis (*ibid.*: 257–74). His conclusions brought together into an integrated framework his interpretation of kinship, marriage, group structure, and religious knowledge and practice, demonstrating that the organisation of Yolngu religion enables age-related polygyny, a complex bundle of themes further explored in his oft-cited article 'How Some Murngin Men Marry Ten Wives' (Keen 1982).

Themes arising out of Keen's doctoral work continued to be important in his writing during the 15 years following the end of his fieldwork, most notably his important contributions to the anthropological study of Aboriginal kinship (Keen 1985, 1986, 1988b) and of Aboriginal religion (Keen 1987, 1988c, 1990, 1991, 1993). These writings cemented his status as an important figure in Australian anthropology, one whose works became widely read and who attracted a cohort of students working on a wide variety of topics.

Although Ian Keen is primarily recognised as a scholar of Yolngu society, he has extensive experience in conducting research on other Aboriginal societies, including a combined total of more than a year and a half of field research for the purpose of land claims. This work is perhaps less widely known, in some circles anyway, but indicates a clear commitment to the field of applied anthropology over his entire career. This research has also been influential in the reinterpretation of his Yolngu research, as well as the development of new areas of interest.

Between his two field trips in and around Milingimbi, Keen acted as a consultant on the Alligator Rivers (Stage I) land claim, carrying out an intensive six-week period of field research in western Arnhem Land with George Chaloupka, and later continued this work for Alligator Rivers Stage II; these land claims on behalf of the Northern Land Council included a total of seven months of fieldwork in that area of Arnhem Land. These consultancies, Keen's first, are notable because of the tension between the claimants' sense of their own sociality and the 'orthodox' model of social organisation set out under the Northern Territory Land Rights Act, a theme that Keen returned to regularly in his later academic writing. Land claims research across the Northern Territory in this period revealed that claimant groups used a variety of rationales for determining group

membership, rights, responsibilities, and succession—real life, as it turns out, did not provide a neat fit for the Radcliffe-Brownian model of Aboriginal social organisation—and the work of anthropologists documenting and interpreting ethnographic data proved to be crucial not only at the coalface of the new land rights era, but also for developing new interpretations of Aboriginal sociality in more ‘academic’ contexts. Ian Keen was among a small group of dedicated scholars working at this crucial juncture.

Alligator Rivers Stages I and II were the first components of a string of consultancies that spanned Keen’s academic career. They were followed by the Milingimbi closure of seas hearings (1981), the Timber Creek land claim (1984), the McLaren Creek land claim (1986–88), a Northern Land Council consultancy concerning mining royalties on the Gove Peninsula (1987), the Coronation Hill inquiry (1991), and the Kūnai Native Title claim in Gippsland (1996–2005), among others. These consultancies have made important contributions to the field of native title anthropology in Australia, and so are valuable in their own right. It is important to note, however, their significance for the development of Keen’s interpretations of Aboriginal sociality over the past two decades. Keen has noted that his ‘brief but intensive’ fieldwork in Yirrkala, Gapuwiyak, and Galiwin’ku in 1987, on behalf of the Northern Land Council, was pivotal in his rethinking of the ‘clan’ concept in the Yolngu ethnographic literature (Keen 2000a: 39), which led to a very challenging and thought-provoking counter-interpretation developed in his writing (Keen 1994, 1995, 2000a, 2000b). The suitability of concepts like ‘clan corporation’, and ‘patrilineal descent group’ for describing Aboriginal sociality and relations to country was also an important consideration in his interpretation of the ethnographic data resulting from the McLaren Creek land claim (Keen 1997), demonstrating the importance of challenging prevailing anthropological orthodoxies across Aboriginal Australia.

It is this period of research and writing about the reinterpretation of Yolngu sociality that I think of as the ‘middle period’ of Ian Keen’s career, marked by the publication of *Knowledge and Secrecy* (1994), his important article ‘Metaphor and the Metalanguage’ (1995), and a set of other publications restating, defending, and extending his basic position (1997, 2000a, 2000b). This is, no doubt, a very personal way of framing an important career, as this ‘middle period’ relates to the beginning of my own association with Ian and his work until the point when I left Canberra and returned to Canada. For me, Ian’s ‘early period’ represents everything prior to *Knowledge and Secrecy*, and his ‘late period’ everything from *Aboriginal Economy and Society* (2004) until the present. Ian’s other colleagues

and students, no doubt, mark the milestones of Ian's career somewhat differently; and yet, it is objectively true that this period marks a concentration of writing about Yolngu sociality unlike anything else in his career.

In *Knowledge and Secrecy*, Keen brings the interrelated themes of heterogeneity, indeterminacy, and power—themes first developed in his PhD dissertation and returned to with some regularity—together in their best-developed synthesis. He challenged the notion that 'Yolngu' social organisation could be thought of as a unified or homogeneous system. The 'same story' was only contingently the same for different groups or individuals; religious 'truths' were only relatively so; sociality seemed to be based on open and flexible networks defined by discourse and action rather than segmentary and clearly defined groups like 'clans'; the definition and ascription of rights over country was not agreed upon but contested; people could interpret their religious beliefs in ways which allowed for cooperation in ritual, but preserved their distinctive differences. As Keen writes:

The form given to groups, the character of country, a group's complement of ceremonies, and local styles were heterogeneous. People sometimes profoundly disagreed over group structure, leadership, identity of country, and the meaning of a ceremony or *madayin* element. Perspectives on ancestral events and the interpretation of ceremonies were relative to a network centred on a group or subgroup, the locus of the greatest degree of orthodoxy, and to the individual. More profoundly perhaps, ambiguity and indeterminacy lay at heart of the construction of ancestral worlds, so that typologies of beings were found wanting. (Keen 1994: 167)

Although other scholars of Yolngu society and ritual had noted and interpreted similar points of detail, *Knowledge and Secrecy* represents the most systematic attempt to re-interpret the 'orthodox' view of Aboriginal social organisation in the light of contemporary social theory. He extended his reinterpretation of Yolngu sociality in his article 'Metaphor and the Metalanguage' (1995), focusing on the analytical slippage between the metaphorical bases of the anthropological metalanguage, on the one hand, and those of Yolngu discourse and action, on the other. The metalanguage of anthropological description, particularly notions of segmentation, corporateness, and boundaries inherent in the 'clan' concept, are based on a set of tropes that are incompatible with Yolngu tropes pertaining to *mala* and *bäpurru*, pertaining to the body, ancestral journeys and traces, and other domains of Yolngu life.

Keen's position on these matters generated what I consider to be academic debate in its ideal form. The 'orthodox' position on Aboriginal sociality, once hegemonic in its scope and influence, had been under increasing scrutiny for decades, and anthropologists working with the Yolngu had been modifying their views based on a wealth of ethnographic data. Keen developed a wide-

ranging and systematic critique of the vestiges of anthropological orthodoxy as a necessary step in developing a coherent analysis of his own ethnographic data, extending important insights for work across the region. His colleagues in Aboriginal research engaged with his challenge in the light of their own work and renewed their commitment to or extended their own positions as a result (Morphy 1997, Morton 1997, Sutton 1999, Williams 1999), but also countered Keen's analysis with their own critiques that had to be addressed (Keen 2000a, 2000b). Keen has written of this extended debate that 'while the critique has aroused some interest, it has not been received with unalloyed enthusiasm' (Keen 2000a: 33). I would posit that unalloyed enthusiasm, if it had occurred, would have represented a failure of academic debate in its ideal form. Valuable ideas are forged in the heat of robust, and even contentious, debate, and some of the most valuable ideas are those that are most hotly contested. In my own research and writing, Keen's challenge has proven to be very productive, and has helped me to develop my own coherent interpretations of my own data.

In December 2014, my family and I made a return trip to Ian and Libby's farm at Harold's Cross, near Braidwood, NSW. On one previous visit there, in 2007, our children had a great time playing with Ian and Libby's grandchildren, who are close to the same age, and they renewed their acquaintance with the property again in 2010. The road from Queanbeyan to Captain's Flat, and then through the Tallaganda State Forest to their farm, was familiar from these previous visits, and we spent an enjoyable and relaxing day and night in their company in the midst of a rather whirlwind trip from Canada. As was customary, after lunch we all took a long stroll around the property, through wooded areas, across paddocks, and along a stream that runs behind their house. This was a purely social visit, but I couldn't help but notice that the study contained many signs of Ian's ongoing scholarly interests, with a variety of books and notes relating to several different projects. I imagined the books that could be written in this bucolic setting.

When one commences an academic career, an initial period of familiarising oneself with a body of literature is followed by a process of backtracking, filling in all of the missing details that came before. My own period of time under Ian's tutelage began with an intensive engagement with *Knowledge and Secrecy* and his research on the Yolngu that led up to it. My fieldwork in Gapuwiyak coincided with Ian's fieldwork in Gippsland on the Kūnai Native Title claim, but it was only later that I read and appreciated his work on Aboriginal societies in

‘settled’ Australia. While at The Australian National University I was a ‘Yolngu-ologist’ (to borrow an apt phrase from Francesca Merlan), but I came to realise that Ian’s work could not be reduced to ‘Yolngu-ology’.

Being Black: Aboriginal Cultures in ‘Settled’ Australia (1988a) was, at the time of its publication, an important contribution to our understanding of contemporary Aboriginal societies in those parts of Australia that are less remote and were more intensively colonised than Arnhem Land, the Western and Central Deserts, the Kimberley, and Cape York Peninsula, regions that have produced a larger share of the ethnographic literature. It remains a widely read book on this topic and played a part in generating important research by a new generation of scholars. Inspired in part by the work of his former PhD student Diana Eades (whom Keen had accompanied on a short trip to her field location in southern Queensland), as well as the work of Gaynor MacDonald and Marcia Langton, *Being Black* brought together contributions by a range of scholars who had worked with the Aboriginal peoples of Victoria, the northern and southern coasts and the central and western regions of New South Wales, Adelaide, southeast Queensland, southwest Western Australia, and the urban fringe of Darwin. In his editorial introduction, Keen provided a framework for the volume as a whole, reviewing the literature on themes pertaining to cultural continuity, identity, heterogeneity, language, kinship and household, economics, politics, belief, and history.

At the time that *Being Black* was published, Keen had not conducted any of his own research into ‘settled’ Aboriginal society, although his consulting work had certainly exposed him to a range of Aboriginal social formations. That changed with his extensive field and archival research in Gippsland in the mid-1990s on behalf of the Mirimbiak Aboriginal Corporation. His findings during this research were in keeping with the conclusions of many of the authors of the chapters of *Being Black*, especially that there are important continuities in Koori culture with their precolonial past. These include spiritual beliefs, language, and kinship networks, the latter demonstrated by Keen’s own genealogical research supplemented by earlier scholars like Norman Tindale (Keen 1999a). His concern with the impact of anthropological models on the interpretation of ethnographic data, so important to his Yolngu research, also became a feature of his consideration of cultural continuity in native title claims in the southeast and southwest of Australia (Keen 1999b). The success of the Kūnai people in gaining the recognition of native title over their traditional country is an indication that Keen’s research on Aboriginal society in ‘settled’ Australia has made an impact.

Keen's research in Gippsland, involving as it did the detailed examination of documentary records created during the colonial period in this region, seems to have led naturally to an interest in the depiction of Aboriginal societies in the historical record and the reconstruction of what those societies must have looked like when the British first arrived in Australia. The earliest anthropological research on the Aboriginal societies of Gippsland was conducted by A.W. Howitt, who made use of the theoretical frameworks of Lewis Henry Morgan and indeed corresponded with him (Keen 2000c). Keen was clear that his interest in Howitt's work stemmed from the possibility of reinterpreting that research in the light of contemporary concerns, namely native title research (ibid.: 95). His next major research project incorporating materials from this region, however, was not a second native title claim, but rather a bold project comparing seven different Aboriginal societies as they existed just prior to colonisation. *Aboriginal Economy and Society: Australia at the Threshold of Colonisation* (Keen 2004), the culmination of this period of research, made use of the earliest ethnographic materials on these societies, representing a wide geographical and ecological spread.

Aboriginal Economy and Society (as well as a later article in *Current Anthropology* using the same analytical framework (Keen 2006)) is an ambitious comparative work seeking to fill a gap in the literature by providing a focused and comprehensive analytical framework for understanding the commonalities and differences among Aboriginal societies relative to their time of first intensive colonisation (roughly from the 1830s to the 1930s, depending on the region). Not only do these societies differ in terms of time frame of historical contact, but also in terms of their environmental conditions and constraints, taking in temperate, desert, and tropical regions. Keen surveys a wide range of ecological aspects and 'institutional fields', but the volume is unified by a focus on the economy because that aspect of Aboriginal life can be usefully integrated into most others. Each chapter's topical focus proceeds through an examination of each of the seven case studies, together with comparative analysis. While collections bringing together a range of papers on a shared topic are common enough, explicitly comparative works like *Aboriginal Economy and Society* are relatively rare in the literature. I believe that taking on a project of this nature demonstrates an important aspect of Keen's approach to scholarship—that is, his willingness to develop serious analyses of topics that may be considered controversial or simply unfashionable. In doing so, he does all of us a great service, as he enriches our shared academic discourse and stimulates the critical engagement of his colleagues.

Keen's next major research project, on Indigenous participation in the Australian frontier economy, pursues similar themes in a slightly different way. On a multidisciplinary and collaborative project funded by an Australian

Research Council Linkage grant, Keen worked with economic historian Christopher Lloyd, historian Fiona Skyring, archaeologist and curator Michael Pickering, and anthropologists Anthony Redmond and John White, resulting in not one but two edited collections (Keen 2010a; Fijn, Keen, Lloyd, and Pickering 2012). These volumes demonstrate the extension of Keen's developing interest in the Aboriginal economy, specifically in the context of Australian colonisation and settlement. In his introduction to the first volume, Keen surveys the existing literature on the Aboriginal economy under two headings: those studies concerned with the 'internal' economic mechanisms operative within Aboriginal domains, and those dealing with 'external' engagements with the mainstream market economy and the state (Keen 2010: 4). The individual chapters of that volume engage with both of these perspectives and, as was the case in *Aboriginal Economy and Society*, they include contributions on Aboriginal societies across the entire continent. The second volume extends the scope and range of topics, focusing primarily on the 'hybrid economy model' and its utility in understanding Indigenous economic participation (Keen and Lloyd 2012: 2).

In surveying the work of a scholar with very broad and diverse academic interests, like Ian Keen, it is of course no surprise to find certain themes emerging with some regularity, developed and redeveloped in various guises and as a result of new data and re-analysis. One such theme in Keen's work that jumps out at me is property, on which he published over the course of more than two decades. A companion theme linked to property in Keen's writing, however, concerns the incommensurability of Western European and Aboriginal tropes in the description and analysis of social life. The latter, as I mentioned above, was the central thrust of his re-evaluation of Yolngu sociality, most carefully developed in the article 'Metaphor and the Metalanguage' (1995). Concerns about the different metaphorical bases for Western European analytical frameworks, as compared to Aboriginal discourses and practices, appear earlier in Keen's scholarly work, and are maintained in some of his very recent publications.

Even in his PhD dissertation (1978), notions of 'property' and 'ownership' among the Yolngu emerged in his interpretation of his ethnographic data. The ownership of land and religious property forms the basis for his definition of the 'clan' and of the 'land-owning group' (one or more lineages affiliated to one country) (Keen 1978: 21). It was in the chapter 'Yolngu Religious Property' (1988c), though, that he clearly began 'to enquire into whether the concept of property is appropriate for thinking about the relation of the Yolngu to ritual and land' (Keen 1988c: 272). He notes that European concepts of property are characterised by 'the notion of possession, the right to use and enjoy, the

right to exclude others from use and enjoyment, and the right to dispose of an object' (ibid.), but that these may not be applicable to Aboriginal rights in land and ritual, despite some commonalities that have led to anthropologists using such concepts in their analyses (ibid.: 273). The Yolngu gift economy does not include much in the way of private property, rights in land are distributed in a variety of ways, and land and ritual objects are inalienable (ibid.: 275–7). Importantly for Keen's broader analytical concerns, Yolngu have no general terms for 'property' or 'ownership' (ibid.: 278); the suffix '-*watangu*' ('holder of') is applied to land and sacra (i.e. '*wānga-watangu*' = 'land-holders'), but there is some slippage between the Yolngu notion of 'holding' and the Western European notion of 'owning' (ibid.: 280–1). Keen concludes that the concept of property is appropriate for understanding certain elements of Yolngu social and ritual life, but there are crucial differences as well that should not be overlooked (ibid.: 290–1). As he develops later in relation to Yolngu sociality (although he does not use the term in his 1988 chapter), anthropological thinking about property includes elements of an anthropological analytical metalanguage that can create anomalies when applied cross-culturally.

Keen's critique of the property concept continued and was extended in two subsequent chapters, both obviously informed by the broader 'metalinguistic' concerns developed in his 1995 article. In a chapter on Yolngu relations to country (Keen 2011), Keen explicitly examines the ways in which the language of 'rights' has dominated discussions of Aboriginal property and land tenure, both in anthropological work and in legislative frameworks. Western legal theory, Keen points out, viewed property in terms of a 'disaggregated "bundle of rights"' (ibid.: 104) to use a resource, although there was a high degree of contestation in legal circles (ibid.: 105–7). Although some dissenting voices appeared in anthropology, overall 'rights' and 'property' have been used uncritically in our discipline. As Keen writes:

The problem with the dominance of the language of 'rights' and 'property' ... is that it obscures Indigenous concepts and discourse ... Unfortunately, the majority of ethnographies simply translate ways of possessing things in terms of 'property' and of 'rights' (ibid.: 110).

After reviewing other anthropologists' work on Yolngu relations to land, Keen calls for a focus on the ways in which the relations typically described in terms of 'rights' are constituted in Yolngu discourse (ibid.: 115).

His third chapter on the topic of property extends the analysis to an examination of how 'property' was interpreted on the colonial frontier. Keen also returns to an analytical framework based on a comparative analysis of historical sources in different regions of Australia at the time of contact, including a variety of colonial officials and amateur and professional anthropologists.

The language of ‘property’ and ‘rights’ is evident in writings in all regions, together with associated notions of ‘families’ tribes’ or ‘clans’ that are the owners (Keen 2010b: 48, 52, 54). As a result, writes Keen, ‘Aboriginal society—at least in its dimension of “property”—is depicted through the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries as a primitive form of English society’ (ibid.: 55). Contemporary anthropological writing has indicated that, in fact, Aboriginal discourse and practice differs substantially from these early interpretations, and there seems to be ‘no equivalent to the overarching concept of property’ (ibid.: 56). Nevertheless, as with our use of ‘clan’ or ‘corporation’ in writing of ‘ownership rights’ and ‘property’, anthropologists may (wittingly or not) incorporate incommensurable Western tropes instead of exploring Indigenous discourses.

A rolling stone gathers no moss, even in academic circles. More than 40 years after he commenced his fieldwork in Milngimbi, Keen is a contributor to a collaborative, multidisciplinary project that relates to but extends some of his long-standing research interests. His involvement with the AustKin project and databases of kinship and social category terms has led to his latest book-length publication, *Kinship Systems: Change and Reconstruction* (McConvell, Keen, and Hendery 2013). Like his other projects of the past decade or more, AustKin demonstrates a concern with comparative and historical analyses, and so can be seen as a natural extension of *Aboriginal Economy and Society* in a new direction. It also brings Keen’s scholarly work full circle, as he returns to the study of kinship that was such an integral element of his PhD research.

He is also developing research and writing interests on language and sociality, a topic of long-standing interest for him. Having used Searle’s speech act theory in his doctoral dissertation, the important links between language and sociality are apparent in *Knowledge and Secrecy*, and were developed in subsequent publications (Keen 1995, 2011). However, it is only now, post-retirement, that he has been able to develop this interest to its fullest extent, with two recent publications (Keen 2013b, 2015), and more on the way.

Ian developed the metaphor of ‘strings of connectedness’ in his examination of the anthropological metalanguage and its relation to Yolngu society. Arguing against the idea that the complexity of Yolngu sociality could be represented by anthropological metaphors of segmentary structures, taxonomic hierarchies, enclosed sets, or enclosure within boundaries, he proposed that Yolngu social identities extend outward from foci and may be represented by ‘open and extendible “strings” of connectedness’ (Keen 1995: 502). Upon reflection, it

seems to me that Ian's metaphor is an apt one to describe his own diverse scholarly interests, as well as his influence on students and colleagues. Ian is not a scholar who is easily pigeonholed, or who is content to work within a safe and 'enclosed' set of research and writing projects, or who restricts supervision to only those students working closely on his own topics of interest. Rather, his scholarly interests extend outward from a wide range of foci: kinship, religion, language, relations to country, and economy, among others. These topical foci are joined together by conceptual and theoretical strings of connectedness: ambiguity, change, agency, sociality, metaphor, and comparison. Likewise, during his career as a supervisor he extended strings of connectedness from his own foci to those of his students. The result is a diverse but coherent network of scholarship that both enlightens and challenges, and that is open to reviving old interests or developing new ones.

The present volume contains contributions from a number of Ian's former students and one of his current colleagues, representing the full span of Ian's distinguished career and the diversity of his scholarly interests. Rather than impose an arbitrary thematic order on the volume, I have opted to present the chapters in a rough chronological order, based on the beginning of each author's association with Ian; the exception here is Patrick McConvell who, although a long-standing colleague of Ian's, is presented here last because his chapter represents their collaboration at the present time. So the volume represents a version of Ian's own research interests as they developed through his career, but refracted through the projects of those upon whom he had (and continues to have) such an important influence.

Diana Eades, Ian's first PhD student at the University of Queensland, opens the proceedings with yet another contribution to her very important work on Aboriginality and language use in Australian criminal courts. Citing the central thrust of *Being Black* (Keen 1988a)—that there are distinctively Aboriginal ways of life in 'settled' southern Australia—Eades examines issues of intercultural communication during courtroom questioning and interviews with police, lawyers, and other judicial officers. Important advances in the sentencing of Aboriginal people in criminal cases have been made over the past 25 years with the recognition of mitigating factors such as alcohol abuse, economic disadvantage, and educational limitations. Eades notes, however, that this focus on problems associated with Aboriginal social life in the realm of sentencing has affected other parts of the legal process, leading to a 'deficit' view of Aboriginal identity that is problematic when considering issues of communication. As she writes in her chapter, 'It is not people's problems which are at issue, but their socialisation and sociolinguistic experiences and abilities, as well as differences

in ways of using language'. Eades argues cogently for attention to the erasure of Aboriginal identity in these contexts, demonstrating that the fundamental insights contained in *Being Black* are still relevant today.

Ian's connection to the University of Queensland continues in Chapter 3, with David Trigger's contribution on change and succession in Aboriginal land claims. As noted above, this topic pertains to Ian's earliest consulting work during the Alligator Rivers claim, in which succession was an important feature. Trigger uses this as a stepping-off point for an analysis of two cases of succession to country that featured in native title claims in the Gulf Country of Queensland: the Ganggalida people who inhabit country near Burketown, and the Waanyi people who live further to the west. Both groups were claimants in native title cases that included not only their own traditional country, but also succession areas that had once belonged to other groups. Both were cases of legitimate succession based on customary law, rationalised by language similarities, subsection or 'skin' names, Dreaming sites and tracks, and actual occupation and use, and in both cases succession occurred despite widespread social and economic changes. Trigger's research demonstrates, as he points out, the need for strong ethnography in order to understand traditional processes of succession, as well as an understanding of the legal framework within which such claims to country are made.

In Chapter 4, Robert Levitus also takes the reader back to Ian's Alligator Rivers work in his account of the life and work of Nipper Kabirriki. Levitus carefully charts the shifting political economy and policy frameworks that transformed the Kakadu region from a backwater of marginal employment to a cauldron of political contestation and engagement. He develops the argument that the coincidence of three factors—the discovery of uranium deposits and the subsequent Ranger Uranium Environmental Inquiry, the passing into legislation of the Northern Territory Land Rights Act, and the establishment of Kakadu National Park—led to a situation in which a new set of cultural capacities focused on 'stories' supplanted the earlier focus on 'skills' among Aboriginal people in the region. A case study examining Kabirriki and how he negotiated this shifting political landscape personalises the land rights era, and situates Ian Keen as one of the earliest of a series of interlocutors interested in his 'stories' pertaining to traditional land ownership and use.

Ian's important contributions to the understanding of ambiguity in Arnhem Land religion, which is fundamental to an understanding of cosmology, sociality, and political life, are extended by Craig Elliott in Chapter 5 in his study of the Marrangu Djinang spirit beings *Merri* and *Mewal*. Referencing Ian's studies of Yolngu social life and cosmology, Elliott describes the social and ritual connectedness of the Marrangu Djinang to other groups, both their immediate neighbours (to whom they are connected by residence and marriage), as well

as those connected across a wide region based on their shared Wild Honey Dreaming. In mythology, *Mewal*, a part-bee, part-human spirit being, collected honey in Marrangu Djinang country and is symbolic of procreative power; her association with the origins of group identity, however, is tempered by her connection to the 'symbolically malign' monsoonal jungles, an attribute shared with *Merri*, as both spirit beings are believed to roam the jungle at night and are associated with antisocial and corrupted attributes. This essential ambiguity inherent in Marrangu Djinang cosmology is personified by *Mewal* and *Merri*, occupying as they do separate but overlapping cosmological domains. Elliott's analysis examines geographical, historical, and demographic factors to account for this ambiguity, and concludes by arguing that Marrangu Djinang belief is not unified or fully integrated, but is, rather, characterised by a conceptual dynamism that was such an important feature of Ian Keen's analyses of the same kinds of phenomena.

In addition to an extended study of Yolngu beliefs in the context of a range of traditional ceremonies, *Knowledge and Secrecy* contains an analysis of Yolngu Christianity as a form of universalistic religious belief and practice comparable to Gunapipi. In the context of widespread social change, both Gunapipi and Christianity allowed broader cooperation between groups, and between men and women; in addition, Ian argued that Yolngu Christianity also represented an attempt to develop 'a common moral order' (Keen 1994: 287) with white society, as well as to reassert a measure of autonomy, although Christianity in the Yolngu context did not displace traditional religious practice. In Chapter 6, Heather McDonald explores a very different dynamic at play in Aboriginal Christianity in the East Kimberley. She begins with a Foucauldian 'archaeology' of Zoroastrian cosmology and the ways in which it was adopted by Judaism and early Christianity, and subsequently revived after the Protestant Reformation and ultimately imported into the 'contact zone' of the East Kimberley. In early Iranian traditions, good/evil and heaven/hell dichotomies were strongly developed in religious beliefs, based on oppositional relations between settled agriculturalists and nomadic herders, and notions of the apocalypse to rid the world of evil-doers became prominent. Such apocalyptic ideas gradually spread into Jewish and then early Christian thought, diminished during the Middle Ages, but then returned with the Protestant Reformation and its literalist reading of scripture, and eventually travelled with missionaries to the East Kimberley, where McDonald conducted her fieldwork. Beliefs in the coming apocalypse were widespread among Halls Creek Aboriginal people, but the cosmological dualisms derived from Zoroastrian ideas became blurred when applied to Aboriginal spiritual beliefs and practices and kin-based morality. Although this represents a very different situation than the syncretism described by Keen, McDonald's insights are nevertheless reminiscent of Ian Keen's emphasis on indeterminacies in post-contact religious beliefs.

This indeterminacy in the bringing together of once-separate systems of thought is a theme Ian pursued in his article 'Metaphor and the Metalanguage' (1995), demonstrating that the use of Western analytical concepts (based on a recognisable set of Western metaphors) generates anomalies when applied to the social practices of the Yolngu (based on a quite different set of metaphors). This incommensurability of knowledge systems is a theme developed by Allon Uhlmann in Chapter 7, in which he examines two competing approaches to Arabic grammatical instruction in Israeli universities. Arab and Jewish students in these courses have been schooled in two quite different approaches to Arabic, the Arabic tradition and the European Orientalist tradition, which are ontologically distinct and draw upon different kinds of tropes. Also, again reminiscent of Ian's work, the two systems are locked into a set of unequal power relations with the indigenous system subordinate, and with Arab students coming to feel a sense of failure when faced with an institutionalised but incommensurable system of instruction. Uhlmann analyses a range of different 'failures of translation' on the part of the European Orientalist tradition, which then generate anomalies experienced by the Arab students and create a false sense of equivalence between the Arabic language and the European Orientalist translation of it. Although analysing ethnographic materials quite different from Ian's, Uhlmann develops similar themes and draws similar conclusions that underscore the productivity of Ian's ideas and the influence that he had on his students, Aboriginalist and non-Aboriginalist alike.

In Chapter 8, I also pick up on the themes of indeterminacy and heterogeneity that have been so important in Ian's interpretations of Yolngu ritual, as well as his recent resurgence of interest in language and sociality, in my analysis of Dhalwangu song texts using the framework of Bakhtin's theory of the utterance. For Bakhtin, the utterance is the unit of living speech communication (as opposed to the sentence, the unit of language as an abstract system), and is characterised by fundamentally dialogical features. In my analysis I take song textual phrases performed by Dhalwangu singers to be utterances in a Bakhtinian sense, and *manikay* as a genre of public song to be a speech genre (another Bakhtinian term). A poetic analysis of Dhalwangu song using Bakhtin's ideas not only generates insights into *manikay* as a living and dynamic tradition, but also lends support to Ian Keen's long-standing interest in the indeterminacies and ambiguities of Yolngu ritual and social life.

Milingimbi as a place was enormously influential on the development of Ian Keen's thought, being the location of his earliest intensive and long-term field research. In Chapter 9, Louise Hamby and Dr Gumbula focus their attention on Milingimbi as a centre of material culture collecting over the last century. Chronicling the long history of the collection of material culture at Milingimbi since the mission was established in the early 1920s, Hamby and Gumbula note

the importance of both mission staff and visiting academics in the development of numerous collections dispersed throughout the globe. These collections provide a tangible history of Milngimbi, and shed light on the central place of material culture in the engagement between Yolngu and Europeans. This chapter also conveys a strong sense of the importance of these collections for contemporary Yolngu, not as relics collecting dust on shelves in faraway places, but rather as living components of Yolngu cultural heritage that have an ongoing importance in Yolngu social life. This is especially significant given that Gumbula was the son of Djäwa, one of Ian's main research collaborators during his Milngimbi research.

In Chapter 10, Paul Burke provides a compelling and ethnographically grounded analysis of the women of the Warlpiri diaspora and their diverse strategies for asserting personal autonomy by severing ties to kin and country and moving away to towns and cities far removed from Warlpiri settlements. The analysis necessarily engages critically with the work of Diane Bell, who posited a return to traditionalism for Aboriginal women's empowerment, and argues instead that Warlpiri women pursue diverse and heterogeneous strategies, which in turn help us to re-examine and redefine concepts of personal autonomy and of active and constructive agency. Burke's case studies include women escaping promised marriages, women who had become leaders in Christian religious communities in Darwin, those who had established semi-traditional women's spaces in Alice Springs or foster homes for Warlpiri children to attend school in Adelaide, and women artists who established an ongoing relationship with a non-Aboriginal art wholesaler in Adelaide. Burke acknowledges that his project has no straightforward relationship with Ian Keen's own scholarly work, but is instead characterised by the more general (but no less important) scholarly influences of being empirically grounded, open to critical and theoretical engagement, and committed to a clear style of writing. That these characteristics are so much in evidence in this chapter attests to Ian's abilities as a mentor and his willingness to allow his students to pursue their own interests, rather than impose his own perspective.

Chapter 11 takes the reader again to the Crocodile Islands, the site of Ian's PhD fieldwork, and again back to issues pertaining to language and meaning. This time, Bentley James considers challenges in the translation and interpretation of the concept of *märr*, in the light of not only the ethnographic literature on the Yolngu, but also in relation to anthropological writings pertaining to the concept of *mana* in the Pacific. Both concepts pertain to notions of spiritual power, and both are inadequately translated when the tropes of the anthropological metalanguage are allowed to obscure the specific contextual features of their originary cultures. After critically surveying the relevant literature, James embarks on an ethnolinguistic reinterpretation of *märr*, focusing on its polysemy,

complexity, and ambiguity, and the lessons to be learned by its use in everyday language. The power of *mārr* is also omnipresent in the Yolngu experience of the lived environment as it is believed to reside in the land, and can be harnessed through ritual means. James's chapter neatly encapsulates a range of interpretive themes that have been present in Ian Keen's work over the past four decades: the links between language and culture, the nature of Yolngu religious beliefs and practices, and the challenges of cross-cultural translation. Careful attention to these issues can have the beneficial result of demanding self-reflexive questions about the rituals, institutions, and ontology of the anthropological project, a goal Ian himself would no doubt support.

John White, in Chapter 12, provides a systematic profiling of the Yuin people of the Eurobodalla region of southeast New South Wales, adopting the analytical approach Ian developed in *Aboriginal Economy and Society* (Keen 2004). Indeed, White was Ian's student during the study period for this book, and he demonstrates convincingly that the categories of ecology, institutional fields, and economy provide a very productive basis for the extension of this comparative study of Aboriginal societies at the threshold of colonisation, opening the way for further studies of this type. White also draws a specific comparison with the Kūnai people of Gippsland, one of Ian's case studies, as both Kūnai and Yuin occupied similar ecological zones which gave rise to similar relations between economy and society. The productivity of Ian's framework when applied to other societies validates his approach and underscores the importance of *Aboriginal Economy and Society* as a work of lasting importance.

The book closes with a contribution by Ian's long-standing colleague and current research collaborator, Pat McConvell, and his study of the diffusion of kin terms in northern Australia. This chapter arises out of their collaboration on the AustKin project which, broadly speaking, seeks to use kinship terminology to generate a comparative framework for understanding Aboriginal social organisation across Australia. The project is an excellent fit for Ian's interests in kinship, the comparative and historical study of Aboriginal societies, and the relationship between language and culture. McConvell's chapter examines affinal terms as noteworthy examples of long-distance loanwords, focusing on two particular kinship terms that diffused broadly across the Kimberley and into the Northern Territory. In its intricate detail and thorough analysis, McConvell not only provides a comprehensive account of two particular cases of linguistic diffusion, but also establishes a clear case for the importance of an historical examination of the links between language, kinship, and other elements of social organisation like avoidance relations. Indeed, as McConvell notes, the diachronic study of Aboriginal kinship systems is augmented considerably by the focus on linguistic materials. Ian's early and ongoing interests in kinship,

his later development of comparative historical frameworks, and his abiding interest in language and society, combine in a way that makes the research goals of the AustKin project a natural and productive fit.

In late November 2011, Ian and I were standing in front of Salvador Dali's massive *Santiago El Grande*, which hangs in Fredericton's Beaverbrook Art Gallery. Ian had been in Montreal for the American Anthropological Association meetings, and then in Nova Scotia to visit his family there, and managed a visit to Fredericton on his way back to Australia. It was the first time Ian had visited us in Canada, and so it was a special occasion for us. It was also special because we were joined for dinner the previous evening by the anthropologist Alan Mason, who had been my undergraduate mentor and who had supervised my honours thesis on the topic of Yolngu religion. I felt that a circle had been closed, with the teacher who had first introduced me to the Yolngu, the teacher who had guided me through my own study of the Yolngu, and I all sharing a meal.

Santiago El Grande is a monumental work that inspires contemplation: physically huge, brilliantly conceived, masterfully executed, and full of symbolism. As we stood there, I was reminded that Ian began his professional life not as an anthropologist, but as an artist. As an anthropologist, though, he has created an *oeuvre* of lasting significance that deserves careful contemplation as well. Ian has pursued a broad variety of different scholarly interests, which nevertheless are linked by a set of overlapping and consistent themes. And, as with a great work of art, careful contemplation is abundantly repaid with additional new insights and inspirations. The chapters collected here represent just one set of examples, of which there will, no doubt, be more to come.

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