

Martuwarra Plenary

Marlikka Persidast, Nyikina Warrwa & Wangkumara Barkindji

The following text is an excerpt from Marlikka Persidast's presentation to the 2021 AIATSIS Summit held on Kuarna Country in Adelaide. During the presentation, she showed a number of short films.

Marlikka Persidast is a Nyikina Warrwa and Wangkumara Barkindji woman. She is also a digital storyteller and researcher with the Martuwarra Fitzroy River Council, an alliance of Traditional Owners who have come together to stand with One Mind and One Voice as a united Council of Senior Elders from Traditional Owner Groups of the King Sound, Fitzroy River, and its Catchment.

Firstly, I said that this is Kaurna land. So I'd like to thank the Elders who have welcomed us here and remind everybody that that is actually an invitation to develop your relationship with country while you're here. I also said in my language that I am a woman who belongs to the Fitzroy River. Now that is a relationship that I have inherited from my ancestors.

Along with that, I've been fortunate to inherit the laws, science, and philosophy. I was lucky enough to grow up on the Western edge of the Northern Savannah, surrounded by culture, cowboys, and academics. When I got older, I went to get my Western education and I was there able to learn the value of First Law, the laws that we have all developed living in our country, living in our regions, which took a lot of time to develop. And that is what we need to survive and to thrive...

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'Some people may have a favourite beach, a park, a family farm, somewhere where you feel at home and company. So when you

have that relationship, the duty falls on you to continue building it and continue developing it because we have to love country and country loves us. I'll now play the third video.

In First Law, everybody is given a Jadiny. Jadiny is a totem, which teaches you to care about things beyond what is simply human. My Jadiny is the crocodile, so I have a relationship with them. I have respect for them, and I have a duty of care to protect them. Different people are given different animals or plants.'

This deep and harmonious relationship shows that there's gotta be a balance in society and removal of the hierarchy. And it teaches you as a young person that you are equal to and share respect with a non-human being, it creates accountability, compassion, responsibility, and it is a lifelong project.

Many Indigenous people do have a totem, but that's not to say that you can not have a totem. The only thing is that you do not pick something that you think is cute or something that you want to necessarily just have an affection

with. It is something that you will take on for a lifelong project to protect until the day you die.

I think I also use the image of the Boab tree there [in the video] to show that these trees are living longer than us. So why do we feel the right to destroy? These videos came about as a completely self-funded project. I had never made film before I can't operate a camera. And it was just this instant urge to get something out there on social media.

So I saved a bit of money for myself and I paid for the fuel and I paid for a bit of the equipment and I'd passed on the editing to a non-indigenous friend. And, they didn't edit it in the way that I wanted. And so I watched them for about four hours and when they left the house, I quickly jumped on and started editing all of it together, even though I'd never done editing.

And so I think it's really important for Indigenous people to start to take control of your narrative, see how you want to be framed and make sure you're part of that process. For me, I really value First Law. And with First Law, it's law of the land, not lore of man. It has become from the land to teach us how to live with that ecosystem where we were based.

So one of the examples when I use First Law is about the Madjulla tree. Now the Madjulla tree is filled with antiseptic, antibiotic, analgesic properties, and as new going to people, we can also use it for a hundred. So we can put it in the water and we can take the oxygen out of the water, the fish rise, and we do sustainable harvest after we've collected what we want.

We remove the Madjulla and the sawfish that lives in the river urinates and creates more oxygen. This ecosystem is living in a symbiotic relationship and it's so important to maintain that we can take one thing. And as a little girl, I used to think, well, what part do we, as human beings have in this ecosystem?

And the old people told me that we keep Country company, we sing to it. We dance. We look after it. And in any other form you have passed this life. You will not have the same privilege to look after Country in the same way.

I've also heard a lot of friends of mine say, but why does this fall on Indigenous people? We do not have all of the resources that the mainstream Australia has. Why do we have to bring them on the

journey? And the thing is that we have a duty of care to Country. We have the philosophies, laws, and science.

We need to re-legitimize ourselves to them in order to protect Country. And when I talk about First Law, I specifically spell it as L A W not L O R E because I do not want to continue using the colonisers language to delegitimise our culture. I've also prepared a one-minute video, which is very different to these.

It uses archive footage to communicate how much we can really tell in a minute. And I think the simplicity of this, in comparison to something that goes for half an hour is really quite profound, and it shows the importance of what we can do in a minute in this modern society. Play the last video and then I'll have a bit more of a discussion-

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'Rivers must have a right to life. And that contribution to all other life must be protected. Some are fearful

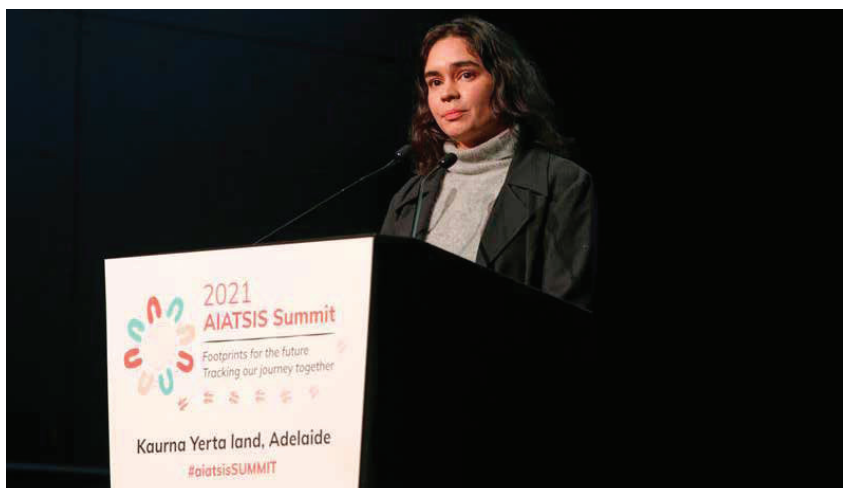
that the humans lead their own extinction. I have hope in human beings for living water lives within them. It's their life they must save if they are to continue living on mother earth; mother earth covered in living waters, cradled beneath the sky.

I keep on singing as I believe, a coalition of hope is coming. I sing this to you. Singing the river laws song for people and Country.'

That video was made with archive footage from the State Library of Western Australia. And I was able to get my brother to do the voiceover, so you can see how every one of us has got different assets that we can use to continue this sharing of knowledge, because it is all about sharing stories. I think when I talk about re-legitimising ourselves as well, I want to look at the word dreaming and dreaming.

Because the dream time, although for some people is folklore, was actually a way for us to communicate our science, our laws, and our philosophy. My auntie who's recently passed, took me to a swimming hole when I was little. And it was there that I debunked this myth that we all kind of have been told. And there, she told me the story about a one-eyed snake.

She told me that the snake was actually mutated by uranium. And it was the first time as a child that I understood that these stories have so much more value and that we have to debunk the propaganda that mainstream Australia has been told. We need to stand up for ourselves and we need to revalue ourselves and legitimize ourselves in our Country for our Country.



Marlikka Perdrisat presenting at the plenary of Day 5 of the AIATSIS Summit 2021, Kurna Country (Adelaide). Photo: AIATSIS