

# The Religious Bases of Connection

Dr John Morton, in conversation with Carmen Cummings

*CNTA FUNDAMENTAL TOPICS FOR NATIVE TITLE ANTHROPOLOGISTS SERIES*



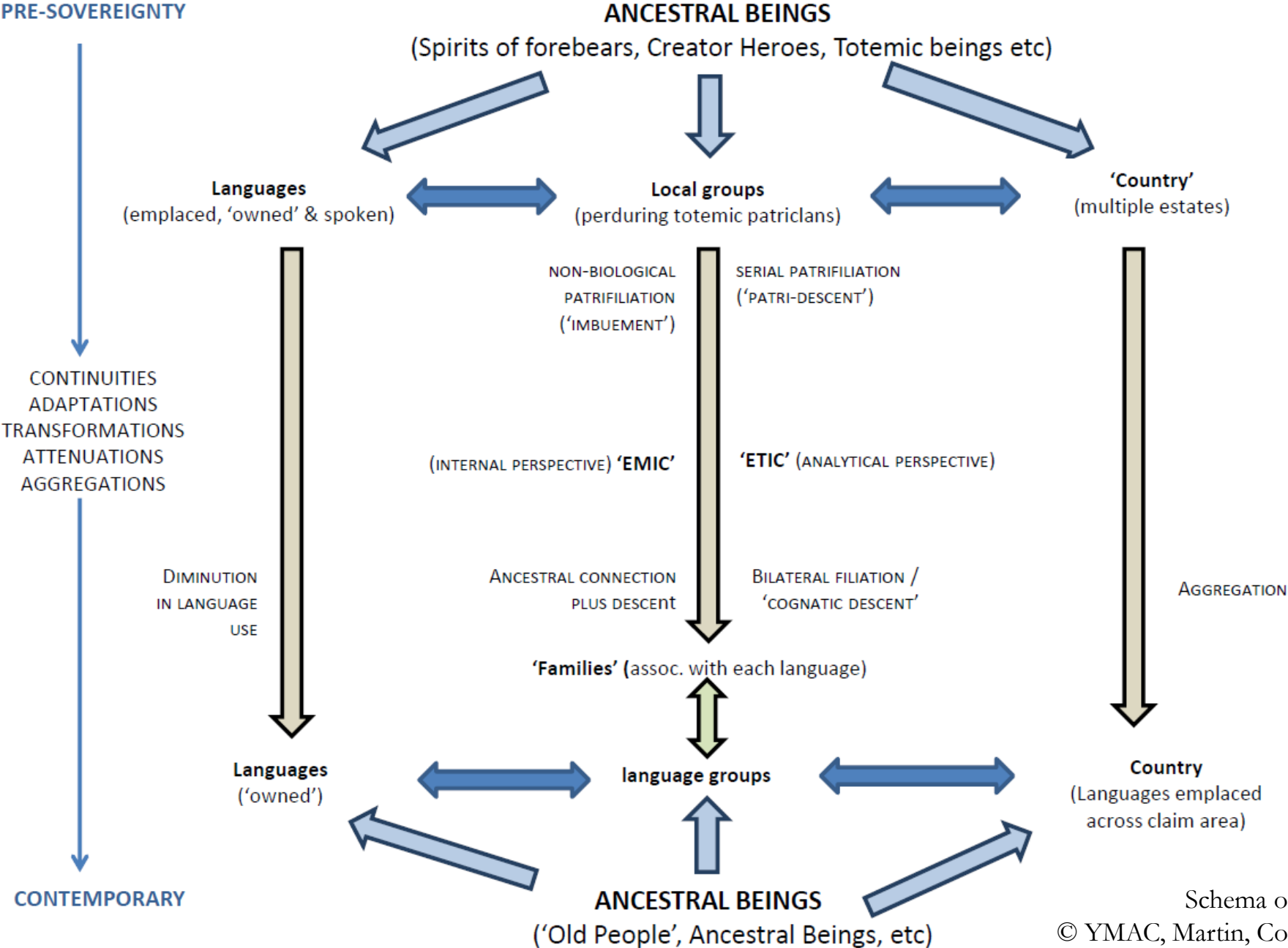
“The associating of a totem with a collection of people was that which transformed them from just a collection into a group with a sign of unity. When everything significant in the world was thus parcelled out among enduring groups, the society became made up of perennial corporations of a religious character. Each group was corporate *in* all that its totems signified and symbolised. Aboriginal totemic groups were thus sacred groups in perpetuity. The yearly round of rites let the Aborigines renew both the sources and the bonds of life constituted in that way.”

- Stanner 1979 *White Man Got No Dreaming*, p.143

“As Strehlow puts it, a person sees in country ‘beings...he has known in his own experience as his fathers and grandfathers and brothers, and as his mothers and sisters. The whole countryside is his living , age-old family tree’ (1947:30). It is also the ‘family tree’ of other species that people routinely refer to as kin.”

- Morton 2017 *Mother's Blood, Father's Land*, p.62

**X REGION – CONTINUITIES & TRANSFORMATIONS**



Historical Phase	Language	Groups and Membership	Land	Ancestors	Title
<b>Sovereignty</b>	Language use Linguistic identities – language ‘ownership’ Ethno-linguistic territories	Clans + congeners Patrification privileged Birth and matrification Alliances and regional communities	Estates and estate clusters Sacred sites Economic ranges	Totemic beings ‘Rainbow serpents’ – <i>bimarra</i> Other uncanny figures Deceased in country	<b>Retention of essential qualities of title, which remains ancestral, communal and inalienable</b>
<b>Colonial Impact</b>	Diminishing use Some continuing ‘ownership’ Increasing regional identification	Reweighting of patrification and matrification Relocation weakens birth criterion Depopulation widens alliance networks	Estate aggregation Attenuation of site knowledge External restrictions on access for use Estate-range conflation	Reduction of totemic repertoire Ongoing knowledge and practices relating to other ancestral beings	
<b>Current Situation</b>	Residual use + reclamation Amplified asserted ‘ownership’ Dual identification – ethno-linguistic and ‘nation’	Localised families (of polity) Bilateral filiation and cognatic descent Recovering population and increased family size	Family areas with histories of ancestral connection Residual sacred sites Residual economic usage	Some totemic mythology known Universally acknowledged importance of <i>bimarra</i> Universally acknowledged presence of <i>wudaji</i> and ‘old people’ in country	

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