Keynote Presentation

Being Comfortable with Discomfort

AES26 International Evaluation Conference

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Acknowledgement

- I would like to acknowledge that we are gathering on Larrakia Country today and I pay my respects to the traditional owners, custodians, elders past, present and future.

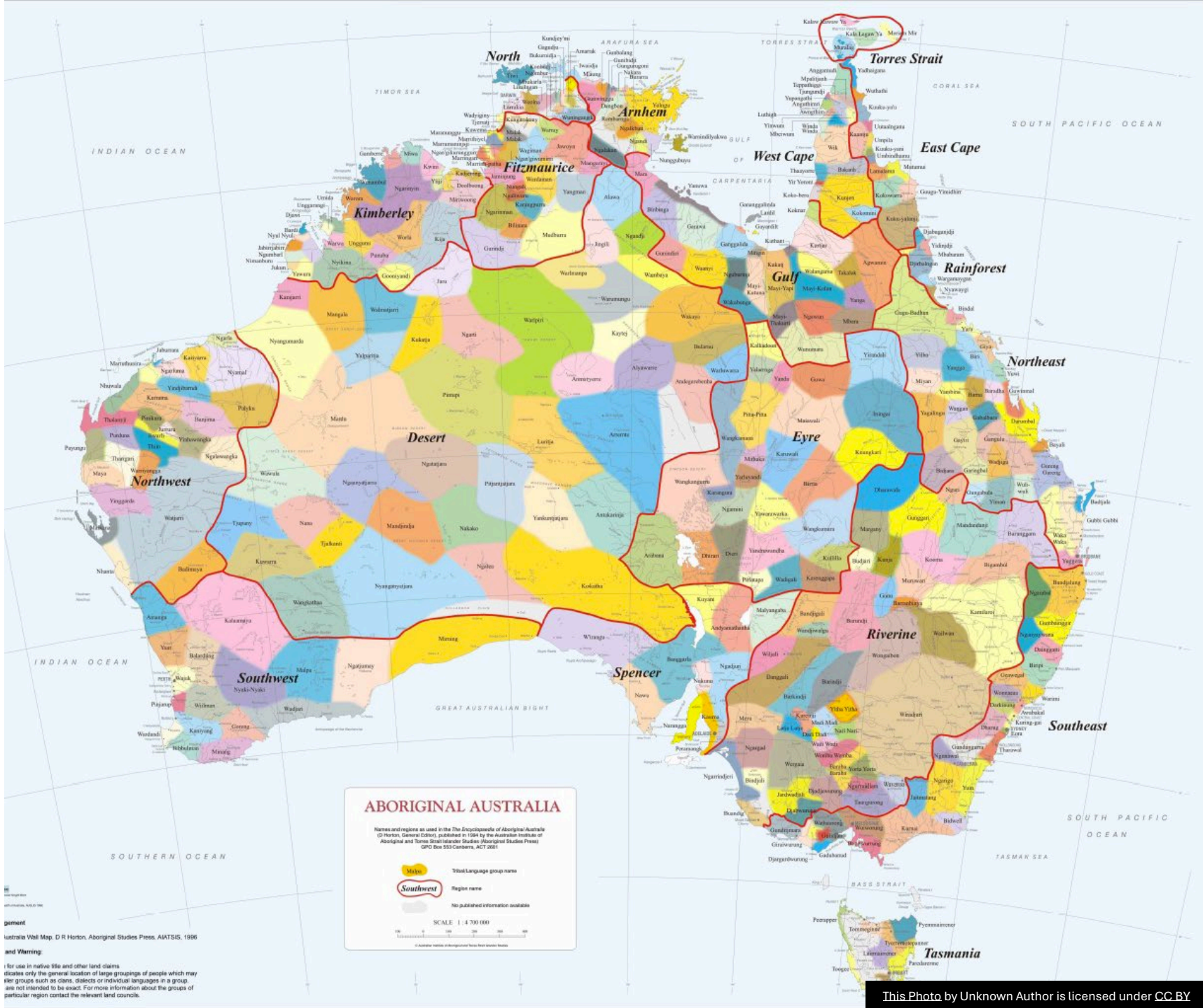




My Story

- Mothers' Cultural Connection in Far North Queensland
  - Mamu/Bagirgibara/Djirribal
- Fathers' Cultural Connection
  - Bulgun-Warra clan
- Western Yalanji in Far North Queensland
- Educator – Early Childhood/Primary/Tertiary Ed.
- Researcher/Evaluator – Indigenous education, governance and leadership, both-ways teaching & learning, Indigenous research methodologies, Aboriginal English. Storyteller

Australia is made up of different and diverse Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander nations, languages and people.



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Slido Questions

- Have you worked in Australian remote or very remote communities?
- Have you worked in remote, regional or urban Aboriginal or Torres Strait Islander communities?
- Have you worked in remote or very remote communities in your own country or other countries?

Being comfortable with discomfort

As a researcher, being comfortable in the discomfort, is having the courage and ability to let go of the reigns, being at ease with vulnerability, and navigating with uncertainty. There is a level of risk taking as we learn to trust the process, go with the flow and be on alert for potential new knowledge transfer through yarning time, kapati times or simply sitting in silence.





Strangely Familiar

In my own experience in working in very remote communities, at first, I felt a little uncomfortable working in new places and spaces on Aboriginal land, with people I didn't really know and had little relationship and languages I could not speak nor understand, it felt strangely comfortable, familiar with a sense of belonging. It was then I realised that this was those strong threads of similarity and cultural connection that somehow draw us together.



A Continual Learner

I do not come with all the answers, I can only speak from my own social, cultural and linguistic positioning and educational, research and evaluation experience and status in the big picture of Aboriginal Australia. I have so much more to learn, but there are strong threads of similarities but also differences within Aboriginal Australia, and this gives me some credibility, and some advantage in working with Aboriginal people.





Community-based Researchers

Evaluation of Nawarddeken Academy (Guenther & Ober 2022)

The importance of Community-based Researchers

Community based researchers are critical to the research process at all phases of research conducted in First Nations contexts. They are **socially**, **linguistically** and **culturally** equipped to carry out the work in an authentic and empowering way, that strengthens the credibility of ethics, processes, cultural protocols, rules and strategies that might otherwise be missed by external researchers. (Ober 2024)



The importance of valuing place in research and evaluation work.

Sharing three stories reflecting the importance of place, people and cultural processes and protocols.

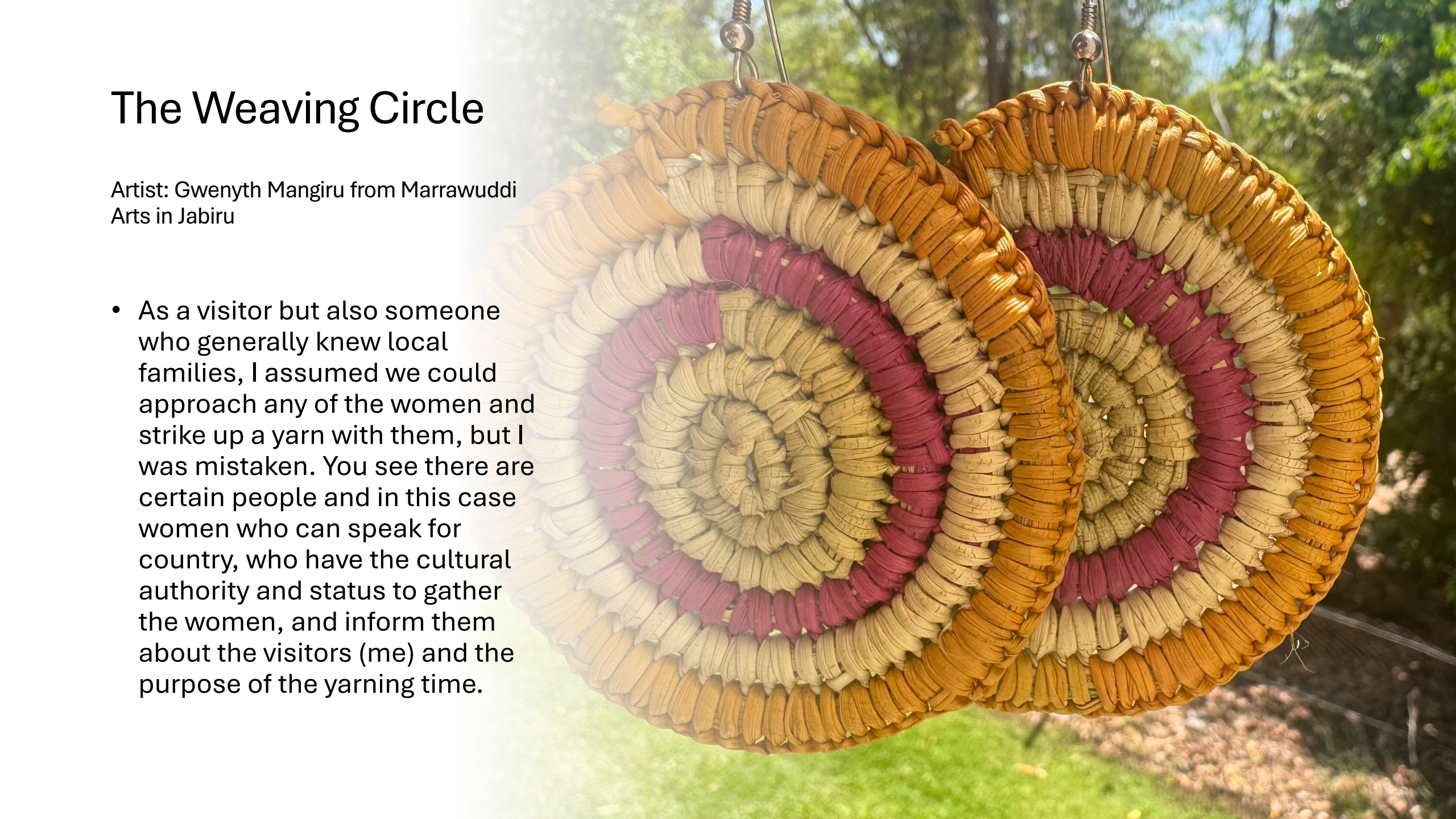
- The Weaving Circle
- Expect the Unexpected
- A wonderful surprise



The Weaving Circle

Artist: Gwenyth Mangiru from Marrawuddi Arts in Jabiru

- As a visitor but also someone who generally knew local families, I assumed we could approach any of the women and strike up a yarn with them, but I was mistaken. You see there are certain people and in this case women who can speak for country, who have the cultural authority and status to gather the women, and inform them about the visitors (me) and the purpose of the yarning time.



Expect the Unexpected

When we realise the airlines have forgotten to book our return flight back to Darwin. So, what do you do, after stressing slightly, now a bit anxious.

What else can you do but Go with the Flow.



A Wonderful Surprise



To my surprise it was home to my friend and former Principal of the Laynhapuy School. We went to Batchelor College together and remained friends since those early years in the 1980s. As I shared my memories of our time together and our last meeting at when she was the Principal, the family wanted to show me her grave and head stone, which we did and took some photos of the family. They were very proud of their sister and what she had achieved for the Yolngu in Northeast Arnhem land.

Reflective Thoughts

What did I learn from the three stories?

The Weaving Circle – Trust the process, let go of the reigns of control and ownership, step back in the distance to look, observe and learn. Allow talk to flow in first language. This talk is rich, deep, noisy and loud but it also engaging raw, real and passionate. At other times talk is quiet, deep in thought and reflective.

Expect the Unexpected – Plan loosely, slow down and pause, seek the positive aspects in the challenging times, seek for the potential in people, dig for gold, draw out the gold, celebrate the gold and expect the unexpected.

A Wonderful Surprise – Sometimes we gain more out of our research than just findings and outcomes. We strengthen, build and re-establish relationships. We learn to be flexible with our time. It is a balancing act, but in the balancing, the uncertainty, the tensions, walls and barriers begin to fall and real, open and honest conversations can happen.

Thank You for Listening!

