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In this tract of country the Bunan ceremony is in force. Some of the dialects are the Thurrawall, Wodi Wodi, Jeringin, Ngarroogoo [Ngarigo], Beddiwal [Bidhuwal]<sup>14</sup>, Mudthang, Dhooroomba, Gundungurra and Wannawal [Ngunawal](Mathews 1898:54).

Further consideration will be given to some of these language groups below.

In a separate article Mathews explains that in the west the tribes gradually merged into Wiradthuri [sic] country, where the initiation ceremony was known as the *burbung*. He suggests that the ceremonies celebrated at the interface of these two greater conglomerates 'would probably be found to have some modifications of detail to meet the views of both communities' (Mathews 1896:327). He also recorded that the Wiradthuri and groups as far as the Shoalhaven would sometimes attend each other's ceremonies (1896:327).

Importantly, as Mathews shows, the *bunan* ceremonies were not closed and local affairs but mandatorily intertribal in character. When an initiation ceremony was to be held the host tribe sent out its messenger or messengers to invite participants amongst a range of tribes covering considerable distances. Following commonly recognised protocols, the messenger travelled from one group to the other to bring news of the gathering. Mathews observed that the main messenger was sometimes accompanied by a second person, preferably someone from a far distant tribe, as this was considered to lend kudos to the invitation,

It not infrequently happens that a man is sent on his mission alone, but men are generally sent together, one of whom belongs to a different tribe to the headman who issues the message. The tribe to whom the two messengers are sent pay more attention to them if one is from a remote part of the territory (Mathews 1896:330-331).

Sometimes, instead of a single or pair of messengers travelling about the country, the headman of the first group receiving the message organised for one of his own men, of the same totem as the original messenger and of the host, to carry the message on to the next headman, who in turn was responsible for conveying the message onward and so on (Mathews 1896:331). The circuit about which such invitations travelled appears to have moved through a set sequence which linked the various participating groups and which was commemorated in the ritual context.

An important part of the ceremonials, particularly on arrival of the various contingents, was the calling out of a series of significant place names with which each group is associated. In his description of the Shoalhaven *bunan* Mathews described how, as the host tribe sets up the ceremonial ground and as each of the groups arrive, a ritual calling out of place names marking their respective countries is carried out. This is also repeated when all the tribes have assembled,

The headman then calls out the names of a few of the chief camping grounds, water holes or remarkable places in his country, and all the men present shout. The headmen of the other tribes follow in succession, each naming a few chief places in his country (Mathews 1896:333).

<sup>14</sup> Bidhuwal is in fact linguistically related to Kurnai rather than the Yuin language family of NSW (Koch pers comm to NK, 4.9.12).

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As Radcliffe-Brown observed amongst the Kamilaroi, in this way each group 'identified themselves with their own territory' (Radcliffe-Brown 1954:105-106). This ritual also seemed to serve as a means for honouring and ratifying, as well as remembering and teaching, the territorial associations of the various groups comprising the broader polity.

Howitt's account of the Bega *bunan* and the related *kuringal* closely accord with Mathews descriptions. Like Mathews, Howitt pointed to the intertribal nature of initiation ceremonies (Howitt 1996:511) but, as will be shown below, he recorded more detail on the specifics of which groups were in attendance at which ceremonies. Howitt describes how messengers were sent out to convey invitations to the *gommeras* (headman) of the various groups. According to Howitt, the messenger chosen was usually someone who through their kin connections had freedom of movement across the various territories. Hence he writes,

A leading man of the Snowy River Krauatungalung, who acted as my messenger to the Yuin, concerning the holding of a Kuringal, was born in their country, and therefore claimed it as his; his mother was a Ngarigo woman, and therefore he claimed her country. He was the accredited messenger between the Krautun Kurnai and the Ngarigo and Yuin (Howitt 1996:83).

The process of alerting all the participants to the impending ceremony could take considerable time as the message was conveyed - in a similar way to that described for the Kurnai - 'from clan to clan and from group to group, till the whole ... community, that is to say the initiated men, became aware of the intention to hold [the ceremony]' (Howitt 1996:516).

In his account of the ceremonies themselves, the ritual calling of place names, is once again noted, although according to Howitt's account, the visitors call the names from the country of their hosts and the hosts those of their visitors. When the visiting group have all entered the *bunan* circle,

One of them then shouts out the name of one of the local divisions of the makers of the *Bunan*, to which all his followers shout "Yau!" that is "Come here!" Then other names of the local divisions of the *Bunan*-makers are shouted, while the men of the contingent are dancing (Howitt 1996:521-522).

Subsequently,

The visitors now run out of the circle, and the *Bunan*-makers run into it, the former taking their places outside the circle. The latter now dance in their turn, and shout out the names of the local divisions of the visitors. These names are received with shouts of "Yau!" (Howitt 1996:522).

At another point he describes how the names of various local groups were shouted out 'the most distant one being first used' (Howitt 1996:528).

According to Howitt's informants, the *bunan* or the abbreviated *kuringal* rite extended as far north as Port Macquarie (Howitt 1996:513), but he shows there were divisions within these limits, with different groups congregating particularly around a more limited ceremonial complex. He gives quite specific description of the attendance that might be expected at a typical Bega ceremony, explaining also the exclusion of other groups who attended ceremonies elsewhere,

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Assuming that the Bunan was to be attended by the clans from Moruya, Bega, and Twofold Bay, that is, by both the Kurial [northerners] and Guyangal [southerners], and that the meeting was to be near Bega, the following would be the procedure as the contingents arrived.

The people from Braidwood, Ulladulla and Shoalhaven would accompany those from Moruya. With them people from Broulee would occasionally come. Next would arrive those from Queanbeyan, then the Gurungatta<sup>15</sup> from beyond Shoalhaven, with whom there might be even some from Jervis Bay; and all these people are true Kurial.

The Wollongong people did not attend this ceremony, because they go to one farther up the coast. The people from Twofold Bay would arrive about the same time, and bring with them some of the Bemeringal from the country along the coast range, being some of those living to the east of the Ngarigo.

The limits within which people would come may be roughly stated as Jimberoo, Kangaroo Valley, Nowra; but at this latter place were Bemeringal, that is, those who lived upon the high tableland, who went to the ceremonies at Goulburn. Nor did the Bemeringal come to these ceremonies from as great a distance as the country of the Ngarigo (Howitt 1996:519-520).

The participation in the *kuringal* that Howitt himself attended may have been influenced by his role in orchestrating it and hence included, or was to have included, representatives of the Krauatun Kurnai and Wolgal who might not otherwise have attended (Howitt 1996:516-517). Although in the latter respect he also makes it clear that Yibai-Malian, the headman of the Wolgal, maintained close ties with the Yuin.

In the first place, we may note that Howitt's description reveals something of the complexities of traditional territorial organisation, multi-layered and contextually dependent factors for defining commonality and difference and equally complicated group naming practices. The primary references in this account are to locales. Also evident are those names which identify broader environmental divisions, such as the Bemeringal, a term equally applicable to the people of the coastranges as to the Ngarigo of the high tablelands. *Kurial* and *guyangal* are directional markers and, although Howitt speaks of 'true Kurial', were likely shifting, context-dependent terms.

Single groups conjoined in various ways to form larger segments, so that in respect of present interests we see the Queanbeyan people joining with the Braidwood people and those from Ulladulla and the Shoalhaven. The Gurungatta [Coolangatta, north of the Shoalhaven] took part, whereas those from the tablelands behind Nowra and Kangaroo Valley, in this case probably Robertson and Moss Vale etc, joined ceremonies at Goulburn. Howitt's suggestion that the Ngarigo did not attend because it was too far is surprising given the proximity and apparent relative ease of passage between Bega and the Monaro and also in view of the strong presence of Manero blacks on the far south coast evidenced by Robinson in 1844. It raises the question whether it was actually because they were involved in a separate ceremonial circuit and therefore suggests a possible

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<sup>15</sup> Most likely a reference to the mythologically significant mountain and locale Coolangatta after which Berry's Shoalhaven estate was named.

distinction between Ngarigo and Queanbeyan. However, in this regard Howitt is also somewhat inconsistent, elsewhere including the Manero as part of the south coast ceremonial grouping (Howitt 1996:512).

The various groups participated in a series of lengthy rituals in which boys - who might be drawn from a number of groups - went through trials and teachings by which they were made into young men<sup>16</sup>. This rite of passage introduced the initiates into membership of the broader regional society and was an achievement of the whole rather than of any one group. After the close of the initiation ceremony a ritual involving the passing of each initiate's tooth from one group to another once again reinforced the distinct identity of local divisions and their linking together to form a regional society. Howitt writes,

The ceremonies being now completed, there remained nothing for the people to do but gradually to return to their own districts. The tooth would be carried by the Gommera of the place most distant from that of the youth it belonged to. He would then send or hand it to the Headman of the locality next to him, and thus it would pass from group to group of the inter-marrying community which had attended the Kuringal. It conveys its message, which is that so-and-so has been made a man. Finally it returns to its owner (Howitt 1996:561).

No single group monopolised the role of hosting the bunan, rather over time the various groups would take their turn to play host, inviting guests to join, contribute to and witness the ceremonies held on their own sacred grounds. The groups who participated in any one particular ceremony likely varied depending on the focal point of the host group hence it may be more fitting to think of overlapping regional societies, rather than mutually exclusive groups.

Early accounts provide clear evidence that local groups in what is now the ACT and its environs also played host to initiation ceremonies and other corroborees. The commonly cited figure of attendances of 500, whether more or less accurate, served not, as these commentators suggested, to indicate the size of a single tribe, but pointed to the fact that the bigger gatherings were intergroup affairs. Not all such gatherings were ceremonial in nature but even in the ordinary corroborees the arrangements of the performance area and of the dancers served to emphasise distinction between the various groups. In the mid 1830s, Eyre, who had taken up land in the Molonglo area, less than 20km from Queanbeyan, says that they [presumably he and his neighbours or employees],

Often had a good many blacks encamped in the neighbourhood and occasionally on the meeting of several tribes they indulged in their favourite 'corrobbery' [sic]. On such occasions the tribes not dancing would sit down in a semicircular form fronting the stage (any low green, smooth spot of ground), each tribe by itself and with a few bushes forming a sort of division between it and the adjoining ones ...When one party had exhibited another tribe would sometimes retire to paint and decorate, and thus they kept up their balls thro' the great part of the night (Eyre 1984:89).

In a separate report he stated,

<sup>16</sup> Detailed accounts may be found in Mathews 1896, 1900 and Howitt 1996.

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On one occasion I saw five tribes met together, and the evening was of course spent in dancing. Each tribe danced in turn, about forty being engaged at once, beside sixteen females, eight of whom were at each corner of the male performers (Eyre 1845:232).

Bluett recounts after Blundell that 400-500 of the Nganbri-Pialligo tribe would assemble by Canburry Creek for ceremonies at which 'neighbouring monarchs' were in attendance (Bluett 1954:1). In an earlier article he wrote,

At the foot of Black Mountain, north of the Molonglo River from the new Parliament House was the Kgamburry's favourite corroboree ground. John Blundell saw many of them. Here a clear open space under a big tree would be selected. Old King Hong Kong sat in state watching the enjoyment of his people, what time a couple of wives plied him with choice morsels of duck and goanna. A big active man he carried himself as born to the purple. A bodyguard of eight or ten warriors, stood behind him each with a spear handy in case of accident (Bluett 1927).

Queen Lucy of Yass says that boys were taken to Canberra for initiation, suggesting that boys from Yass may have been included (The Mail (Adelaide) 8.1.27). Wright, refuting Lucy's claims for the Canberra ceremonial ground, remembered women and children remaining behind at camps at his father's place (Lanyon) while the men took the boys up to Jedbenbilla (Tidbinbilla) Mountain (Wright 1923:61).

I well recollect when these ceremonies took place, as the blacks very often camped at my father's place, while the black men with the boys who were to go through the performance went away to the mountains, and that, too, into the most rough and out-of-the-way mountain top (The Mail 1927).

In general there is no account given of the groups in attendance although an 1859 Goulburn Herald article reported on a 'theatrical performance of a corrobberre [sic] at Queanbeyan by a "tribe of Aborigines" from Braïdwood and the South Coast' (cited Jackson-Nakano 2001:111). It seems that the annual blanket return provided an occasion for intergroup gatherings.

There are many descriptions of groups gathering for the bogong moth feasts in the Bogong mountains, these rich supplies of food likely supporting ceremonial undertakings (see Flood 1984 and Gillespie 1991 for fuller accounts). West describes the Monaro blacks passing through Coolamon in their hundreds on their way to the mountains (Queanbeyan Age 1913). Mickey, of Delegate, told Howitt that the Ngye-mutch of Queanbeyan joined the Ngarigo of Cooma on their way to the Bogong Mountains. Others passed by way of Canberra and Uriarra. Bluett writes,

In the annual spring trek to the Kiandra Mountains for the Bogong moth harvest, two or three families would club together and if they had joined forces about the Canberry district, they might be away for three months...(Bluett 1954:27).

Uriarra is said to have been named 'running to the feast' because it lay *en-route* to the mountains and was, as well, a place where the moths were roasted on the return (Gillespie 1991:43)<sup>17</sup>. There are many scattered references to ceremonial gatherings in the ACT and surrounding regions as well

<sup>17</sup> See Koch 2009 for a sceptical approach to supposed meaning of place names.

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as archaeological site documentation. Given more time it would be valuable to collate and properly analyse information available on sites, attendance, routes etc. with the aim of elucidating the regional society/ies within which Canberra and the broader ACT are implicated.

## BEYOND CEREMONY

Both Mathews and Howitt pointed to the way in which ceremonial gatherings served to define a community, which not only participated in a common ceremony but which also upheld common laws and participated in mutual exchanges in regard to marriage, tribal justice and trade. Howitt writes,

But the rule is, that a certain ceremony brings together a number of tribes. Thus the Kuringal of the Yuin, is attended by people from Manero, Shoalhaven and Braidwood, and they therefore form what may be called a 'community,' which in this sense includes a number of tribes. In other words, all the tribes which attend the same ceremonies form an intermarrying community larger than any one tribe, and approaching what I have called a 'nation'. ...the community which thus meets periodically for the purpose of initiating its youths into the status of manhood, and membership in the tribe, is in principle also that of the united exogamous class divisions (Howitt 1996:512).

Such gatherings provided an opportunity for matters of broader concern to be discussed, Mathews giving account of the meeting of the various headmen,

At a retired spot in the bush, a short distance from the general camp, the headmen have a private meeting place called *warrawurrudthang*, where they congregate to consult on such tribal concerns as may be brought before them by the leading men of the several contingents present, and also to arrange the various details of the ceremonies (1896:328)

Mutual participation in ceremonies was only one strand in an array of important – and it might be added complex and sometimes fluid – interconnections by which groups were allied. Hence in describing the various mascots which a Ngarigo messenger might bear depending on his particular mission, Howitt gives light to a range of different ways in which groups might consolidate and draw upon their allegiances with others,

If the message related to a corroboree, the Ngarigo messenger carried a man's kilt (*Buran*), a head-band (*Ngunumila*), and nose peg (*Elangantu*). If it related to an expiatory<sup>18</sup> fight, he carried a shield for spear-fighting (*Birkumba*); but if it was to call a war-party together, he carried a jag-spear (*Jerumbuddi*). In relation to the initiation ceremonies the token was a bull-roarer (*Mudji*) and also a spear, boomerang, and shield (Howitt 1996:687).

Individual 'tribal' groups did not operate as social isolates but were ensconced within a broader regional society, or perhaps more than one, involving the mutual cooperation of a range of linguistically distinct groups who shared and upheld a broad system of laws and customs, albeit perhaps with significant local distinctions, held joint responsibility for the conduct of ceremonies

<sup>18</sup> A fight for the settlement of a wrong-doing.

involved in the inculcation and reproduction of laws and customs and in the bringing of men to adulthood, recognised and upheld the territorial interests of its constituent members, upheld normative rules for dealing with offences causing affront to the wider community and for resolving intertribal disputes, sometimes exchanged wives and traded in the natural and cultural products of their respective countries.

#### 'THE LINE'

In May 1952 a series of correspondence passed between Norman Tindale and Mr W. Parkes, the former manager of the government settlement at Brungle (Parkes 1952; Tindale 1952). Mr Parkes recalled a description given to him in 1948 by 74 year old Frederick Freeman, an old 'halfcaste' Wiradjuri man, of what he called the Wiradjuri 'line'. The Wiradjuri line, as Freeman had related it, ran through Brungle, Gobarralong, Jugiong, Harden, Wellington, Orange, Condobolin, Hillston, Hay, Darlington Point, Wagga Wagga, Tarcutta, Adelong, 'this side' (north) of Tumut and back to Brungle. Parkes understood the line to describe the territory of the Wiradjuri but was surprised to find that the conception of territory underlying it seemed to relate to the line quite literally, he seemed to think of tribal territory as 'the line' itself rather than as the area it enclosed.

In his reply Tindale told Parkes that he had also come across the concept in relation to the Wiradjuri and believed that the 'lines' described the 'travelling routes along which natives used to proceed to the bora or initiation ceremonies which were held from time to time in different parts of their country'. Tindale's conception of the line as a travelling route misses its deeper significance. The recitation and the physical traversal of the 'line' constitutes, as we have seen from previous discussions, a test and a reinscription of physical, social and perhaps mythological geography and may be better understood as demarcating a string of related countries which together constituted a regional society.

As well as the Wiradjuri line, Parkes also relayed to Tindale the 'lines' described by Freeman for the Gurmali and the Ngunawal.

Tumut was not on the Wiradjuri "line", but on "the line" of the Gurmali, "a different lot altogether", "the lot who lived upon the Bugangs [Bogong Mountains]", who spoke "a lot like the Ngunawal" and were associated with the latter on the Tablelands (Parkes 7.5.1952).

The Gurmali "line" according to Freeman 'ran this way', Bugang Mountains, Tumut, Cooma, Bombala, Twofold Bay, then probably "down Orbost way". This accords very well with the recollections of Wilkinson of Yallowin in the Tumut district who attested that 'blacks' used to come to his property from Yass, Wellaregang, Omeo and Mitta Mitta to attend corroborees (cited Jackson-Nakano 2001:58).

It also meshes with what Howitt recorded apparently in response to his questions about the limits of Wolgal country related to him by Mrangalla, Janey Alexander and Murray Jack,

From Kowumbut down the river ... To Tom Groggin thence to Wheelers and Cudgewa and as far down as the Murray to Walariganya River joining the Murray – above Albury thence to Tumberumba – Adelong – Kilmore Creek to Tumut, thence from the Tumut to Gundagai – to

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Gloot -- to Cullinbong and to Lambing Flat -- thence to Yass -- to Queanbeyan -- to Micalago -- Cooma -- Kiandra -- Lots [Lobs] Hole -- Theibungung [Talbingo?] Mountain -- thence across to Kowombat (cited Wesson 2000:86).

It is an extensive listing and in his published account Howitt seemed to feel the need to cut it back (Howitt 1996:78).

The significance of Lambing Flat as the end of what we may call the Wolgal 'line' in the original account, seems to be supported in Howitt's description of the ceremonial circuit of the initiates' teeth after the Wolgal initiation ceremony,

The teeth knocked out are put in a bag with kangaroo teeth and red ochre, and sent away by the medicine-man who extracted them round to the places from which the contingents came -- for instance, as far off as Lambing Flat (Howitt 1996:565).

The line described for the Ngunawal listed Roseby Park [on the coast near Nowra], Burragorang, Yass, Cooma, Nimmitabel, Bega, Bombala, Twofold Bay. Evidence of a range of connections between these relatively far flung places are indicated in linguistic affinity and marriage partnerships, which given greater time, might be more fully investigated.

It is possible to see how an Aboriginal tendency to respond to questions of territory with a recitation of 'the line' may account for some of the apparent overlaps and confusion which have perplexed understandings of group distributions over time. On this point, however, it is important to note that traditional notions of relationship to country may have extended in concertina fashion beyond the areas in which most authoritative ties were rooted. Myers has argued for the Pintupi that while a person maintained the strongest - and indeed indisputable - rights and interests, as well as a deep emotional attachment to the place which by birth or inheritance they considered their homeland, their notions of 'own country' were considerably more expansive. Through his or her network of kinship and affinal ties, through travel, visiting and sometimes extended periods of residence in other places, and also it may be added through ceremonial circuits, an individual established, over the course of his or her lifetime, a broader domain over which they were able to move (Myers 1982).

#### 'TRIBAL' ENEMIES [ use of the term 'tribal' to be qualified]

While the common employment of terms meaning *man*, such as Yuin and Murring, marked a recognition of affinity between close or loosely allied groups, outsiders - particularly those regarded as distant strangers - were labelled with terms signifying fear and contempt. Howitt records that the Kurnai - a term once again meaning man which the Gippslanders applied to themselves -- used the name '*brajerak*' to refer to their neighbours, the Theddora of the Omeo tableland, the Ngarigo of the Manero tableland, and the Murring of the south coast of NSW. The term was derived from *bra* 'man' and *jerak* 'rage' or 'anger' (Howitt 1996:41). The Gippslanders were reciprocally held in dread and enmity. In recounting an attack upon the Monaro blacks at Coleman by the Gippslanders, West describes how the latter were counted as the 'hereditary enemies' of the Monaro blacks (Barrier Miner 22/7/1908).

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Howitt provides an insight into the way in which these perennial feuds were perpetuated. During the secondary initiation rites for young men amongst the Ya-itma-thang he describes how, after having their hair singed from their heads, the Wahu [second level initiates] were instructed in the attitudes proper to their various neighbours,

...the men would run some way, returning swinging the boughs, with a swishing sound, in a certain direction, mentioning at the same time the name of the district towards which they were pointing. This was repeated three times for each of the various directions they might point to. Each name mentioned was preceded by the emphasised exclamation of 'Wau! Wau!; - for instance, 'Wau! Wau! Tumut!' If the Wau was followed by an exclamation or malediction, it meant that the Wahu might go to the one as a friend; or that in the other direction lived tribes with whom he would have to carry on the hereditary feud (Howitt 1996:566).

In the above-mentioned example it is likely that the Ya-itma-thang and Tumut peoples, who shared closely related dialects, maintained cooperative relations. Relationships between the Yuin/Murring and the Wiradjuri, on the other hand, were as Howitt conversely showed, marked by deep animosity. He writes,

Beyond the most distant Bemeringal known to the Yuin, namely at Kiandra, there were tribes they called Woradjera, and also Kunamildan, or "come by night," who had at times crossed the mountains and killed the Murring. The former are clearly the Wiradjuri, some of whom lived on the lower Tumut River (Howitt 1996:82).

From the opposite perspective, in his discussions with Parkes at Brungle, Wiradjuri man Freeman was quite emphatic in distinguishing the Tumut blacks or Gurmals from the Wiradjuri and in marking the two as enemies,

Far from being connected with the Tumut blacks, the Brungle Aborigines [Wiradjuri] regarded that lot as a hostile people (gurai), and some 'lads' (clever fellows) from the two tribes had killed each other off at Lacmalac, a place just outside Tumut town (Parkes 1952:3).

The aggressors in raids perpetrated by the so-called 'Yass blacks' upon groups to the south and east may well have been Wiradjuri rather than Yass locals. As Flood (1984:23) has suggested, places of white import were rough markers in referencing indigenous locales. Thomas Franklin, an early settler in the Yass district, is said to have witnessed 'a battle fought between about 1000 men, the Queanbeyan, Monaro and Upper Murray blacks<sup>19</sup> being pitted against the Murrumbidgee and Lachlan blacks' (cited Gillespie 1991:52).

Yass seems to have constituted something of a border region<sup>20</sup> between the greater socio-cultural blocs and it may be assumed that relationships at the interface were complex with various degrees of connection maintained on both sides. Frederick Freeman explained something of the hierarchy

<sup>19</sup> This reference may relate to the Wolgal.

<sup>20</sup> See for example Howitt's description of the Wiradjuri groups between Hay and Yass (Howitt 1996:56).

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of relationships between the Wiradjuri and surrounding groups in his description of camping arrangements at intertribal gatherings,

At big meetings we Wiradjuri would camp nearest the Wongaibon because we could understand them; next would come the Ngunawal because we could understand them too; and after that the Gural, and last the Wadi Wadi (Parkes 1952).

This reference of mutual attendance at intertribal meetings is interesting, though I have no further evidence to explain whether such meetings were a common occurrence. There is an account of the Yass and Lake George tribes attacking the Pialligo tribe (Queanbeyan Age 19.3,1919).

There is little information to shed light upon the relationships between the Goulburn peoples and their southern neighbours. Murray documented that a Goulburn man, Mangamore, had raided a camp in the mountains in an attempt to assassinate Onyong but his motive for this attack is unknown (Jackson-Nakano 2001:82).

Early records tell of a big battle between the Pialligo blacks of Canberra and a fighting contingent from the Monaro (Queanbeyan Age 19.3.1919). The story suggests the fight was a hostile raid but it might also have been a formal expiatory fight. Notably, in relating the same tale, Shumack refers to the raiders only as having come from the south west possibly leaving room for the aggressors to have been a group from beyond the Monero. In general, other evidence, such as their mutual attendance at the Bogong feasts and their later congregation tends to suggest that the Monero blacks and their northern neighbours were generally allies rather than foes.

Finally, an early example giving strong evidence of the strong allegiance of the Yuin/Murring groups [as Howitt defines them] comes from Robinson who while at Tinoor [Genoa] in 1844 recorded,

The Twofold Bay, Cape Howe, Maneroo, Yass and other natives have several times begun an expedition to the westward to attack the blacks and steal women but in general returned after leaving, the old men conceiving some omen prejudicial (Robinson :144 ref incomplete).

In all, the evidence of relations of amity and enmity in the region give strong support to the proposition that the groups who traditionally occupied the area now encompassed within the ACT and its environs were members of a broader Yuin/Murring bloc clearly set apart from and at odds with the Gippsland and Wiradjuri Aboriginal people.

**LOCAL CONNECTIONS**

Primary connections to country - those of deep spiritual significance and productive of the strongest rights and responsibilities - are in Aboriginal Australia generally quite narrowly defined. A person acquires - usually by fact of descent or birth - an intimate bond to a specific named place or an estate often centred about an important site or collection of sites. Hence Howitt explains that in the south-east,

Claims to particular tracts of country arose in certain of these tribes by birth. When a child was born among the Yuin, its father pointed out some hills, lakes, or rivers to the men and

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women there present as being the bounds of his child's country, being that where his father lived [ie. the father's father], or where he himself was born and had lived<sup>21</sup> (Howitt 1996:83).

This description of country is reminiscent of those ritualised recitals of place occurring in the ceremonial context. It is not entirely clear whether the demarcations of country related here are equivalent in each of these cases and, in Howitt, at least, there is considerable sliding in levels from the local to the more expansive with noticeable slippage between the discussion of rights in particular tracts of country and broader tribal identities. Neither Howitt nor Mathews was much concerned with the fine levels of association to country which were better captured by Brough-Smyth writing for Victoria,

Each of these tribes had its own district of country – its extent at least, and in some instances its distinct boundaries, being well known to the neighbouring tribes. The subdivision of the territory even went further than that; each family had its own locality. And to this day the older men can clearly point out the land which their fathers left them, and which they once called their own (Brough-Smyth 1972: 40-41).

Mathews unfortunately tended to pay little attention to issues of land tenure and local residence patterns and his writings in respect of the present area of concern have little light to shed on local ownership and occupation of land. In a rare instance in respect of the Kamilaroi he did note that sons inherited their hunting and camping grounds from the father and that they tended to camp close to each other with their respective families. 'These little knots of people', he wrote, 'could be called collectively family groups or local divisions' (Mathews 1912:93).

Robinson, the Victorian Chief Protector of Aborigines who toured the Canberra region in 1844, was aware that individuals claimed connection to particular locales and in the censuses he took, including that at Yarralumla on the Limestone Plains, he enquired after people's country. Although he was not familiar with the place names he recorded himself, his lists provide a valuable source for mapping out the areas with which those then resident or visiting the Limestone Plains held association. These will be more closely examined below. We cannot verify what type of association was being recorded here, but it is noticeable that nearly every person claimed an association with a different place, suggesting that they were in fact volunteering places of their individual or close family affiliation rather than a current commonly shared residential base. The close personal identification of person and place is reflected in the fact that a number of individuals were named after their country.

As previously noted people did not reside or confine their hunting and gathering activities within the bounds of a single clan estate. By a complex system of secondary rights and interests, of standing permissions granted amongst neighbouring groups, and through hospitality afforded to kinsmen and other guests, people were able to circulate much more broadly.

While Howitt is quite clear that rights to country are in the first place inherited from the father, against the monopolistic model of patrilineal descent, which held long sway in anthropological circles, Howitt's study presented a more complex picture of the means by which rights in country

<sup>21</sup> Howitt goes on to add here that a girl took the country of her mother, however, in the light of other information on land tenure, such a gender based distinction seems unlikely. As will elsewhere be discussed, however, rights in country descended to children from their mother in all cases.

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were acquired. Rights in country are shown to descend to a child not only from the father, but also from their mother, from their place of birth if different, and from the place of birth of children as well. He was probably mistaken in suggesting that the girl, in opposite fashion to a boy, took her mother's country, rather it seems likely that every individual possesses rights in their mother's country as well as in their father's. So he explains in one example,

The son of one of the headmen of the Theddora was born in the Ngarigo country, to which his mother belonged. It was therefore his country... (Howitt 1996:83)

In addition, to the rights acquired by descent, Howitt was also told that a person had rights in the country in which he or she was born,

One of the old men of the Wolgal said that the place where a man is born is his country, and he always has a right to hunt over it, and all others born there had also the right to do so (Howitt 1996:83).

Furthermore, where a child was born away from its father's and mother's country, the parents also acquired rights in the country of their child's birth,

Besides this the father took the country where his child was born, if away from his own locality, and the mother took that where her daughter was born under similar circumstances (Howitt 1996:83).

The same reservations over this gender distinction apply as noted above.

Not only did an individual inherit rights at birth but it was also possible to acquire rights and interests over the course of a lifetime. A range of rights were available to the spouses of those with primary rights in country, on a temporary basis to visitors and by standing order to those who were neighbours. Such rights were contingent in nature and subject to withdrawal and did not give the person the rights of decision making over country. Yet it was also possible for consolidation of rights into more authoritative forms.

Powerful men extended their domain of influence through the activation of hereditary interests, through intermarriage of self and kindred, through hosting and participating in ceremonies over a wide range of distance, through the accrual of esoteric knowledge and the development of alliances with leaders of other groups. Howitt describes how the Wolgal leader Yibai-malian had come to have wide-ranging influence,

Yibai-malian, whose father was a renowned "blackfellow doctor" of the Wiradjuri tribe, who joined the Wolgal, with whom he was related by marriage, and then obtained a wife from the Theddora of Omeo. By this he became connected with the Ngarigo through her relations, and thus met the Yuin and became a man of influence in their tribe<sup>22</sup> (Howitt 1996:511).

By fact of his various connections Yibai-malian had fairly free rights of passage over extensive parts of the country.

<sup>22</sup> There seems some slippage in reference within this passage but it is assumed that beyond the mention of his father, it is Yibai-Malian who forms the main subject.

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By the time Stewart Mowle came to live at Yarralumla, in about 1837, demographic strain, land alienation and new engagements with the European stations and settlements are already likely to have led to substantial group reconfigurations. Even so, had he taken the time to report in greater length on his experiences with and observations of Aboriginal people, there is no doubt that he could have told much about such configurations in the broader ACT region. Tantalisingly, he reports on the protocols attending the meeting of two groups,

Two tribes, or members of the same tribe, meeting at a camping ground would sit apart, light their fires, and feast upon their warmed through 'opposums. After a time the leading man of the last arrived would make a remark, then a speech, when they fraternised, and the talking would become general (Mowle 1896:24).

Whereas at the time, Stewart Mowle and others, such as Garrett Cotter, who maintained close contact with Aboriginal people, would have been able to speak about the countries, the group identities and some of the personnel involved in such exchanges, this level of detail must be counted largely lost to present knowledge.

## PART THREE: CONSIDERING THE FINER DETAIL

### JACKSON-NAKANO

In her reassessment of Aboriginal land associations in the area about Weereewaa, the name she gives for Lake George, Jackson-Nakano has made a gargantuan effort to glean from the historical record details of Aboriginal occupation and traditional local group configurations, unearthing much valuable information. Unfortunately, the existing information is too scant and fragmentary to hope to undertake the type of reconstruction attempted. Here a handful of randomly recorded and preserved Indigenous names - whose true referents are completely unknown - have been taken and turned into a patchwork of exclusive tribal territories, together covering every square inch of country. Cleaving to a simplistic tribal model, Jackson-Nakano struggles to make sense of the complexity of local organisation and is forced to resort to notions of territorial expansion and contraction, of conquest, mergers of country, of usurpation of power in the pre-historical period, none of which are commensurate with what is known about Aboriginal territorial relations, at least outside of very long frames of time, although clearly the post-contact period did represent a period of unprecedented change.

There is some inconsistency I would note in Jackson-Nakano's treatment of the historically recorded names for the various areas. Whereas she has seized upon group names appearing on blanket returns, name plates and other historical sources to demarcate quite finely differentiated local groups in the Goulburn and Yass area, she has passed over material of the same sort relating to the broader Canberra area in favour of the Kamberri or Ngambri identity which is credited as holding interests over a stretch of country extending from,

southwest of Weereewaa to Kiandra and the upper Murrumbidgee, down the Goodradigbee River to the south Yass Plains, south of the Yass River through Ginninderra and Gundaroo and across Canberra and Queanbeyan to the Gaurock Ranges (Jackson-Nakano 2001:xxiii).

The use of the Kamberri/Ngambri name as a group identifier with application to the entire ACT region seems unlikely. It clearly related to the area about what is now Sullivan's Creek and may have borne reference to the use of the area as a ceremonial ground. The name was probably used by white settlers, by extension, to refer to the Aboriginal people that came there, at times in impressive numbers.

Within given time limits it has not been possible to fully scrutinise Jackson-Nakano's arguments and interpretation of data, which she herself admitted were still in progress at the time of writing. In a number of cases, discrepancies have been found between the original source material and reported findings, and given greater time a more careful assessment of her interpretations from an anthropological perspective would help to tease fact from fiction.

### KOCH

In the following section Koch's revisionist arguments about local and linguistic associations in the Canberra area will be examined. This engagement with Koch will allow for an exploration of some of the primary source material. A number of points of difference or questions regarding Koch's ideas

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will be raised; however, at present, given the short time available for review of existing materials, I regard my own arguments more as points for further consideration than firm conclusions.

There are two major strands of argument in Koch's recent article regarding Aboriginal languages and social groups in the Canberra region: one is, as aforementioned, that the language spoken from Queanbeyan to Canberra to Namadgi, and possibly including Molonglo, was one dialect, related to, but distinguishable from, the dialects spoken at Tumut and Monaro; and secondly that the name Nyamudy [Namadgi] was the traditional self-appellation for the original inhabitants of the area.

Closer scrutiny of his sources for the Canberra languages is warranted, these are the word list recorded by Stewart Mowle, Chief Protector Robinson's 'Limestone' vocabulary, Eyre's 'Molonglo' word list (1845) and the Queanbeyan vocabulary published by Curr (1887).

Mowle came to Yarralumla in 1837 as a sixteen year old and spent some fourteen years in the region. In an 1896 article he volunteered some items of vocabulary and words of two songs as well as some corrections to the usual spellings of place names. He writes,

The aboriginal songs as under -- and some of many words and names of places -- I learnt in my early manhood days from the Queanbeyan (Cuumbean) blacks. That they are correct in spelling, as English can spell them, I can vouch for, from often having sung the songs with the blacks at their camps long ago, and the Government settlement in Brungle, in 1891 (Mowle 1896:24).

Queanbeyan is to be understood here as a general reference to the district.

A close examination of Mowle's memoirs, coupled with the census taken by Robinson at Yarralumla in 1844, gives finer insight into the territorial affiliations of those with whom he associated. One of Mowle's major informants was Tommy Murray, whom he befriended soon after his arrival at Yarralumla, and who he recounts used to sleep on a carpet on the floor of his hut (Jackson-Nakano 2001:70). Harry, 'tribal friend of Tommy' (Wilson 2001:105) was another companion. Wilson, Terence Aubrey Murray's biographer, describes Tommy as the son of a local chief and also as a Brindabella aristocrat (Wilson 2001:101). The source of these ascriptions is unknown, although Mowle does recount having encountered Tommy's tribe in the vicinity on the return from an expedition into the mountains to the west (Wilson 2001:109; Mowle 1899). Jackson-Nakano records that both Tommy and Harry were from the Tumut district, this appearing to have been inferred from Robinson (Jackson-Nakano 2001:79).

Although not all of the country affiliations can be recognised, details on Robinson's Limestone census suggests that the territorial associations of the 'Limestone blacks' assembled at Yarralumla in 1844 were concentrated west of the Brindabellas in the Tumut to Yaouk area, hence Billy Buckley<sup>23</sup> is associated with Ud.jin.bil.le near Tumut while Harry and probably Paddy (Ko.ber.er.munje) are associated with Goobarragandra, also close to Tumut; Money and Kangaroo Tommy are associated with Yarrangobilly; Bobby, Neddy and Hamilton are associated with Yi.yac (Yaouk), in the latter case the Aboriginal name of Jim mut possibly ties him to Tumut while Charlotte (sic) is associated with Jin.jer.re, possibly in the vicinity of Mt. Gingera (Young 2005:433-434; Jackson-Nakano 2001:72). A number have associations with Bo.lare.rer (near Adaminaby) including Jemmy and

<sup>23</sup> Billy Buckley is listed as a visitor in the Janevale blanket return.

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Johnny while Ong Gong himself is listed as King, Mr Broadrib, the latter also to be taken as a reference to Bo.lare.rer against which Robinson elsewhere records Mr Broadrib although it could also have been Bullerमारंग near Bredbo to which Robinson had recently been invited (Clark 2000:145)<sup>24</sup>. There is a conspicuous absence of any persons with obvious connections north of the Molonglo.

Robinson's material shows a 19 year old named Harry (Koo.ro.mun)<sup>25</sup> whose country is recorded as Too mut, Koo.ber.rer.dan (possibly Gooberragandra). It is not entirely clear which Tommy was Mowle's friend - presuming he was present - because there are three Tommys on the list, at the top Tommy (Pun bun gurn ber ler) for whom no place association is listed, Bolero Tommy whose associations are presumably with Bolera near Adaminaby and Tommy (Murer dun min).

Flood has it that King Tommy or Mur-er-dun-min, aged 19 of Yarralumla is included in Robinson's material (Flood 1984:17) but this is not quite correct. In the census taken at Yarralumla<sup>26</sup>, 19 year old Kangaroo Tommy, Murer dun min<sup>27</sup> appears, his country being listed as Yar ing guber le at Kennedy 50 mile, also a reference to the Tumut district. I see no reference to Tommy as King within Robinson's material although a Kangaroo Tommy, with a different Aboriginal name, is given as chief on a census taken from a Yam.moit.mittong [Nyamudy.midhang as per Koch] messenger at Gegedzerick. Tommy a.k.a. Moo.ro.rare.rer appears on the same list and may be the same person as Murer dun min. Koch has suggested a breastplate inscribed Moorarar of Namutch - NSW (Koch 2011:129) may have belonged to Tommy, although Wesson writes with respect to the same source 'Moorarar/Murrare alias Jacky' (Wesson 2000:112).

Robinson himself provided a word list for Limestone, his interpreter and informant for the word list was Wellington or Mo.rid.jer.gong. Jackson-Nakano makes comment on Wellington's connections to Tumut. Having observed that Hamilton 'was a frequent visitor to the Canberra-Queanbeyan district, but was not a local' she goes on to write, 'both Hamilton and his contemporary, Wellington, were more closely associated with the Tumut district according to Thomas Wilkinson, who knew them well' (Jackson-Nakano 2001:58). It has not been possible to locate the manuscript to check the details, but in light of the fact that Wilkinson lived at Gundaroo before taking up Yallowin it is interesting to note that Wellington told Robinson his country was Kundow.er.re<sup>28</sup>. This name is closely reminiscent of *Candariro* which was recorded by Throsby in respect of Gundaroo in 1820 (Lea-Scarlett 1972:2).

In the Gegedzerick census of Limestone Aborigines taken by Robinson both Wol.lur.dan (presumably Wellington) and a second man Kangaroo Tommy are listed with the Aboriginal name Mor.rid.jer.gong. The elder man is probably the same person who in 1841 was listed on the Queanbeyan blanket return as 30 year old Kangaroo Tommy whose Aboriginal name was given as

<sup>24</sup> Bo.larerer appears in Robinson's notes with the midhang suffix, along with a number of others including Til.le.midhang and Jinne.ne midhang. These require more careful consideration. Robinson did not record Yam.moit.mittong at Yarralumla but from a Limestone messenger at Gegedzerick.

<sup>25</sup> Jackson-Nakano (2001:72) suggests Coolamon.

<sup>26</sup> Presumably the source of Flood's claim for Tommy's territorial affiliation.

<sup>27</sup> As transcribed by Young 2001:434.

<sup>28</sup> Throsby Smith had recorded Gundaroo as *Candariro* in 1820

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Monijary? (cited Jackson-Nakano 2001:63). He was wearing a plate with a reference to Boogolong, in the vicinity of Wee Jasper. I am unable to pursue questions of links toward Yass further at this point but note a number of facts pointing to close enmeshment of groups from Tumut to Yass and Canberra with common references to Goodradigbee featuring in both Mathews' description of Ngunawal country and in Bluett's account of the domain of the Kgamberry (Bluett 1927), Queen Lucy of Yass's claim to familiarity with Goodradigbee and Freeman, as per Parkes, mention that the Gurnal of Tumut spoke a lot like the Ngunuwal and were associated with the latter on the Tablelands (Parkes 1952).

The close ties of Mowle and Robinson's informants to the Tumut area, as well as the fact that Mowle spent six years living at Mannus, near Tumberumba, cast some doubt over the argument that the word lists they supplied were representative of the Canberra area as distinct from the Tumut Valley and therefore from the Wolgal (although it may be argued that the Wolgal proper were located further south). This leads as well to consideration of whether the original Nyamudy name had broad applicability in the region or whether its reference was more constricted.

NYAMUDY<sup>29</sup>

Drawing linguistic equivalence between what have been previously regarded as disconnected names (see for example Flood 1984) including Nammage, Nammitch, Yam.moit and Ngye-mutch, Koch (2011) provides a rich inventory of instances of the name Nyamudy employed in reference to both Aboriginal people and place by early explorers and settlers within what is now the ACT. In Koch's view early references to Nyamudy as an Aboriginal group name may be read, not only with reference to the Namadgi Ranges, to which there are indisputable connections, but as a regional reference for the Queanbeyan-Canberra-Namadgi area and its people more broadly. This is a point on which I am not entirely in agreement. I am not certain a more constricted association with the mountainous area now referred to as the Namadgi Ranges, stretching and perhaps the immediately adjoining Isabella Plains area was indicated.

In January 1834 the explorer Lhotsky viewed the Namadgi range from Campbell's estate (now Duntroon). He wrote, 'from this place the people pointed out to me Namadji range, being 18 miles distant S.W. which is covered with snow during a great part of the year' (Lhotsky 1979:120). At the same time other locales including the Molonglo Plains to the south east and the Kembery Plains to the NNW were identified. Within the white perspective at least, even in the early days, the name Namadgi, had a quite specific reference to a particular range of mountains.

An account by Riley of a corroboree witnessed at 'Tuggranon Isabella Plains' apparently at the end of the 1820s begins with mention of the Namitch tribe. The fact that the performance was instigated at his request, that the numbers involved were not large – a group of eight old men and women who led the singing and a total tally of 23 performers – as well as the reference to a single chief suggest that this was not a major congregation. The basis of this gathering seems to have been what Riley presents as an annual winter bunkering down; he writes,

<sup>29</sup> This spelling represents the linguistically correct rendering of the name whose pronunciation might more easily be Nyam.

The Namitch tribe of natives was assembled here, forming rude huts of boughs of trees and bark open on the north-east side and arranged in the form of a crescent; they had made these 'gunyahs', as they term them, more substantially than any I had yet seen -- only erecting them when in expectation of a continuance of cold and rainy weather, and generally close to some cattle or sheep station where they remain nearly all the winter assisting the stockman in grinding and eating his wheat or maize, and living principally on the skim milk and bran which they beg' (cited Lamb 2006:256).

Similar relationships are likely to have formed with other stations and may have been the basis for the issuing of a considerable number<sup>30</sup> of breastplates in the area for which that issued for Moorarar of 'Namutch' (Koch 2011:129) is only one.

A tendency for such a group to disperse into the mountains in the warmer months and reassemble in the Tuggerong area for winter fits well with the reports made on the same tribe (Namwitch) on the 1834 Janevale [later Wanniasa] blanket return<sup>31</sup>. On this form, the district or usual resort of the Namwitch is described as 'Mountains beyond the Murrumbidgee, opp'e [apparently opposite] Limestone Plains sometimes resides about this part of the country' [presumably meaning Janevale] (in Gillespie 1991:36). Importantly, it should be noted that Jackson-Nakano has omitted mention of the word 'opposite' in transcribing the description of the locale and Koch has relied upon this incorrect reference in his analysis to underline the group's association with the Limestone Plains. It is further noted on the census form that,

The probable number of this tribe [Namwitch] about 60 or 70 men, women, children most part of them wild Blacks, and seldom go near the haunts of white men (in Gillespie 1991:36).

A second tribe listed on the 1834 Janevale blanket return is labelled as the Hagen Hope tribe. Seventeen individuals<sup>32</sup>, led by Chief Jemmy the Rover<sup>33</sup>, are listed with the district being described as 'Limestone Plains, Condore Mountains [in the Brindabellas] and the Murrumbidgee.' This seems to indicate that a separate group was identified with the area including and to the immediate west of the Limestone Plains and north of the Nyamudy. It is interesting that it is the Hagen Hope identity which seems to persist through to the 1841 blanket return at which time personnel from both groups are consolidated under that label, possibly relating to changing or circumstantial residential patterns (in Jackson-Nakano 2001:63). The Molonglo tribe is also separately enumerated on the Janevale blanket return.

In February 1834 a few months before the June 1834 blanket return Lhotsky visited Bradley at Kuma. He was told that the Monero blacks sometimes visited Bradley's hut in numbers of 60-70, were

<sup>30</sup> The Janevale blanket return lists a B which I have taken to mean breastplate against a number of the men. Others known for the area include Neddy of Neis [Naas], Mickey of Gin and Gin and Derry [Gininderra] (Gillespie 1991:21), Kangaroo Tommy of Boogoolong (1841 Queanbeyan blanket return).

<sup>31</sup> Lists of recipients were recorded during the annual handout of government-issued blankets to Aboriginal people.

<sup>32</sup> Two under this head were listed slightly apart and known to be visitors from elsewhere, Captain Brooks of the Illawarra and Old Cry

<sup>33</sup> The origins of Jemmy the Rover are somewhat uncertain. Jackson-Nakano reports that Shumack said that he was not a local (source unlocated). Robinson recorded Jemmy the Rover as Nam.mittong which Koch has interpreted as a reference to Nyamudy. It is interesting to note a Jemmy the Rover, although with different native name, appeared on Robinson's Yate mittong or Omeo census as well (Young 2005:428).

civilised or rather corrupted, and that they travelled to Limestone Plains and Yass<sup>34</sup> (Lhotsky 1979). It is not unfeasible that this was the same group listed as Namwitch at Janevale. According to Jackson-Nakano Mr Davy who was listed at Janevale appeared more frequently on the Cooma blanket returns (Jackson-Nakano 2001:59).

I think some caution is also warranted where equivalences between Nyamudy and the Limestone Plains or with Queanbeyan are indicated. Queanbeyan was at the time a large administrative division. A reference to a place name or district may serve to locate the group relative to other places or districts within European frames but the reverse cannot be assumed. In 1844 Robinson recorded a vocabulary at Gedjezerick from a visiting messenger who was described as coming from 'Limestone near Yass'. This man was also the apparent source of a list or 'census' of the Limestone natives which Robinson recorded under the name 'Yam.moit-mittong or Limestone'. This list bears close similarity to the 'Limestone' census of Aboriginal people recorded by Robinson at Yarralumla. Notably Robinson's journal entries in relation to Aboriginal people at Yarralumla including that census and his recounting of Murray's tales of the murder of half-caste children by local Aboriginal people, Limestone and Molonglo make no mention of the name Yammoit.mittong. I surmise that its employment in his official report was an extension of information taken at Gedjezerick rather than a reflection of advice from Murray.

#### Onyong

The history of Onyong<sup>35</sup>, who in the Janevale blanket return, is listed as Chief of the Namwitch tribe is interesting. According to oral traditions maintained by his family, Garrett Cotter, a convict stockman from the Kenny property near Lake George, crossed the Murrumbidgee looking for pastures in 1827-1828. He is said to have been led in his search by Onyong. At this time Cotter erected a hut in the Naas Forest presumably as a pastoral outstation. In 1832, after being convicted of horse stealing and sentenced to live 'beyond the limits of location', he returned to live in the mountains and apparently, over the six year period he spent in exile, enjoyed close relations with Aboriginal people. The Cotter family say that Onyong later came to occupy the Naas hut and they have erected a plaque at the site to commemorate the friendship between the two men.

Onyong may well have been instrumental in Terence Aubrey Murray's selection of land at Yarralumla and his subsequent explorations in the mountain valleys to the west of there. Jackson-Nakano says that Murray knew Onyong from his Lake George properties and has hypothesised that his name may have derived from the place of the same name located near Murray's Adjamatong Station. She reports that he appeared on censuses in the Lake George and Goulburn areas as well as those at Janevale in the Tuggerong area, at Yarralumla and in Queanbeyan (Jackson-Nakano 2001). Onyong may well have had kinship connections and rights of interest across this extent of country and it is clear he developed a wide range of influence. Nevertheless, in his adult life he demonstrated firm associations with the mountain country, and it might even be argued, in guiding people into the area he exercised a traditional right to do so<sup>36</sup>. Onyong's affiliations in the south-west are further

<sup>34</sup> Jackson-Nakano has incorrectly attributed this to Slater at Yaouk and creates two groups out of one.

<sup>35</sup> Various renditions of his name have been recorded eg. Hong Kong, Hong Yong, Hong-gong, Onyong. For consistency sake, I will use Jackson-Nakano's version.

<sup>36</sup> Although it must also be borne in mind that a retreat to the mountains may have been necessitated by the increasing usurpation of land by white settlers.

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affirmed by his listing in Robinson's 1844 census as King, Mr Broadrib's, a reference to either Bolero or Bullamanang in the Adaminaby/Yaouk/Bredbo district (in Gillespie 1991:36; Clark 2000).

The account of a battle between the Canberra blacks, 'then known as the Piallago tribe' and the Monero tribe as told by one of the 'old identities of the district' locates the battle on the Piallago Plains being east of the Molonglo River between Duntroon and Queanbeyan. The writer, relating the tale, describes the retreat of the Monero with their Piallago enemies in pursuit,

The king of Monaro hurriedly withdrew his men from the field and began a long and disastrous retreat... On and on, for full 15 miles, past Cuppacumbalong, the territory of King Bongong [presumably Onyong], eight more miles to Naas, another 18 miles up to Booth's Creek (as it is now called, but by the blacks named Durrandimmey) and so retreated to their own territory defeated and disgraced (Queanbeyan Age 1919).

Although alternative readings are possible, this account appears to differentiate the territory of King Bongong [sic] from that of the Piallago tribe.

Onyong certainly later came to hold the status of King of the Piallago tribe in the eyes of the settlers, yet there are suggestions this was not necessarily validated by other Aboriginal people. There were reportedly strong tensions between Jemmy the Rover and Hong Gong over issues of leadership and it seems that Queen Nelly of Queanbeyan opposed Hong Gong's appointment to the place of King or Chief by authorities. Bluett, basing his account on the reminiscences of Blundell, recounts, that

Round the '60s<sup>37</sup> King Hong Kong, a tall burly middle-aged son of the Piallago branch, ruled the remnants of the tribe. His authority was recognised, as well as being found useful, at the Police Station in Queanbeyan. The officers presented him with a moon-shaped name-plate, as an insignia of his office, which he wore on his sable chest hung by a leathern strap round his neck. Hong Kong's right was disputed by a peripatetic gin, who called herself Queen Nellie, claiming that she was the daughter of the Canberra branch, and therefore should have her throne like Queen Victoria (Bluett 1954:20).

Although the reasons for Queen Nellie's protests are uncertain it is plausible that she was objecting on traditional grounds to Hong Kong's right to assert rights of authority over the area. It is also noted that early settlers reports have it that Nellie refused to 'go with the wild tribes of blacks' (cited Jackson-Nakano 2001:129).

## MOLONGLO

Jackson-Nakano gives some cause for thinking that Queen Nelly may have had an affiliation with the Molonglo group, suggesting that Nelly may have been listed as an orphan on an 1838 Queanbeyan blanket return and could have been the same girl listed under that name who was counted amongst Robinson's 'Molongler' group in 1844 (Jackson-Nakano 2001:125).

There seems to be good reason to separate Molonglo from the Nyamady at least on social grounds. The Molonglo tribe is repeatedly identified in official records including the Janevale blanket return of

<sup>37</sup> Jackson-Nakano suggests Onyong passed away circa 1850

1834, the Queanbeyan blanket return of 1844 and in Robinson's 1844 Limestone census and commentary (Robinson 1941), as distinct. The presence of a 'sea coast' woman on a Molonglo census suggests that, as indicated in the case of Braidwood by Howitt (Howitt 1996:528), this group shared an orientation toward and close marriage exchange relationships with coastal groups. This is also commensurate with Nelly's later marriage relationships. If, as Koch maintains, *bimme* was a reference to plains, Bob, Bim.mim.mi.gal, King of Molongler might be seen as presiding over the plains perhaps in conradistinction to the mountainous affiliations of the Nyamudy<sup>38</sup>.

Eyre's word list for 'Molonglo or its vicinity' dates from the mid-1830s and was taken at his Woodlands property less than 20km south east of Queanbeyan on the Molonglo River (Eyre 1984). Although he seems to hold some reservations, Koch grouped this wordlist with those of Mowle and Robinson as 'probably' representative of the same language (Koch 2011:141; Wafer and Lissarrague 2008). Although, in any case, Koch acknowledges that the Canberra language is transitional between Ngarriagu and Ngunawal and most of the words in Eyre's list seem to be common to both languages, there a few notable items seeming to lean it toward Ngunawal. Koch includes the word *kundhul* 'eye' as amongst those vocabulary items unique to the Ngarigo/Canberra/Wolgal language, yet 'eye' on the Molonglo list is '*magalite*' comparable to Ngunawal '*mikalady*'. The word for father too is, in the Ngarigo related languages, *babang* yet in the Molonglo list *ko-rai*, commensurate with Ngunawal '*kurang-i*' (Eyre:1845; Gillespie 1991; Wafer and Lissarrague 2008). There are no personal pronouns amongst Eyre's material but I note that the possessive suffixes recorded on the Molonglo list ie. *-da* 'my' as in *naj-jan-da* (my mother) and *-go* 'its' as in *ko.bong-go* (its egg) are the same as those documented by Mathews for the Ngunawal (Eyre 1845; Mathews 1904). Koch advises that the suffix *-dha* or *-dya* is used for my in several Yuin languages and does not serve to distinguish Ngunawal and Ngarigo. He further notes that *-kung* is the possessive suffix characteristic of Ngunawal, the *-go* However, in this regard, I have no data with which to compare this information with Ngarigo and I defer to the linguists.

Queen Nellie was almost certainly the person responsible for the word list contributed by the Police Magistrate to Curr's 1887 volume which linguists Koch (2011) and MacDonald (see Flood 1984) have both determined is Ngarigo or a variant thereof. It is purely conjectural to suggest so, but given Nellie's uncertain heritage, her age, long association with Ngarigo speakers and the possible early demise of the people who originally inhabited the Queanbeyan area, the fact that in the late 1880s she volunteered a word list which was little differentiated from Ngarigo does not constitute definite proof that this was the language originally spoken there.

During his 1834 expedition, Lhotsky observed that Kembery was the name originally applied to the Limestone River by the natives adding the comment 'they are no more!' Lhotsky's comments have been dismissed by various authors as ignorant assumption (Bluett 1927, Jackson-Nakano 2001). However, given that he elsewhere showed interest in and enquired about Aboriginal occupation of country, it is not certain that there was not some pointed knowledge - perhaps of some violent dispersal at least - underlying the assertion. A story related by Elizabeth McKeahnie, whose family arrived at the Canberra/Acton property in 1838, tells the story of an incident taking place in earlier days. Supposedly a plan on the part of Aboriginal people to murder all the men on Acton Station

<sup>38</sup> Although Howitt has used the term *Bemeringal* as one which distinguished people of the uplands from those of the coast.

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was said to have been thwarted when the whites settlers were forewarned of the attack by a 'kind-hearted gin'. The blacks were said to have met with 'a warm reception' (Queanbeyan Age cited Gillespie 1991:34). That these same people retreated to the mountains is, of course, a definite possibility.

References to camps at Piallago and to the Piallago tribe, as to the Nganbra, can be found scattered in the recollections of early settlers. Various tales relating to Ainslie's original discovery of the Piallago plains have it that he was guided to 'her people's' camp at Piallago by a woman he met at either Yass or Ginninderra (eg. Bluett 1954:3; Wright 1923:6). Jackson-Nakano's theory that this woman may have been a captive wife of the Wallaballoo of Yass forced to guide the whites into their enemy terrain (Jackson-Nakano 2001:41) seems most unlikely, but that she may have had cross-cutting kin or affinal ties is feasible. According to F. Campbell, the grandson of the original owner of the station, Piallago meant 'good camping place' and he says, 'that it is on that account that Ainslee, my grandfather's overseer, pitched his camp there'. He reports that 'the last of the tribe of blacks continued to camp close to the house, under the hill known as Mt. Pleasant until they became extinct' (Campbell 1913).

This is likely the same group reported on by Bluett who writes, as apparently reported to him by McDonald, of a group of Aboriginal people camped at Pialligo in the early days 'who were known to the early settlers as the Pialligo blacks' (Bluett 1954:1). Shumack also refers to the Canberra blacks as the Pialligo tribe.

A second group, Bluett says

of a larger number of families set up their mia-mias at the foot of Black's Mountain close to Canburry Creek. These were called the Canburry or Nganbra blacks (Bluett 1954:1).

Bluett maintains that Canberra served as the 'headquarters' of the larger tribe who did not live there permanently but visited on occasion. He paints a vivid picture of the congregation of large numbers of people, from what he refers to as the Nganbra-Piallago tribe and their neighbours, for a ceremonial gathering,

Canberra was the most convenient locality, rich in food, for the King to assemble his warriors and their families 400-500 strong, from his Empire of over two million acres, when he wished to honor and impress his neighbouring monarchs...The night would be lit up with the cooking fires at a hundred and more mia-mias spread along the Creek; the four or six blazing bonfires light up up the big cleared dancing ground; the painted and decorated athletic performers, their greased bodies glistening in the firelight; the dancing and miming and singing and shouting; the piccaninnies goggle-eyed with excitement; the old men chanting and tapping their feet, the lubras clapping hands and slapping buttocks to the rhythm of the dance (Bluett 1954:1).

Terence Aubrey Murray sketched a picture of a man who he identified as 'Bindermarren of Canbrey' in 1836 (Jackson-Nakano 2001:78), apparently at the time when he first took up Yarralumla, but there is no other evidence that either he or Mowie used Canbrey as a group name. A number of references second Bluett's claims that Canberra - or *Nganbirra* (per Koch) - served as a ceremonial ground. Campbell remembers the name being pronounced as Canberrie and says that 'it signifies

“head of the plains”, or chief meeting place for the holding of their corroborees’ (Campbell 1913). Queen Nelly was recorded as giving ‘big-plain, no trees’ [Source?]. One of the contributors to the debate about the meaning of the name which raged at the time of the establishment of the new capital said that it was derived from Wiradjuri ‘*Ngan irrabirra*’ meaning they meet or assemble, while a newspaper report records a ‘statement by old “Queen Lucy,” [of Yass] a dusky royalty, that Canberra’s original name was Go Yanberra, the place where they took the boys for the bora ceremony’ (The Mail (Adelaide) 8.1.27).

If correct, Queen Lucy’s statement adds some support for the claim by Don Bell (dec) that his father was initiated on Black Mountain. I am under the impression that much scepticism surrounds the various claims made by Don Bell to establish his claims of interest over Canberra and the ACT.

In a 2002 report, Hutchins presented a map produced by Bell showing the places the latter’s father had earlier mapped for him delineating Ngunawal country. The map shows a circuit extending from Murrumbateman through Goulburn, Braidwood, Kiandra and Gundagai. I do not find it far-fetched that his father described what we might read as a version of the Ngunawal ‘line’ by drawing a map in the sand for him. In his autobiography Jimmy Barker, a Muruwari man from western NSW recounts how he was taught as a boy about the various local divisions of the Muruwari

(Hippi and Maria) told me how the tribe was divided into groups, and spent many hours drawing in the dust with a stick and explaining their position (Barker 1977:27).

We have seen the importance of the recitation of place names identified with participating groups at initiation ceremonies. Children were always included in those parts of the rituals and it seems that the memorisation of such routes was an important part of a child’s education.

Bell has also asserted that his father used to bring the family to visit Canberra for camping and hunting and gathering expeditions. Not only may there have been some favoured seasonal resource but it should be understood that there is a strong compunction within Aboriginal society for the maintenance of relationships both to people and to place by visiting.

Reminiscent of ‘the lines’ previously discussed, in his 1950s study of Western New South Wales Jeremy Beckett found that people referred to ‘beats’, those circuits which were regularly travelled to visit kin,

All Aboriginal people have ‘beats’, areas which are defined by the situation of kin who will give them hospitality, within which they can travel as much or as little as they please, and where they are most likely to find spouses. Proximity is only a minor factor... (Beckett 1988:131).

Travelling such circuits, it may be argued, not only represented an exercise of rights but was also the means by which one maintained such rights. Although a range of rights might be theoretically available the activation of such rights depended upon the maintenance of relationships to kin through visiting, reciprocal exchanges of kin relationships and the visiting of country itself.

One is known wherever one has lived and wherever one has kin; where one has kin one can also visit and meet the other local people face-to-face. There are no other means whereby one can become known, even by repute. If we are to speak of an Aboriginal belonging to a

community wider than the local residential group, it is his or her beat – the localities where there are kin who will provide a pied-a-terre. In this sense, each individual [has] a personal community, but inasmuch as people are closely inter-related and tend to marry into the same local groups, communities tend to coincide (Beckett 1988:133-134).

There is an integral relationship between Aboriginal conceptions of kin and country. One's location within a social skein defines one's association to place; one's connections to country creates a bond with those who share common affiliation. To know – both in terms of country and in terms of a network of kin and countrymen – where one belongs and that one does belong, continues to be of critical importance in Aboriginal culture and is vital to the sense of self and wellbeing.

CONCLUSION

- This report has demonstrated, after Mathews, that the broader ACT region traditionally fell within a broad Aboriginal sociocultural bloc extending from at least Bulli to Cape Howe encompassing the coastal Yuin groups and the groups occupying the adjacent hinterland region including the southern highlands, southern tablelands and the alpine country of south-eastern NSW.
- The groups within this bloc were united by commonalities in language, social organisation and ceremonial type, were bound by close ties of kinship, intermarriage, trade relationships and ceremonial cooperation and may be regarded as having upheld a common system of Law and custom underlain by their adherence to the *bunan*.
- Within this broader sociocultural bloc particular alliance networks formed around regularly observed ceremonial circuits.
- There is slight evidence for distinction between Yuin and Ngarigo/Wolgal in Howitt's assertion that the two groups traced totemic relationships differently, the Yuin through the father, the latter through the mother (Howitt 1996:133).
- Again although slight there is also a suggestion that while Queanbeyan blacks gathered with those from Braidwood in attending the south coast ceremonies, the Ngarigo did not attend (Howitt 1996:519-520).
- In contrast to their Wiradjuri and Kamilaroi neighbours, the south-eastern groups did not uphold a four class section system, although marriage was regulated with respect to totemic affiliations.
- At the peripheries transitional zones of interaction and cultural cross-over blurred the divide and there is some evidence of mutual ceremonial participation, nevertheless relationships between the south-eastern bloc and the neighbouring Wiradjuri appear to have been marked by strong degrees of animosity and suspicion.
- Where detailed ethnographic research has been conducted in other parts of the country less affected by colonial disruption and European cultural influence, fine-grained and highly complex systems of land tenure have found to be operational. There is no reason to expect that socio-territorial configurations in the broader ACT region would have been different. It is clear that the combined effects of massive demographic stress, alienation from country, forced adjustments and necessary engagements with the European settlers led to an early breakdown of original relationships to land and landed identity.

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- For the purposes of ethnohistoric analysis the written record must be counted thin. With few exceptions the early observers failed to take any interest in or to record their observations of Aboriginal landed associations. The fragmentary information contained within official records and local reminiscences is insufficient to recapture the original configurations of landed identity maintained in the area.
- Evidence from Mathews' and Howitt's works demonstrate without doubt that there were strongly particularised associations between local groups and specific tracts of country. It is clear that high value was placed on knowledge of social and physical geography and that respect for the territorial interests of one's close and distant neighbours was obligatory. Strict protocols guiding the passage of messengers and etiquettes surrounding entry into other camps are indicative of high regard for territorial interests.
- The census material collected about Aboriginal people met with by Robinson at Yarralumla in 1844 provides some evidence for highly localised attachments to country. Of those place names recognisable in his listing of individual country affiliations most are in the Yaouk to Tumut area.
- Tindale's map of tribal territories for the region shows three groups converging on Canberra. Following Mathews he places the southern boundary of the Ngunawal at or just south of Canberra itself. To the south, again based on Mathews testimony, the Ngarigo are depicted as laying claim to the corridor of lowland extending up from the Monaro. To the west, the Wolgal are depicted after Howitt as occupying the high country extending west to Tumut.
- Mathews efforts to salvage linguistic material and to locate the extent of country in which each of the languages was spoken was undertaken late in the historical piece and on the basis of limited interviews. Canberra itself did not form a focal point of his study. His placement of Ngunawal in the Yass area and of Ngarigo on the Monaro tablelands is corroborated by other sources. There are no other known sources which place either of these groups at Canberra or Queanbeyan.
- Wolgal connections to the Queanbeyan area were posited by Howitt. In comparison to Mathews, Howitt's information was acquired over a longer period of time, involving practical interaction in the field with informants with whom he had developed close relationships; however, his knowledge only peripherally extended into the ACT region. Howitt's major Wolgal informant was a senior and knowledgeable man born at Talbingo.
- Koch has made careful and productive use of personal pronouns as a tool for linguistic distinction and has effectively drawn lines of distinction between the Ngunawal/Gundungarra language(s) or dialects and the word lists for the closely related dialects which he posits as Ngarigo, Wolgal and Canberra.
- Koch has produced several instances of the use of Nyamudy which strongly suggest its use as a group name, nevertheless, I hold some reservations as to whether it was one with broad applicability over the entire Queanbeyan-Canberra-Nyamudy area. It seems more

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likely to me that it was the name of a local group with attachments to the mountainous country in the area now known as the Namadgi Ranges and stretching west and south west from there.

- I note that Koch considers both Wolgal and Gurmäl likely general appellations possibly both applied to outsiders Wolgal, it is suggested, refers to the occupants of mountainous country while Gurmäl is understood as a name applied in undifferentiated fashion by their Wiradjuri neighbours to the Wolgal/Canberra/Ngarigo groups. I note that it is Tindale rather than Parkes himself who suggest the Ngarigo belong in this grouping. I have some difficulty in separating the people implicated in Mowle and Robinson's word lists from the Tumut Blacks identified by Freeman.
- I suggest the Molonglo tribe was a group of similar standing whose homelands were located about the Molonglo River south-east of Queanbeyan and would be interested on comment with regard to my suggestions of some indications of linguistic distinction.
- I suggest that there was possibly a separate local division coinciding with the Hagen Hope tribal identity/district listed in the Janevale blanket return of 1834 and a subsequent Queanbeyan blanket list in the country to the west of Canberra. These groups are likely to be local occupational groups.
- I tentatively suggest that there may have been another local group whose affiliations lay about Pialligo or more generally on the northern side of the Molonglo. Given this and my amateur impression regarding the similarity of certain words in the Molonglo list to Ngunawal, I cannot conclusively preclude the possibility that as suggested by Mathews and Tindale Canberra lay on a linguistic divide.
- All conclusions here must be regarded as tentative. Within the given time frames it has not been possible to locate and thoroughly investigate and analyse all materials with relevance to the brief. Furthermore it must be noted that only a detailed ethnographic study conducted at the time when classical structures were still in place could adequately give account of the social and territorial organisation originally existing in the ACT region. Given the traumatic impacts of colonisation on the population and social structures, possibly even before, and certainly after first settlement and the paucity of the written record it may be assumed that the issue of which groups held traditional association over which areas will remain uncertain.
- I have suggested that an anthropological investigation of the contemporary principles upon which those claiming interests in the broader Canberra area, as well as detailed genealogical analysis, may add light to understandings of traditional configurations.

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