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On the Poetic Imagery of Smoke in Warlpiri Songs

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Abstract: Smoke, an ever-present source of comfort in day-to-day Warlpiri lives, is also a powerful ritual symbol and theme in the poetic language of Warlpiri songs. Rather than signalling these soothing qualities, in this more formalised sung context, smoke symbolically alludes to tension, uncertainty and unknown liminal states of transition. Here, I analyse examples from Warlpiri song texts to argue that, rather than being a semantic paradox, the cultural symbolism surrounding smoke has a functional poetic purpose in that it flags circumstances of discomfort or unknown states within the Dreaming narratives upon which Warlpiri songs are centred. To illustrate this point, I analyse song imagery in which smoke and other visually similar phenomena are focal.

Keywords: Cultural symbolism; song language; poetics; Warlpiri songs; Indigenous Australian ritual

In this paper, I explore smoke imagery as it appears in Warlpiri songs. In particular, I contrast the ways in which this imagery is incorporated into the poetic language used in more ritualised contexts, against the more soothing implications of prosaic smoke in everyday Warlpiri life (for the latter, see Musharbash, this issue). Warlpiri song texts incorporate themes of smoke and phenomena with smoke-like appearance to symbolically mark circumstances of discomfort and tension – often liminal states marking transitions into new social roles and encounters with previously unfamiliar circumstances. My argument is that this is a poetic device used in Warlpiri songs that allows for a semantic extension of the cultural symbolism that more commonly associates smoke with the comfort that is derived from the campfires that pervade Warlpiri lives. Symbolism used in Warlpiri songs is highly reliant on the interpretation and explanations of knowledgeable Warlpiri people who know how to sing the songs and tell the associated Dreaming stories. It is through building this knowledge of songs and the gradual learning of the related symbolism that an understanding of the often uncomfortable emotive states of Dreaming ancestors can be understood and be seen to influence the moral order of the Warlpiri world. Such a poetic technique may contribute to the ways in which control is kept over knowledge of songs and influences the ways in which they are shared and learned.

To begin, I set out that smoke is viewed and experienced by Warlpiri people as comforting in its capacity to heal and determine human presence across vast landscapes. However, being closely linked to fire, which needs to be carefully managed lest it become uncontrollable, smoke also is associated with tension and uncertainty and serves as a symbolic marker for the discomfort apparent in transitional moments. This symbolism is explicated by Warlpiri people in the exegesis provided for song texts and tightly bound together across the examples presented in this paper.¹ After laying out the particular ways in which poetic language functions in the women's *yawulyu* series which are central to this analysis, I discuss the ritualised role that smoke has in Warlpiri ceremony as a symbolic marker of liminal social states and transitions. This theme is also alluded to in Warlpiri song imagery through direct references to these ceremonial functions. Following this I provide examples from song texts which illustrate how smoke imagery and themes are symbolically associated with tension, uncertainty and uncomfortable circumstances. I then extend this observation to show that these same kinds of symbolic associations also apply to other phenomena with similar visual appearance, in particular, those that are 'smoke-like' in appearance or camouflaged as well as distant mirages.

¹ The examples I present here have for the most part been published in the books *Yurntumu-wardingki jujungaliya-kurlangu yawulyu: Warlpiri women's songs from Yuendumu* (Warlpiri Women from Yuendumu, 2017) and *Jardiwanpa yawulyu: Warlpiri women's songs from Yuendumu* (Gallagher et al. 2014). The songs and stories are the traditional knowledge of senior Warlpiri women from Yuendumu, including Judy Nampijinpa Granites, Dolly Nampijinpa Daniels, Lucky Nampijinpa Langdon, Lorraine Nungarrayi Granites, Peggy Nampijinpa Brown, Coral Napangardi Gallagher, Barbara Napanangka Martin and other custodians of *yawulyu*—Warlpiri women's ritual. The songs have been published with their consent. The recordings upon which the song texts are based were all made by Georgia Curran and Jeannie Nungarrayi Egan as part of the Australian Research Council Linkage project *Warlpiri Songlines: Anthropological, linguistic and Indigenous perspectives* (LP0560567) (2005-2007).

The Comfort of Smoke in Warlpiri Lives

Smoke, the immediate by-product of fire, is a stereotypically ubiquitous part of Indigenous lives across Australia (see also Musharbash, this volume). For Warlpiri people, in the Central Desert region, it is certainly the case that smoke is both common and abundant in day-to-day lives. In the intimate domestic realm, the smoke from campfires draws families together, providing a cooking source and centralised place for sociality (see Musharbash 2008). The distinctive smell of the smoke from a fire pervades a Warlpiri camp, at once being associated with comfort and home. Upon arriving at a new place to camp or simply hunt for an afternoon, Warlpiri people immediately and without much thought light a fire to provide a centralised point of security in a new place.

Smoke also has the capacity to cleanse sick or wounded individuals, as explicated by Darby Jampijinpa Ross (cited in Laughren & the Warlpiri Lexicography Group 2007):²

'Ngurrju kala nyinaja. Ngula-warnuju. Warlu-jangka nganayi-jangka puyurpa-jangka. Puyurpa. Warlu puyurpa. Warlu yangka kalalu yarrpurnu puyurpa. Puyurpa kaninjarni. Kalalu yirrarnu. Ngula-warnuju, kala wijini yangka yali junma-jangka-rlangu, kala muwa-manu wanarri. [He was fine- after that. As a result of the smoke. It was the smoke – the smoke from the fire. They would light a fire to create some. The smoke was down inside (the hole in the ground). They would then put the person over it. As a result of that, any sores or knife wounds or such, like on the person's leg, would be healed]'

Babies can be calmed through the ritualised process of holding their bodies in the smoke that rises through green leaves built on top of a fire (see Musharbash, this volume). Animals can be tamed through forced dousing of their faces in thick smoke (see Sandhall 1969, for an example of Pitjantjatjara people taming camels with smoke). And, indeed, the country more broadly is cared for through the process of burning off (also called fire-stick farming, see Jones 1969). For Warlpiri people, smoke has a multitude of culturally learned symbolic associations, including feelings of comfort, home, healing, protection and safety, as well as a sense of relief at the sight of a signal fire, as Ormay Nangala Gallagher (2008, 11-13) recounts:

“Wirriyankulu nyangu?” “Lawa nyarrpara-wana-mayi yanu?” “Warlu-rlipa yarrpirni wirriyaku nyanjaku waja-waja jarrinja-kujaku.” Muturna-jarrarlu kapala yarrpirni warlu. Yirrarni kapala parla yulyurdu ngurrju-maninjaku. Wirriya-rlu ka nyanyi yulyurdu wurnturu pirli-wana. “Yati!” “Nyanyi karna yulyurdu. Yapangkujulu warlu yarrpurnu. Yanilki karna jungarni turaki-kirra.” [The people asked, “Have you seen the boy?” The old ladies said, “No, we don't know where he went. Come on, let's make a fire so that the boy can see the smoke because he might be lost”. Two old ladies are

² Fiona Magowan (2007, 78 – 84) also gives examples of smoke being used for purification purposes in mortuary ceremonies at Galiwin'ku (Elcho Island) just off the north coast of Arnhem Land.

making the fire. They are putting green leaves on it to make smoke. The boy sees the smoke in the distance over the hills. He said to himself, “Oh good, I can see the smoke, people have made a fire for me. I can go straight back to the truck now”].

These ‘good’ feelings evoked by smoke are but one aspect of the complex associations smoke engenders, parallel to those of fire, smoke’s close counterpart, some of which are alluded to by Richard Kimber (1983, 38):

the living legends and mythology of the Central and Western Desert regions contain many references to fire. Fire obviously means many things: punishment, hunting, signalling, ceremonies, the hearth, clearing of country and improvement of country are all stated or implied.

Rather than taking it as a paradox, then, that smoke imagery in Warlpiri songs is often associated with the discomfort of transitional states, I argue that this works exactly because smoke is such a strong symbol of security and comfort. Smoke, mirages, and other phenomena with similar visual form, appear in the imagery of Warlpiri songs often to indicate the travels of ancestral beings into unknown and unfamiliar territory, symbolising discomfort, tension and unknowns. Smoke imagery is used in poetic language as a signal of these liminal states of uncertainty - a ritual marker, in many cases verbal one, which alludes to visual properties – and which provides functional symbolic support through periods of transition.

Poetic Language in Warlpiri Songs

For Warlpiri people, songs are central to most ceremonial practices and are an important way in which Warlpiri people identify with their country and Dreamings. Songs dominate the auditory environment of life-cycle rituals and other related smaller-scale events. The *yawulyu* songs which are central examples in this paper are all sung by Warlpiri women in small groups prior to larger ceremonies, or in women-only ritual contexts to nurture the spiritual identity of particular women (for further details on Warlpiri rituals, *yawulyu* and other genres of Warlpiri song see Dussart 2000, 69 – 81 and Curran 2010b, 90 – 110). Symbolic anthropologists have long pointed out that ritual symbols are indicative of and work to reinforce important socio-structural aspects of people’s cultural worlds and give insight into psychological processes (Levi-Strauss 1962, Douglas 1970 & Turner 1974). Nancy Munn’s (1970) detailed work on designs, songs, dances and their associated stories is revealing of the ways in which symbolic systems operate amongst Warlpiri people.

Jakobsen (1987) has shown that in poetic language the semantic conventions of other forms of verbal speech can be altered. In this way, Warlpiri songs are similar to Aboriginal songs from other parts of Australia in that they abound with mythic references, make heavy use of metaphor, and often use archaic and poetic words or borrow words from other neighbouring

languages (Strehlow 1971, Sutton 1987, Green 2001). Warlpiri songs also rely on opaque texts which require the interpretation of knowledgeable elders for an understanding of their meaning (as has also been noted elsewhere in Australia by Clunies Ross 1987).³ Marrett (1994, 70) amongst others, has suggested that this may be intentional, stating that:

Such a lack of explicitness is typical of Aboriginal discourse and forms part of a framework for the generation of further meanings which in themselves may give rise to, or emphasise a sense of community for those ‘in the know’.

Unlike the previously outlined and more straightforward associations that Warlpiri people have linking smoke to comfort, in songs the cultural symbolism surrounding smoke takes on a more estoteric form, with smoke, and visually related phenomena, being extended semantically to incorporate themes of transition and liminality. These themes are drawn out in the exegesis that is provided to give meaning to otherwise ambiguous song texts. These stories and associated meanings of songs can only be explicated by elders who have built up their knowledge of these songs and associated stories through a lifetime of participation in ceremonies.⁴ This knowledge is continually transmitted through poetic devices, bound by the formal structures of songs such as textual, rhythmic and melodic constraints (see Turpin 2007 and Turpin and Laughren 2013). Imagery is one such technique that has been shown more broadly to be a powerful memory aid of particular use for oral traditions (Rubin 1995, 45 – 64). Warlpiri song imagery is centred on symbolism that reflects many of the core cultural values that are widely shared by Warlpiri people with imagery of smoke in various forms: smoke clouds, ritual smoke, and smouldering patches of country all have particular cultural associations which are drawn out in the explanations of the song meaning.⁵ In this paper, I explore the ways in which the comforting qualities of smoke take on more complicated associations when extended in this type of poetic language.

The examples that I draw on are all from a women’s song genre called *yawulyu* which, like other genres of Warlpiri song, are sung in lengthy series of short verses of two, and occasionally three, lines. These verses are repeated a number of times, often for several minutes (sometimes longer) before moving on to the next verse. In this paper, I present song verses individually, taking them out of the structure of their sung context. As the order in which they are sung within this broader context contributes significantly to the intended

³ For further discussion on Warlpiri song language see Curran (2010a and 2010b).

⁴ See Dussart (2000) for details of the social and political context surrounding the performance of songs linked to *jukurrpa* in Yuendumu.

⁵ This visual imagery, grounded in shared cultural symbolism, also has the effect of arousing other sensory associations, particularly that of smell in the case of smoke – a phenomenon which is not so tangibly experienced through the other sensory mediums of touch, hearing and taste. As the singers, particularly the owners for a particular song series, share their identity with the ancestral beings – the sensory responses evoked by these visual images often cause strong emotional responses in singers and other participants. Warlpiri songs are frequently sung using the first person singular pronoun, indicating that the singers identify with the Dreaming ancestral beings who sang these songs in an ongoing creative moment.

meaning of the songs, I have provided, as much as is possible, information relating to the larger narrative story associated with the particular songs.

Ceremonial Smoke and Social Transitions

Smoke features prominently in Australian Aboriginal ritual life, notably marking transitional moments or associated liminal states. Smoking rituals often mark these moments; particularly centering on smoke's cleansing and purifying qualities. Fiona Magowan (2007, 90) describes a Yolngu purification ritual at a school following a death, noting that,

‘Just as songs are produced by breath, their sounds carried in the air, so the smoke of the purification ritual fire combines with the sounds of the words to push the spirit away’.

Following this smoke-infused ritual, she goes on to note that ‘...children could return to their classrooms, and lessons would not be cancelled for the day’. Francesca Merlan (2014, 297) also describes ‘Welcome to Country’ rituals which often incorporate ‘...small rites of “smoking” (cleansing or purifying with smoke)’ after which the proceedings of events may begin. These examples indicate more generally symbolic use of smoke across Australia within rituals that are held to segue into new social circumstances, events, performances or occurrences, and ease through these transitional moments.

In Warlpiri ceremonies, smoke is also used in many of these kinds of transitional rites. During the *Kurdiyi* ceremonies, through which boys are ritually ‘made’ in to men, women dance in a long line, at various points hold smoking fire-sticks. Through the act of a mother dancing with this smoking stick, her son is considered to move through a liminal period marking his transition from an immature boy, to that of an adult man (see Curran 2010 for further discussion).

Upon considering the symbolism of fire in the famous Jardiwampa ceremonies described by Spencer & Gillen (1904) and Peterson (1970), Morton (2011, 17) asks ‘Why is it that conflicts conditioned by bestowal arrangements should be mediated by fire?’ In noting Peterson’s comment that fire in this context has no totemic significance and refers more to the flaming leafy poles and elaborate infliction of burns during this ceremony, Morton argues that despite this, fire has clear symbolic importance. Due to the prevalence of fire in the Jardiwampa ceremony, smoke is also abundant. In the song imagery of the women’s Jardiwampa *yawulyu* songs, smoke is used as a symbolic marker of transition and one also connected to the distinct smell of burned pubic hair, a ritualised mark of the transition of a grieving widow into a woman who is eligible for re-marriage.⁶ This example could be added to David Howes (1987, 399) numerous examples from across the world of ritualised uses of smell from which he has argued for a ‘universal association between olfaction and transition’.

⁶ See Glowczewski (1991) for further discussion of burning the pubic hair of widows.

The Jardiwampa ceremony is centred on reopening opportunities for re-marriage for women who have been widowed and have been in a mourning period for some time. The ritualised act of having pubic hair singed off with a small burning stick, results in these women changing into social beings that are open to have sexual relations again for the first time since their husbands' deaths. Burning hair causes a distinct smell that Warlpiri women provide as additional exegesis to the song. The imagery captured from the song words: 'The pubic areas are in a line of smoke' draws out this olfactory response for someone who has participated in this ceremony. The distinctive smell from this smoke indicates the social category change from grieving widow to a potentially sexually-active adult woman. This distinctive smell is evoked through poetic visual imagery that draws on particular forms of cultural symbolism that in turn rely on prior ritual knowledge for an understanding of its connotations. The ritual usefulness of smoke in these contexts may link back in many ways to its previously outlined comforting qualities – smoke being used to ease the otherwise tense and uncomfortable moments that mark social transitions.

Smoke and Tension

I now expand on the previously asserted contrast between 'smoke' as an everyday comforting symbol of home and intimacy and its use in ritualised song genres as a symbol of discomfort. I demonstrate this through examples from two different song series.

1. Minamina *yawulyu*

The Minamina Dreaming story is associated with a group of travelling ancestral women from Minamina, a site in the far west of Warlpiri country. As this group of single women proceed on their eastward journey, they are pursued by *yinkardakurdaku*, an anthropomorphised Spotted Nightjar bird, who is attempting to seduce them whilst flitting quickly out of view into the scrub behind them whenever the women turn around to see who is following them.⁹ At one point in this song series the women sing the following:

Example (3)

A: *Marrarnki warrurnkura*

The Desert Walnut tree, the Pebble Bush

B: *Kunjuru-kunjuru warrurnkura*

The smoke-like Pebble Bush

In Judy Watson's interpretation of this song, the women cluster under the dense foliage of the Desert Walnut tree whilst the smoke from a bushfire surrounds them (Watson 2016:

⁹ Versions of the Minamina story are presented in detail in Glowczewski (1991).

Barbara Napanangka Martin explains that *wumuwumu* in example 4 means that ‘you are trapped and can’t get away. They are trying to escape but the fire is always following them’ (in Warlpiri Women from Yuendumu 2017, 61). In both of these examples, imagery of smoke deriving from its associated fire is used to indicate confinement from a problematic situation – in this instance a bushfire is out of their control but under the control of Lungkarda, who has dishonourable intentions.¹¹

Peggy Nampijinpa Brown reiterates Lungkarda’s control over this fire in saying that he, ‘sang the fire to sleep, it followed the two Jangalas underground and then lit up again, following them on both sides’ (in Warlpiri Women from Yuendumu 2017, 60). As Lungkarda continues to ‘sing’ the fire, he makes it flare up and chase the two Jangalas further southwards until they are in unknown Pitjantjatjara country marked by the presence of different kinds of trees. The discomfort linked to the unfamiliarity that the two Jangalas feel is notably associated with the imagery of smoke clouds which form in the transitional space between where they stand and their homeland.

As the two Jangalas stand in this unfamiliar country, they gaze back towards their home. Taking on the voice of these two ancestral men, Warlpiri women sing the following (which is in Pintupi/Luritja language to mark the country from where the ancestral Jangalas sing):

- Example (4)
- A: Ngurra ngayukuju puyu-ngarangu
My home is full of smoke
- B: Ngaparri-kutu(rna) pinalji-ngarnu
The way back to their country was ablaze

Again, smoke symbolically indicates an uncomfortable liminal state before the two Jangalas are propelled dramatically back to their home by a booming flare up of the fire from under the ground, again controlled magically by their enraged father Lungkarda. This poetic imagery of smoke in the distant homeland conjures up feelings of homesickness and is sung with marked sadness. As they are transported through the air by the force of the fire back to their own country, the image evoked by *lirranji* in example three, also pretells this aerial path taken by the two Jangala men - smoke rising from the burning ground to form a cloud of smoke across the sky. Once they are back in their own country they are so weak from this ordeal that they collapse, becoming embodied in two rocks which today lie near to the soakage of Ngarna, in the country near their home Warlukurlangu, to the south of Yuendumu.

¹¹ Warlpiri people emphasise the importance of controlled fire which is necessary for rejuvenation of life, against the dangers of creating a big bushfire which is not properly managed.

Smoke-like Qualities of Appearance

The above examples drawn from Warlpiri songs and associated Dreaming stories indicate that in song language there is a connection between smoke and uncomfortable emotive states, such as fear, deceit and homesickness. I now argue that this semantic connection can be extended to also incorporate other phenomena with similar blurry visual qualities.

Two Warlpiri words for smoke, *kunjuru* and *yulyurdu*, are commonly found in their reduplicated form in Warlpiri song texts. Though a clear English translation of these words is difficult to determine, there is certainly an overarching emphasis on visual appearance of some sort. In example three from the Minamina *yawulyu* song series, in which the ancestral women are gathered beneath a Desert walnut tree surrounded by thick smoke but protected from the seductive pursuits of the Spotted Nightjar man, additional interpretation from Judy Nampijinpa Granites also describes the thick leaves of this tree as being a ‘smoke-like’ (Granites 2016: pers.comm.). The reduplicated word *kunjuru-kunjuru* [smoke-smoke] used in this song could be glossed as ‘grey’, a line of translation followed by the Warlpiri dictionary (Laughren et.al. 2007). In Anna Wierzbicka’s (2008, 412) argument against theories of the universality of the concept of ‘colour’, she uses specific Warlpiri examples, including words like *kunjuru-kunjuru*, to argue that other Indigenous ways of categorising should be considered over colour. Her suggestion is that in a ‘Warlpiri way of seeing’, there are categories of things that:

strike the onlookers as looking like some familiar and visually conspicuous features of the environment (commonly occurring local minerals, fresh vegetations after rain, the characteristic local soil, the smoke of evening camp fires etc.

Therefore, she argues that words like *kunjuru-kunjuru* could be better glossed as ‘looking like smoke’, rather than given a particular colour term. With consideration to my main argument in this paper, this kind of explanation helps to define the similar symbolic associations between smoke and other phenomena with similar blurry visual appearance. Examples of camouflaged animals and mirages are given below.

Camouflaged animals

The *yinkardakurdaku* ‘Spotted Nightjar’ birds referred to often in the Minamina *yawulyu* songs are rarely seen by Warlpiri people in the everyday realm, as they are nocturnal and remain so still they camouflage well into the background scrub. Incidentally, *yinkardakurdaku* is the word that children use for a ‘hide-and-seek’ style game, to give further understanding to the behaviour of this particular bird. Judy Nampijinpa Granites (in Warlpiri Women from Yuendumu 2017, 29) describes how the ancestral women from Minamina demonstrate a kind of light-hearted annoyance at being pursued by this bird, who is considered comically irritating in his persistent advances.

‘Yinkardakurdakuku yinyaku kujalpalurla karntapatu(lpalurla) ngarlarrija, yilpa tiirnk-anjanu yinkardakurdaku. Ngulapalurla karnta-patu yayi-rlinpirrkujurnulurla yinkalpalurla ngarlarrija. Yinyaju kuja karnalu yunparni. Kujalpa tiirnk-anjanu. Ngulakurralkulpalurla ngarlarrija. [The Spotted Nightjar bird is the one that the women are laughing at as he was going along teasing them. The Spotted Nightjar bird is calling out to the women but they don’t know where he is. They are going along laughing’.

Following Freud's understanding of laughter as closely interlinked with fear, (see Musharbash 2008 and Curran 2017 for a discussion of this in a Warlpiri context) *yinkardakurdaku*, like other ancestral birds, is likely highly feared, as this bird is closely linked with monsters, sorcery and other wrong doings (see also Musharbash 2016). The blurry visual appearance of this bird, largely camouflaged, symbolically marks this uncertain and potentially uncomfortable association.

In other *yawulyu* songs, the connection between smoke and other phenomena with like visual appearance is made more explicit. In an explanation of the Wapurtarli *yawulyu* songs, Warlpiri women tell the story of a fight between two Warlpiri groups from Wapurtarli and Yumurrpa, respectively. Both of these places are located in the country to the north-west of Yuendumu and are associated with Dreamings of different sorts of bush yams – *wapirti* ‘Pencil Yam’ (*Vigna lanceolata*) is associated with Wapurtarli and *yarla* ‘bush potato’ (*Ipomoea costata*) is associated with Yumurrpa.¹² In these songs the following poetic imagery is used to describe the group of men walking back to their home at Wapurtarli, crippled from the fight:

- Example (5)
- A: Waripinpa kanatinyi kijirninnya
The ones from the fight, coming with their digging sticks
- B: Kunjuru-kunjuru kanatinyi kijirninnya
The smoke-like ones, coming with their digging sticks.

Again, there is a clear connection between the previous troubled situation of the fight and the transition of the fighters as they journey back to the safety of their home – a transition marked blurred visual qualities. The ancestral fighters are referred to metaphorically as *kunjuru-kunjuru* in example five. In line with Wierzbicka’s argument as outlined above, Bessie Nakamarra Simms (2007, pers.comm) drew out in her exegesis for this song, that the song imagery depict the fighters in a distant, hazy view travelling back to their home country. In describing them as ‘looking like smoke’ this hints towards a semantic extension of

¹² Liddy Nelson Nakmarra provides details of this story in ‘Wapurtarikirli: The Battle at Yumurrpa’ in Rockman and Cataldi (1993, 105 – 118).

symbolic associations of smoke to other phenomena with similar blurred visual qualities. When sung in a series, the following song immediately follows:

- Example (6)
- A: Yangkarnirla pantarnu
He hit the broken bones
- B: Manyimila nyirawu nyirawurlu maninya
The Horsefield's bronze cuckoo is affected by the yellow
flowered vine

Simms (2007, pers.comm) explicitly describes *nyirawu* as a kurdaitcha [type of monster] bird, that “looks like smoke and is singing about the men’s broken bones from the fight”. In likening this bird’s visual appearance, which camouflages well into background scrub, to smoke, she also hints at this symbolic link between blurry visual phenomena and kinds of discomfort and unknowns surrounding transitional states.

Mirages

As travelling ancestral beings of all sorts move through Warlpiri desert country, the optical illusion of a mirage often makes a place that is actually quite far away, seem as if it is closer¹³. Mirages are commonplace when travelling around desert areas and therefore a familiar phenomenon for Warlpiri people. An example of the effect of a mirage on the visual appearance of distant country is evident in the following song from the Purturlu (Mt Theo) *yawulyu* song series.

- Example (7)
- A: Mirawarri-rli lajinipini
A mirage raises it (the country) up
- B: Kankarlu pina lajinipini
Raises it up behind (him)

In this song an ancestral goanna central to this story, sings about a mirage making his country look like it is closer to him. Coral Napangardi Gallagher (2014, pers.comm.) explains:

¹³ Turpin and Ross (2013) also describe the ways in which mirages or lift up dancers or country in the distance and bring them closer. Morton (in Turpin and Ross 2013, 32) describes imagery of a shimmering horizon as a song which ‘...pulls them from backstage’.

Mirawarririlpa manu. Pirdangirilpa manu. Nyangulpa pina nguru, pirdangirli ka mani nguru ngaju-nyangu kankarlu-manulku mirawarrirli Waraparnpijarrarla. Warirrp nyangu. [A mirage made the country visible. It made it visible behind. He was looking back at his country. Behind me the mirage is raising up my country. He looked back. He was calling out as he was running away from his country].

Upon seeing his country close-up in this way, the goanna feels homesick. The imagery of the mirage in this song is specifically associated with uncomfortable feelings of leaving home and travelling into unknown country.

Similarly alluding to the same kind of visual markers, Nancy Munn (1973, 147) recounts that ‘one man sang the following song while drawing meander lines representing smoke in a design for a fire ancestor’:

Example (9) *walunggana miraranggana*
 fire ‘big smoke’

In a footnote, she explains that the meaning given for *miraranggana* by her informant was ‘big smoke’. However, she also cites Kenneth Hale’s (n.d) gloss of the associated word *mirawarri* as ‘mirage’, the same word used in the Purturlu *yawulyu* song above and thus provides a further indication of the semantic link between these two phenomena.¹⁴ *Mirawarri*, Munn (1973, 147) notes, is also ‘the name of an ancestral site associated with rain, fire and smoke’, a site also associated with the Ngapa [Rain] *jukurpa* that travels westwards across the country north of Yuendumu (see Warlpiri Women from Yuendumu 2017, 75 - 94). It seems clear that there are strong connections between fire and rain for Warlpiri people, as the owners of both these Dreamings belong to the same patricouple group and therefore have ownership and control over the associated series of songs. It is also pertinent to note that Warlpiri people use the word *julyurlpa* to refer to both fire and water as a location.¹⁵ The similarity between smoke and clouds (and dust in air) and their inter-relationships are made explicit by Warlpiri people and carry these associations when referred to in songs. The interdependency of these two phenomena is apparent in many ways: fire generates smoke, smoke causes clouds to form and rain to fall; rain quenches smoke; fire and water are both needed to gain life from country; fire is used to burn off country to clean it and to prepare for new vegetation which is also dependent on rain for its growth; and both have cleansing functions which are necessary for life. As noted earlier, despite the necessity for life, both fire and water can also be dangerous and can kill. Each can also ‘kill’ the other, in that fire/heat causes water to dry up and rain extinguishes fire. A cluster of related phenomena also connects to this symbolism. In the poetic imagery of the songs, lightning

¹⁴ The difference between the two words *miraranggana* and *mirawarri* may be because the word is being sung.

¹⁵ Thus *julyurl-wanti* can mean both ‘fall into water’ or ‘fall into fire’.

strikes (often connected with the ignition of fire and hence smoke in distant country), are semantically associated and ceremonially materialised through wearing white feathered headdresses to indicate the Dreaming rising out of the ground ready to begin their journeys across Warlpiri country.

The connections between smoke and phenomena with ‘smoke-like’ appearance seems clear with blurry, hazy, and veiling visual qualities being prominent in the cultural symbolism of Warlpiri song language to mark uncomfortable states and unknown circumstances. The latter examples of imagery incorporating mirages demonstrate that these optical illusions are indicative of movement into unknown, or previously unencountered territories – the liminal states which are marked by uncertainty, unknowns and discomfort as social beings transition into new territory.

Conclusion

In this paper, I have demonstrated that the references to smoke in Warlpiri song imagery build on the cultural symbolism that more commonly associates smoke with comfort and home. As such, examples of smoke imagery from songs mark moments of unease, discomfort and transitions into unknowns within the associated Dreaming narratives. This seemingly contradictory form of symbolism hints at the close relationship between the comfort of the everyday and the liminal periods away from this in which Warlpiri people re-establish comfort in different settings or social states. Examples which demonstrate this include escaping the pursuits of an unwanted lover, moving into unknown country, and transitioning into new social statuses. Hale (1984) has pointed out that in *jiliwirri*, a ritualised language used by Warlpiri men based in a principle of antonymy, ‘opposites’ are most commonly found within similar semantic categories.¹⁶ With this in mind, the intertwined and complicated cultural symbolism around smoke makes more sense. The extension of this symbolism in the poetic language of Warlpiri song allows those with an advanced level of ritual knowledge to add layers to their interpretations of songs and hence control the ways in which other people access this detailed knowledge of Warlpiri countries and *jukurpa*.

In considering the examples given in this paper, I have argued that in the poetics of Warlpiri song language imagery is centred on smoke’s visual qualities (see also Tan, this volume), rather than the olfactory experience of smoke. This supports Wierzbicka’s (2008) analysis of ‘Warlpiri ways of seeing’ in which categories are formed of things with ‘similar visual appearance’ – in this case marked as they ‘look like smoke’. The examples in this paper of imagery incorporating references to camouflaged animals and mirages illustrate this point. I have argued that this kind of semantic extension is a technique in poetic language, which gives the singers control over the ways in which they utilise visual imagery to produce meaning in Warlpiri songs. Though it is likely that a further exploration of the ritualised uses

¹⁶ The *jiliwirri* principle of antonymy is more obvious examples: to say ‘I am tall’ one would say ‘You are short’. For less obvious words, a *jiliwirri* ‘opposite’ derives from a closely related word within the same semantic domain eg the *jiliwirri* for a ‘galah’ is a ‘cockatoo’ (Hale 1971: 477).

of fire and smoke in Warlpiri ceremony from a more embodied perspective would draw out additional symbolic associations, the use of imagery in Warlpiri songs has a clear mnemonic function which centres on the singer being able to ‘see’ particular phenomena, things and places in their mind’s eye and provide interpretations based on related cultural symbols: in this case drawing on the actual material qualities of smoke as hazy, blurring one’s view, camouflaging the foreground, and veiling surrounds.

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