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# Making *gambarr*

## It belongs to me, I belong to it

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A few years ago I revisited the Hopevale community in North Queensland with the intention of “repatriating” various sorts of materials – mostly photographs and films – from more than forty years of (discontinuous) research among Guugu Yimithirr-speaking people north of Cooktown. Taking as the central focus a short film about the traditional preparation of *gambarr*, a tar-like substance manufactured from the roots of the *biniirr* or ironbark tree and an essential traditional material for making spears and woomeras, I reflect on evolving and contested notions of land, kin, and ownership that surfaced in a disconcerting and unexpected way during that journey. The film is based on a compilation of photographs and audio commentaries from the 1970s and 1980s. Although at first the families of the now-deceased participants enthusiastically endorsed their elders’ desire that the knowledge they were trying to impart about making *gambarr* be widely shared among younger people, over the course of days of discussion and debate, the families concluded that instead the film ought not to be further disseminated or deposited in a shared community archive of traditional custom and practice. I try to untangle some of the contentious logic of such a decision.

### 1. “Repatriation”: A fieldtrip in 2009<sup>1</sup>

In late April, 2009, together with my daughter Maya and her partner Brad, I made a short trip to the Hopevale Aboriginal community, in north Queensland. Friends from the Cape York Land Council had loaned us a four-wheel drive vehicle, which we drove up the coast from Cairns to Cooktown, crossing the Daintree and calling in at *Wujal Wujal* (Bloomfield) to visit my adoptive sister CJ, who in turn decided to load her dialysis supplies into the car and accompany us to Hopevale to see the rest of the family. A decade earlier I had finished the last major research I had done at Hopevale,

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1. For locations mentioned in the text, see the two general maps at the front of the volume.

culminating in a book (Haviland 1998) about how my Hopevale cousin RH and I had tried to reconstruct, from his memories and those of his kinsmen, fragments of the history of his people, his country, and his language from around Barrow Point near Princess Charlotte Bay (see also Sutton, this volume). And it had been five years since I had previously visited Hopevale, then with the sad duty of laying that same cousin to his final rest. My daughter Maya, who had spent long periods of her childhood running up and down the back streets of Hopevale and who had since embarked on her own project to connect art, image, and word in other comparable places in Australia, had gone even longer without visiting her adopted uncles and aunts who lived at *Juubi*, the Guugu Yimithirr clan name for the area including the main village at Hopevale.

My work at Hopevale had begun in 1970 when I first went to try to learn about the Guugu Yimithirr language. A couple of years later, I traveled north together with Bruce Rigsby, who had been my teacher at Harvard some years before and who was at that moment a colleague at the ANU, during the heady early years there of intensive study of Australian languages. We visited Mareeba and then Cooktown, on a foray in search of old timers who could get us started on languages from Cooktown to Princess Charlotte Bay and anywhere in between, as Bruce simultaneously regaled me with Sahaptin tongue twisters and folksy Kentucky expressions – “queer as a tree full of fish” was my favorite. That had been the beginning of a decades-long relationship with people who came to be my fictive kinsmen in and around Hopevale, a relationship that has now spanned not only several generations but the many twists and turns of political and social change in this corner of Aboriginal Australia. It was a relationship in which Bruce Rigsby was a constant participant, as teacher, colleague, mentor, adviser, companion, confidante, fictive kinsman, and friend, who – especially since I moved away from Australia in the 1980s – periodically gave me a roof under which to sleep, and assiduously kept me abreast, at a distance, of the progress of our mutual Aboriginal friends and relations’ efforts to reestablish at least some measure of control over their lands, their languages, and their social lives.

Amidst the swags and cooking pots loaded into the back of the borrowed truck as we drove north in 2009 was a portable hard disk, brimming with digital versions of photographs, notebooks, audio and video recordings from almost forty years of my visits to Hopevale, all of which had been collected before the advent and without the benefit of the now current ‘informed consent’ required in all IRB (Institutional Review Board, or Ethics Committee) approved research. My idea was to ‘repatriate’ these recently digitized materials, which is to say, in some way to make them available to the community where they originated (see also Allen, this volume, on linking materials held in museums and archives to their ‘source communities’). People at Hopevale had launched sporadic attempts over the decades to organize bilingual education programs both informally and in the local school, and to create a cultural center including

a repository of historical and ethnographic resources. I thought my many recordings and photographs could contribute to such efforts.

As a chronicler of Guugu Yimithirr language and genealogy I had been repeatedly asked to comment on different aspects of what I knew about people's kinship over the years, so I also carried with me digital versions of many Hopevale "family trees." I had learned the importance of keeping kinship relationships straight from my first moments in the community, many years before. On my very first day at Hopevale, for example, several people explicitly suggested that I go to meet old man BJ, the man whom I was taught to call *biiba* "father" and who ultimately instructed me both in how to talk and how appropriately to interact with others in the village. As they told me, "he not only knows how to speak proper Guugu Yimithirr, but he belongs to that language." That is, unlike many people in the community, most of whom were native speakers of the language, Guugu Yimithirr was the proper language of BJ's father and of his father's father before him (see Rigsby 1992, 2005, on the distinction between language use and language ownership, and Rigsby 1998 on shifting notions of ownership). As I listen again to recordings of the many hours we spent in conversation, I realize that BJ was always intent on making sure I knew about two seemingly distinct but completely interrelated things. First were the complexities of people's life trajectories – marriages, children, adoptions, and fostering relationships, or movements across the Aboriginal landscape that encompassed places with Guugu Yimithirr names as well as camps, missions, stations, government settlements and reserves, and sometimes distant rural Queensland towns. Only second were the delicacies of Guugu Yimithirr grammar and precise lexical nuances. Words themselves of course belong to people and places, too, separating coastal from inland folks, or directly linking lexical choices to specific locales and clans (see also Wood, this volume, on similar distinctions in a neighbouring language), helping distinguish *bubu gudyin* 'friends' from *ngarrbal* 'strangers.' As BJ continually pointed out, most people at Hopevale had "their own languages" as well, even if they hadn't learned (or had forgotten) how to speak them.

One of BJ's frequent companions on trips to the bush and in conversation was JM, whose older brother WJ was also my first host at Hopevale, and a person with whose family I continued to live over many years. Indeed, my own "kinship" relationships at Hopevale are complicated by the fact that foster- and step-kin as well as unexpected marriage choices often render it possible, if not necessary, to calculate genealogical relationships in more than one way. (In some cases, usually involving people marrying into the community, or being adopted from the outside, one could simply choose an appropriate relationship term and stick with it. Other cases could be more problematic, as when BJ pointed out a man to me saying, "That fellow walking around there is supposed to be your *mugur* [classificatory mother's brother]; but then he turn around and marry your *dyin.gurr* [classificatory younger sister]; so what are you supposed to call him?" – there was simply no appropriate kinship term for something like that.)

My own case was not so dramatic but resulted instead from the fact that I have had several different ‘father’-like friends and teachers at Hopevale, in different time spans. Most of those people chose to use kin terms with me calculated on the basis of my being like the 3rd (and only surviving) son of BJ. Since BJ was himself the oldest son of an important Guugu Yimithirr man, that left me as an honorary *mugay* (or oldest uncle on the father’s side) for many people in the community. But for others I am like a ‘brother’ regardless of how they called BJ. This is the case with WJ’s children, some of whom I carried on my back to kindergarten; their children, too, have been taught to call me *mugur* or ‘mother’s brother.’ From the ways that such kinship is calculated I thus ‘belong’ by courtesy to at least two different, although interrelated, families, and these are the families whose decisions I chronicle here.

## 2. *Gambarr*: ‘Ancient’ technologies and social life at Hopevale in the late 1970s

After my first visits to Hopevale I wrote a little Guugu Yimithirr grammatical sketch and compiled a series of wordlists. When my family and I returned to Australia in the latter half of the 1970s, we began in earnest to learn about the complex history of the community, from its origins as a Lutheran mission and refuge for the remnants of the Cooktown tribes at Cape Bedford in the 1880s; through the hard times leading up to and during World War I when resources were scant and many people from sometimes distant parts of Queensland were adopted into the community; to the expansion and consolidation of a largely mission-born community between the wars, the catastrophic closure of the mission during World War II and the removal of the entire Aboriginal population, mostly to Woorabinda far to the south where many people died (see also the chapter in this volume by Mushin et al.); and finally to the reestablishment of the community at its current location inland from Cape Bedford at the modern Hopevale (Haviland & Haviland 1980). Community history, genealogy, and ways of life in the early Cape Bedford mission were the principal topics of my conversations with BJ and others, when my family lived for extended periods at the bottom end of the village, far from the office, school, store, church, and hospital where most outsiders lived.

My early field notebooks show that we were initially occupied by questions we had brought with us to Hopevale: the history of the community, and of Guugu Yimithirr people more widely, as represented in people’s personal memories, in counterpoint to Lutheran church or missionary accounts, or to the bureaucratic view afforded by archival documents. These documents traced evolving relationships among the early missionaries, the ‘Protectors’ of Aborigines, the police (both European and ‘Native’) and other arms of the state, local landowners and businesses, boats and luggers and the people who manned them, and *bama* (Aboriginal people) both on and off the mission, in the slightly more than 100-year history of the community.

As an official matter, mission history was much in the air. Preparations were underway for major celebrations of the anniversary of the arrival at Cape Bedford of *Muuni*, G. H. Schwarz, the Bavarian missionary who devoted virtually his whole life to the original community.<sup>2</sup> The elderly men with whom I spent most of my time were involved in expeditions to the old mission station, on the coast, to clean up and post signs on what remained of the original settlement where most of them had grown up and gone to school.

There were also unexpected themes in our conversations, sometimes occluded by a hegemonic rhetoric about progress, development, and the mission's role in preserving the Guugu Yimithirr language and its *bama* from total extinction.<sup>3</sup> Talk about even the most straightforward topics exposed deep ambivalences about the Mission past, although often expressed with reluctance: changes in traditional "law," the anarchy of growing families, poverty, inequities of power, and the politics of race. In the very first decades of the 20th Century, the early mission had capitulated to official pressures to accept people with mixed Aboriginal and non-Aboriginal ancestry, along with the other "waifs and strays" that the government sent to its care, sometimes from distant parts of Queensland. As a result, family relationships on the mission were extremely complicated. BJ's discussions with me about the kin terms I should use with others I met on the street inevitably turned into criticisms of "crooked" marriages – those that violated traditional exogamy rules which "old people would have speared them for" – often linked to early mission families who married according to Schwarz's principles rather than those of *bama*. Talk about preaching or even translating Lutheran hymns into Guugu Yimithirr for Sunday services led to disgruntled comments about how some people – especially those with lighter skins (*barbarr*, as one sometimes puts it in Guugu Yimithirr) – were favored by the missionaries for church responsibilities. Even such topics as people's traditional clan areas led inexorably to tensions lying barely under the surface of ordinary mission civility. Although this was before serious talk about Aboriginal land rights had even begun, Queensland's coming Deed-of-grant-in-trust or DOGIT legislation (see Section 3 below) and the notion of privatizing mission lands for individual "private enterprise" and farming had spurred early talk about who the "traditional owners" were or might be for parts of mission territory. Even more

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2. He had come to North Queensland fresh from seminary at the age of nineteen in 1887, and there he had remained until his death some seventy years later. He had only a single extended absence from the community – his internment as a German alien during World War II – after which he returned to live in Cooktown, although he was no longer superintendent at the inland site of the newly reestablished Hopevale community.

3. See Peter Sutton's (2001, 2009) eloquent reflections about the role of missions in this same period in Queensland Aboriginal life.

vexing was the huge sand mining operation at Cape Flattery – unquestionably part of the traditional clan area of the ancestors of several Hopevale families – which began in 1967 and was purchased by Mitsubishi in 1977.<sup>4</sup> A major international corporate operation that, according to its own publicity, produces some 90% of the silica used in flat screen technology worldwide, the company employed only a few people from the community (and exactly who got such jobs was already a contested issue in the late 70s) and paid massive royalties to the Queensland government, only a trickle of which filtered into the community via allocations to the Hopevale Council.<sup>5</sup>

The resulting inequalities and resentments among Hopevale people added fuel to a kind of racial divide, with origins in the early mission social structure. There were mutual tensions and antipathies between people with mixed ancestry, who occupied many posts of responsibility in the community, and those sometimes self-styled *bama buthun.gu* ‘real Aborigines’<sup>6</sup> who felt themselves to be disadvantaged in their own home. These were topics people avoided in conversation, especially in sociable mission contexts, but which frequently surfaced in private gossip or erupted in quarrels and fights, and which influenced people’s choices in everything from hunting companions, drinking partners, or spouses, to places to camp, where to sit in church, or what language to speak from moment to moment.

Nonetheless, most of my work avoided these contentious matters and concentrated on a frankly naïve ‘reconstruction’ of language, kinship, and ‘traditional’ life in the early memories of the oldest people at Hopevale. Because my family and I spent quite a lot of time with BJ and his family hunting and fishing (and probably an equal amount trying to keep his old car and fifth-hand outboard motor running), I soon learned the importance of the black tar-like substance called *gambarr* that is a crucial adhesive ingredient in the manufacture of *milbiir* ‘woomeras’ (where it is used both for the handgrip and to secure the hook to the blade) and fishing spears (where it holds the prongs firmly in place, but also allows them to be removed for straightening or sharpening). BJ was particularly sought after as a spear maker, and he and I made many forays into the bush to cut and straighten bamboo or to purloin and sharpen fencing wire for spear points.

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4. (<http://www.c fsm.com.au/home.htm>)

5. See O’Faircheallaigh (1996, 2000) on the nature and final outcomes of protracted negotiations over these rights and royalties. The issue was highly contentious – sometimes violent – and it remained unresolved for several decades before a final, uneasy, settlement was reached, involving not only the Hopevale Council, the mine, and the state, but competing Aboriginal families and institutional interests both black and white.

6. Who also sometimes called themselves *bama muunhi buthun.gu* ‘really black Aborigines.’ See Haviland (1997).

On October 11, 1977, around mid-morning BJ and JM, together with the latter's dog, headed out into the bush on the south side of the mission where they thought they would find good quality *biniirr* (ironbark) trees from whose roots, in this part of Guugu Yimithirr country, *gambarr* is traditionally made. I was invited to tag along and to bring my camera. The motive was not pedagogical, but practical. The time of year for good coastal fishing was upon us – the season of mullet runs in the estuaries, and the warm, clear springtime weather that precedes December's monsoon rains. As a result, younger men who didn't know how to make the traditional and highly effective four-pronged fishing-spear had already begun to descend on old timers like BJ demanding the "loan" of a spear or two. His supply of spears and of *gambarr* to make more had run out. With the vague idea that I ought to document this 'traditional technology' I shot several rolls of black and white film with my old Nikon that day in the bush, then filed the negatives away and promptly forgot about them.

### 3. Changing demographics and the coming of 'land rights' in the 1980s

A few years later Timothy Asch, the late ethnographic filmmaker and at the time a close colleague at ANU, encouraged a number of colleagues to print some of our photographs from the field for display in departmental halls. Poring over my slides and negatives, Tim asked me about the pitch-making sequence. I agreed to try to create a small exhibit based on the photographs and, to that end, I printed them and took them back to Hopevale in the last days of 1981.

The circumstances in North Queensland were then somewhat different. Talk of Aboriginal land, ownership, and belonging had become both more prevalent and more contentious, throughout Australia and even in the remote reaches of a politically conservative Queensland. Real possibilities of future access to resources had begun to appear, if only on the horizon.<sup>7</sup> In Cape York there were early negotiations for the 'deed of grant in trust' (DOGIT)<sup>8</sup> arrangements, which would grant limited rights to Aboriginal peoples over land on existing Aboriginal reserves – a political ploy in Queensland to try to head off more meaningful land rights legislation nationwide that would not come for another decade.

Though I continued to struggle to learn more Guugu Yimithirr, I had by then started working with yet another teacher from Hopevale, my cousin RH, who believed himself to be the very last speaker of the language of his childhood, from *Iibwolin*

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7. See especially Sutton (2008) for more on this era in Queensland.

8. In 1986 Hopevale was the first community to receive land under Queensland's DOGIT provisions. See Pearson (1989).



around Barrow Point, farther up the coast (Haviland 1998). RH had been removed from his family as a six-year-old child and taken to Cape Bedford sometime before 1920. We joined other people from Hopevale who were making exploratory forays into their own clan territories north of the Cape Bedford mission territory, areas once hosting cattle stations or mines, but abandoned and largely bereft of human settlement for decades.

Both of my companions on the *gambarr*-making trip to the bush that day in 1977 had died a few years before, leaving their brothers, WJ, and JJ as the senior men in their respective families. JJ was my *biiba* 'father-uncle' – BJ's next younger brother – a generous-hearted, soft-spoken man who had welcomed me into his house, the weekend after BJ died unexpectedly in 1979, so that the two of us could together await the inevitable farewell visit from the deceased man's spirit. The other pitchmaker, JM, was survived by his older brother WJ, who was in turn my longtime host at Hopevale. WJ's children were either grown-up or growing, with children of their own, and my family and I now mostly camped with them when we were at Hopevale. When I came back to the community at the end of 1981, we again moved into a tent in WJ's yard. Uncle JJ was recovering from the effects of a stroke. Newly widowed, he had returned to live at the mission after many years in his own house in Cooktown.

In the growing climate of talk about a new corporate structure for Hopevale and, somewhat contradictorily, the chance for individual Hopevale families to work farms and businesses formerly reserved for mission enterprises, my suggestion that we try to convert the pitch-making photographs into a booklet for use in the community met with some enthusiasm from the two surviving brothers. On the other hand, they had not taken part in the *gambarr* making expedition, and they were understandably conflicted about the tension between an Aboriginal discomfort with images (and the names) of recently deceased relatives, and a firm Lutheran upbringing that ignored such prohibitions. Nonetheless, they were very pleased to see the photographs, and we agreed to sit together over a series of weekend afternoons to look at them carefully and to compose a text to accompany them, whether for a booklet or some other written product.

Listening again to the recordings from more than thirty years ago, I am struck by how much questions of ownership and identity were a constant backdrop to our conversations. They surfaced even in our search for a kind of 'purist' Guugu Yimithirr, pruned of the English constructions and words that were the common medium of Hopevale talk, even among elderly men like these who had largely learned elegant and now somewhat old-fashioned English as young children at the Cape Bedford school. The brothers alternated between commenting on the scenes in the photographs, asking me what we had been doing at the moment I snapped each picture, and trying to dredge up archaic Guugu Yimithirr expressions when our initial spontaneous attempts to find the right words failed.

Here, for example, is an excerpt from our discussion of the first few photographs, which showed BJ and JM setting out from the village, tools in hand.

- (1) Conversation about the first pictures
- 1 wj; *nhila yii bayan nhangu-umun*<sup>9</sup>  
now here house 3SG.GEN-ABL  
'Now, from out of his house'
- 2 *warra ngathu brother,*  
old 3SG.GEN  
'My old brother'
- 3 *nhangu-n.ga-mun gadaara.*  
3SG.GEN-CAT-ABL come.REDUP  
'(They're) coming from out of his (house).'
- 4 *nha-athi, bula now thadaara bula.*  
see-PAST 2DU.NOM go.REDUP 2DU.NOM  
'See, the two of them are going now.'
- 5 *bula yii thadaara gambarr baga-nhu balga-nhu.*  
2DU.NOM here go.REDUP pitch dig-PURP make-PURP  
'Here the two of them are going to dig tar, or make it.'
- 6 *Balga-nhu or baga-nhu?*  
make-PURP dig-PURP  
'(Should we say) 'dig' or 'make'?'
- 7 jj; *bag-a-nhu. awuun.*  
dig-PURP yes  
'Dig.' Right.'
- 8 wj; *yii babaar maandiindi. and I dunno shovel – guya =*  
here hoe take.REDUP NONE  
'Here they're carrying a hoe, and I dunno about 'shovel' –'

9. I transcribe talk as it occurred, in a mix of Guugu Yimithirr and English, with glosses in English where required. The Guugu Yimithirr transcription employs a practical orthography in which *th* and *nh* are lamino-dental stop and nasal respectively, *dy* or *j* and *ny* are lamino-palatal stop and nasal, *r* is a retroflex rhotic, *rr* a flap or trill, *ng* a velar nasal, and *n.g* an alveolar nasal followed by a velar stop. Abbreviations in morpheme-by-morpheme glosses include: 1=1st person; 2= 2nd person; 3=3rd person; ABESS(ive); ABL(ative); ADESS(ive); CAT(alytic infix); CAUS(ausative light verb); CL(itic); DU(al); EMPH(atic clitic); ERG(ative); FOR or 'for the purpose of' derivational suffix; GEN(itive); IMP(erative); LOC(ative); NEG(ative); NOM(inative); NONE (negative existential); NONP(ast); PAST (tense); PL(ural number); PLU(ral suffix); PURP(osive case or verbal inflection); REDUP(licated verbal stem); REF(lexive); SG(ingular number); SUB(ordinating verbal suffix). I use a simplified CA style format in which '=' indicates a 'latch' or continuation without a pause, but I have generally not marked overlaps between turns, as not relevant to the current study.

- 9 =*guugu*.  
word  
'For that there's no word.'
- 10 *babaar* – *hoe*.  
hoe  
'"babaar" – that's 'hoe.'
- 11 jj; *warrbi nhayun* – *nganhthaan warrbi balga-l*,  
axe that 1PL.NOM axe make-NONP  
'And that's an axe; we can write down 'axe.'
- 12 *warrbi and same time babaar*.  
axe hoe  
'An axe and at the same time a hoe.'
- 13 *shovel guya. nhayun wangaarr-bi shovel*.  
NONE that whitefella-LOC  
'No word for 'shovel'; shovels belong to white men.'
- 14 wj; *gurmunh* – *baayga. thunggala*.  
bag bag billycan  
'(They've got) a sack—a 'bag', and a billycan.'
- 15 jj; *baayga nhayun English-bi*.  
bag that -LOC  
'"Bag" is in English.'

Thinking of *gambarr* also prompted reflection about different practices in the wider Aboriginal world. The commentators were acutely aware that *gambarr* made from ironbark roots was very much a local tradition – people north of the Starcke River or south near the Bloomfield River preferred other plants for making pitch – and that despite attempts to find equivalent materials from the repertoire of white man's technology, nothing worked quite so well as the traditional pitch.

- (2) Foreign people versus our people
- 6 *nhayun bama ngarrbal*.  
that person stranger  
'Those would be foreign people.'
- 7 *but around here: biniirr-nganh*  
ironbark-ABL  
'But around here (they get tar) from ironbark trees.'
- 8 *ngali, nyundu, ngayu*,  
1DU.NOM 2SG.NOM 1SG.NOM  
'Like the two of us, you and I.'
- 9 *walu yii area nhin.ga-l ma*.  
like here sit-NONP CL  
'Like those of us who stay in this area, right?'

[...]

- 12 *galbuurr.*  
tar  
'tar.'
- 13 *galga-angu,*  
spear-PURP  
'For spears.'
- 14 *milbirr-a,           and ngaanaa=buthu.*  
woomera-PURP       whatever  
'And for woomeras, and whatever.'

The contrast between traditional ways of doing things and modern habits led to explicit contrasts between old and young, black and white. Young men, voracious consumers of fishing spears, had no experience in the laborious business of manufacturing the necessary raw materials, and thus they experimented with easier European alternatives: battery casings or epoxy glues.

## (3) White man tar

- 16 wj; *well gambarr batha-aya           bama-al   muguul=muguur-nda =*  
pitch       finish=REFL.NONP person-ERG old=REDUP-ERG  
'Well, if the pitch finishes that old folks'
- 17 *=balga-al-giga,*  
make-NONP-SUB  
'make.'
- 18 *you know.*
- 19 *bama   young people bama-ngay,*  
person                   person-PLU  
'Aboriginal folks, like young people'
- 20 *bama yarrga-ngay, bitha-gurr-ngay,*  
person boy-PLU       small-PLU-PLU  
'Like boys, and children'
- 21 *thana   tar maana-a   and use-em gurra-l   galga balga-nhu.*  
2SG.NOM   take-NONP                   do-NONP spear make-PURP  
'They take tar and they use it to make spears'
- 22 *tar – you know,*
- 23 *white man tar.*
- 24 *tar- wangaarr-bi*  
whitefella-LOC  
'Tar from white men.'
- 25 jbh; *motorcar-malin*  
-FOR  
'Like the kind you use in cars?'

- 26 jj; *awuun*  
yes  
'Right.'
- 27 *gaari bitumen, ashfelt, burbuurr-gu.*  
NEG asphalt hard-EMPH  
'Not bitumen, or asphalt – that's too hard.'
- 28 wj; *Bloomfield tar,*  
'(In) Bloomfield (they use) tar.'
- 29 *burrburr like gambarr.*  
hard pitch  
'It's hard like pitch.'
- 30 *battery-nganh, tar,*  
-ABL  
'From battery (casings), tar.'

More directly relevant to my overall argument in this chapter was the ambivalence my interlocutors evinced about the appropriateness of using images of their deceased brothers for any sort of public purpose at all. Photographs of old people, especially from early mission days at Cape Bedford, abound at Hopevale. Nonetheless, showing images or saying the names of deceased relatives was (and remains) a sensitive and delicate matter even in this nominally Lutheran community, just as it is in Aboriginal life more generally. Names both conjure memories of their deceased bearers, and also in a clear sense exclusively *belong* to the families of those bearers. Thus, WJ and JJ both took for granted that they would not be able to use their deceased brothers' names. In fact, both invoked a story I had heard many times before, about a man on the mission whose name was 'Old man *bigibigi*' (from English 'pig').

- (4) Old man 'Pig'
- 1 jj; *ngali-in gadil yitharr*  
1DU-GEN name put=NONP  
'We should put our names down'
- 2 wj; *well don't forget,*
- 3 *bula yii and you say*  
3DU.NOM here  
'These two, and you say'
- 4 *bula yiimu-un bunhthil dumbi milbi,*  
3DU.NOM this-ERG empty leave.PAST story  
'These two left the story 'widowed''
- 5 *nha-mu-ngayng-gu bula yii guthiirra*  
THAT-CAT-ABL-CL 3DU.NOM this two  
'So afterwards these other two'



and formal practices in the Hopevale Lutheran church are often contradictory about naming the deceased. The two families involved in the pitch-making photos, however, were among the most ‘traditional’ in the community. They could lay direct genealogical claims, both paternal and maternal, not only to the Guugu Yimithirr language itself but also to clan areas in the ancestral heartland of Guugu Yimithirr country (although outside the territory gazetted to the mission). The two pitch-makers, and also their brothers commenting on the photos, had the unusual distinction of having spent periods away from Cape Bedford ‘in the bush’ or at least of having known and interacted with their genealogical parents, some of whom had lived for a time in the ‘heathen’ camp at Bridge Creek where a few older people were allowed to stay while their children were in the Cape Bedford school. For these two families, then, care with the names of deceased relatives was more than a relic of a pre-mission past, or something they had only heard about but never lived.

Thus, as they looked through the photographs, the two interlocutors knew that future generations of Hopevale people would not necessarily recognize the protagonists, but that their identities and their family affiliations would be important to record. They suggested several alternative strategies to avoid using their brothers’ names. One was to let their own identities work as proxies for the names of the original pitch makers. As WJ says (in line 18 of the following fragment), such an expedient would work perfectly well, or “come on right.”

(5) Older brother, younger brother

3 wj; *bula nhila thuyu, but milbi bulaan wunaa yii bada.*  
 3DU.NOM now dead story 3DU.GEN exist here down  
 ‘Those two are now deceased, but their story still exists here.’

4 *milbi bula nhayun*  
 story 3DU.NOM that  
 ‘The story of both of them.’

5 *dubi, milbi bula dubi,*  
 leave+PAST story 3DU.NOM leave+PAST  
 ‘They left it, the two of them left their story behind.’

6 *nhila thillin, yaba nhangu-umun milbi miirriili-l.*  
 now then older.brother 3SG.GEN-ERG story tell+REDUP-NONP  
 ‘Now in turn their older brother is telling the story.’

7 *nhila yabaa milbi miirrii-l,*  
 now older.brother.ERG story tell-NONP  
 ‘Now the older brother will tell the story.’

8 *bunhthil dubi.*  
 empty leave+PAST  
 ‘That they left ‘widowed.’  
 ...

- 10      *ngayu gaarga-angan milbi galmba miirriili-l.*  
 1SG.NOM younger.brother-ABL story also tell.REDUP-NONP  
 ‘I am also telling the story of my younger brother.’  
 ...
- 17    wj; *they know then who name, see,*
- 18      *come on right.*

#### 4. Photography, narrative, and interaction

Aside from a brief exhibition of the photographs with a set of English captions at ANU in 1982, the anticipated use of the pitch-making photographs never materialized. When I left Australia a few years later, I relegated the early Hopevale photographs to dusty boxes. Only thirty years later did I return to the photographs as my daughter and I planned the 2009 trip to Hopevale to visit old friends. Digital technology now allowed me easily to carry copies of my early photographs back to the community. Rediscovering the audio recordings from 1981 in turn inspired me to create a photo-film with a soundtrack derived from our tape recorded conversations (Haviland 2009).

As Arnd Schneider (2014) writes, in his recent essay on the genre of photo-film in anthropology, still photographs have an “intrinsic sequentiality” that results both from their physical collocation with other photographs, and from “their narrative uses when we talk about” (p. 42) them.<sup>10</sup> Given typical ways photographs are used – laid out on a table by a family of returned Sicilian immigrants, for example – Schneider suggests that “movement, and not only arrested movement or life, is inherent in photos (in the plural!)” (p. 43). Of course, the very act of taking a still photograph fixes an instant of life (the moment the photograph is composed and the shutter is clicked) which serves as a potentially rich mnemonic of the wider time span of which it is part.

While the sequence of photographic negatives provided one possible order for the photo-film, as a student of Guugu Yimithirr talk, I found a different sort of organizing principle in the words of JJ and WJ. Editing the sound was, in fact, the first step in making the film. The themes of our conversations – language, place, ownership,

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10. There is, of course, a vast literature on the anthropology of photography (see Collier 1986, Edwards 1992, 1997, Edwards & Hart 2004, MacDougall 2005, etc. etc.) spanning everything from James Agee’s use of Walker Evans’ photographs (Agee & Walker 1960, 2013) to much more recent explorations of photography as expressive resources in community development (M. Haviland 2012). My specific interest here is how still images and spoken commentary combine in at least one genre of photo-film.



family, names, belonging, and passing time – seemed now to inhere in the photographic images themselves as I excerpted the old men’s words about knowledge of the past, technology, ownership, and legacies.

As I have mentioned, WJ and JJ themselves had hit upon (or borrowed from well-known and widely distributed oral narrative and discursive techniques) a simple verbal device for breathing interactive life into the still images: invented dialogue. They animated the scenes by putting words into the protagonists’ mouths, even mine.

(6) (Re)constructing dialogue

- 1 wj; *well bula musta been yiway ngaanaarru*,  
           3DU.NOM           here   whatchamacallit  
 ‘Well, the two of them must have been like,’
- 2 *walu gadii thawuunh*  
 like come.IMP friend  
 “‘Come, friend!’”
- 3 *ngali thadaa*  
 1DU.NOM go.NONP  
 “‘We two are leaving.’”
- 4 *well bula yi-muunh waada-y*  
           2DU.NOM here-ABL say-PAST  
 ‘Well, these two said,’
- 5 *ma gadii nganthaan thadaa*  
 well come.IMP 1PL.NOM go+NONP  
 “‘Now, come, we’re all going.’”
- 6 *well bula thadaara now for gambaarr-ngu*  
           2DU.NOM go.REDUP.NONP           pitch-PURP  
 ‘Well, the two of them are setting out now for pitch.’
- 7 *and. nyundu took snaps*  
           2SG.NOM  
 ‘And you took snapshots.’
- 8 *yubaal thadii, ngayu nguumbaarr maanaa*  
 2DU.NOM go.IMP 1SG.NOM picture           take.NONP  
 “‘You go on, I’ll take photographs.’”
- 9 *see, you say, bula-an.gal*  
                                   2DU-ADESS  
 ‘See, that’s what you say to the two of them.’
- 10 *bula walkin’*  
       2DU.NOM  
 ‘Those two are walking.’
- 11 *you takin’ snaps*

I am no longer certain how the two original protagonists, BJ and JM, addressed one another. In classificatory terms, although BJ was the older man, JM was BJ's *biiba* or 'father/uncle,' the son of a man BJ considered his *gami* or 'father's father,' who hailed from a clan area near but not closely related to that of BJ's father. In the imagined dialogues, the two men are portrayed as addressing each other in the neutral ways reserved for not particularly close kinsmen with no specially marked kin relationship—neither potential in-laws who required circumspect interaction, nor, for example, standing in a relationship that licensed ribald mutual joking (see Haviland 1979). In the invented scenes they address each other as *thawuunh* 'friend.'

- (7) A good root
- 1    *jj; thawuunh thaawi,*  
       friend     call.PAST  
       'He called out to his friend.'
- 2        *dyin.gal dabaar waami-iga*  
       root     good     find-SUB  
       'Because he had found a good root.'
- 3        *baga-y    baga-y    yiii,*  
       dig-PAST dig-PAST here  
       'He dug and dug for a long time...'
- 4        *waami,*  
       find.PAST  
       'And found it'
- 5        *nyulu    thawuunh thaawi,*  
       3SG.NOM friend     call.PAST  
       'And then he called his friend.'
- 6        *gadii    thawuunh,*  
       come.IMP friend  
       'Come here, friend!'"
- 7        *yii    nhaawaa dyin.gal*  
       here see.IMP root  
       'Look here at this root!'"
- 8        *ganaa dabaar?*  
       OK good  
       '“It's a good one, no?”'
- 9        *nhaathi gurra,*  
       see.PAST then  
       '(And his friend) looked at it.'
- 10       *ah    dabaar, bulnga-la, baga-la!*  
       good     pull-IMP dig-IMP  
       'Ah, that's a good one. Pull it out, dig it up!'"

## 5. The 2009 visit to Hopevale

By the time we reached Hopevale in late April 2009, many things had changed in the community, even since my previous visit five years before. The initial excitement following the Mabo decision of 1992 and the Native Title Act of 1993 had given way, at least at Hopevale, to divisive and sometimes violent confrontations between families with different and sometimes incompatible claims to land and resources suddenly made both available and contestable under Australian law. Virtually all the senior people in families I was close to and who been my teachers had died. These were the “elders” who had schooled me not only in Guugu Yimithirr language and the territorial claims that went with different families (and languages), but also in politeness, proper compartment around one’s kin, and in marriage “law” – all features of Hopevale social life that seemed to be in disarray.

One aspect of Hopevale life that had changed little over the decades was the racial divide that left some families relatively disadvantaged compared to others, formerly in mission affairs, and now – even more obviously – in the community life of the town after the Native Title determination of 1997. The end of the story of the *gambarr*-making film relates to the resulting long-standing tensions.

My idea about ‘repatriating’ photographs and videos to Hopevale stemmed from the innocent notion that what the old men had tried to teach me belonged with their own descendants more than in the digital archives of institutional libraries. The photos represented family mementos, sometimes the only images available of departed relatives. My fieldnotes from decades of research – a mishmash of handwritten annotations in Guugu Yimithirr and English – and the audio recordings that accompanied them had a more problematic status, partly because they were of dubious use to anyone else, and partly because they were peppered with reminiscences, genealogical fragments, and scurrilous tales imparted in unguarded moments by my highly opinionated mentors. In the years preceding our 2009 trip to Hopevale, I had often found myself reluctant to share such gossipy tidbits with Hopevale people who directly asked me for land-related family trees and histories, especially in cases where my original teachers had explicitly framed bits of genealogy as examples of how one ought NOT to marry. Silverstein’s (2006) reflection on Kiksht names elaborates a similar ambivalence about sharing genealogies with young activists from the Warm Springs reservation. How could the ethnographer surrender lists of personal names that had been bestowed, cared for, and sometimes also ruined by their bearers’ actual behavior to young people for whom antique Wasco-Wishram names were just a simple index of ‘tradition’ and lost ‘knowledge’? For Silverstein names were like family ‘heirlooms’ that his teachers had been determined to protect (and sometimes to hide). Reduced to mere linguistic markers for the younger people who wanted copies of his fieldnotes, Chinook names listed on two-generation-old genealogies meant something considerably different to

Silverstein's original consultants (and, thus, to him) than they would to language and culture revitalizers almost half a century later.

So, too, the *gambarr* making film: to whom did it belong and what should be done with it? The *gambarr*-makers had invited me explicitly to take the photographs, and the brothers had thrown themselves enthusiastically into the subsequent tape-recorded conversations. But although I had collected and (re)assembled the material, by any reasonable moral calculus the film also belonged to the *gambarr*-makers themselves, and thus, by Hopevale standards, to their families.

Moreover, the four elderly men who contributed their time, their expertise, their images, and their words to the project had been quite explicit about their intentions. Partly, as we have already seen, they treated the pitch making process as a kind of mnemonic exercise, a way to bring things they themselves knew to active consciousness. This included retrieving words for tools and techniques that had lain long dormant in their memories.

- (8) The pounding tools
- 2 jj; *yugu nyulu bulnga-l, gunda-l...*  
 wood 3SG.NOM pull-NONP hit-NONP  
 'He's pulling out a root, and pounding it.'
- 3 *nambaal-bay gundaarnda-l.*  
 stone-LOC hit.REDUP-NONP  
 'He's pounding it on a rock.'
- 4 wj; *nambal waalaal, nhaathi,*  
 rock wide see.PAST  
 'A flat rock, see?'
- ...
- 7 jj; *dyinydyi?*  
 pounding\_rock  
 '(I think it's called) 'jinyji''
- 8 *you see that round nambal and that flat...*  
 rock  
 'You see that round stone, flat one?'
- 9 *that dyinydyi*  
 pounding\_rock  
 'That's (what we call) jinyji.'

Scouring their memories for lost words also pushed WJ and JJ into a more general reflection about language and knowledge of language, even invoking the special words of the avoidance register once obligatory in conversation between and man and his wife's relatives (Haviland 1979). They drew a contrast between "plain" language, and the much "deeper" or "bigger" words that tabooed relatives used with one another – the





- 3     *nyulu*    *follow-em* *gurra:y*    *yi*    *till*  
       3SG.NOM                    make-PAST    here  
       ‘And they followed it’
- 4     *young generation*  
       ‘right to the young generation.’
- 5     *well ngali*    *batha-aya*  
               1DU.NOM   finish-REF.PAST  
       ‘Well, if we two finish off’
- 6     *ngali*    *biinii*  
       1DU.NOM   die-NONP  
       ‘if we die’
- 7     *well these*
- 8     *young- young-*
- 9     *comin’ up*
- 10    *they don’t know how to do it*

Over the course of the next weeks, however, as different family members viewed the film several more times, and as my daughter and I began to investigate details of the facilities that might house the visual materials, there was a subtle shift. It is no surprise, in retrospect, that the people in charge in the cultural center were from the same powerful Hopevale families who had been prominent in community affairs ever since early missionary times. The pitch-makers’ families were not among them. (Indeed, my full sister JoJ was temporarily employed in the lowly role of a dilly-bag weaver by the community craft center, where members of more powerful families ruled the roost.) Nor were members of my two families among those with Council jobs promoting community development, nor among the teachers in the Hopevale school or its sputtering bilingual programs, nor among the decision makers allocating resources, fighting for royalties from, nor even employed by Mitsubishi. Coming from clan areas outside mission land, they were also largely marginalized from the main groups of claimants to Hopevale territory, now administered under tortuously agreed communal native title. In the very last days of our visit the families concluded that the film should NOT be placed in a Hopevale archive, that it belonged only to “our families” and should not be left in the hands of others in the community, nor, indeed, in the community at all lest it fall into the hands of non-family members.

In 1981, as authoritative spokesmen for their families, JJ and WJ had decided in the end to re-tell the pitch-making story, names and all.

(8) We can say the names

- 1 WJ; *well ngali*,    *nhayun buunhthiil dubi-iga*,  
               1DU.NOM   that    broken    leave.PAST-SUB  
       ‘Well, we two, since they left the story ‘widowed.’

- 2     *well ngali     now*  
           1DU.NOM  
 ‘Well, now the two of us’
- 3     *miirrili-l*  
           tell.REDUP-NONP  
 ‘are telling it’
- 4     *you know?*
- 5     *well ngali     now miirriili-l*  
           1DU.NOM tell.REDUP-NONP  
 ‘Well, now we two are telling it’
- 6     *but we can say names*
- 7     *because ngali     milbi miirriili-l*  
           1DU.NOM story tell.REDUP-NONP  
 ‘Because we two are telling the story.’

But by 2009, these names – in both English and Guugu Yimithirr versions – seemed to take on a different resonance.

- (12) Children to come
- 1     jj; *children to come*
- 2     *nhayun milga-an nhamaalma     galmba*  
           that ear-ERG see.REDUP.NONP also  
 ‘They will also remember’
- 3     *milga-an nhaamaa*  
           ear-ERG see.NONP  
 ‘They’ll remember’
- 4     *aa, gambarr yii     balga-y*  
           pitch here make-PAST  
 “‘Aaa, this is how they made pitch”
- 5     *bula           nhayun*  
           3DU.NOM that  
 “‘These two”
- 6     *JM-ngun bula*  
           JM-ERG 3DU.NOM  
 “‘JM (made it),”
- 7     *BJ-ngun, and milbi yii bula*  
           BJ-ERG story this 3DU.NOM  
 “‘Along with BJ, and this story”
- 8     *WJ-ngun bula     JJ-ngun balga-y*  
           WJ-ERG 3DU.NOM JJ-ERG make-PAST  
 “‘WJ and JJ made it.”



The families finally came to interpret the pitch makers' dedication of their film to "children to come" not as aimed at *bama* in general, nor even at the children of Hopevale. They asked me to take the photo-film away with me, and to treat it instead as the proprietary legacy of only the direct descendants of the deceased men whose names, in the end, the old men had finally willed themselves to pronounce.

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