

## ONE HEALTH IN UNDERSERVED COMMUNITIES

# Transformation within Indigenous Lived Experiences and the Journey from a Pedagogy of Oppression to a Pedagogy of Hope and Freedom

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## ◀ Fitzroy River

**“WE ARE BUILDING COLLABORATIVE KNOWLEDGE SYSTEMS, COMBINING WESTERN SCIENCES, TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE, AND INDUSTRY PRACTICE IN SHARING OUR MOST PRECIOUS RESOURCES.”**

**“THE NATIONAL HERITAGE FITZROY RIVER IS A LIVING SACRED ANCESTOR FROM SOURCE TO SEA.”**

## ▼ Mijirrikan Painting: Grace and Rosie Mulligan painting the river country

***My Indigenous heritage is Nyikina; ‘ngajanoo Yimardoowarra marnil’, in my language means “a woman who belongs to our sacred river”, which centres me as property and a guardian of the Martuwarra (Fitzroy River). My career has focused on Indigenous health and wellbeing development using human, Indigenous rights and environmental justice.***

### PEDAGOGY OF OPPRESSION

‘Invasion, conflict, divide and conquer, manipulation’ continue as the characteristics of oppression (Freire, 1968). The colonial states were established to create wealth for private and foreign interests at the expense of Indigenous people, our lands and waters. The lived experiences in the Kimberley and throughout Australia is shared with other First Nations people in countries colonised during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. The consequences of colonisation from legislated inequality are termed “structural violence” by the peace philosopher Galtung. Such effects are measured not only in the disparity of mortality rates for children and young adults, healthy life expectancy, and in morbidity from non-communicable diseases, but in the effects on mental health and wellbeing from trans-generational psychic trauma, and the devastating effect of endemic alcohol and drug misuse.

In 2017 we recall a decade since our government ratified the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People; however, we

have not seen this domesticated in Australian law. Many of us who have had our customary law recognised in Native Title are prepared to stand and work together to take charge of our own destiny and partner with like-minded people to act to deliver justice based on First Water Law of the Martuwarra.

### PEDAGOGY OF HOPE

The Freire framework is based on mutual respect involving open and honest dialogue. This heightened sense of cooperation has instruments known as ‘unity, organisation, [and] cultural synthesis’ which if undertaken leads to a process for a truly more positive life which enshrines the principles of human rights (Paulo Freire 1968). On 2 and 3 November 2016, Indigenous leaders met in Fitzroy Crossing to showcase to the world the recognition that the National Heritage Fitzroy River is a living sacred ancestor from source to sea. More recently in May 2018 these leaders united to form the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council. The Council builds on the United Nations Permanent Forum On Indigenous Issues Background Guide (for) 2017. We recognise this is an important model framework for



cultural governance of our natural and cultural resources.

### PEDAGOGY OF FREEDOM

This is a story of hope and freedom as we explore our rights and responsibilities of First Law, the law of the land. This First Law encompasses our relationship with each other, our neighbours, and most importantly our family of non-human beings. These are key indicators for personal, community, cultural and systemic economic wellbeing. The alternative put forward is a ‘strength based’ approach which rejects narratives that promulgate inferiority. Strengths based education has a greater focus on innate ability, the advantages of Indigenous culture (rather than framing it as disadvan-

tageous), dialogue, and ‘hopes and aspirations’ for ‘how we want to be’. Our Centre ([www.majala.com.au](http://www.majala.com.au)) demonstrates, our culture, science, heritage and conservation economy is blossoming, founded upon our connectivity and distinct cultural identities. Guided by First Law, our ‘living water’ systems are our life force, connecting surface to ground water, uniting the diverse cultural landscape of the Kimberley. We are building collaborative knowledge systems, combining Western sciences, traditional knowledge, and industry practice in sharing our most precious resources - water and biodiversity. We are developing our ‘Sustainable Life and Livelihoods’ on country. ■

## ▼ Creation of the Fitzroy River, painted by Grace Mulligan



References:  
Fitzroy River Declaration at <http://www.klc.org.au/news-media/newsroom/news-detail/2016/11/15/kimberley-traditional-owners-unite-for-the-fitzroy-river>  
United Nations Permanent Forum On Indigenous Issues Background Guide (for) 2017 online at <https://www.humanrights.gov.au/united-nations-permanent-forum-indigenous-issues>  
United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples at [http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS\\_en.pdf](http://www.un.org/esa/socdev/unpfii/documents/DRIPS_en.pdf)

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## ◀ Fitzroy River Declaration