

Night, sight, and feeling safe: An exploration of aspects of Warlpiri and Western sleep

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Sleeping leaves those asleep ‘blind’ and hence oblivious to potential or real danger. Such dangers are heightened further and more feared at night, the main time for sleep. In this article, I link ideas about sleep and nighttime social practices with questions about vision. My aim is to tease out some of the meanings implied in cross-culturally distinct solutions to the protection of sleepers at night. I proceed by contrasting ethnographic data from the remote Aboriginal settlement of Yuendumu, Northern Territory, with select elements of the cultural history of Euro-American sleep. Through ethnographic vignettes, I illuminate how people at Yuendumu commonly arrange themselves in *yunta*, or rows of sleepers, at night, and how some sleepers awake regularly during the night to ensure the others’ safety. I contrast this with Euro-American ways of providing a sense of safety to the sleeper through practices of domestic fortification. My comparison revolves around the notion of sight, which in the Euro-American West is clearly linked to ideas of knowledge, and at Yuendumu, as I demonstrate, imbued with a sense of care. I conclude by relating the gained insights to participant observation as anthropological method.

Keywords: sleeping and nighttime customs, vision, epistemology, Aboriginal Australia, cross-cultural comparison

NIGHT, SIGHT, AND FEELING SAFE: A CROSS-CULTURAL INVESTIGATION OF ASPECTS OF WESTERN AND WARLPIRI SLEEP

Heidegger: Im Dunkeln sieht der Mensch nichts.

Fink: Dennoch sieht jeder Mensch etwas im Dunkeln. (Heidegger 1970: 205)

Heidegger: A human sees nothing in the dark.

Fink: Nevertheless everyone sees something in the dark. (Heidegger 1993: 129)

All of us (humans) sleep. In fact, about a third of our lives are spent in that regularly occurring state of reduced consciousness that is contrasted with wakefulness. How we sleep, however, differs socio-culturally, as people across the globe sleep in distinct, embodied, and enculturated ways. Goffman is reported as saying that researchers do not know the people they study until they have slept with them. In

this vein, I examine sleep through what is observable to me as an anthropologist conducting participant observation: in central Australia, next to Warlpiri people, in the midst of rows of sleepers or, as they are called in Warlpiri, *yunta*. (I exclude in this paper what happens ‘inside’ the sleeping person, e.g. bio-chemical processes, REM and NREM states, dreams, and so forth.)¹ By sleeping in Warlpiri *yunta*, I have learned many things about Warlpiri people, and about sleep. There is one particular Yuendumu sleep experience around which this article is based, namely, my own surprise at how gratifyingly deeply I often slept at Yuendumu, despite being surrounded by others, sleeping outside, and being woken often (to be shown a plane overhead, by the dogs, because someone needed a smoke, or felt like a yarn, or, because some young men had returned home late and drunk and were making a mighty racket). I realised that my satisfying sleep experience was due, in large part, to a sense of safety that generally pervades me at night at Yuendumu, a sense which, if I had to paint a picture of it, would be embodied by a person close to me, sitting still and watching into the night, a silhouette I can see against the night sky from my position in the middle of the *yunta*, while I am lying under my blankets, snuggled against the other sleepers, who are breathing calmly. I bring this and other ethnography-based insights about Warlpiri sleeping practices into relief by contrasting them with elements from the cultural history of sleep in the ‘Euro-American West’. Such counterpointing allows me to question assumptions and to delve deeper into the nexus of sleep, sight, and the sense of safety that underpins my article.

Feeling safe at night, in sleep, is an achievement, and in this article I ponder how sleepers in two different socio-cultural contexts, and through different social practices, create a ‘sense’ of safety given that there exist:

embodied *vulnerabilities* and *dangers* of sleep(iness), both to self and others. We are all, of course, by virtue of our fleshy, mortal, embodiment, vulnerable creatures in sickness and in health: beings unto death. Sleep it is clear, whilst undoubtedly a source of great comfort and pleasure, sanctuary and salvation for many of us, renders us vulnerable or dangerous, *potentially* at least, in all sorts of ways. (Williams 2007b: 145, original emphasis)

While asleep, the engagement of our senses with the waking world is minimal.² Most prominently, while asleep we do not ‘see’ the waking world. Such lack of vision is twinned to a potentiality of threat, which is heightened during nighttime sleep as it involves a double loss of vision due to night’s prominent characteristic of darkness *and* sleep’s prominent characteristic of being blind to the waking world.

The night, and with it darkness, bring to the fore the tension discussed by Heidegger and Fink (Heidegger 1993 [1970]: 129): the tension between not seeing and seeing nothing, and through that a ‘seeing’ of something. This ‘seeing’ through not seeing/seeing nothing is regularly associated with fear. Such fear stands in direct opposition (and is linked) to the interconnection between vision and knowledge, which is often attributed to the Enlightenment—in this context felicitously named—but which

exists across a number of cultures and ages. Speaking about ancient Greece, Hamilton-Paterson elucidates:

By the sixth and fifth centuries BC the faculty of vision and the attributes of knowledge had run together in the Greek word *theorin*, meaning both 'to see' and 'to know'. Knowledge was henceforth a register of vision. Ignorance therefore becomes a lack of knowledge predicated on objects not being visible, so darkness equals ignorance. In turn, the dark becomes a source of fear as if a knowledge of visible objects were the only defense against terror and anxiety. (Hamilton-Paterson 2007: 196)

These philosophical questions of vision and knowledge and a related fear in the absence of sight underpin my cross-cultural investigations into aspects of sleeping. I approach this firstly through Warlpiri socio-cultural practices of sleep and care, and Warlpiri ideas of the night and sight. I present the ethnography and analysis of the Warlpiri material in dialogue with aspects of the cultural history of sleep in Europe. From there, I launch into a comparison of the night, in central Australia and in the Euro-American imagination respectively, to explore notions of fear, ideas about safety, and social practices of protection of the sleeping person. I am particularly interested in the contrast between notions of safety that arise when sleeping in groups protected by watchers (in the Warlpiri case) and sleeping in fortified isolation (in the Euro-American case). Exploring this contrast leads me to reflect about the Warlpiri notion of 'looking after' and what it reveals about the senses of sight and safety.

Rather than comparing Warlpiri and Euro-American sleep as broad and sweeping opposites, I focus on one particular aspect: the protection of nighttime sleepers in each socio-cultural context, with a focus on understandings of night and sight as set out in the conundrum between 'seeing' and 'not seeing' captured in Heidegger's dialogue with Fink (Heidegger 1993 [1970]: 129). The data I draw on are textual for the Euro-American cultural history, and ethnographic and experiential in the case of Warlpiri sleep. While I am content to leave purposefully undefined the Euro-American 'West', my somewhat amorphous counter-point, it is imperative for this article that Warlpiri people be briefly contextualised, historically and geographically. Warlpiri speakers are Aboriginal people who traditionally lived in Australia's Tanami Desert, an area of about 184,500 square kilometres, which lies roughly to the north-west of the middle of Australia. Today Warlpiri people live in four main settlements on the margins of their traditional country, as well as in the closest town, Alice Springs, and in smaller numbers in other towns and cities in the Northern Territory and across the nation. One of these principal desert settlements, Yuendumu, is the locale of the ethnography presented in this paper. It was set up in 1946 as a government ration station and today is home to an ever-fluctuating number of about 400–800 Warlpiri people, living in neo-colonial conditions, as well as about a hundred or so non-Indigenous service providers. From the 300 kilometre distant town of Alice Springs, Yuendumu is reached by a half bitumised, half dirt road. Set within beautiful red sand, rocky outcrop, mulga and spinifex surroundings, Yuendumu is a scattering

of semi-derelict Warlpiri-populated houses, interspersed with well-maintained and fenced-in houses for 'white' service providers, and an 'administrative' centre.³

WARLPIRI SLEEPING ARRANGEMENTS

Although I focus on nighttime sleep, it is important to note that among Warlpiri people, sleep is not an exclusively nocturnal activity. As Worthman and Melby (2002: 83–93) elaborate, sleep variation across the globe is immense. Warlpiri sleep conforms to a pattern they identify as generally characteristic of hunter-gatherers: sleep is not dictated by labour demands, thus can happen at any time over the 24 hour cycle. It is not considered rude to wake up a sleeper to involve them in an ongoing conversation,⁴ nor is it rude to doze off during any social activity. Nighttime is reserved for much ritual activity and sleep is often 'caught up with' during the day; siesta-style napping is prevalent, particularly but not exclusively during the hot summer afternoons.

Night is by no means the only time during which humans sleep, but it is the main one (Steger and Brunt 2003; Heijnen 2005; Schnepel and Ben-Ari 2005; Kraftl and Horton 2008; Galinier *et al.* 2010). Significantly, it is only during nighttime sleep that Warlpiri people sleep in rows, called *yunta*. Within a *yunta*, people are arranged with their heads to the east, their feet to the west.⁵ Warlpiri pre-contact camps as a rule comprised a number of *yunta*, made up of windbreaks, sleeping hollows in the sand, and fires. With some modifications, *yunta* continue to be how and where people sleep at night (see Musharbash 2008b for more details on the transformations Warlpiri nighttime sleep practices have undergone since sedentisation). *Yunta* were gendered and such gendered nighttime spatiality continues today: single men, single women, and couples had their own respective *yunta* within a camp (which today are located in and around a house). Any single men within a camp used to form one *yunta* at night, called *jangkayi*, which was traditionally located to the east. A husband and wife or wives and young children formed smaller individual *yunta*, called *yupukarra*, in the centre of the camp. The single women's *yunta* was located to the west, the direction associated with women (who are often dubbed *karlarra-wardingki*, literally 'those belonging to the west'). Called a *jilimi*, again this was one single row of sleepers, consisting of single and widowed women and any children they were caring for. Figure 1 shows the spatial arrangement of a traditional camp with all three kinds of *yunta*, and is based on an adaptation of Warlpiri iconography utilised in so-called 'sand drawings' (for details, see Munn 1973; Watson 1997); a vertical line represents an adult, a shorter one a child, and a horizontal line a windbreak.

Yunta are ephemeral: there during the night, gone during the day. In the past, their main component was the bodies of sleepers, curled up next to each other, in hollows in the sand, flanked by fires. Today, *yunta* also comprise bedding: mattresses, pillows, ideally an abundance of blankets, and sometimes metal bedframes. After a night of sleeping outside, as Warlpiri people continue to do often, these sleeping paraphernalia are moved into rooms (which are mostly used for storage). When sleeping inside a

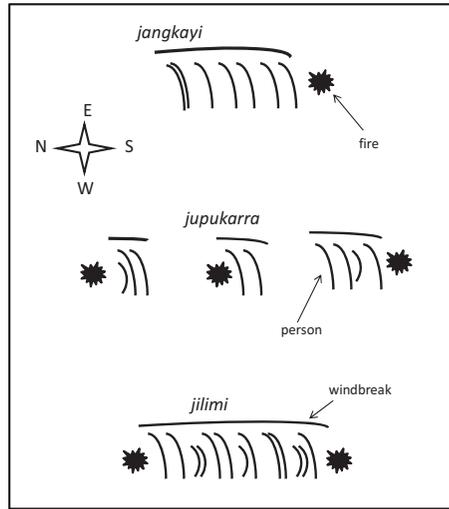


Figure 1 Spatial arrangement of traditional *yunta*.

house, *yunta* are often located in the main living room and the bedding is moved out of the way once sleepers leave their *yunta* in the morning. As in the past, any one *yunta* comprises either women and children, or men, or a married couple and their youngest children; their spatial ordering, however, is not rigorously enforced today: a single house may be used as a *jilimi* or women's camp, these days so large that it has a number of *yunta*, or a house can have a *jilimi* on one verandah, a *jangkayi* (comprising single men) in the yard, and *yupukarra* (married people's *yunta*) inside. Similarly, while Warlpiri people try to sleep in an east-west orientation, this is altered today if verandahs or rooms do not allow for it. Windbreaks, previously made out of branches and spinifex, are substituted today by walls, cars, or suitcases.

The positions within a *yunta*—who sleeps in which *yunta* and next to whom—are subject to change on any given night. Elsewhere (Musharbash 2008b), I have discussed in detail the ways in which such changes are, always obliquely, negotiated, and what underlies them. Important in the context of this article is that two kinds of sleeping positions within *yunta* are distinguished and named: the positions on the outside are called *yitipi*, the ones on the inside *kulkurru*. The most socially senior people sleep *yitipi*, on the outside. Social seniority does not equal age, as the oldest people may be fragile or senile, and will be positioned *kulkurru*. Social seniority and a *yitipi* position is assumed by those present who are the most capable protectors; they need to have skills such as detecting and communicating with *kurdaitcha*, should any be around, spotting snakes and reading tracks, being able to decode different nighttime noises and birdcalls, and being able to wake up at the smallest warning sign (in fact, the absence of any people thusly skilled may prompt an entire camp to move to another camp which has socially senior people present). The sleep of those positioned on the outside is not the same as that of those *kulkurru*, or in the middle. I learned this, like much else, by making a mistake.

At the time of my PhD fieldwork, I mostly slept next to my adopted Warlpiri sister Celeste, who was then caring for three 11 year old boys. One day, Celeste had to fly to Darwin to attend a course, and she asked me if I would look after the boys, to which I agreed. The first night after Celeste's departure, we arranged our bedding at the end of a long *yunta* on the verandah of one of Yuendumu's *jilimi*, or women's camps. Unaware of *yitipi* and *kulkurru* positions and their implications, I put my own bedding next to the outermost positioned woman at one end of the *yunta*, and the boys' bedding next to mine. It was after dark, most people present were asleep already, and we went to sleep too, only to be awoken by a pack of fighting dogs, which, as a knotted ball of teeth, claws and legs, rolled over the boys' end of the *yunta*; the dogs snarling, growling, biting, yelping, the boys screaming. Everybody came running over, beating the dogs off, checking what had happened and helping us. Two of the boys were swiftly moved to the middle of the *yunta*, to sleep next to their aunties. The third boy insisted on staying next to me, and was allowed to, after his bedding was moved to the *kulkurru* position and mine to the *yitipi* (outside), and I was equipped with a stick to ward off the dogs should they fight again.⁶

Yitipi sleepers are expected to wake up more often than the others, to push a log further into the fire, to look and listen ensuring all is safe and sound. If there are many *yunta* in one camp, only some of the *yitipi* sleepers, those most capable and socially senior, perform such duties of care. The frequency of such waking up depends on the perceived (and real) threats present; on a calm, safe night, little waking up may be required. But even on those nights, the *yitipi* position demands, and is taken up by, those capable of delivering responsibility and care. Any 'missed' sleep can be easily caught up with during the day, when a murmured 'too much staying up because of x' suffices to jolt others into action: blankets are brought and laid in the shade so one can have a snooze. Those who were looked after at night by *yitipi* sleepers in turn look after them during their daytime sleep.

The responsibility with which the *yitipi* position is imbued is evocatively illustrated by Polly, a woman in her seventies, and her actions when her granddaughter, Amy, became sick and was thought to be ensorcelled (see Musharbash 2008a for a more detailed description and different analysis of this event). During the weeks that Polly looked after Amy, Polly was always positioned *yitipi* in any *yunta* they slept in, and—as far as I could ascertain from where I was sleeping a *yunta* away—Polly stayed awake all night, sitting up, wrapped in blankets, occasionally stoking the fire, watching over Amy, the camp, and its surroundings. Even without malevolent spirits (or other immediate dangers) being suspected of lurking about the margins of camp in the shadows, as was the case when Polly was watching over her granddaughter Amy's sleep, *yitipi* sleepers are responsible for looking after the *kulkurru* sleepers.

WARLPIRI AND EURO-AMERICAN SLEEP, CONTRASTED

The watching over others' sleep by those positioned *yitipi*, and the being watched over while asleep *kulkurru*, are ontologically different from watching and being watched

during Euro-American sleep. In fact, one characteristic of (normal) Euro-American sleep can be delineated as the right not to be observed while asleep. Taylor outlines 'the right to be first left alone unobserved when sleeping, and then achieving the right to go to sleep at a time, if not for a period, of one's own choosing' (1993: 466) as a necessary rite of passage in the process of growing up and becoming a (Euro-American) adult. Further, this right to unobserved and self-determined sleep stands in direct contrast with the (necessarily) observed sleep of babies and the controlled and supervised sleep of inmates of prisons, old people's homes, and hospitals (see also Williams 2007b; Crook 2008; Williams and Crossley 2008).

Concurrently, the value placed on the solitariness of the sleeper differs drastically between Warlpiri and Euro-American sleep. Among Warlpiri people sleeping alone is highly unusual; indeed it is an aberration (see also Musharbash 2013). Sleeping alone embodies a double danger: being helplessly exposed to potential threats without a guard, and opening oneself up to sorcery accusations (the most obvious explanation of why one is not afraid is that one is causing that which others fear). Contemporary Euro-American sleep, on the other hand, is often solitary: many children and adults, at least during some times of their lives, literally sleep alone in a room of their own. In fact, it has been argued that in the contemporary West, sleep 'achieves its sociological significance as the most radical form of institutionalized periodic withdrawal' (Schwartz 1970: 487).

It is important to note that these characteristics are the result of fairly recent developments in Euro-American sleep. Not so long ago, Euro-American sleep was radically different. In the Middle Ages, for example, all residents of a house, including the owning family as well as apprentices, servants and guests slept in the one room—on the floor, benches, chairs and so forth (Gleichmann 1980; Van der Geest and Mommersteeg 2006). Even when there were beds, as a rule, they were shared, which is poignantly illustrated in the fifteenth to eighteenth century examples of advice on how to share beds with strangers (Elias 2011; see also Williams 2007a). Sleep during the day used to be much more frequent and accepted, viz. the many depictions of sleepers on chairs, stairs, and in corners in early Dutch paintings. Sleep duration for both (Euro-American) adults and children has also changed throughout history (Stearns 1996). According to Ekirch (2001, 2005), prior to the introduction of gas and, later, electric lighting, nighttime sleep across Europe was not an uninterrupted affair.

One constant between Warlpiri sleep on the one hand, and historical and contemporary Euro-American sleep on the other is, as Schwartz points out, that 'social organizations must see to its [sleep's] protection' (1970: 487). I explore this by singling out one element of Euro-American socio-cultural practices of 'protection' of sleep: what Ekirch (2005) calls 'domestic fortification' (this focus diverges from the more usual discussions on the ritualisation of the transition from wakefulness to night time sleep, from saying 'Good Night', brushing teeth, donning sleeping attire, slipping under covers, etc.; see amongst many others Aubert and White 1959, 1960; Schwartz 1970; Pile 1997; Williams 2007a). Domestic fortification relates the topic of sleep directly to understandings of the night and sight.

THE WARLPIRI AND THE EURO-AMERICAN NIGHT AND THE PROTECTION OF SLEEPERS

Night is a distinctive time-space. Humans experience this time-space through a sensuousness that in comparison to daytime seems distorted. At night, to the human sensual apparatus, visibility is limited, shadows lurk and grow, sounds seem warped and their origin is harder to pinpoint and, perhaps as a result, people are (more) afraid. Schnepel and Ben-Ari aver that night is ‘defined and judged in negative terms ... by the absence of light ... by chaos, darkness and fear’ (Schnepel and Ben-Ari 2005: 153). Or, take Van der Geest’s description of the quality of the night in rural Ghana:

It is the absence of light, the darkness, which makes the night truly night. The night creates a space where things and people are not seen—or not fully seen. It is the great cover that protects secrets, private and public ones, benign and evil ones. (Van der Geest 2007: 24)

Against the quite stark historical changes in sleep as a social practice in Europe sketched above, what does hold true across time (and across Europe) is the fact that darkness and the night were regarded as full of threat and people sought refuge in the separation of inside and outside by walls, locked doors, and drawn curtains—through what Ekirch (2005) termed ‘domestic fortification’. In medieval cities, nightfall was the beginning of curfew (from the French *couevre-feu*), the city gates were closed, individual houses locked, and from then until dawn only nightwatchmen were allowed in the city’s streets. Today, the bedroom constitutes the equivalent: an inner sanctum within a locked house. Domestic fortification creates a sense of safety through a separation—literally closing out the idea of threats outside/at night/in the dark—from a safe inside. Ekirch says that ‘the most common idiom in English for nightfall was “shutting-in”’ (2005: 91), which gives an illustrative semantic example of the force of these sentiments. Dement ponders the link between the darkness of night as enemy and sociality thus:

Perhaps family life itself originated from the need to sleep and to cluster for protection in this state. Because sleep occurs during the dark hours when man is least able to cope with his environment, and because man asleep is not alert to the dangers of the outer world, sleep is a state of vulnerability. It is necessary to seek a place of refuge in which to sleep. A troop of baboons has its tree, the wolf has its den; primitive man had his cave or hut, and we have our bedrooms. (Dement 1972: 2)

Warlpiri people also, as a rule, are afraid of the night, and with good reason. At night it is harder to see snakes, scorpions, and the even more feared *kurdaitcha*, evil beings who come to kill. In the past, central Australian Aboriginal people were exposed to nighttime revenge expeditions (for an example see Myers 1986 Chapter 6). Contemporary nighttime fears, above and beyond those about snakes and *kurdaitcha*, revolve around drunks and community members having feuds—fears that are not expressed (or, it seems, felt) during the day, when people feel confident to

‘deal with’ the associated threats (see Musharbash 2010 for a discussion of such threats and Warlpiri responses). Nighttime, it seems true at Yuendumu as well, heightens fears.

Nighttime in the desert, while associated with fear(s), is of a different nature, and differently imagined than it is in ‘the West’, where there seems to exist a conflation of darkness and night. In the desert, the night is not as dark as it may have been in Europe before the introduction of electric light and as it continues in the Euro-American imagination (see also Melbin 1978; Schivelbusch 1988). The darkest desert nights are those (rare) nights that are completely overcast, where no star or moonlight reaches through the clouds, and Yuendumu’s street lights become beacons of pooled orange light against a dark sky. During those nights a fire illuminates Warlpiri sleepers, and defines the wider camp through a low circle of gentle, flickering light. On such dark nights, when awake and scanning for dangers, the *yitipi* watchers look less for definite shapes than for movement. On those nights the vitality of hearing as the other sense with which to perceive danger becomes more pronounced. The watchers are listeners as well, listening into the darkness of the night for steps, whispers, and animal noises—the presence of *kurdaitcha* can be spotted through a certain bird’s call, for example—as beyond the range of the fire or street light, there is darkness proper: black silhouettes of bushes, trees, or rocky outcrops against a slightly less dark background of cloudy night sky. Still, even on those nights the desert is not as dark as the darkness conjured by Heidegger: ‘A human sees nothing in the dark’ (Heidegger 1993 [1970]: 129) does not hold true here. More starkly still, most nights in the desert are bright: the Milky Way ever so slowly turns overhead and its profusion of stars illuminates the night, and the moon shines so that even at night the shadows of bushes and trees are visible on the desert sand, or on the bitumen of the road, or on a front verandah. During full moon, visibility extends far indeed; depending on the vantage point, one can see hundreds of metres into the strange colourless desert nightscape, where everything is black and white, but sharp, clear. The brightness of a Warlpiri desert night is also illustrated by the fact that one of the Warlpiri words for full moon, *pira*, which also means moonlight, seems directly related to Warlpiri ideas of ‘bright’ and ‘shining’⁷: *pirarr(pa)* means bright or shiny, *pirarr-janka-mi* means to shine, light up, and *pirarr-pirarrpa-karri-mi* is a verb describing the process of brightening, for example, when dark rainclouds are replaced by lighter clouds (and the sky brightens).

The watching by those positioned *yitipi* is both similar and different from the ‘not seeing’ and ‘seeing nothing’, and through that a ‘seeing’ of something in the dark, as discussed by Heidegger and Fink, and easily imagined (and also experienced) by a European person like myself. This may well be one crucial reason why Warlpiri people do not practice ‘domestic fortification’, why they do not shut out the dark, and with it the source of fears, through walls. Instead the protection they seek is through the sense of sight. Warlpiri people ‘see’ the night as dangerous, they ‘know’ it to be so. However, the Warlpiri nighttime watchers ‘see’ in a double sense: they *see* into the night (scanning for dangers) and they *watch* over (looking after) the sleepers.

SEEING, HOLDING, AND LOOKING AFTER

The literal ‘watching over’ by the *yitipi* sleepers over those positioned *kulkurru*, I put forward in this section, is a central aspect of one of the core patterns underpinning Aboriginal sociality, called ‘looking after’ in both Aboriginal English and the anthropological literature. The term entered the anthropological canon at various junctures but is most prominently linked to Fred Myers’s work. In *Pintupi Country, Pintupi Self* (1986), he articulates core patterns underpinning Aboriginal social relations (with each other, with country, and with Dreaming): on the one hand, there is the tension between autonomy and relatedness and on the other, they ‘are countered, or resolved, by a third—the cultural representation of hierarchy as nurturance, as “looking after”’ (Myers 1986: 22).

The meaning, etymology, and metaphoric potency of the term ‘looking after’ is crucial to understanding both ‘looking after’ as a core patterning of Aboriginal social relations, and the protection provided by those positioned *yitipi* and embraced by *kulkurru* sleepers. In order to explore the range of potency (as well as of slippage), I provide a brief overview of the term and its vernacular equivalents across central Australia. Strikingly, in some languages the vernacular term equates more closely to holding; in others, such as Warlpiri, it is associated with seeing, and in some the vernacular term seems to have both meanings.

For example, in Pintupi Aboriginal English and in Myers’s work, ‘looking after’ is based on the Pintupi verb *kanyininpa*, which literally translates as having and holding (and Myers’s PhD thesis, the basis for his ethnography, is aptly titled *To Have and to Hold*) (Myers 1976). As Myers explains:

The metaphor of ‘holding’ (*kanyininpa*), as the Pintupi invoke it, is rooted in a powerful experience: it derives from a linguistic expression describing how a small child is held in one’s arm against the breast (*kanyirnu yampungka*). The image of security, protection, and nourishment is immediate. Extension of this usage characterizes a wide range of relationships as variants of this mixture of authority and succor. An older woman who oversees and looks after the younger girls and women in the single women’s camp is said to ‘hold’ them. Most fully, the concept designates a central core of senior persons around whom juniors aggregate and by whom they are ‘held’. (Myers 1986: 212)

The Pintupi case seems to bring three aspects (looking, holding, caring) together, and the Pintupi/Luritja dictionary (Hansen and Hansen 1974: 78) translates ‘*ngamputu katingu*’ as ‘cared for, looked after, watched over, lit “carefully kept”’. In the Kujunka region around Balgo to the northwest, care through holding seems to be the central meaning of the Kukatja term *kanyirninpa*, and Brian McCoy’s (2008) ethnography about male health is fittingly titled *Holding Men*. McCoy relates *kanyirninpa* to the verb *kanyila*, which, in the Kukatja to English dictionary (Valiquette 1993: 18), he says, ‘has been translated into English as “(i) have; keep; hold; (ii) give birth to; have (young); (iii) wear (clothing)”’ (McCoy 2008: 18).

For languages spoken immediately south and west of Pintupi, in the Ngaanyatjarra and Ngaatjatjarra dictionary (Glass and Hackett 2003: 165) *miranykanyilku* is translated as ‘look after someone, care for someone (*kanyilku*, ‘have’, ‘keep’, ‘care for something’)’. Furthermore, entries under English ‘look, looking’ with an element of care (= looking after), refer back to the verb *kanyilku*—thereby illustrating the clear link between holding, seeing, and caring.

To the east, in Arrernte, there is a closer link between ‘looking after’ and vision: *arntarnte-areme/arnte-arnte-areme* is translated as ‘look after someone, watch over something, care for them’ (Henderson and Dobson 1994: 228). Similarly, according to the Alyawarr language dictionary, which documents a language spoken to the north of Yuendumu, *arnareyel* means watching for someone, and *arntarntareyel* means to watch, look after (Arandic Languages Dictionary Project 1990: unpaginated). And in Warlpiri, spoken to the north of Pintupi and west of Alyawarr, the closest to Pintupi *kanyininpa* is a cluster of two terms:

jina-mardani—to be with somebody and take care of them, look after, guard, supervise, keep watch over.

nyangu-nyangu-mani—keep an eye on, keep watching, continuously control image of someone/something by eyes, typically in order to take good care of, protect.

In regard to the latter term, *nyangu-nyangu-mani*, it is significant to note that the Warlpiri term for seeing (sense of vision) is *nyanyi*. I suggest that the sensual element of vision contained in ‘looking after’, of keeping an eye on people and situations, of visually scanning for danger, of watching over literally by looking, is of deep significance. This is brought into the light, ironically, at night, when people cannot see as well as during the day or, if asleep, at all. When Warlpiri people submit to sleep during a night of potential danger their entire sense of feeling safe depends on the boundless confidence that the watchers will watch (for danger, over the sleepers); a powerful metaphor of care and trust indeed.

CONCLUSION

At Yuendumu, at night, to freely transport Hamlet, ‘For some must watch, while some must sleep’ (Shakespeare 1695: Act III. Scene II). At Yuendumu, the watchers care for the sleepers by their very watching. In the West, we replaced the watchers by walls many ages ago, and since then have created more and more elaborate walls between ourselves and the dangerous night: walls of stone and metaphorical walls of rituals separating sleep off as one of the most private aspects of everyday life. A number of conclusions can be drawn from this contrast: about notions of the night, about what we fear and how we protect ourselves from it, and about how ideas of protection are related to the sense of vision.

The *dark* (das Dunkel) at the centre of Heidegger and Fisk’s conversation is not the *night* (die Nacht) but something both related to and darker than the night. It is, literally,

what makes the night dark (and seeing impossible); the dark is the absence of light. It could be argued that in the Euro-American imagination—perhaps through centuries of domestic fortification—the dark and the night have become one. At Yuendumu, where sleeping outside still regularly occurs, Warlpiri people know that the dark and the night are not quite the same: nights can be brightly illuminated by the moon and stars with a far range of visibility—but there will be pockets of dark, in the shadows. Differentiating between the dark and the night means literally having to reformulate Heidegger's sentence 'In the dark I see nothing, and nevertheless I see' (1993: 128) into something more like 'I can see at night but there may be dark pockets, those I will watch to make sure nothing evil comes out of them towards us'. Heidegger's sentence implies that the dark is potent of meaning, and transposed into the Euro-American imagination it can be 'translated' to mean that there are frightful things (outside) in the night. In the Warlpiri imagination, on the other hand, there is a potential for dangerous creatures and beings to approach a *yunta* at night, but as long as they are seen by the watchers before they reach the *yunta*, the sleepers will be safe.

In Euro-America, protection from what lurks in the dark thus happens by 'shutting out' the night and notions of care centre on having a house, having privacy in bedrooms, protecting families with keys, locks, alarm systems. Domestic fortification increases the Euro-American socio-culturally contingent sense of feeling safe (at night). Simultaneously, it also increases nighttime isolation and solitariness and, as a result, both our obsession with and our experience of sleep as a problem (see also Ellis 1991; Stearns 1996). Put differently, Euro-American notions of looking after ourselves and those dear to us through domestic fortification keep us safe, but also keep us isolated at night, in sleep. At Yuendumu, in contrast, protection from what lurks in the dark happens by the (occasional) watching (by some) into the night and thus the literal looking after of the sleepers. Being (or, feeling) protected is contingent on sharing sleep with others at Yuendumu or, following Ellis, who summarises research undertaken with hunter-gatherers and in the West:

Perhaps there continues to be a universal need to bond with others at night, though we now sleep in apartments and houses with locked doors and burglar alarms, worrying about the human marauders who might disturb our shelter and prey upon us. (Ellis 1991: 215)

The sense of safety gained by sharing sleep with others and submitting—trustingly—to being watched over in the Euro-American West may, however, be clouded or counter-affected by Euro-American sensibilities about the relationship between vision and power. Many have categorised the sense of sight as the most hegemonic among the senses in the West, especially since the Enlightenment and specifically in the production of scientific knowledge (this trend by no means started or ended with Fabian 1983; but is most prominently explicated in his book).⁸ In a more quotidian setting, 'being left in the dark' literally means not knowing what goes on. Seeing more than others means knowing more; and seeing others (especially when they do not know or cannot hide) thus, and following Foucault, means having power over them. As he put

it: 'Full lighting and the eye of a supervisor capture better than darkness, which ultimately [protect]. Visibility is a trap' (Foucault 1979: 200). In no small part, this explains the Euro-American 'right' to unobserved sleep (e.g. Taylor 1993; Crook 2008), which in Williams' formulation is even turned into the *responsibility* to 'sleep in a bed, or similar device, in a private place, away from public view (a maximum of two per bed is the general norm)' (Williams 2005: 75).

In light of this, the sense of deep, satisfying sleep I often experience at Yuendumu, which goes against the odds of my Euro-American conditioning, needs to be read as an embodied experience of a radically different ontology, one where being observed is not about power but about being looked after. This insight can only come about through knowledge *not* derived from seeing; if I were to only observe Warlpiri people sleeping rather than participating in Warlpiri sleep then my ideas about Warlpiri sleep would significantly differ (and likely be erroneous). Lastly, then, my conclusion is an endorsement of participant observation as method even into so unlikely a subject as sleep, because ultimately we gain knowledge through more ways than seeing/observation/surveillance.

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NOTES

- 1 An extensive body of anthropological literature about these processes comes from research in medical anthropology that focuses on sleep dysfunction. Dreams and dreaming are topics widely dealt with in social, cultural and psychological anthropology (see Lohmann 2003 for ethnographic examples from around the Pacific; and Lohmann 2007 for a succinct overview on anthropological work on dreams since the early twentieth century).
- 2 See Dement (1972) for a description of a range of experiments from the 1950s through to the 1970s that tested exactly how much (or rather, how little) stimulus is perceived by sleepers.
- 3 While my cross-cultural comparison aims at Warlpiri sleep on the one hand and Euro-American sleep on the other, some of the comparative elements could potentially also be found within the bi-cultural setting of Yuendumu itself. I refrain from analytically exploring this comparison, as I have undertaken no nighttime sleep research with Yuendumu's non-Indigenous population.

- 4 Quite the opposite is true. It can be considered rude *not* to wake someone up, if that would mean they miss witnessing an event they can be assumed to have an interest in.
- 5 Positioning is important, not least for reasons to do with dreaming and the connection of dreams to the spiritual realm. As Dussart puts it: ‘the position of one’s body, in relation to both the land and one’s kin, must be configured in specific ways. How one sleeps at night and wakes in the morning enhances the well-being of the Dreaming by facilitating the fluent movement of the *pir-lirra* [spirit] that constitutes it. To encourage the proper departure, travel, and return of this spirit necessitates sleeping on one’s side and in close proximity to the [respective] kin ... Sleeping on one’s back or stomach, the Warlpiri explain, encumbers the free departure and return of the spirit’ (2000: 140–41).
- 6 Dogs are ambivalent creatures and deserve a paper in their own right: they can be a nuisance, especially when a camp’s pack is too large, when there are bitches on heat, or when there are wild horses around the houses which the dogs delight in chasing. In these instances they are exceedingly noisy and may keep people from sleeping. Dogs can be dangerous when they fight and thus forget to walk around humans on swags, instead running/rolling over and potentially hurting humans. Mostly, though, dogs are very much appreciated, both for the extra protection they offer at night—alerting *yitipi* sleepers of intruders through barking, keeping horses from running over swags, etc.—and for the entertainment they provide during the day.
- 7 The Warlpiri definitions here and below are derived from entries in the unpublished and unpaginated lexical files of the Warlpiri dictionary being compiled by Mary Laughren, Robert Hoogenraad and the late Ken Hale; hence they are not referenced in the text. I thank David Nash for granting me access to the files.
- 8 In regard to anthropology, Schnepel and Ben-Ari highlight the privileging of the day as the major time of research (to the neglect of the night in most ethnographies, see also Galinier *et al.* 2010) and, concurrently, the sense of sight as the primary epistemological avenue of anthropology: ‘Metaphors of vision and sight are central to the anthropological enterprise’ (Schnepel and Ben-Ari 2005: 155). They present a short list of prominent titles to illustrate their point, amongst others, from *With a Daughter’s eye* via the *Native’s Point of View* to *Seeing Like a State*.

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