Encountering Karl: *Willem de Vlamingh and the VOC on Noongar Boodjar*

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*"*Karl *(fire) is at the very heart of our culture".*
—Noongar environmental scientist Glen Kelly[1]

This essay examines key feelings that Dutch East India Company (VOC) crews attached to fires they saw in the southwest of the Australian continent, and understood to be the work of Indigenous peoples. It considers both their own feelings and those they projected onto Indigenous populations. To do this, I use a case study of Willem de Vlamingh's expedition of 1696–97, analyzing documents that conveyed perceptions of the fires and fire culture that the crews encountered on Whadjuk Noongar *boodjar* (Land or Country), the lands in and around what is now occupied by the city of Perth, Western Australia.[2] On this expedition to explore the region, VOC crews saw Indigenous peoples but reported they had not been able to meet with them. However, this essay argues that, through fire, Indigenous and VOC peoples were interacting, and the VOC records contain interpretations of these interactions.

After leaving the VOC outpost at the Cape in South Africa in 1694, the Company vessel *Ridderschap van Hollandt* did not arrive as expected in Batavia. Several other ships had previously

1 Glen Kelly, "Karla Wongi: Fire Talk," Landscope 14, no. 2 (1999): 11, https://www.dpaw.wa.gov.au/images/documents/fire/karla-wongi-fire-talk.pdf.

2 For more detail on the twelve Noongar clans that comprise the Noongar nation, see Noongar Boodjar Language Cultural Aboriginal Corporation, Noongar Language Centre, 2019, https://noongarboodjar.com.au. As an oral language, there are varied spellings for Noongar words that are adopted by different Noongar, including for the word Noongar itself (often seen as Nyungar). For more on the Noongar language, see the Noongar Language Centre website; for a guide, see *Noongar Waangkiny: A Learner's Guide to Noongar*, 2nd ed. (Batchelor, Australia: Batchelor Press, Noongar Boodjar Language Centre, 2015), http://noongarboodjar.com.au/wp-content/uploads/2017/10/Noongar-Learners-Guide-2edn-web.pdf. In this essay, each Noongar word is introduced on first usage with an English translation to assist non-Noongar readers, but it should be noted that English language terms are not strict equivalents that echo the full range of meaning and significance of the Noongar words and concepts.

accidently encountered the west coast of the Australian continent, sections of which were barely charted or still largely unknown to the VOC, as too were its peoples, flora, fauna, and resources. In 1696, the *Heeren* (the board of directors of the VOC) in Amsterdam wrote to the Governor-General and Councillors in Batavia of their resolution to sponsor a new investigation of the region. This new survey would aim to produce information about the *Ridderschap*'s fate, if indeed it had come to grief there, and in doing so would provide further information about the region. Consistent with the Company's sometimes dramatic forms of communication, the letter imagined for its readers the disastrous circumstances in which the *Ridderschap* may have arrived in the area, describing the purpose of its "order to send a ship to the Southland or the Land van de Eendraght, principally with the purpose to see whether any knowledge of the Ship Ridderschap van Hollandt is to be found, for we think that the same shipwrecked there, or that she has made the coast for want of food or water, and as this Coast is full of shallows and rocks, she may be wrecked, as there are many examples to be found which happened previously."[3] Subsequently, Vlamingh—a seasoned captain—was appointed commodore of the frigate *Geelvinck*, which was to be accompanied by the hooker *Nijptangh*, captained by Gerrit Collart, and the galliot *'t Weseltje*, whose skipper was Laurens Theunisz Zeeman, setting sail in May 1696. By the time they had reached the vicinity of the Australian continent in December, however, Zeeman had died, and Vlamingh's son, Cornelius, had been made captain of *'t Weseltje*. After fifteen days spent surveying island and mainland areas of the Whadjuk Noongar, the ships traveled north, up along the western coast until Vlamingh determined on February 21, 1697, to sail toward Batavia to inform the Council of their experiences.

A variety of VOC records remain that have been commonly used to study Vlamingh's exploration of the region.[4] Three records survive from those who were aboard the expedition, each with its own style, language, and tone, suggesting different authorship or at least expectations that these accounts would serve different uses and readers within the Company. Vlamingh kept an account of his experiences that appears to be a personal journal, known through a French translation of an original Dutch work that is yet to be located.[5] It does not appear to have entered the Company's records as a formal account of the expedition. The identity of the man writing the daily log of the frigate *Geelvinck*, however, is less certain. The geologist and author of several works on Australia's maritime history Phillip Playford has proposed that it may have been partially authored by Vlamingh, with some sections perhaps the work of the bookkeeper, Joannes Bremer, and others possibly by the upper steersman, Michiel Bloem.[6] Certainly, these texts differ substantially in tone and in some content. The journal of the *Nijptangh*, on the other hand, has

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3 Willem C. H. Robert, ed., *The Explorations, 1696–1697, of Australia by Willem de Vlamingh* (Amsterdam: Philo Press, 1972), 159. This is an extract from a letter of the Committee of the XVII to the Governor-General and Councillors of the East Indies, March 16, 1696.

4 R. H. Major, ed., *Early Voyages to Terra Australis, Now Called Australia* (London: Hakluyt Society, 1859); P. A. Leupe, *De Reizen der Nederlanders naar het Zuidland of Nieuw-Holland, in de 17e en 18e eeuw* (Amsterdam: Hulst van Keulen, 1868); J. E. Heeres, ed., *Het Aandeel der Nederlanders in de Ontdeeking van Australië, 1606–1765* (Leiden, Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1899); J. E. Heeres, *The Part Borne by the Dutch in the Discovery of Australia, 1606–1765*, trans. C. Stoffel (London: Luzac, 1899); Robert, *The Explorations*; Günther Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, trans. C. de Heer (Sydney: Royal Australian Historical Society, 1985); Phillip Playford, *Voyage of Discovery to Terra Australis* by Willem de Vlamingh in 1696–97 (Perth, Australia: Western Australian Museum, 1998).

5 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 8–9.

6 Ibid., 9.

been identified as the work of upper surgeon Mandrop Torst.[7] While the authorship of these accounts differs and reflects the perspectives of people of different status within the expedition's hierarchy, I argue that the authors broadly share a position regarding the exploration of fire on the land they encountered. Those aboard the three ships on this mission held some things in common. They had experienced shipboard life together, albeit as participants with different status in the shipboard hierarchy. Many were employed members of the VOC and part of the crew. However, some were sailors, others soldiers. Not everyone aboard was Dutch; VOC crews frequently comprised men from many parts of northern Europe. Not everyone was European. Aboard VOC ships were often passengers and enslaved individuals. Vlamingh's expedition had picked up several men from the VOC outpost at Cape Town, who were to be pivotal to decisions about interactions on Noongar *boodjar*.

Further accounts of Vlamingh's mission can be found in the VOC administration at Batavia, which is where the voyage sailed after leaving the Australian continent.[8] Finally, Nicolaes Witsen wrote letters about the voyage and included material in the 1705 second edition of his *Noord en Oost Tartarye*, which contains some of his own views, as well as material not found elsewhere that he claimed came from expedition members.[9] All these accounts were therefore penned by people who had been engaged by the VOC in some capacity, although not all were written as part of their functions within the Company organization. Some wrote from firsthand experience of this region of the continent, and others from reading and hearing these accounts.

The accounts make various claims about fires that VOC chroniclers understood to be controlled by Indigenous populations. Henceforth, I shall use the Noongar word *karl* to describe these fires, reflecting the complex set of emotional, cultural, and spiritual meanings attached to fire in its many purposes and uses by Noongar. I do not intend to suggest that VOC authors understood all of *karl*'s meanings for the Noongar people. Yet their writings and behaviors suggest that they certainly understood that their actions with *karl* held emotional portent for Noongar, and on occasions sought to manipulate it accordingly. Instead, my intention is to reflect the reality that these texts were designed to be read by other members of the Company and by a broader European population, but were nonetheless profoundly shaped by VOC encounters with Noongar on their *boodjar*, and Noongar lives were present and central. Specifically, these accounts first documented emotional experiences generated among shipboard personnel by the experience of *karl*, with which the crew saw, encountered, and interacted. Second, they imagined how *karl* generated emotions among Indigenous peoples within their own culture. Finally, VOC authors considered how the manipulation of *karl* by shipboard personnel might produce feelings among local people about the VOC itself.

While the focus of this essay is the experience and emotions of *karl* that were produced in these VOC accounts, I intersperse these with *maia* (voices) of Noongar scholars about both *karl* and the arrival of the Company on their *boodjar*.[10] Indigenous peoples held profound and com-

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7 See Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, for attribution discussion, 74–75.

8 Documents are transcribed and translated in Robert, *The Explorations*, and, more fully, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*.

9 Relevant letters are translated in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, alongside translations from Nicolaes Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarye, ofte bondig ontwerp van eenige dier landen en volken, welke voormaels bekent zijn geweest* (Amsterdam: François Halma, 1705).

10 *Rottnest Island and the Swan River: A Map Celebrating the Tri Centennial of the Landing of Willem de Vlamingh in Western Australia*, December 1696 and January 1697 [map]. Research by Murdoch University; researchers

plex relationships with their homelands that reflected spiritual connections and nourishment, as well as responsibilities to careful management of its ecosystem, which are understood in the English-language term 'Country' when used in this context or the Noongar-language term *boodjar*, which I use predominantly in this essay.[11] These differing voices serve as a reminder that VOC accounts can offer only a partial narrative of these experiences and events, and that other perspectives and many diverse feelings were at play.

This essay's questions are situated in a growing literature concerned with the experiences embedded in European-driven encounters with peoples of the Australian continent prior to 1788. Scholars are now exploring in more detail questions about the nature of emotional exchanges during such encounters. They have examined European records of feelings in unfamiliar locales, emotions that were generated in the uneven power dynamics that favored Indigenous peoples, who were operating on their own Country. Such studies have also considered the consequences of European imaginings about Indigenous emotions regarding European behaviors and policies for further actions on the Australian continent.[12] Noongar scholars and others have long highlighted the significance of the Noongar people to the shaping of European explorers' experiences in the southwest of the continent, both conceptually and practically in terms of the locating of resources, thanks to fire practices.[13] And it is noteworthy that a series of Indigenous authors,

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Len Collard, Lisa Collard, and Ian Henderson; artist Sandra Hill; designers Johanna Standish and Jude Bunn. Base information provided by the Department of Land Administration. Fremantle, Australia.: Fremantle City Council, 1996.

11 A valuable study of these ideas and practices in a broad Australian Aboriginal perspective is that of Deborah Bird Rose, *Nourishing Terrains: Australian Aboriginal Views of Landscape and Wilderness* (Canberra, Australia: Australian Heritage Commission, 1996). For more on the specific connection of Noongar to their Country, see South West Aboriginal Land and Sea Council, "Connection to Country," Kaartdijin Noongar, accessed April 16, 2021, https://www.noongarculture.org.au/connection-to-country/. See also recent discussion of Land and Country in these contexts in Sandra Wooltorton, Len Collard, and Pierre Horwitz, "Living Water: Groundwater and Wetlands in Gnangara, Noongar Boodjar," *PAN: Philosophy, Activism, Nature* 14 (2019): 5–23. For research into place as methodology and learning, see Sandra Wooltorton, Len Collard, Pierre Horwitz, Anne Poelina, and David Palmer, "Sharing a Place-Based Indigenous Methodology and Learnings," *Environmental Education Research* 26, no. 7 (2020): 917–34.

12 Shino Konishi, "François Peron and the Tasmanians: An Unrequited Romance," in *Transgressions: Critical Australian Indigenous Histories*, ed. Ingereth Macfarlane and Mark Hannah (Canberra, Australia: ANU Press and Aboriginal History Inc., 2007): 15; Shino Konishi, "'Inhabited by a Race of Formidable Giants': French Explorers, Aborigines, and the Endurance of the Fantastic in the Great South Land, 1803," *Australian Humanities Review* 44 (2008): 19, accessed April 16, 2021, http://australianhumanitiesreview.org/2008/03/01/inhabited-by-a-race-of-formidable-giants-french-explorers-aborigines-and-the-endurance-of-the-fantastic-in-the-great-south-land-1803/; Shino Konishi, *The Aboriginal Male in the Enlightenment World* (New York: Routledge, 2012), 19. See also Bronwen Douglas, "In the Event: Indigenous Countersigns and the Ethnohistory of Voyaging," in *Oceanic Encounters: Exchange, Desire, Violence, ed. Margaret Jolly, Serge Tcherkézoff, and Darrell Tryon* (Canberra, Australia: ANU Press, 2009), 175–198; Shino Konishi, "Early Encounters in Aboriginal Place: The Role of Emotions in French Readings of Indigenous Sites," *Australian Aboriginal Studies* 2 (2015): 12–23; Maria Nugent, "Indigenous/European Encounters," in *Early Modern Emotions: An Introduction*, ed. Susan Broomhall (London: Routledge, 2017), 406–9; Tiffany Shellam, *Shaking Hands on the Fringe: Negotiating the Aboriginal World at King George's Sound* (Crawley, Australia: UWA Press, 2009); Susan Broomhall, "Emotional Encounters: Indigenous Peoples in the Dutch East India Company's Interactions with the South Lands," *Australian Historical Studies* 45, no. 3 (2014): 350–67.

13 Sylvia J. Hallam, *Fire and Hearth: A Study of Aboriginal Usage and European Usurpation of South-Western Australia*, 2nd ed. (Crawley, Australia: UWA Press, 2014); Len Collard and Dave Palmer, "Looking for the Residents of Terra Australis: The Importance of Nyungar in Early European Coastal Exploration," in *Strangers on the Shore: Early Coastal Contact in Australia*, ed. Peter Veth, Peer Sutton, and Margo Neale (Canberra: National Museum of Australia Press, 2008), 156–172; Len Collard, Clint Bracknell, and David Palmer,

including Tagalaka fire practitioner Victor Steffensen, are arguing for the importance of reviving Indigenous fire practices for healing people and Country in the present time.[14] In this historically focused essay, I seek to examine the precise nature and shifts of VOC descriptions and the analysis of emotions surrounding fire that emerged in Vlamingh's specific expeditions onto Indigenous lands and in response to the actions of Noongar people.

In a modern context in which Indigenous land management practices involving fire are recognized as offering alternative relationships with the land for Australian society, some researchers have turned their attention to what the contents of European-authored sources from the colonial era may offer as evidence of precolonial Aboriginal fire practices.[15] These European sources need to be understood in their historical and political contexts, and as readers, we must be mindful of the limited understandings of their authors of local Indigenous cultures. With awareness of their diverse motivations for interacting with the continent, the records produced by the VOC can add to our knowledge of European perceptions of fire found in British and French sources. These sources recorded not only what VOC authors observed on the Australian continent but also how they deployed fire themselves to further their own objectives—often violently—and gained and circulated knowledge of fire practices in attempts to assert power over Indigenous peoples.[16] Vlamingh explored the Country of many diverse Indigenous clans and nations, who conducted precise and nuanced fire practices. This essay focuses on his crew's perceptions of fire as they relate specifically to Noongar *boodjar*.

A new literature of the VOC in Australia is emerging: one that extends knowledge of specific missions to chart the coasts of the continent, analysis of the archaeological remains, and exploration of the fate of those who traveled upon vessels that were shipwrecked. This new body of work considers closely the nature, motivations, and outcomes of the Company's engagement with the continent's lands and peoples. These studies have considered the significance of the Company as a Protestant Christian enterprise and how this shaped the aims and interactions of VOC personnel who encountered Indigenous peoples.[17] They have explored the nature of VOC emotional rhetoric, as captains and crew members narrated challenging and confronting experiences on the

"Nyungar of Southwestern Australia and Flinders: A Dialogue on Using Nyungar Intelligence to Better Understand Coastal Exploration," *ab-Original* 1, no. 1 (2017): 1–16.

14 Victor Steffensen, *Fire Country: How Indigenous Fire Management Could Help Save Australia* (Richmond, Australia: Hardie Grant Publishing, 2020); see also *Fire and the Story of Burning Country* by Cape York Elders and community leaders and with photographs by Peter McConchie (Avalon, Australia: Cyclops Press, 2013); Traditional Owners conduct and explain wetland burning in the Kakadu National Park in a video recording produced by CSIRO: "Aboriginal Wetland Burning in Kakadu," CSIROpedia, video, last updated March 25, 2019, https://csiropedia.csiro.au/aboriginal-wetland-burning-in-kakadu-2005/.

15 Bill Gammage, *The Biggest Estate on Earth: How Aborigines Made Australia* (Sydney: Allen and Unwin, 2011); R. W. Braithwaite, "Aboriginal Fire Regimes of Monsoonal Australia in the 19th Century," *Search* 22, no. 7 (1991): 247–249; R. J. Fensham, "Aboriginal Fire Regimes in Queensland: Analysis of the Explorers' Records," *Journal of Biogeography* 24, no. 1 (1997): 11–22; Tom Vigilante, "Analysis of Explorers' Records of Aboriginal Landscape Burning in the Kimberley Region of Western Australia," *Australian Geographic Studies* 39, no. 2 (2001): 135–55; Noel Preece, "Aboriginal Fires in Monsoonal Australia from Historical Accounts," *Journal of Biogeography* 29, no. 3 (2002): 321–336, which notes (at 331) that the principal purpose was not to document Aboriginal burning practices and the authors did not enter into discussions with local peoples to understand their actions; Bruce Pascoe, *Dark Emu: Black Seeds: Agriculture or Accident?* (Broome, Australia: Magabala Books, 2014).

16 This is the focus of my forthcoming essay: Susan Broomhall, "Early Modern Histories of Fire on the Australian Continent," *English Historical Review*.

17 Susan Broomhall, "'Quite Indifferent to These Things': The Role of Emotions and Conversion in the Dutch East India Company's Interactions with the South Lands," *Journal of Religious History* 39, no. 4 (2015): 524–44.

continent within Company understandings of its mission.[18] Such investigations make us alert to the ways in which the preparatory documents surrounding Vlamingh's expedition were always responsive to expectations and understandings about the Company, its aims, and its sense of achievements, on the one hand, and in dialogue with prior experiences and assumptions about the potential hostility of the Australian continent and its peoples on the other.

SMOKE AND FIRE TO *KARL* AND *KARL BOYI*

The varied accounts produced from Vlamingh's mission indicate that smoke and fire played a very important role in VOC expectations of discovery in the uncharted lands. However, they did so in interaction with pre-existing ideas circulating within Company records about what and who crew members expected to find, by following the pathway opened up to them by *karl* and *karl boyi* (smoke). As this section explores, these expectations conditioned the crew's defensive behaviors, determined who formed part of the expeditionary contingent to explore the mainland, and shaped how they interpreted the evidence that fire sites seemed to produce.

Traveling from the Cape, the expedition first spied the continent on December 29, 1696. They came ashore on December 30 in the *Nijptangh*'s sloop on an island off the coast "to search for any remains of lost sailors or anything else."[19] This island, Wadjemup to Noongar people, has also become known as Rottnest Island, after Vlamingh's description of seeing the many quokkas (*Setonix brachyurus*) there, which looked to him like rats, while the island seemed like a rat's nest. The next day, the *Nijptangh* journal reported how the crew members "found a piece of Dutch timber with nails still sticking in it, which it seems must be from a wrecked ship."[20] The day after that, the chronicler described how "our sailmaker [Jan Burgersz] found a piece of wainscot on the beach about three feet long and a span wide."[21] Once on the mainland, as the crews continued to search for their colleagues, the *Geelvinck* author wrote of how they found "a plank as from the doubling of a ship, which they also took with them on board, but it was very old."[22] On his return journey to the Netherlands, the steward of the galliot *'t Weseltje*, Cornelis Matthijsz of Carelscroon, provided a report to the Governor and Councillors at the Cape, which was noted in their letter to the *Heeren* of June 24, 1698. This claimed that "on the beach they had found a side of a ship without being able to make out the make nor the nation".[23] These finds seemed to attest to previous maritime disasters in the vicinity.

Certainly, VOC records circulated dramatic narratives of vessels wrecked in the region. For example, when the *Vergulde Draeck* foundered on the western coast of the Australian mainland in April 1656, a group of its crew sailed north to Batavia in search of assistance for the survivors whom they had left ashore. Over the next few years, the Governor-General and Council of the Indies and the Governor at the Cape assigned several further ships to seek out those left behind.

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18 Richard Guy, "Calamitous Voyages: The Social Space of Shipwreck and Mutiny Narratives in the Dutch East India Company," *Itinerario* 39, no. 1 (2015): 117–40; Susan Broomhall, "Shipwrecks, Sorrow, Shame and the Great Southland: The Use of Emotions in Seventeenth-Century Dutch East India Company Communicative Ritual," in *Emotion, Ritual and Power in Europe, 1200–1900: Family, State and Church*, ed. Merridee L. Bailey and Katie Barclay (Cham, Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017), 83–102.

19 *Geelvinck* journal (hereafter *Geelvinck*) in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 123.

20 December 31, 1696, *Nijptangh*, ibid., 154.

21 January 1, 1697, *Nijptangh*, ibid.

22 *Geelvinck*, ibid., 126.

23 Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 214.

Moreover, through instructions to skippers, they urged them to imagine the dreadful fate that might have befallen the survivors, that perhaps "they have perished through hunger and misery or have been beaten to death by savage inhabitants and murdered."[24] Vlamingh's crew, therefore, was alert to the possibility of the potential dangers, natural or human, to be found in the vicinity, and which now appeared to be evident in the materials they were finding on the island.

Other experiences were possible, however, than those imagined by Vlamingh and his compatriots. Whadjuck/Balardong Noongar scholar Len Collard and David Palmer consider how some Noongar might have welcomed the new arrivals on their land:

> Other Nyungar were not frightened by the mariners.
> They said: *Balang djanga ngalang moort*. We must go and meet our relations.
>
> They took the mariners to their *karla* or home fires and said, '*Noonook ngalang moort*, you are our relations. You must *kadadjiny* or learn important things about our *boodjar* or land. [25]

Reflecting on possible early European encounters, they observe how "in Nyungar ontology it is inconceivable that a stranger would arrive in another person's *karleep* or homefire and assert ownership unless they had some form of relationship with the *boodjar* or land in a previous existence. Therefore many of those Nyungar who saw the mariners for the first time would have simply assumed that the mariners had enjoyed a previous connection with Nyungar *boodjar*."[26] What might have mattered for Noongar, Collard and Palmer note, is: "If the newcomers did not know or could not tell their relationship to Nyungar, it was up to Nyungar to provide them with a basic education."[27]

One of the first notable observations that Vlamingh's compatriots recorded from the island was smoke. As Collard has stated, "When Dutch sailors landed on our shores, Nyungar had *karla* (camp sites) in and around the big *beelya*, later to become the Swan River."[28] At the same time, as the crew members were exploring the island, they were aware of what they understood to be human activity on the mainland. Vlamingh's own account highlighted smoke as significant: "[O]ur bookkeeper arrived with a report that on the coast opposite us he had seen smoke, but that he had seen nothing else of importance."[29] On the same day, December 31, both the *Geelvinck* and *Nijptangh* authors recorded that "the steersman who had been on board reported that he and all the crew had seen much smoke rise up on the mainland coast" and "[o]n the mainland coast smoke was seen to rise up in several places, about three to four miles from us."[30] The following day, they reported "smoke rising in several places along the mainland coast" and that "our people

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24 Louis Zuiderbaan, trans., in James A. Henderson, *Marooned: The Wreck of the Vergulde Draeck and the Abandonment and Escape from the Southland of Abraham Leeman in 1658* (Perth, Australia: St. George Books, 1982), 62–63; see also Broomhall, "Shipwrecks, Sorrow, Shame," 83–102.

25 Collard and Palmer, "Residents of Terra Australis," 170. See also Collard, Bracknell, and Palmer, "Nyungar of Southwestern Australia," 14–15. On alternative spellings of Noongar words, please see note 2 above.

26 Collard and Palmer, "Residents of Terra Australis," 170.

27 Ibid. See also Collard, Bracknell, and Palmer, "Nyungar of Southwestern Australia," 14–15.

28 Len Collard, Sandra Harben, and Rosemary van den Berg, *Nidja Beeliar Boodjar Noonookurt Nyininy: A Nyungar Interpretive History of the Use of Boodjar (Country) in the Vicinity of Murdoch University*, (report for Murdoch University, 2004), 27, https://researchrepository.murdoch.edu.au/id/eprint/21353/1/Nidja_Beeliar_Boodjar_Noonookurt_Nyininy.pdf.

29 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 84.

30 December 31, 1696, Geelvinck in Schilder, Voyage to the Great Southland, 123, and Nijptangh, ibid., 154.

fetched firewood and again saw smoke rising up in several places on the mainland."[31] On January 2 and 3, these experiences were repeated. "As before, saw smoke rise in several places on the mainland coast," wrote the *Geelvinck* author, while the *Nijptangh* writer recorded, "[a]gain saw smoke rise in many places on the mainland" and "after sunset we saw many fires burning along the entire mainland coast."[32] On January 4, a first expeditionary party set out for the mainland.

Vlamingh's men were primed to think of smoke and fire as a way of detecting VOC shipwreck survivors. Previously, in 1629, Commodore Francisco Pelsaert had set on the continent's shores Wouter Loos and Jan Pelgrom de Bij van Bemmel, two men whose death sentences for their part in the *Batavia* murders he had commuted to abandonment. His instructions also permitted the men to attract any future Company vessel sailing in the area by giving "suchlike signs as shall appear to be done with purpose, be it with smoke or otherwise."[33] In early March 1658, while searching for the survivors from the *Vergulde Draeck*, Aucke Pietersz Jonck, captain of the *Emeloordt*, reported signs of smoke along the coast, which he read as evidence of VOC survivors: "[A]t once we saw smoke rising in the ESE and also in the E, which we were sure to be signals."[34] Sailing with the *Emeloordt*, Samuel Volckertszoon, captain of the *Waeckende Boey*, interpreted observations of smoke and fire similarly as signs of the VOC survivors: "[A]t dusk, we saw a fire close to the shore, hoped it was lit by Christian people, either the *Draeck*'s or the *Hoop*'s, since we had never observed such a fire. And so we fired a cannon, whereupon another fire close to the other was seen."[35] A small contingent investigating the mainland, led by *Waeckende Boey*'s upper steersman, Abraham Leeman, was subsequently left behind. They prepared to light their own fires to attract their vessel to their aid:

> The man who was on the lookout cried suddenly "A sail, a sail!" Then we ran up the hill together, and I saw that this was true; had a fire lit at once, and set fire to a great many bushes so that it seemed that the entire island was on fire. I was glad as if we had found a new life. I had a great deal of wood brought to an elevation away from that fire, so that in case they should fire a gun we could light it, so that they would notice that there were Christians. [36]

By the time of Vlamingh's voyage to the region, VOC crews had embedded a pattern of fire observation and practice as signals of their own existence on the continent. [37]

Although the repeated records of smoke in the journals of those aboard Vlamingh's expedition were never explicitly connected to the potential presence of VOC crew or to Indigenous peoples, smoke and the hope of locating people went together in the minds of the VOC. However, the language describing precisely who it was that the crews were searching for appeared to shift over the course of the two weeks that the party spent in the area. As their journals made clear, exploration of such smoke signs sought to uncover people, although whether VOC or local was unclear:

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31 January 1, 1697, *Geelvinck*, ibid., and *Nijptangh*, ibid.

32 January 2, 1697, *Geelvinck*, ibid., 124; January 2 and 3, 1697, *Nijptangh*, ibid.

33 V. D. Roeper, ed., *De schipbreuk van de Batavia, 1629* (Zutphen, Netherlands: Walburg, 1993), 187; Francisco Pelsaert, *The Batavia Journal of Francisco Pelsaert*, ed. and trans. Marit van Huystee (Fremantle, Australia: Department of Maritime Archaeology Western Australian Maritime Museum, 1988), 80.

34 Henderson, *Marooned*, 87.

35 Ibid., 106.

36 Cornelis de Heer, ed., "My Shield and My Faith," *Westerly* 8, no. 1 (1963): 40. On Leeman's emotional expression, see Broomhall, "Shipwrecks, Sorrow, Shame," 83–102.

37 For more on the VOC's fire practices, see Broomhall, "Early Modern Histories of Fire."

they set out "to try to find people"[38] "[b]ut however thoroughly we explored everything, we found no people."[39] The pursuit of smoke had, however, uncovered fire sites that they understood to have been produced by humans and which were surrounded by footsteps that they interpreted as those of children and the elderly, that is, the people whose lives appeared to be lived around such hearths. Increasingly, the language of the journals made it clear that the crew expected it to be Indigenous people whom they would locate. The *Geelvinck* became more specific in that the crew sought "to see whether we could lay aboard any of the inhabitants".[40] The *Geelvinck*'s phrasing revealed the violent consequences of what locating Indigenous fires enabled them to do. The *Nijptangh* diarist was more explicit regarding their intentions "to see if at nightfall we could surprise the inhabitants,"[41] as was Vlamingh, "hoping in this way to catch one of the inhabitants."[42] Although it did not appear explicitly in the VOC preparatory documentation for this expedition, Witsen wrote in March 1696 to Gisbert Cuper of his hopes that the mission would manage "to catch a South Lander and bring him hither".[43] Witsen expanded in his later published account of the voyage, where he described how the capture of Indigenous people, whose lives they imagined might be available to purchase, could further their mission: "[W]e had given the order that some natives should be conveyed here either by purchase or voluntarily, in order to learn the Dutch language so as to give an account of everything".[44] Smoke and fire progressively came to be seen as *karl* and *karl boyi*, both of which could be used as tools for locating Indigenous people who, it was hoped, would serve Company interests.

The actions of the VOC crews as they approached fire sites indicated that they anticipated that those they would encounter would not be like Europeans. VOC authors specified the distinct composition of several missions to locate inhabitants of the mainland. Thus, the *Geelvinck* diarist recorded how they "rowed away at 2 o'clock in the morning and came to several fires, where we kept very quiet and sent 8 well-armed men with 2 blacks ashore to find the people there".[45] The author of the *Nijptangh* journal also made particular note that the group contained "two of the abovementioned blacks whom we had brought from the Cape."[46] The role of the latter, as well as armed men, was evidently important in approaching fire sites. On another occasion, the *Geelvinck* journal recorded the following: "[S]aw several smoke plumes rise up, approached them with 3 people, viz. our bookkeeper and upper-steersman and the under-steersman of the galliot with those two [I]ndians".[47] Vlamingh also recorded: "[W]hen we were close enough we despatched eight well-armed men with two Indians to try to catch one of the inhabitants."[48] The presence of these two men at the vanguard of attempts to meet with local peoples suggests that the VOC crews thought they might be useful in some way in interacting with the people they expected to find. A letter from Governor van der Stel and the Councillors at the VOC colony at the Cape to

38 January 6, 1697, *Nijptangh*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 155.
39 January 5, 1697, *Nijptangh*, ibid.,154.
40 January 8, 1697, *Geelvinck*, ibid., 125.
41 January 11, 1697, *Nijptangh*, ibid., 156.
42 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 87.
43 March 12, 1696, Witsen to Gisbert Cuper, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 4.
44 Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 220.
45 January 12, 1697, *Geelvinck*, ibid., 127.
46 January 5, 1697, *Nijptangh*, ibid., 154.
47 January 8, 1697, *Geelvinck*, ibid., 125.
48 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 87.

the *Heeren* in Amsterdam, written in October 1696, confirms that they had attempted to find men locally who were from homelands "about the South Land". It recorded not only how the vessels were restocked there but also how they had

> supplied as interpreters three black convicts, experienced in divers languages, and, as far as we could find here at the Cape, of birth about the South Land, having these names and experienced in the following languages, to wit:
>
> Aje of Clompong speaks: Malay, Lampoen, Bima, Sambauwe, Tambora, Taci, Sanger, Macassar, Javanese, Portuguese, Dutch.
>
> Mangadua of Macassar speaks: Macassar, Boganese, Malay, Javanese, Gunouw, Amboynese, Portuguese, Dutch.
>
> Jongman of Bali speaks: Javanese, Malay, Bali, Portuguese, Dutch.49

By comparison to the governing officials at the Cape, the journal authors were less interested in recording with precision the names, skills, and origins of these men. In the shipboard accounts, they were termed variously "Indians" (*Indianen*) or "Blacks" (*Swarten*). These terms suggest that what was important to the authors about these men's identities was their dissimilarity to Europeans, rather than precisely what their own cultural origins might have been. That the VOC crews perceived the people in the uncharted land as similar to non-European populations also seemed to have been indicated elsewhere by the comparisons made by the *Nijptangh* eyewitness of the Noongar huts to those of the Hottentots, peoples whom the crews knew from their experiences at the Cape. The *Nijptangh* chronicler recorded how when they had first come ashore, they had "encountered after an hour's advance a small hut quite as bad as those of the Hottentots".[50]

Adding to the otherness of the people Vlamingh's crew expected to find by their hearths were more otherworldly imaginings. The VOC authors recorded signs of habitation discovered by the crews in terms that anticipated encounters with unworldly creatures, potentially giants. Such ideas were already circulating in reports about the continent's people. On Abel Tasman's earlier voyage of 1642, his crew had reported finding trees that "bore notches made with flint implements, the bark having been removed for the purpose; these notches, forming a kind of steps to enable persons to get up the trees and rob the birds' nests in their tops, were fully 5 feet apart so that our men concluded that the natives here must be of very tall stature, or must be in possession of some sort of artifice for getting up the said trees."[51] After the *Emeloordt*—one of the ships sent to search for the survivors of the *Vergulde Draeck*—returned to Batavia, the Governor-General and Council made particular note that the crew had indeed seen "5 black people of an unusually great stature."[52] As they sought out human interactions, Vlamingh's men found many signs of recent habitation, including footsteps. His own account noted the "footprints of men in the sand, also of people of varying age and sex, such as girls, children and men, young and old,

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49 Quoted in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 203. Schilder explores further the languages described and the potential homelands of origin for these men.

50 January 5, 1697, *Nijptangh*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 154.

51 J. E. Heeres, ed., *Abel Janszoon Tasman's Journal* (Amsterdam: Frederik Muller and Co., 1898), 15.

52 "Die van Emeeloort hebben op seeker plaets oock 5 swarte menschen gesien van een ongemeene groote stature," December 14, 1658, in W. Ph. Coolhaas, ed., *Generale Missiven van Gouverneurs-Generaal en Raden aan Heren XVII der Verenigde Oostindische Compagnie*, vol. 3: 1655–1674 (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1968), 211.

and of ordinary stature."[53] The latter part was significant. Both the authors of the *Geelvinck* and the *Nijptangh* made similar remarks, suggesting their preconceived notions of the enormous size of the people they might meet. Early on in their exploration of the mainland, for example, the expeditionary group had located "a river, on the banks of which were several footsteps", which the *Nijptangh* author observed were "no larger than ours".[54] Other footprints they uncovered, the *Geelvinck* author surmised, were "of children and old people, but no larger than normal size".[55] These remarks seem designed to calm their own fears about the inhabitants of these lands. Witsen too assured the recipient of one of his letters that the crew "saw a great many human footprints both of old people and young children, but were of an ordinary size" and, in his published account, "of an ordinary shape, which they had compared with their own feet".[56] These remarks suggest that travelers imagined the continent as a land of otherworldly giant peoples—as would Jonathan Swift later—a myth that it was important to dispel.[57]

Following the trail of smoke and fires was seen by VOC crews through the prism of uncertainty and potential danger. The VOC crews decided to arm themselves while seeking out fire sites, primed for potential violence by reports of previous hostile encounters between the Company and local peoples in the uncharted regions south of the VOC outpost at Batavia. For example, earlier VOC instructions, such as those prepared for Abel Tasman's exploration of the continent in 1642, gave this warning: "In landing with small craft extreme caution will everywhere have to be used, seeing that it is well-known that the southern regions are peopled by fierce savages, for which reason you will always have to be well armed and to use every prudent precaution, since experience has taught us in all parts of the world that barbarian men are nowise to be trusted."[58] This advice was given not without some degree of reflection upon the actions of Europeans themselves, if not specifically those of the Company, "because they commonly think that the foreigners who so unexpectedly appear before them, have come only to seize their land, which (owing to heedlessness and over-confidence) in the discovery of America occasioned many instances of treacherous slaughter."[59] From the investigation of his crew on the island, Vlamingh's account recorded seeing "constant smoke on the mainland, whereupon we decided to arm ourselves well to go there, and to explore everything closely."[60] After a first small group from the *Nijptangh* went ashore to the mainland on January 4, the following day a large contingent was tasked to explore more fully, after the deliberation of the Plenary Council, "in God's name."[61] They approached the mainland,

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53 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 86.

54 January 5, 1697, *Nijptangh*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 154.

55 January 8, 1697, *Geelvinck*, ibid., 125.

56 Witsen to Gisbert Cuper, [1698], ibid., 215, and Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, ibid., 217.

57 Swift, of course, was well aware of the Dutch discoveries and those of William Dampier, who had visited the western coast of the continent just a few years before Vlamingh. As Konishi notes, "In a letter Gulliver admits to advising his 'cousin Dampier' on 'his book called *A voyage round the world*,'" here referring to the famed English buccaneer William Dampier who landed in north-western Australia twice in the late seventeenth century. Lilliput and Houyhnhnms Land, inhabited by fabulous races of giants, little people, horses, and yahoos, were mapped south of Java and next to the actual Dutch discoveries in Australia: the former near Van Diemen's Land (Tasmania) and the latter next to Edel's Land, Lewin's Land, and Nuyt's Land (all of Western Australia)." Konishi, "'Inhabited by a Race of Formidable Giants.'"

58 Heeres, *Abel Janszoon*, 134.

59 Heeres, *Abel Janszoon*, 134.

60 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 85.

61 January 8, 1697, *Geelvinck* in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 125.

however, prepared for a hostile encounter in which God's protection would not be deemed sufficient. This group, as the author of the *Nijptangh* noted specifically, comprised eighty-six men "all well provided with weapons," including "both soldiers and seamen".[62] As the Company men usurped what they thought were Indigenous fires, or as they built their own, the defensive practices of Vlamingh's men pointed to their fear. The *Nijptangh* eyewitness reported how "four guards were posted every quarter of an hour" on one occasion where they spent the night around a firesite that they had come across, apparently vacated, and occupied themselves.[63] On building their own fires, Vlamingh elucidated his defensive logic: "[S]ince some of the inhabitants, at the sight of our fires, might come close, I ordered the sentries to be very watchful all around."[64]

As reported by VOC sources, Vlamingh and his crew had arrived on Noongar *boodjar* already armed not only with firepower but also with powerful ideas about the nature of the local people to whom *karl* and *karl boyi* might lead. Earlier VOC records informed them that native peoples on the uncharted lands were not expected to be like Europeans, were potentially much larger than them, and might be hostile and violent to outsiders. The discovery of footsteps allowed the investigating party to alleviate fears about the bodily scale of local peoples and to circulate reassurances in published accounts. Yet *karl* did not provide the VOC opportunities for human interaction, purchase, or kidnap, as Vlamingh had hoped. As such, imagination could continue to prevail and reinforce existing Company views of local people. Thus, "to all appearances," concluded Witsen from what, by his own admission, was a failure of the mission to uncover more information, "this seacoast is inhabited by nothing but savage naked people".[65]

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF *KARL*

In their interaction with *karl* on the mainland, Vlamingh's men had drawn a number of conclusions about its meaning in local culture, as well as its value for them. They presented some of these findings explicitly and others through the ways that the VOC crews exploited fire dynamics on Noongar *boodjar*.

Repeatedly, the diarists of Vlamingh's exploring party reported how they followed smoke to lead them to fire sites. However, their recorded observations were few and these accounts, made in the immediate wake of their searches, emphasized that fire did not lead them to contact. As the *Geelvinck* author seemed to lament on one occasion, the party "saw no people or anything else but the fires."[66] Another opportunity appeared to present itself during an overnight stay on the mainland, as Vlamingh recounted, "at 2 o'clock at night, upon observing the glow of several fires, we boarded very softly and rowed noiselessly towards that place, and when we were close enough we despatched eight well-armed men with two Indians to try to catch one of the inhabitants." These hopes, though, were dashed, for as his account continued, "they went straight to these fires and when they arrived there they neither found nor saw anybody."[67] The primary focus of these records was the party's lack of success, but on some occasions, the crew documented more about how *karl* formed part of local lives. The diarist of the *Nijptangh* connected a series of observations

62 January 5, 1697, *Nijptangh*, ibid., 154.
63 January 5, 1697, *Nijptangh*, ibid., 155.
64 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 89.
65 Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 220.
66 January 12, 1697, *Geelvinck*, ibid., 127.
67 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 87.

that made clear the centrality of *karl*, noting the party's discovery of "several footprints and the imprint of a hand in the sand, where the marks of the thumb and the fingers proved sufficiently that they had not been there long. Moving up further we found a newly lit fire and three small huts".[68] The following day, as they journeyed up the *bilya* (river), they went ashore, "upon seeing seen several fires. We met with eight and saw a heap of branches lying near each, but no people".[69] These reports made clear that the crew had indeed seen more than "no people," although the few words they devoted to their observations of *karl* speak perhaps to the disappointment of what they felt these fire sites offered them by way of information.

While the journal entries relating to the voyage were extremely limited in their commentary on *karl*, Witsen's varied accounts, written a few years after its conclusion, suggest that the crew had understood, or reflected, much more on *karl* and its significance for the Noongar people. For one thing, as scattered references in the journals already hinted, *karl* and huts commonly went together. As Witsen concluded, the crew had seen huts, about which they noted that local people "always burn a fire in front of them".[70] In Witsen's published account, the observations of the crew were revealed to be far more extensive. What he recorded for his readers was, he claimed, "according to the accounts of our mariners who visited the South Land or Hollandia Nova."[71] Here, readers could learn that the huts had "an opening in one side in front of which the inhabitants commonly have a fire going"[72] and that "the fires are lit near the huts according to how the wind blows, and that they place the opening according to it, which indicates that at night it is quite cold in this region, so that the fire is necessary for these naked people, except that it also serves them to drive off the flies and mosquitoes which vex the people terribly".[73] These observations highlighted strategic and integral communal uses of fire in Noongar culture. As Noongar environmental scientist Glen Kelly has written, "*karl* not only describes fire, but also our immediate or nuclear family [...] the importance of fire as a centrepiece for family and daily necessities of life, such as cooking, warmth and light."[74] Company men had grasped at least some of the more practical elements of what fires could mean in Indigenous lifestyles.

Furthermore, the crew had distinguished a regular pattern between the use of *karl boyi* to avoid mosquitos during the day and the benefits of warmth to be gained by night. Witsen reported "many fires lit during the night, and by day a great deal of smoke"[75] and, in his published account, "smoke is seen rising up everywhere by day, and fire by night".[76] VOC authors did not explicitly consider the value of *karl boyi* in the varied hunting practices articulated by Noongar Elder Mort Hansen in a recent interview, such as to disguise human scent.[77] Nor did they appear

68 January 11, 1697, *Nijptangh*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 156.

69 January 12, 1697, *Nijptangh*, ibid.

70 Witsen to Cuper [1698], ibid., 215.

71 Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, ibid., 220.

72 Ibid., 218.

73 Ibid., 219.

74 Kelly, "Karla Wongi," 11.

75 Witsen to Cuper [1698], in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 215.

76 Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, ibid., 218.

77 "Noongar Stories at Forrestdale Lake," Perth Region NRM, August 11, 2014, video, 7:58, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pvGRCOZnhyI; see also the work of Fiona Kost on Nyungar fire practices: Fiona Kost, "Burning the Bush: The Development of Australia's Southwest Botanical Province," in M. I. J. Davies and F. N. M'Mbogori, eds., *Humans and the Environment: New Archaeological Perspectives for the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013), 117–134.

to consider *karl boyi* as a potential communication between Noongar, an important function that Whadjuck/Balardong Noongar Elder Dorothy Winmar has highlighted:

> [A] lot of these big hills or rocks were very useful to Aboriginals, because they used to get up on top of the rock and send smoke signals to let the one mob know what was going on to another tribe. They would make a big fire and when the other people on some other rock saw it, they would tell them they saw their fire and then they would go down and meet each other. They might tell each other news, like, if an old elder died and they wanted to gather around.[78]

Furthermore, the crew had looked closely around the huts and *karl*. Through them, they had made assessments of what local people ate: "hot coals or burning wood were seen with fish lying on or near to it to be cooked".[79] Inside the huts, "sticks were found which seemed to be used to produce fire".[80]

While none of these VOC accounts explicitly conceptualized the potential for spiritual meanings for fire or for the complex lore that governed Noongar use of fire, the crew's actions indicated an understanding that fire was culturally and practically significant to Noongar lives. Witsen's accounts suggest that the VOC party had made assessments about the centrality of fire to Indigenous culture that were far more detailed than their day-to-day journals for this period of the expedition suggested. They evidently surmised that fire was critical for food preparation, for warmth, and for warding off insects and that Noongar interacted around it. Nonetheless, VOC accounts made clear that they knowingly disturbed active Indigenous hearths, hoping to come across their occupants. Witsen recorded that at fire sites, the crew found "some fish of which someone had eaten and had left the bones, so that the people must have recently left it".[81] On one occasion, the exploring party made the decision to remain on the mainland overnight. Recognizing the utility of fire in these environs to service their own needs, the crew members made use of a fire that they perceived to have been built by local people: "[W]e camped in a wood in a place where we found a fire started by the inhabitants [...] It was kept going by throwing on wood".[82] They were apparently concerned as to how the fire's owners would respond to this usurpation of their property and advantages in the landscape, and they decided to post sentries to watch over their sleeping compatriots.

Vlamingh and his men were right to consider that the Noongar would be concerned by their actions. As noted above, Collard and Palmer observe, "it is inconceivable that a stranger would arrive in another person's *karleep* or homefire [...] unless they had some form of relationship with the *boodjar* or land in a previous existence."[83] However, the VOC authors may have been wrong in assuming the nature of the feelings their actions may have produced: "Nyungar would have felt obliged to refresh the memory of those they perhaps saw as their dearly departed and teach them what they had clearly forgotten about the land."[84]

The VOC authors understood that the fate of their crew depended on how well they could use fire to interact with the local environment and peoples. First, they attempted to create fires

78 Collard, Harben, and Van den Berg, *Nidja Beeliar Boodjar Noonookurt Nyininy*, 62.

79 Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 218.

80 Ibid., 221.

81 Ibid., 218.

82 January 5, 1697, *Nijptangh*, ibid., 154.

83 Collard and Palmer, "Residents of Terra Australis," 170.

84 Ibid., 170; see also Collard, Bracknell, and Palmer, "Nyungar of Southwestern Australia," 14–15.

to interact with the Noongar people. As the *Geelvinck* author wrote, "we went ashore to examine the land if we could get near to people, but all in vain; stayed on the beach and lit several fires to see if the people would come to us".[85] Moreover, just as they understood the value of fire at night for their own warmth and comfort, the VOC crew considered that fire treatment could be important in preparing local foods for consumption. One party had uncovered "some fruits, which they were roasting over a fire on the fire," as the *Geelvinck* author reported.[86] Vlamingh too noted that he met up with "the other two commandants who were cooking various fruits which they had gathered."[87] This cautious fire treatment however did not prevent illness as they had hoped. Those who sampled the fruit, the *Nijptangh* diarist recorded, "began to vomit so violently that there was hardly any distinction between death and us".[88] These nuts or fruits were likely *boyoo* from the *jeeriji*, the red *Macrozamia riedlei* sarcotesta that Noongar consume after a complex process of soaking and pit burial treatments to remove their toxicity.[89] Noongar knowledge holders do not suggest that fire was used in this oil-rich food source's preparation, although fire farming was critical to regular production of the crop.[90] These VOC attempts to deploy fire to locate the Noongar people and access their food sources were failures that reinforced the crew's unfamiliarity and incapability in this environment.

Collard, Whadjuk/Balardong Noongar woman Sandra Harben, and Pindjarup Noongar historian Rosemary van den Berg consider how Noongar—seeing this event—might have talked among themselves:

> Some Nyungar were watching from the thicket as the sailors began to eat the nuts—one Nyungar might have said:
>
> *Kaya, geennung barlapiny janga Nyungar ngarniny nidja warra boyi. Choo, barlup boola mindich ngarniny nidja boyi.*
>
> Yeah, look, they spirit people eating these no good nuts. Oh dear, they will get sick after eating these nuts.
>
> *Nyoorn, mila boorda barl boola mindich, noonook geennung, unna?*
>
> Oh sorrow, sooner or later they get much sick, you wait and see, eh?
>
> *Nyoorn, geennung barl wa? Balapiny koorbool mindich yeye! Nyoornditch choo, balang boola ngarniny warra boyi. Yeye barl boola kobal minditch, unna?*
>
> Oh dear, look at them, what? Their stomach is gonna get sick now! Oh, sorry, shame, they ate lots of poison nuts. Now they'll get plenty sick in the stomach, eh?

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85 January 11, 1697, Geelvinck, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 127.

86 *Geelvinck*, ibid., 125.

87 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 87.

88 January 6, 1697, *Nijptangh*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 155.

89 Regarding the importance of the zamia palm generally, see Robin Rioli in "The Importance of the Zamia Palm," City of Canning, November 13, 2020, video, 3:03, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjdyXCG-_LQ; Collard, Harben, and Van den Berg, *Nidja Beeliar Boodjar Noonookurt Nyininy*, 51–52; for more on forms of processing, see Ken Macintyre and Barb Dobson, "The Fermented Oil Fruit of Southwestern Australia," Anthropology from the Shed, July 2018, https://anthropologyfromtheshed.com/project/macrozamia-ancient-oil-fruit/, and Ken Macintyre and Barb Dobson, "The Ancient Practice of Macrozamia Pit Processing in Southwestern Australia," Anthropology from the Shed, March 2018, https://anthropologyfromtheshed.com/project/the-ancient-practice-of-macrozamia-pit-processing-in-southwestern-australia/.

90 Macintyre and Dobson, "The Fermented Oil Fruit."

> *Barlang djanga mindich yeye, unna? Barlung koorbool mindich, kaat mindich, boola goonah, boorp, boorpiny ngarminy nitch warra boyi, wah?*
>
> The spirit people are sick now, eh? They've got the stomach ache, headache and they've got the runs sickness and passing wind for eating those no good nuts, eh?
>
> *Nyoorn djanga Nyungar balapiny katitjinburt nitch warra boyi unna? Choo, karnya nyoorn janga katitjinburt nitchjuk warra boyi.*
>
> Oh dear, spirit people, they've got no idea, eh? About this no good nut, eh? Oh, sorrow and shame, spirit Nyungar don't know anything about these nuts.[91]

This perspective suggests that the newly arrived individuals could have been perceived as returning Noongar who had become disconnected from their *boodjar* in their spirit form, arousing complex responses such as pity and sadness in the individuals looking on.

What VOC accounts reveal is that their authors saw *karl* as critical to Indigenous lives and employed it accordingly. This realization is revealed and outlined most explicitly in Witsen's record, made in the years following the expedition, through his descriptions of lives lived around *karl*, which he claimed were based on information from the mission's participants. However, the perception that *karl* was central to Noongar was also a feature of the expedition's journals, which described the actions and decisions taken by the VOC party on the mainland. They knew that *karl* mattered to Noongar and might provoke strong emotions, as they determined to keep a running guard after they usurped Noongar *karl*. They thought that Noongar enjoyed human interactions through and around *karl* and thus would be attracted to discover who had made *karl* on the beach. In these cases, they identified the importance of *karl* to Noongar and used it for their own purposes in attempts to assert control over this *boodjar*.

NAMING THE EMOTIONS OF FIRE DYNAMICS

On January 13, Vlamingh and his council decided it was time to move forward with their mission to survey new lands and seek out new opportunities to meet local peoples. But even after they left Noongar *boodjar*, the VOC diarists continued to see and record *karl boyi* and *karl*. They not only noted them but did so copiously: "In the evening when it was dark saw fires all along the coast as has been their custom as long as we have been here."[92] "In the evening we still saw fires in various places all along the coast, as far as the eye could reach without strain."[93] These journals marked the crew's inability to ignore fire; these were signs they continued to read as evidence of local inhabitants: "[W]e noticed some smoke there in various places. Thus, hoping by this means to have some news of the local inhabitants, we remained until night fall."[94]

As they left the continent and sailed toward Batavia, Vlamingh, perhaps anticipating the disappointment of his superiors, summarized a list of the successes he hoped they would see in his mission. From his charts, he argued, "it could be seen that, regardless of perils and dangers, I had done everything possible to explore this Terra Australis and its surroundings, [. . .] sufficient

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91 Collard, Harben, and Van den Berg, *Nidja Beeliar Boodjar Noonookurt Nyininy*, 28; see also Collard and Palmer, "Residents of Terra Australis," 161–162.

92 January 15, 1697, *Geelvinck*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 128.

93 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 91.

94 Ibid., 90.

information to pass on to them to enable them to send another expedition to this coast, without holding any fear for their vessels, which is a rather important indication of the success of my voyage."[95] The *karl* that exposed the inabilities of the crew to meet with people who were clearly there would be reflected back in firepower that was the final act of Vlamingh's expedition with regard to the continent. As they sailed northward to Batavia, the *Nijptangh* chronicler wrote, "five guns were fired, and our ship fired three to farewell the miserable South Land."[96] The journals recorded hostile sentiments about the region, while this parting gesture offered an alternative display of the VOC's harnessing of fire technology for communication.

Smoke and fire had not produced answers, responses, and engagement on Noongar *boodjar* in the ways the Company had expected. An extract from a letter written by the Governor-General and Councillors in Batavia, sent on to Amsterdam, not only lamented the lack of information about the lost ship but succinctly summarized that the expedition had traveled "without meeting any people, except occasionally some fires [...] So that nothing of importance has been discovered during this expedition and voyage."[97] Witsen was equally dismissive of the mission's success: "[W]e remain in the same obscurity as before, not knowing where so many Dutchmen who have been wrecked here earlier have ended up, whether they have been killed or perhaps transported deep into the land and still alive: the interior of this land has never yet been visited by any Christian".[98] However, Vlamingh's approach toward *karl* was assessed specifically for weaknesses in his character, or at least formed part of Witsen's personal criticism of the expedition's leader. Witsen recorded how, going inland eight to ten miles, Vlamingh and his party had located "a high mountain range and saw that a great many footprints, both of grown-up people and of children, pointed on that direction, and he also thought to see much smoke below that mountain range, so that there will probably be a great accumulation of people there at the foot: [...] being worried that they might be surrounded by a great crowd of people, he retreated."[99]

Vlamingh, who had encouraged his crew to capture a Noongar individual, was—by this account—now anticipating with great fear his own potential capture by a larger group of people who were unfamiliar to him. Witsen held a personal grievance against Vlamingh, believing him to be both an alcoholic and unwilling to push his discovery sufficiently. Privately, Witsen commented to a correspondent that "little has been gained, because the commodore, overmuch inclined to drinking, although having sounded the coast, has not gone much ashore, and has stayed nowhere longer than three days, contrary to his instructions drawn up by myself and have ordered him to remain long in one place."[100] In his published account, milder in its critique, Witsen nonetheless carefully demarcated Vlamingh's behavior from that of other crew members, who were, he claimed (or they claimed), more fearless: "[M]any in his company would have ventured the approach, as they reported to me orally, confident in their firearms and the timid nature of the inhabitants who people this coast."[101] Witsen's public account of this decision thus

95 Ibid., 104.

96 *Nijptangh*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 161.

97 November 30, 1697, ibid., 211. "Neither, as far as we know, have they been able to discover anywhere any signs of the lost ship the Ridderschap van Holland".

98 Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, ibid., 220.

99 *Ibid.*

100 Witsen to Cuper [1698], ibid., 215

101 Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, ibid., 220.

concluded with a reassertion of the supremacy of the character and fire technologies of those belonging to the VOC.

Where did blame lie for the failure of this smoke and fire to provide the VOC with a pathway to human interactions in the way they had imagined? The *Nijptangh* diarist concluded just before the party left the mainland that the fault lay with the character and disposition of the native environment and all the living creatures it harbored: "Everything was timid in our presence, both men and birds, swans, brent-geese, pelicans, cockatoos, parakeets, etc."[102] This analysis gave Noongar people agency in rejecting engagement with the VOC. Similarly, Vlamingh surmised in his journal "that those people, on noticing ours, had withdrawn and hidden in the forests and barracks."[103] Vlamingh's choice of words here is telling and suggests that he imagined a violent, calculated capacity among Noongar directed against the VOC. Witsen, too, credited Noongar with the autonomy of resistance in rejecting an encounter with the VOC party: "[B]y night our people saw fires all over the country, but when they drew near, the natives were fled."[104] Witsen's choice of the English word *fled*, however, suggests that feelings of panic or terror governed the decisions that Noongar made at the presence of VOC crews. This perspective was echoed in the rationale that Vlamingh presented within his journal for selecting a small forward party to investigate Noongar *karl* "in order not to frighten the inhabitants with our entire company".[105] Witsen expanded on what he imagined were Noongar feelings: "[O]ur people had seen but twelve of the natives, all as black as pitch, and stark naked, so terrified, that it was impossible to bring them into conversation, or a meeting."[106] In his published account, Witsen reiterated this difficulty: "It is singular that although one sees so much smoke rising up by day everywhere in this Land of Eendracht or Hollandia Novea and fires at night where there are hearths there are settled people—so few people are in fact seen, it seems that fear made them flee at the least sight or hearing of foreign folks and that they are fleet of foot and know how to hide in the forest."[107] Witsen's imagined Noongar feelings invested the exploring VOC with an impressive power over their hosts on their own Country. VOC authors reinforced to themselves that the balance of power in these interactions stood in the VOC's favor, just as they had in discussions of Noongar footprints.

Noongar were likely to have held mixed views and diverse feelings about the new arrivals on their lands. Noongar scholars Collard, Harben, and van den Berg theorize that "Nyungar watched the Dutch sailors and other mariners from the cover of the bush. They did not choose to reveal themselves to the 'djanga or spirits' as they may well have been fearful of this unknown presence or phenomena. In the Nyungar world all known 'phenomena' were created by the Waakal and were known to Nyungar through our mythologies. This event was totally strange and needed close scrutiny."[108] Collard and Palmer propose that it is "conceivable that Nyungar were less than excited about the prospect of being tracked down by the creatures many understood as *djanga* or spirit beings from the *warndan* or ocean to the west."[109] On the other hand, as Collard and Palmer continue, "one can then appreciate the dilemma of early Nyungar confronting a

102 January 12, 1697, *Nijptangh*, in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 156.

103 Playford, *Voyage of Discovery*, 87.

104 Witsen to Martin Lister, October 3, 1698 (written originally in English), in Schilder, *Voyage to the Great Southland*, 222.

105 January 8, 1697, *Geelvinck*, ibid., 125.

106 Witsen to Lister, ibid., 222.

107 Witsen, *Noord en Oost Tartarije*, ibid., 220.

108 Collard, Harben, and Van den Berg, *Nidja Beeliar Boodjar Noonookurt Nyininy*, 27.

109 Collard and Palmer, "Residents of Terra Australis," 162.

group of mariners. There would have been a high priority given to identifying the relationship of the strangers to Nyungar."[110] The very presence of these VOC crews around their *karl* might have suggested to onlookers that they had the right to be there.

Fire produced powerful affective dynamics as a force through which these two groups encountered each other at a distance. As I have highlighted, naming the emotions that were at stake in these interactions was, for the Company, an important way for Europeans to assert control over the experience, at least to their readers. In these texts, they claimed a power to provoke Noongar emotionally as a defining feature of their interactions surrounding *karl*.

CONCLUSIONS

Fire was woven into the fabric of the encounters that took place between Noongar and Vlamingh's men as they interacted in these fifteen days over 1696–97. Fire sat at the heart of both cultures. It was central to the meaning of Noongar lives, while also pivotal to the Company's mission in its search for shipwrecked survivors and for knowledge about peoples and an environment that were unknown to them. This centrality invested the observation and use of fires and *karl* with intense feelings for all concerned. VOC authors, however, employed their texts to make the emotions of *karl*—as they understood them—work for them. If *karl* was Noongar culture, then surprising Noongar as they lived around hearths could achieve VOC aims. If *karl* was Noongar culture, then examining the marks and objects surrounding it taught the VOC more about these people in their absence. If *karl* was Noongar culture, then trying to replicate it might entice Noongar to appear. If *karl* was Noongar culture, then staking it out might provoke Noongar feelings, possibly into a violent confrontation, for which the VOC needed to be prepared with fire technologies of their own. If *karl* was Noongar culture, then the VOC could stake a claim to their successful expedition by controlling the transmission of Noongar knowledge they had gained from *karl* in their published accounts.

EPILOGUE: *KARLUP* REVISITED

Over twenty years ago, Glen Kelly wrote sensitively of *karlup* as "the name given to my home county. Literally translated, it is the place of my fire, my family place, my home."[111] In 2020, at 15 Chamaeleon Approach in Australind, the *boodjar* of the Wardandi Noongar people, an award-winning display home was built by Shelford Quality Homes—the Karlup, named "after the Noongar word for home and reflects what a family home should be—warm, inviting and relaxed." The company advertises that this name embraces Western Australians' "love of entertaining and relaxed living, [...] Entertaining in the Karlup is easy and very social with an expansive entertainment room, opening out onto the outdoor kitchen/alfresco area you will want to host all the events for family and friends all year around!"[112] Commercialization and commodification of Noongar words and ideas mark a low point in intercultural communication, but there are other ways in which we might fruitfully "learn together." Sandra Wooltorton, Collard, Pierre Horwitz, Anne Poelina, and Palmer, a research team comprising Indigenous cultural custodians and Indigenous language learners, have recently explored just such a place-based methodology

110 Ibid., 170; see also, Collard, Bracknell, and Palmer, "Nyungar of Southwestern Australia," 14–15.

111 Kelly, "Karla Wongi," 11.

112 "The Karlup," Shelford Group, 2021, https://shelford.com.au/property/display-home-karlup/.

of "learning together," and of "becoming family" through five case study projects, four of which relate to Noongar. I close this essay with the team's powerful argument for future understanding of, and in, these lands: "Every Australian landscape is an Indigenous, storied one—and Australians have an inherent right to learn that joy in place, and a responsibility to live within the reciprocity of our places and our world. Indigenous cultural resurgence and by extension, relationship with place as family is an Australian responsibility, and we propose that environmental education lead this campaign."[113] A

113 Wooltorton, Collard, Horwitz, Poelina, and Palmer, "Indigenous Methodology and Learnings."