

**CROSS - COMMENT ON DENHAM'S
*BEYOND FICTIONS OF CLOSURE IN AUSTRALIAN ABORIGINAL KINSHIP***

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This cross-comment is intended mainly to enter onto the published record some further well-based statistics on rates of marriage inside and outside the linguistic identity group in Aboriginal Australia. Here I focus on the cases of Mangarla and Nyikina people of the South Kimberley region in north-west Western Australia.

Mangarla is a Western Desert linguistic variety and a member of the very large Pama-Nyungan genetic subgroup of Australian languages. Nyikina is a member of the Nyul-Nyulan family, and very far distant from Mangarla in genetic terms. However, the people whose languages these are have been in contact with each other since before colonisation and increasingly since then.

Genealogies recorded by Norman Tindale and Joseph Birdsell in the region in 1953-54 contain many records of unions where the linguistic identities of the partners were placed next to their names. The tables of these data that follow rely on manuscript sources held in the Anthropology Archives of the South Australian Museum, Adelaide, Australia, as follows (dual and trial linguistic identities are here indicated by 'x'; person code references are e.g. R1791, R1792):

Abbreviations:

NBTD = Tindale's 1953 Derby genealogies (AA346/5/4/3)

NBTM = Tindale's 1953 Meda Station genealogies (AA346/5/4/3)

NBTY = Tindale's 1953 Yeeda Station genealogies (AA346/5/4/3)

NBTL = Tindale's 1954 Liveringa Station genealogies (AA346/5/4/3)

JBBNS = Birdsell's 1954 Noonkanbah Station genealogies (AA689/2/12/3)

JBBLD = Birdsell's 1954 Leopold Downs genealogies (AA689/2/12/3)

JBBFM = Birdsell's 1954 Fitzroy Mission genealogies (AA689/2/12/3)

JBBBS = Birdsell's 1954 Brooking Springs genealogies (AA689/2/12/3)

Raw data

Husband	Wife [generation]	Child	Source
Nyikina	Bunuba [upper]	Nyikina x Bunuba	NBTL p324
Nyikina x Bunuba	Nyikina [lower]	-	NBTL p324
Nyikina x Bunuba	Mangarla [lower]	-	NBTL p324
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	NBTL p324
Mangarla	Mangarla [upper]	Mangarla	NBTL p324
Mangarla	Mangarla [upper]	Mangarla	NBTL p326
Mangarla	Nandjili ? [lower]	-	NBTL p326
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	NBTL p327
Nyikina	Mangarla [lower]	-	NBTL p327
Mangarla	Mangarla x Walmadjarri = Tjiwarliny [upper]	Mangarla x Tjiwarliny	NBTL p328
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	R999	NBTL p330
Nyikina	Walmadjarri [upper]	R997	NBTL p330
Nyikina	Nyikina [lower]	[female]	NBTL p331
Mangarla	Mangarla [upper]	-	NBTL p332
Mangarla	Nyikina [upper]	Mangarla x Nyikina	NBTL p332
Nyikina	Mangarla x Nyikina [lower]	R1005A	NBTL p332
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	NBTL p333
Mangarla	Mangarla [upper]	Mangarla	NBTL p334
Nyikina	Walmadjarri [upper]	Nyikina [2 boys]	JBBNS p818
Nyikina	Walmadjarri [upper]	Nyikina	JBBNS p819
Nyikina	Nyikina [lower]	R1790 et al	JBBNS p819
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	JBBNS p819
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	JBBNS p820
Nyikina	Nyikina [lower]	R1784	JBBNS p820
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	JBBNS p821
Walmadjarri	Nyikina [lower]	[1 male 1 female]	JBBNS p821
Nyikina	Walmadjarri [upper]	R1786	JBBNS p822
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	JBBNS p824
Nyikina	Nyikina [lower]	-	JBBNS p821
Djaru	Nyikina [upper]	R1791, R1792 et al	JBBNS p825
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	JBBNS p826
Nyikina	Walmadjarri [upper]	[female]	JBBNS p826
Nyikina	Walmadjarri [lower]	-	JBBNS p826
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	JBBNS p827
Mangarla	Mangarla [upper]	Mangarla	JBBNS p827
Nyikina	Mangarla [upper]	-	JBBNS p827

Husband	Wife [generation]	Child	Source
Bunuba	Nyikina [lower]	R1827	JBBLD p835
Djaru	Nyikina [lower]	[female]	JBBLD p839
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	JBBFM p847
Nyikina	Nyikina [lower]	-	JBBFM p847
Nyikina	Nyikina [lower]	[male]	JBBFM p847
Nyikina	Bunuba [upper]	Nyikina	JBBFM p850
Nyikina	Olan (Wunambal) [lower]	-	JBBFM p851
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	JBBBS p861
Kitja	Nyikina [lower]	[1 female 1 male]	JBBBS p861
Bunuba	Nyikina [upper]	Bunuba	NBTD p278
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	NBTD p279
Nyikina	Nyul-Nyul [lower]	-	NBTD p279
Nyikina	Bunuba [lower]	-	NBTD p279
Bunuba	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	NBTD p281
Bunuba	Nyikina [upper]	-	NBTD p281
Nyul-Nyul x Tjabir-Tjabir	Nyikina[upper]	Nyikina x Nyul-Nyul x Tjabir-Tjabir	NBTD p282
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	-	NBTD p285
Walmadjarri	Nyikina [upper]	-	NBTD p285
Djaru	Nyikina [upper]	-	NBTD p287
Mangarla	Mangarla [upper]	-	NBTD p289
Worora	Nyikina [lower]	-	NBTD p295
Nyikina	Ngarinyin [upper]	Nyikina x Ngarinyin	NBTD p298
Nyikina	Mangarla [upper]	Nyikina x Mangarla	NBTD p298
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	NBTD p302
Nyikina	Bunuba [lower]	-	NBTD p302
Mangarla	Mangarla x Nyangumarda [upper]	Mangarla x Nyangumarda	NBTD p303
Mangarla x Nyangumarda	Mangarla [lower]	-	NBTD p303
Mangarla	Mangarla [upper]	Mangarla	NBTD p303
Worora	Nyikina [upper]	-	NBTM p304
Unggumi	Nyikina [upper]	Unggumi x Nyikina	NBTM p308
Unggumi	Nyikina [upper]	-	NBTM p308
Nyikina	Warrwa [upper]	Warrwa x Nyikina	NBTM p309
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	Nyikina	NBTY p319
Bunuba	Nyikina [upper]	Bunuba x Nyikina	NBTY p319
Nyikina	Bunuba x Nyikina [lower]	-	NBTY p319

Husband	Wife [generation]	Child	Source
Nyikina	Nyikina [upper]	-	NBTY p320
Nyikina	Karadjjarri [upper]	Karadjjarri [parentage unclear]	NBTY p320
Mangarla	Mangarla x Nyangumarda [upper]	-	NBTY p321
Mangarla	Mangarla x Walmadjjarri [upper]	-	NBTY p321
Mangarla	Mangarla [upper]	-	NBTY p321
Mangarla	Mangarla [upper]	-	NBTY p321
Mangarla	Yulbaritja [upper]	-	NBTY p322
Mangarla	Nyangumarda [upper]	Mangarla x Nyangumarda	NBTY p322

Summary of raw data:

Husband	Wife	Upper generation	Lower generation
Nyikina	Nyikina	14	2
Nyikina [+/- Bunuba]	Bunuba (+/- Nyikina)	2	3
Nyikina [+/- Bunuba]	Nyikina	0	1
Bunuba	Nyikina	4	1
Nyikina	Wunambal	0	1
Nyikina [+/- Bunuba]	Mangarla (+/- Nyikina)	3	3
Nyikina	Walmadjjarri	5	1
Nyikina	Nyul-nyul	0	1
Nyul-nyul	Nyikina	1	0
Nyikina	Ngarinyin	1	0
Unggumi	Nyikina	2	0
Nyikina	Warrwa	1	0
Nyikina	Karadjjarri	1	0
Mangarla (+/- Nyangumarda)	Mangarla (+/- Walmadjjarri Nyangumarda)	13	1
Mangarla	Yulbaritja	1	0
Mangarla	Nandjili?	0	1
Mangarla	Nyikina	1	0
Walmadjjarri	Nyikina	0	1
Djaru	Nyikina	1	1
Kitja	Nyikina	0	1

In the following table I disregard which spouse was husband or wife and also whether or not a spouse's linguistic identification extended to a second language variety (the +/- of the above tables):

Nyikina and Mangarla cases of linguistic endogamy and exogamy:

Spouse 1	Spouse 2	Upper generation	Lower generation	Totals
Nyikina	Nyikina	18	7	25
Nyikina	Non-Nyikina	23	14	37
Mangarla	Mangarla	10	1	11
Mangarla	Non-Mangarla	5	3	8

Exogamy percentages

Language group	Upper generation exogamy	Lower generation exogamy	Overall exogamy
Nyikina	56%	66%	60%
Mangarla	33%	75%	42%

Looking only at marriages involving Nyikina with Mangarla (and vice versa), the figures are:

Nyikina – Mangarla marriages only

Spouse 1	Spouse 2	Upper generation	Lower generation	Total
Nyikina	Mangarla	4	3	7

The Tindale/Birdsell data make it clear that at least one regional pathway to an individual holding dual or trial linguistic identities was by a combination of both father's and mother's language identities:

Multiple linguistic identities based on parentage

Nyikina	Bunuba [upper]		Nyikina x Bunuba	NBTL p324
Mangarla	Mangarla x Walmadjarri Tjiwarliny[upper]	=	Mangarla x Tjiwarliny	NBTL p328
Mangarla	Nyikina [upper]		Mangarla x Nyikina	NBTL p332
Nyul-Nyul x Tjabir-Tjabir	Nyikina[upper]		Nyikina x Nyul-Nyul x Tjabir-Tjabir	NBTD p282
Nyikina	Ngarinyin [upper]		Nyikina x Ngarinyin	NBTD p298
Nyikina	Mangarla [upper]		Nyikina x Mangarla	NBTD p298
Mangarla	Mangarla x Nyangumarda [upper]	x	Mangarla x Nyangumarda	NBTD p303

Unggumi	Nyikina [upper]	Unggumi x Nyikina	NBTM p308
Nyikina	Warrwa [upper]	Warrwa x Nyikina	NBTM p309
Bunuba	Nyikina [upper]	Bunuba x Nyikina	NBTY p319
Mangarla	Nyangumarda [upper]	Mangarla x Nyangumarda	NBTY p322

From the above data and analyses using the Tindale/Birdsell genealogies I derive the following conclusions:

1. The regional default rule for acquiring one's linguistic identity was that one took that of one's father.
2. Dual and trial linguistic identities of individuals could arise from their having parents who had different languages.
3. In the upper generations (i.e. around the late C19 and early C20), the commonest marriage for a Mangarla person was with another Mangarla person, though the numbers in this case are so small that this must be taken with a generous measure of doubt. A third of these upper generation Mangarla marriages were linguistically exogamous. It therefore follows, in my opinion, that for Mangarla people at that time, linguistic exogamy was normal and 'the Mangarla' did not form a closed population.
4. Of 41 upper generation Nyikina marriages, less than half (18) were linguistically endogamous. The figures are large enough to make me confident that linguistic exogamy for Nyikina was common and normal and they also were thus not a closed population by any means. Their rate of out-marriage increased between the late nineteenth century and the mid-twentieth from 56% to 66%.
5. In the upper generations there is only a small amount of evidence of intermarriage between Nyikina and Mangarla. In this sample of 50 upper generation marriages only four fall into this category. This does not indicate strong social integration between the owners of these languages at that time.
6. Nonetheless, given an assumption of medium to long term social abutment/interaction in the claim area, it would follow that people of either or both linguistic identities (Nyikina and Mangarla) would have shared enough in the way of social and cultural systems to have shared an overlapping if not common social milieu, even though they differed with regard to specific institutions such as subsections and sections, and even though they may have engaged in conflict.
7. Indeed two individuals in the above sample were, at that early period, regarded as being **both** Nyikina and Mangarla.
8. At that early time the commonest marriage for a Nyikina person was with a non-Mangarla and non-Nyikina person. Next most common was marriage with another Nyikina person. Third most common was marriage with a Walmadjarri person. (Like Mangarla, Walmadjarri is Pama-Nyungan and only very remotely related to Nyikina.) Thus it would follow that the 'society' to which Nyikina people belonged was also that of members of other linguistic groups in their region, among whom they widely intermarried, with or without any pre-existing linguistic relatedness, but to differing degrees.