CHAPTER 15

Dog-people
The meaning of a north Kimberley story[1]

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Introduction: On the stability of placenames over time

Some Australian Aboriginal placenames are etymologically transparent or at least analysable (see McConvell this volume) while others are not. The opacity of those that are not may be due to their being named in either an archaic variety of their owners' modern language, or in a quite different language, the language of some previous owners.

The land is eternal but its human occupants are, in the broader scheme of things, ephemeral. If a human lineage becomes extinct, who inherits the land which that lineage once owned and occupied? How do successive occupants name the land and its places? These issues are salient not only to *Volkswanderung* scenarios in European prehistory; in Australia large-scale prehistoric population movements across the continent in response to long-term climate changes raise the same questions (see e.g. Sutton 1990, McConvell 2001, McConvell and Alpher 2002, Clendon 2006).

Places in Aboriginal Australia tend to be points on a map. Over most of the dry zone (west of the Dividing Range and north of the River Murray) people travelled between quite precise localities, usually ancestral dreaming sites and the billabongs, creeks, rivers and waterholes which provided them with the wherewithal to live in those places. Famously, Central Australian dot paintings make use of this geography by indicating waterholes and other comfortable and sustaining places as concentric circles with linear pathways connecting them across more economically barren ground. 'Places' in arid Australia less frequently take the form of two-dimensional countries; that is, of extensive *areas* of land named in the way that such owned areas are named in Europe and elsewhere.

Named 'countries' of this sort may be found in some regions, however, and in this chapter I will look at a set of such countries in Western Australia's north-west Kimberley region. Here Worora-speaking people lived in a land partitioned into at least ten discrete, named countries, each owned by an extended family or clan. It is difficult to estimate population numbers and areas of land precisely, but from historical records it would appear that (i) Worora-speaking people numbered about 300 at the time of their first sustained contact with Europeans in 1912; (ii) they occupied an area of very roughly some 5000 square kilometres, (iii) each Worora person belonged to a clan, and (iv) each clan owned and occupied one of about ten (perhaps more) countries. From this it is evident that the area of land named as a country was on average about 500 square kilometres in extent, but this was probably extremely variable, and dependent upon terrain.

It is equally evident that clan size was relatively small: about 30 on average, which is probably the same as many modern extended families that have been in Australia for a few generations. As small lineages they must have been prone to extinction from time to time; indeed Love (1935: 230) claims that he knew of two extinct Worora clans at the time of writing.

Worora clans and clan countries

The terrain in this part of the Kimberley is steep, rugged and arid. The land is hot and dry for most of the year and subject to very heavy monsoonal downpours in the summer. After the wet season groundcover is luxuriant and waterways are full, but relentless heat soon reduces this abundance drastically.

Worora-speaking people lived traditionally in extended family groups (=*rambim*)[2] which were located in specific geographical areas to which family members belonged, and which they owned. Membership of these extended families or clans was by patrilineal descent, and residence was virilocal. Clans were exogamous and sociocentrically named, their names being derived from the names of the countries in which they were located, with only one exception that I know of. So for example people from the land of Loolim[3] could be referred to as *arrlooliya*, with third person plural prefix *arr-* and plural suffix *-ya*; they could refer to themselves as *ngarrlooliya* 'we who belong to Loolim' with first person inclusive plural prefix *ngarr-*; a man or boy could be referred to as *iloola*, with masculine prefix *i-*, and a woman or girl could be referred to as *nyiloolinya* with feminine affixes *nyi-*and *-nya*.

Worora country extends from Collier Bay in the south up to the Prince Regent River (Malandum mana) in the north, and some 50 or so kilometres inland, as well as a greater distance up the Prince Regent River. This is very roughly an area of

some 5000 square kilometres,[4] within which Love (1917[1915]: 21) estimated the number of Worora-speaking people at about 300 in 1915, three years after the first mission was set up there. In 1935 Love (1935: 230-231) listed ten Worora-speaking clans, plus another two that were extinct.[5] The clan countries Love lists are listed in Tables 15.1-3, with the collective titles of the clans occupying them. Where I have been able to verify phonemic representations, they are as given in Table 15.1.

Table 15.1: Worora-speaking clan countries listed by Love (1935), with phonemic representations

Country	Clan name (plural)	Masculine (singular)
Loolim mana	Arrlooliya	Iloola
Larrinyim mana	Larrinyuwaaya	Larrinyuwaaya
Wurnbangku wunu	Wurnbangkuwaaya	Wurnbangkuwaaya
Malandum mana	Arrbalandi (Adbalandi)	Imalandu
Meegrarlba mana[6]	Arrigrarlya	Igrarlya
Mamangurraama mana	Arrbangurraaya	Imangurraaya
Yawijaba mana	Yawijibaaya	Yawijibaaya

The determiners *mana* and *wunu* identify the gender of the country names, as either terrestrial (*mana*) or celestial (*wunu*) (Clendon 1999). The Montgomery Islands (Yawijaba mana) are not listed by Love, but I have included them here. *Yawijibaaya* people used a speech variety noticeably different from Worora, but the two were mutually intelligible.

In 1935 the site of the Presbyterian mission, *Kunmunya* (phonemic Karnmanya), appears to have been located in the country of an extinct clan called *Karnmanyawaaya*. Another clan listed by neither Love nor Blundell (1980) is called *Arnngarrngoyu*. This clan occupied the upper (freshwater) reaches of the Glenelg River, above the zone affected by tides. It was unusual in that the word *Arnngarrngoyu* referred to the human members of the clan, while the name of the country they occupied was called by the phonologically unrelated term Malamalorn (Table 15.2).

Table 15.2: Other Worora-speaking clan countries

Country	Clan name (plural)
Karnmanya mana	Karnmanyawaaya
Malamalorn mana	Arnngarrngoyu

Other clan names, the phonological forms of which I have been unable to verify directly, are listed in Love (1935: 231) as follows (without his diacritics):

Table 15.3: Worora-speaking clan countries listed by Love (1935), unverified phonemic representations

Country	Clan name (plural)	Masculine (singular)
Ilam	Ilangaria	Ilangara
Kanbu	Kanbungaria	Kanbungara
Tjilanma	Tjilanbaia	Tjilanbaia
Mi:tjili:m	Aritjili:a	I:tjili:

The suffix which Love transcribes as *-ngaria* in the plural and *-ngara* in the singular is the Worora Associative/Characterising suffix *-ngarra ~ -ngarri*, with plural form *-ngarriya* (Love did not recognise the rhotic contrast in Worora). On his map on page 230 the placename Ilam is transcribed 'ILA:M', indicating a long second vowel. The scaly-tailed possum (*Wyulda squamicaudata*) is called *ingkanamre* in Worora. But it has another name as well, *irlaangalya*, which in all likelihood identifies this totemic ancestor as being associated with a particular clan country, probably Love's 'ILA:M', which by this reasoning would be 'Irlaam' in phonemic transcription. The clan titles would then be phonemic *Irlaangarra* and *Irlaangarriya*. The clan title suffix which Love uses, *-baia*, is a post-consonantal allomorph of the gentilic suffix *-(bw)aaya*, seen above in the titles *Yawijibaaya*, *Larrinyuwaaya* and *Wurnbangkuwaaya*. The prefixes *ar-* and *i-* on the titles *Aritjili:a* and *I:tjili:* are third person plural *arr-* and third person singular masculine *i-* as noted above.

From this it is clear that all but one of the clan titles reviewed are derived from the country names, just as, for example, the adjectives *Australian*, *British* and *American* are derived from the placenames Australia, Britain and America.

However, there does appear to be a problem in arriving at a definitive list of Worora-speaking clan countries. In Blundell's (1980) account clan size was extremely variable, with anything from two to 35 members, and there is no reason to doubt that these are realistic figures. At the lower end of the scale they indicate how precarious was the hold that some clans had on their land and their existence. Love's figures for both overall population and clan numbers are also likely to be reliable, as he was there at the time of first European contact, he understood and spoke Worora, and he was in a position to question Worora people directly about their demography as a present, experienced reality. At the same time, my own experience suggests that it is perhaps possible that Love failed to record all of the Worora-speaking clans, and that there may have been one or two more than the ten he lists.

It may be a mistake, in any case, to imagine that a definitive list of Worora-speaking clans is a feasible objective. As descent groups they may have been in a more-or-less on-going state of fission, amalgamation or extinguishment. It is likely, for instance, that a particularly large clan, such as *Adbalandiya*, might at some future time have split into two or more smaller groups, to each

of which the term =*rambim* might then have applied. It is possible that some of the 'clan' groups shown by Blundell on maps may have had 'sub-clan' status, or status as some other kind of local group. For instance, a particular family group might be identifiable by its location near, or totemic affiliation to the site of a particular culture hero. Blundell (1980: 104) includes, for example, a group called '*Wodojngari*' (phonemic *Wadoyngarri* [spotted nightjar-ASSOC]) '(people) associated with (the place of) the spotted nightjar'. This term may possibly not have referred to a clan, in the sense intended by Love; but on the other hand we have absolutely no information about how inclusive was the reference of the word =*rambim*: could the members of one extended family also be named as members of another, superordinate descent group? And if so, would both groups have been referred to by the word =*rambim*? The implications of these questions might make it very difficult indeed to calculate clan numbers precisely.

Dogs on the threshold

The relationship between people and their country is perhaps set out most clearly (as far as Worora listeners would have been concerned) in a story called *Dilangarri* (*dila-ngarri* [dog-ASSOC]) 'associated-with-dogs' or 'dog-people', published in Utemorrah (2000: 21-30). Although Daisy Utemorrah recorded this story in Worora, *dila* means 'dog' in the neighbouring and apparently related language Ungarinyin: the Worora word for 'dog' is *kanangkurri*. It is therefore clearly a story that would have been traditionally known to both Worora and Ungarinyin speakers; almost certainly to Wunambal speakers as well, and was probably current throughout the north-west Kimberley more generally. The following is a précis of the story:

> In the Dreaming a group of people called *Dilangarri* 'dog people' lived with their giant dogs. These were magical dreamtime dogs. The parents used to leave their children and dogs at home when they went out to find food. They used to warn their children against tickling the dogs and making them laugh, because if the dogs laughed they would talk. Eventually the children did just that, they tickled the dogs and made them laugh and talk. As soon as the dogs spoke the humans all disappeared: children and adults wherever they were at that time vanished underground. Later their *Wanjurna* ancestor came looking for them, and could not find them. He asked where they had gone. The dreamtime dog-ancestor told him that the human children had made his dogs talk, and so he had caused all the humans to disappear. Grieving for his people, the *Wanjurna* threw the dog up into the moon, where he can still be seen. Then he found two other people from a different place and told them to go to the land where the *Dilangarri* people used to live.

He told them that they would found a family who would live in the land forever, and take the name of the *Dilangarri* people. And this is what happened. (Utemorrah 2000: 21-30)

There appears to be a persistent relationship between language, dogs and fire in north-western Australia, if not elsewhere as well. In a Nyangumarta (Pilbara) story called *Yukurru muwarrpinikinyi, marrngu jama wanikinyi* 'Dogs used to talk, and men were silent' a talking dog sacrifices himself by being burned in a fire so that his human companion can acquire speech, which he had hitherto lacked. A couple of things can be noted in this story: Human and canine speech is in complementary distribution; which is to say that humans and dogs cannot *both* talk – it has to be either one or the other. The man cannot speak until the dog has been consumed by fire, and once the man speaks, dogs can no longer speak. Human beings acquired speech by depriving dogs of it: language is an artefact that can be held at any one time by either but not both of the companions.

In both Lévi-Straussian structuralist formulation and the terms of Victor Turner's symbolic anthropology (e.g. Turner 1978) dogs and fire are both intermediary or liminal (threshold) entities: dogs are intermediary between the human and non-human worlds, being animals who live often intimately and affectionately with humans, and who communicate (non-verbally) with humans, yet who are not human. Dogs cross the space between the human and the non-human realms.[7]

Fire is a liminal entity bringing elements of the (indigestible) non-human world across into the human world by the process of cooking. And indeed verbs of cooking in north-western Australia usually display a somewhat different semantics to that of their English translations: here cooking means 'to render something fit for human consumption'; hence ripened fruit is said to have been 'cooked' in the sun, and wild tobacco leaves are 'cooked' by being rolled in lime to prepare them for chewing (Gwen Bucknall pers. comm.). Cooking imagery goes further in depicting the transfer of entities from the natural world across into the human world. In a traditional Ngaanyatjarra story recorded in Glass and Hackett (1979: 20-28) a stick-insect dreaming ancestor cooks a group of promiscuous, unenculturated 'natural' people to institute the four marriage sections of Western Desert society, and so end the 'chaos' of random sexual liaison. In Aboriginal culture[8] cooking defines our humanity: unless we are brought across from the unpredictable wildness of nature into the world of human culture we will not be able to function decently as social beings. In the Nyangumarta story this transfer is effected by dogs: a concrete example of what Deborah Bird Rose learned from Tim Yilngayarri (Rose 2000: 45-49), i.e. that 'dingo makes us human'. So in the Nyangumarta story language has to be 'cooked' in canine embodiment in order to become part of human culture.

When compared, the Worora and Nyangumarta stories display what Lévi-Strauss refers to as a series of 'inversions': "as often happens when crossing a cultural and linguistic boundary, the myth turns over: the end becomes the beginning, the beginning the end, and the content of the message is inverted" (Lévi-Strauss 1995: 57). Nyangumarta and Worora are on opposite sides of such a cultural and linguistic boundary, and examination of these two stories shows that every element is inverted, even causality. In the Nyangumarta story dogs die *in order for* humans to obtain language. In the Worora story humans die *as a result of* dogs having obtained language:

Worora	Dogs speak ⟶	Humans die
Nyangumarta	Dogs die ⟶	Humans speak

And again in the Worora story men and dogs are in complementary distribution: language cannot be owned by both of the companions at the same time.

Resurrection

When the Dog-people 'disappear' in my English translation, that event in Worora is denoted by the preverbal infinitive *yawarrarra* '(a number of people) descend, sink; drown'. This word is related formally and semantically to *yawak* '(one person) sinks, falls', *yawurlak* '(one person) sinks, drowns' and *wurluk* 'swallow'. In Worora coming-into-being is consistently depicted by images of ascent, and going-out-of-being by images of descent. When child-spirits appear to their parents to announce their conception, they are said to *bariy* 'rise' before their parents from the deep, sacred pools (*wungkurr*) where child-spirits dwell. Dreamtime *Wanjurna* ancestors also come into existence by ascending (*bariy*) or bursting up (*kurruk*) out of the ground, and then return by descending at last back into the earth. And in stories people go out of existence in a metaphor of descent, an image of sinking under the ground as if under water.

Along with control over fire, language is also one of the things that define our humanity: it is a uniquely human attribute and sets us apart from the natural world and the other creatures that inhabit it. In the Nyangumarta story humans come into existence, in the sense of acquiring an attribute that makes them uniquely human, when they acquire language. In the Worora story the reverse happens: humans go out of existence when they return language back to the dogs who gave it to them. In this sense the Worora and Nyangumarta stories really are inverse halves of the same mythic understanding, that dogs hold a special place in human society as liminal beings who in the Dreaming gave their owners their humanity: dingo really does make us human.

The point of this part of the story is that the *Dilangarri* clan go out of existence; they are extinguished completely and without heirs. The *Wanjurna* ancestor then chooses two other people to be the founders of a new family. We are not told who these people are; they were probably related to the previous owners in the sense that all Aboriginal people can trace real or classificatory relationship to just about every other Aboriginal person. But what is certain is that the man and wife chosen by the *Wanjurna* are not *Dilangarri* themselves. *'Anja nyirrimaade Dilangarri anja ngarru kaajenga?'* they ask him: 'Those Dog-people of yours, where have they gone?' The *Wanjurna* does not reply directly. Instead he says: *'Nyirrerndunyini bija wangalaalunguyu kurleen wurrangunjaarndu arrke, Dilangarri kaajaninya. Dambeem mana marramnyaana nyirrkanangka mana. Dilangarri maa nyirramnyaneerrimaade.'* 'Now when you two give birth to children, let them be Dog-people. You (plural) will keep this country as your own, with the result that you (plural) will now be Dog-people.' The grieving *Wanjurna* wants to resurrect the name of the Dog-people; he says: *'Dilangarri arrkumbu maaji waraarrkaarr angayanda'* 'I will cause the name of the Dog-people to be recalled/brought back.' The man and wife will now take on both the land and the title of its former owners: they will *become Dilangarri* themselves.

Blundell (1980: 113-115) and Blundell and Woolagoodja (2005: 70) describe how the country of an extinct clan could be taken over or adopted by members of a related and neighbouring clan, who would then take on the clan titles, totemic emblems, ritual responsibilities and overall identity of the extinct clan, and legally 'become' that clan in an act of social resurrection. This is apparently what happened in the case of the *Larrinyuwaaya* clan, which died out but was revived in just this manner. Larrinyim lies on the coast north of Collier Bay and on either side of the Walcott inlet. Sam Woolagoodja, who took on the resurrection of the clan, came from the area of Cone Bay on the tip of the Yampi Peninsula, where according to McGregor (1988: 83) a speech variety called Umiide was formerly spoken. The language recorded by Sam's son Donny Woolagoodja in Blundell and Woolagoodja (2005), while clearly related, is different in some ways from the language recorded by Daisy Uttemorah and others (Clendon 2000). I have not been able to ascertain how closely Sam Woolagoodja was related to the *Larrinyuwaaya* people whose line had ended. But that was probably not directly relevant in the long run: some family connection would have been able to have been established, probably without much difficulty, to accommodate the social priority of resurrecting a clan name to inhabit the country, to keep its *Wanjurnas* 'fresh' and to maintain and care for its ceremonial centres and ossuary caves. The details of such acts of resurrection were probably negotiated by the principal stakeholders on a case-by-case basis as occasion required, but the legal mandate for such a procedure was provided by the story *Dilangarri*, and possibly by other stories as well.

Conclusion

Here then is a concrete illustration of the primacy of residence in a particular place for the constitution of family identity. In this ideology extended families are the ephemeral human manifestations of eternal places. In essence and from an emic perspective clans are not ''social cells with territorial correlates'' as Keen (1997: 271) puts it, but territories with human occupants. Land, the manifestation in geography of a supernatural human ancestry, in this ideology is prior, and human groups are identified in terms of it.

None of the Worora country names are etymologically transparent; they are all 'just names'. In the past this may have been otherwise: Worora placenames are typically expressive, not infrequently taking the form of nominalised sentences: *Jilinya Jaarr Nyangkawana* 'Where the spirit-woman travelled upstream', *Wurrulku aaku ngarlangarlangarri* 'Augustus Island of the talking water' and *Imalala Jujurr Ingkaarrbanga* 'Where they carried the handsome man' are three examples of placenames commemorating events in the Dreaming, in geography and in local history respectively.

Linguistic boundaries appear to have had little emic significance for social geography, and every traditional Worora person would have been trilingual in Worora and the neighbouring languages Wunambal and Ungarinyin. When a clan lineage became extinct its country could be transferred to the ownership of a family who spoke a different speech variety, as may have been the case with the recent example of Larrinyim, or even a different language altogether.[9] In this way the ownership of countries could pass from lineage to lineage and from language to language legally and peaceably, with a clear mandate from the Dreaming and without the need for discord; and quite outside of an invasion-and-migration kind of scenario which might at first present itself to a modern observer. Note however that the names of countries, like the countries themselves, appear to be immutable. The eventual outcome would be etymological opacity and a placename that originated in a possibly long-extinct language.

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Endnotes

1. I would like to thank Heather Umbagai and Janet Oobagooma of Mowanjum for their advice and assistance in preparing this chapter. Any errors are of course my own responsibility.

2. An equals sign (=) before a Worora morpheme indicates that the form cannot be uttered on its own, but needs agreement-class affixes in order to become an utterable word (so in this case an example would be *ngarambim* 'my patriclan', with first person singular prefix *nga-*). Note that =*rambim* 'clan' is cognate with *dambeem* 'place, camp, home, country'.

3. The root shape of this word is =*looli*: the placename contains the terrestrial class-marking suffix -*m* (see Clendon 1999).

4. Area extrapolated rather hesitantly from Blundell (1980: 107).

5. Blundell (1980: 107) lists 14 clans for 1912, and elsewhere she lists twice that number (up to 29 (Blundell and Layton 1978: 237, Blundell 1980: 104), although this figure almost certainly includes clans speaking other languages). If Blundell's figure of 14 clans is accurate, the average size of a clan country would have been 357 square kilometres, with 21 clan members.

6. Also referred to as both Grarl and Grarlya.

7. Liminal: "occupying a position on, or on both sides of, a boundary or threshold" (Oxford English Dictionary).

8. And in other cultures as well: cf. Lévi-Strauss 1969.sssss

9. Cf. McConvell's (2002: 267) invocation of customary process as a factor in language spread.