

# Anatomies of Relatedness: Considering Personhood in Aboriginal Australia

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**ABSTRACT** Anthropologists have described Aboriginal Australian personhood in various ways. In 1986, Myers spoke about the tension between autonomy and relatedness that he identified as intrinsic aspects of Pintupi identity. More recently, Keen (2006) has identified the extension of Yolngu persons in time and space; others have described Aboriginal personhood as “dividual.” Based on ethnography from the northwest Kimberley region of Western Australia, I argue that one way of characterizing personhood is as an ontology of embodied relatedness. In this, I draw inspiration from Ashforth’s (2011) approach to relational realism, in which he extends the field of relations under consideration to entities beyond the human. I also consider Viveiros de Castro’s (2009) synthesis of kinship, exchange, and magic to argue that the relationship between these can be understood through the embodied relationality that is at the core of cultural conceptions of the person. [*personhood, Aboriginal Australia, relatedness, embodiment*]

In an opinion piece for a national Australian newspaper, Aboriginal lawyer, activist, and political commentator Noel Pearson wrote:

Paul Keating [former Australian Prime Minister] once told me, the problem with your mob [Aboriginal Australians] is you’re like crabs in a bucket. If one of you starts climbing out and gets his claws on the rim, about to pull himself over the top to freedom, the other mob will be pulling him back into the bucket. You all end up cooked. Keating was dead right (Pearson 2011:13).

Pearson’s remarks were made in the context of regenerated political debate in Australia concerning indigenous disadvantage and how it might best be overcome. Pearson, among others, has offered analyses as to how Aboriginal Australians who live in remote communities, and who are welfare dependent, might come to enter into the “real” economy, advancing strategies to try and achieve these aims. In this article, he construes part of the problem as being that “the premium placed on individual freedom in market capitalist systems comes into conflict with communalist traditions and dynamics, and makes it hard for people coming from communal cultures” (Pearson 2011:13). No doubt his reference to “dynamics” here includes the behavior anthropologists call “demand sharing,” in which “giving

and sharing” are expressed through “demands and claims” (Peterson 1993:860). Nicolas Peterson (1993) argues that demand sharing is a way of distributing resources in Australian hunter-gatherer societies; that it is a social mechanism within the “domestic moral economy” of these societies that is “at the heart of the production and reproduction of social relations” (Peterson 2005:5), affirming relatedness. Jon Altman (2011) has noted that anthropological writings about demand sharing have been co-opted in the public policy domain and simultaneously transformed in the process. Rather than being portrayed as one of the social mechanisms for the redistribution of goods and labor, in public policy discourse, it has become an undifferentiated “communal dynamic” of sharing (characterized as “humberging”) and negatively evaluated as preventing remote-dwelling Indigenous Australians from accumulating goods and capital and becoming good neoliberal citizens. These policy perspectives are inevitably linked, too, with perceptions about the intensive kinship relations that characterize life in remote indigenous communities, which Pearson, among others, contrasts with the “individual” orientation that pervades much of the broader Australian society. Intrinsic to these issues are questions of

personhood, “cultural beliefs about the nature of a people” (Myers 1986:105); relations that people describe as “being internal to, and constitutive of, their sense of being alive” (Ashforth 2011:143).

Although the problem of understanding personhood cross-culturally is not new, it is one that remains subject to ongoing discussion (e.g., Spiro 1993; Linger 2005; Mosko 2010). In the anthropological literature, Western persons have often been characterized as “egocentric”: as individual, differentiated, bounded, and autonomous, in contrast to non-Western kinds of persons, often described as “sociocentric” or less individuated, less autonomous, and more interdependent or relational (Spiro 1993:115–116). Spiro’s critique of this dichotomy is pertinent: he argues “these bipolar types of self . . . are wildly overdrawn,” and that “even if conceived as ideal types,” this broad differentiation is “much too restrictive” (1993:116, 117).

Restrictive as the term *individual* may be, it remains heuristically and comparatively useful as a broad description of a “relative value ascribed,” in many Western societies, to a personhood in which “autonomous agency” is valued (Conklin and Morgan 1996:659). This is the “self-fashioning, self-interested bourgeois individual” (Sahlins 2011b:234), who, to draw from Macpherson’s (1962:3) description of possessive individualism, is essentially “the owner of himself.” I have been socialized to spend time alone and in the company of those who are friends, and some time with relatives. Most of the Bardi and Jawi Aboriginal people whom I have known from 1994 until now spend much of their time with people who are related to them via actual or fictive kin relations.

In 2003, a group of Bardi singers and dancers came to the city for a performance they were giving in an international festival. They had travelled south to Perth from their communities in the northern Dampierland Peninsula, over 2,000 kilometers away, for the event. The older members of the group were seasoned travelers, both domestically and internationally, whereas the younger ones were less so. Everyone was staying together in a number of adjoining rooms in the same hostel. After a couple of nights there, one of the elders who I had known for many years rang to ask if he could come and stay with me instead; he wanted some quiet, he said. Once in the quiet of my house, though, he was restless, continually ringing up the others and receiving calls from them, swapping stories about the minutiae of daily life. Over the course of our conversations it transpired that the main reason that he had removed himself from his kin was because he had been at the casino the night before, and, having won a fair amount of money, was trying to avoid the demands to share these winnings that would be inevitably be placed on him if the others knew. His need to remain connected with the same close kin he was also avoiding was nevertheless palpable.

This example encapsulates something of what Myers (1986), writing of Pintupi, characterized as a tension between interrelated patterns of autonomy and relatedness. Obligations toward kin, to stand by them in times of con-

flict, and exchange, sharing or demand sharing may all be understood as indicative of relatedness. “Relatedness” is not undifferentiated: in contexts in which kin terms are extended to all known persons, there are of course varying degrees of intimacy, intersubjectivity, and obligation. There are also various ways in which the tensions associated with relatedness might be negotiated to preserve one’s autonomy and to maximize social distance. Myers described “shared identity with others” as “a primary feature of [Pintupi] selfhood”; this “represents a cultural appropriation of the significant relations of cooperation and exchange that lie at the heart of Pintupi social life” (1986:104). Like Peterson (2005), he thus depicts *exchange* as fundamental, and although Myers did not characterize this as “demand sharing,” the relationship between exchange and demands and claims as an expression of relatedness, and hence as a feature of “shared identity,” is apparent (Myers 1986:115).

Myers’s descriptions of the tension between autonomy and relatedness are patterns that anthropologists working in different regions of Australia have similarly observed (e.g., Martin 1993, 2011; Brady 2004). More recent ethnographic contributions have invoked the notion of the “dividual” as an explanatory framework for understanding Aboriginal personhood with its strong relational emphasis (e.g., Redmond 2001, 2005, 2008; Poirier 2005; Smith 2007, 2008a, 2008b). This dividual characterization runs the risk of presenting Indigenous Australian personhood as one more exemplar of a “universal form of pre-modern subjectivity” that is currently proliferating in descriptions of personhood globally (Sahlins 2011a:13). Sahlins (2011a:13) has also argued that the concept of the “dividual” additionally presents the “category mistake of rendering the relations of kinship as the attributes of specific persons”: a claim that has salience in the Australian context.

Drawing on my field experience with Bardi and Jawi from the northwest Kimberley region of Western Australia, I argue that one way of characterizing personhood is as an ontology of embodied relatedness. This is derived from a cosmology in which ancestral beings, their traces, and the country in which these are left have equivalence, in the same way that detached parts of a person’s body (such as hair) and incorporeal elements (such as or a shadow, a name, or an image) do. This embodied relationality encompasses not just people, but places, species, and ancestral beings; it is a *relationship* between persons and places regarded as consubstantial, and that has consequences for how people, and people and country, are linked through space and time. In this, I draw inspiration from Ashforth’s (2011:135) approach to relational realism, in which he proposes that the “field of relations under analysis must include relations with and among entities beyond the merely human.” By including relations with “other-than-human entities” (Hallowell 1955:179) in my analysis of personhood, I seek to move beyond a “methodological individualism,” which would concentrate only on dimensions of belief (Ashforth 2011:135), and take into consideration here how relationships with other than human persons effect and produce conceptualizations of the

person. Personhood is mediated, relationally, with reference to the moral order stemming from the activities of ancestral beings; the cosmology that Scott (2007:350) has argued is removed from consideration of the Melanesian individual. At the heart of descriptions of personhood are important questions about ontologies of being, about the nature of personhood in different cultural contexts, and, connected with this, the practical significance that such understandings may have.

From the outset of this discussion it is important to note that generally speaking, the situations of Indigenous Australians are diverse. Shared histories and relationally constituted intersubjectivities with nonindigenous Australians, many of whom have forms of subjectivity experienced by “self-conscious ‘individuals’” (Wagner 1991:160), as identified with Western-style individualism, impact on personhood. Among Bardi and Jawi people who reside in or move in and out the Aboriginal communities in the Dampierland Peninsula, some impacts of engagement with individualism appear. I have analyzed something of this regarding what I called the emergence of the individual artist, as related to the commodification, as artworks, of one of the elements of a previously intersubjectively constituted ritual form. This has meant removing one of these ritual elements from others, and—for new objects—from the social relations that jurally validate their ancestrally derived significance. This, I have argued, can be understood as signaling emergent transformations in personhood (Glaskin 2010). Although such transitions are not the focus of this discussion, it is important to note their occurrence, both in this ethnographic context and in other parts of Australia where this has not, until fairly recently, been the case (e.g., see Austin-Broos 2009; Burbank 2011).

A consideration of the person immediately implicates kinship and, as my introduction has indicated, aspects of exchange. The third of Viveiros de Castro’s “triadic synthesis of kinship, gift exchange, and magic” (Sahlins 2011b:238) is, as I will show, also relevant to this discussion. Sorcery (“magic”) is linked to cultural conceptions of the person that extends them spatially and temporally (Keen 2006; Glaskin 2006). To begin my discussion, I first consider different kinds of relatedness and differentiation.

## RELATEDNESS AND DIFFERENTIATION

Bardi country lies at the northern tip of the Dampierland Peninsula in the northwest Kimberley region of Western Australia and includes sea and offshore islands. To its immediate east, it adjoins Jawi country, which is comprised of islands and sea. Along with anthropologist Geoffrey Bagshaw, I began working with Bardi and Jawi in 1994, doing research for their native title claim (an involvement that continued from that time, in various ways, up until the final determination of their claim in 2010).<sup>1</sup> I also undertook doctoral fieldwork with Bardi and Jawi during 1997 and 1998, and further research subsequently. The genealogical research we undertook for the native title claim, which linked oral

accounts with previous research and historical records, indicated that Bardi and Jawi had intermarried since before the effective colonization of this area, in the late 1880s. Over the long course of their joint native title claim, some members of the group came to refer to themselves, not as Bardi or Jawi, but as “Bardi-Jawi” (a term that had previously been used primarily by those with one Bardi and Jawi parent). Although it is clear that processes associated with the joint claim brought on behalf of both groups has significantly influenced this articulation (Glaskin 2007), and there is evidence that it is gaining traction,<sup>2</sup> there is no reason not to think that different social processes in the past would not have equally elicited different ways of referring to selves as against others.

Surrounded by sea, and with most of their economy and mythology mediated through the marine environment, Bardi and Jawi say they are “saltwater” people, a contrast they draw as against other Kimberley Aboriginal groups. As one woman put it to me on a recent visit, “we only eat fish, dugong, turtle—that mob over there, they eat kangaroo.” As saltwater people, Bardi and Jawi have distinct identities shaped by their sea country and their relationships and identifications with it. Discussing childbirth with an elderly woman in 1994, she told me that “they say if a baby is stillborn, or died on its way out, they always say that it was drowned in its mother’s sea. . . . When we have babies the water breaks first hey. Well, that one is called the sea in the womb” (personal communication, Nilili, September 11, 1994). The sharing of turtle and dugong meat is also an important cultural institution linked with kinship relations. When dugong and turtle are caught, it is incumbent on the hunter, because of “the Law,” to distribute cuts of the meat to various categories of close kin, with a person’s *jawul* (their ritual guardian, the person responsible for putting them through initiation, or Law) being one of the primary recipients. This distribution of game to the *jawul* (a term that is used reciprocally; the older *jawul*, the ritual guardian, is often but not always the mother’s brother) is called *nimalj*. This is an example of a different kind of exchange than that encapsulated by the term *demand sharing* but one that is equally reflective (and productive) of particular sets of relationships.

Among the larger Bardi and Jawi group, people have a number of other self-identifications that serve relational purposes in particular contexts and that reflect basic cultural orientations: to language, to region, to estate, to experience, to family. One of these is dialectical (there is a distinction between Bard and Bardi, at least). This distinction has been augmented through historical experience (most Bard people were associated with the old Catholic mission of Lombadina, or are the descendants of those who were; but most Bardi and Jawi people were associated with the old United Aborigines Mission as Sunday Island, or are descendants of those who were).

Another is the regional identifications of people as Gularrgon (west), Baniol (east), Ardiolan (north), Olonggon or Guwalgarr(a) (south); Inalabulu (islander Bardi), Iwanyun (Jawi from Iwany, Sunday Island), and Mayalayun (people

from the east King Sound region). These regional aggregates (which today people refer to as “clan groups” or “clans”) are represented (and embodied) during the public ritual called Nguril, which marks the stage of initiation in which the new initiates are welcomed back after seclusion in the bush. The emerging initiates go and sit with their jawul, their ritual guardians, who are seated within a ceremonial line called *riral*. The line is made up of the regional aggregates and represents their relative spatial orientation in relation to each other. This spatial grouping is called *malundu*. Important for the discussion here, it is not just regions that are referred to by terms such as Gularrgon (west) or Ardiolan (north), and so on, but people themselves: “I’m Gularrgon, I can’t talk for that Baniol country” being the kind of statement I have often heard evoking this. Similarly, people may also be called by the name of the estate group to which they belong. Bardi and Jawi share a system of land and sea tenure primarily mediated through patrilineation connected to named estates, or *buru*. They also hold important rights in their *nyami* country (mother’s father’s country) and in their *gurruriny* country (spouse’s country). It is patrilineates who are considered to have the “top hand” or “final say” over what happens in an estate; that is, the “right to speak authoritatively for an area” (Sutton 2001:11). Bardi have English names and usually one or more Bardi names, colloquially referred to as “bush names,” as well as nicknames. In addition to being called by any one of these names, a person may be called directly by the name of their estate (e.g., Jilirrbur [Jilirr = place name; *bur* = place, ground, country; so a person who is Jilirr country). When people’s names cannot be said for various reasons (either because of prescribed avoidance relationships such as that between a classificatory or actual mother-in-law and her daughter’s classificatory or actual husband, or because someone of the same name has recently passed away), referring to a person by the name of their estate is a way of indicating their identity without speaking their name. This transference of the names of regions and places onto persons with which they are associated reflects the concept that these places and persons have a relationship of shared identity.

Bardi and Jawi share an alternate generational moiety system, in which one generation and their actual and classificatory grandparents and grandchildren are categorized by one term (Jarndu), and their parents and children by another (Inara). Jarndu and Inara are sociocentric categories that are reckoned egocentrically, because the base calculation point is that the individual reckons these relations as against their own self-identification as a Jarndu. One of the main functions of this differentiation is in broadly indicating who is marriageable; a Jarndu can only marry another Jarndu, and Inara another Inara; but every person begins from the perspective that ego is of the category Jarndu.<sup>3</sup> One person’s explanation of the consequences of marrying wrong way is that it “turn[s] fathers into brothers and mothers into wives.” The reciprocal relationship established by marriage (and, in the old days, by the promise of a marriage) is called *karra-*

*muninjun(o)*, and the reciprocity indicated by this term is a reminder that marriage is a kind of exchange.

Bardi and Jawi are embedded within dense networks of sociality, mediated through actual and classificatory kinship, in which all other Bardi and Jawi persons (and many other indigenous persons with whom they regularly interact) are considered relatives. Behavior toward different categories of kin is progressively learned from infancy, normatively prescribed, and socially enforced, often through the morally evaluative sanction of “shame.” Indeed, to behave the wrong way (whether in relation to kin or in relation to other matters of “the Law”), is to have “no shame.” Although not everyone obeys all prescriptions, people stringently maintain avoidance relationships, such as those between a man and their actual and classificatory mothers-in-law. So, for example, a man will avoid riding in a car or being copresent in a confined space with his *alur* (mother-in-law) and will avoid saying her name. During the many public meetings I attended in the community halls at One Arm Point and Djarindjin (two of the three major communities in Bardi country), it was usual to see a coterie of men standing outside the hall so as not to contravene the avoidance relationships with women inside the hall. In accordance with that prohibition, a senior Bardi man to whom I am relationally reckoned as being *alur* (mother-in-law) has never spoken my name. This also indicates the conceptual equivalence between persons and their names. My own placement within the kinship system was derived from the fact that I shared the same name with one other Bardi person, thereby making me *gumbali* (“same name”) to them and therefore having a structural equivalence with them.

Children grow up learning how to call those they meet as relatives and the requisite behavior toward them. So, for example, on a recent visit to One Arm Point I joined a group of women and children on the veranda of the Women’s Center there and was introduced to the young children and babies as “auntie Kate” or “grannie Kate,” depending on how my own placement in the kinship system configured me in relation to their mothers and carers. Although some Bardi and Jawi people live off-country, in bigger Kimberley towns such as Derby and Broome, or in cities such as Perth, most still live in their remote communities on country, and children grow up socially emplaced within this dense network of kinship relations. Where young children are introduced to someone whom they have not met before, they are either told, or are able to calculate, how they should refer to that person.

Of particular local social and political importance is differentiation by surnamed family. The kinds of families I refer to here are a “wider group or ‘mob’ named after a focal descent group” but that may contain members who are associated with the group through means other than descent (Sutton 2003:209). Politics are often expressed at the level of “family.” A contention or an argument begun between a member of one family and a member of another family will instantly implicate all members of both families, regardless

of their actual involvement in the initial issue, and can rapidly escalate to a large scale fight; this can even result in kin living some distance away travelling in to the communities as reinforcements (as I once witnessed in 1998, when family members flew into One Arm Point from Kununurra, a town some thousand kilometers distant). Fighting too can occur within families, and it is at the level of those who are considered “family” that such fighting has the potential to cause serious hurt and harm. On an occasion in 2003 when I went around to visit a Bardi friend at his house at One Arm Point, I found him with his arm in a sling. He told me that he had intervened in a fight the night before in which two of his brothers were fighting a third brother, to whose defense he had gone. One of the brothers had fractured his arm with a big stick. In recounting the incident, what my friend said to me was that after he had been to the clinic to have his arm treated, he felt like drinking because his brother had hurt him. Although he did not disclose what had initiated the fight, Burbank’s (2011:102) ethnography shows that in environments of significant stress, “even momentary and seemingly minor” denials of relatedness between members of a family, as in the refusal of demands to share a particular resource, can cause shame, anger, and conflict (also see Robinson 1997). Among Pintupi, Myers 1986:163) describes differentiation, which can result in fighting, as a “breach” in the “primary, almost primordial, value,” of relatedness.

In her ethnography focusing on stress at the Aboriginal community of Numbulwar, Burbank (2011:142) describes the close identification of family members with one another as a “relationship of equivalence,” arguing that this is “simultaneously a relationship of reciprocity, and so we may say that a moral principle of reciprocity and its negative forms of revenge and retribution accompany the principle of equivalence in the family schema.” In Bardi, the notion that revenge and retribution is a negative form of reciprocity is corroborated, with the term *roorrbooyarra* (*rurrburryarra*) meaning “exchange, reciprocation,” and “vengeance” (Bower 2003:111). Exchange has two distinct elements. *Arnji* is when a person gives something to another, while *ruban* is when you give something back: it connotes reciprocity of action. One of the terms used for “revenge expedition” is the same term, *ruban*, similarly indicating giving something back, in return.<sup>4</sup> Burbank’s “relationship of equivalence” thus seems an apt way to understand how fights begun between single members of a family can escalate to include their other members. Writing about Wik people living in the remote Queensland community of Aurukun, Martin too has argued that retaliation “provides a particular instance of more general principles—those of reciprocity and equivalence—in the transactions of material and symbolic items through which autonomy and relatedness are realised” (2011:201). Martin notes that such retaliation may be realized in open violence or in secret, through sorcery: both are germane to an ontology of embodied relatedness; “magic” and sorcery, through cultural conceptions of the person.

### CULTURAL CONCEPTS OF THE PERSON

For Spiro, a salient distinction is to consider “person” as “referring holistically to the psycho-sociobiological individual, ‘self’ to the individual’s own person” (1993:117). Understood in these terms, he argues, what anthropologists tend to investigate is not so much “the self or the individual’s conception of his self . . . but the cultural conception of the person” (1993:117). This accords with the representational approach Linger (2005:148) identifies, which includes “symbolic and discursive approaches to cultural phenomena.” Given my focus on personhood, my approach could also be described as representational, although I also consider how these concepts are engendered relationally. This is not to diminish the importance of experiential perspectives; instead, it reflects the fact that, as Spiro (1993) suggests, this is the basis underlying many (if not most) anthropological descriptions of personhood (see also Burbank 2011:105); hence the approach seems apt. In identifying different aspects of personhood below, I am not assuming that these cultural conceptions are “isomorphic” with Bardi and Jawi self-conceptions (Spiro 1993:117).

Bardi and Jawi have a cosmology in which ancestral or supernatural beings (*inamunonjin*) shaped the country and gave humans the Law to follow (*inamagana*, “put it there”), leaving their traces in the country and naming places as they moved across it. This creative period, known in other parts of Australia by different names and in English as “the Dreaming,” does not have a single Bardi equivalent, although the term *milamilonjun*, meaning “from a long, long time ago,” is sometimes used. These beings were in some cases humans that transformed themselves into animals or birds or marine creatures; in some cases they transformed from human to animal to topographic or marine feature. The unrestricted mythological story concerning Lululu, a blind man who, after a fight, became a shark, created sea, and transformed into a rock, is an example of this.<sup>5</sup> Notably, the story involves Lululu’s displeasure at being brought male, rather than female, turtle meat to eat and can also be read as an exemplar of the expectations of demand sharing: the fight erupted because the best meat, the female turtle meat, had not been shared with him.

During this period, preexisting invisible spirit beings called *raya*, which Bardi and Jawi sometimes refer to in English as “kids,” “small kids,” or “spirit kids” (“little people that come from your *buru* [country],” as one woman described it),<sup>6</sup> were left in particular locations on land, in creeks, and offshore. Bardi descriptions of *raya* emphasize that although they are invisible, their presence in country can be “felt.” As Ashforth (2011:138) has said, “it is extremely difficult to demonstrate whether, and in what ways, a belief is typical even for a single individual, let alone a social collectivity.” The care that many Bardi take when approaching sites in country where *raya* dwell is one indication of this cultural concept (I return to this shortly). Another is the attribution of agency to *raya*, to causally explain the relationship between a person and a place or terrestrial or marine

feature, and between a person and a species. When a man sees a raya in a dream, this indicates to him that his unborn child will be the instantiation of that raya. A raya may also appear to a man in the form of a creature: should the man spear that creature, then his next child will be the human incarnation of that raya. In answer to a lawyer's question during their native title hearing about how he came to be born, one man explained that it occurred "when my father just seen a turtle passing by and speared a turtle, and it was myself."<sup>7</sup> Birthmarks (*lanbirr*) may be understood as an indication that the child concerned has a consubstantial identity with a creature speared by his or her father at some stage before their birth and with the species that his or her father speared. In this case they are called *lanbirr buruyun* [birthmark from country]. The animal is referred to as that child's *barnman*, which Bardi describe in English as their "totem"; and people commonly say that they cannot eat their barnman, (or *jarlng*) because they will get sick: such food is *buwa* ("rubbish," or inedible food). So, for example, both prior to the native title hearing and in evidence given during it, one woman described how when her mother was pregnant, her father had speared a huge ocean mullet in shallow waters in his buru (estate), and when her older sister was born, she was born with a birthmark under her ribs, which is where the fish had been speared.<sup>8</sup> This kind of conception totemism is something that has been widely reported in Aboriginal Australia (e.g., Tamisari 1998: 255).

A person may have more than one barnman; they may also have a special association with particular sites or features of their estate (such as a particular tree, a soak, a rock, a cave, a creek); these are locations in which their raya dwelt before they were born. Patrilineal relatives may also inherit barnman associated with their estate (a kind of fish, a whirlpool, a current, an ochre site). People have barnman "inside" their body (this is often identified as a locus of "feeling" or *liyan*). The association of physical feeling with barnman (which is also in the form of these sites and features of land or sea) is explicit: *rarrdambal*, a word used to describe the feeling someone has when their "blood runs cold, hair stands up, and (they) get goose pimples," is "connected to" that person's barnman telling them something "very serious." *Jarlngungurr* are "magic" men or women who have special powers (men to heal and perform sorcery; women to heal). Both have the capacity to "see" things that ordinary people (*umbarda*) cannot, to travel in dreams, and to interact with powerful ancestral beings and places (see Glaskin 2008). *Jarlngungurr* are people who "do things with their barnman"; when they become old and "weak," their barnman becomes "weak" too. Barnman is both in people and in country simultaneously: it ontologically and relationally connects them both to others and to particular parts of country, consubstantially identifying them with other people and places (Glaskin 2005, 2006).

A person also has a *nimanggar*, or shadow; the term is used both to refer to their actual shadow and to refer to something within a person ("a soul sort of a thing," as

someone once tried to describe it to me in terms I might understand). A shadow has the kind of equivalence with a person that their name has. When someone is gravely ill, their *nimanggar* may start to separate from their body: only a *jarlngungurr* has the power to see this and, if they can effect a cure, bring the sick person's *nimanggar* back. When a person dies, their *nimanggar* separates from their body. But persons also continue after death, firstly as *ngaarri*, somewhat unstable spirits, still finding their way among the spirits of the other deceased, later as spirits of the "old people," who remain in country. This is one of the reasons that Bardi and Jawi avoid saying the name of the recently deceased (also indicating the equivalence between persons and their names) and why they often address the spirits of the "old people," the longer deceased ancestors, when out on country.

Like other cosmological understandings, the concept of barnman is used explanatorily, both in relation to a *jarlngungurr*'s power (to heal or to ensorcel) but also with respect to ordinary people's health. When someone is physically ill or is suffering pain, different causal explanations are advanced. Bardi and Jawi have a rich knowledge of "bush medicine," and such treatments, along with western medicines, are used for minor ailments perceived of as having natural causes. When people experience major or unusual ailments, though, they may advance explanations for these that reflect the view that these have unnatural causes. Although Bardi and Jawi are increasingly drawing on western medical understandings of disease, it is still the case that if a feature or site with which a person has equivalence shows signs of damage or decay, this will be interpreted as having a causal relationship to that person's health. A place may be affected because someone without the authority—that is, the socially sanctioned and understood relationship to the site or feature—has illicitly approached, used or affected the place or feature (Brady 2004:92 highlights similar causal explanations for ill health in different ethnographic contexts). I once drove an elderly Bardi man, at his request, to see how the sand dunes at the coastal frontage of his estate had been flattened by a grader, which others had reported to him as having occurred. On inspecting the damage, his distressed reaction was to say, "it hurts my body" and to wrap his arms around himself. This direct and immediate expression of the relationship between body and country can be understood as an example of embodied relationality in practice. Another example of this is an elderly woman's report of coming up in a rash because someone used wire to dig out the soak that is her barnman. Although I did not witness the woman's rash nor the interpretive discussions about its cause—this was reported to me afterward—I have seen many discussions in which causes of illness and death are speculated on with respect to a person's relationship to their country, or to them having transgressed the law, or illicitly taken resources from someone else's country. This reflects the body as "the central interpretive matrix for apprehending country," as Redmond (2001: 13–14) has described this in relation to Ngarinyin Aboriginal people, whose country lies to the east of Bardi and Jawi. In

these cases, there are often competing attributions of causality. In such circumstances, accusations of sorcery may also be invoked. These different attributions can be read as a touchstone of the state of emotional relationships between people in a given time. This also indicates the territorialization of social conventions and rules, the objectification of the licit and illicit use of economic resources within the legitimating cosmology, which becomes the moral order, of the Law. The Law includes the initiation rituals that commemorate the actions of the ancestral beings who made the country through performing various deeds in it (including leaving *raya* in their various locations) and the prescribed marriage categories and kinship behaviors; it includes a cultural concept of the person, such as the one I describe here.

Bardi have told me that when they are going to dig for fresh water, the right way to do it is to use the palm of their hand; to dig the earth by rotating the palm of their hand in a circular movement. *Raya* will “read” their “handmark” and recognize their smell, and give them freshwater; but if they don’t recognize a person’s smell, they will only give them salty water. “*Raya* everywhere,” one elderly woman told me. People know that there are *raya* everywhere because they “feel” their presence and because some people see them in their dreams. The relationship is subjectively experienced through the body, as the ground of relatedness. Body parts and bodily fluids (such as blood) are of considerable significance in Aboriginal ontologies and cosmologies (Keen 2006). This is apparent in Bardi mortuary practices, both past and present (Glaskin 2006). I focus here on just one element of these, which exemplifies Viveiros de Castro’s (2009) analytic links among kinship, exchange, and magic, and the personhood that I describe as an embodied relatedness.

In the “early days,” Bardi practiced tree-stage burial in which the corpse of the deceased (*jiwarra*) was first placed in a tree to decompose. Some time later, the bones were collected, broken, wrapped in paperbark and placed in caves or covered with rocks. The hair of a deceased person was cut prior to them being placed in the tree, and the hair was kept by a close relative of the deceased who wrapped it up in paperbark and treated it “like a baby” (nowadays hair of the deceased may be kept in envelopes) (Glaskin 2006:7). The hair of the deceased might also be woven into hairbelts and these exchanged for other items (Bardi still use hairbelts as part of their ritual attire). The hair of a person, whether alive or deceased, has equivalence with the person and has been used to invoke deceased ancestors for “good luck” in card games (Glaskin 2005). Bardi remain careful to guard stray hairs, too, for fear that their hair will be used in sorcery attacks. Hair, part of a person’s body, thus evokes that person even when it is detached from them and after their death. For this reason, hair has played a role in both exchange and sorcery.

I have, so far, referred to equivalences that are made between persons and parts of a person: their shadow, their country, their name, and their hair; but there are other

equivalences, too, between persons and their bones, their blood, their footprints, and their image (Glaskin 2006). There is also an equivalence made between persons born on the same day, who are called *jimarra* (Bowern 2003:60–61), as there are between persons who have the same name, who are *gumbali* to each other. Many anthropologists discussing aspects of Aboriginal Australian personhood have identified, from their ethnography, very similar extensions of persons to those I have described here (e.g., Redmond 2001; Tamisari 1998; Smith 2007). With respect to Yolngu of Northeast Arnhem Land, Keen (2006) has explicitly identified these as spatial and temporal extensions of the person. Some time ago, Stanner referred to the “corporeal connection between man, totem and spirit home” in which ‘body, spirit, name, shadow, track and totem and its sacred place are all within the one system. They all imply each other’ (Stanner 1979:133, 135). In questioning what he calls Stanner’s overemphasis on signification in this regard, Keen (2008:130, 132) draws on Gell’s (1998) idea of the “index” and the “prototype.” The index is “exemplified by the *relation* of smoke to fire, or of a footprint to the person who left it,” while the prototype is the “thing represented” (Keen 2008:131). The idea that body parts, country, shadow, and so on, “index” the person is one way of approaching these equivalences. Another is to say, as Keen (2006, 2008) does, that the cultural concept of the person extends that person in time, and in space; and this extension of the person, in turn, links them with “larger compounds of relations” (Ashforth 2011:135). This, I have suggested, can be understood as an embodied relationality.

There is a phenomenon that has been described for many regions of Aboriginal Australia that demonstrates this: namely, that kin relations have specific bodily referents (e.g., Elkin 1980 [1945]:6; Tamisari 1998:253; Redmond 2001:98; 2005:239; Smith 2007:25–27). In 1994, while speaking with a group of Bardi women, one of the women experienced a muscle twitch, and an explanation of what this meant was advanced by one of the women, to the assent of the others. On discussing this further with them, I was told that when a person’s muscle twitches (*budbud*), this indicates that “something is up” with a kinsperson in the category of kin indicated by that body part. In this schema, a muscle twitch in the bicep correlates with brother-in-law or sister-in-law; in the stomach, a mother, or brother’s or sister’s children; in the upper legs, an uncle or a father; in the legs, below the knees, brothers or cousins; and in the hand, a boyfriend or husband (cf. Redmond 2001:98, 116). Smith (2007:27) describes this kind of phenomena as “the embodied experience of intersubjectivity.” In this, something experienced in the body is relationally understood. This is the case across a wide range of bodily experiences. For example, pain and illness may be understood as stemming from transgressions of the Law or from sorcery; in the former case, a relation with powerful beings has been transgressed, and in the latter case, a powerful person is exerting force, drawing on their own relationship with ancestral beings or powers to do so. Similarly, an external agent may (relationally) cause pain

or illness in a person by damaging a person's barnman (as described above). Person's bodies are mapped onto specific tracts of country with which they are considered consubstantial, and country itself is mapped by the embodied actions of ancestor beings who left their marks, their traces, their footprints and their Law embedded in the land. The extension of the names of body parts to topographic features is also suggestive of the mapping of the body more generally, and metaphorically, onto country.<sup>9</sup> With this ethnography in mind, I now turn to fairly recent conceptualizations of Aboriginal persons in Australia as "dividual."

### THE BODY AS A WAY OF SPEAKING ABOUT PERSONHOOD

Marilyn Strathern's (1978, 1988) concept of the "dividual" in the Melanesian context developed on the model of the dividual person first established in other ethnographic settings, Africa and South Asia (see Sahlins 2011a:10). The concept highlights different aspects of sociality and connectedness with others, and cannot be understood to mean universally the same thing everywhere (e.g., Busby 1997). Strathern's model of the dividual is counterpoised against the notion of the "individual"; such that the autonomous individual is not assumed to be the basis from which relatedness and differentiation occurs.<sup>10</sup> Rather,

Persons are detached, not as individuals from the background of society or environment, but from other persons. However, detachment is never final, and the process is constantly recreated in people's dealings with one another. To thus be in a state of division with respect to others renders the Melanesian person dividual. [Strathern 1991:588]

Scott (2007:338) has argued that the model of Melanesian sociality that highlights the dividual aspects of Melanesian personhood developed partly as a response to "the inability of classic descent theory to describe sociality in Highland New Guinea." The application of the term *dividual* as an analytic construct in the Australian context may share some similarly derived motivation, as ethnographers of Australian Aboriginal societies look for ways to describe the extensive and intensive social relations often subsumed within the language of kinship. In Australian ethnography, Redmond's (2001) use of the term appears to precede the use of it by others. He specifically discusses the dividual within the terrain of kinship, as I explore below; and it is at this juncture that kinship and personhood might usefully be disentangled.

Redmond's (2001) thesis centers on Ngarinyin Aboriginal people whose country is located in the Kimberley region of northwest Western Australia, east and northeast of Bardi and Jawi country. Redmond (2001:13–14) says that in his thesis, he has "attempted to illuminate the ways in which Ngarinyin people project images of the body onto the country and onto their kin." His is an important contribution to the anthropological literature, and his discussion of the relationship between particular body parts and particular categories of kin illustrates embodied relationality in an exemplary fashion (2001:98, 116, 157–62). It is in his

chapter on Ngarinyin kinship that Redmond applies the concept of dividual, citing Marriott (1976), Strathern (1988), and Wagner (1991). Specifically, Redmond argues that it is "a closer scrutiny of [Ngarinyin] kin terms and what they denote" that accord with "the specifically 'dividual' idea of personhood with which I began this chapter" (on kinship), in contrast to "Euro-centric notions of the ego which equate it with the bounded notion of the autonomous individual" (2001:99). Personhood here does appear to be conflated with kinship, kin terms, and "what they denote." Discussing muscle twitchings that indicate various categories of kin, Redmond (2001:98) says that Strathern (1988:131) "writes that Melanesian kinship 'delineate[s] the impact which interaction has on the inner person. . . [such that] what is drawn out of the person are the social relations of which it is composed,'" again indicating that "person" and kinship here may be conflated. Significant here too is that the characterization of Melanesian personhood as "dividual" can be understood as a reconfiguration or "elaboration" of Mauss's (1967) model of gift exchange (Mosko 2010:215).

Sahlins (2011a:10) proposes that "a kinship system," as he understands it, is "a manifold of intersubjective participations, founded on mutualities of being." He has criticized Strathern's notion of the "dividual" person as the "'composite site' of the substances and actions of plural others," because, he argues, there is "some confusion between personhood and kinship relations, with its corollary conflation of partibility and participation" (Sahlins 2011a:13). Strathern, Sahlins argues, wished to contrast the dividual person with the "autonomous Western individual," but he argues that this concept of the dividual ultimately resolves "relations of kin in notions of person" (2011a:13). Against this, and in relation to the characterization of personhood as dividual in the Australian context—and indeed as against the tension between autonomy and relatedness that Myers (1986) identified—it is useful to consider Viveiros de Castro's synthesis of kinship, exchange, and magic.

Viveiros de Castro (2009:240) draws on Gell's (1998) pronouncement that Fraser's view of magic was "wrong": wrong because it imposed a "scientific determinism" on practices "which depend on intentionality and purpose" (Gell 1998:101). Viveiros de Castro (2009:241) argues that this point can be "transposed analogically to kinship." He says:

Perhaps the problem of magic is the problem of kinship; perhaps both are complementary solutions to the same problem; the problem of intentionality and influence, the mysterious effectiveness of relationality. [Viveiros de Castro 2009:243]

To "mediate" and determine the relation between "the possible co-implication of the two founding problematics of anthropology, kinship and magic," Viveiros de Castro next turns to gift exchange. "All gift exchange is an exchange of persons—a personification process" (2009:246), he says. For if, in a gift economy, "things and people assume the social form of . . . persons" (Viveiros de Castro 2009:246, citing Gregory 1982:41), then, he argues, the gift



economy becomes “virtually indistinguishable from the notion of animism. . . [in which] things and people assume the social form of persons.”

In Aboriginal cosmologies, country is sentient, country has agency. Country assumes the social form of persons. Indeed, country is inhabited by various other-than-human persons, and it is these beings, and their traces (which are consubstantial with the beings), that vest the country with such sentience. Povinelli (1993:32) writes that for Belyuen Aboriginal people, country can “hear,” and country can “smell,” and many ethnographies attest to the importance of introducing strangers to the country by speaking to the “old people” who remain in the country, and by placing their own sweat on the stranger, for this reason. This personification of country is a process that resonates with animist ontologies and gift economies (Viveiros de Castro 2009:246), and this returns us to the importance of exchange. Keen has argued that there are strong links between “Yolngu ancestral doctrines and related practices” (namely “sorcery” and “magic”), and “aspects of exchange that involve the transfer of body parts” (Keen 2008:130). Martin’s (2011) discussion of retribution and “payback” at Aurukun, as with my discussion of families and differentiation presented earlier, links notions of reciprocity and equivalence with “exchanges of goods” and sorcery (a kind of “exchange of retribution”), which “structure and reproduce the relationships not only between individuals but between collectivities (such as families)” (2011:201). In this, Viveiros de Castro’s synthesis of kinship, exchange, and magic (sorcery) is exemplified.

In the ethnography I have presented here, and indeed in Redmond’s (2001) rich ethnographic account of Ngarinyin kinship and exchange, these elements can be read as complementary answers to the problem of intentionality and relationality (Viveiros de Castro 2009:243). If kinship, exchange and “magic” (or sorcery) can be seen as complementary solutions to this particular “problem”—and the ethnography presented here indicates that they can—then I would argue it is the cosmology that gives rise to particular ontologies that “provide the solution” to the relationship between them. The relationship between kinship, magic, and exchange can be understood in this context through the embodied relationality that is at the core of cultural conceptions of the person.

## CONCLUSION

In Aboriginal Australian cosmologies, country embodies the ancestral beings, who gave humans law to follow. As Keen says, “people live and move within a landscape imbued with social identities and relations, all grounded in the presence of ancestral traces,” and this “extension of ancestral persons in space and time forms the ‘foundation’ . . . of the regional, communal moral order” (2006:525). Myers saw this objectification of ancestral deeds in the landscape and the corresponding Law as “placing certain principles beyond individual consideration . . . constituting a transcen-

dental realm of value” (1986:22–23), and hence as being the “third pattern” that “resolved” the other two patterns he identified—those of autonomy and relatedness. It is this cosmology that provides a cultural conception of the person that extends persons in time and space; that provides the grounds for kinship and exchange, for an intersubjectivity in which, as Redmond said, “images of the body are prominent” (2001:91); for anatomies of relatedness. In these cosmologies, persons are extracorporealized, extended beyond the somatic boundaries of the body in a way that is quite different to that of the Western “individual” (noting the critiques that have been made of this concept too, e.g., Bäckius 2002; Conklin and Morgan 1996; Spiro 1993). It is this extension of the person that provides the ontological foundations for magic or sorcery; that allows for persons to be considered consubstantial with other “persons”: ancestors, people, creatures, and places, a consubstantiality that Sutton (2010:72) has described as the “leitmotif” of Aboriginal religious life. If understanding this personhood as an embodied relationality “provides a solution” to understanding the relationship between kinship, exchange, and magic, and therefore to many aspects of Aboriginal social life, then it may also be of assistance in understanding how conditions of stress (Burbank 2011) in remote Aboriginal communities have embodied consequences for members of those same communities.

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## NOTES

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1. Sampi on behalf of the *Bardi and Jawi People v State of Western Australia* [2010] FCAFC 26.

2. For example, the first Aboriginal ranger group to have been established in the area is called the “Bardi-Jawi rangers.”
3. In the past, these moieties were marked in mortuary rituals, with mourners’ relationship to the deceased person indicated by mixing either charcoal (*rirrga*) or red ochre (*bidamarr*) with “oil” from stingray, dugong, or turtle fat into their hair, with black representing Jarndu and red ochre representing Inara (Glaskin 2006:8).
4. I have also heard the term *larnda* used.
5. For a published version of this story, see Paddy & Paddy (1988).
6. Commonwealth of Australia, *Sampi v State of Western Australia* transcript WAG49/98 T275.35–6.
7. Commonwealth of Australia, *Sampi v State of Western Australia* transcript WAG49/98 T514.11–12.
8. Commonwealth of Australia, *Sampi v State of Western Australia* transcript WAG49/98 T351.35–352.05.
9. However, note that Bowern says this “body-part/topographic feature polysemy . . . is not nearly as extensive as in some other languages (such as Yolngu Matha)” (2009:336–337).
10. I am grateful to one of my anonymous reviewers for specifically pointing this out.

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