Arriving, Digging, Performing, Returning: An Exercise in Rich Interpretation of a *djanba* Song Text in the Sound Archive of the Wadeye Knowledge Centre, Northern Territory of Australia

LINDA BARWICK, ALLAN MARETT, JOE BLYTE, MICHAEL WALSH

Dedicated to the memory of composer and ceremonial leader Lawrence Kolumboort (1942-2006), who passed away as we were preparing this paper for publication.

The sound archive of the Wadeye Knowledge Centre, Northern Territory, contains a wealth of information about the past and present cultural life of Wadeye (Port Keats), an Aboriginal community of over 2,000 people situated on the coast some 250 kilometres southwest of Darwin (see Figure 1). The archive, comprising some 600 field recordings, consists not only of recordings made in the community by visiting researchers and deposited there for local access, but also recordings created by local people as a result of various cultural initiatives over the years, from the Kanamkek Yile Ngala Museum to the Wadeye Aboriginal Languages Centre (Barwick et al. 2005).

The authors of this paper belong to a multi-disciplinary team project focusing on *djanba* songs, one of several genres of public dance-song in the Murriny Patha language. Murriny Patha is one of the strongest Australian languages, boasting some 2,500 speakers, most living in Wadeye. *Djanba* songs and dances are performed in Wadeye and surrounding regions by men and women for various public ceremonial occasions (funerals, circumcision, ‘ragburning’ mortuary ceremonies, graduation ceremonies, and ceremonies of welcome to visiting dignitaries; see Maret 2005). The multilingual nature of the Wadeye community and its ceremonial life means that *djanba* songs are often performed alongside *lirrja* songs in the Marri Ngarr language (Barwick 2003, 2005, Ford 2005) and *wangga* songs in Marritjevin and other Daly languages (Maret 2003a, 2005), serving similar ceremonial functions (Furlan 2005, Maret 2003b). All three repertoires were conceived and songs first composed around 1960, and indeed the first *djanba* recording—two songs performed for the Darwin Eisteddfod in 1962—dates from this era (Moyle 1967).

Figure 1. Map of northwestern Northern Territory.
Djanba composers and performers, including Lawrence Kolumboort, Felix Bunduck, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Lucy Tcherna and Rita Thawurl, have been instrumental in identifying and elucidating the archival record. In collaboration with these key djanba performers, and with linguists Michael Walsh and Nicholas Reid (see Figure 2), we have identified a total of 88 recordings containing djanba songs (including some newly created in the course of our project). From a corpus of some 800 djanba song items, more than 80 distinct song texts have been transcribed, glossed and translated by our team, building on previous published and unpublished work by Marett (2005), Barwick, Ford, Walsh and Marett’s student, anthropologist Alberto Furlan (2005).

The paper takes an example of one djanba song text occurring in almost every recent ceremonial performance and examines its linguistic and musical characteristics, ceremonial functions and the various explanations about the song by performers.

Djanba Song Creation

Like other repertoires of public song in northwestern Australia, djanba songs were all composed within living memory by known individuals, who usually received them in a dream from deceased ancestors. These songs are strongly associated with the Murriny Patha-speaking clans, especially Yek Dimirnin (whose traditional country includes the present-day community of Wadeye), and Yek Nangu (whose country lies to the south of Wadeye). According to the late Lawrence Kolumboort, djanba songs were first composed about 1961 by his brother Robert (born 1937), who received the songs in a dream from the deceased Nangu clansman Tjimararr. Most djanba songs in the Wadeye archive were composed by Dimirnin clanpeople: the brothers Robert, Harry Luke and LK, their sister Rosie Kolumboort, and other clansmen including Joe Birrarri Dungoi, Barty Perdjert, Charlie Kuruwul, and Theodore Bunduck. A small number of songs were composed by the Nangu clansman Johnny Ninnal and his wife Anna Maria Nardjic Ninnal and the Nangu clan connection is also continued by Tjimararr’s daughter, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, one of today’s main women singers and dancers, and an acknowledged authority on djanba and another Murriny Patha song genre, wurltjirri.

Djanba Performance Occasions

The main ceremonial contexts for djanba performances are mortuary ceremonies (called nandji mulurna in Murriny Patha, or ‘ragburning ceremonies’ in English), circumcision ceremonies, and funerals. These days djanba may also be performed on other ceremonial occasions such as welcomes and farewells to visiting dignitaries, presentations of awards, and, more informally, for general enter-

Figure 2. Felix Bunduck, Allan Marett, Mary Bunduck, Nicholas Reid, Lucy Tcherna and Elizabeth Cumaiyi after a documentation session at the Wadeye Aboriginal Languages Centre, July 2005. (Photograph: Linda Barwick).
tainment. As explained by Marett (2005), djanba songs at Wadeye share these ceremonial functions with wangga and lirrga songs, which are owned and performed by two of the other main language groups at Wadeye (speakers of Marri Tjevin and Marri Ngarr respectively). To promote social coherence at Wadeye, sometime in the 1960s, djanba, lirrga and wangga song-owning groups agreed to adopt a system of ceremonial reciprocity whereby each group would call on one of the others to perform for them whenever they needed it (Barwick 2003, 2005, Furlan 2005, Marett 2003b, 2005).

We can see this pattern of exchange particularly clearly in the ragburning ceremonies, which are performed by preference in the home country of the deceased person. Thus, the ragburning Marett and Barwick recorded in 2001 at Kuy (an outstation to the north of Wadeye, in the country of the Magati Ke, one of the wangga-owning groups) was performed by the djanba group for an important Magati Ke person. Similarly, the ragburning at Merrepen (an outstation to Daly River, to the east of Wadeye), recorded by Marett in 1998, was performed by the djanba group for an important Ngan’gikurunggurr person who belonged to one of the lirrga-owning groups.

At funerals, djanba songs are integrated into the Catholic Church service, and also performed during the procession to the burial ground and the interment in the cemetery. During all these activities, djanba songs may be interspersed with other Christian-themed liturgical songs and chants such as hymns (in English and Murriny Patha), the Hail Mary, and songs from mulgarrin (a repertory of Murriny Patha song with Christian themes).

Circumcision ceremonies, held every two or three years, are major undertakings, involving input of time, resources and ceremonial activity from the whole community. Typically, all three ceremonial groups play a role, with boys from one group being taken through the ceremony by men from one of the other groups. Boys may afterwards be called by the name of the ceremony that accompanied their circumcision, and fathers may make an effort to have each of their sons circumcised by a different ceremonial group (Marett 2005). For example, the circumcision ceremony recorded by Marett at Wadeye in 1988 extended over three days, and involved lengthy and sometimes simultaneous performances by all three ceremonial groups, with dancing by both men and women. The young boys to be circumcised were escorted to the clinic (where a ceremonial leader and a doctor were waiting to perform the operation) by singers and dancers from one of the “other” groups. Figure 3, a photograph taken by Mark Crocombe at another Wadeye circumcision ceremony in 1997, shows a group of young boys from one of the djanba-owning groups being escorted by a group of Marri Ngarr lirrga performers.

![Figure 3. Lirrga performers leading up a group of young boys during a circumcision ceremony at Wadeye, 29 May 1997. (Photograph: Mark Crocombe).](image-url)
Outside groups may also be brought in to perform at circumcision ceremonies (e.g., in 1996, a group of lirrga singers from Barunga, to the east, was invited to sing at Wadeye, and in 1997 wungga performers from Belyuen community, to the north, were flown in). To reciprocate, Wadeye performance groups may also travel quite far afield as invited performers at circumcision ceremonies for other groups; for example, in 1981 Wadeye performers were recorded by anthropologist Deborah Bird Rose performing djanba and lirrga for a circumcision ceremony at Yarralin, in the Victoria River district to the south of Timber Creek. 

Song Text of Djanba 11

This song text, composed by the most prolific composer of djanba songs, Harry Luke Kolumboort (1913-1980s), has been translated and glossed by Joe Blythe with assistance from Michael Walsh and Nicholas Reid, based on conversations in 2004-2005 with singers Lawrence Kolumboort, Felix Bunduck, Elizabeth Cumaiyi, Lucy Tcherna, and Mary Bunduck. The basic text is set out in Table 1.

This text refers to a particular djanba ancestor, named Kardu Ngarim (‘Bee Man’ – kardu being the nominal classifier for humans). With the animate nominal classifier ku, ngarim is also the name of a species of native bee with a yellow body, also known as ku tirisuwa. Kardu Ngarim is the son of another djanba, Mayamunggum, nicknamed Thakuny ‘left-handed’. Ngarim is digging at a particular place.

Most species of native bee found around Wadeye make ku tjithay ‘honey’ (or ‘sugarbag’ in Australian Aboriginal English). Ku ngarim sugarbag bees are one of the main totems for the Kunyibinyi clan estate, which is where djanba ancestors reside and where Dimirrin clanspeople return when they die. Each clan estate has several ngkumarl ‘totems’, or ‘dreamings’, which are associated with particular ngugumini nggi ‘creation sites’ within the estate. Because a totem springs, as do all clanspeople, from the creation sites, people of the clan may address their totem as close kin, most often as karlatj ‘older brother’, and people may also address each other by one of their totem names, e.g., ngarir. Explicit references to bees, honey or beeswax occur in at least ten other djanba songs (numbers 2, 14, 19, 38, 39, 51, 56, 69, 72, 76 in our database). In several of these texts the term ngarim Kunyibinyi ‘Kunyibinyi bees’ is used as an epithet referring to the Dimirrin clanspeople as a group (since all people of the Dimirrin clan have ku ngarim as a totem and in Murrin Patha a totem name is an acceptable form of address).

Explanations of Djanba 11

Although the core song text is a grammatical Murrin Patha sentence, its references are rather cryptic. For explanation to outsiders, like us, Kolumboort and others adopt a variety of strategies, contextualising the song by reference to known places and people. In addition to the free translation given above (explanation 1), there are five other explanations for this song text collected over the years since Marett and Barwick first began to document this djanba song text in 1998.

**Explanation 1.** “Kardu Ngarim, son of Thakuny, is digging holes at that place” (Joe Blythe’s free translation reported above, from conversation with Lawrence Kolumboort, 1 November 2005).

**Explanation 2.** Reporting a conversation with Lawrence Kolumboort in 1998, Marett’s field notes record the following explanation for this song:

About left-handed mob. “Ngarim” = honey bee - people of the honey bee totem are called the left handed mob; “ngarim thakuny” = left-handed for honey bee. This song is about welcoming your son who is living somewhere else like Palumpa or Peppi[menarti]. NB totems are conceived of as sons. ... “My son (=totem), you got to come back to Bathuk for me” (i.e., not go to other people).

(Marett field notes, 22 September 1998)

Bathuk is a creation site within the Kunyibinyi clan estate particularly associated with honeybees, and the spirit home of the djanba ancestors. It is frequently mentioned in djanba songs, as is the general area within which it is found, Kunyibinyi.

**Explanation 3.** Later in 1998, Kolumboort gave the following gloss of the song: “oh my son, come back and help me to sing djanba” (Barwick fieldnotes, 2 October 1998). Here, in addition to mentioning the coming together of father and son, Kolumboort seems to stress another characteristic of the Dimirrin clan: performing djanba songs.

**Table 1.** Text of djanba song 11. (Transcription and gloss by Joe Blythe, 1 November 2005).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>text</th>
<th>ngarim</th>
<th>thakuny</th>
<th>marramarda</th>
<th>nyinirda</th>
<th>karrirndurtuy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>morpheme</td>
<td>ngarim</td>
<td>thakuny</td>
<td>marramarda</td>
<td>nyinirda</td>
<td>karrim</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>gloss</td>
<td>bee_Sp.</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>progeny</td>
<td>that_place</td>
<td>3sS.3_stand.Exist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>part of speech</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>adj.</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>dem</td>
<td>FinV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Free translation: Kardu Ngarim, son of Thakuny, is digging holes at that place.*
Explanation 4. In 2003 Alberto Furlan recorded the following gloss and explanation of the song text.6

“The son of Thakuny is coming out there”. The bees—Mayamunggum’s son and daughters—are there, turning around. But also: “Mayamunggum was standing there waiting for this mob to meet them there, they were digging the ground, going in and out.” (Furlan field notes, 17 July 2003)

Explanation 5. In 2004, when the present research team first documented the song, we received the following explanation from Felix Bunduck: “Left-hand bloke, all his family were arriving from Kunybinyi, all coming out to him” (Barwick field notes, 26 June 2004).

Explanation 6. Another explanation in English was recorded under instruction from Lawrence Kolumboort by Mark Crocombe on 10 April 1997, on WASA tape 441B.

“This song is about the little people coming from Bathuk to Wadeye to visit people at night-time. The little people can only visit at night-time. They can’t be around, they’ve got to go back home before daylight or someone... might catch them” [on the way].

The “little people” referred to here are the djanba ancestors. In this case, rather than the offspring coming back to the ancestral site at Bathuk as in explanation 2, it is the ancestors who visit their offspring living at Wadeye (which is also in Dimirrin clan country).

Multiple explanations for song texts are to be expected—given their telescoped style (see, for example, Bowern 2003)—but are not always made explicit in the literature. This is unfortunate, since the potential ambiguities in the interpretation of song texts should encourage a maximally explicit account of alternative explanations gleaned in the field. In this way other investigators—or indeed the original investigators themselves may be better able to understand the song text in question, as a better overall understanding of the song traditions emerges.

Discussion of Song Text 11

Note that all explanations stress the congregation of Dimirrin clanspeople across generations. The clan totem ngarim ‘honeybee’ and the word for ‘progeny’ (marramarra) are explicitly mentioned in the text, but the explanations for the songs add other distinguishing characteristics of Dimirrin clanspeople: their creation site Bathuk, their clan estate Kunybinyi (implied perhaps in the song text’s nyinirda ‘that place’), and their ceremonial tradition djanba. Some of the diversity in these explanations can be attributed to the differing levels of understanding of the researchers to whom Kolumboort was explaining the song. But it appears that there are also grounds for ambiguity in the song text itself.

As a polysynthetic language, Murri’ Nyngin Patha typically uses large verb complexes. The complex usually consists of an uninflecting coverb carrying the bulk of the lexical meaning, preceded by an inflecting finite verb, as well as a number of other non-obligatory morphemes. The finite verbs, which indicate the subject of the verb, inflect for person, number, gender, tense, mood, and aspect, and in some cases also carry some lexical meaning, such as stance. There are at least 38 finite verb classes. The lexical meaning of the coverb is dependent on the verb class with which it co-occurs; that is, the lexical meaning of the verb is conveyed through the finite verb and coverb in combination. For example, the coverb -ray means ‘dig’ when it occurs with a finite verb of class 3, but when it occurs with a verb of class 20 it means ‘arrive’, ‘visit’, or ‘come out from beneath a surface’, depending on context.

In djanba 11’s song text, the finite verb karrim is a third person singular existential verb of verb class 3 that carries the lexical meaning ‘stand up vertically’. When the coverb -ray ‘dig’ is reduplicated to -rurtuy, as it is here, it can be understood either to have a continuous aspect, i.e., ‘be digging’, or to have a repetitive aspect ‘dig multiple holes’ (which likewise necessarily happens over an extended period of time).7 Once the relevant morphophonemic rules have been applied, karrim + rurtuy is realised as karrirndurtuy. As such, the verb can be understood to mean ‘there is a person digging a hole/digging multiple holes (while standing).’ This gloss and interpretation accords with explanation 1, provided to Joe Blythe in 2005 by Lawrence Kolumboort.

Another explanation could also be accounted for by a different glossing of the verb. For verb class 20 we predict the existential form karram, in which case the combination of karram + rurtuy would be realised as karrarnrdurtuy and would give as one likely reading, ‘there is a group of people visiting or arriving’ (as in Felix Bunduck’s explanation 5 above) (see Table 2).

The two verbs (karrirndurtuy and karrarnrdurtuy) differ by one vowel—a vowel that is unstressed and flanked by syllables bearing stress. In most versions of the song, sung by Lawrence Kolumboort, the high front vowel /i/ seems discernible, although when we first transcribed this song with Felix Bunduck we transcribed karrarnrdurtuy. It may be the case that different singers have different understandings of the text. Perhaps the composer even deliberately exploited this potential ambiguity of the song text, although at this stage we believe that primacy should be given to explanation 1, the translation provided by the authoritative ceremonial leader and brother of the original composer. More investigation is needed to clarify these points, and it is planned that our research team will address these questions in follow-up visits to Wadeye.

It is worth pointing out, however, that digging holes in the ground, emerging from holes in the ground, and congregating in groups with kin are all characteristic of this particular species of honeybee, which builds its nest
Table 2. Alternative reading 1 of the text of *djanba* 11.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>text</th>
<th>ngarim</th>
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<th>nyinirda</th>
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<td>thakuny</td>
<td>marramarda</td>
<td>nyinirda</td>
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<td>gloss</td>
<td>bee_Sp.</td>
<td>left</td>
<td>progeny</td>
<td>that_place</td>
<td>3pLS.20.Exist</td>
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<td>part of speech</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>adj.</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>dem</td>
<td>FinV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Free translation:* The offspring of the left-handed honeybee [Mayamunggum] are arriving at that place.

Table 3. Alternative reading 2 of the text of *djanba* 11.

<table>
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<td>part of speech</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>adj.</td>
<td>noun</td>
<td>dem</td>
<td>FinV</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Free translation:* The offspring of the left-handed honeybee [Mayamunggum] are coming out from [a hole at] that place.

Table 4. Distribution of 99 versions of *djanba* song 11 within the corpus of the Wadeye Aboriginal Sound Archive. Lead singers are indicated by initials: LK is Lawrence Kolumboort, FB is Felix Bunduck, and KB is Kevin Bunduck.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Tape ID</th>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Place</th>
<th>Occasion</th>
<th>Lead singer</th>
<th>Recordist</th>
<th># Items</th>
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<td>LK</td>
<td>Maret</td>
<td>16</td>
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**TOTAL** 99
underground. Similarly, congregating with descendants for ceremonial activity is a constitutive characteristic of the clan.

**Djanba 11 in the Archival Record**

The Wadeye sound archive includes at least 99 versions of this song, recorded on 19 different occasions between 1988 and 2005 (see Table 4). Although the composer of the song, Harry Luke Palada Kolumboort (c. 1913-1980s) was recorded singing *djanba* songs on several occasions in the 1970s by the linguist Michael Walsh and the lay missionary Lesley Reilly (née Rourke), he was never recorded singing *djanba* 11.

Although the performances recorded represent only a tiny fraction of the total number that actually took place during this period, metadata on this sample give an interesting snapshot of the extent and ceremonial functions of *djanba* performances during this time.

With such a large number of performances of the same song text, the corpus also allows us to investigate the extent of variation in its musical performance. For example, we can ascertain that the song text verse is always performed with the same or very similar rhythm and melody, but that the tempo and the absolute pitch at which it is performed vary, as do the number of repetitions of the verse within an item.

**Conventions of Music and Dance Performance in Djanba**

*Djanba* songs are performed by a mixed group which includes both men and women, and indeed their structure normally requires both male and female participation. The lead singers (usually men, but also sometimes including senior women) use paired clapsticks, and other members of the performance group (other singers, dancers, and family members) use handclapping or other types of body percussion to accompany the songs. Both men and women dance, in different styles.

Barwick and Maret have been present at several performances where one or two senior women led the singing of *djanba* songs while a larger group of women were painting up, and while the men were painting up in a separate distant location. The two senior women concerned both own and use clapsticks (a sign of song leadership), and continued to use them and sing alongside the male song leaders in the following joint song performances, but did not initiate the singing of items when the male song leaders themselves were present.

The male song leader during the time of our fieldwork, Lawrence Kolumboort, was also a noted composer. As already mentioned, women may compose songs but, if they do, they pass them to a close male relative. Lawrence Kolumboort’s sister composed a *djanba* song for her own Dimirrin clan, and Anna Maria Ninnal composed several *djanba* songs for her husband’s Nangu clan. A similar situation is reported by Maret with regard to *wangga* songs at Wadeye, where a Marri Ngarr woman, Maudie Dunoos, is the acknowledged composer of a Walakandha *wangga* song belonging to and performed by the Marri Tjevin clan of her husband, Wagin Dunoos (Maret 2005:66).

A *djanba* performance typically consists of a number of song texts, each repeated in several discrete song items (of 45 seconds to two minutes) separated by intervals of informal talking. Each item consists of three or four (more rarely two, five or six) repetitions of a standard group of lines set to the same melody (which we call here “verse”).

Each verse consists of two parts. The first part of each verse is performed by the men alone, started off by the song leader, with others joining in after a few seconds. This first part usually consists of one or two descents covering all, or almost all, the melodic range of the whole song. The second part of the song begins with a smaller descent performed by men alone, with the senior women joining in towards the end of the phrase (often an octave higher than the men), and then a period of repetition of the tonic (the prolonged final pitch of each verse), performed strongly and led by the female voices with continuing clapstick accompaniment from the male song leaders, who may or may not continue singing with the women.

The two parts of the verse are accompanied by different dancing styles. During the first part, the dancers typically advance towards the centre of the dance ground, while during the second part both men and women dancers typically dance on the spot with more emphatic movements (employing gender-specific movements, the beat being marked by stamping for men and rhythmic movements of the arms for women). The last clapstick beat of a verse may be marked with a particularly dramatic flourish, such as the lead male dancer dropping down on one knee on the last clapstick beat of the verse. Figure 4 shows men dancing *djanba* at a ragburning at Merrepen (the women dancers are out of shot).

The two-part dance structure bears some resemblance to dancing of *wangga* and *lirrnga*, where travelling movements tend to occur during the vocal sections of each item, with strongly rhythmic “on-the-spot” movements confined to the instrumental sections of each verse in which only didjeridu and clapsticks are heard (Maret and Page 1995). In the case of *djanba*, which is unaccompanied by didjeridu and hence requires continued singing throughout the item, it seems that the part two of each verse, where the women sing on the tonic pitch, can be equated to the instrumental section of *wangga* and *lirrnga* songs.

The strophic form of *djanba* can also be seen in the internal repetition patterns within verses. Unlike the cyclical isorhythmic structures found in Central Australian and Kimberleys song styles (Barwick 1989, Treloyn 2003), where strict repetition of a
song text throughout the item may be combined with flexible melodic structures that expand and contract to accommodate texts of different durations, *djanba* song texts are always set to the same text to the same melodic phrase in the verse, and a great variety of text repetition structures, and numerous different melodies (*thamarl* ‘voice’) and clapstick patterns (*mirn’iga* ‘clapstick’) are found in the corpus.

**Musical Setting of Djanba 11**

Figure 5 presents a musical transcription of one verse of *djanba* 11. The textual structure of the verse in *djanba* 11 is as follows:

(part 1)

\[
\text{aa ngarim thakuny marramarda nyinirda karrirdurtuy-ye}
\]

\[
\text{aa ngarim thakuny marramarda nyinirda karrirdurtuy-ye}
\]

(part 2)

\[
\text{aa karrirdurtuy-ye}
\]

\[
\text{ngarim thakuny marramarda nyinirda karrirdurtuy-ye}
\]

\[
\text{ngarim thakuny marramarda nyinirda karrirdurtuy-ye}
\]

\[
\text{ngarim thakuny marramarda nyinirda karrirdurtuy}
\]

In part 1, each presentation of the core song text *ngarim thakuny marramarda nyinirda karrirdurtuy* is performed in a single breath, over a range of a seventh (descending from D in the upper octave to E), and is framed by vocables, an initial ‘aa’ and a final ‘ye’, which almost always occur in these positions throughout the *djanba* corpus irrespective of the text performed (these vocables are underlined in the text above). In *djanba* 11, only the first syllable of the first line is accompanied by clapstick beating. Notice that the duration of the final ‘-ye’ is a full beat shorter in the repeated line (see Figure 5).

Part 2 begins with a short line (performed by men alone), consisting of the verb *karrirdurtuy* alone, and again framed by the vocables ‘aa’ and ‘-ye’ and introduced by a single clapstick beat on the first syllable of text (*ka*). Regular clapstick beating (at approximately 120 bpm) is then introduced for the remainder of part 2, which presents the core text a further three times. These first two lines of part 2 (*aa karrirdurtuy-ye / ngarim thakuny marramarda nyinirda karrirdurtuy-ye*) performed solo by the men, cover the same melodic descent d-E as presented in the repeated line of part 1. It is only when the men and women overlap, as the women enter for the fourth and fifth lines of the verse, that the lower tonic D is firmly established. Because most of the women perform an octave higher than the men, their final note cues the highest pitch of the men’s next descent (reached on the first syllable of the core text *nga*-).

Because *djanba* 11, like a number of other songs in the corpus, has different accompaniment patterns in parts 1 and 2, movement differentiation of the two parts is even more marked than usual. In the unaccompanied part 1, dancers move around on the dance ground performing relatively unstructured and unsynchronised

![Figure 4. Djanba singers and dancers at a ragburning at Merrepen, 1998. Photograph: Mark Crocombe.](image-url)
movements, but once the clapstick beating has started in part 2, dancers synchronise their movements with increasing vigour to the beating and hence to each other. The whole djanba performance group, including singers, dancers and onlookers (who clap hands) is brought together by bodily engagement with the music.

Let us pay closer attention to the first two lines of part 2 (the third system in Figure 5 over page). We argue that this system functions as a transition or pivot point between the two paired lines of repeated text and melody presented by the men in systems 1-2 and by the women in systems 4-5. The melodic descent already encountered in part 1 is maintained, but text, rhythm and accompaniment change or are disrupted.

- **Text**: the text line is apparently presented in reverse, beginning with the verb karrirndurtuy that ended the previous two phrases. In the rest of the djanba corpus it is usual for each text line to be presented with one and only one word order and rhythmic setting, and it is highly unusual for a verb to start a text line.

- **Rhythm**: the next words ngarim thakuny are set, like marramarda, over four short syllables as \(\overline{\text{mm}}\overline{\text{mm}}\) rather than with the longer two-beat rhythm \(\overline{\text{mm}}\overline{\text{ll}}\) used for these words everywhere else in the verse. In other words, the rhythm of the first three words of part 2 — karrirndurtuy-ye ngarim thakuny — \(\overline{\text{mm}}\overline{\text{mm}}\overline{\text{ll}}\overline{\text{ll}}\overline{\text{ll}}\overline{\text{ll}}\) is different from the usual rhythm to which the words are set — \(\overline{\text{ll}}\overline{\text{ll}}\overline{\text{ll}}\overline{\text{ll}}\). The anomalous setting at the beginning of part 2 apparently echoes the rhythm of the beginning of the “normal” (unreversed) setting of the textline — ngarim thakuny marramarda — the setting that would be expected in this position if the normal presentation of the text had been maintained. This disruption of the rhythm coming hard on the heels of the text disruption further compounds the listener’s disorientation.

- **Accompaniment**: The listener’s attempts to grasp and make sense of the changed text and rhythm are further disrupted by the introduction of clapstick beating where Part 1 had been unaccompanied. Clapstick beating appears first on the initial syllable of karrirndurtuy, then regularly every crotchet beat from ngarim thakuny. Clapsticks used in Wadeye are made of very resonant hardwood and struck very forcefully, sounding much louder than the vocal part, so that it is much more difficult to discern text articulation when clapstick beating is present.

The overall effect of the changes in relative relationships of melody, text, rhythm and accompaniment in this system of the song is one of disorientation, before a new equilibrium is reached as the women’s singing establishes its own firm groove with regular repetition of the expected text in systems 4 and 5. We argue that the disruptive features seen in this line, which are unique to this song, and totally consistent in every rendition, are by no means accidental but reflect an intentional compositional strategy.

The aesthetic gestures described here seem fitting for ceremonies that concern themselves with the social negotiation of liminality, as the deceased person’s spirit turns away from the living and joins the world of the dead, or as boys turn away from their mothers and become men (Marett 2005:62-63). Indeed, this particular song is often performed at significant points in ceremonies: for example, in the ragburning ceremonies recorded by Marett at Merrepen in 1998 and by Marett and Barwick at Kuy in 2001, the song was performed at the point where the real “business” of the ceremony commenced, after a period of preparation. At Merrepen, the singers had been seated on the edge of the large ceremonial ground for some time, singing various other songs and waiting for the deceased person’s clothes and belongings (the “rags”) to arrive and be brought onto the ceremonial ground. Once the rags had arrived, the mood changed: the singers began to sing djanba 11, the relatives of the deceased began to shred the rags and place them in the hole on the dance ground where they would eventually be burned, and the djanba dancers began to dance away from the singers towards the hole. Similarly, at Kuy in 2001, in the preparatory phase of the ceremony, the singers and dancers had processed towards the ceremonial ground from some distance away, singing other djanba songs as they came. As soon as the dancers entered the ceremonial ground, dancing towards the hole, the singers changed to djanba 11 and the relatives of the deceased began wailing and shredding the rags.

**Conclusion**

The references of the text of djanba 11 — to the totemic community, to the gathering of relatives in a particular place, and even to digging holes — all seem particularly apposite for the central business of a ragburning ceremony, which aims to assist the spirit of the deceased to return to its original creation site within its own clan country. As Marett (2003b) has previously pointed out, the system of ceremonial reciprocity adopted at Wadeye means that the performance group is always mapping its own totemic connections and ceremonial traditions onto those of the different clan group for which it is singing, emphasising the shared cosmologies and social obligations that underpin the larger social network. In fact all three ceremonial groups gather in clan groups for ceremony, and dig holes to dispose of the belongings of the deceased in ragburning ceremonies, and the active engagement with other clan groups through ragburning and circumcision ceremonies is essential to maintenance of the social system by which life in the community is organised.
Djanba song text 11 - sample melody

Marett DAT98-8-s27 djanba 11.wav, verse 1
rec. Marett, singers LK, FB, EC, LT
Transcribed by Linda Barwick June 2005

Composer: Harry Luke Palada Kolumboort
Key: M = Men
C = Clapsticks
W = Women

Figure 5. Musical transcription of one verse of djanba 11, as performed by Lawrence Kolumboort, Felix Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna and Elizabeth Cumaiyi, recorded by Allan Marett at a funeral at Wadeye, 24 September 1998.
The work presented in this article would have been impossible without the Kanamkek Yile Ngala Museum, the Wadeye Aboriginal Language Centre and the Wadeye Aboriginal Sound Archive, the fruits of efforts made over many years by Wadeye elders to foster research and understanding of their cultural traditions in collaboration with researchers. Anthropologists, linguists, musicologists, historians, educators and scholars of religion have all benefited from these activities and have all contributed to the holdings of the archive. In recent years, the establishment of the Wadeye Knowledge Centre as a branch of the Northern Territory Library and the digitisation of many of the museum and archive’s photographs and sound recordings have enabled increasing access to the archive’s holdings by local people (Barwick et al. 2005). The research and analysis we have done for this paper, and indeed the paper itself, will in time be deposited in the archive.

It goes without saying that the holdings of the archive can never replace lived practices of performance and research, but merely reflect them. We hope that in years to come the research work we have undertaken with our Murriny Patha collaborators, as reflected in the archival record and in living memory, will support and strengthen not only those who will take primary responsibility for upholding these traditions of performance and research, but also our wider social networks.

Acknowledgements

Our first debt of gratitude is to the djanba owners, performers and composers of Wadeye. Without the initiative of Lawrence Kolumboort in particular, this research would never have been undertaken. He will be sadly missed, not only by his family and friends in Wadeye, but also by his many friends in Darwin, Sydney and Canberra. Fellow djanba performers and Murriny Patha song and language consultants Felix Bunduck, Elizabeth Cumaity, Mary Bunduck, Lucy Tcherna, Rita Thawur, Manman Dunggoi and Gertrude Nemarlu have been unfailingly patient and supportive as we struggled to get to grips with these wonderful songs. Our linguistic collaborators Lysbeth Ford, Nick Reid and more recently Rachel Nordlinger have provided us with understandings that would have been impossible to achieve by any other means, and Alberto Furlan has been generous in sharing his anthropological research on the social functions of djanba and other songs at Wadeye. At Wadeye itself, Mark Crocombe deserves a special vote of gratitude for logistical support and encouragement, as well as his work to establish and maintain the Wadeye Aboriginal Sound Archive and the Wadeye Knowledge Centre and of course sharing his own documentation work. This research has been funded by the Australian Research Council and the University of Sydney.

Notes

1. In this paper we adopt the orthography given in Appendix 1.
2. Alberto Furlan’s thesis includes an account given by Lawrence Kolumboort of the sequence of events leading to the first performances of djanba (Furlan 2005:144-45).
3. Anna Maria Nardjic Ninnal was originally from the Marri Ngarr-speaking and lirrnga-owning Darrrinpirr clan, but composed songs for her husband’s Yek Nangu clan.
4. For extensive discussions of the role of the different performance groups in circumcision ceremonies at Wadeye, see Marett 2005 and Furlan 2005.
6. Our thanks to Alberto Furlan for making his notes available to us.
7. In Murriny Patha verbal reduplication is used productively to signal repeated or continuous action or plurality of object (Street 1980).
8. The third person plural existential finite verb form for verb class 20 has not otherwise been attested, but the authors see no reason why such a form should not exist, since it seems most verbs have existential verb forms. We predict this form based on the observation that attested existential forms consistently pattern from the first person (exclusive) non-future forms, with a substitution of the velar stop /k/ for the velar nasal /ŋ/. The first person exclusive non-future form for class 20 is ngarram.
9. The rhythmic setting here groups together the whole noun phrase ngarim thakuny marramarda, arguably suggesting a plural reading of the verb subject ‘the offspring of the left-handed honeybee’ (as in explanation 5). By contrast, the usual rhythmic setting separates ngarim thakuny and marramarda by a long note at the end of thakuny, which we suggest may favour the singular reading of explanation 1: ‘Ngarim, the son of the left-handed one [Mayamungum]’.

Appendix 1

Orthography adopted by the Murriny Patha Song Project

Murriny Patha has four vowels for which there is no phonemic length distinction. The four vowels are listed below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Vowels</th>
<th>+front</th>
<th>-front</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>i</td>
<td>u</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>high</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>a</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
For the consonants, there are six places of articulation and a voicing contrast for the stops. However in nasal-stop clusters the contrast is essentially neutralised. In these environments, rather than choose a particular series, we represent the stops as voiced or voiceless, as we hear them on a word-by-word basis. We recognise that certain speakers’ pronunciations of the same word may on occasion differ. To represent the alveolar nasal/voiced velar stop cluster we use an apostrophe /n’/ so as to avoid confusion with the velar nasal /ng/.

The below orthography differs from the one in use at the Our Lady of the Sacred Heart School in Wadeye (Street 1987), which has a single laminal series and uses voiceless stops in nasal clusters.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Consonants</th>
<th>bilabial</th>
<th>dental</th>
<th>alveolar</th>
<th>retroflex</th>
<th>palatal</th>
<th>velar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>voiceless stop</td>
<td>p</td>
<td>th</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>rt</td>
<td>tj</td>
<td>k</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>voiced stop</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>dh</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>rd</td>
<td>dj</td>
<td>g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nasal</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>nh</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>m</td>
<td>ny</td>
<td>ng</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lateral</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>rl</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>flap/trill</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>rr</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Glides</td>
<td>w</td>
<td></td>
<td>r</td>
<td></td>
<td>y</td>
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</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

References


