

Multilingualism on the move

Small-scale multilingualism and mobility in northern Australia

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The logo for the Research Unit for Indigenous Language, featuring a stylized, curved, reddish-brown shape that resembles a traditional Indigenous Australian design.

RESEARCH UNIT FOR
INDIGENOUS LANGUAGE



Overview

- i. the northern Australian context
 - *language*
 - *changing mobilities*
- ii. Maningrida and the Arnhem Land region
- iii. traditional and contemporary mobilities in Indigenous Australia
- iv. stages of Maningrida's history
 - *pre-contact*
 - *protection and preservation*
 - *assimilation and integration*
 - *self determination and self management*
- v. multilingualism and mobilities across time in the Maningrida region
- vi. summary and conclusions



Overview

Data (2014-2020):

- language documentation – focused on Burarra varieties – in Maningrida and Darwin
- recordings of multilingual practices across community domains
- language biography interviews, exploring multilingual repertoires
- collaborative ethnographic work
- *Historical data:* earlier anthropological and ethnographic reports
contemporary community accounts of earlier eras

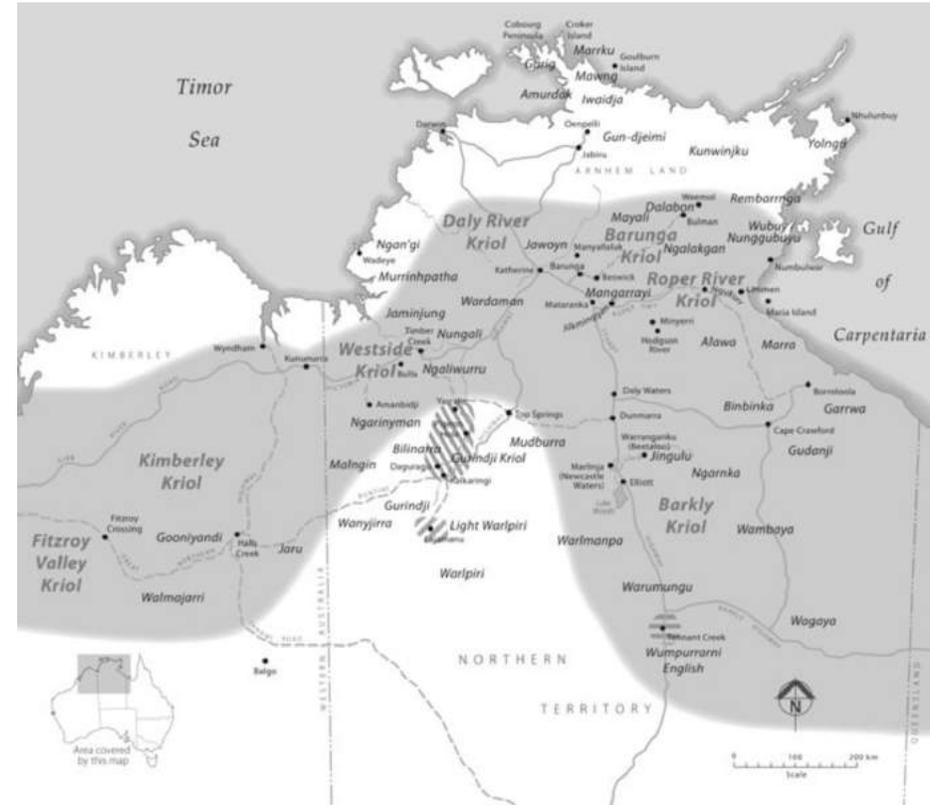
Projects :

- *Documenting Burarra dialectal variation within the multilingual ecology of north-central Arnhem Land*
- *Multilingual meaning-making: the sociolinguistics of language choice in Maningrida*
- *Cultural Documentation of Bábbarra Women's Centre Designs*



Language in northern Australia

- broader context of widespread and devastating language loss across Australia
- in parts of northern Australia, children still grow up speaking one or more Indigenous languages
- emergence of post-colonial contact varieties (Kriol, mixed languages, Aboriginal Englishes)



Kriol and mixed languages
Meakins & O'Shannessy 2016
(Map: Brenda Thornley)



Language in northern Australia

- indirect relationship between individuals and languages, mediated by (often patrilineal) connection to clan and land, with linguistic varieties primordially connected to discrete territories (e.g. Merlan 1981; Rumsey 1993)



(Evans 2007)

- prior to colonisation, multilingualism was small-scale and non-polyglossic (e.g. Brandl and Walsh 1982; Wilkins and Nash 2008)
- reflexes of this system remain robust in some regions (e.g. Arnhem Land) (e.g. Elwell 1977; Singer & Harris 2016; Vaughan 2018), but reshaped by broader demographic and socio-political shifts



Changing mobilities in northern Australia

- ideological connections between language and place have genuine effects in lived experience, but can obscure past and present patterns of mobility
- primacy of kinship-based networks, but orientation to kin varies across sites (Christie & Greatorex 2004)
- post-colonial and more recent changes:
 - urbanisation
 - widening social spheres
 - changing patterns of mobility
- research on traditional languages has tended to foreground a single language in a single community, often at a single point in time
cf. reality of language use characterised by multilingualism, mobility and constant evolution (notable exceptions on Warlpiri (Burke 2018), Kuninjku (Altman & Hinkson 2007), and Yolngu (Christie & Greatorex 2004) mobility)





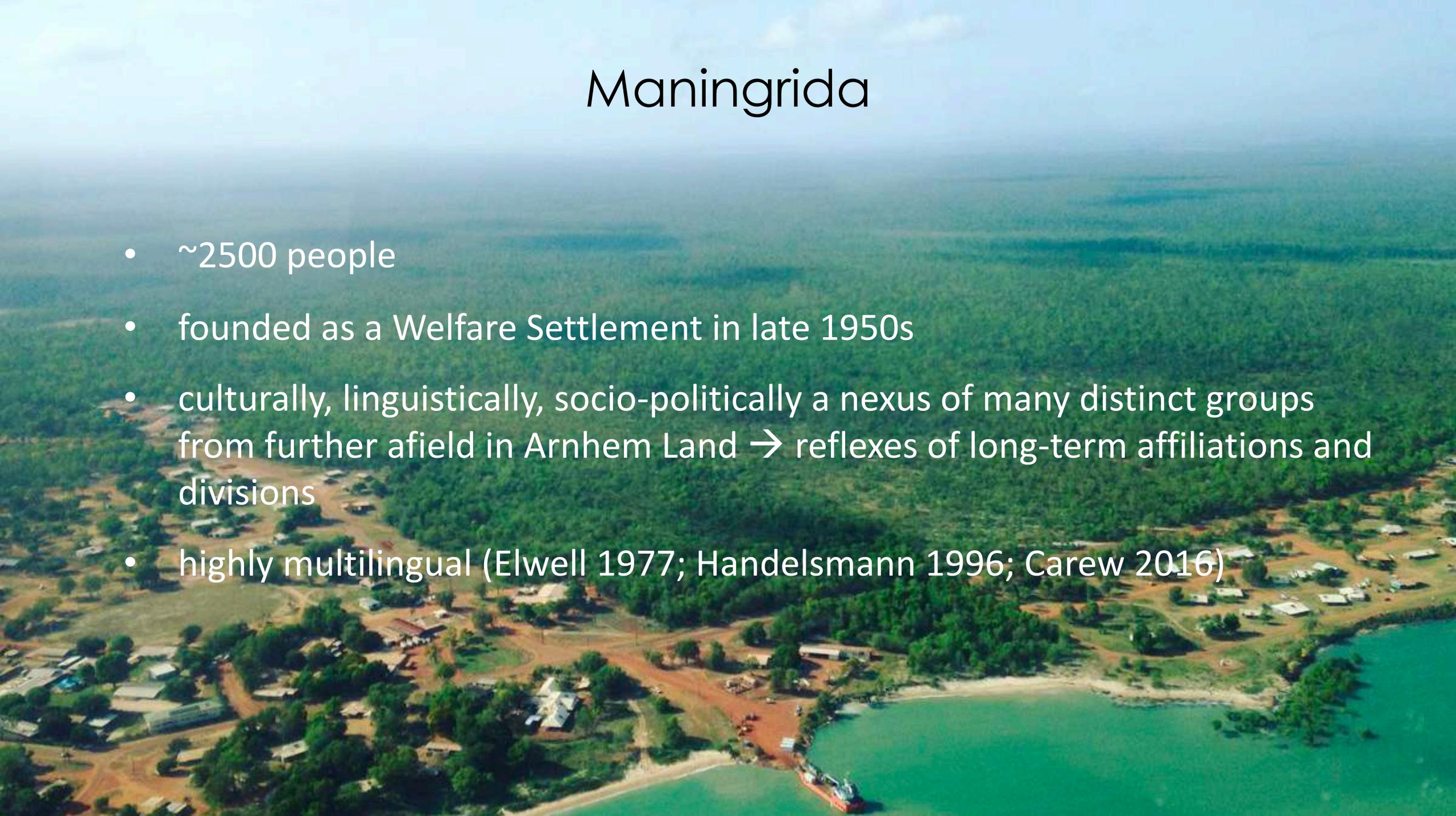
Arnhem Land

- remote region, largely Aboriginal population
- 500km from Darwin
- 97,000km², ~20,000 inhabitants
- Aboriginal territory: visitors must obtain a permit from Traditional Owners
- highly multilingual (20+ languages), many traditional Australian languages of the region continue to be learned by children



Maningrida

- ~2500 people
- founded as a Welfare Settlement in late 1950s
- culturally, linguistically, socio-politically a nexus of many distinct groups from further afield in Arnhem Land → reflexes of long-term affiliations and divisions
- highly multilingual (Elwell 1977; Handelsmann 1996; Carew 2016)



Maningrida

- highly multilingual, with large partially overlapping individual repertoires
- no shared spoken language as a clear lingua franca or communilect used between all groups
- trilingual program at school until 2008
- “the social need for a spoken lingua franca does not seem to exist” (Elwell 1977: 119), although widely-used varieties do exist (localised Englishes, sign language practices, some local languages as L2s)



NON-PAMA-NYUNGAN

Maningridan

- ↳ Burarra (Anbarra, Martay, Maringa)
 - ↳ Gun-nartpa
 - ↳ Gurr-goni
 - ↳ Ndjébbana
 - ↳ Na-kara
- } Gu-jingarliya

Gunwinyguan

- ↳ Kunbarlang
- ↳ Bininj Kunwok (eastern dialects: Kuninjku, Kune)
- ↳ Rembarrnga
- ↳ Dalabon/Dangbon/Buwan

Iwaidjan

- ↳ Mawng

PAMA-NYUNGAN

Yolngu

- ↳ Djinang and Wurlaki (moiety-identified dialects)
- ↳ Yan-nhangu
- ↳ Gupapuyngu, Ganalpingu, Djambarrpuyngu

+ English and local contact varieties (e.g. Kriol, Aboriginal Englishes)



Traditional and contemporary mobilities

- mobility prior to settlement era characterised by:
 - circular seasonal mobility e.g. for access to resources, social reasons, ceremony (Meehan 1982, 1991)
 - trading relationships over longer distances (Berndt & Berndt 1954)
 - predominant social pattern of exogamous marriage (Gurrmanamana et al. 2002; Hiatt 1965) (Carew 2016)
 - contemporary mobility characterised by:
 - ‘hyper-mobility essential to modern living’ (Altman & Hinkson 2007)
 - ‘orbiting diasporas’ between ‘magnet communities’ (Burke 2018)
 - increased time spent in large urban centres (e.g. Darwin)
- changing interactions with ancestral lands
- emergence of new kinds of language practices



Stages of Maningrida's history

(Altman 1987; Bond-Sharp 2013; Carew 2016)

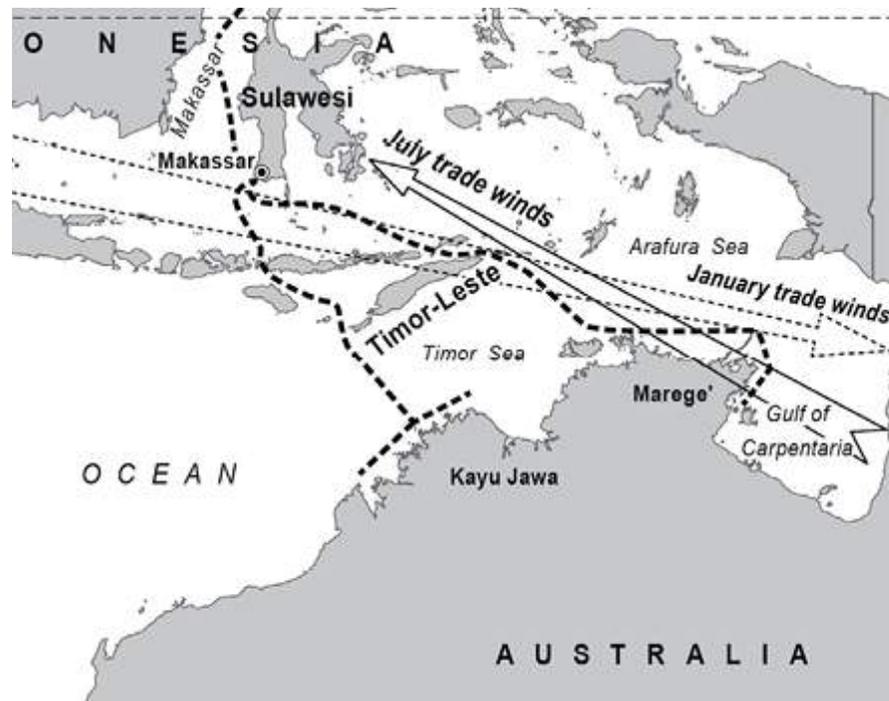
- pre-colonial era
- 'protection and preservation' era *~early 20th C-1957*
- 'assimilation and integration' era *~1957-1973*
- 'self determination and self management' era *~1973 →*
 - outstation movement
 - Northern Territory Emergency Response (The Intervention)
 - global financial crisis

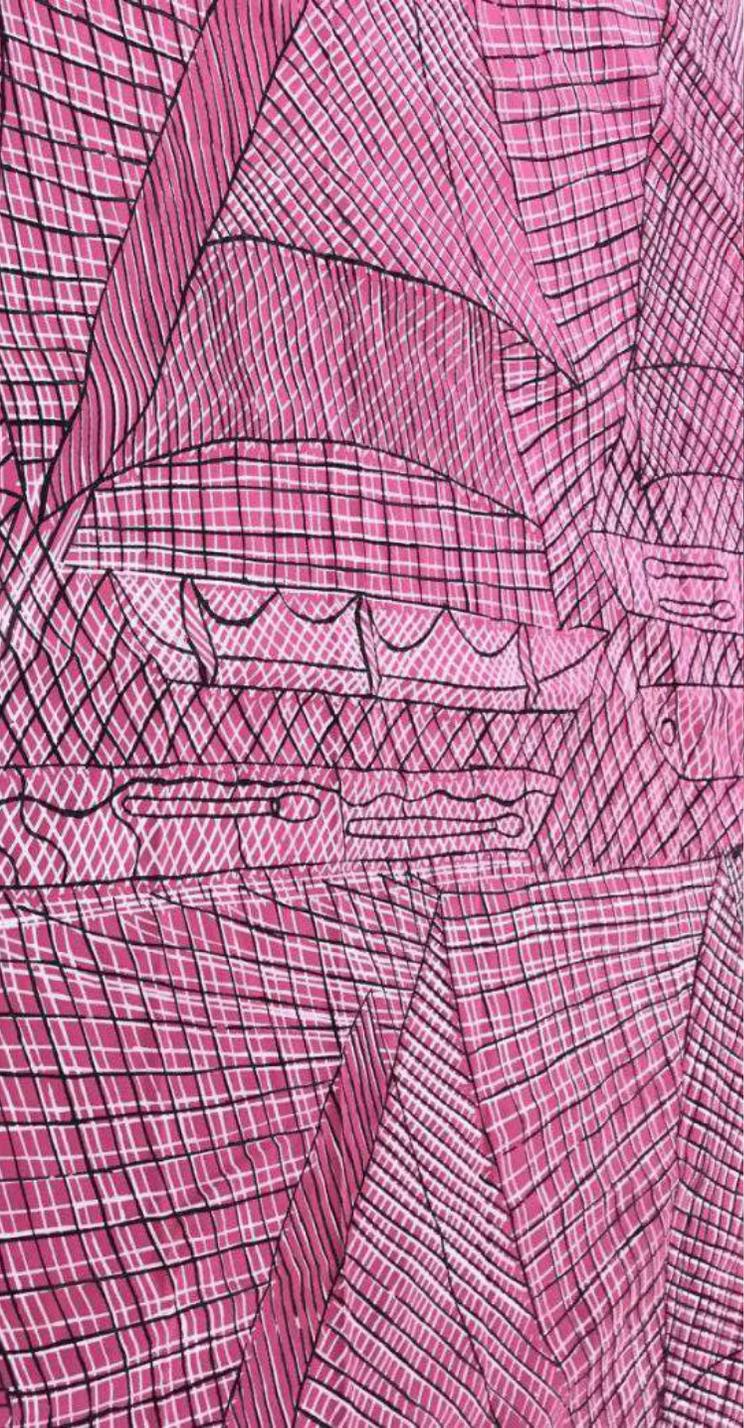


Pre-colonial era

Mobility

- movement particularly associated with:
 - seasonal food sources
 - ceremony
 - conflict (England et al 2014)
- pre-20th C, 400 years of sustained seasonal contact with fleets of Macassan trepang fishermen from Sulawesi (Indonesia) along coastal Arnhem Land





KIP&CO
BARBARA



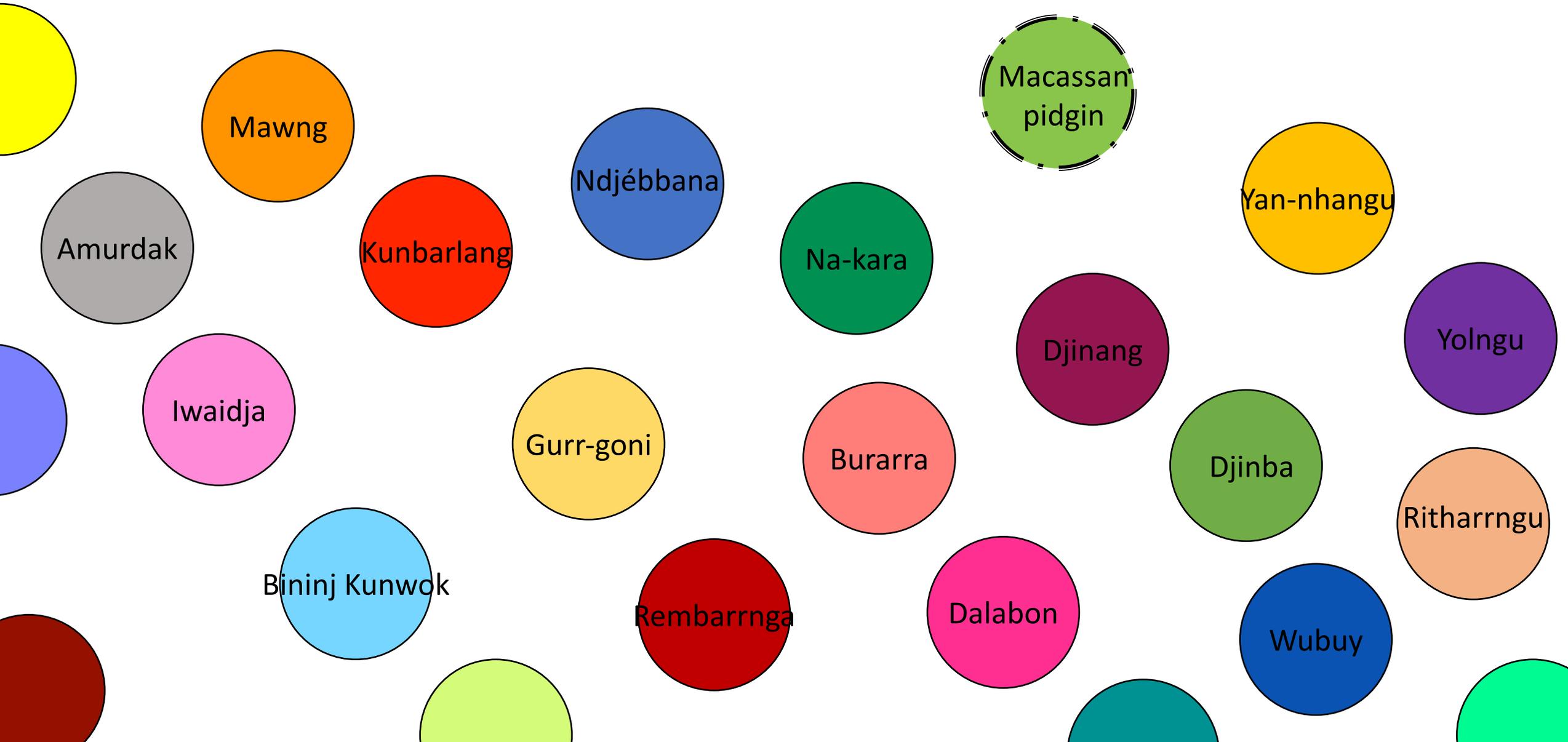
Pre-colonial era

Multilingualism:

- small-scale and egalitarian
- development of pidgin between coastal groups and Macassan traders
 - became lingua franca between different local groups who travelled to trepang processing sites (e.g. Evans 1992; Urry & Walsh 1981)
 - several Macassan words remain in Arnhem Land languages



Pre-colonial era language ecology



The 'protection and preservation' era

Mobility

- 1931: declaration of the Arnhem Land reserve
 - restricted colonial incursions but also shaped ongoing interactions between Indigenous groups within and beyond the reserve (Dewar 1992)
- some attended school in other communities (Milingimbi, Goulburn Island)



The 'protection and preservation' era

Mobility

- 1931: declaration of the Arnhem Land reserve
 - restricted colonial incursions but also shaped ongoing interactions between Indigenous groups within and beyond the reserve (Dewar 1992)
- some attended school in other communities (Milingimbi, Goulburn Island)
- widening orbits for economic/social reasons, e.g. connection between north-central Arnhem and Roper River region
- WWII:
 - military presence at Milingimbi – work for rations
 - men travelled to Darwin, encouraged to contribute to war effort. Following WWII some remained and facilitated future migrations – 'drift to Darwin' (Bond-Sharp 2013)
 - following the war some left to work on stations and farms



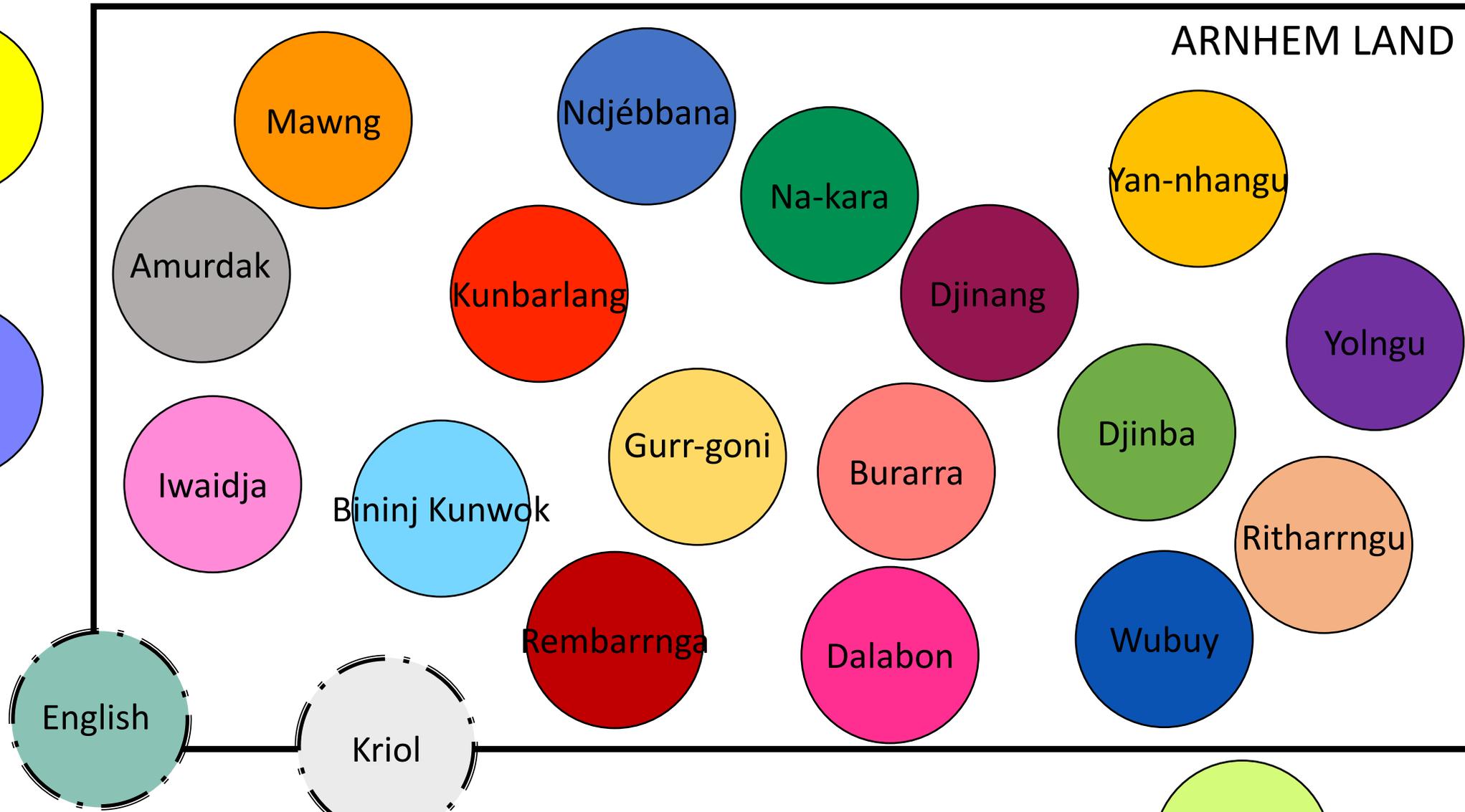
The 'protection and preservation' era

Multilingualism

- creation of reserve contributed to consolidating Arnhem Land as a regional system (e.g. Epps 2008)
- contact with standard English limited (some learned at school elsewhere)
- Kriol formed part of multilingual repertoires of many who grew up in this era



'Protection and preservation' era language ecology



The 'assimilation and integration' era

Mobility

- migration of eastern groups onto Ndjébbana land at newly established Maningrida settlement
 - settlement grew from 300 to 1100 between 1957-70 (Borsboom 1986)
- decline of subsistence economy, increasing reliance on welfare and rations



Maningrida c. 1962 – i: hospital; ii: school; iii: rations (Source: BBC *Quest Under Capricorn*)

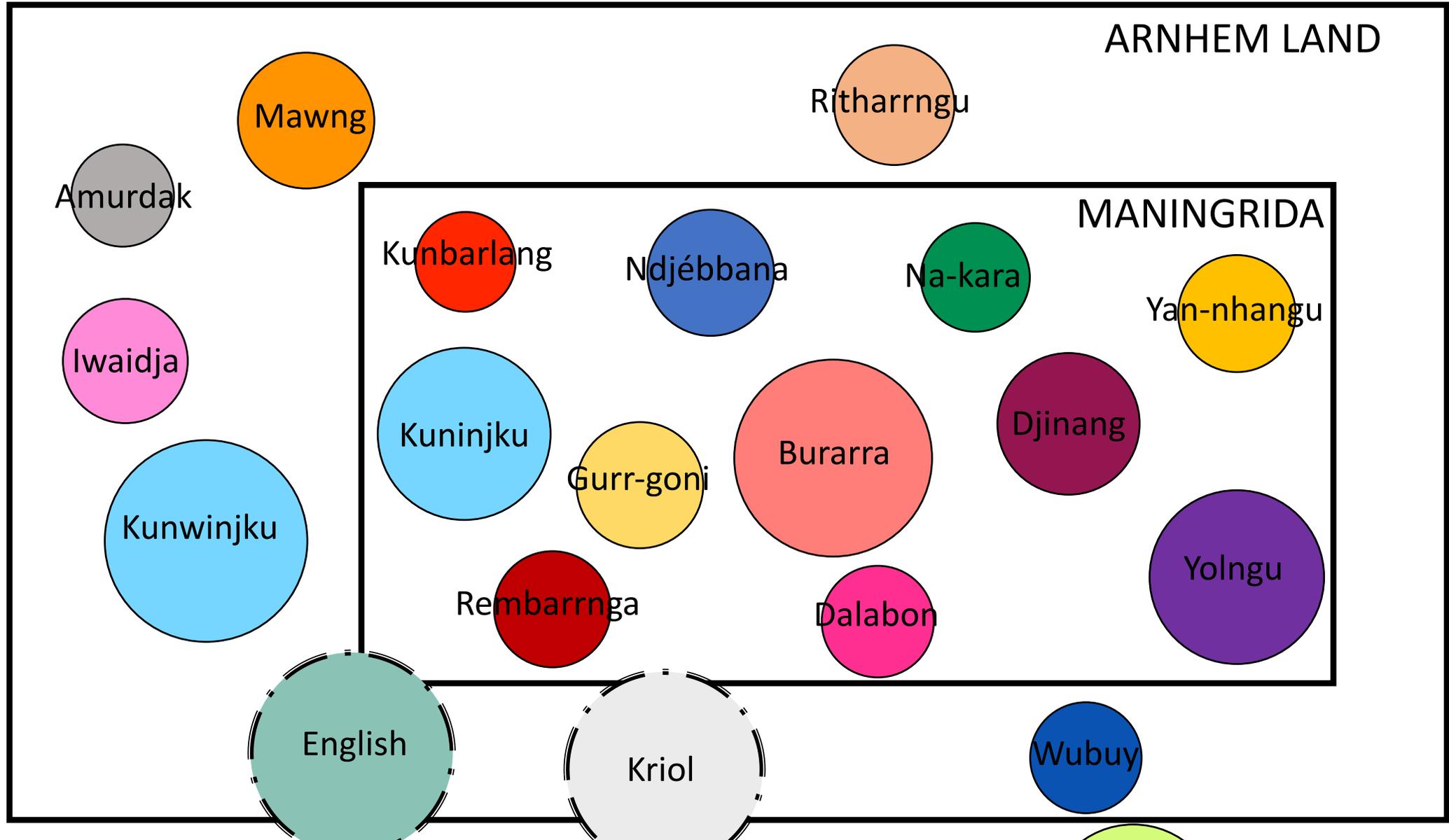
The 'assimilation and integration' era

Multilingualism

- arrival of groups such as Rembarrnga, Burarra, Na-kara, Kunwinjku and Gurr-goni
- Burarra speakers now the largest group, smaller language groups exerted less influence (incl. Ndjébbana)
- 'cultural renaissance' (Borsboom 1986) as groups who were separated post-war are again in contact
 - resurgence in use of groups' own languages, traditional ceremonies



'Assimilation and integration' era language ecology





Burarra and English/Kriol used to translate/explain new voting rights to a linguistically diverse crowd – *Maningrida 1962*

An-guna an-bombula, an-guna a-yinmiyana an-gugaliya – a-yinmiya a-nirra. Aburr-guna aburr-weya aburr-nirra three men, gentlemen. Aburr-jinyjirra, rrapa an-guna an-bombula, him no more sabi, this man here. Gala marn.gi.

This man doesn't know, this Aboriginal man, he's that kind of man. These men are sitting talking, three men, gentlemen. They're standing, and this one, this man here, he doesn't know.



The 'self determination and self management' era

Mobility

- change to Whitlam government from 1973 meant (among other things):
 - gradual and partial return of local political power to Indigenous groups
 - right to education
- the 'outstation movement' (70s and 80s) entailed a shift back to traditional lands (Altman 2008; Hiatt, Coombs, Dexter 1982)
 - some degree of autonomy from state and capitalist projects
 - supported by Outstation Resource Centre/Bawinanga Aboriginal Corporation
- emergence of new non-land-based socialities (Carew 2016: 78) e.g. around spheres of work, education, Christianity and sport (esp. AFL football)



The 'self determination and self management' era

Mob...



Corporation

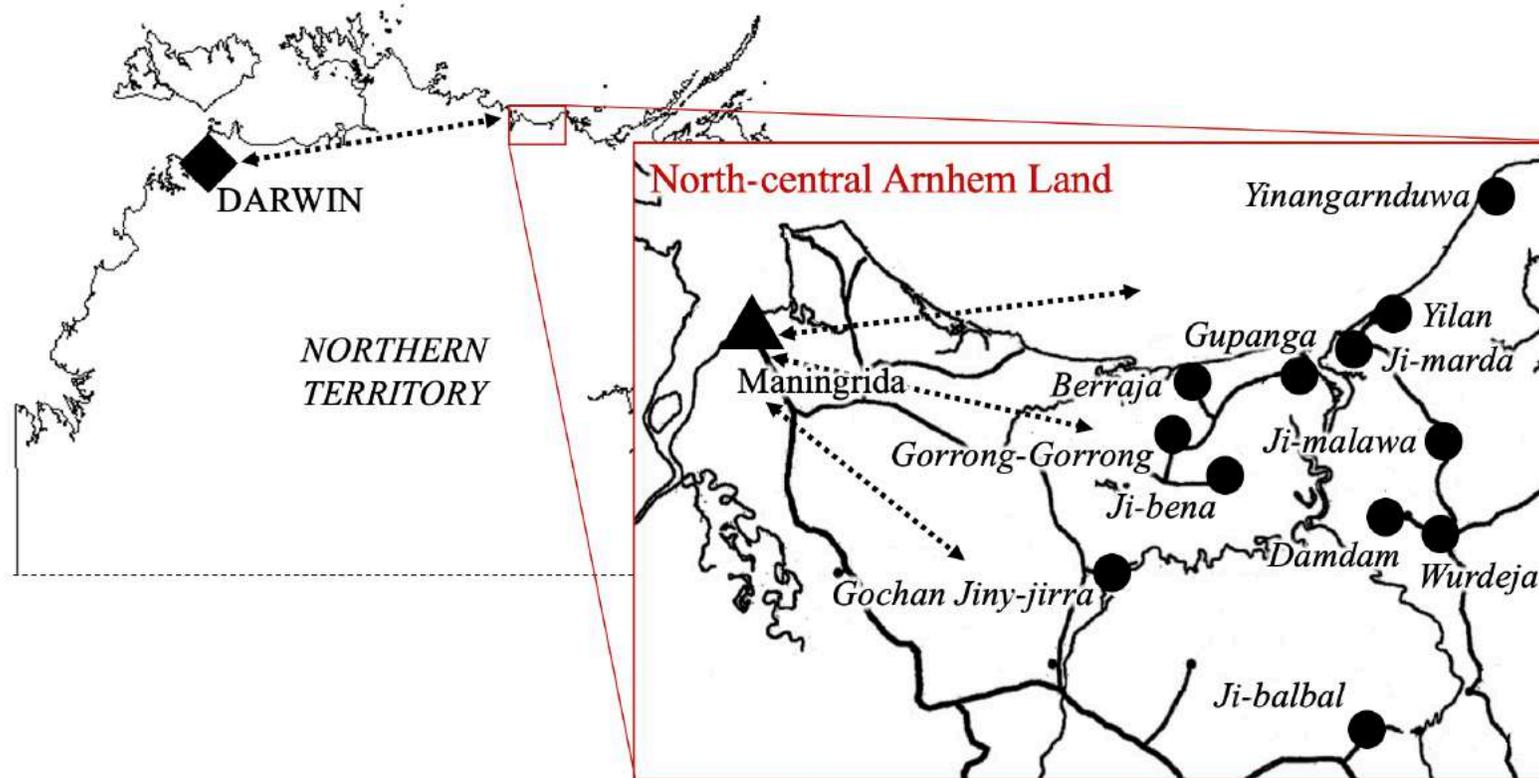
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The 'self determination and self management' era

Mobility

- 'orbiting diasporas' between 'magnet communities' (Burke 2018)



Burarra mobility network showing major centre (diamond), regional hub (triangle) and outstation communities (circles)



The 'self determination and self management' era → today

Multilingualism

- strong reflexes of small-scale multilingualism persevere, but...
- some destabilisation of egalitarian multilingualism due to unequal power of different language groups and differing roles for languages, e.g.:
 - Ndjébbana (1978-2008) and Burarra (1986-2008) in trilingual school program
 - other small lges (Na-kara and Gurr-goni) received less social support
 - language repertoires of speakers of larger Indigenous languages are less multilingual than those of speakers of small languages (Elwell 1977)
- emergence of new varieties not directly affiliated with traditional clan territories (e.g. Amery 1985; Langlois 2006; Mansfield 2014)
 - e.g. town-based, generational and subcultural identities and associated lects/variation



The 'self determination and self management' era → today

- communilect still does not exist, but...
 - dominant local languages as common L2s
 - some convergences in shared language features
 - code-switching (esp. Burarra-English) as speech style in some contexts



Burarra-English code-switching

Jina-bona 1999, collecting the stories. Gu-manga janguny, gu-gurtuwurra gu-manga from elders, aburr-ngaypa tribe, Gun-nartpa people. Collecting jiny-ni stories, pictures mu-manga. [...] But it's good for our young generation, so grow up aburr-ni barra mbi-na barra who they family. Then ngaypa half way ngu-gortkurrchinga. 2014 nguna-manga nyirriny-bona mun-gata last finish mu-ni m-bamana this book.

‘She came in 1999, collecting the stories. She collected stories, gathered and collected them from elders, my tribe – Gun-nartpa people. She collected stories, and took pictures. [...] But it’s good for our young generation, so when they grow up they will see that book, see who their family is. Then half way through I came on board. In 2014 she came and got me and we finished off this book.’

[20150325-burarra_lects077]

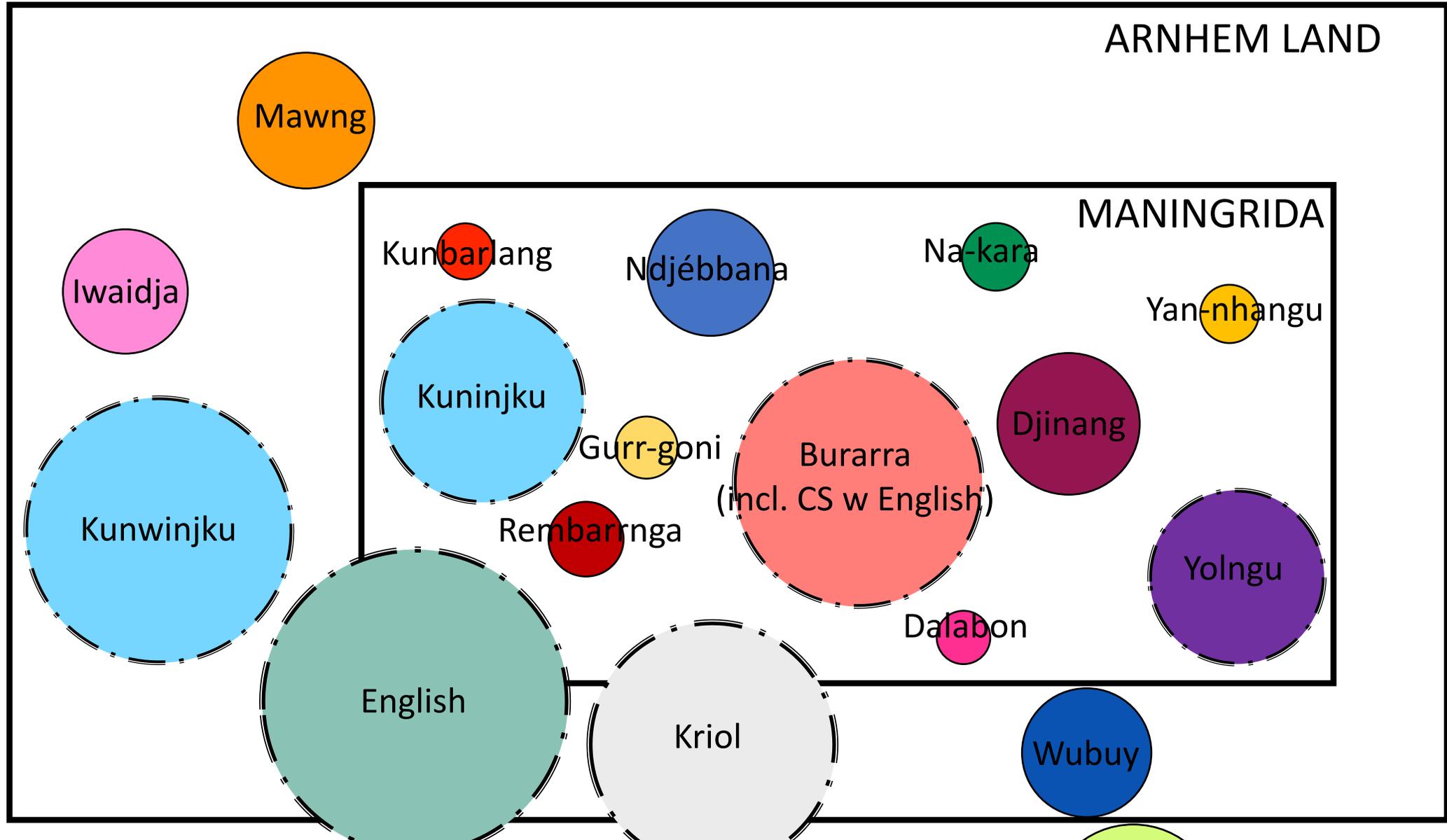


The 'self determination and self management' era → today

- communilect still does not exist, but...
 - dominant local languages as common L2s
 - some convergences in shared language features
 - code-switching (esp. Burarra-English) as speech style in some contexts
- 'digital diglossia' (Mansfield 2014; Simpson and Wigglesworth 2019)
 - English used more (but not exclusively) in texting and social media, in part necessitated by a lack of traditional-language literacy for some speakers



Contemporary era language ecology



Final thoughts

- incorporation of ‘alterity’ in small-scale multilingual ecologies and multilingual repertoires not necessarily a new phenomenon born of colonialism and globalisation (Carew 2016; Garde 2015)
 - e.g. incorporation of Macassan signifiers and linguistic features in Arnhem Land sociality and language repertoires since
- the evolution of multilingualism is not necessarily unidirectional
 - i.e. diverse and small-scale/egalitarian → less diverse and di/polyglossic*
 - varied factors may drive intensification or reduction of multilingualism and diversity at various points across time
 - factors such as urbanisation may drive either outcome
 - e.g. monolingualism/emergence of lingua francas driven by mission communities vs. increased multilingualism at welfare outpost like Maningrida
- similarities to what has been described as ‘superdiversity’ (Vertovec 2007) or ‘diversity within diversity’ (Blommaert 2013) here evident at the peripheries of globalisation (cf. Silverstein 2015; May 2016)



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