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# Evening Play: Acquainting Toddlers with Dangers and Fear at Yuendumu, Northern Territory 14

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## Abstract

Based on research with Warlpiri people at the Aboriginal town of Yuendumu in Central Australia, this chapter provides ethnographic material on and analysis of an Aboriginal extended family group's nightly play sessions, focusing on three toddlers (between 2 and 2.5 years old). These sessions happen after dinner and before the toddlers fall asleep, when family members spend the evening in the camp, socialising. All action focused on the toddlers during this time has to do with inducing and relieving fear. I relate these sessions to others described in the anthropology of Aboriginal Australia and read them as part of larger processes of social learning through which Warlpiri children acquire understanding of their world and how they fit into it.

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## Keywords

Australian aborigines • Social learning • Play

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## 14.1 Introduction

Central Australians, like all other parents, indulge to a considerable extent in frightening their children. They tell their children: 'Don't go far away. A *bankalanga* might come. He will take you to his cave and cook and eat you'. Or, they will say: 'The Nyipamdipandi (Wild-woman) will come. She will put you in her trough and take you away. Then you will be her child and she will make you like herself. You will never see your own mother and father again (Róheim 1974, p. 75)'.

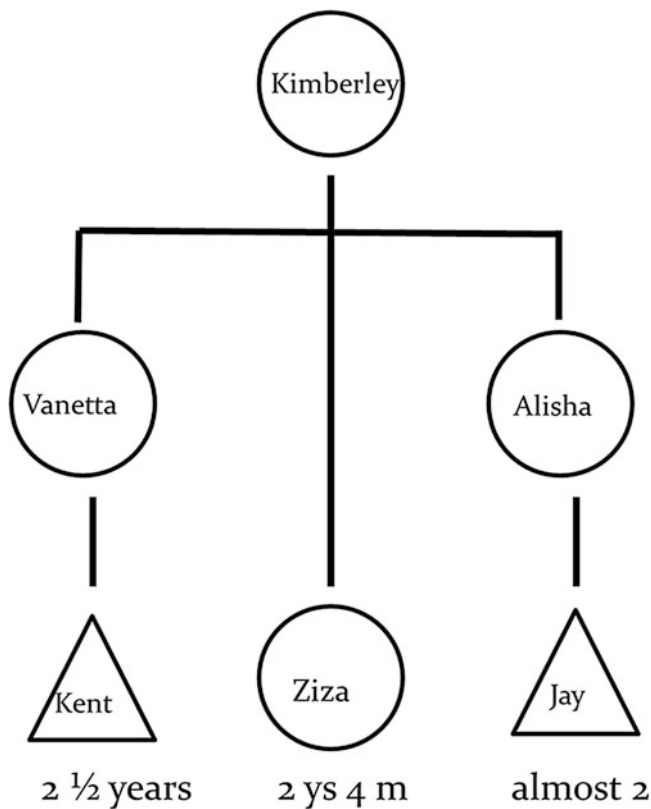
*Central Australia, 2012:* We were sitting around the fire in my Warlpiri 'sister' Marina's yard in Yuendumu's East camp, finishing our supper of lamb chops, bread and tea, when, same as most evenings, Marina's daughter Kimberley arrived.<sup>1</sup> She had walked over from her camp in the company of her two grown daughters and three toddlers: her own youngest daughter, Ziza, and her grown daughters' sons, Kent and Jay (see Fig. 14.1).

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<sup>1</sup> Please note that I employ pseudonyms throughout.



**Fig. 14.1** Genealogy Kimberley, her daughters and grandchildren

Everyone around the fire (mostly, but not exclusively, women) greeted the children with shouts of welcome, using the respective kin terms between themselves and the child they were addressing, vying for the children's attention. Kimberley and her older daughters joined us around the fire and the kids went off to play on the veranda.

Half an hour or so later, as the sun was about to set, the kids became fidgety and began fighting with each other. The adults around the fire, led by Kimberley and her daughter, Vanetta, started pointing at the top of the trees in the yard and sang out to the children: 'ooh, look' and then in very deep voices, 'monkey!' The fighting amongst the children ceased and they drew nearer to the fire. It was getting darker, and all adults joined in pointing to what the children could not see: imaginary monkeys, swinging from tree to tree, sitting in tree tops and hiding behind tree trunks (there are no monkeys in Central Australia!). The children's former irritated mood was replaced by terrified shrieks and pleasurable shudders as they sought safety close now to one aunt and then next to a grandmother. After a few deep breaths and perhaps a hug, they darted again to the edge of the circle of firelight towards the dark again, to yet again flee from the scary monkeys pointed out to them in deep, dark, daunting tones by the adults: 'mohhhnkey! There, mohhhhhnkey!' Any exclamation of fear by any of the children was greeted

with laughter and increased activity by the adults, pointing and intoning 'mohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhnkey' in ever deeper voices. The session of riotous fun left the children contentedly exhausted from combined fright and exhilaration and the adults giddily satisfied.

## 14.2 To Scare Toddlers While Eliciting Fear, Joy and Contentment

Based on research with Warlpiri people at Yuendumu, a Central Australian Aboriginal town located about 300 km northwest of Alice Springs, my paper revolves around nightly sessions like the one in the case study described above. These sessions concentrate on inducing and relieving fear by scaring the toddlers and then protecting them. They are somewhat akin to those in Jean Briggs's (1998) *Inuit Morality Play*, and like Briggs I have difficulties categorising the genre. She describes having been 'increasingly plagued by the problem of what to call them . . . it was the often game-like and playful quality of their style that was most salient for me' (1998, p. 8). Yet, the sessions she describes (and ends up calling 'dramas') much as the ones I am concerned with in this chapter are different from actual 'play'—which, at Yuendumu as elsewhere (for just two examples, see Eickelkamp 2008; Hamilton 1981), takes manifold shapes and differs not least depending on whether played amongst children or between children and adults. Moreover, unlike most games played by Warlpiri children or children and adults, which have names, there exists no actual Warlpiri term for the kind of session I analyse here. Warlpiri people say that these sessions are 'something we just do'; they are executed without meta-reflection, as my interviews also showed. Rather, if these particular play sessions are talked about, and they rarely are, people employ the verb *lani-mani* [to make frightened, to scare, to frighten] in a simple literal description of what took place 'we frightened the children'. I understand them as a single, and particular, practice that forms part of larger processes of Warlpiri social learning. As I lack a more apt nomenclature, for the purposes of this paper, I interchangeably call this quotidian evening practice *lani-mani* or play session.

To the best of my knowledge, this chapter constitutes the first deep ethnographic description of *lani-mani* sessions. Its primary purpose, accordingly, is to provide anthropological description and analysis of one single practice in which Warlpiri adults and children engage with each other and during which (as well as through the repetition of them) Warlpiri children learn *something*: about the world around them, about themselves, about their relationships to those they are close to and about what is frightening and where to find protection. However, I do not mean to say that there is no mention of this or related practices in the literature. Quite

to the contrary, most anthropologists researching early childhood in Aboriginal Australia mention that, as Róheim puts it in the opening quote of this chapter, ‘Central Australians, like all other parents, indulge to a considerable extent in frightening their children’ (1974, p. 75). As I illustrate in the following, before I delve deeper into my own exploration of *lani-mani* sessions, references to such practices of scaring children pepper the literature. They illustrate some stimulating similarities and differences between practices elsewhere and *lani-mani* sessions at Yuendumu.

The most extensive description of related practices I could find is contained in Annette Hamilton’s (1981) work on Anbarra child rearing in north-central Arnhem Land. There, they are engaged in at an earlier age than at Yuendumu (6–18 months), and Hamilton understands them to be part of a larger range of practices, all focused on discouraging the toddler from leaving the mother’s immediate space:

The way in which infants are prevented from practicing their physical skills by being firmly replaced at their mother’s side has already been described. In addition to this, threats both gestural and verbal are used more and more frequently, especially in the context of the child’s developing exploratory interest. The ‘return’ gesture of smiling and shaking the breast is the mildest of these, and seems to be used on the crawling infant as soon as it reaches a distance of 3 m from the mother, and on the walking infant at 4.5–6 m. (Hamilton 1981, p. 55)

More specifically related to practices of scaring, she adds:

Children between 6 and 18 months of age appear passive and dependent, prevented from using the skills they acquire so early, presented by the adults with a fearful environment of ‘debil-debils’ beyond the light’s edge of the camp, drawn back to their mothers side by gestures and the fear of the world away from it, carried everywhere their mothers go, straddling a hip or clinging to curly hair, fed irregularly according to the availability of food and their ability to cajole it, still able to have the breast any time they can obtain it through their own actions. (Hamilton 1981, p. 56)

While she mentions ‘beyond of the light’s edge of the camp’ and thus evening or night-time practices, she also describes instances of scaring during the day, stating that ‘the most frequently heard verbal warning is the word *wongera*, translated in English as ‘debil-debil’ (Hamilton 1981, p. 55).

Róheim also presents a picture of adults scaring children potentially happening at any time, for example, in this recounting of his childhood by Urantukuru:

Urantukuru told me that he had been a very pugnacious little boy who was always throwing stones at adults. His narrative typifies the general native attitude toward children and gives a picture of the Australian pedagogical methods. When he was very small, he stayed constantly in the camp with his mother. When he grew a little older his mother would often say to him: “You see that willy wagtail? It is scolding you. Go and kill it!” He would then throw a stick at it. Or she would say: “There is a red breast. It is swearing. Go and kill it!” Since she did not want him to wander far from the camp, whenever he did so she would shout: “Do you see that black stump? It is an enemy, a blood avenger!” He

would run back to his mother and howl: “Mother, come and pick me up,” and she would lift him and carry him on her shoulder. (Róheim 1974, p. 74)

Róheim interprets the ‘use of a bogey to create fear’ as one of two main ‘techniques of pedagogy’ employed by Aboriginal parents (Róheim 1974, p. 76). While his larger interpretive framework is psychoanalytical, he grants that the simplest effect of these techniques is about safety: ‘The parents were certainly being realistic in their desire for their children to stay near the camp, because children are easily lost in the bush. There is also the possibility that they would be killed by strangers’ (Róheim 1974, p. 75).

Two contemporary Anangu women (Tjitayi and Lewis 2011) describe how they experienced such practices of scaring as an evening practice, as well as the (pedagogical) effect it had on them:

If none of these techniques [of comforting a child into sleep] helped and the child were still restless, the mother or grandmother would resort to scaring her. She would evoke an ogre figure called *mamu*, with a mock question like this: ‘What’s that? Did you hear this?’ Then from somewhere would come a ‘miao,’ and the growling of a bushcat. As children, we were very scared, which exhausted us so that finally we became tired and found sleep. (Tjitayi and Lewis 2011, p. 53)

They continue:

Inculcated from infancy onwards, the fear of child-attacking creatures remains a powerful reality for years to come. An older child might hear some unidentifiable noise and think, ‘Oh, this growling is what my mother told me about, just this sound of a cat miaowing.’ Another sign of approaching danger is a movement in the branches of a tree, together with a scratching rustling sound that our parents had also warned us about. So when we children stayed out playing in the dark and heard something in a tree, we would think, ‘This is it, the rustling noise!’ We would be so frightened that we cried. Father and mother then came with a burning branch of spinifex grass to light up the path and we would quickly run home. (Tjitayi and Lewis 2011, pp. 53–54)

Conducting research with Anangu, and on the particular monster Tjitayi and Lewis mention, the *mamu*, Eickelcamp says about *mamu* in particular and ogres generally that they:

pay testimony to the struggles and anxieties, but also the ferocious joy, that are part and parcel of the breaking out of the maternal bond and the quest for social relatedness that mark the growth of the human self. Whether stuck up as a frightening mask at the post of a child’s bed in Victorian England, identified as the seductive call of a bird that wants to lure an Aboriginal child away from the safety of the camp at night, or declared to possess an infant in northern India who refuses the breast, the hungry ogre lingers on the margins of ‘home’, ready to attack the one who steps outside. (Eickelcamp 2004, p. 162)

She observed play sessions like scaring children with *mamu* at night:

I observed Pitjantjatjara adults warning their children not to leave camp during the night and to stay close to the fires, lest the MAMU will bite them. (Eickelcamp 2004, p. 166)

And, albeit in a different register, during the day:

[During the day, *mamu*] is called upon playfully, when teasing infants and toddlers in the manner of the peek-a-boo-game. In the latter, the repeated mentioning of the word, stretched out and with a deep voice, makes the toddler scream with fear and avert her/his eyes. S/he runs off, and, at the laughter of the adult, comes back for another encounter. Pulled closely to the face of the adult, the child anxiously and at the same time cheerily awaits to hear the word again. We may understand this narcissistic play with the demonic-benevolent mother to present a reality check on the part of the child, in this way securing for itself a new existential dimension – the ego-ideal. (Eickelkamp 2004, p. 176)

At Yuendumu, as I will elaborate, *lani-mani* sessions are reserved for night-time, only.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, and in contrast to the practices described above, they do not exclusively use monsters as the object that scares. O’Shannessy says that at Lajamanu, another Warlpiri community:

There were two danger themes enacted during the children’s play. One was about looking after young children so that they were not taken by a mythical monster and the other was adult violence. Warning very young children not to stray from the populated area for fear of being taken by a mythical monster is a common strategy for controlling the children’s behaviour. (O’Shannessy 2011, p. 150)

While she refers to children’s play sessions during which they imitate real life (rather than those initiated by adults), what stands out is that in the latter, at Yuendumu, other danger themes above and beyond monsters play a role in *lani-mani* sessions.

In the following, I attend to these *lani-mani* sessions through analysis geared towards understanding the meaning of this practice and, in particular, the emotional effects it has on the toddlers and its outcomes in terms of social learning. I proceed by considering:

1. What toddlers are scared with
2. Who plays
3. When sessions are conducted
4. How sessions are conducted

In the ensuing conclusion, I reflect about the consequences of this practice to Warlpiri ways of being in the world, paying particular attention to the question of how to approach dangers, and how to deal with fear, and how this fits with the rapidly changing world Warlpiri people find themselves in.

<sup>2</sup>Children certainly are made frightened during the day as well, for example, when misbehaving they are threatened with ‘that policeman who will come and lock you up’. There is, however, an important difference between daytime scaring of children (as an example of scolding) and the *playful* nature of evening time *lani-mani* sessions.

### 14.3 What Toddlers Are Scared With

Unlike most of the countless *lani-mani* sessions I have witnessed over the years, and the ones described in the literature, the one I began the chapter with involved monkeys. Kimberley elaborated on the scope of objects of fear that can be employed during *lani-mani* sessions at Yuendumu: ‘you can use anything that is scary or poisonous, anything that might bite you or trample you, some kids get frightened of animals like that black monkey now [that they saw on TV], than you can use that’.

These objects of fear can be categorised in a number of ways. A first categorisation that offers itself is into standard objects of fear, family-specific ones and child-specific ones. The first amongst the most common and standard objects used to frighten toddlers at Yuendumu, mirroring the literature, are monsters (*kuuku*). As Hamilton describes for Anbarra practices:

The most frequently heard verbal warning is the word *wongera*, translated in English as ‘debil-debil’. The nature of the debil-debil is never described, but the combination of this word shouted suddenly at a child and an expression of mock terror on the adult’s face is generally sufficient to send all but the most resourceful of children rushing back to the protection of the mother’s lap. (Hamilton 1981, p. 55)

The Warlpiri equivalent is *kuuku*—the most general and non-specific Warlpiri term for monster or ogre. As in north-central Arnhem Land, what or who exactly a *kuuku* is, what it looks like or what it will do is never made clear. A *kuuku*, much like a bogeyman, is a nebulously undefined embodiment of that which causes fear.<sup>3</sup> Other commonly used objects of fear include cattle (*bullock* in Aboriginal English) and snakes (*warna*). Like *kuuku*, I have heard these are used in sessions across all of Yuendumu, or, put differently, all Warlpiri toddlers are made frightened of and by these, a point I will return to.

Next, there are objects particular to some families but not others, for example, more specific forms of monster (*pankarlangu*, a Warlpiri version of Bigfoot, rather than *kuuku*), the moon; certain masks; non-Indigenous people, especially female nurses (*jija*); and the monkey from the case study with which I opened.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, there are objects of

<sup>3</sup>The Warlpiri cosmos is populated by a great many monsters, of varying degrees of scariness. It is significant in itself that during *lani-mani* sessions, monsters, who have the potential to kill Warlpiri people, like *jarnpa* (see Meggitt 1955; Musharbash 2014), are *never* employed. Their suspected presence terrifies adults (and children), and to jokingly engage them might actually draw them to the camp, with dire consequences.

<sup>4</sup>Hamilton (1981, p. 55) reports an interesting twist on the use of non-Indigenous people in scare play. She details: ‘Today, an even more potent threat is used when the child is out of its immediate camp area and in the territory of Europeans, e.g. at the canteen, the

fear identified by individual toddlers and used to scare only them. Examples of such child-specific objects include the following:

- A small boy was frightened by a loud motorbike noise during the day, following which he was frightened by adults during *lani-mani* with the threat of the arrival of motorbikes from the dark.
- Another boy is frightened of cockroaches, which he calls *marna kuuku* (grass monster) and *kuuku wita-pardu* (little monster), and these in turn are used in *lani-mani* sessions involving him.

What the toddlers are scared with can also be categorised according to how dangerous the objects actually are, with one category containing what might be called ‘real’ dangers: snakes, bullocks and so forth, on the one hand, and the moon, masks and monkeys, amongst other things, on the other. And then there are nurses, not dangerous, but known to stick children with needles or, even more ambiguously, the monsters, *kuuku*, which in this generic guise are more real to the children than to the adults.

What they all have in common, and which lies at the core of the sessions, is that they scare children. And it was the moon, perhaps the most puzzling amongst these objects, that helped clarify a chief purpose of these sessions most clearly. As one mother said: ‘you make kids frightened of the moon, especially when they are restless, then they come to our lap, try to go to sleep. Makes them come to me, because the moon is everywhere else’. A primary objective of these sessions is to draw restless toddlers away from straying into the dark and towards adult carers and the fire. The other is to alert toddlers to potential and actual dangers in their world; as Kimberley said, ‘in the evenings, I say mooooo moooooooooo in that deep voice, during the day, if Ziza hears a bullock, she runs to me’.

#### 14.4 Who Plays

*Lani-mani* sessions target toddlers roughly between 1 and 3 years old. As one mother said, ‘when they are older, they know what bullock is, and they are not scared of the moooo sound I make at night; they still take care during the day’. In fact, Kent, the oldest of the three toddlers from the case study, was pointed out as just transitioning from being scared and participating in *lani-mani* sessions with Ziza

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hospital or in the dining room. This is *wongera balanda*, literally ‘debil-debil white man’. When threatened with this, the child characteristically buries its face into its mother’s knees or shoulders and may not start to timidly look around again for 5 min’.

and Jay and wandering off to join his older cousins. As his grandmother and aunty commented, ‘he is growing out of it now’. By the time most toddlers reach 3 years of age, they, like Kent, begin to leave their cohorts of toddlers and female carers and join their cousins and older siblings; put differently, they leave adult care and begin what in Aboriginal Australian English is called *being boss for oneself*—making decisions of their own, including choosing their own cohort, generally made up of siblings and cousins of different ages. As their engagement in *lani-mani* sessions ceases by the time they are 3, it is not surprising that not a single person I interviewed could remember being the subject of such play, in contrast to Urantukuru’s recollections (recounted in Róheim 1974) or those of Tjitayi and Lewis (2011). All that adult Warlpiri people remembered is watching senior family members engaging in the practice with junior family members and joining in as they became older.

Importantly, one only conducts *lani-mani* sessions with one’s own children and children one is close to: some of one’s own grandchildren, nephews or nieces and younger siblings. People say ‘you gotta be close to that kid, it wouldn’t be right to scare other people’s children, other families’ children’. ‘Close’ in the Warlpiri context is meant emotionally; socially, in terms of kinship; and spatially as aptly captured in the Warlpiri term *ngurra-jinta*. Literally, it means ‘of one camp’, but it is used to signify one’s closest relatives, those out of the wide range of relations (*warlalja*) that one lives with, which means sharing time and space and engaging in practices of demand sharing (Peterson 1993), as well as emotional care and, clearly, practices that are part of the processes of social learning.

I asked Kimberley, who engages in *lani-mani* with her youngest daughter, Ziza, and she described that the group consists of herself, her husband, her older children, her mother-in-law, her mother, her brother and a handful of her children’s close cousins. Two aspects are significant here, when considering the implications of *lani-mani* in the context of wider Warlpiri sociality:

1. The toddlers are conditioned to seek help from close family only; put differently, they learn that protection lies with those one is close to as opposed to, say, adults generally. This fits with a general emotional ecology of trust in close family and feelings of shame and distance towards ‘other families’ and ‘strangers’, brilliantly captured by Myers in his work on neighbouring Pintupi people. He says ‘The concept of *walytja* can be said to define the moral order of Pintupi society as ‘family,’ in contrast to relations with strangers, which are full of fear, hostility, and suspicion’ (Myers 1986, p. 111).
2. Even once a toddler grows out of *lani-mani* session age, the child continues to look to its close senior family for

aid when frightened, something that continues throughout the Warlpiri life cycle. In this regard, then, *lani-mani* sessions can be seen as one of a multitude of practices habituating gerontocracy.

#### 14.5 When *Lani-mani* Sessions Are Conducted

During the day, toddlers are warned about actual dangerous creatures if they are near, for example, if a snake is spotted, and the dangers are explained: ‘*Warna-kujaku! Kapu yarlkirni!*’ (Beware of the snake! It will bite!). Even if there is a snake on TV, it is always pointed out to toddlers with warning words: ‘*Warna!* It’s really dangerous’. *Lani-mani* sessions, on the other hand, are an evening activity. As Kimberley and Alisha put it: ‘It’s for night-time, especially evening or night-time, when they get restless’. Kimberley elaborated: ‘when they get restless at lunchtime, we give them something to play with, or turn the hose on if it’s hot. After supper, if they get restless, if they don’t want to sleep, I say *ngula bullock!* And she will come running to me’.

Speaking about Lajamanu, O’Shannessy (2011, p. 144) says that:

Adults often lead children into play activity in order to manage their behaviour, for instance to distract children from straying too far from where they are expected to be, or to stop them from fighting.

*Lani-mani* sessions are one version of this. And importantly, Kimberley made a connection to the old hunting and gathering days: ‘*Nyurruwiyi* [in the old days], kids and teenagers don’t used to run around, they sit around fire, then go to sleep, no running around in the dark’. While this may be an exaggeration of just how well behaved children were during the old days, it strikes me (along with Hamilton 1981; Róheim 1974; Tjitayi and Lewis 2011) that the practice of *lani-mani* is exactly what would have prevented toddlers from straying from the fire of the hunting and gathering camp and the very real dangers that were lurking behind its circle of light. As Eickelkamp (2004, p. 166) puts it: ‘Adults commonly use the threat of demonic attacks to control the behaviour of children’.

#### 14.6 How *Lani-mani* Sessions Are Conducted

In *lani-mani* sessions, people ‘use that deep voice, like “moooooo moooooo” (drawn out and as low pitched as possible) especially to scare [the toddler]; to make her scared, we use really deep voice’. That deep voice makes the toddler run to their mothers and other caregivers. That deep voice is also, importantly, associated with play, with

joy and with the exciting shudder of pretend fear. It stands in stark contrast to the high-pitched voice of actual danger, where the same words may be used ‘*warna, warnna, warnna*’ [snake, snake, snake, yelled piercingly]. In the case of real danger, the threat is screamed in such a way that the toddlers can hear and feel the fear in their mother’s voice. The toddler’s reaction, though, is the same; they will run to the caregiver closest to them. As Kimberley said, ‘eventually, I don’t need to make that sound; if she sees snake, or hears bullock, Ziza runs to me. That is why I make her frightened, so she runs away from that thing and to me’. Alisha added, ‘we use that deep voice, and sounds, moooooooo for bullock, or whistling for *kuuku*’.

#### 14.7 Conclusion

In my conclusion, I want to reflect on how the practice of *lani-mani* is situated in regard to three issues:

1. Adult fears for their children
2. Children handling potential dangers
3. The changing world that Warlpiri people live in

In regard to the first, Kimberley neatly summed up her fears for Ziza. She said:

- I worry about her walking in long grass because of snake.
- I worry about her walking without shoes: put shoes on; it’s really hot; it might burn you.
- I worry when she climbs, she might fall.

*Kapu wantimi, kapungku jankami, kapu yarlkirni*—it will fall; it will burn you; it will bite (bite as a dog does, or a snake, but also March flies or ants)—these are the warning cries of adults when they see their children close to danger. And while the warning about falling may well be universal, the warnings about being bitten and being burned are desert specific, triggered by snakes, centipedes, spiders, dogs and the ever-present fires. These dangers are pointed out to toddlers during the day, they are incorporated into play during *lani-mani* sessions, and they are yelled in high-pitched high alert voices if actually present—these dangers literally and aurally populate the toddlers’ world.

As a response, toddlers, as they discover their world, face any of their caregivers, any of their *ngurra-jinta* (close family), who engage in nightly *lani-mani* sessions with them, every time they find something new. As Kimberley described:

Ziza is surprised to see little animals, new ones she doesn’t know, frog or mouse. Every time she sees something new, she looks at me if OK or dangerous, then she asks, can she touch it: Manta? [she asks] Manta! [I say if it is safe]. Like yesterday, when we went to Wakurlpa. Remember? She got frightened of

tadpoles [which she had never seen before]. She looked at me, and I showed her not to be frightened. I hold that tadpole and said “it won’t bite you, look, he’s alright”. Like her cousin Katani, she was proud of herself yesterday, singing out everytime she got tadpole or frog, and then we praised her.

And Alisha added ‘the same is true for Jay. Anything new, he comes running to me, like when he had little ants crawling up his arm; he came running’.

In a last step, I want to contrast *lani-mani*, the meaningful scaring of Warlpiri children that helps them to be safe in their physical, social and emotional world, with an anecdote about how such practices are perceived by some non-Indigenous service providers at Yuendumu. I only know the following story second hand, but find it peculiarly poignant. It was told to me by a linguist friend, who has long worked with a set of committed Warlpiri teachers at the local school. Two of these, she told me, had spent considerable time writing and designing a manuscript for a Warlpiri children’s bedtime story book. They proudly presented the manuscript to the non-Indigenous World Vision employees, who administer and assist the Warlpiri Early Childhood Care and Development Project, in the hope of getting it printed. The project got refused outright and the World Vision employees compared the stories to child torture—how could any child sleep after hearing such scary tales—they asked.

One danger perhaps scarier even than being bitten, being burned or falling that Warlpiri toddlers face as they grow up is living in a world administered, policed, controlled and defined by people who do not see, who do not hear, who do not feel, who do not know and who do not fear what they do.

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