

## Gunwinggu

### 1. Description

1.1 Name of society, language, and language family: Gunwinggu, (Alternate names: Gunawitji, Gunwinjgu, Kunwinjku, Mayali), from the Australian language family (1).

1.2 ISO code: gup (1).

1.3 Location (latitude/longitude): Northern Territory, Arnhem Land, Oenpelli, Maningrida, Croker Island (1). Latitude: -18.327 / Longitude: 133.800 (2).

1.4 Brief history:

1.5 Influence of missionaries/schools/governments/powerful neighbors: Apparently, the missionaries have interfered in Gunwinggu marriage practices, and so now, some Gunwinggu are able to get away with intra-moiety marriage (3, pg: 61).

1.6 Ecology: “tropical setting that includes sea coast and tidal rivers as well as dry escarpment” (3, pg: 30).

1.7 Population size, mean village size, home range size, density: 1,410 (1996 census) (1). A population study done of Northern Australia in 1957 shows that there were approximately 155 adults (75 males, 80 females) and 105 children [children 15 years or younger] (56 males, 49 females) that were classified as Gunwinggu (3).

**2. Economy: “On the whole, and compared with many Aborigines farther inland, the Gunwinggu have a territory rich in food and water and raw material for the equipment that is part of their traditional way of life. They know what kinds of terrain suit various foods and what they can expect to find where—and where they are likely to find almost nothing. They can identify the plants they want by obvious signs like growth patterns and foliage, and animals, reptiles and birds by their tracks and feeding and nesting habits” (3, pg: 30).**

2.1 Main carbohydrate staple(s): Yams or ‘sweet roots,’ honey, lily, plums, and other fruit bushes (3, pg: 36).

2.2 Main protein-lipid sources: Kangaroo, wallabies, buffaloes, crocodiles, snakes, geese, ducks, insects, fish, shellfish. Also, there is a mention that the Gunwinggu used to drink kangaroo blood, but they don’t do it so much anymore because it became a social taboo at acculturation. Previous to acculturation though, kangaroo blood was a good source of salt. The book also mentions that the Gunwinggu like their meat rare (3, pgs 34-35).

2.3 Weapons/tools: Mention of spears (3, pg: 33). Spears, stone axes, digging sticks, spear-throwers, knives, kangaroo sinews are used to repair broken weapons and tools (3, pg: 38-40).

2.4 Food storage: Mention of baskets (3, pg: 33).

2.5 Sexual division of production: Men are out hunting game, while women are the ones out foraging. Both sexes will go after honey though (3, pg: 34).

2.6 Land tenure: Semi-nomadic. They seem to move around based on the wet and dry seasonal patterns (3, pg: 106).

2.7 Ceramics:

2.8 Specified (prescribed or proscribed) sharing patterns:

2.9 Food taboos: Yes. “Food taboos...concern particular life-stages or life crises: for example, certain foods are taboo to menstruating women, and, traditionally, before the birth of their first child women should not eat goannas. Others are associated with religious rites. Others again are tied to specific localities; decreeing, for example, that only local land-holders should eat fish there, or that only they or only old people should eat new fish following the rainy season, or that only men should eat new fish and new goose eggs while women must wait until burning-grass time” (3, pg: 49). Food taboos are also really important social tools for the Gunwinggu. “Differences in social and ritual status are symbolized in various food taboos on the basis of age, sex, territorial affiliations or ritual considerations” (3, pg: 52).

2.10 Canoes/watercraft: Yes, there is mention that they use canoes (3, pg: 40).

### 3. Anthropometry

3.1 Mean adult height (m and f):

3.2 Mean adult weight (m and f):

#### 4. Life History, mating, marriage

4.1 Age at menarche (f):

4.2 Age at first birth (m and f):

4.3 Completed family size (m and f):

4.4 Inter-birth-interval (f):

4.5 Age first marriage (m and f): After a young girl has her nasal septum pierced at the age of 8 or 9, she is considered eligible for marriage, and she can go and live with her spouse at that age. A girl is not considered a full woman until she has had her first child (3, pg: 161).

4.6 Proportion of marriages ending in divorce:

4.7 Percent marriages polygynous, percent males married polygynously: There is mention of polygyny on (3, pg: 106).

4.8 Bride purchase (price), bride service, dowry?:

4.9 Inheritance patterns: “Ideally, all personal names except nicknames come through the *gunmugugur* as personal gifts from immediate paternal relatives in the parents’ grandparent’s generations, either their own names or others remembered from a generation or so back, and they belong to the local territory” (3, pg: 55). **See also, 4.10 “Offspring interactions” (3, pg: 54).** Most Gunwinggu have a variety of *gunmugugur* names (3, pg: 55).

4.10 Parent-offspring interactions and conflict: When a person is born, they are born into/of their father’s territory; they are a part of his land, and whatever is his, is also theirs. It is partilineal descent in the Gunwinggu aspect of inheritance. Belonging and full-rights to the group come from your father (3, pg: 54).

4.11 Homosexual activities, social attitudes towards homosexuals:

4.12 Pattern of exogamy (endogamy): The Gunwinggu practice exogamous marriage rules; it is not allowed for a Gunwinggu to marry someone from the same moiety, you must marry outside of your own (3, pg: 61). Gunwinggu husbands and wives must also be from different semi-moieties. (3, pg: 62).

4.13 What is the belief of the role of males in conception; is paternity partible? Are these “other fathers” recognized?

4.14 What is the belief of the mother’s role in procreation exactly? (e.g., “receptacle in which fetus grows”)

4.15 Is conception believed to be an incremental process (i.e., semen builds up over time)?

4.16 Occurrence of sexual coercion, rape

4.17 Preferential category for spouse: The Gunwinggu prefer marriages to be opposite of your moiety, outside of your semi-moiety and someone in the opposite subsection in the opposite moiety and of his/her own generation level or the generation level of her grandparents (3, pg: 69).

4.18 Do females enjoy sexual freedoms: Sexual freedom in the Gunwinggu is really sort of nonexistent. Women even have set rules as to who is an acceptable spouse for marriage (3, pg: 71). Men are very careful who they leave their wives with if they are going to be gone on a long hunt; they like to keep a close eye on their women so that there is not a chance for extramarital affairs (3, pg: 110).

4.19 Evidence of giving gifts to extramarital partners or extramarital offspring: There is mention of Gunwinggu having extramarital partners or “sweethearts,” and usually people know about them, but if your husband finds out and gets angry, usually the affair is curtailed or at least better hidden. Men will occasionally beat their wives or harm other men because of extramarital affairs and jealousy (3).

4.20 If mother dies, whose raises children?

4.21 Adult sex ratio: number of adult males divided by number of (reproductive) females

4.22 Evidence for couvades

4.23 Different distinctions for potential fathers (e.g., lesser/younger vs. major/older)

4.24 Kin avoidance and respect: Mother-in-laws and son-in-laws are not allowed/should not address each other in a direct manner (3, pg: 78).

4.24 Joking relationships: The Gunwinggu have joking names for one another, also referred to as “nicknames” (3).

4.25 Patterns of descent: “Every Gunwinggu...belongs to three kinds of unit based on matrilineal descent...all of them cover the total population, but they slice it at different levels of inclusiveness—the first into two, the second into four, and the third into eight. These are moieties, semi-moieties, and subsections” (3, pg: 60). Each Gunwinggu is born into one of two moieties, your moiety is determined

based on which moiety your mother belongs to. Subsections are sort of like a social map that helps to understand kin networks...(3, pgs: 60-62). The Gunwinggu also have patrilineal moieties that are built into their subsection moieties (3, pg: 70).

4.26 Incest avoidance rules: "A brother and sister should never address each other in such a direct way..." (3, pg: 78).

4.27 Is there a formal marriage ceremony?

4.28 In what way(s) does one get a name, change their name, and obtain another name: Names are given by family members, usually your grandparents and you either receive their names, or the names of a previous ancestor (3).

4.29 Is marriage usually (or preferred to be) within community or outside community: It doesn't seem to matter as long as the person is a Gunwinggu and you stick to the rigid moiety marriage rules (3).

4.30 Are marriages arranged? Who arranges (e.g., parents, close kin): Women have imposed limitations on who they can marry, and decisions about who you are allowed to marry are made by older men in the group (3, pgs: 70-71). Arranged marriages are ideal (3, pg: 94).

4.31 Evidence for conflict of interest over who marries who:

### **Warfare/homicide**

4.14 Percent adult (male) deaths due to warfare:

4.15 Outgroup vs ingroup cause of violent death:

4.16 Reported causes of in-group and out-group killing:

4.17 Number, diversity and relationship with neighboring societies (external relations):

4.18 Cannibalism?

### **5. Socio-Political organization and interaction**

5.1 Mean local residential (village) group size:

5.2 Mobility pattern: (seasonality): Based on wet and dry seasons (3).

5.3 Political system: (chiefs, clans etc, wealth or status classes): "Obligations, rights, and duties are dependent to a very large extent on kinship positioning, both in the domestic sphere and as a basic substructure in religious affairs. Kinship rules permeate the division of food and labor resources, and the coordination of activities in almost all enterprises" (3, pg: 91).

5.4 Post marital residence: It looks to be patrilineal and patrilocal, although we do see emphasis on matrilineal descent when it comes to moieties (3).

5.5 Territoriality? (defined boundaries, active defense):

5.6 Social interaction divisions ? (age and sex): "By the time that they [Gunwinggu children] can run about they should be able to identify ordinary tracks in and around the camps, starting with people, dogs, and small things like ants, beetles and lizards. Whether they go with a foraging group of women or stay at a prearranged spot with elderly people, especially grandmothers, a lot of their time and energy is spent on such matters. Most of their games have some connection with hunting and food-collecting or the tools and equipment that go with it. Boys have miniature bamboo spears and they practice on tiny sun-lizards or fish. Girls more often practice with real food, collecting with their mothers or other women" (3, pg: 33). **See also, 2.9 "Food Taboos" (3).**

5.7 Special friendships/joking relationships: There is mention of people using "joking names" with one another (3, pg: 61).

5.8 Village and house organization:

5.9 Specialized village structures (mens' houses):

5.10 Sleep in hammocks or on ground or elsewhere: Sleep on the ground (3).

5.11 Social organization, clans, moieties, lineages, etc: "Moieties are fixed at birth and cannot be changed" (3, pg: 73). The Gunwinggu are divided into moieties, semi-moieties and subsections (3).

5.12 Trade:

5.13 Indications of social hierarchies: **See 4.25, "Patterns of Descent" for information regarding social hierarchies (3, pg: 60). See also 5.3 "Political System" (3, pg: 91).**

### **6. Ritual/Ceremony/Religion (RCR)**

6 Time allocation to RCR: Religion and ceremony have huge emphasis placed on them in the Gunwinggu. Kinship is also a huge part of how religious ceremonies are played out (3, pg: 117).

6.1 Specialization (shamans and medicine): The Gunwinggu believe that some men are sorcerers, and they have more religious power in the group (3, pg: 143).

6.2 Stimulants:

6.3 Passage rituals (birth, death, puberty, seasonal): Food taboos (3). Young boys and girls will have their nasal septum's pierced when they are about 8 or 9 years old, and this signals their transition into the adult world (3, pg: 161).

6.4 Other rituals: Food taboos are a huge part of initiation rights for men and women (3).

6.5 Myths (Creation): Most of the Gunwinggu myths do not trace ancestry, but rather, they focus on people/characters that they believe to be "original prototypes and founding ancestors;" there is not any genealogical link with current and living people (3, pg: 18). "No [Gunwinggu] accounts deal with the creation of the earth itself or the sky or the sea. The fundamental setting is assumed to have been already in place, in substantially its present form" (3, pg: 18).

6.6 Cultural material (art, music, games): Plants and bugs are usually the subject of children's stories and songs and they are hard to translate because they are usually made up of onomatopoeic sounds representing movement of water creatures or bird calls (3, pg: 32). The Gunwinggu paint and carve figures into trees and rocks—mostly art is done on large pieces of bark (3, pg: 156).

6.7 Sex differences in RCR:

6.8 Missionary effect:

6.9 RCR revival:

6.10 Death and afterlife beliefs: Believe in ghosts/spirits (3, pg: 51). Names of the dead are taboo for at least a year...(3, pg: 61).

6.11 Taboo of naming dead people: Names of the dead are taboo for at least a year...(3, pg: 61).

6.12 Is there teknonymy?

6.13 Briefly describe religion (animism, ancestor worship, deism, magic, totems etc.)

## **7. Adornment**

7.1 Body paint: Women and men are painted for religious ceremonies (3, pg: 136).

7.2 Piercings: Young boys and girls get their septum's pierced around the age of 8 or 9 (3, pg: 161).

7.3 Haircut: In pictures, both men and women keep their hair pretty short, although men's hair is kept a little more closely to the head than women's is. Also, it seems like a lot of the Gunwinggu have wavy/curly-looking hair (3).

7.4 Scarification: Yes, the Gunwinggu practice scarification. From the pictures, it looks like both men and women go through scarification although men's scarring looks to be more intense than the women's (3).

7.5 Adornment (beads, feathers, lip plates, etc.):

7.6 Ceremonial/Ritual adornment:

7.7 Sex differences in adornment:

7.8 Missionary effect:

7.9 Cultural revival in adornment:

## **8. Kinship systems**

8.1 Sibling classification system:

8.2 Sororate, levirate:

8.3 Other notable kinship typology, especially cross-cousin (MBD/FZD) typology (Crow/Hawaiian/Omaha etc.):

## **9. Other interesting cultural features (list them):**

### **Numbered references**

1. Lewis, M. Paul (ed.), 2009. Ethnologue: Languages of the World, Sixteenth edition. Dallas, Tex.: SIL International. Online Version: <<http://www.ethnologue.com/>>.

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< <http://www.findlatitudeandlongitude.com/?loc=northern+territory.+australia>>.
3. Berndt, Catherine H. and Ronald M. "Man, Land and Myth in North Australia: The Gunwinggu People." Michigan State University Press. 1970. Print.