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A journalistic study of Narrogin's feuding families

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Articles

This is a series of feature articles written after I spent a week in Narrogin in January, 2010. Each article is followed by footnotes documenting the sources of the information presented, that were not included when the articles were commercially published, but which will remain publicly available in this version for archival and reference purposes. The articles were written for dissemination to the broader public via an independent online news publication called Crikey – that posts articles on www.crikey.com.au and sends a daily newsletter to 13,000 subscribers. Crikey ran the five articles as a series on March 30, 31 and April 1, 5 and 6, 2010. Crikey's editorial focus is on politics, media, business, the law, culture and national and international affairs. Crikey's stories are pitched at an educated Australian audience. Stylistically, they are often written in more colloquial language than traditional broadsheet journalism, first person narration is often employed and some Crikey writers are artists in the gonzo tradition, developed by Thompson (1972) and refined by writers like Rundle (2008). A key feature of this style is presentation of material gleaned from a variety of sources without constant, clearly articulated reference to the sources of information. This was deemed to be an appropriate approach to these stories given the multiple, interwoven sources of information, that if directly included would impede the flow of the narrative. Another reason for employing this style is that sources were wary of putting their names publicly to everything that they said to me. While this may suggest unreliability, it can also be to do with people wanting to keep a low profile so as to avoid further entanglement in violence, and as such it was respected. The articles are followed by an exegesis.

Narrogin's feuding families

Shots fired during a brawl last November made national news, highlighting the family feud brewing in the town's Indigenous Noongar community. Kayt Davies went to the town, nestled in the wheat growing region of South West WA, to find out what they're fighting about.

Part One: The September Prelude

If there's a shootout in the near future, another spate of suicides or some other calamitous event involving hundreds of Noongar people, it could well be in Narrogin. And if it happens, there'll be mourning people who'll say "We told 'em so. We said it might come to this. We asked for help." [1]

The agricultural town 190km south-east of Perth hit the news last November when shots were fired during a brawl, following the funeral of an Aboriginal matriarch. The words 'firearms', 'shooting' and

‘family feud ’ made headlines [2] , charges were laid and as members of both families headed out of town for the summer, an uneasy [3] peace settled over the town [1]. Now the new school year is starting, people are back and members of the feuding families involved say temperatures are rising once again[1].

Sitting with me in parks, in their offices and on the verandahs of their homes, they told me that the help they want is not a handout and it’s not another year or two of fruitless [4,5]government meetings. It’s something more tangible. They want the problem to be publicly acknowledged [6]and they want counsellors who can work in a flexible and careful way on the raw loathing [1,7] and deeper philosophical differences [8] that are have come to a nasty head over recent years and that are now threatening to explode into a bloodbath[1].

Surrounded by wheat fields, baked butter-yellow by the summer sun, Narrogin has a population of around 4670. About 300 of those people are Indigenous, mostly Noongar, people who have extended family connections that spread throughout the southwest of WA and the state’s prison population[9]. There are three primary schools, one senior high school, five banks, a wheat silo, a bowling club, three art galleries and three pubs in Narrogin[10].

The main street sidewalks are red-brick paved, shaded by tall leafy trees and at night lit by heritage-style street lamps[11]. For most of the population life here is peaceful [12]. But just a few blocks from the centre of town, is a small dusty dry-grass park surrounded by suburban housing that has some play equipment, bright lighting, and white circles on the roads[11] painted by forensics experts to mark the locations of last November’s bullet shells and blood stains[13].

Clark Street on the west side of the park is like the shadow version of Ramsey Street. In July 2009 some high school girls threw some spiteful words at each other at a netball event [1, 4]. The fight simmered on, as high school dramas often do, and on September 21, 2009, it was at boiling point. But this time their mothers were drawn into it, and, as fists (and feet) flew, protective male relatives stepped in[1, 13].

While the claims the girls were making were one source of indignation, there was also anger about the way that the argument between the girls had been handled. Some parents were furious that the organisers of the netball trip had allowed the fight to fester and hadn’t sorted it out then and there, while they were away at the competition[14].

The shouting and threatening went on for several days and escalated [1], the dispute between the girls and their mothers had resonances with other disagreements simmering between older family members about rhetoric, racism and control of the organisations that receive government funding [1,14]. Rivalry over drug dealing issues [9] and police sympathy may also have played a part, with both families claiming the police favour the other side[1, 14].

In the weeks following the September fight someone was threatened with an axe, someone was hit with a golf club and windows were smashed [1, 13, 14]. Charges were laid, police slapped misconduct orders on one member of each family, and the court granted nine restraining orders[13]. This wasn’t a solution

though. Everyone was angry, not everyone thought the police had been fair, and a 58-year-old man, well respected for his work at the Narrogin Primary School [15], was so saddened by it all that he tried to end his own life[9].

His suicide attempt rocked the town[15], still numb and grieving [16] from a spate of six suicides in 2008 that had triggered the formation of a new community reference group[1,16]; prompted calls for – and the promise of – an Inquiry by the State Coroner [17] (that has not yet eventuated [18]) ; prompted Oxfam to step in to fill what it considered to be a "dangerous void" in mental health services in the town; [19] and sparked the interest of the Senate Select Committee on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities[20].

The September violence also prompted the Narrogin police to publicly call on the State Government's Aboriginal Mediation Service for help. Explaining that local attempts at mediation between the two rival families had failed, Sen.Sgt Martin Voyez told *The Narrogin Observer*: "There's not much else we can do." [21]

All this was the prelude to the shooting in November 2009.

Tomorrow Part Two: What happened that night.

Part One – Notes and sources:

1. Sourced from Kickett family interviews, January 21-23, 2010.
2. *The West Australian,* November 17, 2009, http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/mp/6480797/town-at-a-loss-how-family-feud-flared-into-riot/
   The Age, November 20, 2000 http://www.theage.com.au/national/family-feud-shooting-victim-brought-back-from-death-20091120-iq3s.html
3. "Uneasy" because both families told me that windows of homes have been broken over the summer . Sen. Sgt Martin Voyez said there had been two reported complaints over the past few months of damage (broken windows) to Indigenous housing.
4. Sourced from Janine Terry interview, January 21, 2010.
5. This specifically refers to the Narrogin Interagency Group which Janine Terry said had yet to initiate any programs to help local people. Ms Terry was a Narrogin Aboriginal Community Reference Group (NACRG) representative on the board of the Interagency Group until December 2009 when the NACRG withdrew, "due to the inertia of the Interagency Group" (source Janine Terry interview, January 21, 2010, details confirmed by phone January 28, 2010). The senate inquiry hearings and initial meetings about the coronial inquiry into the suicides are also yet to result in anything concrete for the community. Priscilla Kickett's letter of submission to the Senate Inquiry on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities includes this: "NACRG has been prominent in highlighting, often to the displeasure of service providers, of their perplexing response through irrelevant, ineffective, duplicated, uncoordinated, totally culturally inappropriate and apathetic service delivery to the Aboriginal community of Narrogin following

but not exclusive to the spate of suicides." The letter is here: http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/Committee/indig_ctte/submissions/sub105.pdf

6. Sourced from Chad Kickett interview, January 23, 2010.
7. Raw Loathing refers to the axe/golf club disputes between Bjorn Kickett and Olive Penny in September 2009, that resulted in both people being issued with Misconduct Orders.
8. The former CEO of the Aboriginal Health Council of WA, Daryl Kickett , said in an interview in 2008 with Andrea Haywood (http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/probe-narrogin-deaths-health-group-20080725-3ksb.html) that grief, alcohol, cannabis use and child abuse could be behind the mental health issues surfacing in Narrogin. In the senate hearing (see note 20) he discussed the impact of racism on Indigenous mental health in Narrogin.
9. Sourced from Basil Kickett interview, January 22, 2010.
10. All of these figures were confirmed by Narrogin mayor Don Ennis on January 25, 2010.
11. Personal observation.
12. Sourced from interviews with Mayor Don Ennis (January 25, 2010) and Narrogin Observer editor Andrew Hobbs (January 20, 2010).
13. Source Sen.Sgt Martin Voyez interview January 25, 2010. Police media confirmed, on March 3, that Bjorn Kickett and Olive Penny are due to appear before the Narrogin magistrates Court on charges relating to these incidents on April 8, 2010.
14. Sourced from an interview with Murray Riley and members of other families related to the Colbungs of Narrogin. January 25, 2010.
15. During the Basil Kickett interview (January 22, 2010) I was shown a folder of certificates and glowing letters of reference and commendation relating to Mr Kickett's work at Qantas and with the Education Department. The folder also included letters and cards that were sent to him by colleagues and school children while he was in hospital following his suicide attempt.
16. Sourced from Narrogin Aboriginal Community Reference Group Press Release November 16, 2009.
17. Reported in WA Today July 25, 2008 http://www.watoday.com.au/wa-news/probe-narrogin-deaths-health-group-20080725-3ksb.html and The Australian May 30, 2009 http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/west-australian-coroner-to-investigate-wheatbelt-suicides/story-e6frg12c-1225718404413
18. In a phone interview on January 28, 2010, Janet Roy secretary of the State Coroner said the Inquiry was going ahead but would be unlikely to produce results before mid-2010 because of workload and court availability issues.
19. Oxfam Media Release, February 2, 2009.
20. Transcript of the hearing in Narrogin on October 8, 2009 is available as Hansard here: http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commttee/S12440.pdf
21. *The Narrogin Observer*, page 1, September 30, 2009.

Part Two: What happened that night

To tell this story in context we need more specifics about the fight in September. The teenage girls were the daughters of Kylie Bolton of Ashworth Crescent, and Olive Penny, whose brother Dean Colbung lives on Clark St. The two houses are both close to the south west corner of the park. It was Kylie who was kicked. [1]

The funeral in November was for Dean and Olive's mother and, unrelated to that, 55-year-old Graham Bolton and his wife, 54-year-old Penny Bolton, had come from Pinjarra to stay with their daughter Kylie for the weekend and were catching up with their Kickett relatives. [1]

Dean Colbung was raised in Narrogin but lived away from the town for many years. He returned in 2007, six months before Murray Riley came back to Narrogin[2]. Although Murray is related to the Kickett family, he's close friends with Dean[2], and according to Basil and Chad Kickett [3,4] the feud started to heat up around about the time that Dean and Murray came back to town.

Murray, who was a police liaison officer attached to the Gosnells Police Station between 1996 and 2002, and a mine worker from 2002 to 2007, said that he was angry about being labelled a trouble maker and said: "They should have done their homework and found out more about me and my personal background before jumping in and labelling me as a cause of the problems in town – especially when they haven't identified their own role in causing what has happened." [2]

Getting back to that weekend in November, according to Sen. Sgt Martin Voyez[5], about 20 members of the Kickett/Bolton family were gathered at a house in Floyed St, about a block away from the park, and there were about 100 people gathered in Clark St for the wake. He said he had visited both families earlier in the day and that the families had agreed to keep to themselves.

At some point in the evening Graham and Penny Bolton went from Floyed St to Clark St, other members of the Kickett family followed and then there was mayhem[5].

While I was told several blow-by-blow versions of events that night, these can't be reported yet because charges against Graham Bolton have been listed for committal mention in the Perth Magistrates Court on April 15, 2010, and the charges against Penny Bolton have been adjourned for mention on the same day[6]. To report them now would risk influencing the course of justice and invoking contempt of court charges.

After the brawl, the only violence-related charges were laid against Graham and Penny Bolton. Initially they were charged with discharging a firearm to cause fear and a week later Graham Bolton was charged with a further three counts of committing acts intended to cause grievous bodily harm, possession of a weapon, inadequate storage of a firearm and carrying a firearm while intoxicated. In addition, Bjorn Kickett, 30, was charged with breaching the Misconduct Restraining Order he was placed under following the axe incident in September[7]. Some people were treated for wounds consistent with being hit by blocks of concrete but no charges for throwing blocks of concrete have been laid.

Following a police search of his Clark St house, Dean Colbung, 48, was charged with inadequate storage of ammunition[7].

Police allege that members of the Bolton family "discharged a 12 gauge double barrel shot gun into the crowd" and hit Dean's son, Dean Colbung Jr, 23, and Armadale woman Lisa Woods, 36. Both were hospitalised for emergency surgery and have since recovered. Police also allege that one of the Boltons "aimed and fired directly at the driver of a motor vehicle attempting to transport one of the injured persons to Narrogin Hospital." [7]

Looking back on it, the Kickett family are angry that their fears about what might happen that night weren't taken more seriously by the Narrogin police [1].

Basil Kickett [3] said: "They don't understand that if there's going to be trouble it's around a funeral. If you're going to have a fight you're going to have it when all of the strongest people in your family are in town. The other problem is that when all those people come, some of them they bring speed and ganja with them and then everyone gets drunk as well. The police treat it as trivial but they shouldn't. They don't foresee the dangers. "

He said that he had told police that he had been warned by the Colbungs of Narrogin and the Abraham family from Armadale that the homes of four of his family members would be smashed up that night and that it was a threat they took seriously because the windows of the Floyed St house had been smashed in September while women and children slept inside [1, 3]. Sen. Sgt Voyez confirmed that this window smashing event had occurred, but said that he had done all he could that weekend [5].

Sen Sgt Voyez added that it was not possible to close the bottle shops in town, as the Kicketts had requested, because there was a motorsport event called RevHeads on that weekend and the significant portion of Narrogin's community involved in RevHeads reasonably expected to be able to get a drink[5].

On November 16, the Narrogin Aboriginal Community Reference Group (NACRG), chaired by Priscilla Kickett , issued a press release expressing the family's anger about the way the police had handled the incident. The claims in the release triggered an investigation into the conduct of police, individually and collectively, in the period leading up to and during the shooting. The investigation, conducted by Inspector David Picton King (then the Divisional Inspector for the Great Southern Police District) found that the "police performance was comprehensive, appropriate and lawful". In late January he said his report had been forwarded to Police Internal Affairs and the Corruption and Crime Commission for further review [8]. The Kicketts remain dissatisfied and said they hope that someone external to the Police department will look into the matter [1].

What worries the Kicketts, Murray Riley and police alike is that now guns have been used once that the anti has been upped and there is now a greater risk of them being involved next time[1,2,5].

Tomorrow Part Three: Hatred and Retribution

Part Two – Notes and sources:

1. Sourced from Kickett family interviews, January 21-23, 2010.
2. Sourced from an interview with Murray Riley and members of other families related to the Colbungs of Narrogin, on January 25, 2010.
3. Sourced from Basil Kickett interview, January 22, 2010.
4. Sourced from Chad Kickett interview, January 23, 2010.
5. Sourced from Sen.Sgt Martin Voyez interview January 25, 2010.
6. Sourced from a telephone interview with Laura Timpano, January 29, 2010. She is a lawyer who has acted for the Boltons at their earlier court appearances. She said that she was not contracted to act for them on an ongoing basis.
7. Charge details from this police media release, November 21, 2009: http://www.police.wa.gov.au/Portals/11/PDFs/Media%20Release/2009/091121%200800%20Narrogin%20Shooting%20Further%20Chages.pdf and names confirmed by Sen.Sgt Martin Voyez in an interview on January 25, 2010.
8. Sourced from a telephone interview with Inspector David Picton King, January 29, 2010.

Part Three: Hatred and Retribution

In the week following the shooting in November, the media [1,2] reported that there were fears of retribution when relatives gathered for another funeral. *The West Australian* [2] mentioned that it was the funeral of "a stillborn baby".

What wasn't reported was that the mother miscarried a couple of weeks after the house she and other women and children were staying in was attacked while they slept on the night of September 29, 2009 [3]. According to the Kickett family, they had huddled together as windows were broken and after sweeping up the glass the next morning the woman had felt pains.

Explaining the context of the attack on the house, Murray Riley (a friend of the Colbung family) said, it may have been retribution for an event earlier that night that saw rocks thrown at the house of Dean Colbung's sister, Joanne Humes. [4]

Despite the fears and sadness there were no violent incidents after the baby's funeral, nor were there any after a funeral of a man related to both families on January 22 [5].

Police had been on alert though, horses had been brought up from Perth and they helped police to maintain a visible presence outside the town's three pubs that January night. There were very few, if any, Noongar people in the bars though. A few car loads of people had bought take away alcohol from the bottle shop at around 6pm and the families stayed on separate sides of town [5,6].

While the violence hasn't boiled over again it has been simmering.

There has been a spate of window smashings [7] and police released a statement on November 21, 2009, [8] saying that an Armadale couple who had been in Narrogin for the funeral in November had reported hearing two loud bangs on the Wednesday night after the brawl and had found three holes, apparently made by bullets in their Mitsubishi wagon the next morning. Police said neighbours had also heard what sounded like two gun shots but no one has been charged over the incident [9].

What is worrying about the Armadale issue is that it shows that the feud could to spill to other communities. The Kickett/Bolton clan is one of the largest in the 25,000 strong Noongar nation, with family members living in communities all over WA's south-west [10]. Basil Kickett said: "If we were to call our family into town it would be huge. We would outnumber them, but we're not doing that. They call and offer to come, but we say no." [6]

Dean Colbung, who hasn't yet returned to Narrogin, after leaving for the summer, is also aware of the potential for the fight to get out of hand. Asked if he's scared about what might happen next, he said: "Yes, and it's getting worse ... My son got shot and we're still dealing with that." [11]

These ongoing concerns, fuelled by the trauma of the many sad events in recent years [6,11], fly in the face of statements from the town's political leaders that it's over and peace reigns in Narrogin.

The *ABC* [12] quoted WA Member for Wagin Terry Waldron telling a crowd assembled for the awarding of police long service honours on December 4, 2009, that "residents were focussed on rebuilding relationships after the recent violence between feuding families".

In the same vein *The Narrogin Observer* [13] quoted mayor Don Ennis as saying: "I don't think we'll have any long term effect out of this. We will all get together after this and iron it out. It's just a flare up that happens from time to time."

The Police are not so sure that the situation has settled down. Sen. Sgt Martin Voyez [4] said: "The concern for police is that we've gone from shouting to an axe to a shooting where someone could have been killed in a very short space of time. We are concerned that it could happen again with fatal consequences. Guns and firing onto a crowd including women and children shocked a lot of people and, having happened once, it may happen again." [4]

What scares members of both families is the way fights between teenagers can be the sparks that set off older, more dangerous relatives. Asked what needs to happen to ease tensions in Narrogin, both families suggested that the other revise their parenting practices [11,15].

Most of the teenagers involved are students at Narrogin Senior High School, where a brawl broke out on muck-up day in December, 2008 [15]. A description of the fight posted by a 'student' on the Perthnow news site [16] included: "Bricks were thrown, teachers were threatened, surrounding students would be screaming and crying, the whole school was in shock." There was another incident at the school in June, 2009, that prompted a boycott of the school by parents of 25 students [17].

In the wash up there was debate about whether the fight s involved racism or just generic bullying [18], some students were suspended, the school upped its anti-bullying efforts and according to 15-year-old Kyle Kickett, “everyone else just shook hands and got over it” [19]. Older members of the Kickett family are still concerned about it though, and want something done to challenge what they call the town’s “systemic racism” [20].

The potential for teenage squabbles to ignite fights between older families is heightened by the presence of drugs in some parts of Narrogin’s Noongar community. As one man [6] put it: “Speed makes people vicious and angry and ganja makes them paranoid. It’s a dangerous mix.”

This danger intensifies around funerals because it often travels in the bags and pockets of visiting family members.

Sen. Sgt Voyez confirmed that the primary drugs of choice in town were “marijuana and some speed/amphetamine”, but he stressed that drugs in Narrogin were not confined to the Noongar community and added that while alcohol plays a part in the violence that he hadn’t “seen signs of speed”. He said that tackling the flow of drugs into town was an ongoing operation, often involving highway car searches and that it had some, but not complete, success [5].

Policing and legal action isn’t the perfect solution though. It sometimes exacerbates the hurts and adds to the bitterness.

Many of Narrogin’s Noongar people are professionals holding down responsible jobs [21]. They understand the impact of police reports, restraining orders and complaints to employers on professional reputations and future career opportunities [4,6,11].

The upshot of this has been a series of complaints and counter complaints to employers across town. While this may seem petty, it’s deadly serious to people who have worked hard for decades to escape racist stereotypes.

Basil Kickett worked for Qantas for eighteen years before a shoulder injury and an interest in helping young people prompted him to return home to Narrogin. He’s proud that he was able to buy his own house and of his current fulltime employment as Narrogin Primary School’s Aboriginal Islander Liaison Officer. Chatting to him on his porch he showed me a folder of professional references, awards and acknowledgements. He said: “I’ve done all this to make myself a good role model. Role models are what our young people need, and now I have a restraining order on me, just because I went to the defence of my family members who were being attacked. What was I supposed to do?” [6]

He’s hurt that in the days following the brawl in November members of the other family complained to the school principal that they weren’t sure their children were safe in the school with him working there[6] . On the other side of the dispute, Dean Colbung [11] claims his wife was forced to leave town after complaints were made about her work at Southern Wheatbelt Primary Health.

Both sides acknowledge that some kind of mediation is needed, but so far nothing acceptable to both sides has materialised. According to Murray Riley, three mediation attempts have been made, but so far none have been acceptable to both families[18].

In the meantime both families' unprocessed grief, anger and fear continues to fester. The terms "deep hatred", and "eye for an eye" are being used [21], and the boy who found one of the suicide-death bodies (three days later and looking gruesome) still hasn't had a single counselling session [6].

Tomorrow Part Four: Don't call me racist.

Part Three – Notes and sources

1. ABC News, November 18, 2009. http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/11/18/2746774.htm?site=news
2. The West Australian, November 17, 2009. Article by Ben Spencer: http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/mp/6480797/town-at-a-loss-how-family-feud-flared-into-riot/
3. The timing information was sourced from Kickett family interviews, January 21-23, 2010 and confirmed by Sen.Sgt Martin Voyez in an interview on January 25, 2010. The family believes the incident and the miscarriage are connected. Sen.Sgt Voyez, said he understood their belief but added that, as far as he knew, no legal action was being taken as the causality couldn't be definitively proved.
4. Sourced from a telephone interview with Murray Riley on March 11,2010.
5. Sourced from Sen.Sgt Martin Voyez in an interview on January 25, 2010.
6. Sourced from Basil Kickett interview, January 22, 2010.
7. According to Sen,Sgt Martin Voyez there were only two incidents of window smashing property damage reported over the summer, but in interviews Chad Kickett (January 22, 2010) and Dean Colbung (by telephone, January 21, 2010) both said there had been more windows broken in recent weeks .
8. Police Media Release, November 21, 2009. Available here: http://www.police.wa.gov.au/Portals/11/PDFs/Media%20Release/2009/091121%201100%20Shots%20Fired%20at%20Vehicle%20in%20Armadale.pdf
9. Steve Potter from WA Police Media confirmed by phone January 29, 2010. That no one had been charged and no further information was available on the case.
10. This figure was cited by Darryl Kickett on page 25 of the transcript of the hearing in Narrogin on October 8, 2009. It is available as Hansard here: http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commttee/S12440.pdf
11. Sourced from Dean Colbung interview by telephone, January 23, 2010.
12. *ABC News*, December 4, 2009: http://www.abc.net.au/news/stories/2009/12/04/2762208.htm
13. *The Narrogin Observer*, page 2, on November 18, 2009.
14. Sourced from Sonia Kickett interview, January 21, 2010.
15. Sourced from Kickett family interviews, January 21-23, 2010.

16. Perthnow.com.au, May 30, 2009. http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/aboriginal-family-claims-children-victims-of-racism-in-schools/story-0-1225718575433
17. Perthnow.com.au, June 17, 2009. http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/narrogin-racism-row-leads-to-school-boycott/story-0-1225736664477
18. Sourced from an interview with Murray Riley, January 23, 2010.
19. This comment is part of a caption Kyle Kickett put on a photo he had taken of the high school at an Oxfam photo-voices workshop on January, 23, 2009.
20. Sourced from Quenton Jackson, page28-29, and Associate Professor Ted Wilkes, page 30, of the transcript of the hearing in Narrogin on October 8, 2009.
    http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commttee/S12440.pdf
    And Priscilla Kickett's letter of submission:
    http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/Committee/indig_ctte/submissions/sub105.pdf
21. Personal observations. Priscilla Kickett and Murray Riley work for Kaata-Koorliny Employment Enterprise Development Aboriginal Corporation (KEEDAC), Chad and Basil Kickett work at Narrogin Primary School, and Chad is on the KEEDAC Board.
22. "Deep hatred" came from a member of one family, "an eye for an eye" from the other, I assured the people who said them that they wouldn't be quoted by name, as these comments could attract retribution.

Part four: Don't call me racist

Racism is a dirty word, and in Narrogin it gets people's backs right up. I promised the old timers in the pub I wouldn't quote them by name, but when I floated the 'racism question' every one of them slipped straight into a story about how they used to play footy with Noongar boys, how they'd grown up with them and how anyone who said they were racist was clearly just stirring up trouble[1].

That doesn't mean it doesn't exist. But it's tricky because different people have different ideas about what racism is, and as the town's indigenous population struggles to find solutions to its problems – that are manifesting in suicides and brawls – it is inevitable that statistics about 'the Gap' [2] will be evoked and the word 'racism' will be used.

My search for the story behind the brawl in which two people were shot last November uncovered seething anger over the 'Redneck Narrogin debate', with one feuding family on one side, and the other on the other. If there is a core issue at the heart of the dispute between the two families, their attitudes towards racism, and how 'the Gap' should be closed, could be it.

On May 30, 2009, the *Sunday Times* ran a story with the headline "Redneck Narrogin". On June 10 the *Narrogin Observer 's* front page headline was "Rednecks? Not us." [3,4]

The *Sunday Times* [3]story quoted human rights lawyer John Hammond, who was representing the Kickett family over the allegedly racist treatment of 11-year-old Eli Kickett at Narrogin Primary School. Among other things, Eli had been called a 'Nigger' in class. Hammond's words were: "I believe it is institutionalised racism. Redneck Narrogin."

The *Observer* [4] story quoted two prominent locals arguing that the town was working hard towards reconciliation and that people from all backgrounds co-existed peacefully.

Questioned by the *Observer*, Hammond added [4]: "I was definitely not suggesting everyone in the town of Narrogin was a redneck". But he added: "From what I've been told, racism seems to be commonly accepted at the school. It seems students and, to a more alarming degree, teachers, think it's OK to harass people based on the colour of their skin."

It wasn't the first, or last, time that claims about racism in Narrogin have been raised in public by members of the Kickett family and/or their representatives. [5]

In September 2008 Warren Kickett was bashed with a baseball bat outside the Duke of York Hotel in Narrogin's main street, while 20 people stood around and watched. The police were called and the one person arrested at the scene was Warren Kickett.

The story, as others in town tell it, is that a 20-year-old man may or may not have said something disparaging to Warren, Warren responded by throwing a punch, the young man then called his father who turned up with a baseball bat, and proceeded to bash Warren while others looked on[1,6.7].

Eventually the father was arrested and charged, and Warren's sister Priscilla caused a media stink over whole affair. *The Koori Mail* [8] reported that police "admitted that proper procedures were not followed" but Sen Sgt. Martin Voyez has no memory of any complaints about it[7].

What remains contentious about the Warren and Eli incidents is whether they are indicative of racism, or just rows between individuals.

Murray Riley is a friend Colbungs and the chair of Kooraminning Aboriginal Corporation and, like the old boys in the pub, he's angry about the racist rhetoric [9].

Kooraminning is a committee established around an old railway workers house in east Narrogin, gifted to the local indigenous community by the State Government in 1986[10]. Over the years it has been a meeting place and a youth centre. In recent months its committee has started applying for funding and running community-oriented programs[11.12].

Riley [9] said: "For the past nine years Narrogin has been put in a dark hole by bad publicity. I put it down to people being selfish.

"At the end of the day innocent white people have been dragged into this and our community shouldn't have to go through that. The fight between Warren and the guy in the pub was a fight between individuals, the kids get called names at school because who are they are as individuals; to call it racist is to blame someone else for the problem."

Sitting with me and a small group of his friends in a shady park, he said he sees the passing on of blame as a good way to make yourself unpopular with the rest of the community. He thinks it's counter-productive. In his words: "If a Noongar person has a problem, the only person who can fix that problem

is that person. Instead of complaining about racism he should be making it his business to find work." He waved his arm towards one of the young Noongar men standing nearby and said: "He used to be in jail, but since he got out, not a day has gone by when he hasn't been either working or working on a qualification or ticket so that he'll get better jobs. He's taking responsibility for himself."

Asked if he thought racism was a problem, the young man said he'd been disappointed that although he'd been working hard at the grain silo before Christmas, and had the licences required to drive the vehicles involved, that he'd been passed over for fulltime work, in favour of migrant workers without the relevant licences[9].

At this, Murray[9] added that he'd rather see Equal Opportunities and the Department of Indigenous Affairs "coming here for the right reasons, like unfair dismissal, not the wrong reasons." He thinks the Kicketts are boys crying wolf, and that the danger is that people will stop listening.

Tomorrow Part Five: Duelling definitions, money, power and uncertainty.

Part Four – Notes and sources:

1. These pub conversations happened on the evenings of January 20-25, 2010, at the Duke of York Hotel in Narrogin.
2. This refers to the 2008 Federal Government report called: Closing the gap on Indigenous disadvantage: the challenge for Australia http://www.fahcsia.gov.au/sa/indigenous/pubs/general/documents/closing_the_gap/default.htm and the continuing work of the Close the Gap steering committee.
3. Sunday Times May 30, 2009: http://www.perthnow.com.au/news/aboriginal-family-claims-children-victims-of-racism-in-schools/story-0-1225718575433
4. Wednesday June 10, Narrogin Observer, Page 1: Rednecks? Not us.
5. NACRG Media Release: September, 2008.
6. The West Australian: Alleged Racist Gang Attack in Narrogin. September 20, 2008. http://www.fightdemback.org/2008/09/20/alleged-racist-gang-attack-in-narrogin/
7. Sourced from Sen.Sgt Martin Voyez interview by telephone February 1, 2010.
8. Story from *The Koori Mail* reproduced in *The Guardian*, page 3, November 5, 2008: http://www.cpa.org.au/guardian-pdf/2008/Guardian1389_05-11-2008_screen.pdf
9. Sourced from an interview with Murray Riley and others in a park in East Narrogin on January 25, 2010. The others declined to give their names but contributed to the discussion.
10. This information is on a brass plaque mounted on the front of the Kooraminning building.
11. Sourced from Don Ennis interview, January 25, 2010.
12. Sourced from Basil Kickett interview, January 22, 2010.

Part five: Duelling definitions, money, power and uncertainty.

Murray Riley and the older Kicketts all feel like they're fighting, not only for their own children but their grandchildren, and their whole communities, as well. It's deadly serious and it's manifesting as a competition between Kooraminning and Kaata-Koorliny Employment and Enterprise Development Aboriginal Corporation (KEEDAC) for funding to run programs [1,2,3].

KEEDAC has been around since 1999 and up until July 2009 it was the administrator of Narrogin's CDEP projects[3.4].

CDEP stands for Community Development Employment Program; they were introduced in the 1977 as a way to pay Indigenous people to work in locations where it was difficult for them to find other employment. FaHSCIA shut down all CDEPs in June 2009, except for a few in remote areas that are now called reformed-CDEPs and will only be funded until mid-2012 [6].

When it shut down the regional CDEPs, FaHSCIA said they would be replaced with Indigenous Employment Programs (IEPs) [6]. The problem is that according to Chad Kickett, KEEDAC is still waiting for its IEP funding and in the meantime all of the people who had been earning wages on CDEP projects have been turfed onto the dole [2,3].

Whose job was it to deliver this news to the Noongar people of Narrogin? The Kicketts and Boltons, and it didn't add to their popularity in town[2,4].

As Priscilla Kickett, community support officer at KEEDAC, said in her letter of submission[7] to the Senate Inquiry on Regional and Remote Indigenous Communities: "The cessation of CDEP, which was managed by KEEDAC, created tremendous stress on the families and left workers with a sense of hopelessness regarding employment. In their eyes no one will employ an Aboriginal person."

Adding to the confusion around the CDEP closure is the fact that FaHSCIA cited widespread corruption in the CDEP system as one of the reasons for closing it down[1,3].While it made no specific mention of the Kicketts of Narrogin, it hasn't publicly exonerated them either and suspicions of corruption (resulting in the withdrawal of popular CDEP programs) have fuelled the fires of hatred [1,3].

On the flipside, Chad Kickett has been a director of KEEDAC for six years, he said he joined the organisation at a point where it was in financial chaos and deficit, and when the Federal Government was just starting its review of CDEP. He said that within 12 months KEEDAC's books were in good enough order that the Government expanded its coverage area, to the point where it was employing 200 people[3].

There was a downside though. Chad [3] said: "When it got harder to get money out of it, they (people from other Noongar families) would come and shout at us, and we'd say we couldn't do anything, and they got angry with us. The more we tried to help the community by fixing it up, the worse it got. I used to run T-Ball in the park for kids from all families but I don't do it now. Too many parents are getting their kids into the hatred."

Isobel Williams[8], a woman more closely related to the Colbungs than the Kicketts, described the impact of the withdrawal of the CDEP programs in Narrogin, saying: “It was really positive when it was here. A lot of people were willing to work and now there is nothing for them; nothing positive here no more.”

Her friend, who opted not to give his name, was angry that CDEP was shut down. He said: “I was on CDEP for 10 years. I used to work at the panel beater and now there’s no work.” Between them they listed tree-lopping, welding, farm work, cooking, sewing, knitting and chopping wood as CDEP programs they thought had benefitted the community[8].

Priscilla Kickett is hoping that, once thenew funding comes through, KEEDAC will start providing the former- CDEP workers with useful programs. It’s a waiting game though 1[3,4]. Another wild card is that Murray Riley has just been appointed as youth and family officer at KEEDAC, and his presence in the office may improve or worsen relations between the feuding families.

In the meantime the Narrogin Aboriginal Community Reference Group (NACRG), an organisation comprised primarily of Kicketts and chaired by Priscilla, is proactively making as much noise as it can about gaps in services that impact on the social and emotional health of Aboriginal people and it uses the word ‘racism’ freely, often with adjectives like systemic, institutionalised and covert attached [4,7].

Activism isn’t new to the Kicketts. Chad [3] said they were proud of their ancestor John Kickett who in 1917 wrote letters and gathered signatures as part of a campaign for government permission for his daughters to attend school. (In one letter he wrote: 'Sir, I cannot see why my children could not attend [the school] here at Quairading. My People are fighting for Our King and Country.') [9]

Armed with stories like this, and supported by people like Darryl Kickett, former CEO of the Aboriginal Health Council, and Associate Professor Ted Wilkes from Curtin University’s National Drug Research Institute[10], the Kicketts of Narrogin are unlikely to stop campaigning for a better deal, even if the word ‘racist’ raises a few hackles.

The Kicketts think the police in Narrogin are racist because they don’t take complaints about the behaviour of the feuding families seriously enough [2, 3]. They have publicly complained [11], prompting an inquiry into the police behaviour, the result of which was exoneration, but before the result was in police commissioner Karl O’Callaghan [12] said to a crowd gathered in Narrogin: “I’m very proud of the way you responded to the most recent challenges, I’m very proud of how the town has responded and I won’t have people criticising police for being racist, I won’t have people criticising police for doing the wrong thing when I know you’re out there trying to make decisions in a split second and trying to do it to benefit the community.

Whether the police commissioner ‘will have it’ or not, the criticisms are likely keep coming because the Kicketts want more to be done to stop low level violence from escalating, and they want help with their teenage and adult kids that doesn’t involve the lock-up[3,4].

Asked for his definition of racism, Narrogin's most senior police officer Sen. Sgt Martin Voyez [13] said: "It is when a person is treated differently or adversely because of their ethnic background."

Does it happen in Narrogin?

Voyez: "A little bit, in the ... years I've been here there's been two incidents, what happened to Eli Kickett at the primary school and a hate letter that was sent to Priscilla."

So why do you think a higher proportion of Indigenous people are imprisoned in Australia than non-Indigenous people?

Voyez: "Hmmm, not sure. We don't arrest and charge them because they're Indigenous. Where there is an offence being committed we arrest and charge whether they are Aboriginal or not."

Voyez sits on the Interagency Group that is working on improving service provision and community relations in Narrogin. Dean Colbung, who hosted the wake that turned into a brawl last November, was a member of the Interagency group but he has stepped down, as he may not be returning to Narrogin for a while.

Like many police professionals, Voyez has an air of invulnerability to criticism. Police are used to nicking people who don't want to be nicked, they know that not everyone is going to like them for doing their job. What matters to Voyez is that his superiors are happy with his performance [13].

According to Mayor Don Ennis[14], the police behaviour towards Narrogin's Noongars can not only offend the Noongar population. Asked for a definition he said: "The pure form is when the whole population objects to one group within the population and racism doesn't exist in Narrogin in that pure form.

"What you do have is people perceiving a different application of the laws and rules for Noongar people, over issues like housing allocation and street drinking, and an ill feeling arises from that."

Chad Kickett [3] thinks it's important to talk about racism. He said: "It's not like the KKK is going around, but there is racism in Narrogin, including among some of our people – especially when it comes to sports.

"But it's ok to talk about it because the racist people know who they are, and the ones who aren't should know that we're not talking about them."

He thinks the first thing the town needs to do is admit that there's a problem, once that's done he thinks that progress could be made on working something out.

Getting everyone to admit to the problem is the sticking point though.

While the town is coming together in a number of forums such as the Interagency Group, and the Reconcillation Action Group run by Mike Sully from the town council, there is still a sense in some quarters that the aim of all this work is to get the Kicketts to stop using the 'R word'.

The Kicketts are frustrated to the point of weariness[2,3,4].

As Priscilla[4] put it: "They say they hear us, but they don't hear us."

The collective deafness is evident in bureaucratic statements about what the family feud is all about:

Don Ennis was quoted in *The West* [15] as saying: "no one can define when the arguments started or what they were about … the problem comes when (traditional) animosity rears its head, usually sparked by alcohol."

Police Inspector David Picton King [16] agreed with him, and said: "Long standing animosity between some families is endemic in WA's Indigenous community. It is evident in a range of locations and it ebbs and flows. All of a sudden, for some inexplicable reason, it bubbles up and causes police a great amount of anxiety and work, and then, for no apparent reason, it ebbs again."

Statements like these anger the Kicketts [2,3] who see them as trivialising their issues, making them sound like rowdy drunks who get violent for no reason.

They also miss the point, or demonstrate the lack of communication in the town, despite the many meetings that have been called and held. There are layers of logic behind the feud and the Noongar people of Narrogin are keen to talk about them [1,2,3,4]. The Kicketts say they want to get to grips with social problems at the core of the Gap statistics [2,3,4]. While Murray Riley [17], representing the other side, said: "It's about giving people the opportunity to be their own voice, rather than speaking for them."

The question that remains is whether their dispute will continue to be trivialised to the point of exploding frustration or elevated into a genuine and empowering debate about pathways towards Indigenous self-determination.

Part Five – Notes and sources:

1. Sourced from an interview with Murray Riley and others in a park in East Narrogin on January 25, 2010. The others declined to give their names but contributed to the discussion.
2. Sourced from Basil Kickett interview, January 22, 2010.
3. Sourced from Chad Kickett interview, January 23, 2010.
4. Sourced from Priscilla Kickett interview, January 21, 2010.
5. Crikey, July 1, 2009. http://www.crikey.com.au/2009/07/01/hope-and-concern-jostle-as-times-change-for-cdeps/
6. Media Release: Jenny Macklin April 30, 2008: http://www.jennymacklin.fahcsia.gov.au/internet/jennymacklin.nsf/content/gov_timetable_30apr08.htm
7. Sourced from Priscilla Kickett's letter of submission to the Senate Inquiry: http://www.aph.gov.au/Senate/Committee/indig_ctte/submissions/sub105.pdf

8. Sourced from an interview with Isobel Williams and three others in a park in East Narrogin on January 25, 2010. The others declined to give their names but contributed to the discussion.
9. Biskup, P. (1973). *Not Slaves Not Citizens*, UQP: St Lucia: p. 154
10. Darryl Kickett and Ted Wilkes both spoke in support of the Kickett's position at the senate Inquiry hearing in October 2009. Transcript of the hearing in Narrogin on October 8, 2009 is available as Hansard here: http://www.aph.gov.au/hansard/senate/commttee/S12440.pdf
11. NACRG Media Release: November 16, 2009.
12. Sourced from notes by Andrew Hobbs, editor of *The Narrogin Observer* who recorded and transcribed O'Callaghan's speech.
13. Sourced from Sen.Sgt Martin Voyez interview January 25, 2010.

14. Sourced from Don Ennis interview, January 25, 2010.
15. The West Australian, November 17, 2009. Article by Ben Spencer: http://au.news.yahoo.com/thewest/a/-/mp/6480797/town-at-a-loss-how-family-feud-flared-into-riot/
16. Sourced from a telephone interview with Inspector David Picton King, January 29, 2010.
17. Sourced from an interview with Murray Riley, by telephone on February 1, 2010.

Exegesis:

Introduction

Feuding families are intriguing; the Hatfield-McCoy feud from West Virginia in the US in the late 1800s is now the stuff of folklore, and, as the story is told, it all started when Randolf McCoy accused Floyd Hatfield of stealing his pig (Thomas, 1942). Local authorities are now cashing in on public curiosity about strange folk who killed each other for apparently stupid reasons with a range of tourist attractions that relate the details and tragic consequences of the dispute. The feud between the Montagues and Capulets, in Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, is one of the greatest literary mysteries of all time. Why were they fighting? The bard didn't say, but the moral of the story is simple. The fight was stupid because it resulted in the heartbreak and death of the young protagonists. With stories like this providing associative capital behind the term "feuding families", it is not surprising that editors leapt at the chance to use those words in their headlines when a dispute between two families erupted into a brawl involving shot gun blasts in the wheatbelt town of Narrogin in November 2009.

Media (Spencer, 2009; De Garis, 2009; PerthNow, 2009) reported that the brawl was related to a "family feud" but little or no detail on the origin or cause of the feud was offered in the weeks following the brawl and since then, with one exception, the only follow

up has been court reporting related to the progress of charges arising from the incident. The exception was an article headlined *Town at a Loss How Family Feud Flared Into Riot* that *The West Australian* (Spencer, 2009) ran on December 17 that indicated that questions about the origins of the feud had been asked, but the story failed to provide an answer. Instead it quoted the Narrogin Mayor, Don Ennis saying that there was no reason, other than drunkenness, for the feud.

This project aimed to discover and report the origins of the feud. The key belief underpinning the investigation is that all behaviour, including risky behaviour, is rational, purposive and instrumental towards the attainment of goals (Jessor, 1977). As such, the hypothesis was that there was a reason why the families were feuding, and that use of a journalistic (feature writing) methodology (Adams, 1999) involving patient and respectful interviewing practices could find out what it was and present it to the public.

Significance

There are a number of reasons why it's important to tell this story at greater length and depth that the media to date has done (Spencer, 2009; De Garis, 2009, PerthNow, 2009). Foremost of which is that simplification of the issue is a form of misrepresentation, and concerns have been raised that misreporting of political debate with Indigenous communities can fuel racist stereotyping (Maddison, 2009). The families involved in the brawl are Aboriginal Australian Noongar people – the word Noongar describes the people from the area south of Geraldton and east of Esperance. The Aboriginality of the families was mentioned in media reports about the brawl (Spencer, 2009; De Garis, 2009, PerthNow, 2009).

Concern about the portrayal of Aboriginal issues in the Australian, specifically West Australian media is not new. Plater (1993) cites Elliot Johnston QC as saying, in his report to the 1991 Deaths In Custody Royal Commission, that while the media played a role in calling attention to the need for the Commission that Aboriginal people generally claimed that they have had an extremely bad deal from the media, in terms of access and presentation. Plater added: "We all accept that and know the pain and suffering that has been caused by the lies and distortions, negative stereotypes and clichés that the media often uses when reporting on Aboriginal issues."

Insight into why this happens was given to the Commission by journalist (cited in Plater 1993, p. 204) who said:

> Racial stereotyping and racism in the media is institutional, not individual. That is, it results from news values, editorial policies, from routines of news gathering that are not in themselves racist or consciously prejudicial. It results from the fact that most

> news stories are already written before an individual journalist is assigned to them, even before the event takes place. A story featuring Aboriginals is simply more likely to be covered, or more likely to survive subeditorial revision or spiking, if it fits existing definitions of the situation.

In addition to being inaccurate, in presenting the troubles in Narrogin as something that could have been simply solved by more rational people, or by failing to explain the intelligent ideological differences at the core of the dispute, aspersions are being cast on the people involved. As Larissa Behrendt put it, non-Aboriginal people are "quick to label any type of internal dispute as evidence that the Aboriginal community is incapable of running its own affairs" (1995, p. 94-5). Jackie Huggins (cited in Maddison, 2009, p. xxx) made a similar point, writing: "when blacks publicly analyse and criticise each other it is perceived as infighting. However, when non-Aboriginals do the same it is considered a healthy exercise."

Maddison (2009) also cited academic Colleen Haywood as saying that few other issues are represented as simplistically in the Australian media as Aboriginal politics. Haywood added that journalists seek to present the view that Aboriginal people are 'all like minded', and where there are differences of views, they are used as evidence that Aboriginal people are not organised and don't know what they are talking about. Hayward said "we have different views. That's healthy." (Maddison, 2009, p. xxix). It is, except when concrete blocks are thrown and shotguns are fired into brawling crowds. The escalation of the Narrogin dispute into physical violence indicates a level of crisis, a need for something to be done to help the community deal appropriately with its distress, its passions and its differences. The escalation into violence doesn't demonstrate that the fight is foolish. If anything it serves as an indicator that there are likely to be complex issues at its core that matter to members of different generational strata within the community. If this is the case then in-depth reporting of the Narrogin feud, exploring the issues and, if possible, allowing it to be framed as a political dispute, has the potential to stimulate diplomatic progress between the two parties, and to promote respectful reflection on the broader issues among all of the stakeholders in Narrogin.

While sharing the story could help, there are good reasons for the Narrogin families to have been tight lipped about the deeper causes of the feud to date. Maddison (2009, p. xxx) wrote: "There are sound reasons for Aboriginal leaders and activists to display a degree of wariness about revealing their internal conflicts and contradictions. Disagreements between Aboriginal leaders and activists have often been used to embarrass them or to undermine their credibility." With this in mind it was deemed important to invest time in trust building and to give the interviewees more control than is common in usual journalistic practice over the way their words would be used.

Finally, the telling of this story is not only important to Narrogin, it's important for all of Australia. It is a bell tolling for all of us. If this story is run in the national press, it will be part of the public conversation about Indigenous affairs, and it will showcase how the ideological dynamics and policy shifts playing out on a national scale are impacting on a specific community.

Methods:

The methodology employed in this project is journalistic, as described by Lamble (2004).

Materials:

Before leaving for Narrogin I compiled a scrapbook of articles published about Narrogin, over the past three years. When I got there Andrew Hobbs, editor of *The Narrogin Observer* gave me a file containing press releases, transcripts, more press clippings and contact phone numbers.

Interviews:

I arrived in Narrogin on Wednesday January 20 and left on Tuesday January 26, 2010. My process is outlined in detail here to show the way that both families were approached, in my attempt to privilege them equally. On Thursday, January 21, I called Dean Colbung (host of the wake that turned into a brawl), who said he was out of town, took my number and said he would ask his sisters to call me. I then called Priscilla Kickett, chair of the Narrogin Aboriginal Community Reference Group (NACRG), who asked me to meet her during her lunch hour that day. I interviewed Priscilla, in person, and she introduced me to her sister Sonia (who lives in Clark St, next door to Dean Colbung), and Janine Terry (a former member of the Interagency Group), and I interviewed both of them as well. I also met Basil Kickett (a member of NACRG, and one of the men who attempted suicide) and Shane Bolton (a local police officer related to the Kickett family) that day and made a plan to visit Basil for an interview the following day. I also met Lara McKinley from Oxfam who was in town running a PhotoVoices workshop for young Noongar people; the workshop was co-ordinated through the NACRG. Later that afternoon I went to Clark St to take some photos and met Sonia again and had a second 'on the record' conversation with her.

On Friday, January 22, Laurelle Keough from Oxfam called me to explain Oxfam's involvement in Narrogin. I agreed to help Lara McKinley with the final stage of the workshop, which involved working with the children as they selected photos for use in a (proposed) exhibition and drafting captions. I then conducted a two hour interview with Basil Kickett on the verandah of his house and went for a walk around east Narrogin, visiting Kooraminning. As there was a funeral in town that day and police expected trouble

I made a point of visiting all three bars in town that evening to observe the atmosphere and police response.

On Saturday, January 23, I spent the morning at the PhotoVoices workshop where I met several Kickett-family children and teenagers. That afternoon I conducted a two-hour interview with Chad Kickett at his home. On Sunday, January 24, 2009, I started drafting my articles. I called Dean Colbung again, as I hadn't heard from his sisters and he gave me their phone numbers. I also conducted a brief phone interview with him.

On Monday, January 25, I conducted a one-hour interview with Mayor Don Ennis, followed by a one-hour interview with Sen. Sgt Martin Voyez. I then went to KEEDAC where I briefly met Murray Riley and I met again with Priscilla Kickett and I read her quotes back to her, in the context of the draft article. I then called Dean Colbung's sister Joanne Humes and spoke with her and her sister Olive Penny and made a plan to meet them at a park in east Narrogin at 3pm. I went to the park at the appointed time but they didn't come, as they were dealing with a medical emergency. While I was there I struck up a conversation about CDEP with Isobel Williams and three other people. The older woman in that group, suggested that I meet some of her other relatives and so we drove to a house in east Narrogin where I met Jeffrey Anderson. Murray Riley then happened to drive by and we arranged to meet back at the park. Murray brought Dean's sister Olive Penny with him and there were three other people present as I interviewed Murray. Olive didn't speak much but she nodded in agreement as Murray answered questions about her involvement in the fights.

On Tuesday, January 26, I spent an hour with Basil Kickett and his wife Brenda, and read them their quotes in the context of the draft articles. Both confirmed that their quotes were accurate and in context. I drove back to Perth. In addition to these meetings, as I was staying at the Duke of York Hotel, and dinning there each night, I met a number of other locals who declined to be formally interviewed but who provided me with background information.

After returning to Perth I interviewed Inspector David Picton King by telephone (as suggested by Martin Voyez), and I called Chad and Sonia Kickett, and Murray Riley and read them the draft articles to ensure they were satisfied that their quotes were accurate and in context. I also phoned Martin Voyez again to ask a supplementary question and I contacted the Wheatbelt Primary Health Service, following a suggestion from Dean Colbung, but they declined to speak with the media about employment issues in Narrogin.

Technology and interview protocol

The interviews were recorded in a notebook and all Noongar people interviewed were visited or called back after their interviews and given the opportunity to withdraw or amend any quotes I had drawn from their interviews. None of their unapproved comments have been used in these articles. This strategy, inspired by Lester-Irabinna Rigney's (1999) paper on 'indigenist' research methodologies, was used in the expectation, (based on my experience of interviewing Indigenous people in the Kimberley) that it would elicit more relaxed and genuine discussion than I could achieve using microphones and signed consent forms. I have found that gadgetry is distracting and ethics forms can intimidate people not familiar with academic bureaucracy and protocol (it is not unreasonable for people to suspect that they are signing rights away, rather than gaining rights by signing a form). The non-Indigenous people interviewed were included because of their specific professional roles as mayor, senior sergeant and police inspector and, as they hold those roles, they were deemed to be capable of understanding usual media protocol. In accordance with the MEAA Code of Ethics, I identified myself as a journalist prior to all interviews. Nothing discussed off the record has been used in this project, other than in the form of questions asked to other stakeholders. The interviewees were asked to relate what had happened before during and after the brawl in November, and for their definitions of racism and thoughts about the existence of racism in Narrogin. Most questions were open ended and the interviewees were not challenged on the truthfulness of their comments, or interrogated for more detail then they were willing to give. At no stage did any interviewee become visibly angry or upset with the interviewer, although sadness and anger at others were expressed.

Limitations

Time and space are always limitations in the practice of journalism. More time for longer and slower, more ethnographic, interviews would enabled the creation of deeper relationships with those interviewed which may have elicited more information. More space would have allowed me to use more of the material I gathered during my interviews and to extend the contextualisation part of this paper. I could also have expanded the scope of the study to include more stakeholders such as education and health care workers from Narrogin. However, given that the task was to gather sufficient material to address the hypothesis, (about the existence of a rationale for the feud), the interviews I conducted provided abundant material.

Because the case against Graham and Penny Bolton is still before the courts there are limits on what can be reported about the shooting, due to the potential of incurring penalties for

sub judice contempt of court. In addition some comments made by interviewees in their interviews were defamatory and therefore could not be used.

Ethics

As an employee of Edith Cowan University in Western Australia I am encouraged to work in a manner compliant with the Australian Code for the Responsible Conducts of Research. As such, I submitted an application to the Edith Cowan University Human Research Ethics Committee on January 15, 2009, but was told that the committee would not be meeting in full until February, which would be too late to grant approval to conduct interviews in late January, which was the only time this semester that I could spend a week in Narrogin. As such, it should be noted that this research was not undertaken with the approval of ECU's Human Research Ethics Committee. It was, however, conducted in accordance with the Media, Entertainment and Arts Alliance Code of Ethics, and with the four key principles of the *National Statement on Ethical Conduct in Human Research (2007)*. These principles are embedded in the project as follows:

Research value and Integrity: The value of this project is in the civic importance of furthering public understanding of the manifestation of indigenous disadvantage. The integrity of the project was ensured via strict adherence to the Journalism (MEAA) Code of Ethics, which emphasises accuracy, fairness and balance.

Justice: One aim of the project was to highlight gaps in recent news coverage that may have unfairly portrayed Narrogin's indigenous community as irrationally violent and dysfunctional. In addition, by airing complaints about government processes and policies being made by members of Narrogin's Noongar community this project has the potential, as all forth estate media coverage does, of holding decision makers to account.

Respect for persons: The research process involved long slow interviews, that gave the participants opportunities to tell their stories, to see how they were written up and to amend their comments, in order to record their considered opinions. This interview techinique was selected because it was deemed to be a respectful way of working with participants who may not be as familiar with being interviewed as most other news subjects, and who may feel that their views are underrepresented in other news media reports (Maddison, 2009).

Beneficence: It is hoped that the project will benefit the people of Narrogin by informing journalists who will cover future events in the town about the logic behind the feud; limiting the extent to which conflict is portrayed as random acts by senseless people. It will do this by being published in a medium that maintains on online searchable archive. The interviewing and narrative building process is also potentially empowering to the Noongar

people of Narrogin as, like counselling, journalistic interviewing can provoke self-reflection. (MediaCollege, 2010; White & Epston, 1990). In addition, the feature articles, may function as a form of narrative therapy (White, 2003), helping the opposing parties in Narrogin to understand each others' perspectives better, and resolve their differences, or to find respectful and non-violent ways to disagree. Copies of the article will be printed out and posted to members of both feuding families as well as the mayor and Narrogin police.

Discussion

It is widely acknowledged that feature writing has the potential to evoke emotional responses, by illustrating the human interest elements of political issues (Adams, 1999). The process of writing a series of feature articles about Narrogin revealed a complex series of complaints, some of which fall into the gambit of usual fourth estate reporting (Schultz, 1998), such as questions about the sufficiency of the Government response, but most of which are likely to be of interest to the public because of their universality, and the empathy that feature article treatment makes it possible to feel for the protagonists of the story.

Sarah Maddison (2009, p. xxvi) summed up the challenge facing people like the Kicketts, Dean Colbung and Murray Riley with the words: "No other group of political actors faces greater challenges than Aboriginal people in their struggles to articulate a collective identity, connect with the broader Australian population, and achieve urgent political outcomes. Certainly, no other group of political actors has as much at stake as does this group. Narrogin's Noongar community is struggling with exactly those problems and it is doing so in the hothouse of a small country town, where political issues blur into personality issues, where quarrels bleed from one generational group to the others, and where it's hard to get some breathing space once tempers have flared.

What this enquiry established is that there are at least three generational levels of disagreement in town that all split along similar family lines. At school Kickett-related children have playground arguments with Colbung-related children; the young adults in town are circling each other, shouting insults and vowing revenge for past injuries; while the professionals and grandparents are storming out of meetings, writing press releases and fuming over ideological differences.

While legal limitations and space-constraints prevented the use all of the material I gathered during my interviews, I was able to use enough to frame the current tensions in the town within a cohesive and readable narrative, that allows the participants in the brawl to be perceived as logical and caring people. While it was not my intention at the outset to frame the story in this way, I was prepared at the outset to believe that the Noongar people

of Narrogin were rational and what I saw and heard confirmed my suspicions. While I aimed to tell the story as I heard it, the potential for bias in my selection and omission of material is acknowledged as a natural part of the journalistic process, as discussed at greater length by other journalists who have worked on long-form projects aimed at describing the sentiments of groups of people (Thompson, 1972; Rundle, 2009).

There is scope for further discussion about the interviewing as a means of gathering information. As Charles Briggs wrote, in the midst of a discussion about asymmetries of power in interviewing: "When interviews provide the nation-state and its institutions with representations of marginalized populations, the possibilities for constructing a 'minority voice' that confirms the hegemonic status quo is thus acute." (2003, p. 243-244). He added though that abandoning interviewing would be "as counterproductive and it would be unrealistic". Interviewing is a key element of journalistic methodology and the detail outlined in this exegisis is intended to analysts moving beyond the scope of this paper.

For now it's clear that each of the layers of dispute calls for a different kind of solution, and that solutions are needed. Some work is already being done in efforts to resolve the town's problems. The senate inquiry heard what Narrogin's Noongar leaders had to say and may act on what they heard. Oxfam has funded a counsellor for another six months to provide services via NACRG; Kooraminning has a men's group running; and the release of some new mental health funding was announced by FaHCSIA on February 9, 2010. The ongoing journalistic task is to monitor these developments and report on their successes and failures.

The academic task that follows this investigation is one of deeper contextualization. Comparisons can be drawn between Murray Riley's assertion that "If a Noongar person has a problem, the only person who can fix that problem is that person. Instead of complaining about racism he should be making it his business to find work" and Noel Pearson's (2000) claim that welfare dependency is poison, and the first essential for remedying it is employment. Riley's position is clearly in accord with Pearson's view that to survive as a people indigenous Australians need to get rid of the passive welfare mentality.

Priscilla Kickett's claims that Narrogin is riddled with institutionalised racism can be discussed in the context of Martin-McDonald and McCarthy's (2007) examination of their own whiteness in relation to their work with indigenous Australians that they concluded helped them to move away from upholding "white hegemony and racialist inequality". Priscilla and Chad Kickett's views also clearly resonate with Vicki Grieves' (2003) claims that "Australians as a people have not yet come to terms with the dynamics of race in our society and how racism and colonialist attitudes manifest: they are so ingrained as to be a 'natural' response and an intrinsic part of culture." Grieves added that "The 'great

Australian silence', in Indigenous history until the last three decades, is testimony to the fact that Australian settler colonialism is overwhelmingly characterised by denial." These lines from Grieves are from a paper arguing against the ideology behind Keith Windschuttle's (2002) book *The Fabrication of Aboriginal History, Volume 1.* While Priscilla Kickett and Murray Riley both said that they are not reading the academic arguments about Aboriginal history, their comments are consistent with views expressed in the discourse, and, in being consistent, they support the academics who are claiming that their arguments are relevant to the lives of people living in Australia. This process of comparing the statements made in Narrogin with other things said elsewhere will continue to build on the work begun here, that is the first telling of a story. The positions held by families on both sides of the feud have broader support and Narrogin is, in a sense, a microcosm where the broader debate is played out.

The idea of going to Narrogin and asking the families what they were feuding about was inspired by frustration at the brevity of the media coverage to date; the obvious incompleteness of the story as told in the public sphere. What emerged was not a story about old tribal conflicts; not about land ownership; and not about superstition and black magic that have played parts in other disputes between Aboriginal groups (Davies, 2009). Instead it was about ideology and rights and responsibilities. If anything it illustrates the relevance of questions now being asked about whether Indigenous Australians should vote for their spokespeople, in order to circumvent arguments about who is speaking for whom and whether they have the right to do so (Report of the Steering Committee for the creation of a new National Representative Body, 2009).

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