

The Gatherers

Gunhinarrung learnt to gather – map Country
with little feet as morning’s pink horizons bring heat
and light to long-water Murrumbidgee women gather
in the early air when dew drips from frond and leaf
while mulbirrang nesting in hollow gum sing a new day
garru warbles – maliyan soars high above majestic
Baiaime watches the balaagangirbang with wide-eyed
balis cooing on the sturdy hips of gunhis as they
gather under the watchful eyes of balaagans
skilled with time and wise with age – custodians of
place – keepers of the secrets of women teaching
the young minhis and mingaans the lore of the land
yiray marks time – rises high burns Country cobar-red
migays forage for guddi and nharrang – catch warramba
by Wollundry shores – net marrumin in the gudha of clear water
dig for cumbungi in the marshes – gather budyaan’s eggs
among the reeds – search for buugang among miniature mountains
of moss – Gunhinarrung learns to look for small things that matter –
to take carefully – leave some always – to gather is to share
Gunhinarrung learnt to weave under shade of magalang
when yirinirin blows hot and dry across the plains
yiray’s tangent moves above – turning time and tide –
Gunhinarrung watches the nimble fingers of migays
twine and loop braiding stories with reeds and grasses gathered
weaving words of wisdom with baskets and dillys – crafting coolamons
to learn that trees do not bleed when bark is taken – they give –
share – bear the scar to remember – to remind us
to always take carefully – gather only what is needed –
gather to return – return to gather

As steady hands sift through earthy archives – Gunhinarrung
learns to sow seeds gathered – to return to Country what it gave –
to gather is to release
She listens – gathers stories – reads them in the land she walks
Wagirra softly the balaagans tell her – tread softly on Country
they say – *Balumbambal always watching* – the ancient ones –
dead but not gone – their blood flows through us – gathers us
listen – the dead speak all the time
yiray’s rays fade to a deep red girragan
arana’s pale face peeks out from behind the hills
madhan is gathered and fires are lit
bilabang swirls milky white across the dark sky
night’s black blanket swaddles the ngurang circle
beneath chunky blazing stars – carcoar croaks a lullaby
yiray rises and sets – arana waxes and wanes
turns day to night – Baiaime watches
Gunhinarrung grows from wanggaay to ngamandhuray
now she learns to gather secrets – things that only
women know and keep deep in storage vessels of memory –
the seamless baskets of the mind where
what is woven will never unravel
Gunhinarrung becomes a wingadhan and teaches her
children to gather – to store history in safe hands
to share and gather again
Colonial collectors come steal and kill
Gatherers are dispersed hunted herded – collected
as artefacts – recorded as anthropology – listed
in catalogues – displayed as scientific specimens –
exhibits A to Z of the primitive – snapped up by
Klaatsch’s camera for Basedow’s missing links –
Gatherers are collected – amassed – classified –
arranged in order of hierarchy white to black

all our Gunhinarrungs become scattered words on
pages in someone else's collection – collectors do not
give back what they take
Everything is collected but memory that was gathered
stored and kept – Gunhinarrung cradles secrets between
walls that capture her – sees her history manhandled –
watches like a silent prisoner in someone else's story
as everything else is pillaged except for that held
in the intricately deep woven basket of her mind –
no man lays claim to this – Gunhinarrung listens for
the Balumbambal – only the white man thinks
the dead can't speak – she hears them – they
speak of what can never be stolen
Garinguns listen to the gatherings buried safe
as seeds in the Country of Gunhinarrung's memory
like the yinaagirbang before us we look for small things –
listen for silences – weave our own basket of
gatherings to keep safe for our galingabangbur – gather
and gather again – restore – regenerate – remember.

Black Child

Black child –
born deviant from norms of western culture.
Dispossessed like a refugee in a sea of white
divisiveness where cognitive capabilities
are measured on a colour scale according to
my phenotypic reality.
My Blackness –
marked already by your history.
So much so that you know all about me
before I am even born.
Black child –
thwarted by ingrained white perception.
My life not yet lived, but my existence already
theorised by my Black skin.
Black child –
born already labelled – swimming from
the womb against currents of conformity.
Black cross in white box records
my existence in the nation – statistically
tracked from birth to death
captive of the white square mentality.
My Blackness –
already confined by your colonial chains
redefined by white rhetoric.
Identity already ascribed from above
by a raceless ruling elite.